The Boston Annenberg Challenge:

Baseline Evaluation Report

July 14, 1999

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I. INTRODUCTION

In this first evaluation report to the Boston Annenberg Challenge (BAC), we provide baseline data on two components of the BAC's work with Cohort II schools. They are (1) the early phase of implementing an instructional focus on literacy, and (2) the work of the WSC coaches and the support that the BAC provides to them. We focus on these two components because we consider them integral to deep implementation of the BAC's reform agenda. They direct our attention to the improvement of teaching and learning and to the development of schools as learning communities in which all adults work together to forward student achievement. We focus on them now, as well, because we want to inform BAC leadership about early program progress and alert them to areas that may need attention. We intend this report to provide timely information that can be used to confirm areas of program strength and suggest areas in which it may be prudent to make program adjustments.

In this report, we also provide a review of the Pilot Schools, a sub-group of ten schools within the Boston Public Schools (BPS) that were originally created in 1994 to be models of educational innovation and to serve as sites of promising research and development for effective urban public schools. As baseline data, we focused on the ways in which these schools operate as part of the Boston Public Schools (BPS) but with autonomy from some of its policies and practices.

Design of the Evaluation. In order to implement the four-year evaluation of the BAC, Education Matters is following the work of whole-school change in a sample of five Cohort II schools – three elementary, one middle and one high school.[1] These schools were selected to reasonably represent the schools in Cohort II. During the 1998-1999 school year, in those schools, we interviewed 41 teachers and observed 32 of them. In addition, we interviewed each principal twice and interviewed coaches who work with the evaluation sample schools as well as with all other Cohort II schools. In the fall and in the spring, we interviewed BAC Project Director Mary Russo; we also interviewed Regis Shields and Jonna Casey, two other members of the BAC leadership team. Throughout the year, we attended, first, the August meeting of coaches and principals and then, six joint Whole School Coach (WSC)/content coach meetings and three professional development sessions designed to help schools begin the work of developing an Internal Accountability Plan (IAP).

With respect to our evaluation of the Pilot Schools, in consultation with Dan French, Director of the Pilot Schools Network and Superintendent of Schools, Tom Payzant, we selected four schools for in-depth evaluation study – two elementary, one middle and one high school. As with our selection of sample schools for Cohort II, these schools were selected to represent the set of Pilot Schools. Education Matters researchers visited each school twice to interview Directors and teachers. We also interviewed Dan French, Director of the Pilot Schools Network. To learn more about the entire set of Pilot Schools, in the fall of 1998, we interviewed the

[1]Sample schools were selected with input and agreement from the BAC Project Director.

Directors of all ten Pilot Schools. We also attended six Director network meetings, one meeting of the special education committee and one meeting of the fiscal autonomy committee.

With respect to all aspects of the BAC's work and our evaluation focus, we have reviewed relevant documents prepared for the schools and for the Annenberg Governing Board. Data from all of these sources inform the analyses presented in this baseline report.

The section of the report that describes the early implementation of a literacy focus is based primarily on data collected from October 1998-January 1999. During this time, schools were beginning their literacy work and some did not yet have content coaches to assist in this effort. In the spring, we asked follow-up questions about the progress of implementing the literacy focus and interviewed the content coaches who had joined the BAC after January. Following this round of data collection, we updated the literacy section where appropriate. The section of the report that focuses on the work of the WSC coaches is based on data collected throughout the 1998-1999 school year. The Pilot School section of the report is also based on data collected throughout the year.

In writing this report, we have made every effort to mask the identity of schools, teachers, principals, and coaches. To assist in this process, we use the feminine pronoun "she" to refer to all individuals. We thank all of the teachers, principals, coaches, and members of the BAC leadership for their contributions to our work. We would be unable to provide evaluation feedback to the BAC without their generous support.

Organization of the Report. We turn next to a discussion of the early phase of implementing a literacy focus. In this section we discuss the hard work that teachers and coaches, in particular, are doing to learn and implement new literacy practices. We highlight the strengths of the work to date and point out the need to continue the effort, expand it to the upper grades in the elementary schools, begin the process of addressing literacy at the secondary level, and maintain coach and other support to ensure effective implementation. After this, we address the work of the WSC coaches, in particular, and the support they receive from the BAC. We describe aspects of the WSC coach role that make the work challenging and describe the ways in which coaches work with principals. We review the ways in which the BAC leadership has strengthened coach meetings by providing coaches with opportunities to learn from one another. We also identify ways in which coach meetings are not yet fully addressing coaches' learning needs. In our baseline report on the status and work of the Pilot Schools, we describe the unique status of these schools within the BPS and their orientation to the district. We describe their philosophical values and structural conditions and how these influence their work given what we have called their "hybrid" status within the BPS. Finally, we review our findings and suggest next steps for the evaluation.

II. LITERACY: EARLY IMPLEMENTATION OF AN INSTRUCTIONAL FOCUS

One of the Six Essentials in the Boston Public Schools Plan for Whole School Change is to "identify and use a school-wide instructional focus." When we visited schools, we learned that all schools in Cohort II had identified a focus and most were beginning to make significant changes in order to develop it. Such changes include reworking a school's Comprehensive School Plan in order to emphasize the instructional focus, and devoting much of the school's professional development time to teacher learning in the area of that focus. While one school had chosen math as its instructional focus, other schools across the Cohort had chosen to focus on literacy. We concentrate this report on the latter, and explore schools' progress as they work to develop a literacy focus.

Schools have begun to implement both small and large scale strategies as they develop their school-wide literacy focus. In some cases, they have adopted a literacy program such as ELLI[2], Success for All, ELIC, BEL or LLIFE. Schools have been tackling large issues surrounding their literacy focus, such as how to address the diverse needs of students, how to measure student progress, and how to teach reading and writing across the content areas. There is much diversity among the schools in terms of the intensity of the literacy focus. Teachers involved in the training or implementation of specific literacy programs have, for the most part, been engaged in rigorous professional development. On the other hand, there are teachers who are not involved in any new training or activities related to literacy. Thus, it is not surprising that we have obtained data describing diverse practices and situations.

In this report, we base our findings on the schools in our sample, where we observed classrooms and interviewed teachers and administrators. In addition, we are informed by data from interviews with most of the content and change coaches in the rest of Cohort II's schools.

While schools are very much in the beginning stages of developing the literacy focus, we heard reports of progress in three areas: setting up a literacy program; implementing non-program elements of the literacy focus; and measuring student progress in relationship to the literacy focus.

Within these three general areas of progress, we heard several promising strategies that we hope will serve as fruitful suggestions for other schools in the district. These strategies address certain areas of need that we are seeing throughout the schools. Our data reveal not only the amount of work involved, but also that teachers, coaches, and administrators are grappling with deeper issues as they learn more about what a literacy focus means for their school.

[2]Recently, we learned that this program has been renamed the Literacy Collaborative. For the purpose of reflecting data from this schoolyear, in this report, we refer to the program as ELLI.

Implementing a Literacy Program

By the end of our fall 1998 round of data collection, most Cohort II schools had chosen a specific literacy program as part of their literacy focus. Some had opted to implement a "home grown" approach where they combined targeted strategies for improving reading and writing skills. Others were still in the process of choosing a program during this academic year. [3] Among the schools in our sample, all of the elementary and middle schools had chosen literacy programs. The programs they have chosen are ELLI, ECRI, and LLIFE. The high school in our sample is not using a specific program; few balanced literacy programs currently exist for the high school level.[4] Our discussion of literacy programs, then, draws upon our data from elementary and middle schools.

Among the elementary schools implementing ELLI, one school from our sample is in "phase 1," one is in "phase 2," and one is in "phase 4" of the program.[5] We will briefly describe each school's background with ELLI training to set the context for our findings.

At the school in phase 4, the literacy coordinator has been trained and this year was engaged in training the rest of the primary teachers. Over the years that ELLI has been the school's program, teachers have attended classes and workshops on ELLI at various times. The program, thus, is well established in the school. At the school in phase 1, the principal and a team of teachers attended ELLI training for five days over several months. In addition, other teachers that are not on this team have learned about certain aspects of ELLI from a specialist who has worked with the school, and some have attended additional training sessions through Lesley college on their own. At the school in phase 2, the literacy coordinator received the full ELLI training this year. Although this means that the rest of the primary teachers will not be trained in ELLI until next year, some of them have already gone to training sessions that Lesley College provides. In addition, with funds from the CLD, some teachers from this school participated in a literacy-focused group that met regularly. Those meetings were led by a standards facilitator and a literacy specialist at the school. During most of those meetings they discussed ELLI methods.

At the two schools that are in early stages of the program, there are teachers who are using ELLI ideas or implementing ELLI practices in their classrooms without having gone through the

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[3]By the end of the schoolyear, all Cohort II schools, other than high schools, had chosen a literacy program.

[4]During this school year, Sheila Brown, Director of Cohort III, led a task force that looked into literacy approaches at the secondary level. As a result of the task force's work, secondary teachers will have access to literacy professional development this summer.

[5]ELLI is meant to be implemented in five stages. They are: Phase 1(School-Based Planning Team– the principal and several teachers– receives five days of training in the framework); Phase 2 (Literacy Coordinator receives six weeks of training in theory, practice and leadership); Phase 3 (Literacy Coordinator conducts intensive in-service for School-Based Planning Team); Phase 4 (Literacy Coordinator trains other teachers); and Phase 5 (Lesley College [or other ELLI training site] supports school as staff implements ELLI. (*Focus* volume 1: 1998-1999. Produced by the Boston Plan for Excellence for Boston's Annenberg Challenge Schools)

official ELLI training (when they will be trained by their literacy coordinator). While these teachers are making the most of the training they have received by trying things out in their classrooms right away, they are also doing so without the benefit of full-fledged professional support. This can lead to some difficulties. For example, such teachers are not usually receiving the supplies and books they need to fully implement ELLI, and they may be using pieces of ELLI practices without a complete understanding of the whole process. Finally, in situations where the literacy coordinator is not yet trained, these teachers are implementing parts of ELLI without the resource of a literacy coordinator to answer their questions and support their learning. Their desire to try out the model, however, demonstrates their commitment to changing their literacy practices.

While ELLI is a five-phase program that can take five years to fully implement, the other two programs represented in our sample involve more short-term training. The teachers who participated in ECRI training did so over three days in the summer of 1998. Not all the teachers in the school participated in the training. There are plans to offer the training to more teachers in the future. The teachers who participated in LLIFE training did so over twelve weeks in the fall of 1998. This took the form of weekly classes with a trainer, who also visited classrooms to observe and provide demonstration lessons. More teachers were trained in LLIFE after the initial group of teachers were trained, and there are plans to continue training teachers in 1999-2000.

Evidence of Progress. Teachers and administrators mentioned several aspects of the literacy programs they have adopted that they feel are directly benefitting their students:

> *It's very interesting to see [this program's] approach to have them writing right away, which is something I didn't do before. I shouldn't say I didn't have them writing. I had them writing the very first day but they're using more tools to write now. I'm very excited about the writing. I'm very excited about the reading. It's wonderful....[Because of this program,] I see my children more skilled than they would have been. I see the children as much better writers than they would have been. (Teacher G)*[6]

> *I was doing some of [the program] when you came down to the classroom and we've learned to adapt to the style in the classroom, but always using [the program] to help train them, especially when it comes to words and understanding sentence structure and so it's working out really well with the kids, and they like it and they're right into it and they know the whole program at this point, and it's only like three months into school, which is great. So, it's working out really well. (Teacher I)*

> *They all think they're writing. Every single one of those children thinks they're good writers. It is hard for a lot of them because they don't have the ability to pull up words and the spelling is difficult. I think that each child was writing yesterday*

[6]For the purpose of preserving the anonymity of our interviewees and schools we have taken the names of specific programs out of the quotes.

and I think that they all feel successful. If you ask them if they can write, it's amazing... That's one thing that [the program] has done for them ... A lot of the things that I've done in the past are the same things that [the program is] doing but they've made me more organized. They've made me more aware of looking at the work that the children are doing, assessing it. Seeing what they're doing and then letting that drive my instruction for the next day. So [the program] has improved my teaching immensely. I think the strengths are going to the child, finding exactly what that child knows and then moving them upwards. (Teacher H)

Even this year in my classes, I've been involved with the [program] class I just finished, I've been doing a lot of writing. A lot of character development stuff which causes them to do a lot of writing and analysis and look between the sentences, and try to be able to say, hey, there's more than what's on this page or, these group of words, or this is what it's really saying... In the course of the twelve weeks of the program, I mean, it was– I almost felt like a kid in a candy store. Because there were so many things that I was exposed to that I hadn't even really thought of, in terms of engaging my students in writing and in reading... (Teacher U)

The benefit [of the program is that] it's a balanced approach... It takes a lot of good best practices and packages it, and the reliance and the emphasis on centers allows the children to have fun, to have more control of their learning, and to be more responsible. And that's one of the subversive things about it. It's not a stated goal, really, but it really is very innovative in the sense that if you're doing those centers, it's the kids running the room. You've got to teach them how to do it, you know, this is what we do in a center, this is what we do when we move towards it, but the children end up being much more in control of their own learning in a very positive, well managed way. (Administrator C)

One thing that [the program] really did for us was the assessment piece. It really taught teachers that you have to know where a child is, every level whether it's a grade level or letter level or whatever, and what strategies that child uses and does not use, and you have to teach those strategies and assess again... I think that was powerful for people, that there was this lingo. He's starting off at "[level] A," now he's on a "[level] C," isn't that amazing, that it was reaffirming, it was sort of celebrating, wow, I'm teaching. (Administrator B)

Many of the teachers who had participated in ELLI training mentioned assessment as important, and some discussed the process of using "Running Records" as a particularly useful component of the program. Teachers use Running Records as a means to assess individual students' progress in reading texts. The system of Running Records, however, is not exclusively an ELLI practice. We will discuss the use of Running Records in a later section on "Measuring Student Progress in Literacy."

Challenges of Implementing the Programs. Despite the optimism we heard from teachers who had been trained in a program and who were just beginning to implement that program in their classrooms, we also heard of many challenges. For example, some teachers are wary of replacing current practices with new ones. Others find it difficult to prepare their students for new practices. Many commented on a lack of materials necessary for implementing the program.

As we mentioned, some challenges are appearing because program implementation has begun before the completion of training. In some cases this means that teachers have not been trained in all aspects of the program; in other cases, not all teachers have been trained. In both situations, some teachers feel frustrated with the lack of support they have received, while others attribute the challenges to the fact that they are in the process of learning new stragtegies. The following two teachers are currently involved in phase 1 and phase 2 of ELLI training:

> *With my class this year I could not do everything they were suggesting we do without someone coming in and helping me to see where I'm making mistakes, if I'm making mistakes, and if there's something else I should be doing to make some of those activities more accessible to the class. (Teacher B)*

> *The [program] model, we don't use it totally because we really do not know how to use the total model yet. From what I see going on in this room it's very different than what I have ever done in my life. There's no basal involved. There's none of the rote phonics involved. It's not the way that I have taught children traditionally in first grade to read. But I'm seeing success so anyone can change. Heaven knows we're all open to doing that. (Teacher A)*

Although the second teacher recognizes that she will have to change her instructional practices, she appears enthusiastic about the program. Other teachers expressed more hesitation and anxiety about the changes they felt they were being asked to make:

> *[For the program] you're supposed to be small groups and you're supposed to be [doing] shared reading. This is fine for some of these kids. I have some children that are very happy to do this type of thing. I also have some children that have never held a crayon before. So trying to work all these groups by yourself is not-- and as you see they're going somewhere all the time. (Teacher C)*

> *I mean, it's really difficult.... It's hard to work with the tables [which is part of the classroom structure for the program]. The kids have a difficult time because they're used to having their own space that's theirs. Their desk, their things and they have to share materials. There's a lot of creativity involved on our part in terms of where do we put their stuff ... (Teacher D)*

> *She [the site coordinator for the program] showed me how to do cooperative learning. I have a hard time with that because it's a different type of noise level and I have a very structured class. So once I move someone and let them work in*

groups, the noise level goes up and I don't know if they're ready for that yet. (Teacher E)

The interactive writing [for the program] is very challenging with the group that I have this year. Not so much the work. It's more the management of the children while this activity is going on. Some boys and girls can't handle the not so structured atmosphere and immediately when we're done they can go back to doing what they're supposed to be doing and then others just can't settle down. (Teacher B)

As these quotes show, it is not easy in the beginning stages for teachers to make some of the pedagogical as well as structural changes required by the literacy programs.[7] Thus teachers who have been trained in some aspects of the program, and have begun to use what they have learned in the classroom may need outside support if the literacy coordinator is not yet fully trained and therefore unable to provide the support herself. Furthermore, as this teacher notes, those who have been fully trained encounter new challenges as their circumstances change.

First grade was easier in that we're looking for words and putting the letters in alphabetical order. Finding words that begin with specific letters. Finding words that end with specific letters or rhyming words. Now [that I'm in] second grade, you want to engage them in looking at words and pulling words apart. That's a course in itself. So that's something that I would like more training on. (Teacher H)

In some cases, additional training may help these teachers feel more comfortable with the programs; however, as some of the teachers state, it is essential that teachers are given support not only in the actual program but in helping their students adjust to different instructional practices as well. Although students' readiness is a challenge teachers will face during implementation, it should not become an excuse for holding back. Administrators, coaches, and site-based coordinators must be prepared, through training if necessary, to provide guidance for teachers as they work with the new program.

An additional challenge schools have experienced is getting the necessary materials to implement the programs as they were intended. Program materials are expensive and seem to be provided to varying degrees across schools. Teachers from several schools expressed concerns over the lack of material support they were receiving.

There's a lot of money involved with it. We've got teachers here spending hundreds and hundreds of their own dollars to buy easels and boards to set up centers and magnetic letters and this and that, which the City of Boston does not pick up. You talk to the teachers about the correcting tape, which is three dollars a roll. That's part of [the program]. They have correcting tape so students can

[7] As a reminder, ELLI is not intended to be fully in place until three to five years after its adoption.

correct. So teachers themselves are doing that. That's on the side but that's part of setting up the whole program. (Teacher A)

I have to take my Xerox paper, which I get an allotment of Xerox paper, and make this stuff... So, I use my allotment to do [the program] and then when I want to run something off they say there's no more paper until January. So I've got to go out and spend my money and buy paper, okay... So, on top of this great program, we don't have the materials to reinforce the program.... I don't have anything I need to make the program fully effective and I hope the principal realizes that she won't see any profound results from the teachers because we don't have all [the materials] to supplement the program. (Teacher F)

Those are things that are part of the model. We don't even have the books. Like the books that I have supplied myself and, you know, it's been kind of a juggle. We've been helping each other with okay, I purchased these books or I got these books. You can come and get them or you can use these. We're looking to have sets of sixes or eights for the reading groups and we have some upstairs that were ordered for us, that we have to do a library checkout system to use and some teachers ... we have been, on my team, ordering things ourselves...But we just felt that we didn't have the support that we thought we would. (Teacher D)

Another teacher described how she has been unable to implement the program because the school is lacking books in all but one of the reading levels. What good is it to do diagnostic tests to see at what level students are reading, she says, if there are no books to give them to read at their level?

It is true that literacy programs are expensive to implement, particularly at the beginning stages. Schools have very limited resources and must make budgetary decisions carefully. Clearly, it is impossible for a school to provide everything at once. However, as the above examples suggest, there are some resources that are absolutely essential to the viability of a literacy program at the classroom level. If teachers are left unable to implement the program, then their training has been wasted. As school decision-makers decide what to provide teachers, they must be fully aware of what materials are necessary to make the programs effective. This means that they must be familiar enough with the program itself to make these decisions.

Conclusions. Baseline data on literacy programs in the Cohort II schools suggest a reasonable beginning. Teachers are grappling with new ideas and working to implement them. Literacy training is making it possible for them to learn and try out these new practices. Such training that is ongoing and readily accessible to teachers remains essential if teachers are to continue to learn and utilize what they have learned. Teachers need a deep understanding of the practices they are trying to implement in order to make real progress.

Strategies Related to the School-Wide Literacy Focus

Implementing a literacy program is only part of what schools are doing to develop a school-wide literacy focus. As schools work to define and develop their literacy focus, they realize that there are areas of instruction that remain outside of the literacy program. We highlight three of these areas where we see schools concentrating their efforts. The three areas are: developing a program for the upper elementary grades in schools that have adopted ELLI for the primary grades; establishing literacy across the curriculum in secondary schools; and targeting efforts toward developing specific literacy skills. In all of these areas, it has been necessary to come up with strategies that draw together different ideas and means of support. In talking with those who have engaged in developing such strategies, our findings point to (a)teacher collaboration, and (b)external or coach-driven professional development, as two components that are essential to building the skills and resources necessary to effectively develop a school-wide literacy focus.

Literacy in Upper Elementary Grades. Determining school-wide priorities in literacy is as challenging for a school as its students are varied. While an effective literacy focus addresses the needs of all students in the school, some of the literacy programs available to schools are limited to certain developmental levels. For example, ELLI, as it is currently presented, is meant to be used in K-2 classrooms where most children are still learning to read fluently. This means that a school may devote all of its time and resources toward children who are "learning to read," without taking on the issues facing children who are "reading to learn." Recognizing a gap here, some schools in this position are concentrating on adapting ELLI for the upper grades, and others are coming up with alternative plans for grades 3-5. Some have broad goals for the upper grades, with the central focus on increasing the extent to which students read and comprehend real literature.

> *What we're focusing on in the upper grades is really getting children to enjoy reading. Getting children involved in reading. Getting children to pick up a book and read from cover to cover with enjoyment.... They don't understand how to choose a book because that's difficult for kids. We talk a lot about how to choose a book that's correct for you. That's what's helped with the "browsing boxes" where I've taken books and I've put them in different genres and I've just started that in the classroom. That's been helpful. Getting children to read between the lines-- helping with comprehension. All those things that children need to be competent readers. (Teacher S)*

> *Children should be reading classic children's literature right through school. It's the only thing that's going to give them a love of reading. Taking bits and pieces, excerpts from fine pieces of work and sticking them in a basal reader is not... The purpose of teaching [figures of speech] is so that children not only recognize them in their reading, but they start to use them in their writing... So now, [BPS is] recognizing, finally, that novels, fine children's literature, classic children's literature is the way to go... So you asked me where the literacy program is, that's where it is right now. The novel. Key Questions. True, classic literature. That's our literacy program, basically. (Administrator D)*

Some teachers feel that ELLI could be extended, with some modifications, to fit the upper grades, and have been exploring how they might go about this.[8] One ELLI teacher comments:

> *A lot of the things that we do on a kindergarten level obviously, [and the] first grade level can't be used in the upper grades but there are a lot of components that can be. The guided readings can be. Literature circles which starts in second grade can be brought through third, fourth and fifth. But people think 'read aloud' shouldn't be in the upper. I firmly believe that, yes, 'read aloud' is in kindergarten but I think it's important for third, fourth and fifth to hear 'read alouds' as well. So I think that there's positive that can be brought up but it's not formalized and people don't quite know where to go. (Teacher H)*

A teacher who had participated in some initial training, but is now teaching fourth grade, has a similar perspective:

> *[The program] can be modified to reach older children... That's why I've adopted some of these principles in the fourth grade class. Typically I am a first grade teacher...and I can see where I can modify some of the training to work in the fourth grade classroom and better serve the children... Some of the skills, the group work, the oral readings, even though the children are older they do need oral reading. They do need story telling in the classroom and they do enjoy that. Yes, there's more silent reading and independent reading. However, at that age they still enjoy stories... I think it generates enthusiasm across [reading] levels. (Teacher V)*

In one school, a group of upper elementary teachers attended a set of ELLI workshops together. This equipped them to develop a way of extending ELLI into the upper grades. By breaking ELLI into eight reading and writing components and then defining them as they apply to the lower and upper grades, the teachers were able to identify current practices which already fit the model and areas where further professional development will be needed. This was made possible not only through the training which provided the knowledge base for this work, but also because the upper elementary teachers had common planning times, which they had decided to use to work on issues around literacy.

It is important to repeat here that schools in Cohort II are at different stages in the process of implementing literacy programs. The teachers we describe in the previous paragraph have already been through the ELLI training and have established the program. They are now able to focus on pooling resources; combining external training, coach support, and teacher collaboration to achieve targeted goals. In this way, they are using a combination of strategies to get at central issues in elementary literacy.

[8]We know that the developers of ELLI have designed a program for the upper elementary grades, which should be available to schools in the 1999-2000 school year.

Upper elementary teachers are often in the position of teaching fluent readers and non-fluent readers in the same classroom. Therefore, their focus on literacy must include strategies for addressing all levels of readers. In some cases, third grade teachers have been trained in ELLI although it is meant to be a program for grades K-2. These third grade teachers are in the position to use ELLI, or teach other upper elementary teachers to use it, in order to help older children who are reading below grade level. One example of this is a third grade teacher who is in a cluster with fourth and fifth grade classrooms. She used her ELLI training to work with slower readers throughout the cluster. Another example is a third grade teacher who reorganized her own classroom to accommodate readers at more than one skill level:

> *Well, as I began to work, I discovered that because the difference between the levels was so wide, that not everybody needed that concentrated kind of reading instruction [that the program provides]... It turns out that [some] kids were reading way above level and I probably don't need as much time to do guided reading lessons. I've tended to say, "OK. I'm not going to meet with them as much." That was the trade off and not one that I liked. They needed attention, too. A different kind of working in small groups, but definitely they deserved their time, too. That was the hard part for me, scheduling... That's when I did make the decision to have two things going on at separate times... So I'm able to get the core literature required by the standards on the third grade reading list covered as well as specific training for individuals that I can accomplish through [the program]. (Teacher J)*

These are examples of how ELLI can be adapted to address the literacy needs of children reading below grade level in upper grade classrooms. In order to address the specific needs of more fluent readers, schools are adapting components of ELLI, as well as developing other strategies.

One school, working to strengthen the literacy instruction in the upper grades, has started leveling books. To do this, the content coach worked with teachers to create a text gradient form, based on a system in place for the lower grades, to be used for leveling upper elementary books. A coach in another school describes plans to provide upper elementary teachers with professional development in strategies for teaching writing:

> *...we have kind of informally tried to encourage them to engage in staff development on their own around writing because the writing is so key to the whole literacy process. So they're beginning now to go through about four or five sessions, all day sessions, with process writing from the Collins associates....I think it's a good step for them since they haven't been directly involved in training [in a primary literacy program]. This will fill the void a little bit. (Coach D)*

The challenge of how to develop the instructional focus in the upper elementary grades has been daunting for some schools. Others gave their initial attention to the early grades and are now beginning to consider how to address the literacy needs of upper grade students. As schools proceed with this work, teachers will continue to need guidance from coaches, literacy coordinators and administrators so that they can meet their students' diverse literacy needs.

