

**Evaluation Report on Year Two:  
The Boston Plan for Excellence's 21st Century Schools Program**

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## **Introduction**

The Boston Plan for Excellence (BPE) began planning a complex, collaborative, multi-year venture with the Boston Public Schools (BPS) during the 1995-1996 school year. It was designed to enable the district's schools to move forward expeditiously with standards-based reform that would increase student learning and measurable achievement. The venture, called the 21st Century Schools, is a unique collaboration that requires a high degree of cooperation between the BPS and this outside, private, local education fund. As partners in the collaboration, the 27 early learning centers, elementary, middle and high schools that were competitively selected to be 21st Century Schools receive help to adopt the BPS's Citywide Learning Standards and develop teaching and assessment practices designed to implement standards in ways that lead to high level achievement for all students.

The collaboration came at a propitious moment in Boston when a) the superintendent had laid out a comprehensive reform agenda for the BPS in a document called "Focus on Children," b) the superintendent, mayor, and appointed school board all shared that reform agenda, and c) there was strong financial support for school reform from taxpayers, local private foundations and corporations. In this environment, there was good reason to conclude that the BPE, an external agent, could work productively to help schools improve.

### **Overview of the Findings: 1997-1998 School Year**

At the end of the first year of our evaluation work, Education Matters, Inc. concludes that the BPE's work with the 21st Century Schools, the first cohort of schools to attempt the reform strategies, is having an impact at the schools and at the district. Our data reveal that all partners -- high level BPS central office administrators, BPE staff (which includes the whole school change (WSC) coaches and content coaches), and principals and teachers -- are exerting extraordinary effort to make the reform agenda a reality. The work of reform is frustrating at times. Progress seems to be too slow for those in leadership positions and too fast and intense for those at the schools. However, our findings at the end of one year of evaluation research demonstrate a commitment to reform on the part of all who are involved, a commitment to learn how to work well together, and a commitment to providing children with an education that enables them to enter the 21st century well-prepared for the challenges that they will face.

During this school year, with the help of their WSC and content coaches, teachers and principals worked on improving instruction. They began to implement their school's instructional focus by participating in targeted professional development.

Study groups, instructional teams and subject matter teams began to look at student work as a strategy to understand the links between teaching, curriculum and learning. Principals began to work more closely with colleagues to develop their own roles as instructional leaders. They began to open the doors of their schools to one another in the hope of gaining insights from their colleagues' programs and practices.

The BPE and the BPS worked together to ensure that schools understood that Boston had **one** school reform agenda. To this end, school reform in Boston became conceptually and organizationally unified through the district's adoption of the six Essentials developed by the BPE as the focus of district-wide school reform. The document that describes the reform agenda, entitled "Boston Public Schools Plan for Whole-School Change" states clearly that it was "developed collaboratively by the Boston Plan for Excellence in the Public Schools, the Boston Annenberg Challenge, and the Boston Public Schools." It was approved by the Boston School Committee in November 1997. This adoption by the School Committee ensures that all schools in Boston understand that they will move in the same direction with the same reform agenda. Plans are underway to support Cohort III beginning in the 1998-1999 school year.

Further evidence of the unified approach to school reform comes from the Boston Annenberg Challenge (BAC) which includes the second cohort of reforming schools. BAC schools, known as Cohort II, adopted the First Year Essentials (FYE) and coaching approach designed by the BPE. The BPE accepted Annenberg Challenge funds which brought it into the BAC. To indicate the coherence of the reform, 21st Century Schools are now known as Cohort I schools. The BAC supports Cohort II schools. Finally, during this past school year, the BPE and BPS began to work collaboratively to figure out how to address central office policies and practices that impede implementation of reform strategies designed to help children achieve.

This unified approach is significant and bodes well for the implementation of BPE/BPS-shaped reform in Boston. This is not to say that the complex relationship between the district and the BPE is without challenge. Throughout the school year, BPE and BPS staff members were frequently challenged to create relationships that worked and accommodate the insider/outsider relationship that characterizes school reform in Boston. Our interviews with BPE and BPS staff reveal strain around these issues, but they also reveal success in dealing with them and a commitment from all partners to work for positive outcomes for students.

## Overview of the 21st Century Schools Program

The BPE has given itself a complex assignment. It is attempting to promote serious and focused attention to teaching and learning in a sample of schools for at least four years. To this end, it provides schools with human and material resources and has in place an implementation plan that requires attention to teaching and learning. Due to the vigilance of the BPE, schools cannot take the grant money without implementing the components of the 21st Century Schools program. This is a new experience for the schools. As the Superintendent points out, even though implementation is “uneven” in the schools,

*my sense is that there aren't any schools that are just blowing it off and saying, "Well, we got the money, let's do what we want to do with it." It's been very hard for any school to do that, because the overall design with respect to the principals and headmasters, and the pushing that the 21st Century has done in terms of their expectations and their oversight, has made it difficult if not impossible for anybody to be asleep at the switch.*

But the BPE wants to do more than sustain attention to teaching and learning for the duration of the 21st Century Schools program. It wants to create new knowledge, skill and capacity within schools. It wants to change the culture of the schools so that they continue attending to teaching and learning when the external funding is spent. And, the BPE wants to engage the BPS in a similar program for all of the city's schools.

As a result, those leading the reform at the BPE must invent the reform, figure out how to enable schools to do the work that follows from the reform design, plan for its next stages, and figure out how to develop schools' capacity to continue the work when the grant period ends. To accomplish these goals, the BPE must engage with the BPS to ensure that the district's policies and practices support the reform's short- and long-term goals.

The BPE's reform design for whole-school change is grounded in eight key assumptions.

- \* Change must center on curriculum and instruction. School change must explicitly aim to improve student achievement.
- \* Change efforts must assess student learning with measurements that inform instruction.

- \* Change must be based on existing practices and research which have demonstrated improved achievement.
- \* Change efforts must involve every member of the school community, including students and parents. Team- and consensus-building are crucial.
- \* Change must be accompanied by new roles for teachers.
- \* Change requires principals skilled in instruction and in school management.
- \* Change will require a new organization of existing resources.
- \* Change efforts must be ongoing and must be continuously measured and adjusted to reflect lessons learned. (Focus, February 1997, p. 2)<sup>1</sup>

From these assumptions, the BPE derived an implementation strategy with which 21st Century Schools could advance the reform agenda. Schools selected for the program were to engage in six interconnected steps starting in the 1996-1997 school year, the first full year of implementation. These steps, called the First Year Essentials (FYE), served to focus teachers' and principals' attention on factors likely to influence student achievement. They are:

1. As a faculty, each school will choose an instructional focus for its initial efforts which applies to the entire school.
2. Each school will review "what exists" and "best practices" within and beyond the BPS so that school staff can rely on already-developed materials and strategies to reach their goals.
3. In each 21st Century School, teams of teachers will look closely at the performance of students they are responsible for by comparing samples of student work against the newly defined BPS standards.
4. Having completed each of these steps, schools will lay out their current use of resources and explore options which might more effectively match student and teacher needs.
5. Each school will identify the professional development and the student incentives needed to carry out these steps.

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<sup>1</sup> These assumptions fit well within the framework for reform set forth in "Focus on Children," the superintendent's call for whole-school reform.

6. Each school will establish evaluation mechanisms and interim benchmarks with which to look at the school and its work critically, including student outcomes.

For Year Two, the BPE developed a set of expectations designed to extend the work that each school completed in Year One. The Year-Two Expectations are:

- \* that principals will become stronger instructional leaders, assisting teachers as they work to implement best practices in their school's instructional focus;
- \* that school staff will continue to engage in the ongoing, collaborative examination of student work in relation to the Citywide Learning Standards;
- \* that school staff will use 21st Century funds for professional development activities that support their school's instructional focus;
- \* that school staff will reorganize all resources -- fiscal and human -- around their school's instructional focus;
- \* that school staff will reach out to parents and the community to help implement standards-based reform;
- \* that principals and teachers will network with other schools -- to share and learn from each other; and
- \* that schools will begin to measure student performance against the Citywide Learning Standards -- and see improvement. (Focus, Summer 1997)

To facilitate implementation of the FYEs and the Year-Two Expectations, the BPE provides 21st Century Schools with a number of supports and resources. These include, a) "Whole School Change" (WSC) coaches who are selected by the school from a large group of candidates approved by the BPE, and who spend an average of one day each week in the school working with teachers and principals to address the FYEs, b) in year two, WSC coaches as well as content coaches who work with teachers to advance the academic focus chosen by the school, c) financial resources to support teacher and principal visits to other schools to observe "best practices," d) professional development support for the schools' academic focus, e) help with a resource audit designed to help schools figure out how to best use the financial and human resources that they have to raise student achievement, and f) for principals, an opportunity to network with other reforming principals and develop a collaborative learning community among principals.

In addition to these major components of the 21st Century's program, the BPE continually develops additional supports for the schools. For example, during the first year of implementation, the BPE created *Focus*, a newsletter for 21st Century Schools that addresses issues of great relevance to schools within the grant program. Each issue has a central theme as well as additional articles. For example, the December 1996 issue had an article on how to make the most of a "best practices" visit to another school; the March-April 1997 issue described strategies for "Finding Time [for teachers] to Meet in the School Day," and the Summer 1997 issue discussed latest research on professional development. The newsletter provides timely, useful information that is directly related to the work that teachers and principals do in fulfilling the first and second year BPE expectations. During the 1997-1998 school year, when the BPE joined together with the Boston Annenberg Challenge, *Focus* became the Challenge's official newsletter.

As schools proceeded to implement components of reform, teachers, principals, coaches, and the BPE began to realize that they did not have clear ideas about the trajectory of reform. How far, for example, should they get in a year? What did the BPE expect? What would the course of reform look like? What evidence would demonstrate progress? In response to these and other important questions, staff at the BPE developed a Phase Chart. The chart, drafted in January 1998, describes three phases of implementation for each of the BPE's Essentials. Phase 1 describes the beginning of whole-school change, the exposure to reform ideas. Phase 2, Implementation, describes what the program would look like when fully implemented, and Phase 3, called On-going Improvement: Teacher as Learner and Principal as Instructional Leader, describes the way in which the school continues to learn and grow to enhance student achievement. The phase chart brings clarity to the trajectory of school reform for the 21st Century Schools. It is notable that it cites the evidence that schools must provide to demonstrate that they have reached a particular phase for each Essential. (The Phase Chart is attached as Appendix A)

The design of the 21st Century Schools program and the sample of on-going development activities that we have described, demonstrate that the BPE has undertaken a huge task. In collaboration with the BPS, it is leading the way for school reform in Boston with these and other aspects of its program for Cohort I. Its work involves worrying about doing a good job while inventing and tinkering with the components of reform. Uncertainty is integral to the enterprise; considerable stamina will be required to see it through so that subsequent cohorts benefit from knowledge and skill gained from Cohort I. Four years is not a long time in which to accomplish the reform. In its first two years, the BPE and the schools that constitute Cohort I have exerted great effort to begin the process of

whole school change. Our first year of evaluation suggests that the 21st Century Schools program has made a strong start.

### **Design of the Evaluation**

Our evaluation of the 21st Century Schools program combines qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods. It combines a set of in-depth case studies that focus on both program implementation and impact, with survey information and analyses of student outcomes. (OERI funding for this evaluation became available as of July 1, 1997.) This baseline evaluation report addresses two of our broad evaluation questions:

1. How and with what effect are principals, teachers and other school personnel in the 21st Century Schools planning, organizing, implementing, monitoring and sustaining practices designed to meet the FYEs and programs and practices designed for subsequent years?
2. How and with what effect do resources and practices of the BPE, for example coaches and the networking of expert resources, help principals, teachers and support staff develop and utilize attitudes, behaviors, knowledge and skills to enable students' to meet the Citywide Learning Standards?

With respect to the qualitative component of the evaluation during the 1997-1998 school year, Education Matters, Inc.:

\* Selected a sample of seven schools from the 21st Century Schools (Cohort I) and three schools from the Boston Annenberg Challenge (Cohort II). The Cohort I sample includes one high school, one middle school, two K-8 schools and three K-5 schools. The Cohort II sample includes one high school, one middle school and one K-5 elementary school.

\* With the assistance of the Principal/Headmaster and/or Director of Instruction, selected a sample of teachers to interview and observe over the four years of the evaluation in six of the Cohort I schools and two of the Cohort II schools. We continue to work with the administrations of the remaining two schools to develop a teacher sample. Our teacher sample to date includes 74 teachers. In addition, we include in our school sample all principals/headmasters, assistant principals/assistant headmasters/directors of instruction who are involved with instruction, and other key instructional leaders at each school.

- \* Interviewed twice and observed once all sample teachers at six of the eight schools in which we have a sample. Interviewed teachers once in the other two schools. Interviewed twice all principals/headmasters, assistant principals/assistant headmasters/directors of instruction and other key personnel in each school.
- \* Interviewed all key BPE personnel twice and BPS and BTU personnel once regarding their work on school reform, for a total of 18 people.
- \* Interviewed all Year 1 WSC coaches once at the end of Year 1; interviewed all Year 2 WSC coaches in our sample schools once during Year 2; and interviewed all Year 2 content coaches in our sample schools.
- \* Attended Instructional Team Meetings (ILTs) at seven sample schools and a number of other teacher study group/team meetings that were focused on the work of reform.
- \* Attended 16 Coach Meetings and 4 Principal Network Meetings.
- \* Reviewed key documents from the schools, individual teachers, and the BPE and BPS including school plans, self-assessment reports, newsletters and other documents that are pertinent to the evaluation work.
- \* During the summer of 1997, coded and analyzed the first round of data collected from interviews with BPE staff and all coaches and wrote a brief report to the BPE about the role of the coaches and their relationships with the BPE and with the schools. (Attached as Appendix B)
- \* In preparation for data analysis and writing, a) transcribed and coded all interviews and sorted the coded data by roles and by individual schools, b) summarized thematically the observation data from the coach and principal network meetings, c) summarized relevant documents.

With respect to the quantitative component of the evaluation, Policy Studies Associates, Inc.:

- \* Designed and piloted baseline surveys. This work included drafting survey instruments and respondent participation request letters for teachers, coaches, and principals.
- \* Refined survey instruments and distributed baseline surveys to teachers, principals, and coaches. Made follow-up requests to nonrespondents. Achieved

response rates of 95 percent for the coach survey, 88 percent for the principal survey, and 55 percent for the teacher survey.

- \* Designed and piloted surveys to be administered at the end of evaluation Year I. This work entailed retaining core elements of baseline surveys and adding questions on progress achieved during the 1997-1998 school year.

- \* Created a new survey targeted to content coaches. Refined teacher contact methods to achieve higher teacher response rates. Fielded all Year I surveys.

- \* During late May and June logged-in survey responses and made follow-up contacts with nonrespondents.

- \* Analyzed and reported baseline survey data for use in the Year I report. Made plans for writing a report on the quantitative data from the two data collections during the 1997-1998 school year. (This report will be available in August. See Appendix C for aggregate data from the fall survey.)

- \* Reviewed student outcome data on all 21st Century Schools. Ascertained data availability for each school, including data from SAT-9 tests and other uniformly reported sources. Outlined planned analyses of outcome data.

## **Organization of the Report**

This report is based on data collected during the second year of the 21st Century Schools program, the 1997-1998 school year. We introduced the report with a discussion of the work that the BPE has undertaken in order to help schools and the district engage in reform that focuses on teaching and learning, and a review of the evaluation design. We turn next to the ways in which the reform strategies, more specifically, the focus on teaching and learning, play out in our sample of 21st Century Schools. Then, we address the ways in which the BPE and the BPS are working together to create a coherent reform strategy. Finally, we summarize our findings, highlight areas that we think are worthy of further consideration, and detail the next steps in the evaluation.

A Note About the Presentation of Data: In this first report, we aggregate data across schools. It is too early in the implementation and evaluation process to write about individual schools for two reasons. First, our sample was drawn to help us learn about the implementation and impact of the 21st Century Schools program. In this first report, we want to provide data about the program and how its design and implementation are influencing what schools are doing. Second, our data are baseline and, as such, do not lend themselves to an analysis of school-

level progress. With only one year of data, we cannot yet know what the trajectory of reform looks like. We prefer to wait until the end of the 1998-1999 school year to talk about progress at individual schools and the ways in which school, district and BPE factors influence that progress.

## Reform Work at the Schools: Keeping the Focus on Instruction

In this section of the report, we discuss the ways in which teachers and principals are learning to implement standards-based reform within the framework of the Whole-School Change model. We begin with a discussion of standards because standards are the heart of the instructional agenda. Then we turn to issues of professional development. First, we discuss the ways in which teachers are using Looking At Student Work (LASW) to inform their understanding of student learning and the need for changes in curriculum and instruction. Second, we discuss other opportunities in which teachers can learn. These include specific instructional approaches such as ELLI and Success for All which help teachers implement their instructional focus, as well as teacher study groups, for example. Third, we discuss the ways in which the BPE is providing principals with the knowledge and skill they need in order to become instructional leaders. With all kinds of professional development, we pay attention to the kinds of support and facilitation provided by coaches. Finally, we address the ways in which the BPE and the BPS are working together to maintain a system focus on reform.

### Implementing Standards-Based Reform

We begin our discussion of standards-based reform by addressing two basic questions about standards. What are standards? Why might they be important to districts and schools in helping students achieve at high levels? These questions are important because the concept and meaning of "standards" frame our analysis of this component of BPS reform.

Anne C. Lewis, in her synthesis of the "standards movement," points out that there are several different kinds of standards. With respect to the BPE's emphasis and the BPS' approach to standards, we want to attend to three kinds of standards:

*"Content standards* [that] establish what should be learned in various subject areas, and, judging by the new standards now showing up, the emphasis is apt to be on learning content more through critical-thinking and problem-solving strategies than through rote learning of discrete facts....[and] *Performance standards* [that] define the levels of learning that are considered satisfactory. [These] seek to answer the question, How good is good enough? ...[And] *Opportunity to learn*

*standards...[that include] high-quality teaching and sufficient instructional resources." (Kappan, 6/95, p. 746)<sup>2</sup>*

According to Ruth Mitchell who is directly involved in providing assistance to schools implementing standards reform (in Lewis, 1995), implementation requires at least five years of hard work, "with teachers reflecting on what happens every minute in their classrooms to promote high standards" (p.750). We suggest that professionals at all levels of the organization, in the schools and in central office, will have to reflect on what is happening in classrooms and schools and how their policies and practices can forward standards-based reform.