Improving Literacy Instruction Across the Curriculum. In all schools that have chosen literacy as their instructional focus, a major goal is to incorporate literacy into the teaching of the non- language arts subject areas. This is true of primary and upper elementary grades as well as secondary grades. An administrator and a coach in two different elementary schools comment:

> *... you cannot physically cover what you're required to do, by the Boston Public School standards and curricula in each of [the content] areas, if you don't integrate curricula. So I think [teachers are] coming to the realization that through my literacy block, we can't only read Beverly Cleary. We need to read books that tie social studies curricula into my literacy block, and somehow I have to tie science in at times, into my literacy block. And if we're going to be writing about math, I have to tie math into my literacy block as well. Or I can't cover the curriculum... So our literacy block is becoming, yes it's our school focus, and when you think in terms of literacy, you right away think in terms of just reading. And reading and language arts has always been separated from social studies and math and science. It's no longer that way. (Administrator D)*

> *That was part of my job, when we talked about this last spring, about a staff development plan, those folks in the three through five were emphasizing writing, talking about it. I tried to explain maybe we should all sort of do writing in the content areas. So we had some agreement that writing and writing in the content areas would be useful, writing across the curriculum. (Coach D)*

Improving students' skills in both reading and writing across the content areas is a major goal. In addressing this goal, elementary teachers and secondary teachers alike face more demands on their time and expertise.

Although literacy across the curriculum is a subject that affects schools from Kindergarten through twelfth grade, it is a much different situation in elementary school than it is in secondary school, where teachers are trained in specific content areas. Secondary teachers rarely have training in teaching reading even if they are English teachers. Furthermore, there are few training programs or professional development packages that target literacy in the secondary grades. For these reasons, secondary teachers have found the emphasis on literacy especially challenging to put into practice. Most of the quotes that follow come from secondary school teachers; however, since some elementary schools have specialist teachers who are affected by the literacy focus, and since elementary schools are addressing issues of integrated curriculum, viewpoints from elementary schools are represented here as well.

In assigning and assessing student work, those who do not teach English or language arts have to combine the requirements of their own subject areas with what they understand to be the necessary skills in literacy. This leads to two separate problems: one is that teachers may not have the time to teach reading and writing in addition to their own subject, particularly if their students are below grade level. The second is that teachers may see the connection between

literacy and the content material, yet not have a clear understanding of what it actually means to teach literacy in that content area.
In many cases, teachers feel that they simply do not have the time to combine teaching literacy skills with their own subjects. A science teacher states:

> *It is difficult because the literacy is always going to slow you down. If you want to get into the beginning of the universe or the different theories they had in the beginning of the era or even the different components of unified science, you find that kids are lost because they cannot focus on the topic sentence. They cannot get the gist of a topic sentence. You have to tell them, "Well this is the topic sentence. It's usually in the beginning of the paragraph. It will tell you a lot about what the paragraph is about." That slows you down. It does slow you down. (Teacher W)*

Another science teacher has asked other teachers in her school to offer students opportunities to read science materials outside of science class:

> *I've been saying that we have wonderful books in science. That's part of your reading program. We need to do more reading in factual areas. Kids need to do more writing in factual areas and that's part of your language arts program. I use writing. I use some reading. But I don't teach those things. I do a little bit of writing instruction but I don't do any reading instruction at all. The kids just apply it. By state mandate, BPS mandate, the time that they come they have to spend so much time a week doing active hands on science. That's not reading science, it's doing science. So either I teach them the reading and you're doing all the activities with the kids or--it's basically--I do most of the hands on stuff. We're sort of getting more comfortable that that's the way it is. (Teacher L)*

This teacher goes on to point out that the reading level in science books she is using may be higher than the reading level of her students. While these students can understand the science content that is appropriate for their grade level, they would be at a disadvantage if asked to read at the same grade level in class. Furthermore, it takes much longer for slower readers to complete reading assignments both in and out of class. This interferes with her ability to learn the appropriate grade-level content. As a result, teachers devise ways to get the content material across without having students read. A social studies teacher comments:

> *I had planned to have the kids done with [a myth]... but they were having such a hard time with the vocabulary. I tried to find something at their grade level but they were having a real tough time. It's not their fault. It is a tough story. We ended up reading four pages of "Cliff's Notes" on it... we all did what we could to get through it. We never got to the activities that I wanted to do after the reading. So what I ended up doing... we sat in a big circle and I read it to them like a story book. (Teacher Q)*

An administrator points out that the problem has to do not only with students' reading levels, but also with teachers' preparedness to teach reading:

> *One of the biggest problems we have here is that kids don't have good skills in functional reading. So it's very difficult to get them to a higher level of reading and thinking if their functional reading level is not that great. The other thing that I find here is that the English teachers by and large are pretty good at knowing how to teach reading, and the other teachers are not. And other than the people who are assigned to teach reading... the only other people really who know how to teach reading, whether it's a science text or a math text or whatever, are the English people. But what they feel is that they're caught in a bind between whether or not they should be teaching reading and literacy or they should be covering this curriculum, which is really literature based that the kids just can't handle because their reading levels are so low. That's the biggest excuse with the Boston, the new Boston curriculum, is that the suggested readings for each grade level are so above the [proficiency] of the kids. (Administrator A)*

English and non-English teachers alike express the difficulties of adding basic literacy skills to an already full curriculum. And, there is a second aspect to the issue: confusion about how to define the type and quality of literacy skills that students should demonstrate in each content area. Exemplifying this, a math teacher in a secondary school expresses her frustration with trying to understand what, in fact, she should be emphasizing when teaching students to write about math:

> *It's just very difficult in math. I've never done it. I need more training... We're doing something now but... I don't feel like I'm getting enough. And it's very difficult. I'm doing my best in the classroom. I'm constantly asking my kids why things are the way they are. And I look at the MCAS exam and I see the open ended questions and they're not the same as what our English teacher's going to give and what a history teacher's going to give. They ask for process. And I've always, always done that. So now the kids are writing process. I'm hoping [to get] more examples in mathematics on how to write a paragraph... It's tough... Because I've never had to do it. It's something brand new and I don't really know what they want. I don't know what the final result is that they want. They want complete sentences. But the MCAS, I looked at the MCAS and those open ended questions don't ask for paragraphs and essays. They ask for process, which is what we do in mathematics. And the kids can do that. They can write down the steps, but they may not be able to put it in paragraph form.* ***I*** *may not be able to do it in paragraph form. I don't know! (Teacher M)*

Another non-English teacher comments:

> *I think it's a hard thing without a specific program in teaching writing and I think it really is hard, because even if you're a really good writer yourself, if you don't know the skills to teach writing... and if there's not a common method in the school then I think it's really hard, because that's kind of how I feel. It's like I think that I'm-- I mean I could write until I'm blue in the face, but actually trying to say to a*

student now this is my process and this is how you do it, I think that's really, really hard. (Teacher K)

As these teachers indicate, teachers as well as students need to know exactly what it means to reach a high standard of literacy in the contexts of math, science, and social studies. Schools, then, have to decide how they are going to define that standard of literacy and make it clear to everyone involved. In addition, schools have to decide how they are going to teach and reinforce the necessary literacy skills. This takes considerable professional development. Without it, teachers feel isolated from deeper knowledge about how to teach the relevant literacy skills for their subject.

Some schools have been exploring ways to address these needs. Some have chosen a specific program in teaching literacy skills and are making sure that teachers gain instructional strategies through these programs. Literacy coaches are providing beneficial professional development in this area as well:

[For] one teacher I was working with, actually, I did a whole program on the Mayas. I developed all these lessons and got all these resources, spent a lot of time, because they have to do this for social studies. So I developed this idea of integrating their language with their social studies. I figured that this is efficient, they will get the standards, they will get their language, they will get their reading, and they will get their social studies this way. So I gathered all the materials and I demonstrated certain lessons, and I wrote them up, wrote up the outline so they could follow up with them, and I gave them certain resources. And this is something that they hadn't done like this before. (Coach I)

Coaches admit that the task of incorporating literacy into all subjects is not easy:

[I work with] all content areas. That's a little bit of a challenge, too... system wide there is this issue of how does the literacy help...math. Can you ask Key Questions in math? Isn't every question a key question in math class? How do you use the writing? You do want to use discussion. You do want to use writing but there's a whole other element of graphing, systems function and all that kind of thing which is at the center of the math as well... I work with a couple of foreign language teachers. Sometimes I have to figure out what I can do to support them as well... The writing can be a tool to write a dialogue or whatever... So what I'm saying is essentially I think that the literacy piece--sometimes you have to stretch to see how you can best support a teacher and really have them think that you are helping further their curriculum, help with their content. (Coach E)

In addition to direct professional development, schools are also addressing literacy across the curriculum through teacher collaboration.

For [a particular cluster] there's an English teacher who is part of that common planning time. So that has been very productive, and having a content area person who raises the standards and who can talk about looking at writing across the curriculum, that is very productive. That's wonderful. (Teacher Q)

Some schools are using LASW sessions to focus on students' writing in social studies and science. Below, a secondary teacher describes how she is working with her colleagues across subject areas to make sure that the writing skills they emphasize in one class are consistent with what students learn in their language arts class:

> *Literacy is extremely important to all of us. I don't care if it's the language arts teacher or the science teacher... and what is happening is that [we're] realizing that students expect to receive guidance for the bulk of their writing skills from the language arts teacher, and, as a result, when they go to language arts, they make sure that they write correctly. On the other hand, when they come into science, they may not feel that there's a connection with the writing from language arts in the science class. So that, you know, even though they get directions from me on information that I want from them, I have to caution, make sure you use the skills that you use in language arts and the only way that I can reinforce to the students that I am looking for those writing skills that you develop in your language arts class, is by that constant communication. (Teacher N)*

This teacher's point that constant communication is crucial to implementing writing across the curriculum has significance in two ways: it is important that teachers communicate with students about what they expect of them, and it is also important that teachers communicate with each other about the types of expectations they are each setting for their students in order to improve literacy skills. The latter can happen through cluster or team meetings when teachers look at student work together. As this same teacher describes, these meetings provide a forum for the language arts teachers to help the non- language arts teachers with teaching writing:

> *...one of the things that we do during [looking at student work] is examine the student responses to open-ended questions and we get information, a lot of feedback from the language arts teachers who are very involved with [training in literacy], as to how we [non-language arts teachers] might better help students improve on the work that we're examining, the work that's on the table from week to week. So that's one very important way that we are trying to reinforce that literacy component in the different subject areas... [The language arts teachers are helping teachers in other content areas] because they're the ones who are being bombarded with that literacy training. Not only that, but, because they do have a degree in language arts, they are more familiar with the proper format... For example, that whole thing with the theme, opening the introductory sentence, supporting details. I mean, once I get that terminology from them, once I get the format from them, then that will give me the opportunity to say to myself okay, given that format, how can I translate it into giving students the information that I'm looking for when I have them write a response to an essay for me. (Teacher N)*

The way this teacher's instructional team has addressed writing across the curriculum is a promising example of teacher collaboration. As she points out, non- English teachers in a school with a literacy focus are charged with the work of translating reading and writing skills into their regular curriculum. This may be easy for some, but for others it involves rethinking their pedagogy as well as assessing their students differently. Early data suggest that coaches are

supporting this type of work. In addition, teachers working together in an ongoing format can be an excellent source of professional development on instructional strategies. This type of collaboration can help teachers and administrators determine what priorities need to be emphasized school-wide.

Organizational Strategies that Support Literacy. Schools require a combination of strategies to develop a school-wide literacy focus. Regardless of the shape that the literacy focus has taken in each of the schools, most of them have begun to employ targeted strategies for the purpose of improving reading and writing skills, increasing students' awareness of and access to reading, or augmenting teachers' professional development in teaching literacy.

1. Literacy Blocks. Structuring the school day to accommodate extended concentration on reading and writing is one strategy that schools have used as part of their literacy focus. Some schools at the secondary level have set up a school-wide reading or literacy period. Some at the elementary level have incorporated a literacy block that is, in most cases, 90 minutes long. It is a time when all the teachers in a given grade level, or even across the school, will be working on literacy.

Teachers reported that a literacy block makes it easier to work with ELLI, which demands a longer stretch of time than a 45 minute period. We heard that instructional teams that did not have a literacy block scheduled into their day felt that they were simply not able to implement ELLI. Some teachers talked about another benefit of having a literacy block: it gives them the opportunity to split up the students in their classes and, for instance, have one second grade teacher on a team work with students whose reading level is lower, while the other teacher takes the more advanced readers:

> *We have a 90 minute reading early literacy block. We change for reading. Myself taking the upper half of the two [second] grades. [My colleague] takes the lower half... We're in the process of setting up learning centers in each one of the rooms to set up guided reading groups and to try and hone in on the more needy, lower students and give those children who are really flying more independent work to do. (Teacher A)*

Another example is an instructional team that uses the common literacy block to divide up students into smaller, cross-classroom groups. The teachers on the team assessed their students in order to place them into groups according to their performance level in reading and writing. Each classroom teacher and resource teacher working with the team was assigned to a group. This way, the groups of students were smaller than a regular class size. In addition, they set up benchmarks that were used to determine when a student was ready to move up to a more advanced level group. The benefits of a system like this, says the teacher, is that all the faculty members are able to pool their resources and work together toward providing much more focused, skill-oriented instruction.

2. Connections with Standards. Teachers are also working together to make sure the new curriculum they adopt is addressing standards for literacy. For example, one teacher described how she and another teacher had worked out which particular ELLI skills fit under which Citywide Learning Standard. Teachers are also working together to improve students'

writing by focusing on Key Questions.[9] A teacher reported that her instructional team has made it a priority to come up with alternative ways of teaching students to answer Key Questions. Developing Key Questions has been an area of concern in schools, and some teachers have sought out each others' expertise to address this:

> *We answered Key Questions today and my discomfort level comes with developing the critical thinking skills with the kids. I talked with one of the ELLI coordinators... because I'm really close to her. I said, "This is what I want to do. How do I do it?"... We went through the steps of the process and then we actually did the writing today. (Teacher O)*

3. Other Programs/Initiatives. Teachers also described programs and activities that their schools are engaged in to promote literacy, such as maintaining classroom libraries, bringing in outside tutors and using literature circles in the classroom. Also to promote literacy, a school has adopted the practice of pairing up "buddies" from different grade levels to read together. This teacher describes a few of the benefits of buddy reading for both older and younger students:

> *My class is working with the fourth grade. The fourth graders at this point are picking out books to read to their second grade buddy. We do that once a week. Second graders can take a book and they can read to the fourth graders but at this point we're really stressing that the fourth graders pick the book. When we started we wanted them to feel very comfortable with the book that they were reading with the kids. [The teachers] went through levels to make sure we were matching. Not only levels of reading, but also, personality to set up groups... [We] thought that would be a good way of getting kids to feel good about themselves. To kind of build a community, get the older kids involved with the little ones and give the little ones a chance to find somebody to read to. (Teacher H)*

Not every strategy for promoting literacy has been a total success. For instance, some schools have incorporated a time period into the day called D.E.A.R. time (Drop Everything and Read). During this time, everyone in the school is supposed to read a book of their choice. Students see teachers and administrators modeling reading, and students can read a book solely for pleasure. While some teachers reported that this idea has worked very well, others feel that it takes time away from other activities that need to get done during the day:

> *There are some things we tried this year that didn't work as well. We're looking at DEAR and seeing if we want to do it again. [We were] trying to do [reading] conferences during DEAR time, but some people had a problem with that, because DEAR is supposed to be Drop Everything And Read... Because of our schedules I found that the time was getting to be catch all. For instance, if I had some kids [who needed to make something up], and if I have to have them go out during time, that happens to be DEAR time because I don't want them to miss-- I mean,*

[9] "Key Questions are open-ended questions that require students to form an opinion or take a position; to support the opinion/position with carefully selected details from the text, lecture, video, or other source; and to draw a logical conclusion." (BPS Office of Curriculum and Instructional Practices: Course Guide– Grade 5, 1998-1999.)

there's a lot of time when they could do independent reading, as opposed to if they're missing math, they're missing literature, it's a pain. (Teacher T)

4. Coach and Administrative Support. Coaches play a crucial role in helping schools develop the literacy focus by providing ongoing, on-site instructional guidance. They may help them network with other schools to learn about programs or best practices, or they may work with instructional teams to develop priorities within comprehensive school plans. In addition, many coaches spend time in classrooms, both modeling lessons or observing and offering feedback to teachers.

One of the items that I do, and I feel is very valuable to myself and to the school, is to spend time sitting in the classrooms. That's one of the first things I did when I got here is just to spend time sitting in the classrooms, seeing what the teachers do, and establishing a rapport with them. And trying also to identify what strategies or what best practices we're already using, or what we have that we can change easily, and from there, classroom teachers have individually sought me out to improve specific areas that they have concerns about or that they would like to improve... (Coach F)

I went there and saw what they were doing and was able to give them some suggestions as to how to run a reading workshop which might be something that people not specifically trained in diagnostic reading or even developmental reading techniques would be able to do. I provided some training and I continue to work with teachers to help them implement that. I've also worked in classrooms, content area classrooms, literature classrooms and math classrooms to demonstrate model reading and writing lessons, how to incorporate reading. (Coach G)

Such guidance, which is focused on literacy content, is invaluable as on-site continuous instructional support. In addition to the literacy content coaches, some change coaches have also brought literacy expertise to their job and thus include working with teachers in the classroom as one of their responsibilities.

One administrator mentioned that having her coach spend time in classrooms helps her be a stronger instructional leader. Unable to spend as much time as she would like in classrooms, the principal is able to learn, through the coach, about what professional development and resources are needed. Other administrators support their teachers more directly. A coach describes an administrator's role in the classroom as supporting the focus on literacy:

I've seen her interact with especially the teacher who I'm working with the most. She spent a lot of time with her before I was on the scene and even, I mean, I'm only there a day a week. Bringing in things, giving her ideas. She's good at seeing what's happening in the class and kind of reading what you could do strategically that would, pedagogically that could help kids get things they're not getting. That sort of thing. She was a reading teacher for a long time and she really knows her stuff. And she loves literature and she's always bringing in something that the kids can read, and that sort of thing. (Coach H)

Other administrators are becoming more involved in instructional support. Some are attending professional development for literacy programs with their staff. This is a vehicle for providing direct supervision and support in the classroom:

> *[The principal] is going to be in classrooms more with ELLI. She is going to fully engage in the ELLI training, and that will get her in classrooms because you have homework, you have to do things in classrooms... [The ELLI model] fits where her own head goes, I think. And she has gotten them all started on word walls, she monitors. That's another piece of instructional leadership, that you're monitoring the implementation of what we agree on as effective instruction. (Coach B)*

As this coach points out, administrators' involvement with literacy training can be a crucial factor in their work as instructional leaders. Below, a principal who has been trained in the ELLI program describes how she supports ELLI teachers:

> *That is one way [I support ELLI], finding the funds to pay for ELLI has taken up a lot of my time... I think the other way is making sure-- two things. One, making sure that anything they need to support ELLI is there so that there's no excuses. The third, the other piece of that is saying to people, "This is what you're going to do." And it wasn't really a mandate, but it was sort of "yeah we're all going to do this" because I knew there were enough of them who wanted to do it. So the resistors didn't have a big choice. But I think the biggest support that I give them is validating that it's working, you know, constantly saying wow, it's amazing how so and so is reading. Wow, you mean 25 of your 28 are above and on grade level? Going into classrooms and—and I am; this is not an act—being wowed by the independent stuff that's going on, watching, saying to someone... "Wow, you're doing stations, you're doing your work board"... just sort of pointing out why it's important, or why it's working. (Administrator B)*

As administrators spend more time in the classroom focused directly on content, their involvement can be a springboard for providing other instructional support for teachers, whether inside or outside of the classroom. Furthermore, the involvement helps administrators work through the details of the literacy focus over time.

Conclusions. In this section on developing a school-wide literacy focus, we have shown that schools are engaging in a variety of strategies, both small and large scale, for improving students' skills in reading and writing. As we will show later, we have seen advances, but they are not representative of what all schools are doing. We have picked out some specific strategies and challenges to demonstrate the work that is being done across the Cohort. Some schools are engaging in several of these types of strategies at once; some schools, in comparison, are doing very little.

At this point, we have seen almost no systematic literacy focus at the high schools. Although content coaches may work with individual teachers in productive ways, we have no evidence that their impact will extend beyond the few teachers who have chosen to take on this literacy work. There are several reasons for this situation. First, given the design of the BAC strategy, high schools may not be getting sufficient support to initiate and sustain a literacy focus. The one or

even two-day-per-week coaching model enables a coach to reach only a few of the many teachers who make up a high school faculty. Second, currently, there are no literacy models or programs for use in high schools. As we noted earlier, this situation could change as a result of the task force on secondary literacy led by Sheila Brown. Third, high schools are devoting much of their common planning time to issues associated with school restructuring as required by the district. This has the effect of limiting time for discussion of literacy and literacy instruction. And, fourth, many high school teachers across the content areas do not yet see themselves as responsible for literacy development. As a result, they are not eager to engage in literacy focused professional development. We have no evidence to suggest that, at the current time, headmasters are working to change teachers' conceptions of their role with secondary literacy development.

In schools that are actively engaged in their literacy focus, teachers, often with the participation or the support of administrators, are attending workshops and in-services. They are looking at student work to assess writing skills. They are setting up programs that encourage students to read more. They are working with coaches to come up with targeted goals, and ways to move toward those goals. They are meeting with each other for curriculum discussion and planning.

As teachers, administrators, and coaches across the Cohort talked to us about the beginning stages of their focus on literacy, they described the challenges related to multi-faceted tasks like integrating literacy across the content areas or establishing a literacy focus for grades that are not part of a literacy program. These tasks are large, and take time to think through and set up. For this reason, we emphasize the importance of making sure that people have opportunities for working together on implementation. We showed examples of teachers who feel frustrated and isolated when it comes to the literacy focus in their classrooms. We also showed examples of teachers who have been setting up programs and changing curriculum through their work in teams. If teachers have structured time to collaborate specifically on the literacy focus, and if they have tools to develop instructional skills and ideas, they can accomplish a great deal.

Teachers, administrators, and coaches are working hard to ensure that their school-wide focus on literacy results in success. We heard examples of recent improvements in students' reading and writing skills:

> *Well I know that the group of students that I got this year seem to be on a much higher level. Their skills seem to be much higher than I'm used to. Writing and being able to-- I mean, I'm just amazed at the writing that they can do and that they can write. I can give them a topic and that they write a few paragraphs that relate to the topic and have organized writing... somewhere they developed some better skills and I'm not sure exactly where. But I know that other kids I've had in the past, you've been lucky to get a sentence out of them, and so somewhere something is improving. (Teacher K)*

> *So have I seen evidence [of progress]? Yes. There are teachers clamoring for books. That's a good sign. Why would you want books if you didn't have kids reading. There are teachers clamoring for dictionaries. That's a good sign. Why would you want them if you weren't planning to teach them some words. I have gone around the building and in general... [during] the reading period, there's more quiet and more order. That's a good sign. I have seen an exemplary reading*

workshop going on at that time. I've seen directed lessons going on at that time. They do have basal readers, which teachers who haven't taught reading before have been using. So that's good that it's going on. I've seen that. There are bulletin boards going up indicating that teachers are using writing in the classroom. (Coach G)

Well, last year's Stanford Nine scores. We went up 40%, I believe, overall, in this classroom itself, in language arts... And we see so much more progress [this year], so we're like, when are [this year's] scores coming back, because we saw the kids develop tremendously... [I attribute this to] the fact that they had teachers the first year, and then they had the same teachers the next year, and the focus on writing last year for our... class, I mean we wrote constantly. And we did the same thing this year. We always write, always write, always write. And just the teaching style. And the co-teacher, having two teachers teach the subject, being able to focus on certain students, and making sure the students' needs are being met, because there are two teachers in the classroom. I think that's a huge factor. The kids' needs are being met. (Teacher I)

Children have to really think about [answering a key question]. And they have to support it with details. And they know that. And I've done tons and tons of modeling with the children. They like to sit and hear each other's responses to Key Questions, they count out the supporting details, they look for the wrap-ups, and they talk about if it's a one, a two, a three, or a four, and they can go "it's a high three," and the hands go up, and the hands go down to show that's a low, I mean they're really into it now, and they know what constitutes good writing. The writing is so much better. It's just so much better. It's very exciting... [Also supporting the literacy focus,] the literacy tutors that came through [a separate project] were extremely helpful. I had some children who don't get support at home, but getting that support for one hour a week kept them on target. (Teacher G)

The change of my kids from the beginning of the year to now. It's like they're different kids than they were. They're different kids now than September. The way they look at books, the way they choose books is very, very different. The way they share books with each other is very different. The fact that I actually have kids finishing books. It's definitely different. It's not only my classroom but it's the school community. There's a difference in the way the children react to books. [I would attribute this to the fact that] I think the school as a whole has a focus. Its focus is consistent. There's consistency between the grades. The children understand that and they see that. I think that's the main difference. (Teacher S)

These quotes provide some insights into what factors teachers feel have led to improved literacy. Some of these are specifically related to Boston's focus on literacy: Key Questions, consistency in focus, and emphasis on writing. Other factors are those that many feel help learning in general: individual tutoring, a smaller teacher-to-student ratio, and looping teachers.

The fact that teachers and coaches are noting concrete evidence of progress in their schools is encouraging. As schools begin to see changes like these, they are reassured that their efforts are making a difference. It is crucial that schools be able to make educated observations about their students' improvement, so that they can tell what is working and what is not working. It is also important to make these observations in order to reassess school-wide priorities as time goes by. In the next section, we will discuss the efforts schools have made toward assessing where students' literacy skills are now and where they are going.

Measuring Student Progress in Literacy

If decision-makers in a school opt to devote resources and training to an instructional focus, then they will want to have a means for determining its effectiveness. In fact, we have learned from our interviews that in many schools, measuring student progress has become a component of the school-wide literacy focus. Measuring student progress is important to the literacy focus in two ways. First, a literacy focus should always be responding to students' needs, which can only be determined through careful analysis of their performance. Second, measuring student progress provides a means for evaluating whether or not the literacy strategies themselves are effectively improving reading and writing skills. Not all schools are using measuring student progress in literacy to its full potential. However, some are making significant progress.

Some of the literacy programs schools have adopted, such as ELLI or the John Collins training in writing, provide training in classroom or school-wide assessment strategies. Thus, the programs lend themselves well to integrating assessment into literacy instruction. This can happen for the teachers who are participating in the training, or it can be extended to the whole school. For example, at one school that is undergoing ELLI training, the principal has asked teachers in all grades to submit an "assessment plan" that describes how they will measure students' progress in the classroom. The principal has made this a school-wide policy even though ELLI is only directly affecting the primary grades.

Teachers from the schools in our sample that have adopted ELLI are being trained in using "Running Records," a system for providing classroom-based assessments on a continuous basis. The process is meant to provide detailed information that helps teachers zero in on specific skills that students may be lacking. Moreover, the process is meant to be repeated throughout the year, so that students' overall progress can be gauged:

> *...we trained everybody on Running Records. All the primary teachers are using Running Records on their students. And the plan was that they measure everybody in the fall, and then every six weeks every student who is not up to level is measured again, so you have a continuing monitoring process. Which means teachers just have to do it with two students a day to be able to do their whole class. (Coach B)*

> *[In grades K-2] they have identified the Running Record... and the observation survey to establish the baseline as well as the quarterly checkpoints on progress. They really take the kids' literacy levels... They are becoming trained in [Running Records]. This year they're much more skillful at it. Do they use it for grouping*

instruction? Not really as much as I would have liked. They [are] still learning the tool. (Coach C)

As this last coach explains, not all teachers are using Running Records to their full potential as of yet. Nonetheless, several teachers expressed excitement about the capacity of Running Records to help them identify their students' needs:

I think the major benefit [of Running Records] is you can address individual needs quicker and group kids for a guided reading based on their particular needs instead of saying these are best readers, these are my in between readers, these are my low readers or just grouping children haphazardly. All children have certain strengths and certain things they can improve on. It helps you teach through their strengths in most cases. (Teacher V)

The following teacher speaks about using Running Records in conjunction with another, more intensive system for measuring individual students' progress in literacy:

I like very much the Running Records. Because we are becoming an ELLI school, we've just assessed all of our children, which is something we never did before. Annenberg did fund substitutes for two days so I could take my children one at a time. I can't tell you [how much] I learned about them doing that... We did Running Records and then a written piece and a spelling piece. It was very, very interesting to me. I did not get that when I did the quick Running Records. I didn't see it as much. (Teacher G)

Aside from assessment strategies that are connected to literacy programs, schools are using several different means for measuring progress in writing and reading. In terms of writing, some schools have been collecting baseline data and setting up benchmarks for writing skills. To assess students' performance in writing, one school is conducting faculty meetings across all the grades for the purpose of analyzing what the writing skills look like as students progress through the grade levels. Additionally, several schools are administering a writing prompt, and others are assigning BPS Key Questions across grades. In these ways, the schools collect writing samples from each student, and analyze the scores:

I saw the writing assessment for the midyear [writing prompt] that just got completed... it was modeled after the MCAS, I would say... [an open ended] type of situation. It was set up for kindergarten all the way up to fifth grade and it varied, it responded appropriately to the developmental levels of those grades. They had a criteria or a grid set up for evaluating the writing piece. Instructions were provided in depth specifically for teachers, what they would say and how to administer it, so that there would be continuity in that type of assessment. (Coach F)

What we have been able to do so far is set up three or four benchmarks. They use the key question process that Boston demands in an uncoached manner, scored a set of Key Questions for every single one of their students so they have a baseline. Are kids performing at level 1, level 2, whatever? We also entered Stanford 9

grades and if there was any ESL or second language benchmarks, we put those in. There's a plan to look at Key Questions at the end of winter and then again in June, to see if the work that we're doing enables kids to be better writers. Can we move a level 2 kid to a level 3. (Coach A)

To assess reading, some schools are using established reading assessments such as the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), or the Gates-MacGinitie reading test. One school is conducting conferencing sessions with individual students in order to determine the extent of their reading development in different areas.

Although it is too early to tell how schools are going to use the results of these writing and reading assessments, some teachers and coaches have given us an indication of some of the ways in which analysis of assessment results, across classrooms, can be used:

[In grades 3-5, we've talked about using] the Stanford 9 [to determine] how are the students doing? How do you read the test data? What does this actually mean? We got the Stanford 9 booklet... and were able to see what's considered textual reading, recreational reading, functional reading. So when it says that a student scores low on functional reading, what does that mean? (Coach C)

We did a school wide reading, vocab, and comprehension test and people are starting to look at the results of that and to more quickly say that this is what this kid needs to know. One class did pretty poor, in general, on the vocab. The person [said it] wasn't vocabulary, it was spelling. So, aha, we need to focus on spelling. That conversation just happened. We're doing it on our own, which is very interesting. (Teacher L)

...we just developed this rubric... to improve the scores on the MCAS and so this will be writing across the curriculum and in each class once a month they'll have to have a writing assignment and it will be graded in terms of the rubric... and then we'll have meetings with teachers and talk about the writing and compare writings and talk about how it's going and... teaching strategies. (Teacher P)

As these examples show, schools are engaging deeply not only with establishing systems for measuring student progress, but also with experimenting with how these assessments can drive instruction. This multi-step process is not an easy task. It involves, in many cases, making significant changes in teaching practice. Below, a teacher describes a workshop she attended which allowed her to develop a way of basing instruction on classroom assessments:

I learned something recently, last summer... They taught us how to keep anecdotal records or notes. What I'll do is just keep little notes on who knows what based on what comes out of [student work]. I try to do that whenever I grade some of their writing. I have had a hard time trying to keep track of who could write paragraphs and who remembered capital letters and who remembered their periods at the end. But now I've learned a new way to jot those things down and keep it in their records... Now, I know how to keep things organized so that I know who knows what. That's always been the most difficult thing for me. Just really

keeping track. ***It's easy to keep track of grades. This person did that. But <u>who</u> knows <u>what</u> is a whole different ball game. So this helps me to do that...*** *It's new. Right now I feel like it's a mess. But hopefully it will firm up and get organized. (Teacher J)*

As this teacher points out, the process of conducting deep assessments of student work is more than just recording grades. Maintaining a working knowledge of the specific skills that each student has and does not have is something else entirely. A coach makes a similar point about the importance of using assessment strategies in the classroom:

I strongly believe that... [assessment] dictates how we teach and that you can't live without it, and how do people teach without this kind of assessment, whether it be formal or informal assessment? Whether it be a test, or whether it be just observations and notes? Whether it be the benchmark book, or the writing sample? Whatever it is, it's a form of assessment that helps drive instruction... I just want to get more involved in how can we bring this assessment piece to the classroom in a practical way for these teachers, in how it's going to drive instruction for them. (Coach F)

Coaches have been devoting time and energy to helping their schools use assessments to drive instruction. When the focus is on measuring reading and writing skills, the literacy content coaches have been involved. They may be providing professional development for teachers, as well as setting up, administering, and analyzing the assessments:

Right now I'm also working on establishing the benchmarks for them... We're going to level all the stories in the anthologies, first around that criteria, and then we're going to begin to do trade books. And my job is to establish the benchmarks which they can operate off of... and the assessment piece comes in as why? how do we then change instruction to bring that child up to... whatever those levels are that they're comparing? (Coach F)

The other part of the work is sitting in on the team grade level meetings and helping them to identify what are kids doing. Where do we see a need? How do we address that need? (Coach A)

I've also worked with them to develop a baseline data gathering instrument. The plan at the beginning of the year was to train all teachers to give an informal reading inventory... That's not something you can do in a couple of hours of in service. So what we chose and what I've developed is a set of closed reading passages at multiple grade levels that will be administered during the reading periods. The teachers will score them and tabulate the results and then we can do it again at the end of the year and see if there has been some growth, [to see] the number of people [who] are at different grade levels on that passage from below to above grade level. (Coach G)

The process of measuring student progress can be used as a way to help teachers make ongoing changes in their curricula and in their teaching practices, because they can analyze progress in

terms of specific skills, not just specific students. The key word here, however, is "ongoing." No teacher can make a one-time analysis of student data and come away with a full understanding of how her class is progressing. Similarly, none of the activities that the coaches describe above can simply be set up once and left to run on their own. On the contrary, coaches and teachers must develop the capacity to work together over time to achieve their goals.

Because setting up a school-wide literacy focus is an ongoing process, schools take on a lot of work when they undertake the task. However, the fact that it is an ongoing process also means that using a system of measuring student progress as a part of the literacy focus makes it a more efficient focus. As we have seen, some schools are measuring student progress as a way of maintaining or monitoring the efforts they are making in the area of literacy. Other schools may be trying to focus on literacy while also setting up assessment strategies, without connecting the two. For these schools, one process takes time away from the other:

> *Because people are just starting the literacy training and although in some ways it would make total sense to do the internal accountability kinds of workshops at the same time, again, it was the feeling that you'd be drawing on the same people for all of these various things, and it just is too much. So we're certainly aware of the data and measurement and accountability needs. But we're not, that's still an area of sort of growth in terms of really figuring out how it's going to fit more into the school in a regular ongoing way... it's not at the stage where it needs to be yet. (Coach H)*

It is true that if external training is part of a school's plan to measure student progress as well as focus on literacy, there may not be enough time for teachers to undertake both at once. However, although they realize that time constraints are a real and serious problem for teachers and administrators, coaches caution against this type of differentiation within a whole school change process. In fact, some coaches are explicit about the extent to which assessment models that are embedded in specific literacy programs can benefit their schools:

> *And it [the John Collins training] also will help us stimulate the assessment process of collecting information, comparing it, having some kind of vehicle for saying what is a good paragraph? What are some of the dimensions of a good paragraph? Instead of just saying well, that looks OK. So [it makes] it less subjective. And there's going to be, he's going to provide charts for recording students' progress over time. It should be a good step for them. (Coach D)*

> *Our plan is when they select a literacy model, I am hoping that these teachers will [take part in the BAC internal accountability training.] The difficulty is each of the literacy models that schools might choose has [its own] way of doing assessment... You use that to then say what does that tell us as a school. What do we need to put in place? The difficulty with this school [taking part in the BAC internal accountability training right away] is they don't have the literacy model so they haven't got a means of assessment yet. (Coach A)*

As coaches, with direction from the BAC, continue to emphasize measuring student progress in their schools, we expect to see much more activity and progress in this area. Since many schools

will simultaneously be working to implement literacy plans, it would be efficient for schools to view the two as mutually complementary means to an end. This is not to say that schools should be measuring student progress exclusively in literacy. However, if a school's instructional focus is literacy, then efforts to integrate an assessment system into the focus can be doubly beneficial.

Conclusions. In this section we have shown that many schools are measuring students' progress by assessing their writing and reading skills. Assessment is multi-layered. Teachers can use it to see student progress as a whole, and/or to analyze how that progress (or lack of progress) should affect their classroom or subject area, and/or to maintain an understanding of which specific skills need to be taught differently. As our examples show, teachers and coaches who are measuring student progress, and who find it effective, link the process to changing classroom practice and to their own professional development. Although most of these links are made in reference to what teachers and coaches would like to do, rather than what they have already done, their comments indicate the direction in which they see their schools headed.

As schools continue to measure student progress in literacy, they will be able to determine the effectiveness of their literacy focus. They will also be able to continually reassess what students need in terms of reading and writing instruction. We are encouraged by the strong start that some of the schools have made, and will continue to investigate how teachers and administrators are collecting data and analyzing the results (particularly what they are using the results to accomplish) over the next few years.

Summary and Conclusions: A Need for Ongoing Support

Cohort II schools have been focusing on literacy for one or two years; but some of them are very much at the beginning stages of their development of this focus. Although schools are moving forward, there is still significant work ahead of them:

> *I think this new program in writing will help the whole school, actually, because these people will pick up the ball... And yet they haven't tapped their potential. That's the problem. They've got a ways to go. (Coach D)*
>
> *We still have our literacy team [which is]... a group that would meet with [an external literacy specialist last year]. It's the group that meets amongst ourselves in order to look at supplies, look at needs, look at how we're using the personnel for literacy and looking at what direction we're heading as far as literacy in the school... We're still plugging away. It's harder without a coach. It makes it difficult. I guess I would classify us in somewhat of a sophomore slump... There's a lot of pockets of professional development going on but we haven't been able to bring it all together. (Teacher V)*
> *The challenges now are beyond the implementation of ELLI. It's now taking it to that higher order. You can implement something and do it the same way you've always done something... Are we now taking it to the next step with kids? Are we asking the kinds of questions that I think the foundation and the philosophy of ELLI is on? We've all been trained in writers workshop and we're all doing this, but are we still spelling words for kids? Are we still marking up papers and making spelling the big thing? We're making kids really independent learners, but*

are we also making them managers of their learning?... So I think we're really at a next level. We're really beginning to think of objectives... And I think we'll struggle with that and I hope we always do that. I hope we never get to the point where we stop doing that. (Administrator B)

I want to move them from teacher directed to more student interaction. I want to move them from an assessment model so they talk in terms of where they see a need for intervention and what that intervention should be. What it ought to look like. I want to do a little bit more with writing across the curriculum... because Boston has put a push on the Key Questions process, a lot of what they do when they look at student writing is in response to those Key Questions which is automatically your literature. So they haven't done much writing in math or science or social studies. (Coach A)

I know that there are more teachers doing reading than ever before... Some of them are not... Some of them are set on methods that are thirty years out of date. (Coach G)

It is clear that schools are at varying stages in the process. Our findings are based on early, baseline data. In this report we have focused on three major areas where we have seen progress in certain schools. They were: the process of implementing a literacy program; the "non-program" strategies associated with a literacy focus; and measuring student progress in literacy.

From schools that are beginning training in a literacy program, we learned that while the initial training teachers are receiving is extremely helpful, they find it difficult to set up the programs in their classrooms if they do not have ongoing support. From schools and instructional teams that are concentrating on other strategies besides a literacy program, we learned that some of the challenges that present themselves require complex, multi-faceted problem solving. Decision-makers in schools are figuring out how to set up a structure for addressing the varying needs of a student population across subject areas, or across grade levels. From schools that are measuring student progress in literacy, we learned that assessing students' reading and writing skills is beginning to inform and change teacher practice. Teachers and coaches are talking about assessment as a means for guiding instruction, and for coming to a firm understanding of what type of work needs to be done school-wide.

Based on the data we have collected from the schools that are engaged in these areas of progress, we make the following suggestions:

- **A specific literacy program should be introduced into a school within a larger infrastructure of support.** If teachers do not have the support or the resources necessary to implement the program in their classrooms, they will not be able to use what they have learned. If it is impossible to provide all of the material resources connected with a new program right away, then teachers should be aware of when and how they will be obtained. Similarly, teachers implementing a new program need to have a source of

support for addressing their questions, concerns, and ideas about the program. This should be available via regular meetings with a literacy facilitator or coordinator, or a coach or administrator who has been trained in the program. During such meetings, the only goal is to talk about the literacy program.[10]

- **As administrators and teachers plan and develop a literacy focus in their schools, they should have continual opportunities to collaborate on strategies and goals.** Baseline data suggest that some instructional team meetings are being used for this purpose. The task of focusing on literacy is large and varied. If it is left to be vaguely defined or carried out, there is the danger that nothing will change or improve. On the other hand, if teachers can work together, with administrators and coaches to facilitate these discussions, they can inform each other about what strategies they are trying, what is working, and where the problems lie. If time is set aside to talk specifically about literacy, faculty can get very specific about how the pedagogy necessary for achievement in literacy gets translated into their classrooms. Finally, they can be clear about how the different pieces of the focus fit together into a comprehensive plan.

- **Schools should measure student progress in the target areas of their literacy focus.** Many schools are in the process of establishing a system for collecting data on student performance in literacy. Measuring student progress is a multi-layered activity that is most helpful when results can be directly related to the classroom. For a school with a literacy focus, a logical way to do this is to measure student progress in the areas where the literacy focus is concentrated. This can be a great help as schools come to deeper understandings of "the focus of their focus." Since every school's literacy needs are different, and since they may change over time, evaluation and re-evaluation of goals and strategies are necessary. As measuring student progress provides the data and the forum for this re-evaluation, it is an essential component of a school-wide literacy focus.

Two key factors help all of these components of a school-wide literacy focus happen: professional development that is ongoing, and the opportunity for teachers (and involved administrators) to collaborate regularly. We emphasize that both these components need to be maximized in the schools. Both of these types of support need to occur continually throughout the year. Ongoing professional development can take on a variety of forms: coaches providing classroom demonstrations; administrators, literacy facilitators/coordinators, or coaches leading on-site professional development; or external workshops and in-services that can be followed up over time. There are some examples of this happening in Cohort II:

> *Built in support is having a literacy coordinator. I think that's a powerful thing that ELLI, that any good program does; it allows it to sustain when they leave. They have trained her well. She is a lifelong member of this little club... as long as we're an ELLI school or a Literacy Collaborative school, she will have to do certain things that will then keep her current, will keep us current. And I think that's pretty powerful... (Administrator B)*

[10]A model for this exists in the ELLI program where, in the fourth phase of implementation, the literacy coordinator leads weekly "ELLI classes" with teachers currently being trained in ELLI.

One teacher who had participated in weekly classes for LLIFE, said the classes worked well because a group of teachers were trained by a teacher and administrator in the building who had earlier been trained in LLIFE. She goes on to describe the setup of the classes:

> *It was always after school [once a week] and then during the school time we would go in and watch the teacher do what we learned in LLIFE. And we would share with the class what we were doing in LLIFE in our classroom... And the teacher that was actually doing the LLIFE program came and got some of the work that we had implemented, and shared it with her class. So there was a lot of sharing, and "you talk to me, I talk to you," as a way of opening up the teachers that normally didn't share. It was good. (Teacher I)*

Professional development is only helpful if it is targeted to what teachers really need. Teachers find out what they need, and what larger sectors of students need, when they work together. Ongoing teacher collaboration can happen in many ways: school decision-makers meeting regularly to analyze the results of student data; regular opportunities for teachers implementing a literacy program to meet; or instructional team meetings that are targeted to instructional goals and strategies. A teacher describes a writing class that she was taking outside of school time, with teachers from her school as well as other Boston schools:

> *It gives us an opportunity to share student work. [The teacher] brings in guest speakers from different fields, social studies, English, what have you, and gives us all samples of really good work. Really good ways of getting kids started with reading and writing. (Teacher Q)*

Such valuable learning experiences do not have to happen outside of school. A teacher describes her involvement with weekly common planning time that is geared exclusively to literacy:

> *I think in terms of professional development that this is the best model for professional development in terms of meeting weekly, once a week, to check up. Sometimes we've had professional development and then we never hear about it ever again when everybody went for like the week or the day and nothing ever happens. And some people do it and some people don't. This is a nice way of keeping up with what's happening or follow through. (Teacher P)*

Another teacher describes a Teacher Inquiry Grant that she and her colleagues received from the Center for Leadership Development (CLD) that they used to run a literacy-focused weekly meeting for some of the primary teachers:

> *We established an Inquiry Group and... we're up to 15 teachers now. And we've met every [week] for an hour and a half, and as part of the grant every teacher got one day to go visit an ELLI school and go with a group of a teachers, go out and have a late lunch and discuss what you saw. That kind of time is never built into anything, because you see something and then you run back, and you don't get a chance to talk about it while you're fresh... And I think that the Inquiry Grant is probably the best thing that we ever did. No money involved for anybody,*

everybody volunteered their time, there's a coach...and she came the first day and said that she didn't have time to give us any time, but she would come this particular day, and she came the first day, and she's come faithfully ever since, because she was so motivated by a group of people who wanted so much to discuss new ways of teaching, new ways of learning, new ways of presenting books, and she's been a great help. And the group has been wonderful, and I think it really gelled the... teachers together. They feel much more cohesive, we're very comfortable, we do a lot of trading of information... I think the Superintendent has decided, from what I heard, that they are not going to do Inquiry Grants for next year. [But] really, the bonus for the teachers is getting all of this time. That's probably the best money spent in the city... I would suspect that at least some of us will continue next year. People were very comfortable with it. I'm going to try again to get people in it. (Teacher G)

One coach describes how much gets done when teachers have the opportunity to combine collaboration with effective professional development in the context of a workshop she led outside of school time:

... when I have done in-services one of the most valuable things to the teacher is a chance to talk to other teachers about what they're doing. This is real instructive to them... To be honest, when you're in there in the school it's really catch as catch can. You're meeting with teachers in their one P&D time. A lot of times you don't have time. I was just reading pre-conferencing with teachers and post-conferencing with teachers. I was thinking, how do find the time to do this in a teacher's day? Having that course time with people and having more of a sounding board [is better]. To do it in a milieu of other teachers working on the same kinds of things is really very helpful. (Coach E)

Coaches, especially literacy content coaches, are in an ideal position to provide ongoing support for teacher collaboration regarding literacy. They can also provide or organize useful professional development, because being in schools on a regular basis allows them to determine that school's specific needs. From a recent Annenberg coaches' meeting we observed, we know that the BAC is stressing the need for coaches to help schools make ongoing professional development in literacy a priority.

On the other hand, we caution against having a coach be a school's only means of ongoing support. Coaches cannot provide adequate support for a school in one day per week. Furthermore, since coaches will not be around forever, there should be administrators and teachers trained as literacy coordinators or facilitators who are able to fill this niche. As Cohort II schools continue to undergo training in literacy programs that include literacy coordinators or facilitators, we expect to hear more about their role in supporting a literacy focus.

An instructional focus on literacy is a focus on improving students' literacy skills, as well as developing teachers' pedagogy and classroom strategies in order to accomplish this goal. Toward this end, we will look for more school-wide assessments of student performance, targeted professional development, and teacher collaboration in the future. We will also look for evidence of more teachers and administrators involved in the literacy focus. As we have shown in this

report, schools are at the initial stages of developing a literacy focus. They are beginning at a number of different points, and engaging in different strategies, depending on their individual needs and objectives. As schools continue to focus on literacy, we will surely witness more and more progress toward the achievement of their goals.

III. WHOLE SCHOOL CHANGE COACHES AT WORK

Coaches are fundamental to the implementation of the Essentials that frame reform in Cohort II schools. During the 1998-1999 school year, most schools had two coaches – a WSC coach and a content coach – each of whom spent one day a week in the school.[11] Both coaches help teachers implement their instructional focus.[12] However, WSC coaches a) work most closely with principals supporting their work as instructional leaders and leaders of whole-school change, b) assist with implementing the BAC's focus for the school year, and c) support the work of the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT). Coaches understand their role in these terms. Yet they also report that it is often difficult to know how to approach these areas. Coaches report that their role is ambiguous and varied, that the work is difficult and challenging in many different ways. Coaches are correct; their work is difficult and challenging. It is also important. Without continuing coach support, it is doubtful that schools could keep their attention on whole-school change and on activities that focus on teaching and learning.

WSC coaches come to their work from different backgrounds and with varied knowledge and skill. Without initial and ongoing professional development support from the BAC leadership, coaches could not learn the full meaning of the whole-school change effort in Boston nor get better at their work. The primary forum for such learning has been monthly coach meetings. Coach interviews revealed considerable dissatisfaction with these meetings during the 1997-1998 school year because meetings were dominated by the BAC leadership and required coaches to sit and listen to information. BAC Project Director Mary Russo agreed with this characterization of the coach meetings. Interview data also reveal that during the 1998-1999 school year the BAC leadership made significant progress in changing the tenor and content of the meetings by a) creating a "head coach" role that provided a liaison between the coaches and the BAC leadership, and b) engaging coaches more in shaping their work within the context of the BAC meetings. These changes have led to reports of greater satisfaction with the meetings. Despite these improvements in support, late into the 1998-1999 schoolyear, WSC coaches continued to raise fundamental questions about how to approach their work. They want to know how to take the most appropriate approach with principals, and how to encourage more teachers to take leadership positions within the school, for example. Although coaches understand that there are no simple responses to such complex questions, they struggle to find for themselves the most effective and proper balance between alternative choices: supervising versus supporting, directing versus facilitating, moving fast and pushing hard, or going slow and stepping back. These choices, and how coaches choose to make them, have important implications for the outcomes of their work. They also have implications for the kinds of learning opportunities necessary to guide coaches' work.

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[11]High schools, due to their large size, have their literacy coaches for two days each week and they have a math content coach one day each week.

[12]Some schools in Cohort II did not have coaches for all of this school year. Some schools did not have WSC coaches until well into the fall; others did not have content coaches until January or February of 1999. By May, 1999, Education Matters had interviewed all but two WSC and content coaches. In this section of the report, we focus on the work of the WSC coaches. We present the work of the content coaches in the section that addresses the implementation of a literacy focus.

To further explore the role of the WSC coaches, we turn first to a review of the ways in which they understand their role and implement their work with principals. Coaches' work with principals is essential since, without principal leadership, it is unlikely that the changes necessary to support better teaching and learning will occur. Second we review the role of the BAC leadership in supporting the coaches' work, identifying areas of strength as well as areas in need of further attention. We conclude this section with a discussion of issues to consider as some schools contemplate phasing out the work of the WSC coach.

Understanding the WSC Coach Role

The BAC leadership set very general expectations for the WSC coach role. Basically, it expects WSC coaches to be "diagnosticians," that is, a) to enter a school and assess that school's progress in meeting the Essentials, and then, b) with the principal and the ILT, to develop a plan to move the school forward. The focus of their work is to be on developing instructional leadership knowledge and skill in the principal and in the members of the ILT. WSC coaches understand their role in these general terms and they understand that they must "customize" their work in light of the school's and principal's particular needs. The need for customizing means that coaches must figure out what to do; they know that there is no single set of strategies that will move all schools effectively toward achievement of the Essentials. Coaches describe the clarity as well as the complexity of the role.

> *I was given the seven Essentials... this is what we're trying to do. So that was very clear, that part of it. The actual work is a little bit more customized...[The role] is confusing; it's very complex. But, I think it's a role that needs to develop within the school, ... (Coach P)*

In broad terms, coaches understand that they are to help schools focus on the Essentials. Many, however, are not sure, how to turn the general approach to the role into specific actions.

> *I don't know how well articulated I ever felt the position was. I'm not sure it was well articulated. The impression was that we were to facilitate the change process within the school, but that there was to be a real focus on instruction, but not instruction from the perspective of the way in which the content coach actually works in the classroom. But that we were really supposed to sort of facilitate the change process and try to have the schools doing certain things, or starting to take certain steps, whether it's the ways in which they're doing their professional development or planning or building instructional leadership within the school, whatever. That there were certain ways in which the schools needed to start moving forward. But I'm not sure how well articulated it was. (Coach Y)*

> *It wasn't described well... What I was told as a change coach is that I was going to go in there to help them move forward. And that was about all I got. When I really found out what my job was is when I was having difficulties with the staff and Mary Russo came into a staff meeting, and she explained what my job was to*

them. That was kind of the first I'd heard of all the pieces, and the first I'd heard that it was to be focused on literacy. I didn't know that going in. I didn't know that when I had my first few meetings with the principal.... I'm still not sure I have it right. It's clearer in my mind that it's supposed to be about literacy, but I've talked to other coaches and they're not clear about that. They're clearer that it's supposed to be all school change, and that's what I was told in the beginning. But then I was retold to be focused on literacy. (Coach Z)[13]

Coaches report these uncertainties about the focus and parameters of their role whether they are new to their schools or whether they have been coaches since the first year of the BAC.