We know from our work evaluating standards-based reform in six other urban districts that this reform is about much more than changing the academic content that is taught. It is about more than the content of the Citywide Learning Standards. This reform is about transforming basic ideas about how students and adults learn. Standards-based reform requires change in, at least, the following areas.

È The conception of content and performance standards asks teachers to reject the idea of a normal distribution of grades and achievement in favor of the requirement that all children achieve at levels reflecting high standards. As such, it is radical and, therefore, difficult for most school and district practitioners, students, parents, and community members to grasp.

È The reform asks teachers and principals to accept responsibility for student learning. Until today, teachers and principals were responsible for presenting the material and, perhaps, presenting it in an engaging and thoughtful way. They were responsible for providing access to learning. Standards-based reform shifts the emphasis to the achievement of learning, to student outcomes, and asks educational professionals to figure out how to help children reach the standards.

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<sup>2</sup>One factor central to Opportunity to Learn standards is the extent to which teachers are sufficiently expert in their content areas. In interviews, principals and teachers have noted the importance of having teachers who can teach to the content standards. Initial analysis of the baseline principal survey data from all 21st Century Schools revealed the following: With respect to subject matter knowledge, a sizeable percentage of principals said that teachers in their schools are not fully prepared to implement the Citywide Learning Standards. Almost one quarter of principals (24 percent) reported that teachers in their schools were "not at all" prepared to teach to the standards in science; 12% said that they had teachers "not at all" prepared to teach mathematics; 12% said that they had teachers "not at all" prepared to teach social studies. We want to stress that these data do not report the percent of teachers who are "not at all" prepared; they report the percent of principals who indicate that they have such teachers

Ë As such, the reform requires teachers to have a substantial knowledge of their content area and to develop teaching strategies that engage students in constructing the meaning of academic content within the framework of each discipline.

Ë Teachers need well-developed and articulated content standards in order to develop curriculum that will help students achieve the standards, and they need appropriate materials with which to teach the curriculum.

Ë Teachers, parents and principals need to see the performance standards and assessments with which students will be judged. Without these, no one will truly know what they are aiming to achieve. Without the assessments, we have seen student content standards turned into traditional curriculum guides that leave teachers focused on what they are "covering" and what students are doing rather than what students are learning.

Ë In order to make such shifts, teachers, principals, and members of central office staff need long-term professional development that assists them a) in making the paradigm shift, and b) in developing teaching strategies, curriculum materials, and assessment techniques to accompany the reform. The teaching requirements rest on notions of cognitive psychology that have been translated into subject matter reforms such as those recommended by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM).

Ë Research on changing teaching practices and on implementing standards-based reform strongly suggests that teachers will learn best in the company of others. They will learn by sharing examples of student work and comparing them to the performance standards. They will learn by discussing together how to increase the achievement of those who are not performing up to standards. They will learn by realizing where they need additional assistance -- expert professional support, for example -- and engaging in such work as a faculty or department. Often, teachers benefit from the assistance of a facilitator or coach when engaged in these processes of examining standards, assessment, and student work.

Ë Principals are not usually sufficiently knowledgeable about instruction, standards, and assessment at the outset of standards-based reform. Too often, they are not participants in professional development that could increase their capacity to advance the reforms. If schools are the locus of much reform activity, then principals need to increase their knowledge and skill about instruction and about leadership in order to lead standards-based reform.

È Parents and other community members must be involved with the reform in order to understand what it entails, its goals, and its strategies. Since standards-based reform represents a significant change from most parents' education, they are most likely to worry about whether their children are the focus of an unworthy experiment. To garner parent support, districts and schools must engage parents in the content, process and goals of the reform strategy.

È Parents' involvement is also essential because it is likely that the method of reporting student achievement will change from traditional grades to achievement of standards. Parents need to understand what the new reporting process tells them, what it measures, and what it means for their children.

È School personnel will have to figure out how to address the educational needs of students who do not meet the standards at key benchmark points. For example, it will no longer be sufficient to relegate such children to a lower track class where the curriculum is weak. Rather, schools and parents will have to provide learning opportunities that enable students, with rare exception, to achieve the requisite standards.

È School personnel will need to learn how to use data to analyze their progress and to provide meaningful feedback to parents, students and the community.

The BPE, with its 21st Century Schools program, has designed an intervention and implementation strategy (described in the previous section) that addresses the major issues detailed above. In this first evaluation report, we describe what we have learned about the implementation of standards and the role that the BPE strategies have played in this effort. In addition, we identify the strategies that the BPS has put in place to advance standards-based reform and the ways in which the BPS and BPE strategies together are working to implement the reform.

In order to learn about these issues, we asked teachers to tell us about their understanding of standards-based reform, its goals, and how it might influence what and how they teach. We asked them to consider the potential value of standards to students and to identify any problems that they thought would accompany implementation. And, we asked teachers about the role of the "products," "Task Descriptions," and "Did I?" sheets that the BPS provides to support standards implementation.

Taken together, teachers' responses to these questions reveal a) a rudimentary knowledge of the implications of standards-based reform for teaching and learning, b) hope that the focus provided by standards would improve student achievement, and c) confusion about the links between the standards, their implications for

curriculum development, and the required products. We explore these responses in the next section, beginning with a discussion of teachers' views on the purposes of standards reform.

### ***The Purposes of Standards Reform***

When they talk about the purpose and value of standards, teachers in our sample schools sound like teachers across America who are in the early stages of implementing this reform. Most think of the standards as a new form of curriculum guide. They suggest that standards will provide equivalent and, perhaps higher expectations, for students across the district. Teachers point out that Boston, like many other urban districts, did not require or encourage teachers to collaborate around what or how they taught. As a result, they say, there was often little consistency in the academic program from grade to grade or school to school. Teachers agree that content standards will bring a much needed consistency to what is taught in school.<sup>3</sup> The following comments reflect our teacher sample's perspective on this point.

*Well, first I think it's something they're trying to do to help every single teacher be doing the same things across the board. That is not happening here in any way. And I'm thinking [of this] not only within the same school, but from school to school. ...In the subject area, I think the good thing about it is that if everybody does follow the same standards and everybody is expected to teach the same things in the same sequence, I think the kids might be able to use more of the other students as resources, too, sort of just talk to one another. (Teacher H)*

*What are the standards all about? They're about making sure that what should be covered at each level gets covered as much as possible, and that people really focus on what's important. (Teacher AA)*

*Because the system was lax for a long time, and it was do what you want, whatever way you want to teach it is OK. And it's been proven it's not OK. So I think this forces all teachers to be aware of*

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<sup>3</sup> A few teachers made cynical remarks about school reform and its likely short duration. We respect their perspective, especially given their seniority in the BPS and their experience with many Superintendents and reform strategies. We note their perspective and suggest that it be taken seriously. However, we do not quote their perspective in each section of the report.

***standards, to know what they're supposed to be doing at their grade level, and to make an honest attempt at making it work. (Teacher AC)***

Teachers often commented on the connection between the Citywide Learning Standards and higher expectations for student learning.

***I think they're trying to make sure across the board that the kids are getting the same thing. I think it hasn't happened over the last whatever years, so they're trying to make this a uniform thing across the board. So if a kid moves from [one school to another in Boston], it's the same thing. The same expectations are there that are here. (Teacher AB)***

***I think it's consistency across the whole entire district. And I think it's an attempt to create expectations, to raise expectations of students. (Teacher A)***

Most teachers, although they value the consistency that will come with the standards, think that the **idea** of standards does not represent anything new. For example,

***Standards-based reform is defining what should be done and then measuring what you're doing against that standard. That's my understanding. I don't really see that there is much difference, frankly, from what I've been doing. (Teacher Z)***

Teacher comments about similarity between standards reform and prior approaches to teaching are an important indicator of the early stages of standards implementation and the limited view that teachers have of the reform strategy. As we noted at the start of this section of the report, standards reform has a set of distinct characteristics that make it quite different than previous approaches to teaching and learning. Absent an opportunity to learn what these differences are, and given, primarily, the content standards, teachers, quite reasonably, focus on what is similar to what they already do. It may be important for the BPE and the BPS to provide opportunities for teachers to learn what is similar and what is different about standards reform and more traditional practice.

When discussing the purpose of standards reform, teachers also suggest that it has an accountability component for them and for their students. While they did not speak against accountability, teachers did raise concerns about whether they could realistically meet the new standards for student achievement, given factors that mitigate against their best efforts.

*You cannot turn a Beetle into a Rolls Royce just because you say it's going to be a Rolls Royce. There's got to be a process. And we don't have a process. We're being told that this is what's going to be taught and these are the standards. These kids can't even write a coherent paragraph,.... (Teacher AD)*

*And we have students who come here without having had the best in the world, with a lot of family problems, a lot of needs that haven't been met, and it's been very stressful because we have kids who are so needy, and yet the pressure to produce students who are achieving at the top, you sort of feel at a loss. **There are definitely things you can do as a teacher, but the pressure to try to take this child who has been forming all these years without you, and produce something totally different, something that they haven't been exposed to, that's kind of a lot.** And I think, with all the standards that are changing, with all the expectations they've asked, it's a little overwhelming. (Teacher Y)*

Some teachers argue that the standards will not be responsive to the needs of students learning English as a second language because they significantly limit teacher discretion.

*I think it's going to make it harder [for ESL students], because one of the things they have going for them, when the standards aren't as rigid or as structured, is teacher flexibility. Teachers can change things to help meet the needs of the students more. **I think that the curriculum is going to become less student-based, which makes it harder for someone who has English as a second language to really master and excel in a content area, if there is much more focus on content rather than on student issues. It's going to be very difficult. I'm not sure how they're going to deal with that.** (Teacher V)*

These comments, and others like them, reflect a concern for students and for the new demands on teachers. On the one hand, teachers wonder how ESL students, who arrive at all different grade levels and with widely varying educational backgrounds will be able to meet the standards for their grade level. They wonder whether the curriculum will be a good one for such students. On the other hand, they also wonder how they will be held accountable for student learning in such a context. If schools remain organized as they are and if the content of the curriculum becomes more difficult, teachers fear that they and their immigrant

students will be unable to succeed. Although we do not have a large sample of teachers who raised these issues, we think they are worthy of consideration.

Other teachers, however, had a different perspective. They pointed out that standards reform could have a beneficial impact on students learning English as a second language. It could bring equity to their education by holding them accountable for the same high standards as students who already speak English.

*I think a lot of the kids feel that what they're learning in the bilingual class is completely different. I think they get that feeling that it's completely different from what they're teaching in the regular ed classes. So that **I think [standards] would give them an opportunity to see that everybody is learning the same thing.** (Teacher H)*

This, too, is an important perspective on the promise of standards reform. It, and the comment before, highlight both the potential for greater equity as a result of standards reform and the complexity of implementing the reform in ways that lead to more equitable opportunities and outcomes.

A small number of teachers in our sample indicated that they understand the equity implications of standards reform. Two teachers made this argument most clearly.

***I think the move to standards is an attempt to create a more concrete system of accountability for both students and teachers, [a system] that's very concrete and very specific.** What is an A? What should you be able to do at the end of third grade, really? Well let's create this standard. Let's say all third graders should be able to read these books or be able to discern these things in a math lesson or a science lesson. **And, I think that it's one way of taking an educational system that might be scattered -- at your school you use this book and teach this, but at my school I use this book and teach that -- and attempt, perhaps, to also create some kind of equity along with the accountability.** Students should all have access to this at this grade level because this is where you need to be. So I think it's for those two reasons, that I see it sort of moving along as part of a bigger loop of school reform, accountability and equity. (Teacher M)*

*I think it's, particularly working in an inner city school, low income city school, it's easy to lower your standards, even subconsciously. And particularly over the years, the work you get. So it's, I really like the idea of having a standard the students have to achieve. And also, not just a standard, but a standard that's being judged by somebody else.*

*In other words, if my students are doing work, I'd rather have their work judged by somebody else than by me. **My best situation is when students have an outside standard they have to achieve that's a very high standard, and I'm working with them to help them do that.***  
(Teacher AE)

Most teachers were not explicit about the equity component of standards reform other than to note the potential for students to have access to the same content. This is not surprising given that, at this early stage of implementation, they understand the reform as one focused on the content to be taught.

Almost all of the teachers in our sample doubt that standards reform will have any impact on their teaching -- the pedagogy that they use -- even if it does influence what they teach. This finding is both unsettling and expected. Standards reform in Boston, as in many other districts, has focused at the outset on what should be taught and learned, the content standards. Even with the requirements for products and the use of Task Descriptions and key questions, described more fully below, the idea of standards has crystallized around content. So, at the present time, this is what guides teachers' understanding.

In theory, standards-based teaching is not considered effective just because teachers "cover" the content; it is not considered effective just because teachers use a range of grouping practices or engage students in a variety of activities. Teaching is effective to the extent that the teacher has the knowledge and skill with which to transform the content into curriculum so that each student is engaged and has a reasonable opportunity to master it at high levels. The Citywide Learning Standards, the content standards, by themselves, are only one component of standards reform. Therefore, at this point in the implementation of standards reform, it is the content standards that teachers understand to be the focus of reform. When teachers talk about the influence of standards on their teaching, most of the time they are referring to the reform's impact on **what** rather than **how** they teach.

*[Standards have] helped me a lot, because at the beginning of the year, I look at all those things and I say, OK this is where my kids should be in June. So I **have to make sure that I get the kids over there, by making sure that I cover all those standards, all those strands.** ...When I started teaching, we had those thick curriculum guides, but there wasn't someone after you making sure that you have the product by the end of the year, this and that. Now with the new standards, you've got to do it. You are accountable as a teacher for everything that's there. So it helps my teaching, because **it's guiding***

***my teaching. I make sure, like I said before, that my lessons correlate with whatever is in the standards, that I'm covering all that. (Teacher T)***

*I would say we had standards here, and I'd been using the standards and the objectives. I mean, they were old, but I was using those. And I really haven't seen too many changes. So I was following the objectives all along, so it really hasn't made that many changes for me. **It's just adding to what I've been doing the new information or the new objectives.** (Teacher W)*

These comments reflect the opinions of the large majority of teachers in our sample that standards-based reform is an effort to clarify and hold teachers accountable for teaching the required content without a requisite change in teaching practice. A few teachers recognize that there may be implications for teaching, but they note that these have not yet been addressed. One teacher articulated this view by saying,

*I would say [that standards have had] very little [impact on teaching]. We really haven't talked about **how** to do things. We've talked about **what** is being expected. Very little attention has been given to how, to actually sitting down and looking at the curriculum and saying how to do this. (Teacher AF)*

Given the focus on unvarying content, some teachers, particularly those teaching middle and high school, object to the idea that they can help students meet the standards when students' prior schooling has left them without appropriate knowledge and skill. They raise important questions about what it is reasonable to expect from secondary school students during the transition to standards-based reform. They worry that some students might be hurt rather than helped by the reform.

***I think the kids who are caught in the initial part of it will really suffer, just like the kids who were caught in the initial part of desegregation really suffered. And I don't think that the system that put these changes, in place -- I think they're willing to sacrifice whole groups of kids just so they can say that they've done what they said they were going to do. But they never provide the support to help those kids who are caught in the initial change. Or the teachers. (Teacher AG)***

These concerns are important. Students cannot be held accountable when they have not had the opportunity to learn due to factors in the school and school

system. Teachers cannot be held accountable when they work without sufficient resources or support for implementing the reform.

Other teachers worry that attention to content will fragment the curriculum rather than lead to its coherence. They suggest that single-minded attention to what is taught will lead teachers and students away from the critical thinking skills that are essential to the reform.

*It seems to me that once...we start making up the lists of standards, it sort of sounds like we're getting into some kind of goal oriented, skill oriented kind of instruction. We're getting away from the critical thinking. Which we don't want to do. (Teacher Z)*

A few teachers who said that the standards would not lead to changes in teaching did note that standards ask them to pay attention to the students and to what they are learning. They suggest, also, that students will be asked to pay greater attention to their own learning.

*No, [standards will not lead to changes in teaching] because those things [the content of the standards] are there, and they were there before. The only thing [is], you are more aware of what you are teaching. ... Now they tell you what they expect to see. The norm is more toward the students, not toward the teachers. We are the providers. We are supposed to make sure that they learn those. Before, they used to say to introduce this vocabulary. I was the one who was introducing, but they didn't say anything about the student half. Now the students know that they have to know this. The wording is a little different. For me, if you say "introduce", it's for me to do it. When the student reads, "Did I read the words that the teacher has introduced?", then it's for the student. It's different. That's the only thing that's different. (Teacher C)*

Although this teacher seems to consider it a minor point, the distinction she makes is at the core of standards reform. The reform requires a shift away from sole attention to what to teacher is doing to an understanding of what the student is doing and learning. The reform is, as she says, "for the student." Almost none of the teachers in our sample suggested an awareness of this distinction. Teachers understand that they will have to cover more material and that the material may be more difficult than what they taught in the past. They worry and wonder about how students will meet the demands of the standards. But only a very few acknowledge that their job is to figure out how to teach the new content so that students do learn it.

A few teachers noted that the consistency around curriculum content could lead to the development of professional conversations among teachers on how to better design instruction to help students meet the standards. We, in fact, observed one such conversation in which teachers and their coach discussed the issue of **how** to teach if their students were to meet the standards set out in the new state assessment. A teacher at another school explained how the reform might lead to these kinds of conversations.

*Now, teachers in the whole system have these same standards, so there can be conversations across schools. There is more uniformity. There is language that we can share, there are expectations that we can share. These things weren't there before. I can have a conversation. And **it's actually forced us, having to look at these has forced us to have conversations with each other that we wouldn't have had.** ...It's clarified what our expectations are, and I guess, we haven't done a whole lot with assessment, but, where are the kids in relation to what our new expectations are? How do we get them from here to here? (Teacher B)*

From our perspective, it is not the standards by themselves that “force” teachers to have such conversations. Rather, it is the BPE’s requirement that schools, for example, a) create an ILT that meets and, among other things, chooses an instructional focus, b) engage in professional development related to the instructional focus, and c) ensure time for instructional teams to meet and look at student work in light of standards and in light of the work’s implications for teaching, that has led to the kinds of conversations described above. Without such requirements and structured opportunities for conversation, standards are more likely to lead to uniformity of content without any changes in teachers’ involvement with their colleagues or access to new ideas about how to teach. We explore these ideas further in the section of the report devoted to LASW as professional development.

Finally, some teachers who work as standards facilitators, some who have been involved in, for example, standards-based mathematics professional development, and some who have had opportunities to work on the development of the standards have a more complex understanding of the links between content standards, performance standards, assessment, and teaching and learning.<sup>4</sup> As we discuss in the next section, teachers’ work with Products, Task Descriptions and

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<sup>4</sup> Teachers who participate in programs such as ELLI or Success for All talk about how those programs are leading to changes in their teaching. These programs are not explicitly tied to standards. However, the practices that they teach support the implementation of standards.

key questions have not yet led most of them to see the links between the components of standards reform.

### ***Using Products, Task Descriptions and Key Questions***

Boston is trying to address the implications of standards for teaching practice through the requirements for products and in the Task Descriptions and student “Did I?” sheets that accompany the products. As we understand them, products are meant to represent “best practice” in having students synthesize and report their learning of standards-based academic content. Key questions support the implementation of standards by stressing critical thinking skills. In principle, these strategies might well extend the implementation of high level content standards in the district.

However, our data suggest that, at this stage of the reform, teachers and principals are often puzzled about the district’s intention for products and unclear about how they relate to curriculum and instruction. Most teachers with whom we spoke do not yet see them as part of on-going student assessment. With a few exceptions, which we will discuss below, they tend to see them as a) another way to ensure consistency in the curriculum, b) external accountability tools, and c) “add-ons” to the regular curriculum. The following comments reflect the views of teachers in our sample.

With respect to consistency, teachers made the following kinds of comments.

*What do I see as the purpose of those products? Well, I think that the system wants to get its staff working in the same direction, and I’m sure they would like some standardization of evaluation, evaluating products. I would hope that part of it is they want to see what kids currently can and can’t do, and that we should be designing our strategies towards improving those things that need improvement to get to the perfection or whatever they see as being proficiency. Instead of whatever we see as proficiency. (Teacher AG)*

*[What do you see as the purpose of the products?] That’s another way to analyze whether students are reaching the standards that we set out for our level. That’s a way we can say, OK, we’re all doing the same product and this is what we’ve got. Is that good enough? Or everybody in one class, the product that they produce is completely different than the same assignment for another class that’s going on here. What are the teachers thinking in terms of what’s good enough? (Teacher AA)*

These and other comments like them support the teachers' views that standards implementation is, primarily, about consistency in curriculum content. Products are another strategy for developing that consistency. As such, they could be used within schools and departments to demonstrate implementation of standards. They could provide teachers with insights into the extent to which they and their colleagues are addressing the new learning goals for students.

In addition, teachers and principals suggest that the products can be used by the district to check on the extent to which the standards are being implemented. Some suggested that the products might be assessed for quality. Teachers and principals, however, were not sure what the district intended to do with the products once it had them.

*Some of the products will be collected for the, for curriculum and development maybe to take a look at to see what each school thinks is a quality product from students who have met the standards. I know we are going to collect them to select samples at each school, each grade level, the standards facilitators and the principals are going to collect samples. But ultimately what's going to happen we have not been told yet. They will probably randomly select some, the computer will probably select two from me, and maybe they'll take a look at them [at Court Street] just to see what, just to see what each school sees. (Teacher AH)*

*Last year, the principal, a couple of people were supposed to go into the classrooms and look at all the products,.... I had it all in folders, neatly, everything in, with all the checklists and everything. But they didn't have time to go into my classroom. It's not that I want to do things for people to come in and see. But if they say, "OK, we're going to be in your classroom, we're going to look at all your products", I want to make sure that I prepare my kids and I prepare everything. [Then, I want] you come to my classroom, and you validate. (Teacher T)*

The following teacher expressed the frustrations of several others who saw the products as a burden to be completed only because of the district requirement.

*Products are coming up, we're going to be asked to share products and display products. So it's just too much all over the place. ... I think Boston, as much as I agree with their standards, I think that if they're expecting schools to make these sort of implementations, they've got to back off, and they've got to give a little bit of leeway*

*so that we can do it. ...And then with products it's just very difficult. So what I found myself doing is I heard the superintendent is coming to visit us on the 20th, so what do I find myself doing? Getting products done. You know. That's not the way it should be. (Teacher A)<sup>5</sup>*

Products have the potential to forward the implementation of content standards by describing the kind of work that students should be helped to produce and by providing exemplars of student work at different levels of achievement. It is our understanding that this is the BPS' intent. However, near the end of the 1997-1998 school year, teachers and principals viewed the products, primarily, as district requirements for external accountability. They were seen as additions to all of the other work that teachers had to complete. As a result, their potential for helping with districtwide implementation of standards reform was minimized.

Nonetheless, a few teachers in our sample understood the potential value of products as strategies that combine teaching and learning with assessment. One such teacher stressed the way in which products provide students with opportunities to revise their work, thereby improving its quality.

*I love the idea of products and portfolios. It's a way of showing what you've learned. It's producing something that can be read, can be published, perhaps. It's a record, and something that the kids take pride in and keep. I use a lot of student samples from year to year, show kids what other kids did, and they love that. And I think kids like the idea of a product, too, the concept of working on it and not just having it be, "I did the task, I filled it out and here it is." This is, OK, let's step back a bit and let's work on it some more. We'll see what else we need. Let's look at it again. And that concept is I think very useful, especially for our kids, who aren't used to really getting it the first time anyway. The idea is that you take it back, you work on it, you get more evidence, you work on the transitions, you can change this into something that's really good. They like that, rather than a one shot deal, take a test. (Teacher S)*

Another teacher, who was puzzled about the district requirement for products, suggested a similar way in which they could be used to help students.

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<sup>5</sup> Both teachers and principals were confused about the district's purpose for the products. We were told repeatedly that someone from the district office would visit the school and collect a sample of them. However, our data collection ended prior to any district request for the products. We will return to this issue early in the fall.

*To be honest with you, I don't know [the purpose of the products]. Really. I really don't know why we have to have these products. I don't know. I know that's probably stupid, but I really don't know why there is a need for a product. Because I don't know who looks at them. I suppose ourselves. It's probably more for the teachers to look at, I guess, and to have the children really look at their papers and do a "Did I?" sheet on them to realize what they're not doing. I suppose that's really the reason. To look more at the work, have ourselves assess it in a different way. So in that way it's helpful. But I do that to a lot of other papers, too, that aren't, quote, final products. I don't know. Haven't we been doing final products all this time? I don't know. Just is it a key term now out there? But I suppose for our own benefit and for the students to look at their own work. (Teacher D)*

In contrast to the comments of most of the teachers cited so far, we found that teachers whose schools were engaged in project-based learning, were less puzzled by the request for products. Although they, too, wondered what the district was going to do with them, these teachers saw the links between on-going student work and the district's requirements. They suggested that they could use projects to fulfill the district's requirements.

*And I think that by coming up with these city-wide products, it kind of can serve as a gauge for, a standard per se, or a benchmark, or whatever vocabulary you want to use, on how schools are doing. So it's OK. For us it's nothing different. We're just taking [a project we already do] and turning it into an autobiography. I know that the perception from other schools is, oh, this is one more thing we need to do. I'm not looking at it that way. I see it as a gauge to look at schools, and then, and look at students. (Teacher A1)*

*Well, [products happen] to be very useful to me because last year in planning the [integrated unit] I looked at the products very carefully. So one of the things they have to do for BPS and that they overlap from this unit into the next is they have to write a presidential speech that's persuasive around some issue of social reform. So they'll be writing a presidential speech that's persuasive in nature. That's what BPS calls for; it has to be persuasive. And along that line we'll also have a debate where they'll be assigned identities and they'll have to debate some issue. Last year they wanted to debate sweat shops and the right of public employees to strike. So those were the two issues that they selected, and then they were given identities for the debate*

*and had to assume that identity, and had to back themselves up with reference materials that they've used throughout, again, following the persuasive speech sort of thing, but actually doing one yourself.*  
(Teacher M)

If the district envisions products as the logical result of the kind of curriculum and instruction suggested in these two quotes, it is not yet clear to most teachers or principals. In part, this is because the message that the schools have understood, regardless of the message that the district may have intended, is that the products are largely for external use. In part, it is because most teachers and principals do not yet understand that standards reform implies the implementation of changes in teaching practice.

Finally, a few teachers, often ones who are knowledgeable about standards reform, see the potential benefit of products, but are upset by the way in which they appear to be disconnected from teaching and learning, and even content. They suggest, with regret, that products have a symbolic but not an educational purpose.

*I have a really low opinion of this process that the city has around products. And I'm doing it. I can say I'm doing it. But I see what some people think are products, and they're nice art projects, or they're something else. But my question is "OK, what's the math in that? You've got this really great poster up here or this really great mural or this very nicely designed and painted book that the kids made, that has some numbers on it. But what was the math? What did they learn from it?" **I'm afraid that the products are part of a show and tell kind of thing, and that they're not deep.** I don't like that. I feel like there's no understanding from the higher ups. I feel like those people are so far removed. And they go oh yeah, here's what's current now, let's get these people to be doing some products. And so all of us are down here like oh my god, we've got to do these products, let me look in the book. Oh, do a 3D assignment. OK, kids, make a pyramid, paint it yellow, and let's put glitter on it. OK, there's our product. Now you've not only disrespected me, you've wasted my time, the kids' time, the school days, and you've reinforced that you can do junk and get away with it. I guess I feel pretty strongly about that. ...I hear people talking about products, and I know that they're not teaching math so that they can get these products done. The conversations that people are having around products are not conversations around math. (Teacher B)*

Our data, and our experience evaluating standards-based reform in other districts, strongly suggest that products and Task Descriptions, as currently understood by teachers, as accountability devices that are detached from on-going instruction and assessment, are unlikely to lead to desired changes in teaching and learning. As long as teachers describe the products, in large part, as “add-ons” to the curriculum that can be completed all at once at the end of the year or just before someone from central office wants to collect them, they will most likely not be educational activities. Further, the Task Descriptions and “Did I?” sheets have the potential to focus teachers’ and students’ on superficial aspects of the work, rather than on its content and quality. The following example suggests the danger we think is inherent in the district’s approach to creating performance tasks.

*We took our key question, we had our first draft. And I put it on an overhead, we placed it up, and I read it to the teachers, explained what the story was about, and then we all analyzed, did they cite three quotes from the passage, did they have good paragraph formation, did they include a closing statement, did they include an introduction? (Teacher Y)<sup>6</sup>*

Our point is that student work developed from a key question and based on a Task Description can currently be assessed without attention to the quality of the work.

### ***Conclusion: Implementing Standards***

At the beginning of this section of the report, we identified many areas in which standards-based reform requires change from traditional assumptions and practices. In light of our findings with respect to standards implementation in the BPS, we return to two of these areas. We noted that:

È Teachers, parents and principals need to see the performance standards and assessments with which students will be judged. Without these, no one will truly know what they are aiming to

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<sup>6</sup>We have seen this approach used in two other urban districts that are implementing standards-based reform. In both districts, standards are increasingly being transformed into “chunks” of disconnected information and lists of procedures that are easily measured. Students can identify whether they had a thesis sentence and whether they included three paragraphs of content and one of conclusion, for example. Teachers can assess whether the students used the correct number of references in the research paper. Scoring guides enable students to “pass” a standard without having demonstrated mastery of content. The strategy, in addition, transforms what was intended to be **meaningful** knowledge into a list of discrete content objectives. In the Looking at Student Work section of the report, we will discuss further concerns associated with relying solely on Task Descriptions to assess student work.

achieve. Without the assessments, we have seen student content standards turned into traditional curriculum guides that leave teachers continuing to stress what they are "covering" and what students are doing rather than what students are learning.

Standards appear to be turning into a traditional scope and sequence in Boston. Given that performance standards and exemplars reflecting work at high standards do not yet exist, it is not reasonable to expect teachers and principals to do more than this. However, as a result, they are not quite able to address another key component of standards-based reform that we highlighted at the outset.

È The reform asks teachers and principals to accept responsibility for student learning. Until today, teachers and principals were responsible for presenting the material and, perhaps, presenting it in an engaging and thoughtful way. They were responsible for providing access to learning. Standards-based reform shifts the emphasis to the achievement of learning, to student outcomes, and asks educational professionals to figure out how to help children reach the standards.

Until performance standards and exemplars are available so that teachers know what is expected, it will be difficult for them and for principals to take meaningful responsibility for student learning.

Our data suggest that teachers know that they will be more accountable for student learning given the reform. But, their comments suggest that they see themselves as accountable for presenting a consistent, aligned curriculum to students. Understandably, given the stage of the reform, they stress the importance of districtwide agreement on what should be taught and at what grade levels. Only a few teachers recognize the implications for how instructional practices might need to change in light of performance standards. Again, it would be difficult for teachers to envision such changes absent clear indicators of what is expected of students.

Other districts that are in the process of implementing standards-based reform have found themselves at this same stage of implementation. Teachers in those districts ask the same questions and raise the same issues as do Boston teachers. As the district and the BPE move forward with reform, it is important to keep in mind the fact that teachers take the standards seriously and believe that they will be responsible for implementing them. What they need and want is help in figuring out how to do that. From our perspective, it is essential that the BPS and BPE help teachers understand that standards reform is about improving teaching practice and

assessment as well as content. This will only occur through intensive, on-going professional development that links content with content-specific pedagogy.

From the outset, BPE has seen the need to support the improvement of instructional practices. To this end, the 21st Century Schools program requires teachers to engage in LASW with the goals of a) understanding the work that students produce, b) connecting that work to the quality and features of the assignment given, and c) changing instruction to improve students' opportunities to learn the material. This first and second year essential has the potential to strengthen the implementation of standards in the district. We turn next to a discussion of LASW and its links to improving teaching and learning.

### **Looking at Student Work**

The BPE has consistently made clear that they expect looking at student work (LASW) to be a central component of schools' professional development. The purpose has also been clear: to stimulate instructional improvement by using discoveries made when looking at work to plan instruction, choose professional development, and establish annual goals (BPE, *LASW: Clear Expectations for Phase II*, N.D. Attached as Appendix D). By supporting training for teachers, principals, parents, and coaches in the Education Trust model of LASW, the BPE has advocated a process that relies on reflective conversations focused on teaching and learning. In distinguishing between LASW and "group scoring," Ruth Mitchell of Education Trust explains how LASW can lead to such conversations:

Looking at student work has the same *form* as group scoring, but it has a different *purpose*. It doesn't stop at producing grades; instead it goes on to ask what we learn from the work about the teaching the students have received and the learning opportunities open to them, and how are we going to provide them with teaching and learning opportunities so that their work will meet the standards. (Mitchell, *Front-End Alignment*, 1996, p. 28, italics in original)

The Education Trust protocol includes specific steps that are intended to guide these conversations. The steps in the model are:

1. Teachers do the student assignment themselves and discuss which standards may be supposed to be addressed by the assignment.
2. Teachers make rough scoring guides using the language of the standards.
3. Teachers score student work and then discuss areas of disagreement.

4. Teachers discuss what the student work shows about learning in the classroom and about the skills students have acquired.
5. Teachers reflect on and discuss what needs to happen in the classroom, school, district, and at the state level for students to do well on similar subsequent assignments.
6. Teachers develop an action plan.

In our sample schools, understanding the purpose of LASW and developing the comfort and trust to share student work with colleagues has been a slow process. The extent to which teachers are looking at student work varies considerably from school to school. Some schools have been working with the process for the last year and a half and they are beginning to have productive, reflective conversations. At other schools, only a small group of teachers (one or two instructional teams) is looking at student work on a regular basis. Across the schools, however, the baseline data suggest three important findings relating to LASW.

(1) LASW marks a significant change in the way teachers work together at their schools and poses many challenges. ***The active support of a trained facilitator is essential to progress in this area.***

(2) A variety of approaches to LASW is used at our sample schools. ***To achieve its goal of improving instruction, the BPE should continue to support the use of a LASW model that is aligned with the Education Trust model.***

(3) ***In many places, LASW is becoming a regular part of teachers' work and is beginning to yield positive outcomes.***

We expand upon each of these findings below.

### ***The Critical Role of the Facilitator***

The schools and teams which have made the most progress in LASW report the active support of the WSC and/or content coach or another facilitator. At a basic level, the presence of facilitators helps to ensure that teachers' common planning time is used to look at student work. At a deeper level, the support and guidance provided by these trained facilitators is helping teachers develop an understanding of the implications of LASW. At this point, teachers' understanding of the purposes of the process varies tremendously. This variation indicates a need for on-going support of this work.