Some coaches understand that the thrust of the reform agenda requires a significant change in current practices. They recognize what they need to attend to and that it requires a great deal of work on the part of principals and teachers, as this coach suggests.

My interpretation is that a reform coach actually helps in changing the structures, the instructional focus, really looking at whole school change long term and what has to happen there in terms of everything. In terms of meetings, in terms of looking at the data and gathering a group of leaders and so forth. Coming up with ideas, bringing in other resources, working with the team. (Coach P)

Although coaches understand that they must tailor the work of implementing the Essentials to the school contexts in which they work, some note that there are limits to the flexibility and authority that they have in this regard. They report that each year the BAC identifies areas that coaches and schools must emphasize. These emphases are required, regardless of the coach's view of the school's readiness for them, as this coach suggests.

Year to year there are new requirements and expectations that are announced to us, without input from us. This is what we're working on this year; Cohort II schools will do thus and such this year, and the change coaches will be responsible ...to accomplish these things. And there is frustration in the fact that the requirements are sometimes removed from the situation that exists in the school and what's actually needed in the school. (Coach K)

According to the BAC leadership, these requirements and expectations were carefully developed from the schools' self-assessment data. This link between school-based data and emphases for the schools, however, may not have been made clear to the coaches.

Coaches face potential tensions, then, as they navigate between tailoring their work and designing it in light of the schools' needs while assuring that the schools are heading toward achieving the Essentials. In this context, many coaches, especially those who were new this past school year, reported that they would have liked more clarity and definition. This is so, even though they

[13]At the start of the 1998-1999 school year, the Superintendent identified literacy as the focus for everyone in the BPS. This coach may have been confused about how the WSC effort was to include this focus.

realize the role is inherently and necessarily ambiguous and must be refined in the course of their work.

There is another area in which coaches express uncertainty about how to implement their role. As part of tailoring the work to achieve the goals of the BAC, coaches must figure out how to start and sustain the change process. WSC coaches work in schools that vary with respect to principal's knowledge and skill and teachers' willingness to take on the work of reform. They work in schools where disruptions to teaching and learning are minimal and in schools where they are frequent. And, they work in schools that are at various stages of implementing the components of Boston's whole-school change model. Within these settings, coaches must figure out, for example, a) when and how hard to push principals and teachers to address the reform agenda, b) how directive to be when they see little movement at the school level, and c) how much collaboration and joint decision making they need to encourage in order to embed the reform agenda in the school. Coaches ask themselves whether to be more directive (to get things moving more quickly) or whether to be more inclusive, at the risk of slowing the pace of reform. Coaches understand the trade-off between shared decision-making (a slow process), and traditional decision-making (a simpler and quicker process). These issues are endemic; they require coaches to make decisions about how to proceed.

For example, in deciding whether to push or move gradually, coaches must assess what kind of responses their advice will trigger. Deciding this issue is not a matter of understanding the Essentials, rather, it is a question of how to strike an effective balance among options as the following coaches' comments demonstrate.

> *The thing that I think we've done, in fact, we might have even erred on the side of it through this whole process-- is being really democratic. Just in my own reflection as a coach, I think in some sense that things have gone too slow at different points because we've wanted to be really inclusive. It's something that I work with the principal on. It's an ongoing conversation about what do you just decide and what do you get input on.. [Yet] there [have] been moments when the democratic bent has been immeasurably important. (Coach J)*
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> *I also spend a lot of time worrying about the leadership team. Frankly, I don't feel like I've made enough progress there. I think it's collective responsibility but part of the issue is the principal doesn't really use that group or see that group as a vehicle, [it] has played a very passive role. So I'm trying to work with her. Push, guide, coach her into using the group more effectively and in general being a more effective leader....One thing I've really pushed ... is [the principal] being more present in ... meetings. She never comes. .... It's more like if she sees me, then it's a reminder that maybe she'll come that day to that meeting. ... It didn't occur to me at the beginning of the year that I had to be explicit about that. Of course you would come. It's your school. The faculty is gathering! (Coach L)*
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> *That's an inherent difficulty for someone as myself as a change coach because it's easy for me to come in and say, "Oh, you're doing it totally wrong. You should do*

this and you should do that." But then I get to comfortably leave and say, "I'll see you next week." ... It's very easy for the principal to turn to me to say, "Oh, it's easy for you to come in here ... and talk about all these high ideas when I just had to take a child away from his parents... Down comes the social worker, down comes DSS, we're taking this child away from their parent... So what could be more profound than that..." And I want to say, "Wait a minute. Let's talk about teaching math for understanding." They're like, "Yeah, right." (Coach I)

And we talk about getting ready for meetings with staff about what we're going to emphasize... I can't push too much. You don't want to turn people off. So I do it in a gradual way, tell them to get after the opportunities to do certain things ... But [my approach] is sort of talk to her about certain issues in the school, ask her questions, ask him what's going to happen next. And then maybe occasionally I would take a stronger point of view and say no. (Coach D)

Finally, in the face of the complexity of the role, coaches must figure out how to exude confidence and coherence about the ultimate benefits of the reforms the schools and district are attempting. They must do this in the context of uncertainty and with full awareness that schools are being asked to do more work and more different kinds of work than they have done before and are feeling a great deal of stress as a result. The following coach comment captures part of this component of the coaches' role.

So really in a sense my role, it's a lot of hand holding. It's a lot of telling people-- this may seem chaotic and confusing-- but we have our plan. Let's just stick with our plan and things are going to work out. It's really this issue that we've been struggling with for decades now in school reform,...The idea that your kids are there everyday with all of their issues and all their problems and all their dysfunction. The school has to function just doing its normal work and now you're trying to do all this other stuff as well. It's just inherently a very difficult thing to do. Teachers' energy level(s) are really sort of ...sapped fully by their teaching. The principal's energy level is sapped almost completely by running the school. So now we come in with this whole other level of complexity and say in addition to all that-- which you can barely do-- we're going to add all this other stuff. It's really hard... So my role is all about trying to just keep us moving ahead in the face of all of these obstacles. (Coach I)

We think the combination of lack of specificity about what the WSC coach role should involve and how it should be implemented, coupled with the general agreement that it will be worked out in the context of each individual school, has the potential to strengthen or dilute the impact of the reform initiative. Coaches who construct a WSC coach role that reasonably represents the goals and practices envisioned by the BAC, will likely be able to tailor their work while maintaining the integrity of the reform agenda. WSC coaches who misconstrue their role and/or the goals and practices associated with the reform, could tailor their work to meet the school's stated needs but not those of the BAC reform agenda. Thus, the result of locally developed WSC coach practices can either nurture or thwart development toward the Essentials. The outcome will depend on how

well coaches understand the theory that undergirds the reform agenda and the strategies that can be used to achieve them. At this point in our evaluation, we are concerned that coaches have not been provided with sufficient professional development to ensure that they understand the coach role in theory and in practice with respect to implementing the Essentials as the route to whole-school change.[14]

One way to ensure that coaches develop and use common criteria and understandings is to provide them with a) meaningful opportunities to develop the conceptual ideas that undergird the reform, b) an idea of what those ideas might look like in practice, c) appropriate support when they find themselves dealing with difficult situations and d) feedback about the progress of their work. The first three items can be addressed in formal and informal coach professional development. The fourth can be addressed through an ongoing process of coach assessment and evaluation. We return to these issues in a later discussion about coaches' opportunities to learn in their coach meetings and the BAC process of evaluating the quality of their work.

The Coach-Principal Relationship. In order to fulfill their coaching obligations, WSC coaches need to establish reasonable, trusting relationships with principals. Since principals had a role in selecting coaches, most coaches begin their work on a positive note. Then, it is up to the coaches to demonstrate that their knowledge and skill can help the principal move her school forward with its reform agenda. Our data suggest that many WSC coaches have a positive working relationship with their principals.[15] Many report having made some progress in developing principals' capacity as instructional leaders. Others report struggling to influence the principals with whom they work. And, a few coaches, those who work in schools that are very far along in implementing the seven Essentials, wonder how to identify the moment when they should recommend terminating their involvement with the school.

In the context of this variation, we want first to review what WSC coaches do to establish their credibility and assist their principals, and second to consider the question of what to do with principals who seem not to be responding to the reform agenda and principals who think they are ready to terminate the work of the WSC coach. At the end of the section, we will discuss the question of whether some schools are ready to stop working with a WSC coach.

One important element of building a relationship with principals involves **convincing the principal of the coach's commitment to the school**. Some coaches accomplish this by being available to principals well beyond normal working hours. For example, one coach reflected

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[14]In our February 1999 report to the Boston Plan for Excellence, we noted that Cohort I coaches were also concerned about the extent to which they shared common understandings of the core elements of the school reform agenda. They worried that without such common understandings, they might not be helping schools to move in desired directions.

[15]For this baseline report, we interviewed all WSC coaches, not only those who work in our five sample schools. As a result, we have the coach perspective on coaching from all schools, but the principals' perspective on the coaches' work from only the five sample school principals. Overall, their assessment of the WSC coach role is positive. In future reports, we will focus on specific examples of the ways in which principals in our sample schools describe working with their WSC coaches.

many of her colleagues' experiences when she reported coming to the school to help her principal overcome a special challenge that had nothing to do with Annenberg because "[the principal] was desperate."(Coach K) Such behaviors highlight the intensity and commitment some coaches feel to their principals. The fact that principals want their coach to help, demonstrates that the principals have come to value their expertise. Such principal behavior provides important feedback to the coaches.

> *I have access to her all the time and we talk on the phone periodically, and she really lets her hair down with me. And she listens to me. I think she values my input... when I give feedback... she hears and applies exactly what I say... When it works, there's some real magic there. (Coach K)*

Although WSC coaches have been assigned to schools for one day per week, several report having extended conversations with their principals on the telephone, evenings and weekends. Occasionally these coaches describe circumstances in which principals open up to share their vulnerabilities and concerns. In these trusting relationships, **coaches may spend a considerable amount of their own unpaid time out of a sense of personal obligation to listen and advise.** The following coach comment reflects this fact; the coach also stresses the importance of building into the role time for such conversations with principals.

> *In terms of the principal, we talked a lot on the phone last year; every Sunday night we talked for about two hours... I think that is a necessary structure. One of the things you must do is block a time every week to meet with the principal. Have it be stable and set and a certain place and do not disturb and all that. Otherwise, it won't happen. (Coach J)*

Coaches describe their role as **helping principals reflect** on what they do and how well it works. As these coaches explain, this part of the role involves listening and asking questions.

> *I think the best thing that I can do is to be a sounding board for her in a way that allows her to reflect on what she does. When I ask her questions, sometimes that's the best thing I can do. (Coach I)*

> *I go in there and I listen to what her needs are and respond to them. She says, "You know, I need you there at the ILT, and to take this role." She wanted me to go to the block scheduling [meeting] and facilitate that. She wanted me to help her in the Title VII grant, all of that. And basically to...be another colleague who is also aware of what's going on in the school, whom she can problem solve with. She can get ideas from me that respond to the needs of the school, because she can't be everywhere. So I'm another eyes and ears for her without getting people in trouble, ...I always defer to her. I mean, I just give her the support and give her the ideas for her to translate to the ILT. So it's not coming from me, it's coming from her. I think that's really important in this school, too, because the leadership has to be very clear and has to be in one person. (Coach P)*

WSC coaches spend a good deal of their time **helping principals focus on instruction and instructional leadership**. They understand that enabling principals to establish instruction as a priority and then focus on it is a key aspect of this part of their work. WSC coaches understand that the principal faces pressures and demands from multiple sources and that many have too much to do. Almost all change coaches commented on the extremely complex environments in which principals work. Given the complexity, coaches stress the importance they place on helping principals focus on instruction.

> *I see my primary goal there is to help her focus, help her be reflective... I really see the leadership of this school needing help in staying focused. That's what they need, and I feel personally responsible in helping her do that. (Coach J)*

> *I think effective instructional leadership has to do with being clear about the focus. And every decision you make comes back to that focus. How do we keep driving it? ...I just wanted to make sure that she keeps focusing on it, because sometimes she gets these great ideas about going off and doing other things. (Coach N)*

Coaches initiate a wide variety of activities to maintain the principal's focus on teaching and learning by helping principals make teaching a public enterprise, organizing visits to other schools to see "best practices," planning professional development for teachers, organizing staff to look at student work and, helping school personnel to understand and use data. The following comments provide examples of how coaches help keep teaching and learning at the forefront of principals' attention and assist staff in learning how to interpret data.

> *One of the things I worked with the principal on is... to make teaching a public enterprise... After seeing this high range of quality we kind of bandied around ideas of how we can improve the quality... the idea of having teachers present their common assignments to each other came up as some form of accountability. Again, there's not any clear standards for that, it's just kind of out there. But tomorrow, each of the ... grade level teams... will be talking about what they want to do with their colleagues. (Coach J)*

> *One of the things that we've done is sit down and actually try to wade through that data. I've helped her and the instructional leadership team try to make sense of what that data reflects about student performance. That was how we came upon the whole identification of the need to improve problem solving. (Coach I)*

WSC coaches also **encourage principals to be out of their offices and in classrooms**. They understand the importance of this very visible focus on instruction. Coaches also understand that good instructional leadership is more than having a presence in the classroom; it requires principal engagement with teachers about teaching and learning. These coaches speak of creating a school environment that is a "learning place" or a "sacred space" that is conducive to regular discussion of ideas.

So [the principal is] creating all the conditions for them to learn, and the environment is such that people come into the school and say, "This is a learning place! This is like getting a master's degree just being here, because you're always engaged in things." And I think that's your most important job if you're a principal of a school, if you're the instructional leader. That's something you have to do all the time. (Coach D)

So what an instructional leader should do is create an environment in which the norm is for people to sit around talking about the very specific details of instruction. The only way that you do that, I think, is by modeling it... So, to me what it's all about is saying that all the administrivia and all of the stuff that could easily be dealt with in a different format doesn't get to enter into this sacred space where we talk only about teaching. (Coach I)

Many coaches report that they **help principals understand the importance of recruiting teachers to assume responsibility in order to drive whole school change**. They do this by helping principals to empower or to engage teachers to take on instructional leadership roles, including decision-making and problem-solving tasks. Coaches understand that this capacity-building role is essential to the continuation of the school's focus on instruction when there is no longer a coach on site.

I think what the principal really needs to do is create an environment of shared decision making where teachers are genuinely engaged in problem solving in the school, namely discussing ideas...I feel like instructional leadership is encouraging all of the staff to get involved in solving the problems of the school. (Coach I)

It leads into an interesting discussion that [the principal] and I are beginning to have about what's our role in helping develop leadership among the teachers...You need to have built some leadership among these folks so that they can carry on what you're doing, so if a new [principal] comes in they don't just take over and drive it in a different direction. And she's going: yeah but I'm not leaving. I say, I know you're not leaving, but think about that as a concept. (Coach N)

In terms of building capacity for shared decision-making, **WSC coaches act as strategists, assistants, and teachers**. As strategists, they engage principals in discussions before and after meetings to plan their next steps; they assume the role of "community organizer," that is, putting together the various action groups, mobilizing and coordinating group activity, and developing strategies to win support for various proposals. These organizing tasks are all related to the larger goal of spreading responsibility throughout the school community. Descriptions from the following two coaches capture the centrality of strategic work in effective coaching.

I think my client, the school, wants me to help them work through the change process, and that means getting the faculty, the parents, and the students all on board to revitalize methodology, content, toward successful student outcomes. So how do we do that? How do we reformulate the school? And the way the school

has chosen to go with my assistance is through a school-wide effort for everyone to be involved and for everyone to take little pieces of the change process....So we have all of these little pockets, owned by the faculty themselves, with a member from administration working with them. So, they see my role as sort of the facilitator of action, not the content expert, but really the facilitator of change. (Coach K)

What I've heard at one of the high schools we listened to the other day, getting them to be committed to one simple thing and going around and trying to lobby quietly to get them to come together. It was a very interesting case study for me, because I think that sometimes that's what it takes. You have to just do groundwork, spade work. We forget that sometimes. We think, well, I'm going to take care of that at the meeting, or something. Well, maybe that's OK, but you've got to maybe do more than that. Maybe you've got to do some personal contacts. (Coach D)

As assistant, the coach actually rolls up her sleeves to schedule appointments, do a multitude of tasks to free up the principal, or remind the principal about tasks not yet completed, conversations not followed through, meetings not attended or led successfully. Some coaches, especially those who operate at a greater distance from principals, function as intermediaries: writing agendas, writing notes from meetings, and memos to staff in order to keep communications open. Their goal in undertaking this work is not to assume it for the principal, but rather to model the kind of work that must be done to keep attention on instruction and the organizational structures that support the focus on instruction.[16]

As teacher, the **WSC coach models leadership skills**. Coaches understand that to build leadership capacity, it may be necessary to model a variety of skills: facilitating meetings, listening, or forging compromise. One coach, described how she actually walked teachers [and the principal] through mock sessions to hone facilitation skills.

I needed to run them through a mock session so that they could test their skills in various situations. Yesterday they actually ran the sessions, and I wanted to be there to give them feedback and coaching on how well they facilitated groups of their peers. (Coach K)

Summary. Change coaches work closely with their principals -- many in trusting relationships-- with the goal of strengthening instructional leadership skills. In doing their work, most coaches understand broadly that they are to help schools implement the seven Essentials, but that their role cannot be clearly defined by the BAC. Rather, they have customized their role through the complex daily interactions with the principal and others. How coaches choose to interpret their understandings and then mediate them in partnership with their principal is the

[16]Nonetheless, some coaches take on this work because their principals do not have the desire or capacity to do it themselves. In these cases, the WSC coach is supporting the school's efforts but not developing its capacity to fulfill these important and ongoing functions.

essence of coaching. It is a large and complex task that requires coaches to evaluate alternatives, exercise judgment, and identify effective strategies.

The fact that the course of school reform is not fully predictable requires coaches to examine choices, reflect, and make mid-course corrections. It requires them to deal with challenges and make decisions in light of their understanding of where their school is and where it is trying to go. Because these are the conditions under which coaches work, it is crucial that they have a thorough understanding of the reform they are trying to implement in order to make decisions that will move schools toward their goals. Coach interview data strongly suggest that coaches do not yet have -- and do not believe that they have -- a thorough grounding in the basics of the reform theory and agenda in Boston. To explore this situation, we turn next to issues of coaches' opportunities to learn their role.

The BAC's Work with Coaches

The BAC's stated goal in working with coaches is to a) help them become knowledgeable about the Essentials that undergird school reform in Cohort II, b) communicate clear expectations about coaches' work and, c) offer appropriate support, guidance and direction. Since its inception, the BAC's primary vehicle for this work has been monthly coach meetings. At the end of the 1997-1998 schoolyear, it was clear from coach interviews and from interviews with the BAC Project Director that coach meetings were not accomplishing these goals. Initial orientation and professional development for the WSC coach role had been weak.[17] Monthly meetings were described as unfocused and insufficiently attentive to the coaches' needs. When they were focused, meetings involved coaches in passively listening to information provided by the BAC. Coaches who joined the reform effort mid-year had virtually no introduction to the work of the Challenge.

A number of factors operated to create this situation. Foremost was the delayed appointment of a BAC Project Director. Mary Russo, a principal in Boston, was not appointed Project Director until late in December 1997. From July through December 1997 she served as Interim Project Director. During this time, she was also principal of her school. She was not replaced as principal until February 26, 1998. Even after her appointment, considerable resource constraints, most notably the lack of adequate support staff and assistance, seriously limited her ability to administer an ambitious reform initiative for 23 schools as well as direct all facets of the BAC.[18]

By the end of the 1997-1998 schoolyear, BAC leadership knew that many coaches were frustrated by the organization and content of their meetings. Coaches had individual and school-specific concerns and wanted the meetings to provide them with an opportunity to share experiences and

[17]During this schoolyear, Cohort II schools had WSC coaches but not content coaches.

[18]The BAC Project Director was directly responsible for the work of the Challenge in Cohort II schools, the Pilot Schools, and the Center for Leadership Development (CLD). In addition, she was responsible for organizing the Board of Governors' and Executive Committee meetings and for attending national Annenberg Challenge meetings of Directors, Researchers and Communications Directors.

benefit from the expertise of their colleagues. The BAC Project Director assembled a small working group, comprised largely of veteran coaches, that worked together to rethink coaches' knowledge needs. The group concluded that meetings should provide much more supportive instruction targeted to the Essentials as well as draw on the expertise of existing coaches. Several coaches noted that, while the coach cohort represented highly-intelligent individuals with impressive expertise in a variety of areas, as a whole, they had little direct experience in bringing schools through the change process.

> *A big part of the problem...is the fact that a lot of these coaches have never done whole school change. They know change process; they're very bright, capable people, but they need training. They really need, as a group of coaches, to be taken through how you do a resource audit, to be taken through how you lead a group in looking at student work, to be taken through what we mean by how you set up for, and work with, a group on site visits, on what an internal accountability system is, and how you work with a school to develop one... I mean, an internal accountability system is like turning the culture of a school on its head. That's not an easy thing to do, and pulling a few people out and teaching them how to do it isn't going to make it happen unless these coaches understand it...And the coaches don't know how to do it. (Coach B)*

With all of these ideas in mind, in the fall of 1998, after talking with many coaches, a plan was formulated to respond to coaches' requests to restructure their monthly meetings. First, the Project Director appointed a "head" coach to lead the meetings, an important step in conveying to coaches that the meetings would be more responsive to their needs. In addition, coaches were asked to complete a survey that would help the BAC leadership identify their knowledge needs. Second, veteran coaches with first-hand experience in facilitating the change process in schools were asked to lead the structured component of the monthly meetings. Third, a new format to encourage consultative collaboration was adopted, giving coaches more time to engage in mutual problem-solving. Fourth, the leadership organized a meeting schedule to allow content coaches and change coaches to meet separately and together on alternate months. These changes were implemented to ensure that coaches would have greater access in the collaborative, problem-solving discussions to those coaches whose needs most matched theirs. And, fifth, in a further effort to facilitate coaches' opportunities to talk with each other, the BAC set up an internal web site to enable coaches to converse electronically about school-related issues.

The goal of these changes was to provide coaches with a deeper understanding of their work and an opportunity to tap into the expertise of veteran coaches. To accomplish this goal, coaches were involved in planning and implementing the meetings. Our data suggest that the BAC leadership has met some of its goals for coach meetings, but not others. Our data also suggests that this approach to the coaches' meetings may have left some coaches without access to important knowledge and skills because it was not systematically available beyond informal conversations with coach colleagues.

Education Matters' researchers interviewed Mary Russo formally twice during the year to learn about the progress of the coaches' work and the goals of their monthly meetings. From those

interviews, we understand that her goal has been to set clear coach expectations without micro-managing coaches' daily work. This is a good approach since coaches are hired because they are competent to manage their own daily work and because the BAC Project Director could not know enough about each school's progress to suggest specific coach actions. According to Mary Russo,

> *We want to set their expectations, but we don't want to micro-manage how they do their jobs. So it's kind of a balance there.... We want to be really sure that we have the network of support for them as they do this work, that they have the training that they need to do this work, that their expertise is fully utilized in this work. And we want them to truly be a team.*

Education Matters' researchers also attended six coach meetings during the 1998-1999 school year. During those meetings, we noted the increased opportunities coaches had to work with one another on issues that arose out of their work with schools. The BAC Project Director made a successful effort to utilize the expertise of existing coaches thereby establishing meetings that were collegial and enabled coaches to support one another. We noted, however, that there did not seem to be an emphasis on helping coaches develop a common body of knowledge and skill with which to approach their work in Cohort II schools.[19]

In this section of the report, we explore BAC support for the coaches. We begin with a discussion of the ways in which the BAC used coach meetings to foster collegial work among the coaches and a sense that they are members of a reform team. Then we turn to the use of coach meetings and the ways in which they provided coaches with structured opportunities to learn. After this, we review the ways in which coaches' work was to be evaluated and we consider the question of whether some schools may no longer need their WSC coaches. Finally, we note areas in need of further attention.

Opportunities for Collaboration. One of the Project Director's major goals this year was to establish an environment that encourages teamwork and collaboration among the coaches. Mary Russo hoped that WSC and content coaches assigned to the *same* school would work together forming an in-school partnership. Because coaches are not necessarily scheduled to be in the schools on the same day, this ideal of teamwork was often difficult to achieve. Nonetheless, coaches have told us that it is important for them to have regular contact with the other coach working in their school.

> *I have been looking at this process, the contact with the change coach. Even if I see the person or have a small conversation on a weekly basis, I find that very beneficial. There's something about that contact week after week that keeps me motivated and going....there is something about that physicalness of having someone else there, another coach. (Coach F)*

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[19]We draw this conclusion with particular attention to the WSC coaches. Content coaches' work is more clearly defined from the outset; they do not express the same concerns about their role as do the WSC coaches. In addition, we have no direct observation of content coach meetings since the two that we planned to attend were canceled due to snowstorms.

One really great thing is we have very comparable styles, approaches, philosophies, and we work well together. So we've been doing the planning and working at the school in tandem and we're there on the same day. I think that's helpful. (Coach L)

Having a colleague for whom one feels responsible and from whom one derives support, is an important element in fostering resilience among coaches, especially for those who work in the most stressful situations.

I feel a commitment to working with (the content coach). I respect her and I respect her dedication and her expertise. You take two idealists and throw them in a situation like this, you've got to hang together. The last time we were in there I said, "Our job is not to bail out. We have to make sure that regardless of what else happens that we don't bail out." So I think I feel a personal commitment and responsibility to hanging in there with (the content coach). (Coach G)

I'm fortunate to work with (the change coach) because she coaches me. I don't know if that's her job but she coaches me. When I get frustrated with something that's gone on I'm just like, okay, I need to talk about this. That's been a big help...I think the role they've set up with the whole school change coach has importance in this. It would be very hard for me to have gone in cold [without the WSC coach there]. So that was good in the way that was planned. (Coach O)

Coaches also emphasized the pivotal role of coaches *outside* their schools in helping them cope with multiple challenges of coaching work. They believe there should be a systematic way to tap into the diverse talents that exist within their coach cohort.