Facilitators help ensure that people attend meetings and stay focused on the task of LASW. Our data reveal that the most common explanations for not engaging in LASW are the realities of limited time and competing demands.<sup>7</sup>

*...we're expected to spend our time on looking at student work. So we meet once a week to look at student work, [but LASW] is always being pushed aside because of this, or this, or this. So it's very difficult. (Teacher A)*

*There is not enough time. We have 45 minutes of planning time on Monday. Planning people aren't always there on time because they can't be two places at one time, and somebody has to get back. And if that meeting ran over, then you have to wait for them to come, so there might be like a seven minute time loss there. You get up there, and you want to wait until everybody is there. And then there are immediate issues that aren't dealt with, so we never get to kind of deeper conversations about students and student work, "what does a literacy block in the fifth grade look like?" We don't get to those conversations... There are more pressing problems. (Teacher B)*

As these teachers explain, there are a variety of reasons people are not looking at student work. Some teams just do not meet regularly; some meet but only the same two teachers show up each time. Some find their 45 minute meetings cut short on both ends, leaving little time for productive conversation; and some teams operate in crisis management mode and rarely, if ever, protect the time to engage in LASW conversations aimed at longer-term change. With the support of coaches, these challenges are less likely to become immovable obstacles.

In describing the challenges he faces and his role in facilitating a productive conversation, one coach highlights a situation we heard about in several schools.

*...the team meetings are resisting looking at student work because they've got so much else to do, from their perspective. And we do end up spending a lot of time talking about standards, which is good.*

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<sup>7</sup>An important ingredient for supporting LASW is time, and apparently schools are finding ways to make time available for this purpose. In responding to a question in the baseline survey of WSC coaches about their school's decisions about resource allocation, 82 percent said that their school had made a resource allocation decision to increase the time available for teachers to meet together to review student work. Reflecting the importance of this priority, far fewer coaches (43 percent) selected the next most frequently chosen response regarding resource allocation decisions ("to reorganize instructional/classroom time [e.g., by going to block scheduling, team teaching]"). Principals' responses to the same question were very similar to the responses of the WSC coaches.

*And when we talk about the standards, we actually bring in student work and look at it around the standards. [We ask] What are we doing for the standards, and we share that kind of stuff. But it's not in the kind of format, with the Education Trust model or any other protocol. It's just sort of let's sit down and look at it. And if I'm there or [the other coach] is there, we manage to kind of ask the questions that the protocol asks, but if we're not there, then it generally doesn't get done. And there is no incentive for people to make a summary of what they're doing, so it's very hard to get the data. (Coach A)*

Teachers who are engaged in LASW talk about their growing understanding of and appreciation for the process. They also note that it represents a significant departure from previous ways of thinking about student work.

*There are a lot of people who just don't want to give up taking all the work and putting it into three piles, and saying top, middle, bottom, and these are the As and these are the Bs and Cs, and these are whatever. That's the way we've worked for so long, and change comes slowly. But I think everybody is finally at the point where they're saying, "oh, that's what you mean." So now we can start moving forward. (Teacher E)*

*Last year, we were just learning ourselves what we were looking at. So it was more getting there and saying [sigh] "what are we doing today?" Nobody knew...And I look forward to them this year, whereas, last year it was more, "Oh, I'd rather be with the kids than do this." But now I know it's showing me something. (Teacher D)*

While teachers talked about their growing understanding of the benefits of LASW, for many the connection between LASW and instructional improvement is not yet explicit.

*I think the benefit can be to come up with some uniform understanding of how to assess students, student performance... However, I don't feel that it is necessary to continually look at student work. I feel that even of greater benefit will be to have discussions about OK, we have a group of students who are in 1. Where do we go from there? What are some of the strategies that we can brainstorm and implement? What material can we share to bring this up? I think that is of equal if not greater benefit. I think if we come to certain understandings of how to evaluate student work, then our next step needs to look at how are we going to do this, and promote*

*the sharing of activities among teachers that will enable kids to move from the second to the third to the fourth level. (Teacher G)*

*I see a lot of talk around [looking at the strengths and weaknesses of students' writing] every time we look at assignments, but there is very little follow up after we do this... Like for example, the first time we looked at different key questions, people brought their students' key questions and how they graded them. We looked at the things the kid was missing and the part that was good about it, and then what I was supposed to do to help that kid move from a 2 to a 3, or from a 3 to a 4. We talk about it but I don't think it's something that always goes back and gets implemented into the classroom. (Teacher H)*

These two quotes present two different cases which reveal that teachers want to focus on improving instruction, but the connection between the LASW process and instructional improvement has not been made or followed through. Perhaps, in the first case, the model the teacher's group is using more closely resembles "group scoring" than LASW. In the second case, it may be that the sessions are not documented and do not include follow-up on teachers' experiences using new instructional strategies. In both cases, the goals of LASW are more likely to be fully realized with the support of a trained facilitator to help teachers move through the process. For example, one coach talks about the need to support teachers to document their observations and action plans in order to make the critical connection between LASW and instructional improvement.

*I keep feeling that in order for this change in teaching to really be sustained over the long haul, teachers have to become more disciplined at writing things down and sharing things in a systematic way. And, looking back at what they themselves wrote is another piece that's not happening yet. I think it's, I hope it's only a question of time. (Coach B)*

Teachers along the continuum — from those who aren't yet looking at student work, to those who are just beginning to understand the implications of LASW, to those who are more engaged in LASW but frustrated that their experiences do not extend far enough into the classroom — make evident the need for continued support to push conversations to the point at which teachers are reflecting on instructional practice.

The baseline survey data suggest that coaches are playing a rather important role in this respect. For example, when asked in what ways the coach was most helpful in the instructional team meetings, the most frequently cited response among

teachers was “facilitating the discussion” (47 percent of responding teachers). The majority of responding teachers (60 percent) also reported that the coaches’ contributions to the work of the instructional teams was “important” or “fairly important” because the team “would not have been able to work together as effectively without his or her help.”

While coaches facilitate many LASW sessions, administrators and teachers also facilitate and be can very effective, as one coach describes here.

*They’re very well organized, very serious, focused on instruction. The sessions are facilitated by one of their own and an administrator, which I think helps. Keeps them focused. But the level of conversation is good, so I think they’re making good use of the process. (Coach D)*

However, our data suggest that administrators’ and teachers’ abilities to lead the conversation in the intended direction depend enormously on their own understanding of the purpose of LASW and their facilitation skills. And, the levels of understanding and skill vary markedly. For example, one administrator seems not to have sufficient understanding of the purpose of LASW to lead the conversation beyond “group scoring”:

*They have what they’re considering a good paper, what should be included, and they just go through and see how many of those items are there and then decide what grade they want to give it... [Interviewer: When you’re in those meetings, what do you do?] I sometimes vote. And if there’s a tie, I sometimes break the tie. But it has to be pretty much up to them... They have to come up with something that they can all agree on. (Administrator A)*

Another administrator plays a more involved role to ensure that these sessions take place and that they follow the designated protocol.

*I’m in charge of all the [instructional teams] so I sit in every [team meeting] in school... And I plan and make sure someone is going to be presenting, and I take care of the protocol and all the logistics for the [instructional team meetings] to take place. (Administrator B)*

Yet another administrator explains that, although he is on an instructional team, he is not able to keep the focus on LASW, apparently because of competing demands on time.

*I will say that, in all honesty, in the [instructional team] that I'm in, that's something I've got to catch up on. We have brought work down. I've collected it, and then not really, we never really got into it.*  
(Administrator C)

While teachers and administrators must eventually take full responsibility for facilitating LASW, the range of abilities to do so at this point remains uneven and indicates the need for on-going, external support. Some administrators talked about the goal of teachers engaging in LASW without external support, but they recognize that teachers at their schools are not yet ready for this.

*It's fostering a spirit of being able to talk to each other about your work. Which I think is a big roadblock. I think that it's not as easy as people make it to be, and I think that it takes work. It's not something just going to happen. Right now there is a facilitator, either the [assistant principal] or another person... my goal is eventually that if we get good enough at this, that we can wean, not totally, but that the teachers can take the onus for carrying this work out on their own. And again... it's got to be relevant to you if it's going to be worthwhile for you to continue doing it. If it's not relevant and helpful then it's not going to be something that's going to catch on and people are going to do.* (Administrator D)

*There are a lot of grades where you need to provide the leadership from the outside. OK, that's fine. It's one of the stages of development and that's all fine. But we need to get to the point where they have those conversations amongst themselves. They know a whole lot more about that than I do, about student work. They're producing it with the children. So it should not... require my intervention to make it happen. But at this point it does... (Administrator E)*

Fortunately, there is evidence that teachers are developing the habits of mind that support the LASW process. According to coaches, most teachers are engaged in self-reflection and self-assessment to some degree. In the baseline survey, coaches were asked about the extent to which teachers in their school "reflect on their own teaching and critically assess the effectiveness of their instructional approach." Of the responding coaches, 15 percent said that teachers reflected and assessed "to a great extent," and 75 percent said that they engaged in these practices "somewhat."

And, there is evidence that coaches are working to support the development of these habits. Coaches were asked the extent to which they have spent time helping teachers “learn how to reflect on their own teaching and critically assess the effectiveness of their instructional approach.” Of responding coaches, 37 percent said that have spent time in this way “to a great extent,” and 63 percent said that they have done this “somewhat.” They also said that these practices represented a major change in their school, with 53 percent of responding coaches stating that these practices represented a change “to a great extent,” and 37 percent stating that such practices represented “somewhat” of a change.

**Summary: The Critical Role of the Facilitator.** Engaging in conversations around student work is new to most, if not all, teachers with whom we spoke. Learning how to make these conversations productive and connect them to teachers’ work in their classrooms remains a challenge. If the goal of these conversations — to improve instructional practice — is to be achieved, teachers will need the on-going support of a trained facilitator. The BPE-supported coaches are in an ideal position to provide this support; they also have the capacity to work with the teachers and administrators who will eventually take responsibility for facilitation. The coaches’ efforts on both fronts should continue to be supported.

### ***The Issue of Models***

Teachers’ understanding of the purpose of LASW is closely tied to the protocol or process they use. Most teachers did not identify a specific model when they talked to us about LASW. However, in many cases, the default model appears to amount to the collaborative assessment of student products or responses to key questions against BPS Task Descriptions.<sup>8</sup> There are many reasons why this is the predominant approach. First, as discussed above, moving beyond this point requires the regular support of trained facilitators.

Second, although many teachers were introduced last year to the Education Trust model, they talked about using Task Description checklists in their LASW sessions because these tools are clearly connected to the requirements of the BPS reform. The following two teachers explain how the existence of Task Description checklists and “Did I? sheets” has made the process more clear to them.

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<sup>8</sup> The Education Trust model emphasizes the value of looking at everyday work. To the extent that products and responses to key questions differ from everyday work, this is not happening in many of our sample schools.

*...it's the first year we have the Task Descriptions that we can use to actually make the rubrics up according to that, instead of on our own. So that's helped a great deal, because last year for a while it was very confusing as to what we were actually supposed to make. I mean, that's the thing. Every teacher has their little things. Some are mechanical, some want imagination, and so it was difficult for a whole group to agree, but now with Task Descriptions it's much easier to do that. (Teacher I)*

*...we're at that level now that we feel comfortable really analyzing students' work. All last year it was just kind of pre-stuff for us. We really weren't sure what our jobs really were. But now, this year, it's really coming into place and we're all coming to these meetings eagerly. And I find them helpful now. Last year, to be honest with you, I found them just kind of a waste of time. But this year I find that they're really, because it goes along with the standards that we need to be doing. We need to be looking more at students' work and we actually are. We're following the Did I? sheets, did they do this, did they make smooth transitions, did they, and I think we're getting a better understanding of student work through all grades. That way we know if a fourth grade teacher needs to do more of this, if I need to do more of this to prepare them for the sixth grade. So I think the meetings this year are a hundred percent better. They're more useful. I walk away feeling that I can go back to my room and look at something and improve on it. (Teacher D)*

In addition to having a more obvious link to the BPS reform requirements, using the Task Descriptions when LASW is easier than using the Education Trust protocol. This is because using the Task Descriptions eliminates the step of creating a scoring guide and it limits some potential disagreements over actual scores for the work. However, there are benefits to having teachers develop rubrics as opposed to relying solely on the Task Description checklists. These were explained to us by a coach. The important implication here is that instructional teams should be encouraged to use or generate definitions of quality work that extend beyond the relatively narrow checklists otherwise in use.

*I'm finding that [BPS] checklist moves people away from the more holistic narrative that the Ed Trust model has. And I think the Ed Trust model is more powerful, because it breaks down some of that item analysis mode. ...Teachers will say it's much easier to use a Task Description than it is to create a 4, a 3, a 2, and a 1 [narrative]... I insist that we create a 4, 3, 2, and 1 narrative using, you can use that*

*language, but I insist that we also talk about what might be beyond that language that's not there [in the checklist], and that we also connect it so that, if the answer has well developed paragraphs that use complete or complex sentences with grammar, [it's] because that's what gets the message across. It's not, Do they have well developed paragraphs? Yes. ...I think that everyone should see them much more connected, the teachers and the kids. And I think the Ed Trust model where you're writing a narrative description pushes people to connect those. (Coach B)*

Ruth Mitchell of Education Trust explains why the discussions that result from disagreements over scoring are also critical to the process: "These discussions are crucial, for in them are revealed the assumptions hidden like landmines in the path to high student achievement" (Mitchell, *Front-End Alignment*, 1996, p. 35).

Third, at some of our sample schools, many teachers were not trained in the Education Trust model. At one school, a teacher expressed her frustration that because more teachers were not trained to use the Education Trust model, those who were trained did not have colleagues with whom to begin the work.

*[The Ruth Mitchell training was] very useful and I was ready to implement it, I suppose. But few of us were trained, and I asked if those of us who were trained, if we were responsible for training of other teachers. At that point, we were told that we were not responsible for training other teachers. So whatever information I had I could not use with my colleagues, because my colleagues had not been exposed to the model. (Teacher J)*

Although in many cases teachers reported that LASW sessions focused on products and Task Descriptions and typically did not move beyond coming to consensus around the scoring of student work, some teachers talked about combining different processes for LASW (i.e., using rubrics with the BPS Task Descriptions). Others talked about their teams defining their own approach, "not using a formula." And, still others clearly use a protocol that is much different from what either the BPS or the BPE has promoted. The following excerpts from teacher interviews indicate a range of processes used to look at student work.

*...we bring products... different products. And we learn from that a lot. Showing our products. It's about products... We are using the Task Descriptions, but also we are using rubrics. And that rubric is helping us a lot with what we have to look for in the math product, in the language arts. (Teacher K)*

*I think that the way we should do it is like if this is a level 4, for instance, these are the things we're looking for in a level 4, and these are the things we're looking for in level 3, and so forth. We need to standardize that, because whatever is level 4 for me now, it may be a level 2 for you, and that's what these meetings are about. We need to get consensus. And that is happening, but we're not using a formula to do this. And I think it's supposed to happen like that.*  
(Teacher J)

*...what we've done is, just using student writing samples, we've tried to hold ourselves accountable for making sure that the measure we're using is reliable. So that I will take a teacher's papers and correct them and not let the scores be known to the homeroom teacher, whoever that teacher's papers are, that teacher, the homeroom teacher will also correct those papers. We'll get the same results, which is what you want.* (Teacher L)

A coach also spoke about the hybrid model employed at a school where conversations are beginning to extend to instructional practice.

*I would say that they have created a new version of the Ed Trust model, in the sense that they'll do the first piece and talk about the student work, they can spend half an hour talking about what kinds of assignments [they're giving]... We have examples of [instructional teams] that have focused on specific instructional strategies as a result of that, and encouraged each other to try these new strategies.*  
(Coach D)

A few teachers — typically standards facilitators — spoke of the different protocols specifically. These teachers were trained by both Education Trust and BPS, and they talked about the need for clarity regarding which protocol they are expected to use.

*...here is Dr. Smith in the curriculum office trying to develop a rubric for evaluating student work, and here is the 21st Century with the Ruth Mitchell program. I feel that the two should have worked together and presented to us, the facilitators, a model to follow. And for me, who was both the standards facilitator and also participating in the 21st Century, I feel I'm being torn between the two.* (Teacher G)

*...it [the multiple models of LASW] really gets to be confusing. ... Who and what exactly are we going to use? And, how are we going to use it? And, is there a place for all of them? Or, is there just a place for one of them? ... And, what purposes do they serve? And so now we've got BPS rubrics, and we have [other] rubrics, and then with the Ruth Mitchell process you generate your own rubrics. And I think what we need is some sort of consistency in the how and when are we going to use which ones. We haven't had a really good discussion about that that makes it abundantly clear to everyone... OK, this is the Ruth Mitchell process, this is how it works, this is how you do it. Now, when and how should you use it, or could you use it, that makes it look a little different from what we've already shown you, but that's practical and good? And then really make some firm, fixed decisions. Are we using [our] rubrics for writing and BPS rubrics for everything else? And you know, for which products are we using whose rubrics when? And does that mean we have to have 98 different assignments or can one assignment serve many masters?*  
(Teacher M)

In this context of mixed messages and multiple protocols for LASW, teachers, administrators, and coaches are crafting solutions school by school and team by team. At one school, they alternate between the Education Trust protocol and another protocol, depending upon the student work they are looking at. An administrator at this school talked about how using the Education Trust protocol has led them to focus on examining the work against standards. This focus on standards marks a departure from the way teams had worked together in the past.

*The protocol calls for strict alignment with the standards, and so we have to comply with that. So that has changed somehow the shape the [instructional teams] take because we have to make reference to the standards, and then we have to strictly look at student work.*  
(Administrator B)

This approach to LASW poses new challenges because it asks teachers to assess student work in light of absolute standards of quality rather than perceptions of student capacity or effort or in comparison to other students.

*I remind the teachers time and time again, it just so happens that we know who the student is, but please try to ignore that part. I know it's almost impossible, but try to ignore that part, because we really have to make them accountable to the standards. And the problem with looking at student work has also been, and I'm always there to*

*be the person reminding them, that you're not comparing one to the other, you're comparing to the standard. So refer back to the standards. Don't tell me how was the one before and how it's going to be the one after. Just to the standard. (School Administrator B)*

Coaches also spoke of their efforts to resolve some of the confusion around the issue of LASW protocols. In this case, the coach supported a model which employed the "key elements" of the Education Trust model, but allowed for some flexibility.

*...many of the teachers were trained in looking at student work, either by going to an outside group or by participating in a group here led by me. Or, some of them, their training consisted of being trained within [their team]. So there's varying levels of familiarity and training with the Ruth Mitchell model. I felt much more comfortable once we arrived at this, with the understanding that it didn't have to be precisely the Ruth Mitchell process, and as long as those elements, that it was collaborative, that it focused on standards and resulted in reflection and action plans, those were the key elements that had to be there. (Coach C)*

Our baseline survey of coaches at all 21st Century schools sheds further light on schools' LASW habits. Almost half of responding coaches (47 percent) said that the instructional teams spent the most time on the Education Trust model's third step, "Teachers score student work and then discuss areas of disagreement." In contrast, only six percent of coaches reported that instructional teams spent the most time on the fifth step, "Teachers discuss what has to happen for students to do well on similar subsequent assignments." And, no coaches reported that the instructional teams spent the most time on step six, "Teachers develop an action plan." [The remaining coaches identified either step two or step four as the part on which instructional teams spent the most time.] While these data from the coach surveys indicate a range in the way instructional teams use their LASW time, they may also support the finding in our sample schools that LASW in many cases is not yet extending to in-depth reflection on instructional practice or to action plans for change, steps five and six of the Education Trust model. In fact, 28 percent of the responding coaches said that the step that posed the greatest difficulty to the instructional teams was the final one, "Teachers develop an action plan."

**Summary: The Issue of Models.** If LASW is, in the words of one coach, "not about scoring the child" instead "it's about using the scoring of work as a lab for teaching, to reflect on your teaching," then the BPE is right to continue to provide support for the institutionalization of LASW that more closely resembles the

Education Trust model.<sup>9</sup> It is not clear to us at this point that complete fidelity to the model is necessary to generate productive professional conversations. However, BPE's on-going support should continue to emphasize leading teachers through the process to Steps 5 and 6 of the Education Trust protocol. Step 5 focuses on the question: "What needs to happen in the classroom, school, district, and at the state level so that all students can do this and similar tasks well?" (Mitchell, *Front End Alignment*, p. 31). This question then leads to Step 6: Develop an action plan to improve student learning and have a recorder write down teachers' responses to the "what needs to happen?" question. The documentation of these conversations can enable the formulation of "large-scale and longer-term action plans, above and beyond what" individuals are able to accomplish (Mitchell, *Front End Alignment*, p. 38). These steps are essential to get to the original purpose: using student work as the basis for conversations on how to improve instructional practice.

### ***Positive Results: What Teachers Are Gaining from LASW***

According to the baseline survey of teachers, the most frequent activity of the instructional teams operating in the 21st Century Schools in 1996-97 was "reviewing and discussing student work." Among responding teachers, 39 percent identified this activity as one of three activities to which their instructional team devoted the most time. The next two most frequent activities were "discussing approaches to assessments/designing assessments" (28 percent of respondents) and "discussing instructional strategies" (25 percent). Just over half of the teachers responding to the survey (56 percent) said the instructional team meetings "were worth attending because I learned from the experience and we accomplished things in an appropriate amount of time." The case studies shed light on these survey results by suggesting just how challenging, but how potentially valuable, the business of LASW is.

Teachers who reported regularly looking at student work find the process worthwhile. In our interviews with them, they told about a) how it informs their teaching in specific and powerful ways, b) how it helps ensure greater consistency across classrooms in terms of what is taught and what is expected of students,

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<sup>9</sup>A good example of a protocol that closely resembles the Education Trust model, but incorporates the requirements of the BPS reform is "The Embedded LASW Model" that was developed by BPE coaches on the LASW working group (see Appendix E). For example, this model recommends using many sources of information, including the required product Task Descriptions, to create a rubric or scoring guide that reflects standards of quality. This protocol allows for flexibility while remaining faithful to most aspects of the Education Trust model.

and c) how the sessions provide an opportunity for teachers to share ideas and support one another.

**LASW informs teaching.** Almost two-thirds of the 21st Century Schools teachers responding to the teacher survey (65 percent of respondents) reported that, since the 1996-97 school year, there had been a change in how they determined the curriculum that they taught. Based on responses to various other teacher survey questions, the major reported influences on curriculum included teachers' consultation with their peers and coaches, *especially through the continuing review of student work.*

In our interviews with teachers, they told us that they find the process of LASW useful in terms of planning future lessons, primarily to fill gaps in students' knowledge or skill and to clarify expectations. Here is a sample of what we heard.

*It gives me an idea as a teacher on how I need to teach my classes, like what I need to concentrate on... so as a teacher, that helps me, not only to help them, but to help myself in how to teach them that.* (Teacher N)

*...we just bring in a whole set of papers from one classroom each meeting and go through them. And we would pass them around and check for all of the certain things we have in the rubrics and then mark them, and then see... where the majority of the children are, what skills are really lacking with that classroom, and then, as a teacher, go back and set up a sub-skill lesson that you can, that would hopefully translate into the next time they do that same kind of assignment. And then, of course, reassess, keep seeing if that's worked... (Teacher I)*

*And also it helps because it helps us guide the question, do a lot of scaffolding before you ask that or be more specific as far as what is it that you want to see written. (Teacher O)*

Identifying gaps in knowledge and skill, and recognizing that assignments and expectations may have been unclear is often made possible because teachers are working through this process collaboratively. An administrator talked about how this has worked at her school.

*What I think [LASW] has done in some cases is made the teachers rethink, "Well, my directions to the kids on this particular assignment were not really what I wanted to get from them." And so they're*

*starting to look at their own work and saying, "How can I make this better, in terms of making sure the kids understand what it is that I want to do?" ... So that kind of information that they get from their colleagues by having somebody, another adult look at what it is that you assign, and how the assignment gets played out, I think is very important. (School Administrator D)*

Teachers also talked about seeing patterns across classrooms or among whole groups of students. When asked how LASW can inform teaching, one teacher articulated the feelings of many.

*Pretty doggone specifically. Because when you look at it, you see there are pretty much trends of, wow, the entire grade... needs to work on... So once we've gone through it, it's very concrete as to, wow, it's really lopsided. The kids didn't get that. On the other hand, it's really evident that everybody, except for maybe two or three kids, knows very well how to format a paragraph. So I don't need to spend several more hours working on paragraphs, although I can tack back to it. But I really need to concentrate on verbs, changing tense... things like that. And also then the stylistic elements. Those weren't quite as easy to pull out, but things like writing and maintaining your central focus seem to be still really questionable for some of the kids. So that will very directly inform what I do with writing assignments, and what I look for and what I teach in the classroom... (Teacher M)*

Identifying patterns also helped teachers realize that perhaps they did not communicate their expectations clearly enough to students; in at least one case, this led to a schoolwide response.

*[LASW] became a more integral part of what they were doing, and we got good documentation through the fall. I did a summary of some of the recurrent themes. And one of the recurrent themes was the fact that teachers felt they needed to be clearer with their students about expectations. And as a result of that, the ILT has asked the teachers to work specifically on choosing some exemplars of excellent work, showing physical evidence that they're doing this by having some displayed in the room with clear explanations of why these pieces are excellent. And then we're going to go on a mini walk through in two weeks, the ILT, to see the evidence of this in the classroom, which was a direct outgrowth of looking at student work. (Coach C)*

At some schools, teachers administered a schoolwide prompt and the student work was collectively scored with the goal of using the information gleaned to guide instruction. An administrator at one of these schools explained how they were doing this.

*...right now the teachers are working on looking at the prompt that the kids have done with no edit, except the self edit. And kind of see where the gaps are. And so that will hopefully guide our instruction for the next few, the rest of the year until, June we'll do a prompt again, a different prompt, using the same. (School Administrator D)*

Teachers also find LASW useful in identifying ways in which individual students might benefit from a different instructional approach. Analyzing the work of individual students — and identifying their strengths and weaknesses — is an important goal of LASW.

*[LASW gives] teachers another tool of how to assess student work according to these standards, sort of not looking at the implied meaning, but what is the child actually putting on paper, where do you need to tailor your instruction to this individual child. So I think it is an important tool. (Teacher A)*

When the focus is on individual students, teachers spoke of targeting instruction for students who are at-risk of falling behind their peers.

*[LASW] helps us because we always focus in on the ones that are behind... so it has helped. I mean, that's what we use to see what to do in our lessons, to see where they are. (Teacher F)*

*Oftentimes... if we do something, if they're doing their first step in the writing process... then we'll look at them and decide, OK, these are the five or six children who need some extra help in something, and one of us the next day will take those kids and do a lesson on the carpet with them while someone else is editing. So we use student work a lot to decide where we're going. (Teacher I)*

*...it is just really having the time to look at their writing if they're not improving, and just focusing right in on whatever they need to do. (Teacher Q)*

In the case of at least one school, the process led to a specific and intensive professional development activity.

*...it [a LASW session] was wonderful. The teachers really got into talking about it, and talking about gee, maybe if this is what you're looking for at fifth grade, you ought to be doing this in second grade. That kind of discussion was going on, and then, how do we teach this kind of stuff better? And that actually led to [a consultant] coming in and doing [an intensive professional development workshop]. (Coach A)*

This type of response to LASW is exactly what is possible if teachers follow through with the process to the point at which they ask "What has to happen?" and develop an action plan. Fortunately, teachers are still reaping benefits when they do not get that far in the process. In fact, for some teachers, the process itself — especially using a rubric and working with an outside facilitator — is instructive in terms of learning new skills.

*...combining the rubrics with [support from the content coach] has taught me a lot of skills on how to teach writing. And I didn't know them before... I had been actively trying to get that help in that area, because I didn't think I was doing great with it. So these two things have really helped me. (Teacher R)*

Finally, LASW made some teachers feel more accountable for the quality of work students produced.

*Our goal is to make all papers a 4, a perfect paper. And a lot of them were down at 1s and 2s at their beginning... it makes me realize what I need to teach... So it gave me the positive and the negative, but it really made me, I think more than anything, look at my teaching. They didn't do it because I didn't teach it. And I said that. I said, gee, you know, I didn't stress that enough. (Teacher D)*

*[LASW] has been very helpful, that whole thrust of looking at student work is good because it allows teachers to come to conclusions rather than just say the kids can't do this or this or this. You have to teach them how to do this. Well, gee, we're starting to get to that in our meetings now. How do we teach them to be able to exhibit the mastery that is called for on these tests? They can't do this, they can't do that. Well, what lesson do you teach that makes them able to do that? What lesson and how? (Teacher S).*

In general, teachers spoke more about the implications of LASW in terms of specific skills that need to be imparted to students. In that sense, they found it

useful in identifying areas in need of remediation; they spoke much less about the process helping them to identify students' strengths as a guide to supporting academic enrichment. We are not surprised by this finding given the districtwide focus on raising the achievement of the lowest performing students, but we think it is a point worth raising in light of the promise of LASW to identify strategies which can help all students — even those who are meeting the standards — achieve at higher levels.

Teachers also spoke very little about the process leading them to conversations about pedagogical and programmatic changes, or the professional development that will be required to support such changes. In light of the confusion regarding approaches to and purposes of LASW, this is not surprising. It does, however, highlight the need for clarity and on-going support to steer conversations in these directions.

**Teachers come to consensus on what is taught, how work is assessed, and how good is good enough.** Teachers spoke about how the process of LASW leads to greater consistency across classrooms in terms of both curriculum and assessment. They also related stories of how LASW can stimulate discussions of teachers' expectations of students.

One teacher explained that LASW can lead to greater consistency in terms of what is taught across classrooms, especially so that bilingual and monolingual classrooms are more in sync.

*The whole school should be working together and all the kids should be exposed to the same thing. That's why I feel that it's beneficial to sit down and make sure that we're all doing the right thing. Because eventually... my children will end up in the monolingual classroom, and I don't want them, when they end up in that classroom, to be lacking, to have those learning gaps. So I think we can support each other, too, in the whole process of teaching. That's what we're supposed to be doing... helping each other. (Teacher T)*

Many teachers also talked about coming to consensus on how to assess students' work.

*We'll assess their writing as if we were their teacher, and what's interesting is to see how differently we assess, even though we use the same rubrics. And we come to a consensus. What is the best way to do that? It could be something that continues. And sort of talk about student expectations. (Teacher U)*

*We discussed what assessment tools we used in assessing student work, what made a paper good, and we found that there was a lot of disagreement over that. Some people placed a lot of emphasis on grammar, punctuation, a lot of people will ignore that for the sake of good content (Teacher V).*

Teachers also spoke of growing consensus regarding expectations for student performance. One teacher shared an experience she had in which she realized she ought to expect more of her students. In this case, being exposed to another teacher's student work enabled her to see that students just like hers were able to achieve at higher levels when appropriately challenged and supported.

*I think it's important for teachers to meet together and sort of come to a consensus upon what are we expecting our children to produce, what is exceptional, what is average, what needs improvement. But I think consistency is really, because I think that we're all sort of, we have different beliefs of where first graders should be, and I think that's across grade levels. (Teacher A)*

*[LASW] will make me aware that my standards weren't as high for that assignment. So I'll look at that work and I'll read and I'll take a look at her [another teacher's] high student and a low student, get a sense of where she's bringing them. And all of a sudden I'll realize she's giving them, that's like a sixth grade expectation, seventh grade expectation. She's preparing them for it and they're doing it. And I'll realize, well my kids can do that, but I didn't set my standards as high. (Teacher Q)*

The issue of consistency across monolingual and bilingual classrooms emerged again in the context of expectations. In this case, a teacher relayed a story illustrating the problem of different expectations for different students.

*We bring students' products to the team, and we decide if this is a 4, this is a 3, and we have a kind of conference, "Why do you think it's a 4?" and "Why do you think it's a 3?" ...My expectation is "This is a 3 because of this," and their expectation will be "Oh, this is a 4, because he is a bilingual student." Our expectation in the bilingual program is like "No, he can do better. He is progressing, he can do better." And their expectation is "He's doing it." That's the conflict about 3 and 4, or 2 and 3. (Teacher K)*

Clearly, LASW can help teachers come to hold the same high expectations for all students, a belief that is at the heart of standards-based education.

**LASW creates an opportunity for professional collaboration.** Overall, teachers enjoy LASW collaboratively: they appreciate the opportunities to support one another and to share strategies and ideas. Some teachers reported that looking at student work sessions were the first time that the teachers had ever shared their student work with one another. As these teachers describe below, this sharing of student work provides valuable information, generates ideas, and establishes a forum through which to support one another.

*...we get ideas from each other, too, and find out where kids are at in various classrooms, and what people are doing. And some wonderful ideas come from that. (Teacher G)*

*...the emotional support of having a sounding board to go to and air frustrations that you're pulling your hair trying to teach [somebody to do something who is not doing it]. And having that be acknowledged; yeah, I'm having the same problem and I've [done] this and that. So also sharing support, and then also sharing ideas. (Teacher L)*

*...it really helps to do it as a group, number one because of the support mechanism that's involved. You don't feel like, "Oh my god, this is so terrible. How can I possibly deal with [it]?" Again, because we share our strategies and talk about "what did you do?" and "this is what's good" and "did you think about that?" It helps you get some ideas for what you might do to deal with what you see. (Teacher M)*

*I'm learning, I'm finding it interesting to look at other work besides my own, and hearing what other teachers do. I'm learning a lot from that, I think, hearing what other teachers do in their classroom, how they present the questions, how they engage the students in this work. So I think ... looking at student work is very valuable, and also, there's two things here, also hearing what your colleagues are doing. And sometimes sharing the struggles with it, as well. (Teacher P)*

Given the isolation that many teachers endure, it is not surprising that these, and other teachers welcome the opportunity for professional collaboration.

**Summary: What Teachers Are Gaining from LASW.** As these excerpts from teacher interviews make clear, many teachers are engaged in and learning from LASW. Even after only limited experience with the process, they report being able

to use what they learn to inform their teaching. And, they are recognizing differences in their approaches to assessment and their expectations for students and are beginning to come to consensus on these issues. And, finally, but not least important, they are enjoying the professional contact and opportunity to engage in joint work.

### ***Conclusion: Looking at Student Work***

The BPE is on the right track. They are advocating a potentially powerful approach to looking at student work and following through with facilitation support. Many teachers are engaged in LASW and finding it valuable. They are beginning to have conversations that are reflective and that are informing their instructional practice. Getting to this point with LASW has taken a great deal of hard work. Teachers conversations, however, would yield deeper, more significant changes if they included more dialogue on the “what needs to happen?” question and the resulting action plan. These key components of the Education Trust model that link LASW to school improvement must not be lost as schools settle on their approaches to LASW. In addition to the issues associated with LASW models, teachers who are less involved in LASW report more basic obstacles. Their teams do not meet regularly or when they meet they tend to address “more pressing” issues. For the variety of reasons presented here, teachers need on-going, and possibly additional, support to learn to have productive conversations and reap the benefits of this work. The BPE has acknowledged that LASW “will be difficult and time-consuming” (BPE, *21st Century Schools: First Year Essentials*, N.D.). They did not overestimate the challenge. This kind of work is new to most teachers and requires learning to communicate and work together in new ways. For teachers to see the value of this work given the many competing demands on their time, it is crucial for these sessions to be well-facilitated so that they lead to productive conversations. The BPE’s efforts to support this work should be continued and intensified.

### **Other Professional Development Opportunities**

Teacher professional development did not begin with the 21st Century Schools program. We know that the district created the Lead Teacher role and the mentor teacher program several years ago. Teachers have had the opportunity to form school-based study groups and to participate in district-led professional development courses. Some schools have been implementing programs that include on-going professional development. However, with the implementation of the 21st Century Schools program, Cohort I schools have had not only the opportunity, but the requirement to participate in additional school-based

professional development designed to address the schools' instructional focus. LASW is a great part of this professional development. But there is more.