I think within those collections of coaches... we can cover almost anything that comes up. We've got, I don't know, I could say a thousand years worth of experience sitting in those two groups there. From college professors to teachers to ex-principals, to ex-superintendents, to graduate students. I mean, they're coming from a whole spectrum of folks. I just think we're not making good use of that talent..... (Coach N)

I believe that when I listen to, I look at and listen to the other coaches, we are most, well, there is great variation in what we bring to the party. And I think we could all learn a heck of a lot from each other if the climate were right for us to honestly share and build skills. Because I do sense that some are much more educationally, theoretically based. ....So, I think there's a hell of a lot of possibility there if we could all exchange and share and grow. (Coach K)

Content coaches report that it has been especially helpful for them to share materials with content coaches working in other schools:

[Another coach] is coming here and she's going to bring the result of that item analysis and we're going to horse trade. She's going to give us that and we're going to give her our packets. We are networking already...sharing material. (Coach T)

To encourage and sustain these within and between school collaborations, coach monthly meetings provide time for small group coach discussions using what coaches referred to as a "consultancy protocol." This protocol provides a way of framing discussions for coaches in small groups around school-related issues. Most coaches with whom we spoke found the protocol beneficial.[20]

And the protocol was: one person has an issue, two people listen to the issue, and then when that person is done with the issue the two people discuss what they heard the other person say. We did that. It was fine. It was personally rewarding and helpful, and I can speak for the other members, as well. My evidence is that they said thank you and wanted to give me a hug afterwards. And I felt that meant that it had some positive impact. (Coach K)

Lately the coaches' meetings have started to be more focused around problem solving and sharing dilemmas and questions and I feel that's a really healthy direction... In the last one I got to present a question for a consultancy protocol to two other coaches and got their feedback. It was very specific. We each talked through a dilemma and it had immediate application to your work...I presented this question about how do I influence this principal and got their insights. (Coach L)

It was very helpful to talk with other...coaches. But also there was [the] opportunity within the actual meeting where a lot of the issues that I was having were actually addressed. It was very helpful. I feel much more comfortable and confident now that I've had the meetings with the other coaches, so just in terms of support it's been a major benefit. (Coach S)

I find them beneficial. I've gone to two combined coaches meetings, and I've enjoyed being there. I've gone away with a lot of information. They have accomplished their goals... and they've been productive... We've talked (at the coach meetings) about other issues, like problems other coaches are having. And I've found in the coaches meetings, when we did that in our last meeting, ... talking and hearing someone else had the same problem I have, ...it doesn't seem as bad. It's easier to cope with... It put it in a better perspective knowing you weren't alone. And maybe ... you feel like, if you don't see someone physically, you feel like you're more alone. And you need a support system...it's the support. (Coach F)

[20]Although coaches do speak well of the consultancy protocol, our observations reveal that coaches were more likely to talk informally about an issue than actually follow the protocol. We think that the protocol had symbolic value; it's presence indicated the importance that the BAC placed on coach interactions.

I'm trying to get ideas from people [about] when they have breakdowns what they do about them, and maybe try to think about how that would be useful at the school. It, I think [talking with other coaches], makes you step back, take a big, broader look. Because you can get into a microcosmic thing. You can get very focused on one little building, and you need to get perspective. This gives you a little perspective. (Coach D)

Our group broke out so that there was one teacher who worked in a high school, one coach who worked with a special needs population...and [myself]. That collaboration about how it looks at different schools, things that you've tried. I got real good advice from [one coach]..about setting goals with teachers and finding ways to follow up to see if those goals were set. (Coach A)

The BAC has responded to coaches and worked with them to redesign their professional development. On the basis of our interview and observation data, we know that coaches appreciate the opportunities they have to share with one another and offer support and guidance when they can. However, although the monthly meetings have provided coaches with opportunities to work with one another, they have not provided all the help that some coaches want and need. A few coaches reported that they remain unsure about their role and the way to bring about reform, as this coach reports.

I didn't know what I was doing in the beginning, and so, I really needed to get together and sit down and say what are you doing? I don't know what I'm doing. I did [that] personally outside of professional development...It was on my own time...and a little bit in the coaches' meetings you'd find out. But that was like the side conversations. It wasn't the conversations. The conversations were the big picture. But I really, really needed the day to day picture. (Coach Z)

Finally, the BAC tried to increase support for coaches by establishing a web site with an e-mail chat group to facilitate discussion. Because it is so difficult to schedule sufficient time for coaches to meet, some were enthusiastic about the potential for communicating by e-mail. Many coaches communicate with each other through e-mail, however, the potential of the chat group is, as yet, unrealized.

Structured Opportunities to Learn. The first coach meeting of the 1998-1999 school year began with a clear statement of the goals of the Annenberg Challenge Staff and Annenberg Head Coach with respect to the learning needs of coaches in light of the goals of the BAC. As stated, these were:

To be responsive to the individual and collective needs of coaches by providing on-going and timely professional development.

> To provide support and assistance in keeping the momentum of school reform moving forward and raising levels of student achievement.[21]

Coaches were told that, during this school year, their work should focus on helping schools create their professional development plans and put in place a system to measure student progress. In Cohort II, this would take the form of implementing what was originally called an Internal Accountability Plan (IAP). The structured component of coach meetings would focus on helping coaches learn how to assist their schools with developing a professional development plan and putting in place the IAP. Also on the agenda of this first coach meeting was time to discuss a survey that would reveal coaches' learning needs for the year. The first meeting was designed to respond to coaches' concerns from the previous school year.

During the discussion of coaches' learning needs, the conversation focused on a) the process of getting information from coaches about their needs and b) how to create some specific training for coaches new this year to the BAC. There was no discussion of the actual content of coaches' needs. The group decided that such a discussion would take place at the November coach meeting, after coaches had filled out the needs assessment survey and after new coaches had more time to work in their schools so that they would have a better idea of what they needed to know and be able to do.

At the November meeting, coaches had time to sit in small groups and discuss the needs of their schools and, therefore, their own needs for training. At the end of the small group discussions, coaches offered suggestions to the whole group. These included, for example: performance based assessments, helping principals develop as instructional leaders, creating trust among teachers so that they would work collaboratively, helping teachers become leaders, what leadership means and how to develop it, working with different members of the school community, and how to develop capacity among ILT members and others for the time when coaches would no longer be at the schools. At the end of the meeting there was general consensus among the coaches that they had identified key areas for their learning. BAC staff and the head coach then met and prioritized these areas. Since the time available to address these areas was limited to the monthly meetings, they decided to focus on two areas: internal accountability and the capacity of the ILTs. BAC leadership felt that many of the other areas could be addressed in the small collegial groups that met to share issues and concerns.

The agendas of subsequent coaches' meetings were the BAC's efforts to respond to coaches' needs, but coaches did not always understand the links between the agenda items and their needs and the BAC did not make the links explicit. For example, at the November meeting, coaches heard a presentation on the possibility of involving Cohort II teachers in an action research project at their schools. Coaches felt this would not be a good use of anyone's time. They considered it another project for which teachers would not have time and which would divert them from their focused work on literacy and whole-school change. From the leadership's perspective, the action research project had two promising features. First, it would enable teachers to involve themselves

[21] See Appendix A for the complete statement of Annenberg Challenge Cohort II Expectations for the 1998-1999 school year.

in work that would support internal accountability efforts and build internal capacity for that work. Second, teachers might be willing to participate in it because it would be led by a university professor and, therefore, they would be able to gain continuing education units from the work. These reasons for proposing the project were not made explicit to coaches.

At the December meeting, Jeff Nelson, an experienced coach and consultant, was invited to speak about how an Internal Accountability System could lead to higher MCAS and SAT9 scores. Although this topic was related to the coaches' work, it did not seem to address an item on their list of needs. From the BAC leadership's perspective, this session was designed to address the coaches' desire to learn more about performance assessment and was linked to later work that focused on measuring students' progress.

By the March coach meeting, conversations in the small consultancy groups strongly suggested that many coaches, especially those new to the BAC this year, were still unfamiliar with the Essentials and their implications for practice. For example, at the March meeting, one group of mostly newer coaches seemed unfamiliar with Looking at Student Work (LASW) as a school-based professional development activity. They had just come across the term "Embedded Model" and asked a more seasoned coach to explain what it was. One of the newer coaches then said that he had thought LASW would be explained when they had training on Measuring Student Progress (MSP). Other coaches told him that was incorrect and that LASW and MSP were two separate tasks. In a general, whole group discussion one coach said, "Some literacy models that schools are adopting come with assessment components that have teachers LASW. How does this fit in with the Essential?" Further discussion seemed to lead to more confusion.

At the April coach meeting, coaches talked at considerable length in small groups and then as a whole group about the need for further clarity about their role. They were talking about two aspects of this question. First, some of them wondered what they could insist on at the school -- what authority they had -- and what decision areas were fully in the school's domain. Second, they talked about the difficulty of implementing their role when principals and teachers were unclear about its parameters. They raised additional questions about how to a) provide feedback about principals and teachers who were not fulfilling their job obligations, and b) how to work in schools when there seemed to be little commitment to whole-school change. These important questions harken back to topics raised at the first two coach meetings.

We provide these examples to suggest that our data reveal little of what we would call a focus on the issues with which coaches indicated they wanted help a) in the survey they completed and discussed and b) in their interviews with us. Therefore, despite the fact that coach meetings were improved dramatically and enabled coaches to share and learn from one another, they did not provide coaches with the opportunity to gain clarity on some of the basics of their work that they identified as important to them as coaches.

This is not to say that the structured components of the coach meetings were without value. There were structured sessions in which coaches shared their expertise with one another. In such sessions, training was focused on something in which the coaches were engaged. For example, in April, shortly after coaches had received materials describing the Self-Assessment Process that had

to be completed by schools, the coach meeting was devoted to presentations by experienced coaches about how they had facilitated this work in the previous year and what they had learned from it. The session provided coaches with a number of strong options for getting the Self-Assessment completed. It included explanations of how different school contexts influenced what the coaches had done and the ways in which particular strategies had worked. This was a fine examples of how targeted training by experienced coaches supported the work of Cohort II coaches.

There was one particular area in which coach comments revealed that the meetings had helped them learn about a specific area of focus for Cohort II schools. This was the area of assessment.

> *We have had monthly meetings to acquaint us with each other–the coaches: content and change– and to give a larger perspective of what's going on.* ***Heavy on the assessment [measuring student progress] because that's the key.*** *That's the trigger, toggle point that they're using. Well, it makes sense. (Coach T)*
>
> *The coach meetings this year have been excellent... I think that they have addressed the issues so that each meeting has a focus.* ***I notice that our meeting for this month coming up is going to focus on the role of the coach in changing the MCAS results.*** *So it has a very definite focus, and we know it before we get there so that we can bring the right materials with us. (Coach V)*
>
> *It was a combined coaches meeting. It was very helpful for me.* ***I'm very interested in the discussions about the assessment piece for the city learning standards and how that plays a role in instruction.*** *So that information that I've gotten at the combined coaches meetings has been very helpful for me. (Coach F)*
>
> *And then I went to a whole coach meeting, I mean content and reform coach, where we had several presentations and* ***we were talking about measuring data, which is right on target with what we were talking about****. (Coach P)*

Such information was important to coaches since they knew that schools would begin to develop strategies for measuring student progress and that standardized test scores were high on all schools' lists of priorities. However, we also want to point out that coaches are quite correct in noting that they **learned about** assessment and using data to measure student progress in coach meetings. During their meetings, coaches did not have the opportunity to learn how to work in this area with their schools, and there was no follow-up to this introduction to the topic.[22]

We understand that there is little time available to train coaches in all that they need to know and know how to do. It is difficult to figure out what to include and what to exclude in whole group sessions. It is difficult to determine what information is essential given that coaches vary in

[22]Nine schools participated in Measuring Student Progress workshops during the spring. Coaches who attended those training sessions had the opportunity to learn more about this process. However, they were not participating in training about their role in supporting schools through this process.

experience and expertise. We recognize that there are limits to the BAC's resources and that it cannot pay coaches for all of the time it would like to have them participate in structured training. For example, nine Cohort II schools participated in four days of training focused on measuring student progress. Their coaches attended these sessions with their schools and so had an opportunity to learn what key leaders in their schools were learning. Other coaches, those whose schools were not yet involved, did not have this opportunity. They were invited to attend the training, but doing so would have involved them in missing that time at their schools or adding four days of unpaid time to their work. The structural constraints of coaches' one day per week commitment stood in the way of their attending.[23]

Evaluating Coaches' Work. Coaches we interviewed through early March 1999 told us that they did not know how their work would be evaluated at the end of the year. Many said that they did not have a clear idea of what the Project Director thought of the quality of their work. We knew that the Project Director had developed an evaluation mechanism that included at least five criteria to assess coach performance: coaches' monthly reports, feedback from schools, evidence from walk-throughs, the quality of the school's self-assessment report, and finally, periodic coach interviews with the Annenberg leadership. But none of the coaches with whom we spoke were aware of this evaluation scheme.[24] Some coaches had received informal feedback on their work, and most were aware that the Project Director read their monthly reports with great care. Still, they did not know the basis on which they would be evaluated as these coach comments indicate.

> *Coach evaluation. I haven't been told about that, and I'm not sure. We do have these invoices, which I'm not very clear about how to fill out, so, at the last minute, try to fill in every piece of information I can remember. But I know I don't stick them in any kind of strict format or any way that I would write a regular research report. Because of time constraints again. So I don't know if those are useful at all. I'm hoping that I will be evaluated by the work in the school and the progress of the school and the principal's evaluation of my work there. And the teachers. (Coach P)*

> *It's [how coaches will or should be evaluated] a difficult question because some schools are further along than other schools... The expectations have to be so general to include all the different schools and all the different situations...that it becomes very difficult to figure out where you fit. (Coach S)*

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[23]In Education Matters' *Mid-Year Evaluation Report* (2/99) to the BPE, we discussed limitations on the coach role that result from its structure and organizational context. Most of the issues discussed in that report are relevant for Cohort II coaches.

[24]The Project Director points out that the process of developing the evaluation in collaboration with the Human Resources department at John Hancock and getting BAC Governing Board approval for it took a great deal of time. In addition, the Project Director followed the advice of the head coach in determining when and how to introduce it. It was presented to coaches at their March 19, 1999 meeting.

One issue I have about taking on a school that I knew was in bad shape is: Am I responsible if they don't move from point A to point B? And how do we decide [how much movement is enough]? What's measurable? (Coach L)

If I'm going to be evaluated I'd like to know other than my guess work. If they want something specific I want them to tell me but [they have not been] ... terribly specific... [they] expect positive change. They expect to see results. (Coach T)

I'm sure the other coaches don't want any surprises at the end. Tell us exactly what's going to be expected and we'll put all the pieces into place, but work with us. Let's work together to determine what those pieces are, and processes for doing so. (Coach U)

At the March 19, 1999 coach meeting, coaches learned that their evaluation would be based on a coach self-assessment, feedback from members of the ILT, the principal/headmaster, and Project Director, Mary Russo. The evaluation forms were distributed and coaches were asked to consider them in small groups prior to having a whole-group discussion. Note was made of the fact that the forms were designed for the WSC coach evaluation and that they would be adapted for content coaches. Small group discussion focused on a) ways in which coaches thought the form did and did not address pertinent issues and, b) questions about how the ILT would complete it. With respect to the first point, coaches wondered, for example, why there were questions about their role in helping the school select an instructional focus since that happened in the previous year and might have happened with the help of a different coach. Some did not realize that there were schools still working on their focus and the selection of best practices at the start of the school year. Coaches wondered why there was a question about their role in "leading" the school since this was not an accurate representation of what they do. With respect to the second point, coaches wondered, for example, whether each ILT member would complete the evaluation as an individual or whether the members would have to come to consensus and present one ILT coach evaluation.

Some of these questions were addressed when the coaches reconvened as a whole group, but very quickly the discussion turned to process, to the ways in which the ILT might complete the evaluation. Many coaches felt that completing the evaluation could help the ILT review their goals for the school and seemed to think that this was a major reason to complete the evaluation. One coach asked about this and was told by the head coach that the purpose of the evaluation was both to evaluate the coach and to evaluate the whole-school change process. The Project Director noted another purpose for the evaluation, suggesting that it could be used to determine whether the coach role was effective. She said that the BAC was trying to discern whether the WSC coach role could be reduced in some schools that had made significant progress.

As a result of this coach meeting, in our view, coaches had a better idea of how their work would be evaluated, but were left with some major questions unanswered. Foremost among these was the absence of any standard against which they would be judged. Would coaches be evaluated against absolute criteria, that is the degree to which schools were accomplishing the Essentials, or on criteria that reflected their schools' progress from where they had begun? How would their work be evaluated if they had been in the school since the start of the BAC? Since the middle of the

1998-1999 school year? Given that Annenberg leadership has suggested throughout the year that there may be specific benchmarks, or standards for judging successful coaching performance, it would have been appropriate to communicate them to the coaches directly, or to work with coaches towards establishing clear standards of performance. Although coaches did not seem particularly troubled by the remaining ambiguities of the evaluation system, we think it would have been helpful for the leadership to have clarified these kinds of points for the coaches. It is likely, also, that laying out the criteria for successful coach performance somewhat more specifically would help clarify some of the anxiety coaches feel about the parameters of the coach role.

Phasing Out the WSC Coaches. At the coach meeting on October 16, 1998, the BAC Project Director Mary Russo spoke to the combined group of WSC and Content coaches about the importance of their roles. With respect to WSC coaches, she pointed out that they were fundamental to enabling schools to build the capacity with which to implement the Essentials of whole-school change. She noted that while other reforms rely solely on content coaches, the BAC did not. Despite this emphasis on the importance of the WSC coach role, in April 1999 we heard coaches and principals talk about eliminating or sharply reducing the time the WSC coach spends in schools during the 1999-2000 school year. The major reason they gave for wanting to make this change was the desire to have more funds available for content coaches who would help teachers implement their literacy focus. The suggestion for reducing WSC coach time came from the principals. In an interview at the end of the schoolyear, the BAC Project Director confirmed that these conversations had been taking place and that decisions about the WSC coach would be made on a school-by-school basis with input from principals, ILT members, coaches and the Project Director. She pointed out that Cohorts III and IV did not have WSC coaches, that BAC funding would be available for only two more years, after which the Cohort II schools would be supported by the BPS and, therefore, without WSC coaches. This scenario argued for beginning the process of phasing them out of Cohort II. According to the Project Director, however, several schools would keep their WSC coaches because they were not ready to continue the reform agenda without that support. In some of the schools, leadership was changing and the WSC coach provided stability. In some, WSC coaches were also content coaches and so would stay on with the possibility of continuing aspects of the WSC coach role.

We can understand schools' desire to put more of their resources into content coaches. However, given that the whole-school change reform agenda requires more than implementing a literacy or math focus, we think it is unlikely that schools in Cohort II are ready to move forward with the Essentials without a WSC coach. Our experience in the evaluation sample of Cohort II schools suggests that most would benefit significantly from their continuing support.[25] The cohort includes a range of schools: some in which the principal and teachers are not yet interested in and committed to whole-school change; some in which the principal does not yet have the knowledge and skill with which to move the school forward without the coach; and, a few that might be ready to learn how to sustain the reform without a WSC coach. We doubt that any school has so fully

[25]Our work in Cohort I schools leads us to the same conclusion. Those schools have had WSC coaches for three years. Most are not ready to continue the reform agenda without the support of their WSC coach.

implemented the Essentials that it is ready to go forwarded unaided at the start of the next school year.

As we wrote in our most recent report to the BPE, decisions about continuing or phasing out the WSC coach need to be made on a school-by-school basis. We know that the Project Director shares this view. However, in order to make good school-by-school decisions, the BAC needs to have a set of criteria by which they will evaluate the school's stage of reform. Then, we think it is essential for the BAC to consider what else principals/headmasters and teachers will have to know and be able to do if they are to continue their reform work without a WSC coach. It may be true that reform is quite advanced in a school; this does not imply, however, that the school knows how to sustain what it has achieved without the support of the coach. Therefore, we offer the following reminders as the BAC tries to make sensible decisions about schools' needs for WSC coaches.

Coaches will likely need to train teachers and principals to facilitate the work of whole-school change. Some of the coaches may not have the skills to provide such training. This is especially likely in those instances where the coach is not quite clear on her own role. It is also true, as some coaches note, because having the facilitation skills themselves is not the same as teaching them to someone else. The BAC leadership will need to address this facet of its work with coaches and schools. If financial resources are unavailable for this work, it would be advisable to try and procure them.

Principals who say they do not need a WSC coach may underestimate the amount of support currently provided by the coach. As a result, principals may not always be in the best position to judge the extent to which they need the coach. BAC leadership needs to find a fair way to a) assess the principal's understanding of what the coach has been providing and, b) have the principal demonstrate how such work will continue without the coach.

As the work of whole-school change moves forward, we are learning that members of the ILTs (in Cohort I and II) are finding that they, and perhaps a few others, are carrying the load of whole-school change. Some ILT members feel isolated from their colleagues. They are seeking ways to engage more of those colleagues in the work of whole-school change. **In our judgement, the work of involving more teachers in reform activities, of institutionalizing the new structures and strategies, will be difficult to do without the support of a WSC coach.**

Finally, if after these and other issues are considered, schools wind up with only content coaches, it may be wise for the BAC leadership to consider whether those content coaches need to take some responsibility for whole-school change issues. Without attention to these issues, it is possible that the reform effort will be reduced to nothing more than the implementation of a literacy model.

At some point, there will likely be a phase-out of WSC coaches. In preparation for that time, it is clear that the BAC leadership along with the coaches need to develop plans, strategies and appropriate professional development for school site leaders to ensure that the hard work of whole-school change can be sustained without the support of a WSC coach.

Review: The Work and Support of the WSC Coaches

WSC coaches have a difficult and important job. Their work influences the extent to which schools become new kinds of organizations, organizations in which teacher and administrator learning is seen as the route to improved teaching and student learning. In this section of the report, we have reviewed WSC coaches' understanding of their role and some of the ways in which they work with principals. We have discussed the strategies that the BAC leadership has used to support that work and to further coach knowledge and skill. Before ending this section, we want to mention briefly several additional issues that arose in the course of our analysis of the data we collected about coaches.

First, coaches in Cohort II, like their colleagues in Cohort I, find that they do not have enough time to do all of the work that is required of them. Hired to work one day each week, in most cases, they find themselves being asked to attend additional meetings or participate in school- or cohort-based professional development that adds significant, unpaid, time to their jobs. They would like the BAC to consider what the time commitment of the role should reasonably involve and how they should set priorities for their school-based work and their broader obligations to the BAC.

Second, coaches who faced especially difficult situations in their schools reported that the Project Director was always available to assist them. All they had to do was call and they were able to speak to her during evenings and weekends to plan strategies that might be helpful for their schools. They described the Project Director's attention to difficult and sometimes critical situations as commendable.

Third, some coaches suggest that they would like ongoing feedback from the BAC Project Director. They would like formal opportunities to sit with the Project Director and hear her views on the work they are doing. Although they report knowing that she reads their monthly reports, most report that they do not get comments from her on their content. Coaches say that the reports serve as a vehicle to help them focus on what is happening at their schools and what they ought to do next. Although they recognize the time that would be involved, coaches indicate that they would welcome specific feedback from the Project Director on what she thinks of their progress and plans.

Fourth, and again like their colleagues in Cohort I, coaches wonder how to work with principals who are weak and/or who do not want to implement the changes required by the reform. While most coaches do not find themselves in this situation, the few who do are frustrated because they lack the authority to make change happen. This leads them to wonder whether everyone might benefit from more BPS involvement in the cohort's work with principals. Some suggest, as a matter of routine for all principals, the implementation of twice yearly meetings of the principal, BAC Project Director, WSC coach and the Deputy Superintendent who supervises the principal.

At such meetings, there could be discussions about the work that needs to be done and formal agreements about the principal's responsibilities. Coaches suggest that the presence of the Deputy might encourage some principals to be more attentive to the work of reform.

Fifth and finally, some coaches suggest that there are principals who are willing to move forward with reform but who do not know how to make good use of their WSC coach. They suggest that such principals would benefit from targeted professional development, perhaps by the BAC, that offers them guidance as to the roles and responsibilities of the coach, the reasonable parameters of their work, and examples of how they, as principals, can benefit from the coaches' knowledge and skill. The BPS might well be involved in such work as it would lend authority to the enterprise and to the importance of the principals' work with coaches.

IV. THE PILOT SCHOOLS

The Pilot Schools are a sub-group of ten schools within the Boston Public Schools (BPS) that were originally created in 1994 to be models of educational innovation and to serve as sites of promising research and development for effective urban public schools. They operate individually – with distinct histories and cultures -- but as a group they are committed to a common core of fundamental philosophical and structural reforms. The Pilot Schools are committed to: personalization, where adults and children can know one other well; a flexible and responsive locally-derived curriculum; and non-traditional forms of assessment such as portfolios and exhibitions. They actively seek to create conditions which they believe are necessary to achieve these philosophical ends. These conditions include small size and the freedom to hire like-minded staff, control curriculum and scheduling, and target financial resources to meet local needs. Although many of the elements and practices found at the Pilot Schools can be found elsewhere within BPS – such as block scheduling and looping -- these ten schools share a distinct orientation toward the means for improving student achievement in urban public schools.[26]

Though they share this orientation, a unique feature of the Pilot Schools is that they still operate within the mainstream BPS system. Emerging originally as a response to the charter school movement, the Pilot Schools carry an expectation of autonomy and independence into their relationship with the Boston Public Schools. Pilot School directors and staff expect to enjoy greater autonomy than other schools within BPS, and, in some important respects, they do. We see this most prominently in their freedom to hire whomever they wish, in their release from some of the BPS standards requirements, and in their increased control over budgetary decisions.

At the same time, because these schools must work within a larger urban public school system, they lack some of the autonomy and flexibility which they seek. Therefore, we call these schools "hybrids." They have some of the autonomy and flexibility of charter schools, and, at the same time, are bounded by some of the same district policies as other schools within BPS. Of note, however, is that these schools chose to remain within the system. (Two schools even won charter school status and turned it down in order to remain or become part of the Boston Public Schools.) We found two reasons for Pilot Schools choosing to remain in the system, even at the cost of complete autonomy. First, some Pilot School directors speak of not wanting to abandon the public school system. They see themselves prodding the system along and playing a role -- from within -- in its reform. Second, they wish to stay a part of BPS, because they see advantages to having the district handle such areas as facilities, payroll and transportation – responsibilities which charter schools assume on their own.

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[26]This baseline report does not explore the relationship between "pilot status"and improved student achievement. Another research firm contracted with CCE will address this critical issue using existing data on a variety of system-wide indicators (such as recruitment, matriculation, attendance, transfer, suspension, attrition, and high school/college acceptance rates). Their research will examine the extent to which the Pilot Schools' teacher and student population is representative of the BPS' teacher and student population. We believe this is an essential component to understanding Pilot School effectiveness.