In this section of the report, we briefly review the additional new work that teachers are doing as a result of their status as 21st Century Schools. In particular, we review a) the ways in which the school's instructional focus is shaping professional development, b) how teachers' work with their Instructional Teams, other than LASW, is influencing their practice, and c) how they are using visits to other schools to observe "best practices." We also discuss teachers' need for support as they implement changes in their practice. Teachers' and principals' comments in interviews and on surveys suggest that they are increasing the amount of time they spend focused on improving teaching and learning as a result of participating in the reform program.<sup>10</sup>

### ***The Influence of the School's Instructional Focus***

21st Century Schools have chosen literacy as their instructional focus and they have opted for different approaches to addressing it. Some have chosen a particular model, for example ELLI which focuses on literacy in grades K-2, while others have tried to create a locally developed program that would meet the needs of their students. Each of the formal programs includes professional development. Locally developed programs are figuring out, with the help of the WSC and content coaches how to learn what they need to know.

In schools that have adopted a literacy model, professional development is targeted at its implementation. Common meeting times are used to learn about the model, grapple with implementation issues, demonstrate lessons, and discuss readings. The literacy models facilitate a coherent, ongoing discussion of literacy instruction. Teachers report that this focused strategy is a strong influence on their teaching. We have learned from coaches and from teachers that the focus enables teachers to work together toward a common goal. As this principal notes, the instructional program they have chosen keeps teachers and administrators focused on teaching and learning; it reduces teacher isolation.

*And the ELLI program, one of the reasons we chose it was it lets you [look at literacy issues] in a very systemic way in terms of looking at the work that the kids can produce, and benchmarking them all*

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<sup>10</sup>Because we do not want to identify individual schools in this report, we have summarized qualitative data. In subsequent reports, when appropriate, we will provide specific feedback on professional development and its influence on teaching.

*through the year, rather than [saying] you're in [room] 201 and you're in 101 and 103, and you do whatever you want. (Administrator D)*

In some schools, we were told that the common instructional focus led teachers who otherwise never spoke to one another to collaborate on the goals of the instructional program. When provided with a program that enables them to learn more about their content and their pedagogy, they report that they productively focus on the common task. This outcome is extremely important for the implementation of whole-school change.

In schools without a literacy model, teachers and principals report devoting their professional development time to specific tasks -- such as LASW, evaluating components of different literacy models, developing content area student assessments, and gaining computer literacy skills -- which may or may not be directly connected to the instructional focus. In other schools, teachers find themselves continually negotiating the agenda for common meeting times. The process of planning for their joint work gets teachers talking to one another, but it has not yet led to a coherent professional development strategy. In addition, the need for frequent planning cuts into the time available for professional development. Our data from the first year of evaluation suggest that having a literacy model makes it much easier for teachers to share a common focus on instruction.

In several schools, either due to the literacy model that has been adopted or due to other aspects of the professional development plan, only certain teachers are participating in the professional development program. For example, primary grade teachers are involved in professional development for ELLI. Involved teachers report that the professional development significantly influences their practice. Those not involved feel they are missing an opportunity to learn new practices; they wonder how they will build on what the primary teachers are learning.

*We've sort of left grades three, four, five [without professional development]. Now you have this 90 minute literacy block, and now it's how do you fill it? How do you fill it wisely? And they're feeling a little unsupported right now....[They say] We want to do something and we need to be connected to ELLI...We were leaving them in no man's land. (Administrator G)*

This realization that all teachers are not yet able to learn new strategies and that they are unhappy about that, is important for two reasons. First, the finding reveals that teachers are eager to learn how to better work with their students. They hear good things from the teachers who are engaged in focused professional

development and they want to be a part of this opportunity to learn. Second, upper grade teachers will need to build on the strategies implemented by the primary teachers if they want to sustain the hoped-for increases in student achievement. Coaches have discussed the frustrations of middle and high school teachers who would like to have the option of trying literacy models for their students. They feel they have insufficient access to literacy strategies that will help them and their students. We think it is important to assure teachers that all of them will have access to important professional development. If all teachers cannot be participants at the same time, then it will be useful to explain how they will be phased into the professional development opportunities at a later time.

### ***Instructional Team Meetings/Common Planning Time***

As we described earlier, teachers spend considerable time in their Instructional Team meetings in LASW, and, if appropriate, participating in professional development related to the literacy model they are implementing. Our baseline survey data provide a broad picture of what teachers say about the influence of professional development during their Instructional Team meetings. For example, when asked about the effects of the Instructional Team meetings on their teaching, more than half of the responding teachers (57 percent) reported that the meetings “motivated me to try something new in my classroom.” The next two most frequently cited effects of the Instructional Team meetings were that they: (1) raised teacher expectations for student performance (43 percent); and (2) made teachers aware of new developments in education (42 percent).

Our qualitative data suggest that the extent to which team meetings are organized around topics that would lead to such changes varies with the schools. Some of the variation is a function of time. Although a number of our sample schools have scheduled ample time for teachers to meet regularly and in continuous blocks of time, others have not. For this approach to professional development to be fruitful, meetings need to be long enough to enable teachers to engage in lengthy discussions, regular enough so that discussions are on-going, and focused enough so that the discussions remain on teaching and learning. In schools where Instructional Team meetings are organized in this way, we heard about positive impacts such as the ones that this administrator describes.

*We’re discussing... better practices, which they have never had a chance to do before. So right now we are breaking a culture of isolation that they have, and they’re talking more about best practices in education, what is the best way of helping specific children. I can say for example, this child, I’m having a lot of problems with this child because he’s having difficulty learning this, this, and that. And this*

*other teacher says, well, I had the same problem, too, but when I did this everything was taken care of and he learned. So the other teacher hears the idea and applies it to the classroom. And it works that way. (Administrator F)*

Instructional Team meetings, used for LASW and other strategies for improving teaching and learning, form an important component of teacher professional development. Our data suggest that using team meetings for professional development, for the most part, represents a significant change in practice. With respect to the work of Instructional Teams, we repeat what we said in the section on LASW: the quality of work completed in these meetings often depends on whether there is a facilitator present who can sustain the team's focus. Therefore, we suggest that the BPE continue to support coaches and others in facilitating meetings at which teachers work on issues of instruction.

### ***Site-Visits to Other Schools***

The BPE expects teachers and principals to visit other schools to observe "best practices" and at least some staff members in each of our schools have had the opportunity to make such visits. Our data suggest that the results of the visits are mixed. In some schools, administrators find it difficult to motivate teachers to make the visits.

*One of the things we keep saying to people is, "We can send you." I have the ability to get a sub. We can pay for it, we can get them out, we can send them out in teams. And people are still hesitant about doing that. They really are hesitant about stepping out and seeing what's out there. I don't know why. And we're trying to push a few of them out, and a few of the risk-takers have done it. Others have not. (Administrator H)*

Some teachers said that they were unclear about the purpose of the visits. They were not sure, in other words, of what to look for or the framework with which to think about what they were seeing. If these teachers made site visits, they reported that they did not see anything they construed to be "best practice." They concluded, for example, that their program was the same or better than the one they visited.<sup>11</sup> Other teachers and principals concluded that the practices they saw

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<sup>11</sup>We did not make site visits with teachers and principals and, therefore, we have no firsthand information about the quality of what they saw. Therefore, we want to note that it is possible that teachers saw programs and practices no different from their own. To the extent that this is true, teachers and principals should be helped to find better sites to visit. On the other hand,

were better, but could not be implemented in Boston due to a) inadequate resources in their own school, b) union policies and practices that precluded assigning faculty in more productive ways, and c) their lack of training in how to implement the practices.

In contrast, site visits where faculty knew the purpose of the visit and had identified practices that they wanted to improve, led to better results. At least one such visit resulted in the adoption of a new way to teach reading. We repeat that, in this case, the teachers knew they were going to that school in order to bring back ideas of how to improve literacy at their school.

Principals were asked about the extent to which they considered the time that teachers spent visiting other schools to be a good use of their time; 58 percent of responding principals said it was useful “to a great extent.” Referring to their own visits to other schools as part of the 21st Century Schools project, principals most frequently responded (63 percent of respondents) that the chief benefit was that the visits “motivated me to try something new in my school.” Coaches were asked what benefits teachers tended to take away from the school visits. The three most frequently cited benefits were information on new instructional strategies (62 percent of responding coaches), information about particular program models (62 percent), and new classroom organization and management ideas (57 percent).

### ***Supporting Instructional Change***

In our discussion of LASW, we stressed that teachers need support to successfully engage in this activity. They also need support when they are learning to use new teaching strategies, observing “best practices,” and when they are discussing all of these in their common meeting times. Most teachers in our sample are aware of this need. They report that support -- from coaches, standards facilitators, other teachers, and, sometimes, principals -- is essential to their professional growth. They worry that the BPE will terminate support for the WSC and content coaches too soon.

Coaches have the opportunity to work with teachers in their classrooms. Data suggest that, although they make few classroom observations, when they do, they provide important feedback and support to teachers as a result of this work. On the baseline survey, coaches were asked to cite the three topics on which they most frequently provided feedback based on observations. According to the

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if teachers were not provided with a framework with which to consider what they were observing, it is possible that they missed significant differences. We are not sure which of these possibilities is correct.

responding coaches, the most frequent topics were instructional strategies (56 percent of coaches), use of Boston's learning standards (53 percent), and reviewing and analyzing student work (44 percent).

Even though very few teachers were observed by their WSC coach, their survey responses indicate that when they are observed, teachers appreciate the feedback. In the baseline survey, teachers said that the three most important effects of their coaches' feedback (based on observation of teachers' classrooms) were that it "motivated me to try something new in my classroom" (49 percent of responding teachers), "made me aware of new developments in education" (47 percent), and "raised my expectations for student performance" (34 percent). Among responding teachers, 89 percent said that they were "satisfied with the feedback your coach has given you about your classroom practice." With the advent of the content coach, we imagine that more teachers will have the opportunity to be observed and benefit from the coach's feedback

Some teachers have not yet taken advantage of opportunities to learn. Where this is happening, principals stress the importance of coaches and other facilitators. They suggest that teachers may resist because they do not believe that they can change what they do in ways that will lead to improved student achievement. Coaches can help them try small changes, as this principal suggests, that lead to visible improvements. With such support, teachers may come to see the potential benefits of engaging in professional development.

*I know they need some help. It's not that they don't want to do it; they can't see how [it will help]. It's real, the pressure [to improve]. But my concern is that they're so into this sort of dysfunction that they can't get out of it. We need to walk them and show them, a piece at a time. ...And it's getting them to see things half full, not half empty. To see, just don't say to me that this is a challenge. But in fact, you have to see that. It sounds too gushy and stuff to remain optimistic about things, but if you don't, then you really quickly get into this funk, and the funk gets translated to the children, and that's my major concern. ...If it comes back to the kids because you're just delivering this sort of subtle message about negativity and futility and impossibility, then I know that it gets transmitted whether you pretend or not. (Administrator E)*

In such situations, coaches and other individuals who provide support are essential if change is to occur.

### ***Conclusion: Other Professional Development***

The BPE is off to a good start in creating instructionally focused professional development in Cohort I schools. Schools have chosen an instructional focus, created common meeting times for teachers, and are at various stages of implementing their professional development plans. Their progress to date represents, in most schools, a tremendous effort and commitment to improve their practice and, thereby, their students' achievement.

### **Changing the Knowledge, Skill and Work of Principals**

All over the country, principals in urban schools are being asked to focus on instruction. Yet, in most districts, their job descriptions and the criteria by which they are evaluated reflect a strong orientation to management. Most principals, indeed, were trained in programs that stressed management and most district-provided professional development has kept them focused on those aspects of the job. As a result, principals in Boston as elsewhere wonder what their new role will look like and how they will learn what they need to know in order to act as instructional leaders. Principals in our sample note that they may have to make significant changes to fulfill their new roles.

*I think we're still in too much of a mode of just: if you're the principal, you know what to do, and you run the show, and you are the one who is supposed to be doing things. You as teachers need to know what the math curriculum is all about and I [as principal] don't need to know. I'm capable of going in and evaluating your work [without that knowledge]. But in fact, no. Do you [the principal] really know what a class ought to look like when you're doing math? What's supposed to be happening? Well, if you really don't know because the standards have changed, or methodology has changed, then you may not get a picture that fits that new standard. Or you may think that everything is OK; you walk into a classroom and the teacher is teaching. (Administrator E)*

This principal and others understand that if they are to effectively observe teachers who are using new teaching strategies, for example, they will have to know what those strategies should look like. They understand that if they are going to discuss instruction with teachers at times other than those devoted to formal evaluation, they will have to develop a climate in which teachers feel safe describing their teaching dilemmas to principals. They recognize that reform will change the entire school, not just the work that teachers do. And, if principals learn how to do all of

this, they wonder how they will find the time for this instructionally focused work given the other demands of their jobs. Principals of the 21st Century Schools refer to all of these challenges when they talk about implementing new roles for themselves.

In this section of the report, we identify the ways in which principals are participating as instructional leaders and learners at their schools and with their colleagues. And, we highlight features of their work that should change if they are to successfully implement their new roles.

### ***21st Century Principals' Involvement with Instruction***

In some of our sample schools, principals, assistant principals, and directors of instruction are significantly involved with instruction. They attend instructional team meetings when teachers are engaged in LASW; they observe classrooms with an eye towards the implementation of standards-based lessons; they participate in professional development with their teachers; and they provide in-school professional development experiences. Several administrators reported on their involvement in these kinds of activities.<sup>12</sup>

*Every two weeks we meet for ELLI purposes after school. I go to all those meetings as well, and what we've been doing is we've been talking. The teachers and myself and [our coach] work on issues that we have. So the things that [the coach] is capable of teaching us, like [doing the] observation survey, the running records, and so on and so forth, she does. I, for example, Monday brought in a video on a program that's put out that uses all of the methodology that ELLI calls for, but it was a video that critiqued and looked at [the classroom] for content in terms of what did the teacher do right, how can we incorporate these things in our classroom, and that kind of conversation. (Administrator D)*

*I do tend to go around to every classroom in the school every day. ...And I'll go in and I grab some chalk if I have to, or I continue with the lesson if I have to, or I make some sort of reference to what the students are doing or I ask a few questions here and there. Sometimes they're just quick visits because I don't have time for more, sometimes they're more in depth. (Administrator B)*

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<sup>12</sup>In this discussion, we do not distinguish between principals, assistant principals and directors of instruction, all of whom have roles that should be related to instruction. We have also removed all comments or program descriptions that would identify administrators and/or schools.

Some administrators who are trying to take on a greater role in instruction find that it is difficult to move in that direction because teachers are wary of describing their difficulties to their supervisors. They realize that if they are going to have a new role in instruction, then they will have to develop new relationships with teachers. In the current system, administrators observe teachers as part of the formal evaluation system. Evaluation is not seen as a time to confess weaknesses to the principal or ask for help.

In order for administrators to gain the confidence of their teachers, they must be able to separate talking about practice for professional development purposes from the formal teacher evaluation process. If they can convince teachers that such distinctions are real, teachers may become more open with their administrators. The work of changing the focus and content of discussions between teachers and administrators requires commitment from both parties. Administrators cannot do it alone and they will likely need help in figuring out how to begin the process. One principal in our sample spoke about wanting to take a greater role in this way but explained how her position as administrator makes it difficult.

*I still would like to have once or twice a reading consultant to come in and sit with them and talk. So it's not me. Because suddenly, if I do it, or [my assistant] does it, then it's the administration is now guiding. It's going to work better if it comes from them saying, well, I'm doing this, I'm doing that, I'm having problems with this or this is working well. A facilitator or a consultant in some way working to help them through that. (Administrator G)*

Another recognizes the same dilemma.

*I would like to see more teacher empowerment. This is going to happen over time because there is still suspicion between faculty and administration. Because we have to change ourselves... The teachers are doing the bulk of what has to be done. They have to talk to us. I want the teachers to have a place where they can vent, and they can let their frustrations come out. I want them to develop the trust and the freedom to do that, to vent their frustrations, to let us know what's hurting them, what they think we could do to make things happen. ...So when I say empowerment, I mean to be able to deal with them not so much as a boss to teachers, but eye to eye, and all of us professionals. And we know that we all have a job to do, and we know what job we all have to do, it's just a matter of doing it, and for all of use to be supportive of each other to be able to do the best*

*job... I think that we have to be the ones to initiate that. It's not going to come from the teachers. We have to open the doors.*  
(Administrator F)

At the start of the 21st Century Schools program, administrators varied in how they enacted their roles. Some, despite the district's long-standing focus on the managerial aspects of the role, engaged themselves with instruction. Others did not. Teachers varied, too, with respect to their relationship with their administrators. Some saw them as instructionally competent; others did not. As a result, the ease or difficulty that administrators experience in taking on the instructional role will vary. What is clear at the end of this first year of evaluation, is that administrators are aware that their roles are changing and that the BPS as well as the BPE expects them to take a greater role in instruction. Some have begun this work and enjoy it; others are struggling to get started. A small number seem to have no interest in or capacity for the work of instructional leadership.

Those who are attempting to create new roles for themselves and gain teachers' trust have tried different strategies. Some attend Instructional Team meetings, but take a back-seat unless they are asked for their advice.

*I think overall the teachers...feel that they've had, and I think overall across, that they pretty much feel that they've had a lot more input in determining what is happening in their particular...areas. People listen to each other. It's not an administrator running the meeting and then from the top down. It's a very much give and take and a sharing process. It's very much by consensus. And I think that would be, if you asked them that, or you observed [the Instructional Team meeting], you would see that in action.* (Administrator H)

Others, such as Administrator D cited earlier, take an active role in instruction.<sup>13</sup> Whatever their approach, for the most part, administrators who have begun to spend more time with teachers in their team or department meetings, find, to their surprise and delight, that they like the work and are invited back.

Principals, in particular, have initiated other activities sparked by their participation in the 21st Century Schools program. They have encouraged teachers to visit each others' classes and to visit other schools in and out of the BPS. They have, in

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<sup>13</sup>We drew this conclusion about how principals operate at team meetings from our qualitative data. Then, at the last joint coach and principal meeting of the year, our researcher reported that coaches and principals talked about seeing these two strategies in schools throughout the cohort.

other words, spurred teachers to seek out “best practices” from which they can learn. Principals have taken leadership roles on their ILTs and have convinced teachers to adopt schedule changes that enable them to have common planning time. Some have participated in LASW at their schools; those involved with ELLI participate in professional development focused on that program.

Without doubt, principals are trying to increase their knowledge of and involvement in instruction. For some, as we said earlier, this focus involves much less of a change in orientation than it does for others. For all of our sample principals, implementing this component of the 21st Century Schools program is meant to be facilitated by participation in one of the BPE’s principal network groups and in joint meetings of all Cohort I principals. We turn next to a discussion of these groups.

### ***Principals’ Opportunities to Learn from One Another: Network/BPE Meetings***

The BPE leadership realized that principals, like teachers, need to learn in the company of colleagues. They knew that principals, as much as teachers, are isolated from one another by professional norms and by the organization of their work. Therefore, the BPE developed the Principals Network to meet the needs of principals for a community of colleagues who could support and learn from one another in the process of implementing the 21st Century Schools program.

The BPE brought principals together on a regular basis from the start of the program, but according to principals, at first the meetings were similar to district meetings. BPE staff developed the agendas and led the meetings. There was scant opportunity for principals to address issues that they might want to discuss. This structure of principal meetings changed when Gloria Woods, a BPS principal on special assignment, became Director of the 21st Century Schools program during the middle of the 1996-1997 school year. Woods acknowledged the principals’ need to influence the agenda of their meetings and suggested that principals meet in breakout groups to decide what their needs were with respect to implementing reform. The dominant message to the BPE from the breakout groups was that principals wanted time to talk with one another.

As a result of this meeting, the 21st Century Schools Director met with the principals of the Lead Schools to work on a strategy for organizing the principals into networking groups that could have meaningful conversations.<sup>14</sup> The decision was to have the four Lead Principals facilitate the Network. Principals in Cohort I

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<sup>14</sup>Four schools that had already implemented significant, positive reform with respect to instruction and whole-school change were part of Cohort I. These were known as Lead Schools and they were to serve as demonstration sites and sources of support for other Cohort I schools.

were then assigned to network groups by grade level: High School, Middle School/K-8, and Elementary School.

From the start, Woods wanted to ensure that these network groups focused productively on instruction. As she put it,

*I had to think. This can't be the same old network where everybody's talking about what happened, what's broken, what Central [office] is not doing, and everything but instruction. So, I met with Tony Alvarado and told him that I wanted...the network to stay with the focus throughout the course of the grant. And that I really wanted literacy to be the focus, developing literacy...And Tony said, "Absolutely right. You really can't waiver; you have to stay with it and try to work with the principals so that they can define what literacy means in relationship to their own school." And so, that's where we started off. The goals in the networks are "principals as learners" with a focus on literacy and the use of the "walk through."<sup>15</sup> ...I wanted the principals to feel the ownership, to really feel that they are owning their own network with the focus around literacy. (Gloria Woods)*

Each of the four network groups met and, with the leadership of their facilitator, set an agenda that included "walk throughs" of one another's schools. From the principals' and the BPE's perspective, principals' meetings improved with the new organization and focus. Minutes of the network meetings provided the following insights into the work of the groups.<sup>16</sup>

1. In August 1997, the high school group agreed to select days to observe one another's schools to observe classes and debrief together. The group decided that one of their goals for the year should be to look at instruction and its connection to standards. They agreed that another goal would be to serve as an advocacy group for instructional and political purposes. Notes from meetings during the

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<sup>15</sup>Walk Throughs were developed at the Institute for Learning in Pittsburgh. Simply put, they involve principals observing other schools with a focus on some aspect of instruction and a small number of questions that the school's principal has identified as important. After the Walk Through, principals get oral feedback from the visiting team. For the BPE, these Walk Throughs were intended to be of a collegial rather than supervisory nature.

<sup>16</sup>These summaries are taken from the minutes of the network meetings which were written, for the most part, by BPE staff members who were in attendance.

year suggest that principals maintained the focus on instruction through implementation of “walk throughs.”

2. In August the middle school group talked informally about several topics for focus during the coming school year. They decided to focus on “walk throughs;” differences in achievement represented by different levels on the Stanford 9; exit criteria for grade 5 to grade 6 in light of the district’s English/Language Arts standards; sharing feedback with colleagues; and using 21st Century funds for parent involvement. During the year, the network facilitator familiarized principals with a “walk through” instrument developed by the Institute for Learning and principals simulated what a “walk through” would involve. The group also discussed issues associated with implementing standards and using Key Questions. Several schools hosted “walk throughs” during the year.

3. Elementary Network A.<sup>17</sup> This group decided in August 1997 to focus on learning about early literacy programs and trainers who could provide professional development for their teachers. With respect to early literacy, they wanted to learn about a) pre-assessment of students prior to implementing learning plans, b) keeping running records and training teachers to do this, c) what principals should know about and look for when observing and offering support, d) how to decide between programs such as ELLI and Success for All, e) finding an assessment strategy in addition to the Stanford 9, and six or seven other topics related to implementation of early literacy programs. At subsequent meetings, principals kept their attention on these questions. They and their colleagues provided information on the topics, bringing in resources and experiences to share.

4. Elementary Network B. This group discussed “walk throughs” and the importance of keeping their focus on instruction. Principals indicated that they wanted the group to be one in which they could speak honestly with one another. They agreed that they would like to learn more about, for example, a) LASW, b) time management, c) improving literacy instruction, d) effective use of assessment information on an on-going basis to inform instruction, alignment between products required by the district, and, among other topics, e)

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<sup>17</sup>Due to the large number of elementary schools in the 21st Century Schools program, the BPE decided to create two elementary principals network groups.

their own growth as instructional leaders. Subsequent meetings included “walk throughs” and discussions of literacy issues.

This BPE design for the Principal Network is constructive. BPE staff knew that it would not be sufficient to put people together and give them time to talk; they knew that it was necessary to have some focus and activity connected to the talk if it was to be productive. As these brief summaries suggest, the Network got off to a reasonable start. Principals valued their time together as this typical comment indicates.

*We are in a network...and we meet once a month... It's been [pause] the idea is a good idea. I think that, again, it's sort of the thing that teachers do in study groups. It has to be worthwhile for me to spend my two hours here. I feel like I'm getting something out of it. I'm also letting somebody else get something out of it. [That makes me] feel OK about being in the group and the time. One good decision that we made was that we were, you know, we were talking about “walk throughs” and looking at each other's work and sharing some ideas. And that has been very positive. (Administrator D)*

Our principal interview data suggest that during the network meetings, principals stayed focused on the issues they identified as important. They completed “walk throughs” and found them valuable. Meetings engaged principals in working together in new ways to forward the goal of improving student achievement. However, during the second half of the school year, principals reported that the BPE seemed to be usurping time from their agenda without prior consultation.<sup>18</sup> When the Cohort principals were together, they objected, for example, to hearing a BPE consultant talk about leadership style. It was not a question of whether the consultant had useful information to offer; it was a question of the principals lack of involvement in the decision to change the agenda. The following principal comment reflects the views of other principals we interviewed.

*In the beginning, it started out pretty well... [the principal facilitators] were taking the lead and they were bringing the agenda... they had someone presenting on “walk throughs” in schools... Somehow, lately it seems to be shifting to the Plan for Excellence agenda. Lo and behold, in our last meeting there was a gentlemen there who was*

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<sup>18</sup>Principals were confused by the number of meetings they were attending and the question of who was responsible for the meetings -- the BPE, BPS, CLD. They, and we, were not always sure when answers referred to BPE meetings and “walk throughs,” cluster meetings and “walk throughs,” or BPE meetings of the entire group of Cohort I principals.

*hired apparently by the Plan for Excellence,...he clearly then was pushing on what does leadership mean to you, and so on. So there was some conversation, and then suddenly he was throwing out all these things, and then we were reacting to what he was saying, and the next thing I knew everyone was griping. It was a gripe session. Nothing against him, but... I feel that if those meetings are any good to us, it needs to be totally our agenda. (Administrator G)*

It is good news that principals find their network time valuable. Creating such professional conversations among principals supports the development of their role as instructional leaders; it supports the development of a community of learners at their schools. The BPE should sustain the network and continue to ensure that its focus remains on instruction and instructional leadership.

At the same time, we recognize that there will be occasions when the BPE wants to expose principals to an outside expert who may be helpful to them or use their meeting time to discuss common issues. We imagine that the BPE, perhaps with the help of the Lead Principals, can work with the principals to figure out a way to meet the BPE's and the principals' goals by making explicit, ahead of time, issues that they would like to put on the agenda and why they are important.

### ***Supports that Administrators Need to Implement Instructional Leadership***

In this section of the report we want to note several factors that influence principals' capacity to be instructional leaders. Most are outside of the domain of the BPE alone. They could be addressed, however, by the joint BPS/BPE Resource Action Team (REACT).

First, principals have too much to do in their schools and too many meetings to attend out of their schools to fully focus on instruction. In some of our sample schools, principals describe themselves as overwhelmed with the day to day operation of the schools and the demands of the BPS for reports and meetings. They say that there has been no serious discussion of the reality of their work and the desire for them to spend more time on instruction.

*We haven't had a deep down, drag-down dirty discussion about ... feeling overwhelmed, overburdened in terms of the amount of work. ... I mean, they got the idea [that principals should spend 50 percent of their time in classrooms] from these people New York... Well, unfortunately, until we get the support [it's impossible]... The connection between the reality of what we face every day and such things as if you have a discipline issue,... that's going to take you*

*oodles of time to do and resolve and call the parents and write the letter and do the report and put it in the computer. I mean, none of this comes without a price. So for them to say be in the classroom 50 percent is not quite realistic. I think we can do better at being more in the classroom.* (Administrator D)

Most principals are trying to add instructional leadership to their priorities. As we described, they attend ILT, Instructional Team and department meetings to participate in LASW and in professional development related to their school's instructional focus. They try to spend more time observing classrooms, but most say they cannot do as much of this as they should. Coaches help principals find some time to do this work, but we doubt that principals will be able to spend sufficient time on instruction unless they are relieved of some administrative responsibilities that can be efficiently done by someone else.

Second, some principals work with assistant principals who are capable of taking on significant instructional leadership roles. Others work with assistant principals who they describe as incapable of doing such work. Our interviews with assistant principals confirm this assessment.<sup>19</sup> If assistant principals cannot support the principal with instructional activities, then the principal has too much to do in this area. In addition, the BPS and its students, in the long run, will suffer from future principals who cannot take on a significant role in instruction. And further, assistant principals need to learn instructional leadership roles if they are going to become effective instructional leaders. If their preparation for the principalship is limited to operations, scheduling and discipline, for example, how will they learn to fulfill the principalship as it is being newly defined? Maintaining the current situation does not bode well for the institutionalization of the reforms that the BPS as well as the BPE are attempting to put in place. Regardless of how this situation arose, we think it needs to be addressed and ameliorated if principals are to become instructional leaders.

Third, principals claim that they often have no control over who comes into their school and who may get bumped out as a result of transfer policies agreed to by the BPS and the Boston Teachers Union (BTU). Interviews with individuals at all levels of the BPS reveal that this is correct. It is unreasonable to expect principals to develop a programmatic approach to literacy, train key teachers, only to have them bumped out of the school by teachers with more seniority who may or may not have the knowledge, skill and desire to implement the new instructional program.

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<sup>19</sup>We are not providing specific examples in this discussion in order to maintain confidentiality.

Fourth, principals need sustained support in order to fully develop as instructional leaders. Our interviews suggest that the WSC coaches provide principals and other administrators with much of the expert guidance that they need. As these administrators describe, coaches model ways to set the agenda for ILT meetings and foster discussions among teachers who have rarely spoken to one another.

*He's a moderator. He initiates the conversation. He's really good. Oh, he's really, really good. Because he allows the can of worms to open. At the beginning, it was very emotional. There was a lot of stuff bottled up for years that the teachers didn't have a chance to deal with, and when the cork was opened, all that came out. And the coach very, very astutely, and very, very professionally, professional to the end, guided to the teachers to a better way of communication. (Administrator F)*

*[The coach] helps us in terms of setting the agenda. And then, when we go through the discussions, he clearly defines the discussion, the issues of the discussion. Sometimes we just go around in a circle, and we really need someone who is able to put everything in clear terms so that we know what we're saying here, or what we've heard said. And that's been very important. And I think the idea of having someone who is an outsider really listen and take a look at things and say, yes, this is a very similar situation to what went on in this school and this is what they did. And just having that resource that has access to other resources that we couldn't possibly have access to I think is extremely important and it just takes us so long to get some things accomplished. (Administrator H)*

They serve as an external set of eyes and ears to principals.

*One of the best parts of the model, the 21st Century model, is the coach, the change coach. ...Having that sort of savvy, experienced, external person rumbling around the school, talking to the principal, thinking strategy and everything, is absolutely the key to getting schools to change. Because we're so caught up in the sturm and drang. ...I really need it. ...this whole [beginning] stage has been critical, but it isn't going to get simpler here. We're going to have even more challenges next year implementing this plan. So I think there is an ongoing need [for the WSC coach]. I think it has not outlived its usefulness. (Administrator I)*

And, they provide principals with positive feedback, a rarity for the principals in our sample.

*I think [the coach] has been wonderful for the school. I've found [the coach] to be a very valuable resource. And actually filling a function as somebody who is very supportive, telling you when you're doing good things. No one [else] ever tells me that. It's nice to hear it from the coach. (Administrator C)*

We are convinced that principals (as well as the teachers with whom they work) need on-going coach support.

### ***Conclusion: Changing the Knowledge, Skill and Work of Principals***

The BPE has forged productive opportunities for principals to learn about instruction and to create a community of colleagues among themselves. Most report that they appreciate the opportunities to learn and want to know more about how to support improvements in teaching and learning. They point out, however, that they lack the time to take on the instructional role proposed for them.

We are sure that some principals could make better use of the time they have. But we imagine that even the best organized principals will have a difficult time focusing on instruction if nothing is officially removed from their workload. Therefore, we suggest that the BPE and the BPS look toward “best practices” in other districts that have been grappling with how to provide principals with time to attend to instruction. Other districts may have found viable approaches to this problem that can be adapted to the Boston setting.

### **Maintaining a Systemic Focus: Relationships Between the BPE and the BPS**

From the outset, the BPE understood that its work had to become the work of the BPS if children were to benefit from the BPE's efforts. The 21st Century Schools could not become a program, a boutique for reform that stood apart from the system's approach to school improvement. From the outset, the BPE also understood that to fulfill its potential, the BPE would have to encourage the district to stay focused on instruction. The tension of needing to become part of the system while remaining apart in order to exert pressure, was built into the model. As Executive Director Ellen Guiney noted,

*We can't succeed if we can't work well with the [BPS], and I know that. And this will only succeed if it is viewed as a Boston Public*

*Schools initiative. There is no question in my mind about that. It has to be a Boston Public Schools initiative, and viewed proudly by the system and embraced by the system. And I think it will be, because [the Superintendent and Deputy] are so supportive, and the school people are so supportive. I thought that this was ... a potential model to solve the problem of districts having a lot of trouble staying focused on instructional issues. ... If you could have an outside organization that kept trying to keep schools focused on the instruction all the time,... the useful tension of having an outsider all the time keep pushing in a intense way, has to be useful, should be useful.*

Administrators inside the BPS agree that the reform must be seen as a unified approach of the BPS and the BPE. However, the BPE is a highly visible partner who comes with funds, human resources, and a set of requirements for schools that are somewhat different than those required by the BPS. Some central office administrators voiced concern that collaboration and unity were not happening. They suggested that the BPE had, de facto, created itself as a second central office to which the 21st Century Schools were responsible. Schools in Cohort I, as a result, did not know who they were to attend to. The view from inside of central office was not that the BPE must cede leadership to the district, but rather that the two entities must act as one complex organization that has the same goals and expectations for all schools. On this point, one central office administrator reported that schools ask:

*Why aren't you protecting us? And why did you leave us sort of hanging out there with the Plan telling us one thing and you telling us something else? Why aren't they both hooked together? So I keep trying more and more to see where we can hook them together. And that's one thing that we've got to do better. ...The key for me would be [to figure out] how we provide a sense of seamlessness to the schools. And that doesn't mean we always have to agree, but we've got to stand up and say when we don't. (District Administrator A)*

We agree that a "sense of seamlessness" should be the goal. But we want to stress that this goal cannot be achieved without the hard work of experimenting with all facets of the reform. One of those facets is the relationship between the BPE and the BPS.

With respect to focusing on instruction, central office administrators varied in the extent to which they saw the BPE's efforts as productive. One administrator noted:

*They push us and prod us, hopefully sort of promote something more interesting in terms of what goes on in school. Some people would disagree; some people would say “no, they’re undermining us and they’re subverting us and they’re constantly competing.” And there probably some who ask “are they subverting us or are they pushing us forward?” There’s some truth to both, and that’s probably inevitable. But if I were to sit back and say, “Is the first cohort really doing its job to push the central office at this point to support schools [in this effort]?” Yes. I would like to use the coaching model next year as a part of what the central office does, and I attribute that at least in part to what the Cohort I experience has been, and will certainly benefit from what [the BPE learned about] who makes a successful coach, how you develop a contract with a school to support them in a different way. Their effort has definitely helped reform some of these things that I’m hoping central office will undertake. (District Administrator B)*

Others take a different view of the prodding. First, they feel that the BPE, by its actions, is saying that the BPS is incapable of mounting and sustaining reform internally. Second, they do not think that prodding, or more aggressive strategies, are likely to be effective in the long run.