Although the Pilot Schools chose to remain part of the district, not all of the Pilot School directors feel obliged to play the Research and Development role for BPS. Nor are all of them optimistic about the degree to which Pilot Schools can influence the larger system. These schools have moved from an earlier, necessary focus on individual survival to healthy group viability, with their R & D work focused primarily on themselves and one another. It is not clear to us how these schools might serve as the R & D "laboratories" that they were designed to be for the whole district. While these schools have developed some innovative structures and practices, we do not yet have data on student achievement to deem these innovations worthy of dissemination. And, we do not have a clear sense of the level of BPS receptivity to expanding Pilot School conditions and practices beyond these ten schools.

Like many other schools in BPS, the Pilot Schools struggle with meeting the needs of diverse students (including SPED and ESL students), effectively using new organizational structures such as longer blocks of time and teaming, motivating disenchanted students, and preparing students to succeed on the MCAS. However, in addition to the challenges common to all BPS schools, Pilot Schools face unique challenges. For example, early in their existence, Pilot School funding formulas were inequitable and inconsistent, suitable facilities were difficult to obtain, and questions lingered about the extent of the Pilot Schools' autonomy with regard to their budgets and their curricula. As hybrids -- somewhat at odds with the traditional practices of the system -- the Pilot Schools had to advocate for themselves as individual schools, which was often ineffective and draining.

Since 1997, the Pilot Schools Network has brought these schools, which were also isolated from one another, into a collective whole. The Network has provided a forum for sharing ideas and solving problems. It has also served as a unified political voice for the Pilot Schools. Through the work of this Network, the meaning of "pilot status" continues to evolve and mature as a concept within BPS. The Pilot Schools were able to successfully address their funding inequities, to develop a common vision, and to continually refine the understandings of autonomy and flexibility within BPS. Most recently, the Network has acquired funding to develop common competencies, which could pose as a future alternative to other forms of assessment.

The existence of the Network, and the shared hybrid status that these schools experience does not mean that they are identical. Some of the Pilot Schools existed prior to becoming Pilots, while others are still forming, adding additional grades or finding new facilities. Others have chosen to become Horace Mann Charter Schools[27], thereby increasing their curricular and fiscal autonomy while still remaining in the Pilot Schools Network. The ten Pilot Schools also display an array of approaches to organizing themselves and addressing student needs. Governance practices vary, as do assessment processes, organizational structures, and student makeup.

In this baseline report -- the first of a four-year study -- we begin by examining the distinct "orientation" that these schools share. In the first section, we look specifically at the history of the

[27]Horace Mann Charter Schools are in-district charter schools. They receive their charters – and subsequent renewals or revocations – from the state of Massachusetts. They also, unlike Commonwealth Charter Schools, remain part of their districts and are subject to certain parameters by their districts' central offices.

Pilot Schools and how they evolved to hold their common educational theory. We explore the specific philosophical values and structural conditions they believe to be necessary for improving urban schools. In the second section, we examine how these educational theories play out, given that Pilot Schools have this unusual hybrid status within BPS. In what ways does this status support and/or constrain the implementation of their philosophical and structural reforms? Here we will look specifically at curriculum, budgeting, staffing, and facilities -- four areas especially impacted by their semi-autonomous nature. In the third section, we examine, how, through the Pilot Schools Network, these schools have found a collective identity, garnered mutual support for implementing their theories, and fostered political advocacy needed to define and strengthen Pilot School status within BPS -- all of which has increased their ability to achieve their reform agenda.

The Pilot School section of this report is based on data collected during the 1998-1999 school year. Together with Mary Russo, Tom Payzant and Dan French, we selected a sample of four Pilot Schools that would broadly represent the Pilot School population K-12. We interviewed the directors of all ten of the Pilot Schools, as well as a sample of teachers representing the core disciplines at each of our four sample schools. In addition, we conducted interviews with Mary Russo and Dan French – and we attended numerous meetings of the Pilot Schools Directors and of the sub-committees of the Pilot Schools Network. We also reviewed key documents concerning the Pilot Schools, CCE, and the Pilot Schools Network.

The focus of this report is on the organizational, political and philosophical aspects of the Pilot Schools and their status within BPS. As such, this reflects largely the perspectives of the Pilot Schools directors. Teachers we interviewed at our sample schools were generally in agreement with the views of their directors on the issues we discuss concerning the philosophy and structure of the Pilot Schools. Our discussion of the Pilot School Network reflects only the views of the directors since teachers have only minimal involvement in the Network. In our next report, we intend to focus on how Pilot School teachers implement the educational reform agenda articulated by the directors -- with a spotlight on curriculum development and assessment.

Schools with a Distinct Orientation

The Boston Pilot Schools serve 1,500 students in kindergarten through grade twelve (out of approximately 64,000 overall in BPS). They include three elementary schools, which will eventually be K-8, one middle school, and six high schools. Another secondary school (7-12) is slated to join the group in 1999-00 academic year.

The Pilot Schools as a group have developed a distinct orientation toward the improvement of student achievement in urban education. This orientation is a function of the *Pilot Schools' history*, their common commitment to a *core of philosophical reforms*, and their deliberate fostering of *conditions and practices* within the schools that facilitate these reforms. In this section of our report, we look at each of these three elements in order to illuminate the distinctive character and orientation of the Pilot Schools.

History. In 1994, Pilot School status was granted to applicant BPS schools largely in response to state legislation mandating educational reform and the creation of charter schools state-wide. The actual and threatened loss of Boston students and jobs to charter schools resulted

in an unusual alliance of the BTU, the Boston School Committee, the Superintendent and the Mayor that secured a teacher union contract in 1994 creating the possibility for more autonomous schools within BPS, quasi- charter schools, which were to be known as "Pilot Schools."

The original agreement with the BTU allowed Pilot Schools to emerge out of existing schools, from schools within schools, or as entirely new schools, but with a clear expectation that Pilots were to be innovative and share successful practices with schools throughout BPS. Two-thirds of a school staff had to approve the change of an existing school to pilot status.

Pilots were modeled closely after charter schools, offering freedom from some district policies and union agreements in return for increased accountability. Like charter schools, teachers could be hired regardless of their seniority. Curriculum, assessment and school organizational structures could be decided by school staff and a more independent Board of Governors. However, bureaucratic and cumbersome issues such as payroll, health plans, and transportation would be handled through the connection to BPS. In exchange for such autonomy, Pilot Schools had to agree to comply with increased, formalized accountability protocols and periodic high stakes evaluations.

Six Pilot Schools were approved the first year. Two of the schools existed prior to the union contract creation of Pilot Schools: Greater Egleston and Fenway Middle College High School (now known as the Fenway High School). The rest were new schools, and not all of them opened the first year.

The union contract creating the Pilots did not address the unanticipated, intensive needs of small, relatively autonomous start-up schools trying to establish themselves within a much larger system. Although not by design or intention, essentially there was no infrastructure for the Pilot Schools during this start-up period. By their very nature, Pilot Schools were redefining relationships between central office and individual schools, and challenging long-standing district policies and practices. They were essentially out on their own and consumed with sheer survival, with little chance to develop professional relationships with each other. Issues of facilities, governance, resources and relationships with BPS staff unfamiliar with the implications and realities of pilot status and Pilot School needs became stumbling blocks. Funding formulas appeared to be different for each pilot school. By 1997, six of the nine Pilot Schools were getting levels of per pupil funding as much as $1,000 less than at equivalent BPS schools.

Superintendent Tom Payzant inherited the Pilot Schools with all their problems, possibilities and potential when he came to Boston in October of 1995. In seeking funding to create his own reform agenda, he found the Annenberg Foundation specifically interested in the Pilot School reform efforts, so support for the Pilots was folded into Annenberg's Boston funding package in 1996. In 1997, with financial support from Boston Annenberg Challenge, funds were awarded to the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE), a non-profit umbrella organization, to support the development of a Pilot Schools Network. The Network was created to foster the political solidarity of the Pilot Schools within BPS, by offering a forum for peer schools to streamline solutions to common problems and to share best practices and successes.

Two of the Pilot Schools have chosen to evolve into Horace Mann Charter schools, while still remaining in the Network. Horace Mann Charter schools are in-district charter schools sanctioned by the state, distinct from Commonwealth Charters, which receive funds directly and independently from the state. Horace Mann schools have more fiscal autonomy than Boston Pilot Schools, a characteristic which particularly appeals to Pilot School directors and staff who often feel constrained by BPS budgetary policies and procedures.

The definition of Pilot School status continues to evolve, with the Network now addressing several issues such as the needs of SPED students and Network-wide competencies which we discuss in a later section. But enrollment parameters for Pilot Schools have not changed. By design, they are not "exam" schools; they do not screen or select students. By percentage agreement with BPS, and by law, they must carry a representative sample of students, including SPED and ESL. Most of the Pilot Schools have deliberately welcomed students at risk of dropping out of school, and all elementary and middle schools use a lottery system.

Commitment to Common Core of Philosophical Reforms. Pilot Schools were created to be models of educational innovation, to be sites of promising research and development for effective urban public schools. However, they have each harnessed their autonomy and flexibility in different ways. Pilot Schools are not all the same. They are individual schools with different cultures, goals, hiring and governance processes, curriculum approaches and organizational structures. Each school, while sharing a similar mission, sought to achieve this mission in its own way.

From the outset, Pilot Schools were interested in looking at "reasons why students were not being successful," as one director explained it, and then creating schools which addressed those issues directly. What were some of these "reasons?"

> *..the size of scale, lack of personalization, structures, fragmented subject areas and on and on...and we would try to correct them and so the mission was almost from the get go, was two parts. It was one, build community for these kids and... two, break all the traditions, ask any questions, break the rules in pursuit of building that community. And the two were symbiotic and synergistic and inextricably linked.* (Director A)

Challenging business-as-usual was a motivation echoed in the interviews of many of the Pilot School directors:

> *I firmly believe in educational reform. I think if we don't, as educators, take the lead on it we're going to be led. I think we have to change the way we deliver services to our children. So an opportunity to put a different school together was really important.* (Director B)

> *We have a foot in two worlds. Our foot in the world of progressively minded education in terms of our approach to curriculum and assessment, and a foot in a world of very strongly structured, reward and punishment based, respect-based*

culture of behavioral character expectations. I think with that...a foot in those two worlds, of urban educational issues and progressively minded educational issues is one of the tensions that I think most guides us as a school...(Director C)

A key defining feature of the Pilot Schools is that they are collectively committed to a common core of fundamental philosophical reforms, in the service of improving urban education. These reforms include a belief in the importance of *personalization* in schools (adults and children can know each other well;) *flexible responsive curriculum*, reflecting local needs and environments; and *non-traditional forms of assessment*, such as portfolios, projects and exhibitions.

Personalization has to do with the conscious building of relationships between adults and students, as well as among students, over time. What emerges from our interviews is that the adults in these schools believe it is important that students feel they are known well, that they belong, that they are not anonymous or invisible. In these schools, education is described by teachers and directors as both a "social enterprise" and "a personal thing."

I think that we also accept that, in addition to students needing to be sort of active participants in their own learning, that learning is a social enterprise. And so therefore, a fair amount of emphasis has to go on into sort of creating the construct for positive social interaction so that students... can support and learn from each other. And that means building a fairly strong community, giving kids the skills to have those kinds of positive interactions, to develop the values in which our kids see it as important to support each other. (Director D)

The relationships that students and staff can have with each other, I think that makes the first huge difference in their lives. We hear this from students that they dropped out from the other school or they left their high schools because they didn't know anybody, nobody knew them. They felt ignored, disrespected, not valued, unchallenged or too challenged. There wasn't the right fit academically, socially, personally for students. I think that's one of the first tiers [of what we think is important]. (Director E)

In the same vein, Pilot School staff members believe strongly in the importance of **flexible, responsive curriculum,** of having internally created, original curriculum projects and programs which can reflect local community issues and student interests as well as externally-based content standards.

To me, it would make much more sense -- and it always has -- to start close to kids, what they experience more directly, and then as they begin to be able, they're more skilled in making connections, and seeing a variety of different perspectives, move further and further away from them ... so they've got a solid base to understand how to make connections and see universal perspectives and things, to move further away. So... you start with a population like ours maybe reading novels, literature and stuff that's pretty close to their experience, and then you move further away and you do Shakespeare later. (Director D)

Pilot School directors and teachers believe that having this kind of curricular autonomy enables staff to create programs personalized to the school and its population, to the interests and needs of a particular set of students and their community. Consequently, a rich diversity of localized curricular programs and approaches exist within the Pilot Schools. For example, one school focuses on Boston Harbor and the Harbor Islands as a central curriculum resource. The director describes this focus as a function of the logic of geography:

> *We do it, frankly, more out of the fact that this is the local resource. If we were in the mountains, we would be the mountain school. I didn't enter this with a desire or great appreciation of marine biology but understanding that a school has to shape projects and learning from the major resources around.* (Director C)

One school developed a long-term project around the discovery that its local community had the highest asthma rates in the state. Teachers developed an interdisciplinary "environmental justice" curriculum incorporating math, science and humanities. Students monitored air quality, tested soil, and worked with environmental agencies and legal organizations. The director saw this project as an example of the school's opportunity to engage students in learning through a curriculum tailored to their community:

> *We were able to respond to a community... we have the flexibility to create the curriculum to address that need. We don't have to read Hamlet by October 10th. This is what we are doing and these are themes that we want to address this year and we have the flexibility to select materials that goes with that. We don't have to use the textbooks that BPS sends. We have a lot of flexibility in terms of curriculum as long as we are accountable and there's evidence that our students are achieving, mastering certain skills and competencies....When students are reporting that they spent the night before in the emergency room with their kid with asthma and here we are learning everything about it and what can be done .... are you getting the power? ...It becomes personal. Education is a personal thing.* (Director E)

One Pilot School has a math and science focus, one the arts, while other schools work to address curriculum projects in the context of future careers, with internships and apprenticeships tying academics to the workplace. Curriculum that is flexible, attuned to local needs and interests, and coherently interdisciplinary is valued as a high priority at Pilot Schools. It is perhaps even central to their mission. As Larry Myatt and Linda Nathan observed in their 1998 article "Journey Toward Autonomy"[28] : "Without autonomy over curriculum, the other areas of autonomy that we seek may be relatively meaningless."

The Pilot School staffs also value school-wide **non-traditional assessments**, again developed locally and reflective of individual school goals. These include portfolios and high stakes exhibitions, which are individual presentations of collected work to committees of school staff and outside assessors. These assessments represent ways of looking at student growth over time from

[28] *Phi Delta Kappan*, December, 1998.

multiple perspectives, inviting students to continuously refine and improve their performance. They differ from traditional evalution that audits student work on discrete tests, quizzes or final products.

Embedded in these longitudinal approaches to assessment is a belief in the importance of building solid intellectual and work habits in students. Several of the directors spoke of the importance of fostering in students the ability to set goals, to self-assess, reflect and be responsible for their own learning. As one director described it, "We teach children to think. We teach children to be reflective. Part of that reflection is assessing your own work."

> *Our challenge is how do we convince some students that you can do it in a different way and that you are responsible for your education, and that it's not about sitting in a chair for a set amount of time accumulating points but you actually have to produce something. You have to put together a portfolio. You have to demonstrate what you know. So that's a real challenge for students who have a history of failure time and time again.* (Director E)

Pilot School staffs are exploring not only alternative forms of assessment, but also traditional report cards. They are implementing fresh formats, such as including narrative reports, using collaboratively developed rubrics and creating presentations for parents which combine traditional and non-traditional assessment instruments.

> *We also put a lot of work into a pretty traditional report card with big teeth to it. We give no grade lower than a C. We say if you're doing D work in this school... you're failing yourself. So we're raising the bar. We report detailed grades every quarter. So every family knows what their kids have gotten on the test and the projects and we can do some triage of where we've fallen short. So that's very reflective of a school that's working from two sort of school cultures. I believe very much that you can [be in] both worlds. You can have a report card with detailed grades and put teeth behind grades, and also have a strong culture of portfolios.* (Director C)

In the service of improving urban student achievement, Pilot Schools seek to create personalized learning cultures, responsive curricula, and forms of thoughtful assessment which work to improve and enrich performance, not just audit it.

Commitment to Structural Reforms. Pilot School directors and staff believe that particular conditions and practices must be present in order to achieve their fundamental philosophical reforms. These structural reforms include *small school size,* and *local control of staffing*, *organizational structures*, and *budget.* We now turn to a discussion of these conditions and practices.

The Pilot Schools range in population from 100 to 390 students. While some school directors spoke of gradually increasing their size to include expanded grade levels, there is a strong belief repeatedly mentioned in interviews with Pilot School directors and staff that maintaining **small**

size is critical to giving students a sense of membership and belonging, a welcoming, consistent invitation to remain in school and work to succeed. Many of these educators believe that only with a small total population, small class size and small teacher-student ratios, can personalized cultures -- where students and adults can know each other well -- be accomplished. As one director said, "Small size and personalized attention to students academically and socially makes all the difference*."* Directors and staff acknowledge they are not successful with all students, and that motivation and engagement remain difficult with some students. However, most Pilot School directors are adamant that without the more intimate and personally accountable culture and relationships made possible by small size, they could not work toward their mission and goals for improved student achievement.

> *... building a fairly strong community, giving kids the skills to have those kinds of positive interactions, to develop the values in which our kids see it as important to support each other and help build each other up, a sense that education is not about competition per se but about us all being lifted up together. Those are a set of values that I think are quite distinct to small schools. And I think that our school -- as a small school – is in a much better position to be able to offer some of those things. (*Director D)

In addition to small school size, Pilot School directors expressed that **local control of staffing**, particularly the ability to hire whoever they want, is absolutely central to the mission of their schools. With the autonomy to control hiring, Pilot School directors are able to construct staffs that are hand-picked to respond to particular needs and curricular designs of their schools. The only hiring constraint is that teachers must be certified in the state of Massachusetts. Pilot School directors were unanimous in their appreciation of the importance of this freedom and flexibility. As one representative director said,

> *I would say this is one of the single benefits, clearly, of being a Pilot School. In my opinion, the center of school reform is that schools need to be able to develop their own character and ally themselves with staff who are competent, capable, and invested in the particular mission of the school.* (Director D)

We heard many examples of this power to establish quality staffing criteria explicitly shaped to the mission of their schools. Directors described looking for people who have "experience in portfolio culture and the assessment structures that come with that" or, "the ability to work with students for whom behavior is a real issue" or, "the flexibility to try new things" or, "the willingness to work in a community-based educational setting." They can seek philosophical alignment and racial diversity:

> *[We look for] charisma, dedication, energy, knowledge of, commitment to Coalition principles[29], prior urban education experience, some significant work on behalf of kids or*

[29]This refers to the Ten Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools. The Coalition is a national school reform organization based on the ideas of Dr. Theodore R. Sizer.

community, deep pedagogy, deep training, ability to work as teammates, ability and desire, to work with who our kids are, not...you know, some mythological kids from a bygone era. (Director A)

Most of our students are African-American and Latino students. We really wanted to attract people who are African-American and Latino. Most of our staff is non-white. I think it's really important for students to be able to relate to this person and feel that this person knows where I'm coming from. (Director E)

Most schools like to have tailored criteria and high standards for staff hiring. The key difference with Pilot Schools, however, is that they have the power to hold to those criteria, without compromising their priorities due to vagaries of BPS and BTU staffing policies.

For Pilot School directors, having staff on board who actively support the mission requires **local control of organizational structures** to support teachers in their development of locally-derived curriculum suited to the needs and interests of students, as opposed to an external authoring agency or office. As we discussed earlier, curricular autonomy is a key philosophical commitment shared by Pilot Schools. Embedded in and necessary to this kind of curricular control is the ability to create learning communities and design schedules in the service of curriculum. The freedom to design large time blocks for integrated projects and field trips, for example, or the flexibility to organize teams and houses to serve different curricular emphases and assessment needs is a function of small size, staff-owned decision-making, and control over curriculum -- all elements which Pilot Schools view as critical to the support of their common philosophy.

Since most important school decisions are ultimately reflected in budgetary allocations, it is not surprising that so many of the Pilot School directors with whom we spoke cited **local control of budget** as a critical condition to their success. These school directors believe that having autonomy to shape a school necessarily means having a high degree of fiscal autonomy. As one representative Pilot School director described,

If we are going to be responsible for the education of our children -- and that is part of our responsibility as a director -- you need to give the director or the principal or the headmaster the authority to do that. And to operate his building or her building as she sees fit to do so. And so therefore, if I need more for math this year, that's what I need. I may not need as much for computers this year, because maybe they're okay. So why should I be forced to spend it on computers when I really need to [do] something else? To me, it doesn't make sense. (Director F)

Pilot School leaders believe that it is important to be able to decide – at the school level – the number and types of teaching positions needed to meet the needs of the students. Therefore, more than simply wanting to be able to hire like-minded and committed staff, Pilot School leaders want to – and do – use their resources freely toward staffing plans of their choosing. With such budgetary leeway, Pilot Schools can choose to devote a greater percentage of their resources toward classroom teachers, in order to bring down pupil to teacher ratios. These schools can also, with this desired level of fiscal control, choose to create new positions or to eliminate others.

In this section of our report, we have described Pilot Schools as small, independent schools that share an orientation toward the improvement of urban education. They adhere to a theory of education reflected in their fundamental philosophical belief in the importance and centrality of personalization, curricular autonomy, and non-traditional assessment. To enact such philosophical reforms, Pilot Schools seek to create supportive, structural reforms: small school size and local control of hiring, building organization and budget. An active working commitment to these philosophical beliefs and the structures and conditions which support them characterize the Pilot Schools as a sub-group within BPS with a common, distinctive orientation to schooling.

Implementing Reforms as Hybrid Schools

While the Pilot Schools share a commitment to particular philosophical and structural reforms, they operate within a large urban system. They are therefore subject to some BPS policies, while at the same time, they are granted some charter school type freedoms. In this way, as noted earlier, we see Pilot Schools as hybrids, neither as fully autonomous as charter schools nor as accountable to all district policies as other schools within BPS. In the context of the Pilot Schools' commitment to their particular set of reforms, such hybrid status presents unique challenges and opportunities. In this section, we explore how curriculum and assessment, budget, staffing and facilities affect the Pilot Schools' ability to enact the educational reforms they believe central to the improvement of urban student achievement. Finally, we address the Pilot Schools' potential as a systemic influence on school reform within BPS.

Curriculum and Assessment. As Pilot School directors Larry Myatt and Linda Nathan were quoted earlier, reflecting the perspective of most of the Pilot School staff we spoke with, the need for curricular autonomy (including thoughtful, non-traditional performance assessments to improve as well as monitor learning) is perceived as so central to effective school reform, that without it, other kinds of autonomy seem "relatively meaningless." And in the realms of curriculum and assessment, Pilot Schools essentially do have autonomy to develop their own internally-developed units, which often emerge from students' interests or from the school's immediate surroundings. Several of the Pilot Schools have also developed assessment tools such as portfolios and exhibitions in order to measure student learning and progress. But, reflecting the tension of hybrid status, the Pilot Schools, just as BPS schools, must pay attention to Boston's Citywide Learning Standards.[30] They are also held accountable for their students' achievement on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), which is administered to students in all public schools statewide, including charter schools.

For school leaders and teachers hoping for greater control over curriculum, such semi-autonomy has caught them by surprise and forced them to accommodate both their interest in innovative forms of teaching and authentic forms of assessment with their need to meet the challenges posed by these external city and state measures. As one principal explained,

[30]The Pilot Schools are not expected to submit the "products" and "task descriptions" that are required of other BPS schools, but they are expected to develop curricula that are "equivalent to" the Citywide Learning Standards. There appears to be a great deal of confusion over what such equivalency entails.

> *We are theoretically supposed to be able to develop our own programs and curriculum, which we are, for the most part. However, looming over us are these things called the BPS Learning Standards and the statewide frameworks and the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System tests. So we're trying to sort of reconcile our program in a way that it takes those things into a reasonable consideration.* (Director D)

For some school leaders and teachers, however, such an accommodation is a hard pill to swallow, because they view teaching to externally-sourced, content-driven tests as conflicting with a more skill-based and personalized approach to teaching, learning and assessment. One principal described his frustration with the Citywide Learning Standards for the social science curriculum as a "conflict of vision:"

> *Grade nine, we're going to do the origins, central teachings, and spread of Christianity for topic one. Then we're going to review the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. Then we're going to review the Byzantine Empire, institutions, religion and culture. Then we're going to go on to the origins and principles of Islam, including the spread of Muslim power. [Then] the component of early European civilization, Roman, Christian, and invaders. Going on to topic six, western feudalism, religion and the three estates. Then we move to the Middle Empire in China. Next, Japan's classical age, Shintoism, Buddhism, and Sino-Japanese culture. Then Russia and the Mongol Empire. I mean, if you were to try to develop a curriculum around these standards, they're not standards. I don't know why they're called standards. These are the citywide learning standards. They're topics, which essentially is in my point of view the same old coverage oriented chronological way of looking at the study of social sciences. .... All of that is grade nine. ... I mean, this test is asking kids to be Jeopardy whizzes. And that's not what we're interested in. We don't want our kids to be Jeopardy whizzes. So it's a very different vision. We're in a conflict of vision. And how that's going to play itself out, how it's going to resolve itself, I don't know. Because to actually prepare somebody to be able to do well, if the new history test is at all similar to what last year's was, would be a very frustrating exercise. Because it would mean that you would have to design your curriculum around very superficial coverage sort of survey type courses that were coverage amounts of information with very little depth or complexity. And that's not what we've chosen to do in terms of the curriculum. We've made a very specific choice. We're going to try to go into a few areas in more depth that are going to give kids less breadth, but more sort of direct experience wrestling with the complexities of something specific.* (Director D)

How much autonomy do the Pilot Schools have within this "conflict of vision?" There appears to be some confusion among Pilot School personnel regarding their theoretical autonomy versus some undefined degree of requisite allegiance to BPS Citywide Learning Standards, with regard to curriculum and assessment. As one principal tried to explain,

> *The city has the Boston Citywide Learning Standards, which we as Pilot Schools are more or less exempt from. So, it's not entirely clear exactly what that means. ... Sid Smith (from BPS) showed up a couple of weeks ago and wanted to discuss curriculum with me. And I'm not sure what that actually means. I think that ideally we're supposed to be allowed autonomy and flexibility to develop our own curriculum and devise our own instructional practices, and I think that in most cases that happens. But I'm not sure if it happens because the school committee, I mean, the School Department, actually believes in the autonomy of the Pilot Schools.* (Director D)

Another Pilot School principal expressed his sense that the focus on standards, which is a current BPS focus, had moved the district as a whole in a new direction, away from the type of instruction that his school valued.

> *I'm really frustrated .... with the accent on standardized testing. My displeasure is with standards based approach for all schools. Its great for some. It's a good starting place. I don't think its going to be by any measure the answer to what the kind of stuff you really want kids to do. I see the way it's playing out in my visits to other high schools, and I'm unimpressed. I worry, especially because we had some deep conversations beginning to start... and now we're talking about standards and Key Questions and lists and that kind of stuff and we stopped talking about holistic instruction. We stopped talking about integrated curriculum. We stopped talking about changing the nature of the school day. We stopped talking about portfolio assessment. They're out there, they're floating, but they don't have currency because they don't have a place to start. The ground is not friendly in the Boston Public Schools for the kind of instruction I would want for my own kids.* (Director A)

It is also worth noting, however, that not all of the Pilot School directors and teachers oppose the current emphasis on external testing. One Pilot School leader argued that the tests had helped teachers hold students to higher standards, and created a common basis for comparison. But most of the directors felt that the increasing emphasis on a unitary, standardized assessment undermines the personalized, locally-derived curriculum they believe resonates at the core of their mission to improve schools for urban students.

Thus, as hybrids, these schools must yet define their place within BPS in terms of curricular autonomy. For most of the Pilot Schools, it appears that their expectations of curricular autonomy -- coupled with their emphasis on authentic forms of pedagogy and assessment -- run counter to BPS policies and priorities. These differences will eventually need to be resolved. We suspect that the Pilot Schools Network's upcoming project to create common competencies across the Pilot Schools, as a possible substitute for MCAS will push the issue of the Pilot Schools' curricular autonomy to the forefront over the next few years.

Budget. Pilot School directors see budgetary control as one of the necessary means to their philosophical ends. And the Pilot Schools do experience a degree of quasi-charter fiscal

autonomy, since they each receive lump sum budgets based on the number of pupils and are funded at comparative rates to other schools at their corresponding grade levels. Such lump sum budgeting provides for a higher degree of fiscal autonomy than exists at other schools within BPS, whose budgets are tied to allocations by specific positions, by teaching assignments, or for purposes such as professional development. Thus Pilot School directors' hands are less tightly tied than those of principals at other BPS schools with regard to budget authority.

Where such autonomy appears to be most influential concerns staffing. In fact, some of the Pilot School directors have used budget autonomy to hire additional teachers. As one director explained,

> *Although we don't have much money, it's up to us how we use it. So we've been able to keep a low student-teacher ratio and then commit to raising soft money for operating expenses. I wouldn't have been allowed to take that risk if we had normal funding or budget guidelines.* (Director C)

Another Pilot School administrator commented,

> *As a Pilot School we got X number of dollars per kid and we could decide where we want[ed] to spend that. So we ..... increased our student support staff. ... we increased our teaching staff. We were able to lower our ... pupil to teacher ratio and so on because we could translate that money into teachers, as no other school can do.* (Administrator G)

Other Pilot School directors used such increased budgetary leeway to create new positions at their schools. One director hired two "academic coordinators" and two others to serve as in-school social workers. She argued that her level of control over her lump sum budget allowed her to make this type of decision, which she believes will directly impact the experiences of students at her school. All the directors relished this ability to allocate resources toward staffing configurations which best served their notions of personalization and mission alignment.

But again, as in curriculum issues, there are tensions which emerge within budgetary control due to the schools' hybrid status and fiscal relationship with BPS. As a group, the Pilot School directors are adamant in decrying their lack of fiscal autonomy in two key areas: the "central costs" deducted from their budgets and the challenges posed by BPS purchasing procedures.

While Pilot Schools do receive lump sum budgets, a portion of these budgets are deducted by BPS toward "central costs" before the schools receive their money. Central costs pay for services such as transportation, facilities, special education services, and overhead costs. Several Pilot School directors with whom we spoke see such a deduction as a limitation on their ability to use their dollars as they deem necessary. As one director, frustrated by his budgetary "hybrid status," described,

> *We basically get to design our budget as we see fit. We're given a certain amount of money based on a number of pupils that are in the school. And we're allowed to*

> *organize that budget pretty much as we see fit. Now, there are qualifications on that. There's a huge chunk of that money that's just automatically taken away from us at the beginning that .... goes for what they call group two costs, which have to do with facilities, central office costs. ... And it's a huge chunk of the money out of the $7000 that we're apportioned per student. It's about $2000. So we're talking about a huge chunk of money. Which if we were a charter school we would get all that. We would get all of that money.* (Director D)

Instead of the blanket deduction for centralized costs, what some of the Pilot School directors want is to have such costs itemized and made discretionary by BPS. These directors argue that, if the central office of BPS would cost out each of these services by function and program, then schools could choose – or not choose – services on a case by case basis. In this way, they contend, they would operate more as small businesses and charter schools do, with the freedom to pay for what they want from whichever providers they want.

The dissatisfaction directors expressed regarding the deduction of central costs from their budgets is directly related to their concerns regarding the BPS purchasing procedures. The Pilot Schools, like all other BPS schools, are required to order most of their supplies through the district, using district-approved vendors. Several of the Pilot School directors commented on the difficulties such a requirement poses for them, particularly with regard to the time lag between ordering and receiving supplies. The following director's statement is representative.

> *We're paralyzed by being tied into the system in the way the system spends money. So getting lockers, for example, into the school. As opposed to us being able to just take a bank account and go out and contract... you know, make the bids to companies and then deal with them directly, we have to deal through BPS. It took us eight months to get our locker order filled and installed. It's taken us six or eight months to order tables and chairs. The purchasing lag is absurd. It's just absurd, and it's really crippling. So there [are] certain things around -- how money flows -- that need a lot of work.* (Director D)

Such dissatisfaction is not unique to Boston's Pilot Schools, yet the Pilots came into being with an expectation of greater autonomy and flexibility; to be granted budgetary autonomy in some areas and not in others came as a surprise to several of the Pilot Schools' directors. As one Pilot School director explained,

> *I thought one of the freedoms that we would get was that, like the charter schools, we'd have a budget line for supplies, and we could order them anyplace we wanted. Turns out we can't.* (Director H)

In fact, it is important to note here that two of the Pilot Schools are also Horace Mann Charter Schools.[31] In this way, we can compare the level of fiscal autonomy granted to these two schools with those of the other eight Pilot Schools. Since Horace Mann Charter Schools are not subject to the BPS contract requirements, they, unlike Pilot Schools, receive up-front funding in four quarterly payments from the district. Additionally, with this funding, Horace Mann Charter Schools can decide which portions of their budgets they wish to keep "within the BPS system" and which they wish to allocate elsewhere. Horace Mann Charter Schools may also set up their own bank accounts without having to negotiate a special contract with BPS. As the director of one of the two Pilot/Horace Mann Charter Schools describes,

> *We get to manage our funds. We get our money, we have our own bank account. So basically we have control over our own budget, completely. (*Director I)

Our initial data thus shows that, while the Pilot Schools do experience a degree of fiscal autonomy and flexibility through their lump sum budgeting, they are "hybrids" because they are constrained from achieving the same level of fiscal flexibility and autonomy enjoyed by Horace Mann Charter Schools. Pilot Schools, while free to make allocation decisions over much of their budgets, still must adhere to BPS policies regarding the deduction of central costs and purchasing. This constraint negatively affects their ability to control as-needed purchases in support of curricular autonomy and local decisions regarding services and support for students.

Staffing. As we have described earlier, the charter school-like ability to hire, fire and allocate staff for smaller pupil-teacher ratios is a highly prized arena of autonomy for Pilot School directors, another critical means to their philosophical and structural reform agendas of personalization, cohesive mission alignment across the staff of a given school, and curricular autonomy. They value the opportunity to find and hire staff who will work well with students and colleagues to create locally-derived, engaging curriculum. And, other than certification, there exist essentially no limitations on who the directors can hire. Pilot Schools, like all BPS schools, must post all openings within the system, but they do not need to go through the district's excess and transfer pool. Pilot Schools can also place job announcements anywhere, budget permitting, and they can interview and hire anyone that they want. We do not yet have data on the backgrounds of teachers at the Pilot Schools, but there appears, initially, to be a mix at each school of teachers who came from other BPS schools and those who came from the outside.

As hybrids within this large urban system, however, Pilot Schools' staffing policies can run up against those of the system as a whole. For example, Pilot Schools have more leeway to dismiss staff than other schools within BPS. Even though their teachers become part of the Boston Teachers' Union, they are not protected by the same collective bargaining agreement as other BPS teachers. Non-tenured teachers who are dismissed from Pilot Schools simply leave the system; however, dismissed tenured teachers can be put back into the system and placed in non-Pilot BPS schools. This may become a point of contention between BPS and the Pilot Schools, especially

[31]Horace Mann Charter Schools are in-district charter schools. They receive their charters – and subsequent renewals or revocations – from the State of Massachusetts. They also, unlike Commonwealth Charter Schools, remain part of their districts and are subject to certain parameters by their districts' central offices.

since the Pilot Schools are free to hire whomever they wish. If these new hires do not work out, then -- since they accrue seniority and are awarded BTU membership -- they can become problematic for the district as a whole, as a placement must be found for them, according to protocols of the union contract.

Conversely, it is also possible that a teacher with seniority from another BPS school, who loses his or her position due to a layoff, could be "bumped" into an equally senior position in a Pilot School. In this way, a teacher not chosen by a Pilot School director, could be "forced upon" a school. In the initial agreement between BTU and BPS, Pilot Schools were not released from the requirement of accepting the transfers of tenured teachers whose positions had been eliminated. One Pilot School has had this situation occur for two years, and the issue was resolved only because the assigned staff decided they did not want the position. Other than that, "bumping" has not been a significant problem in the rest of the Pilot Schools, in part because BPS has not suffered any massive layoffs in recent years, and, in part because the Pilot School job descriptions are extensive and act as a deterrent to transfers from other BPS schools. As a hybrid, however, Pilot Schools must navigate their way through a context in which their freedom to hire as they please could be impacted by BPS policies to which they must still comply.

Facilities. Basic to conditions enabling effective school reform is a school facility that serves efficiently and effectively in support of the core work of teaching and learning. This almost goes without saying, an operational assumption of any school system. However, securing suitable facilities is an area of some difficulty for many of the Pilot Schools. The opening of Boston Arts Academy and the Josiah Quincy School were each delayed because of a lack of facilities.[32] Health Careers Academy was once housed simultaneously in three locations, with its administrative offices at Northeastern University. Now the entire facility is housed at Northeastern. The Lyndon School, which has occupied a building which is too small, is now permanently in two separate buildings, one for kindergarten through third grade and the other for fourth through eighth grades. The Harbor School, which is housed in a youth center and has needed more space, will be in a new building this fall as well. Boston Evening Academy shares space within the Franklin Institute and can only use its classrooms from 4:30 - 8:30 p.m. Their space also lacks handicapped access. Greater Egleston's facility is also overcrowded, and they are hoping to rent new space next year. Young Achievers is moving this summer so it can expand.

Perhaps the genesis of this "facilities problem" is the fact that, originally, it was thought that Pilot Schools would grow primarily out of pre-existing BPS schools. As Dan French explains, "the city did not expect to see new schools being created and never planned on the need to create new buildings." While this issue is being addressed, it is worth noting the challenges that Pilot Schools have faced in this area. One representative teacher described the impact of her school's facility problem on her work with children.

[32]Boston Arts Academy is now housed together with Fenway High School in a building near Fenway Park. The Josiah Quincy School will be housed in six "portables" with no common space when it opens this fall.

The drawbacks ..... one of them has been not knowing where we will be next year. You know, we're renting space. As much as I love this old building, which I do, its also not conducive to many things that have to do with how you see education today. ... The acoustics in here .... every little teeny sound you make bounces off the walls, and it isn't that the kids are particularly noisy. But you move a chair and it just reverberates. It's really practical things like that. We now have a home unfortunately out of this community. So I don't know what effect that will have on the school. (Teacher A)

What remains is to determine the locus of responsibility for solving these facilities dilemmas. Some would argue that, as BPS schools, the Pilot Schools can expect BPS to assume responsibility for finding them suitable facilities. However, as semi-autonomous schools within BPS, some see the responsibility over facilities as falling more to the Pilot School boards and administrations. We see this particularly hybrid-related problem as a continuing issue.

Potential System-wide Influence. Despite the struggles and strains of their unusual hybrid status, many Pilot School directors -- though not many Pilot School teachers -- spoke of their commitment to being part of the Boston Public Schools. In this way, these school leaders see remaining in the system with their hybrid status as offering them an opportunity to create innovative school reform for themselves. But their status also offers an opportunity to play a part in the future of the district. As one principal described,

One of the things that I try to take up as a Pilot School director is the charge of "we are Boston Public Schools." We happen to get into this through the Pilot School mechanism, but we're not a Pilot School to distance yourself. We are a Pilot School to be a part of the system, to take advantage of every piece of autonomy we have, as any other good school would ... to make bridges, to participate with Boston Public Schools. (Director C)

How much of a role to play, however, remains a point of contention among the Pilot School directors. Some would like to see the Pilot Schools working more consciously to collaborate with other BPS schools and to prod the system along in terms of school reform. As one principal complained, "the trouble is that they (BPS) are not even using us as a weight to create change in the rest of the district." The Pilot Schools' message about the reforms needed to improve schools is being "drowned out" by the current BPS focus on city-wide assessments and standards as the route to reform.

At the same time, even the Pilot School directors who wanted their schools to serve as philosophical and structural reform "gadflies" for the system, were clear that their schools did not have all of the answers and that they could not necessarily be replicated. They could, instead, be used as "research and development" labs, to be observed by other BPS teachers and administrators to stimulate discussion and change.

We've got to document the daylights [out] of what they [teachers] are doing so we can look at how we can move ... [but] stop talking about the fact that these schools

were meant to be replicable. That was the one word that they could scratch out. We don't want to talk about replication. You want to talk about lessons learned so that others can experiment. I never want to be replicable. I don't go visit other schools so I can do exactly what they're doing. I go to visit to be invigorated, so I'm chastised, so I'm shocked, so I'm woken up, so I see things that are the same. That's the service we should be providing for the district. (Director J)

Other directors, however, suggested that, while they wanted to play a role in helping to improve Boston's public schools, they were not yet ready to serve as catalysts within the BPS. Still seeing her school as a "start-up" organization, one director explained,

The reason I'm running a Pilot School instead of a charter school... [is that] I'm very committed to the component of our mission that's about influencing public education for all kids. But I don't think we can do that until we're in better shape. (Director F)

Some Pilot School principals argue that the constraints of being in this hybrid position – not yet released from all of BPS' requirements – has kept their schools from becoming the type of models that they would like them to be. For these leaders, only when their schools are allowed the freedom to develop into radically different types of schools will they be able to address the shortcomings of the system as a whole.

The question exists as to whether or not the Pilot School movement is really successfully pushing the envelope on what education really looks like .... if it is really as radical as I think it needs to be. Because the one thing that ... progressives and conservatives in education both agree on is that there are real serious .. lackings in our kids' educations. And they have to be addressed. (Director D)

Similarly, other Pilot School leaders contend that the system itself was not yet willing to consider using the Pilot Schools to "push the conversation" about the conditions needed in Boston's schools. For these directors, putting energy into collaborating with other schools or trying to change policies at central office seems ill-advised.

I think it's good energy after bad. I don't think it's going anywhere until we can get some major concessions from the union and central office about how you organize buildings, how you support them ... a very dramatically different orientation. We've known the recipe for a year. We could have given you the recipe years ago. ... Every organization has its recipe. What's missing are the particular conditions and the procedures, which... fly in the face of the way central office is thinking and the union thinks. Everybody wants to know .... what are they (the Pilot Schools) doing to inform good practice, and .... it's tiring. It's tiresome because we're working with two different paradigms, so there isn't going to be much intentional, meaningful cross-pollenization of ideas. The cultures are dramatically different. What every principal or headmaster should have are the

> *kind of conditions Pilots would have and then we can talk. That's everything from size and scale to hiring their own staff to instructional flexibility to governance, the works. Until those cultures more resemble each other and the conditions are established across the divide, I'm not optimistic that there's going to be lots of meaningful exchanges. It's still going to be us and them.* (Director A)

One director suggested that external pressures, beyond those that Pilot Schools could apply – either individually or as a network – were needed before these schools could put energy into trying to influence BPS as a whole.

As hybrids, however, Pilot Schools also enjoy the benefits -- the services and security -- that come from being within a large system such as the BPS. The district provides services such as payroll and transportation, (albeit through central costs deductions from their budgets) as well as the security that comes from being part of a larger, established entity. Coupled with the potential of playing a role in influencing the future of BPS, the services and security were the reasons that Larry Myatt and Linda Nathan, then co-directors of Fenway Middle College High, decided in 1997 to return the state charter that they had been awarded and become, instead, a Boston Pilot School. As they describe in an article published shortly afterward,

> *The charter presented numerous risks, most notably the inability to guarantee teachers' salaries, as well as philosophical questions about whether the Massachusetts charter movement was indeed a step to weaken the commitment to public education. .... On the issue of teacher job security and the ability to attract and sustain a senior faculty, we felt that the Pilot School offered more opportunities. We also knew that our parents preferred Fenway to remain in the system. They had only to point to the myriad of parochial schools that had recently closed because of insufficient funds as evidence for their preference of the stability of Pilot Schools. Finally the notion of being part of a "system" and potentially being able to influence that system in a positive and more progressive way was what influenced our decision. The pros for becoming a Pilot School outweighed the pros of becoming a charter school.*

Thus the decision to remain within BPS was a conscious choice for Fenway, and it can be characterized this way for the schools as a group as well. The Pilot School leaders chose to be part of BPS and generally feel a commitment to playing a role in the district's future. However, the relationship between BPS and the Pilot Schools is constantly in flux, because the Pilot School leaders want to belong to BPS but also want to be able to shape what that relationship with BPS might look like. In a sense, these schools want to be members of BPS on their own terms. For example, we noted at a Pilot School Directors meeting, that several headmasters said that they were not planning to attend an upcoming BPS event for principals. Also, because these schools are "semi-members" of BPS, they are sometimes left out of the BPS "communication loop." One Pilot School teacher expressed frustration that she hadn't heard soon enough about a BPS opportunity for her students. We also have heard stories of BPS central office staff expressing surprise to learn that Pilot Schools were actually part of BPS. So there appear to be two levels of confusion. One is that the relationship between the Pilot Schools and BPS is still evolving, with

many areas yet to be defined and clarified. Two is that what has been defined may not be consistently known across BPS and Pilot School personnel. One director expressed it this way.

> *What paperwork do we have to respond to? Which don't we have to respond to? What guidelines should we have for recruitment and... and diversity? A lot of little nitpicky things that come up. What are we eligible for? What aren't we eligible for? What meeting should we attend? What shouldn't we attend?* (Director A)

We also observe, however, some variation among the Pilot School directors in their sense of obligation and their level of optimism with regard to their role within BPS. While many of the Pilot School principals believe that they have much to share, they are also quick to point out that they do not hold all of the answers to urban school reform. Nor are these school leaders, as a group, convinced that the system, as it stands now, would welcome them playing more of a catalytic role. We believe that the role that these hybrid schools play with regard to influencing BPS is currently a tentative one, and we are interested in how this relationship continues to be defined.

The Pilot Schools Network

Initially, the Pilot Schools operated in isolation, independent of one another. In their individual efforts to create schools which embodied their particular set of philosophical and structural reforms, they had to navigate their own paths through BPS policies and practices. For start-up schools struggling to establish themselves, this navigating was onerous and largely ineffective. Each school, on its own, had little power to negotiate. Each was also duplicating one another's efforts in negotiating such areas as funding, facilities or programmatic issues with staff from BPS. Despite their shared philosophical orientation, there were few structured avenues for conversations between the Pilot Schools and little opportunity for mutual support. The need to organize into a network became clear. In 1997, with Annenberg Foundation funding, the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE), a non-profit umbrella organization, created the Pilot Schools Network, bringing these outlier schools into a collective whole. Facilitated by Dan French, Executive Director of CCE, the Network has provided a forum for sharing ideas, solving problems and addressing political issues.

Through the work of this Network, much of what was only partially defined two years ago regarding the relationship between the Pilot Schools and BPS has been further clarified. We see this particularly with regard to funding, assessment, and Special Education. And each time the Network addresses a new issue – whether through negotiations with BPS or in discussions among themselves -- the meaning of pilot status is not only further clarified but continues to evolve and mature. In short, what it means to be a Pilot School is clearer today than it was two years ago. And the Pilot Schools Network, as a political entity within BPS, is maturing and strengthening. Even though much remains to be defined regarding "pilot status," and even though Pilot Schools do not have all of the autonomy and flexibility which they seek, the Network provides these hybrid schools with two important elements critical to their viability: a strong sense of collegial support and unified, political voice within BPS. The Network has evolved into a collective entity which enhances and forwards the Pilot Schools' reform agendas.

Collegial Support. Through monthly directors meetings and yearly retreats, as well as through the meetings of various sub-committees, the Pilot Schools Network has provided the Pilot Schools with a forum for sharing ideas and solving commonly held problems associated with their hybrid status. They support each other in their different stages of development. In addition to reporting out the results of their sub-committee meetings, principals and teachers use Network meetings to share approaches to such issues as: devising teacher evaluation strategies, developing interdisciplinary units, creating portfolio assessments, and finding ways to motivate under-prepared and apathetic students, to name a few. The Network meetings are facilitated by Dan French, yet the "running" of the Network is highly collaborative. The directors as a whole set the agendas for their meetings, and most important Network decisions are made collectively. When a quick decision needs to be made on behalf of the Network, an Executive Committee – comprised of French and three Pilot School directors – is called into action.

What makes this type of network meaningful for participants is the common philosophical bond that they share -- as well as the common "hybrid predicament" which they experience. Two principals described their affinity for the Network in this way:

> *The Pilot School Network is contextual to the environment and to the conditions for change. [In this Network], I have many colleagues who are in the same mind set and the same conditions, different contexts for the conditions, but adhere to certain principles and have certain visions. And that's really affirming.... it's like a hub that provides a number of different supports. It provides services to the school that we're able to purchase, it provides a dialog, discussion, and a reflective mechanism. When we look at strategies, when we look at issues, when we look at needs. I've come to value the Network as ... something that can create, that does create alternatives.* (Director K)

> *It's a whole different conversation. ... I've been going to headmasters meetings since, you know, eight or ten years now. ... We never read a book. We never talked about educational ideas. We talked about safety. ... just total bureaucratic crap, never a high level intellectual, substantive educational conversation in all those years. And in the Pilot School stuff, ... we're reading books, we're reading articles, we've talked about solving the educational problems. We're talking about policy. We're talking about critical friendship. We're talking about the issues that we really should be contending with.* (Director A)

For participants, sharing ideas with like-minded colleagues also offers opportunities for peer accountability. As Larry Myatt and Linda Nathan explained in their article,

> *The Network provides an opportunity to meet with "peer schools" who provide meaningful feedback, as well as greater accountability than bureaucracies. Feedback from other schools can have a tough edge to it, and is perhaps taken more to heart because it comes from those who know young people and the profession first hand. We often grow much more intimate with our Network*

colleagues even though they may be farther away geographically than with our co-workers at the district level.

The Network also offers collegial support – above and beyond the meetings – to Pilot School directors facing difficulties in their schools. In this way, the Network has helped to fill some of the unanticipated needs experienced by these pioneering schools. For example, Dan French went to one school, which faced disagreements between administration and faculty, to help them write up a policy for decision-making and overall school management. The Superintendent then offered a one-time transfer for any staff members who wanted to leave the school.

The Network has also offered schools support in preparing for the School Quality Review Process. This process -- which involves a three day site visit by an external team -- was stipulated in the Annenberg funding for the Network, and it serves as the mechanism by which the Pilot Schools are held accountable. One principal, whose school was going through this process, describes the role of CCE and the Network.

> *The Center has been very helpful with helping us evolve the development of the school so that when we come to our School Quality Review progress report, which is due this spring. They're kind of helping us facilitate that as an outside eye looking at that process. And helping us make sure that we have a timetable so that work is getting done. ... And so the Center has been very helpful at coming in and saying you need a timeline for this, you need to have a list with specific people assigned to specific tasks of who's going to do this and that. You need to have a place where you're collecting all the information. And we have that now .... everything is now being documented in books, so that we can point to it and get it whenever we need it. It's been very helpful to have their guidance in that.*
> (Director D)

As helpful as the Network has been to the Pilot School directors, our data suggests that Pilot School teachers are much less involved at the Network level. The most frequent meetings, the Directors Meetings, generally involve only a few teachers whose participation is irregular. The sub-committees (described below), as well, are primarily composed of directors. We found that many teachers were unaware that these committees even existed. As one representative teacher expressed,

> *Lots of times as a Pilot School you don't feel like you're part of a network, or I don't feel like I'm part of a network, and again, I think those opportunities to get together exist on a level that's above teachers, at this point. You know, certainly I know people who work in Pilot Schools. So informally, you know, we talk.*
> (Teacher B)

Structures do exist within the Network for teachers to share ideas and practices; however, these are somewhat embryonic, relative to the momentum and organization of the directors' activities. A Pilot Schools Teacher Network was formed but met infrequently. Similarly, the Pilot Schools Network solicited participation in Teacher Study Groups this year, but only one group formed and

held a meeting. Teachers express interest in being part of a cross-Pilot School sharing process, but many also speak of the hectic nature of their jobs and their lack of time to participate in such events. Those who did speak of their involvement with the Network tended to refer more to specific content-based workshops and consultants who came to their schools to provide service and support. One teacher described her own experience with the Network.

> *We've gotten involved in projects under CCE, like the Simse grant for math and science, which has been really wonderful. And that sort of connected us to other schools across the state, and that's been really helpful to see, like, just where are we standing? How much work we have to do or how much we have done? So those opportunities have been more meaningful, I think, for us than the sort of Pilot Schools Network meeting on Monday.... because we never make them, in all honesty. I know the people who do go enjoy them, and feel like they've learned something. But the majority of us never make them. Sometimes I really question what their (the Network's) mission and their philosophy is, and I know I've read the literature a thousand times, but I'm still sometimes unclear ... what potential sort of benefit it could hold for, not only teachers but, indirectly for kids. I think most of us haven't thought of too much else outside of this building since August.* (Teacher C)

While few teachers appear to be directly involved in the Network, some of those who participated in this year's Annual Retreat spoke out in favor of greater teacher involvement, particularly in the shaping of the overall direction of the Network. Dan French recalls,

> *The couple of teachers who were there really raised the issue: how are we going to make this a network that expands beyond the directors, and if so what power do teachers within the network have? I think that is an issue that is going to have to be tackled within the coming year. I think it's great that the teachers are pushing that issue. It certainly came up earlier in the year when we were putting out some due process and grievance and documents advisory to the Pilot Schools as well as combined with an election work agreement template. In other words, do you want to come to work at a Pilot School? Here are the conditions. A couple of teachers from Fenway actually raised the issue of how can we be creating this document without teacher input, which was a good point. So we then included them, and the directors agreed to expand the subcommittee – the committee that was working on it – to include teachers, and they posed some significant language changes. That was then made and endorsed. There's beginning to be some small ways in which they're hearing from teachers that you've got to rethink this. .... The same thing happened when we had one teachers' network meeting in the fall – sharing assessment practices. When I brought up, "well, do we want to have more network meetings?" They said, "yes, we would like more opportunities, but we want to have a hand in shaping that and determining what the agenda is." So I think as the Network matures, the way it is governed and how decisions are made will expand and evolve hopefully.*

The Pilot Schools Network provides a forum for collegial support for these like-minded directors, which they find useful, effective and affirming. One of the Network's next challenges however, will be to look into the value of extending this type of cross-school collegiality and support to teachers in the Pilot Schools.

A Unified, Political Voice. The Pilot School directors value the opportunities for collegiality and support provided by the Network. They also value the role played by the Network in providing them with a unified, political voice and avenues for action within BPS to forward their school reform agendas. Through whole-group discussions, direct negotiations, and, particularly, through the work of focused sub-committees, the Pilot Schools have been able to continually refine the understandings of autonomy and flexibility associated with "pilot status." As one director argued, the Network serves as a "kind of liaison," allowing Pilot School representation on the BPS Leadership Team with the Superintendent and ensuring that they are "taken seriously."

The Pilot Schools Network has established its voice and representation within BPS through a set of sub-committees, each of which focuses on one structural condition viewed as critical to the Pilot Schools' implementation of their core philosophical agenda. These sub-committees include: Fiscal Autonomy, Policies and Flexibility, Dispute Resolution, Instructional Support, and Facilities. One director summarized the work of these sub-committees.

> *Each of the committees has different functions. Some of them are looking to create innovative models of reform that can be implemented both in the Pilot Schools and others, that could be looked at as replication mechanisms, like SpEd, for the system, as well. We're (Special Education Committee) looking at the way we do our special needs assignments [and] special needs assessments. [The] Policy [Committee] is looking at changes that will enhance the capacity of the schools to be fully manageable .. school based management at its largest implication. And looking at changes in the operational policies of BPS that impinge and actually curtail the development of Pilot Schools. [The] Fiscal autonomy [Committee] looks at the developing fiscal process or processes that will enhance the capacity of the schools to manage their dollars and their resources. [The] Facilities [Committee] is looking at the problem of facilities and looking at developing a comprehensive plan over the course of the next two and a half years to develop both a final response to the issues of school facilities and a financial capital plan that would be ratified and supported by the mayor.* (Director K)

These committees have identified problems, drafted memos and recommendations to BPS, and essentially, as one principal pointed out, have negotiated on behalf of all the Pilot Schools in order to gain concessions or particular conditions. In effect, these committees are about generating structural reforms and alternatives to BPS policy, some of which could be applicable to BPS schools beyond those in the Network.

At this point, the committees have experienced varying levels of success in addressing and negotiating these alternatives. Significant progress was made in the area of funding equity. On

the other hand, facilities remains problematic. We also see the beginnings of committee efforts to address alternative ways of approaching SPED and Network-wide assessment of student progress. What makes these nascent efforts worth reporting is that both, potentially, have implications for the larger BPS system. These are baseline findings; we will be following these efforts over time and reporting on them in future reports of this longitudinal evaluation.

Funding inequity was a divisive stumbling block for the Pilot Schools right from the beginning. Each school received different per pupil funding levels and had to negotiate its own budget individually with the district. And, as mentioned, these levels were as much as $1,000 below district funding for equivalent BPS schools. Thus solving the funding inequities became an important impetus for founding the Network. Over the past two years, the Fiscal Autonomy Committee has secured, via agreements with BPS, a uniform per pupil lump sum budget for each grade span level, which went into effect this past year. Now, all of the Pilot Schools receive funding that is not only equitable in relation to one another, but in relation to other schools across the district. The Fiscal Autonomy Committee has also gained additional budgetary flexibility from BPS by gaining two other concessions. These include: the adoption of actual versus average teacher salaries for budgeting purposes, and the inclusion of more categories of items in the discretionary portion of their budgets. This committee continues to address many of the issues highlighted earlier in this report, most notably the lack of control over central costs, the problems associated with BPS purchasing procedures, and the difficulties associated with the delayed funding cycle. In all, the efforts of this committee reflect the high priority that Pilot School directors give toward maximizing local control over their resources in order to shape their schools as they see fit.

Unlike the successes of the Financial Autonomy Committee, the Facilities Committee has been unable to negotiate a unified approach to handling Pilot School facilities issues, which, as noted, have been considerable. Thus, in terms of facility issues, Pilot Schools continue to work with BPS individually with varying success. A representative director describes the situation,

> *Facilities, I would say unfortunately, is still a vestige of the old days when school departments cut an individual deal with every school. The school department is not ready to deal with all Pilot Schools around setting precedents for how much of the ... facility should a pilot school be responsible for. [It's] still very much the individual deal. Who's in the most need? Who do we have to deal with now? Who can wait? I think the Facilities Committee has not been nearly as effective -- because the nature of the work --as the Fiscal Autonomy. But it has been successful in raising the issue [that] these Pilots aren't going away, and if you're not going to kill them, you have to find a place to house them.* (Director C)

The issue of facilities remains problematic, suggesting the need for further clarification of the respective roles and responsibilities between BPS and the Pilot Schools.

Another problematic issue -- for all BPS schools -- has been the over-identification of Special Education students, as well as the too common exclusion of these students from mainstream classrooms. Individual Pilot Schools have been struggling with these issues since their beginning,

but now, through the Instructional Support Committee, the conversation has expanded to become network-wide. Specifically, the Pilot Schools are, as a group, exploring alternative ways of surfacing individual needs without all the requirements of IEP labeling. They believe that, given their small class sizes, they can design alternative service models that could better serve students with special needs. One director explained her frustration with being caught between her own desire for flexibility and the district's requirements, in this case with regard to SPED policy.

> *Special Ed [is a] Catch 22. On one hand, if we don't have enough Special Ed kids they'll [claim] that we're not taking our appropriate share. On the other hand, if we do take them, which we do a lot here, then they start harassing you about that you're not meeting all the legal obligations. Meaning that you don't segregate them if they're .4 children, and that you [should] have a Special Ed teacher. So the reason the parents are sending them here is because we have small class sizes, two adults in the room, and tutors to help them. And everything else. And that you'll see they're doing marvelously. So stop trying to get us to treat them the way they're treated where they're not doing marvelously. So there's a catch 22 between the rules and the regulations. Now, in a very big school, you could hire somebody... you simply couldn't even do it in a school this size. We don't have enough . 4 kids [to make a] special class. But their claim is that you should... set up a special class. You have to have someone on board. But this is too small a staff. In a very large school you can play some of those games.* (Director H)

At the June, 1999 Pilot Directors meeting -- in response to a proposal by the Instructional Support Committee -- the directors approved a Network-wide study intended: 1) To develop an alternative method to document a systemic needs-assessment profile of all students enrolled in the Pilot Schools; 2) To document good practices happening at Pilot Schools in relation to Special Needs students; and 3) To negotiate for more autonomy in order to develop an alternative service delivery model for these students. We see this new initiative as important, since it represents another way in which the Pilot Schools are collectively and coherently addressing a complex problem involving their autonomy and flexibility within BPS. It is also an issue which has potential system-wide implications.

Another recent initiative undertaken by the Pilot Schools Network has been the acquisition of a grant to develop Network-wide competencies for pre-kindergarten -12th grade. Again, we view this as an example of the current strength and potential of the Network. Dan French asserts that such an initiative would not have been possible as little as a year ago, and that over two years of "networking" has resulted in a cohesive and somewhat emboldened group. According to French,

> *People feel so besieged by right wing reform rhetoric of this state...testing and standardized curriculum...that people also see it as an opportunity to demonstrate that a Network of schools can actually create common competencies and assessments and hold themselves accountable in that way and hopefully present that work to the state.*

As with the SPED initiative, this effort is about Pilot School autonomy and flexibility, and has potential for affecting the system as a whole. Many Pilot School directors see well-developed common competencies as an alternative accountability system, potentially replacing the MCAS for their students.

Conclusion

The Pilot Schools are an organized group of schools that share a distinct orientation toward the improvement of urban education. They share a commitment to personalized learning, locally tailored curriculum and authentic forms of assessment, as well to the structural conditions that support such values: small size and local control over hiring, budget and curriculum. These commitments and conditions necessitate on-going dialogue at both the individual school and Network level. Pilot Schools are actively engaged in looking at alternative approaches to teaching and learning, but they make no claims about having all the answers to the difficult realities of urban education and the challenging, complex needs of students. However, Pilot School staff believe that on-going conversations about a school's programs and goals are integral to thoughtful, effective schools.

Despite their shared orientation, these schools are not the same. They have distinct histories, cultures and organizational structures. Governance, for example, varies widely across these schools. Some appear to have hierarchical leadership structures, while others are deliberately more democratic and "horizontal" in their approach, as evidenced by very different conversations and descriptions of individual schools around governance at a recent Pilot School directors' leadership retreat. These schools also display an array of student body make-up, and represent a variety of educational foci and neighborhood interests. This report has focused on Pilot Schools' commonality and their developing cohesion, but we feel it is important not to lose sight of their individuality.

The central commonality that Pilot Schools share is what we have called their "hybrid" status. These schools are in a unique position; they have some of the freedom, flexibility and autonomy of charter schools, while at the same time are embedded within a large, urban system. These schools have chosen to remain part of the system, even though a few of them had the opportunity to become full-fledged charters. The system offers particular benefits such as the overseeing of issues like payroll, benefits, and transportation. Also, being in the system enables these schools to play a part in the district's future, even though, as noted, the Pilot School directors vary in their optimism about how influential their efforts could be in effecting change system-wide at this time. The extent to which Pilot Schools can influence BPS is an unresolved question. Many Pilot School directors argue that "pilot school conditions" are a critical prerequisite to genuine reform, and until and unless these conditions exist in other BPS schools, any efforts by the Pilot Schools to influence "the system" will necessarily be minimal. It is also not clear to us at this time how receptive BPS leadership is to the kinds of ideas promulgated by the Pilot Schools.

The very existence of the Pilot Schools within BPS challenges the status quo. The hiring, budgetary and curricular freedoms granted to these hybrid schools run counter to longstanding practices and policies of this large system. In many ways, these schools swim against the stream

of institutionalized public education. As outliers, resolving most important issues has involved complex negotiations, concessions and compromises with BPS. In this way, the original conception of pilot status had to be continually re-defined and sharpened, but at a cost that was, in many ways, too great for individual start-up schools to shoulder. The Pilot Schools Network thus emerged as a way for these schools to more effectively work within BPS.

The Network has been instrumental in providing valued, collegial support, and a unified, political voice. It has helped the Pilot Schools solve some of the dilemmas unique to their hybrid "pilot status." These schools, through the work of the Network, have achieved greater fiscal autonomy and equity. However, Pilot School directors continue to struggle with constraints on their budgetary control. Facilities remain an unresolved issue, one that Pilot Schools still must address individually with BPS. There is also confusion surrounding the extent of Pilot Schools' curricular autonomy, particularly with regard to the Citywide Learning Standards.

Currently, the Network is exploring unified approaches to Special Education policy and student assessment. These initiatives exemplify the Network's role in shaping the evolution of what it means to be a Pilot School. They also demonstrate the cohesion of this group, as well as the growing political voice of these outlier schools within BPS. Through the Network, the Pilot Schools have moved from a focus on individual school survival to a sense of group viability and potential. They have clarified and improved their own status – and have articulated a common vision (see Appendix for Pilot Schools Vision Statement) built around their commonly shared philosophical educational values. The Network has offered valued support to the Pilot School directors; however, the data clearly shows that teachers do not feel the same degree of allegiance to or involvement with the Network.

Ultimately, regardless of the current viability of these schools -- and regardless of the strength of their Network -- it is important to remember that pilot status is a means, not an end. While this baseline report has focused on the current status as well as the problems and possibilities associated with these semi-autonomous schools within BPS, we do not want to lose sight of the goal of the Pilot School initiative: to improve student achievement through the exploration of key philosophical and structural reforms leading to innovative and effective practice. In future reports we will continue to explore further the relationship between the philosophical and structural reforms and the innovative practices these schools are able to implement, as well as how the relationship between BPS and the Pilot Schools continues to evolve and develop.

V. SUMMARY

In this first evaluation report to the Boston Annenberg Challenge (BAC), we provided baseline data on two components of the BAC's work with Cohort II schools: (1) the early phase of implementing an instructional focus on literacy, and (2) the work of the WSC coaches and the support that the BAC provides to them.

In the **literacy section**, we discussed the hard work that teachers and coaches, in particular, are doing to learn and implement new literacy practices. We highlighted the strengths of the work to date and pointed out the need to continue the effort, expand it to the upper grades in the elementary schools, begin the process of addressing literacy at the secondary level, and maintain coach and other support to ensure effective implementation. Because the high school in our sample is not using a specific program (few balanced literacy programs currently exist for the high school level) our discussion of literacy **programs** drew upon our data from elementary and middle schools. High school data inform other aspects of our findings.

Baseline data on the literacy focus in the Cohort II elementary and middle schools suggest a reasonable beginning. Major findings include:

> Teachers involved in the training or implementation of specific literacy programs have, for the most part, been engaged in rigorous professional development. Literacy training is making it possible for them to learn and try out these new practices. Teachers are grappling with new ideas and working to implement them. On the other hand, there are teachers who are not involved in any new training or activities related to literacy. Training that is ongoing and readily accessible to all teachers remains essential if teachers are to continue to learn and utilize what they have learned. Teachers need a deep understanding of the practices they are trying to implement in order to make real progress.
>
> Despite the optimism we heard from teachers who had been trained in a program and who were just beginning to implement that program in their classrooms, we also heard of many challenges. For example, some teachers are wary of replacing current practices with new ones. Others find it difficult to prepare their students for new practices. Many commented on a lack of materials necessary for implementing the program.
>
> As schools work to define and develop their literacy focus, they realize that there are areas of instruction that remain outside of the literacy program. We highlighted three of these areas where we saw schools directing their attention: developing a program for the upper elementary grades in schools that have adopted ELLI for the primary grades; establishing literacy across the curriculum in secondary schools; and targeting efforts toward developing specific literacy skills. Schools face challenges in taking on this work and vary in the extent to which they are engaged in it. In talking with those who have engaged in developing such strategies, our findings point to (a)teacher collaboration, and (b)external or coach-

driven professional development, as two components that are essential to building the skills and resources necessary to effectively develop a school-wide literacy focus.

Content coaches (and a few WSC coaches) play a crucial role in helping schools develop the literacy focus by providing ongoing, on-site instructional guidance. They may help them network with other schools to learn about programs or best practices, or they may work with instructional teams to develop priorities within comprehensive school plans. In addition, many coaches spend time in classrooms, both modeling lessons or observing and offering feedback to teachers.

Many schools are measuring students' progress by assessing students' writing and reading skills. Assessment is multi-layered. Teachers can use it to see student progress as a whole, and/or to analyze how that progress (or lack of progress) should affect their classroom or subject area, and/or to maintain an understanding of which specific skills need to be taught differently. Teachers and coaches who are measuring student progress, and who find it effective, link the process to changing classroom practice and to their own professional development. Although most of these links are made in reference to what teachers and coaches would like to do, rather than what they have already done, their comments indicate the positive direction in which they see their schools headed. We are encouraged by the strong start that some of the schools have made, and will continue to investigate how teachers and administrators are collecting data and analyzing the results and what they are using the results to accomplish over the next few years.

Based on our findings, we repeat the following suggestions made earlier in the report:

- **A specific literacy program should be introduced into a school within a larger infrastructure of support.** If teachers do not have the support or the resources necessary to implement the program in their classrooms, they will not be able to use what they have learned. If it is impossible to provide all of the material resources connected with a new program right away, then teachers should be aware of when and how they will be obtained. Similarly, teachers implementing a new program need to have a source of support for addressing their questions, concerns, and ideas about the program. This should be available via regular meetings with a literacy facilitator or coordinator, or a coach or administrator who has been trained in the program. During such meetings, the only goal is to talk about the literacy program.

- **As administrators and teachers plan and develop a literacy focus in their schools, they should have continual opportunities to collaborate on strategies and goals.** Baseline data suggest that some instructional team meetings are being used for this purpose. The task of focusing on literacy is large and varied. If it is left to be vaguely defined or carried out, there is the danger that nothing will change or improve. On the other hand, if teachers can work together, with administrators and coaches to facilitate these discussions, they can inform each other about what strategies they are trying, what is

working, and where the problems lie. If time is set aside to talk specifically about literacy, faculty can get very specific about how the pedagogy necessary for achievement in literacy gets translated into their classrooms. Finally, they can be clear about how the different pieces of the focus fit together into a comprehensive plan.

- **Schools should measure student progress in the target areas of their literacy focus.** Many schools are in the process of establishing a system for collecting data on student performance in literacy. Measuring student progress is a multi-layered activity that is most helpful when results can be directly related to the classroom. For a school with a literacy focus, a logical way to do this is to measure student progress in the areas where the literacy focus is concentrated. This can be a great help as schools come to deeper understandings of "the focus of their focus." Since every school's literacy needs are different, and since they may change over time, evaluation and re-evaluation of goals and strategies are necessary. As measuring student progress provides the data and the forum for this re-evaluation, it is an essential component of a school-wide literacy focus.

Two key factors help all of these components of a school-wide literacy focus happen: professional development that is ongoing, and the opportunity for teachers (and involved administrators) to collaborate regularly. We emphasize that both these components need to be maximized in the schools.

Regarding **the work of the WSC coaches**, in particular, and the support they receive from the BAC, we found the following:

> In doing their work, most WSC coaches understand broadly that they are to help schools implement the seven Essentials, but that their role cannot be clearly defined by the BAC. How coaches choose to interpret their understandings of their role and then mediate them in partnership with their principals is the essence of coaching. This is a large and complex task that requires coaches to evaluate alternatives, exercise judgment, and identify effective strategies. It requires them to deal with challenges and make decisions in light of their understanding of where their school is and where it is trying to go.
>
> Because these are the conditions under which coaches work, it is crucial that they have a thorough understanding of the reform they are trying to implement in order to make decisions that will move schools toward their goals. Coach interview data strongly suggest that coaches do not yet have – and do not believe that they have – a thorough grounding in the basics of the reform theory and agenda in Boston. One way to ensure the development of such knowledge is to provide coaches with a) meaningful opportunities to develop the conceptual ideas that undergird the reform, b) an idea of what those ideas might look like in practice, c) specific strategies to use when helping schools, d) appropriate support when they find themselves dealing with difficult situations , and e) feedback about the progress of their work.

One of the Project Director's major goals this year was to establish an environment that encourages teamwork and collaboration among the coaches. She was successful in this effort. Coach monthly meetings provided time for small group coach discussions using what coaches referred to as a "consultancy protocol." This protocol provided a way of framing discussions for coaches in small groups around school-related issues. Most coaches with whom we spoke found the discussions beneficial.

Although coach monthly meetings provided coaches with opportunities to work with one another, they did not provided all the help that some coaches wanted and needed. Therefore, despite the fact that coach meetings were improved dramatically and enabled coaches to share and learn from one another, they did not provide coaches with sufficient opportunity to gain clarity on some of the basics of their work that they identified as important to them as coaches.

There was considerable discussion late in the spring about the possibility of phasing out WSC coaches at some schools. As we wrote in our most recent report to the BPE, decisions about continuing or phasing out the WSC coach need to be made on a school-by-school basis. We know that the Project Director shares this view. However, in order to make good school-by-school decisions, the BAC needs to have a set of criteria by which they will evaluate the school's stage of reform.[33] Then, we think it will be essential for the BAC to consider what else principals/headmasters and teachers will have to know and be able to do if they are to continue their reform work without a WSC coach. It may be true that reform is quite advanced in a school; this does not imply, however, that the school knows how to sustain what it has achieved without the support of the coach. Therefore, we offer the following reminders as the BAC tries to make sensible decisions about schools' needs for WSC coaches.

Coaches will likely need to train teachers and principals to facilitate the work of whole-school change. Some of the coaches may not have the skills to provide such training. This is especially likely in those instances where the coach is not quite clear on her own role. It is also true, as some coaches note, because having the facilitation skills themselves is not the same as teaching them to someone else. The BAC leadership will need to address this facet of its work with coaches and schools. If financial resources are unavailable for this work, it would be advisable to try and procure them.

Principals who say they do not need a WSC coach may underestimate the amount of support currently provided by the coach. As a result, principals may not always be in the best position to judge the extent to which they need the coach. BAC leadership needs to find a fair way to a) assess the principal's understanding of what the coach has been providing and, b) have the principal demonstrate how such work will continue without the coach.

[33]The Phase Chart and Self Assessment Survey (SAS) could be used to inform this process.

As the work of whole-school change moves forward, we are learning that members of the ILTs (in Cohort I and II) are finding that they, and perhaps a few others, are carrying the load of whole-school change. Some ILT members feel isolated from their colleagues. They are seeking ways to engage more of those colleagues in the work of whole-school change. **In our judgement, the work of involving more teachers in reform activities, of institutionalizing the new structures and strategies, will be difficult to do without the support of a WSC coach.**

Finally, if after these and other issues are considered, schools wind up with only content coaches, it may be wise for the BAC leadership to consider whether those content coaches need to take some responsibility for whole-school change issues. Without attention to these issues, it is possible that the reform effort will be reduced to nothing more than the implementation of a literacy model.

Several additional issues arose in the course of our analysis of the data we collected about coaches.

- First, coaches in Cohort II, like their colleagues in Cohort I, find that they do not have enough time to do all of the work that is required of them. Hired to work one day each week, in most cases, they find themselves being asked to attend additional meetings or participate in school- or cohort-based professional development that adds significant, unpaid, time to their jobs. They would like the BAC to consider what the time commitment of the role should reasonably involve and how they should set priorities for their school-based work and their broader obligations to the BAC.

- Second, coaches who faced especially difficult situations in their schools reported that the Project Director was always available to assist them. All they had to do was call and they were able to speak to her during evenings and weekends to plan strategies that might be helpful for their schools. They described the Project Director's attention to difficult and sometimes critical situations as commendable.

- Third, some coaches suggest that they would like ongoing feedback from the BAC Project Director. They would like formal opportunities to sit with the Project Director and hear her views on the work they are doing. Although they report knowing that she reads their monthly reports, most report that they do not get comments from her on their content. Coaches say that the reports serve as a vehicle to help them focus on what is happening at their schools and what they ought to do next. Although they recognize the time that would be involved, coaches indicate that they would welcome specific feedback from the Project Director on what she thinks of their progress and plans.

- Fourth, and again like their colleagues in Cohort I, coaches wonder how to work with principals who are weak and/or who do not want to implement the changes required by the reform. While most coaches do not find themselves in this situation, the few who do are frustrated because they lack the authority to make change happen. This leads them to

wonder whether everyone might benefit from more BPS involvement in the cohort's work with principals. Some suggest, as a matter of routine for all principals, the implementation of twice yearly meetings of the principal, BAC Project Director, WSC coach and the Deputy Superintendent who supervises the principal. At such meetings, there could be discussions about the work that needs to be done and formal agreements about the principal's responsibilities. Coaches suggest that the presence of the Deputy might encourage some principals to be more attentive to the work of reform.

- Fifth and finally, some coaches suggest that there are principals who are willing to move forward with reform but who do not know how to make good use of their WSC coach. They suggest that such principals would benefit from targeted professional development, perhaps by the BAC, that offers them guidance as to the roles and responsibilities of the coach, the reasonable parameters of their work, and examples of how they, as principals, can benefit from the coaches' knowledge and skill. The BPS might well be involved in such work as it would lend authority to the enterprise and to the importance of the principals' work with coaches.

In this baseline report on the status and work of the **Pilot Schools**, we described the unique status of these schools within the BPS and their orientation to the district. Our focus was on the organizational, political and philosophical aspects of the Pilot Schools and their status within BPS. We focused on the ways in which these schools operate as part of the Boston Public Schools (BPS) but with autonomy from some of its policies and practices. We described their philosophical values and structural conditions and how these influence their work given what we have called their "hybrid" status within the BPS. What we have learned is:

> A key defining feature of the Pilot Schools is that they are collectively committed to a common core of fundamental philosophical reforms, in the service of improving urban education. These reforms include a belief in the importance of *personalization* in schools (adults and children can know each other well;) *flexible responsive curriculum*, reflecting local needs and environments; and *non-traditional forms of assessment*, such as portfolios, projects and exhibitions.
>
> The Pilot Schools are small, independent schools that share an orientation toward the improvement of urban education. To enact such philosophical reforms, Pilot Schools seek to create supportive, structural reforms: small school size and local control of hiring, building organization and budget. An active working commitment to these philosophical beliefs and the structures and conditions which support them characterize the Pilot Schools as a sub-group within BPS with a common, distinctive orientation to schooling.
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> While many of the Pilot School principals believe that they have much to share with the BPS, they are also quick to point out that they do not hold all of the answers to urban school reform. Nor are these school leaders, as a group, convinced that the system, as it stands now, would welcome them playing more of a catalytic role. We believe that the role that these hybrid schools play with regard

to influencing BPS is currently a tentative one, and we are interested in how this relationship continues to be defined.

The Pilot Schools Network provides a forum for collegial support for the Pilot Directors, which they find useful, effective and affirming. The Pilot School directors value the opportunities for collegiality and support provided by the Network. They also value the role played by the Network in providing them with a unified, political voice and avenues for action within BPS to forward their school reform agendas. Through whole-group discussions, direct negotiations, and, particularly, through the work of focused sub-committees, the Pilot Schools have been able to continually refine the understandings of autonomy and flexibility associated with "pilot status." The Network serves as a kind of liaison, allowing Pilot School representation on the BPS Leadership Team with the Superintendent.

Despite their shared orientation, these schools are not the same. They have distinct histories, cultures and organizational structures. Governance, for example, varies widely across these schools. Some appear to have hierarchical leadership structures, while others are deliberately more democratic and "horizontal" in their approach, as evidenced by very different conversations and descriptions of individual schools around governance at a recent Pilot School directors' leadership retreat. These schools also display an array of student body make-up, and represent a variety of educational foci and neighborhood interests. This report has focused on Pilot Schools' commonality and their developing cohesion, but we feel it is important not to lose sight of their individuality.