*My sense is they think we’re resistant to change and that if it were not for them there wouldn’t be progress in this district, and I strongly disagree with that. But when you’re on the inside you see stuff that you don’t see from the outside and you want the change to be long term, which to me is internal capacity building, that you’re changing people’s thoughts, and you’re changing their expertise, you’re giving them new tools. You need a different approach, and hitting people over the head won’t do it. So that’s my sense of where they are. (District Administrator A)*

There are other ways in which central office administrators admire and welcome the work of the BPE. For example,

*The 21st Century has done some excellent work with resource allocation and really pushing the schools to address this issue, because as long as people are in an “add-on” mentality in terms of the budget, the only way you can change is to add-on and nothing goes away... You may have a wonderful Comprehensive School Plan but your chances of implementing it won’t be very great unless you really address the issue of resource allocation. And so, there’s a vacuum*

*there and I hope we can really build on what the 21st Century Schools have started and do some work there, and at the system level, to maybe take what we may have learned from the 21st Century schools, so [we can figure out] what we can do in terms of system supports to perhaps make it easier for schools to do this. (District Administrator C)*

*I think the work that they're doing around looking at student work is very important. I struggle with their desire to only look at student work, because what I think you need to do in reform is look at all kinds of information about student achievement. Student work is one way, it's not the only one. You need to look at this variety and say, now, what does that tell us about what's happening with our kids? What does it tell us about what we're doing and where we might need to change? I think in that sense there are a lot of things they do that are positive, that are really on track. Their publication, Focus, is very helpful. And people who aren't in 21st Century or Annenberg Cohort II will often ask to look at it because it's very thoughtful. (District Administrator A)*

Although there are fundamental areas of agreement between the BPE and the BPS serious conflicts do arise out of the process of developing and implementing the 21st Century Schools program. The BPE leadership has not always included key BPS administrators in decisions that might, in the long-run, have an impact on the district. Both BPE and BPS leaders speak of the development of the Whole-School Change Model in this context. Some BPS leaders wanted involvement in the design of the model; BPE members realize that they should have included the BPS. The incident led to bad feelings about the process and, to some extent, about people's motives. The resolution of this disagreement, however, demonstrates that the partners remained focused on the ultimate goals of reform. No one disagreed with the fundamentals of the Whole-School Change Model and so, despite considerable dismay about the process, the BPS helped refine the BPE proposed model which was then adopted by the BPS.

Another issue that led to strains in the collaboration concerned the adoption of a model for looking at student work. The BPS would have liked to be a part of the discussion of which model to select for 21st Century Schools. As one administrator noted,

*It actually isn't so much that I even reject the model, I just wish we would have been a part of a conversation that had said when you're looking at student work, what are the things you need to be looking at*

*so that we could even have evaluated whether it was a good model or not. We did not get that opportunity. So, it isn't so much that I wouldn't have chosen it as I don't know. Because I don't know what the other possibilities were. And given that they were already so steeped in it I didn't want to say, no. (District Administrator A)*

We do not want to minimize the emotional toll that collaboration takes on members of the BPE and the BPS. But we do not want to overstate them either. Some old tensions are likely to recur along with new ones as the partners figure out how to work together toward a common goal but with somewhat different resources and strategies. Each organization must maintain a separate identity within the collaborative venture. The BPE, after all, is a free-standing organization funded by donors who want their efforts to be notable as well as successful. The BPS is, ultimately, accountable for the success and failure of the system's schools regardless of whether or not some schools participate in the 21st Century Schools program. Genuine questions will arise about when the BPS is engaged in school reform work that should include the BPE and when it should operate outside of the collaboration. Similar questions will arise about the BPE and when it needs and needs not to consult with the BPS. Our data suggest that the partners are making the effort to retain a common focus and work out the organizational arrangements with the goals of school reform in mind.

For example, BPS and BPE leaders have created REACT, a team of BPE leadership and key members of various units in the BPS to work intensively on obstacles that seem to stand in the way of practices designed to support teaching and learning. The team will address issues raised by schools that have been stymied by district policies and practices (which include policies of the BPS/BTU agreement). This group has the district's support and has been meeting regularly to figure out what gets in the way of schools' progress and how to address the roadblocks.

Another BPE/BPS group has been working on developing a common approach to the LASW process. And, in an effort to demonstrate the unity of the reform effort, the BPS agreed to have the BPE take responsibility for providing feedback on the district-required Comprehensive School Plans (CSPs) to 21st Century Schools. This enables the schools to avoid having to produce different plans for different feedback from the BPE and the BPS. This decision, in our view, demonstrates that a high level of trust has developed between the BPE and the BPS, as well as confidence that the BPE will help forward the BPS-developed components of the reform agenda.

Another source of tension derives from the ways in which the BPS finds out about how the work of the BPE is going. One administrator noted that principals call with

complaints about how the BPE is making unreasonable demands. They ask the BPS to intervene. The administrator admits that the information is not systematic and may not be representative. However, with complaints as the main source of information, this administrator and others develop a view of the BPE as overly aggressive. What is needed is what this central office administrator suggests:

*I think one of the things we need to do is meet with the principals and get feedback about how, what's helpful to them, the progress they think they've made, how we could be more helpful in orchestrating or facilitating their work. I've been trying to figure out how to do that in a way that principals feel they can be honest about both the good and the negative. Because they're on edge, they're nervous about saying both without being insulting to the Plan. Because I think if we ask for any kind of review or conversation they're going to think it's spying or an attempt to play "gotcha". And that's not what it's intended for at all. (District Administrator A)*

Tensions also arise from the schools' perceptions of the roles of the BPS and the BPE. For example, a central office administrator said,

*Some of the 21st Century Schools I think have been spending a lot of time worrying about their status as 21st Century Schools and where that puts them in terms of the rest of the system. Some have played it as though they'd like to have most favored nation status and be separate and apart and do their own thing, thank you very much. And we're saying to them, "No, you're still part of us and part of the schools. It's still the same agenda. You've got flexibility to do things in different ways, and so on, but it is not a different agenda." It's been interesting. Within that cohort you've got two experiences; some who are trying to run away with it as a separate school system, and others who want to hang on so much to make sure that they're BPS and don't have any kind of a separate identity at all, who aren't really taking advantage of the opportunity that that identity gives them. And I'm smiling because I think a certain amount of that it is natural, but it's been real tough for a lot of folks, and there have been some real tensions around it. (District Administrator C)*

In our view, the BPE and the BPS have done remarkably well in working together around important issues of school reform even if the experience has been, at times, stressful. They have put considerable thought and energy into making the enterprise work, and they have successfully negotiated difficult issues, several of which we described above.

From our perspective, the time spent on collaboration is well-spent. This is because it is spent struggling about important content. In the same ways that 21st Century School teachers are being asked to come together and trust each other enough to share student work and observe each other teaching, the BPS and BPE leadership are coming together to share ideas and agree on practices that will enhance student achievement. They are not collaborating for the sake of collaborating, but for the sake of improving teaching and learning.

Recently, in Volume I, 1998, of *Focus*, Superintendent of Schools Tom Payzant responded to concerns about collaboration that were coming from inside the BPS and from elsewhere. In his letter on page one, he stated clearly his view of collaboration and the importance of learning from external organizations.

*In my view, external organizations like the Boston Plan for Excellence and the Boston Annenberg Challenge are an essential part of the process of school change. Many of our schools have benefitted considerably from their relationships with external organizations, and these groups have brought a wealth of expertise, programs, and services to the schools. It is reasonable and appropriate that these organizations also bring a set of expectations to these relationships. In the case of funding sources, this is especially true: It would be imprudent in the extreme for a funder to give a grant to a school and not expect the school to deliver on its promises....No school can undertake the challenges of whole-school change by itself. We are all going to need all the help we can get. External groups like the Boston Plan for Excellence and the Boston Annenberg Challenge are a critically important part of our reform strategy, and I welcome their involvement.*

This important statement by the Superintendent makes it clear that the BPS wants to learn from all organizations and individuals who have something to teach and who wish to engage collaboratively with the BPS to achieve the goals described in "Focus on Children." The statement reminds everyone in the 21st Century and the Annenberg Challenge schools that the BPS welcomes the kind of outside expertise and prodding that the BPE has brought to the process of school reform.

## Conclusions

At the end of the first year of our evaluation work, Education Matters, Inc. concludes that the BPE's work with the 21st Century Schools is having a positive impact at the schools and at the district. Our data reveal that all partners — high level BPS central office administrators, BPE staff (including the coaches), and principals and teachers — are exerting extraordinary effort to make the reform agenda a reality.

During this school year, with the help of their WSC and content coaches, teachers and principals worked on improving instruction. They began to implement their school's instructional focus by participating in targeted professional development. Study groups, instructional teams and subject matter teams began to look at student work as a strategy to understand the links between teaching, curriculum and learning. Principals began to work more closely with colleagues to develop their own roles as instructional leaders. They began to open the doors of their schools to one another in the hope of gaining insights from their colleagues' programs and practices.

Finally, during this past school year, the BPE and BPS began to work collaboratively to ensure that all Boston schools were implementing the same school reform and to figure out how to ameliorate central office policies and practices that stand in the way of implementing strategies designed to help children achieve. These collaborations across organizational lines are significant and bode well for the implementation of BPE/BPS-shaped reform in Boston.

In the remaining section of the report we first review our major findings. Then we detail suggestions for strengthening the work of the BPE and the 21st Century Schools program.

### Review of the Findings

***Design of the 21st Century Schools Program.*** The BPE approach to school reform rests on two critical features.

1. **The approach is comprehensive.** To facilitate implementation of the FYEs and the Year-Two Expectations, the BPE provides 21st Century Schools with a number of essential supports and resources. These include, a) "Whole School Change" (WSC) coaches who are selected by the school from a large group of candidates approved by the BPE, and who spend an average of one day each week in the school working with teachers and principals to address the reform essentials,

b) in year two, WSC coaches as well as content coaches who work with teachers to advance the academic focus chosen by the school, c) financial resources to support teacher and principal visits to other schools to observe “best practices,” d) professional development support for the schools’ academic focus, e) help with a resource audit designed to help schools figure out how to best use the financial and human resources that they have to raise student achievement, and f) for principals, an opportunity to network with other reforming principals and develop a collaborative learning community among principals.

**2. The BPE learns from its experiences, makes changes in light of those experiences, and continues to develop additional supports for the schools.** First, the BPE took seriously Education Matters’ recommendation in the memo of August 1997 that it figure out a strategy for assessing the progress of the schools. Our data indicate that the process the BPE used took advantage of principals’ knowledge and skill as well as the knowledge and skill of BPE and BPS personnel. The result, the Phase Chart, enables schools to demonstrate progress based on evidence while it draws their attention to the ultimate outcomes they are expected to achieve. Second, coaches seem pleased with the process and outcome of the development of an instrument with which to assess their work. Again, the BPE took advantage of coaches’ and principals’ knowledge and skill to develop a strategy that provided good information and garnered the support of the coaches for the feedback. Both of these activities suggest that the BPE, like the schools, is learning from their efforts and making changes as needed. Third, in our August 1997 memo to the BPE, we noted that coaches wanted more time at their meetings to learn from one another and deal with issues of immediate concern for their work in schools. Our data suggest that the BPE has made some significant changes to the use of coaches’ time in meetings so that they are better able to share with one another. Finally, the BPE continues to publish *Focus*, a newsletter for 21st Century Schools that addresses issues of great relevance to schools within the grant program.

***Implementing Standards.*** Standards implementation is at the heart of school reform in Boston. Therefore, it is with standards in mind that the BPE addresses the learning goals of the BPS. Our data reveal that teachers and principals take the standards seriously. They believe that they will have to implement them and they are trying to determine what that means for them and for their students. We

learned, however, that teachers and principals do not yet understand the full implications of this reform.

Our data suggest that teachers know that they will be more accountable for student learning given standards. But, their comments suggest that they still see themselves as accountable to deliver content. They envision the Citywide Learning Standards as if they were no different than a scope and sequence. Only a few recognize how instructional practices might need to change in light of performance standards. Until performance standards and exemplars are available it will be difficult for principals and teachers to envision what the reform expects of students and, therefore, of them.

***Looking at Student Work.*** Many teachers are engaged in LASW and report using what they learn to inform their teaching. As a result of LASW, they are beginning a) to have conversations that lead them to recognize differences in their approaches to assessment and their expectations for students, and b) to address how to reach agreement on these differences. Teachers are enjoying the professional contact and opportunity to engage in joint work. Their conversations, however, often stop before addressing the links between LASW and teaching; before addressing the “what needs to happen?” question and the resulting action plan. Teachers who report being less involved with LASW cite as obstacles to this kind of work the fact that their teams do not meet regularly or when they meet they tend to address “more pressing” issues.

The extent to which teachers are LASW varies considerably from school to school. Some schools have been working with the process for the last year and a half and they are beginning to have productive conversations. At other schools, only a small group of teachers (one or two instructional teams) is looking at student work on a regular basis. Across the schools, however, the baseline data suggest three important findings relating to LASW.

- (1) Our sample schools use a variety of approaches to LASW.
- (2) LASW marks a significant change in the way teachers work together at their schools and poses many challenges.
- (3) In many places, LASW is becoming a regular part of teachers’ work and is beginning to yield positive outcomes.

***Other Professional Development.*** The BPE is off to a good start in creating instructionally focused professional development in Cohort I schools. Schools have chosen an instructional focus, created common meeting times for teachers, and are at various stages of implementing their professional development plans. When teachers are engaged in professional development that focuses on content as well

as pedagogy they report that a) they can apply what they learn to their teaching, and b) they can better engage in substantive conversation about curriculum and instruction with their colleagues. Teachers' progress to date represents, in most schools, a tremendous effort and commitment to improve their practice and, thereby, their students' achievement. However, we also found that in many schools only small groups of teachers were participating in sustained professional development geared toward the instructional focus. In some cases, this is because the professional development is associated with a literacy model that only serves the early elementary grades; in others cases, it is because the professional development is targeted at a specific grade level or subject area; and, in still other cases, it is because some teachers are not choosing to participate.

***Principals as Instructional Leaders.*** The BPE has forged significant opportunities for principals to learn about instruction and to create a community of colleagues among themselves through the Principals Network. Most report that they appreciate the opportunities to learn and want to know more about how to support improvements in teaching and learning. They want to ensure that their network meetings sustain the focus on instruction and address topics that the principals define as important. Principals point out that even though they accept that they will have to pay more attention to instruction, realistically, they lack the time to do this given current responsibilities. And, they report frustration about how to improve instruction when they have little voice in who teaches in their schools and who serves on the administrative team.

For example, assistant principals vary in the knowledge and skill they bring to instructional leadership.<sup>20</sup> Some, among them those who recently were teachers, have considerable knowledge and skill to bring to their work with teachers. They participate in LASW with teachers, observe classrooms to help with the implementation of standards, and provide resources for teachers who want help. Others, however, seem to have none of these skills. The strength of the administrative team supports some principals and constrains others. If the administrative team is incapable of working on instruction, it is unlikely to support increased student achievement. It may be a drain, rather than a support for the principal. In addition, were such administrators to be promoted to principal, they would be unable to fulfill the instructional leadership role.

***Relationship Between the BPE and the BPS.*** The BPE and the BPS have done remarkably well in working together around important issues of school reform. The time they spend on collaboration is worthwhile because it is spent struggling about

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<sup>20</sup>We do not provide specific examples of this variation in ways that identify assistant principals in order to ensure confidentiality.

important content. In the same ways that 21st Century School teachers are being asked to come together and trust each other enough to share student work and observe each other teaching, the BPS and BPE leadership are coming together to share ideas and agree on practices that will enhance student achievement. They are not collaborating for the sake of collaborating, but for the sake of improving teaching and learning. They have put considerable thought and energy into making the enterprise work, and they have successfully negotiated difficult issues, several of which we described in the body of the report.

## **Recommendations**

***Design of the 21st Century Schools Program.*** The WSC and content coaches are essential to the success of the reform. Although we have not written directly about their work, we have identified the ways in which they are essential to all aspects of instructional improvement in the schools. They are a vital support for LASW, for other issues addressed in Instructional Team meetings, and for the principals as they try to focus on instruction. In our view, they should continue to be an integral part of the BPE's reform plan. The BPE might consider that, by the end of Year 3, coaches identify teacher leaders and school-level administrators who can take over responsibility for their work when the grant period ends. During year 4 of the 21st Century Schools program, then, coaches could train the school-based staff to take over leading instructional work, coaching them so that they can become coaches for their colleagues.

If this transfer of coaching to school-based personnel is a viable option, then the BPE and BPS will have to figure out how to provide time for teachers, in particular, to take on these roles. If they have no additional time, as is usually the case for the BPS standards facilitators, for example, they will not have a genuine opportunity to become successful and sustain the work begun by the BPE.

***Implementing Standards.*** Teachers need and want help in figuring out how to implement standards. It is essential that the BPS and BPE help teachers understand that standards reform is about improving teaching practice and assessment as well as content. This will only occur through intensive, on-going professional development that links standards with content with content-specific pedagogy.

In light of what we are learning from evaluations of standards-based reform in other urban districts, we caution the district about relying on Task Descriptions and "Did I?" sheets to forward standards reform. These kinds of tools may be useful, but they are fraught with the danger of fragmenting knowledge and assessing the quality of student work on its less important features. We urge the district to consider the academic goals of standards reform and ensure that the

implementation tools it develops support teachers in moving their students toward those goals. This can best be done by developing performance standards and exemplars of student work. Once they have the exemplars, teachers will know what kind of student work they are helping students to produce. In addition, with the exemplars of student work, teachers and the district will be able to develop rubrics that describe the quality of work that meets the standards at different performance levels.

***LASW and the Issue of Models.*** The BPE should continue to provide support for the institutionalization of a process of LASW that more closely resembles the Education Trust model. We do not think that complete fidelity to the Education Trust model is necessary to generate productive professional conversations. However, BPE's on-going support should continue to emphasize leading teachers through the process to Steps 5 ("What needs to happen in the classroom, school, district, and at the state level so that all students can do this and similar tasks well?"), and Step 6 (Develop an action plan to improve student learning and have a recorder write down teachers' responses to the "what needs to happen?" question.) A good example of a protocol that closely resembles the Education Trust model, but incorporates the requirements of the BPS reform is "The Embedded LASW Model" that was developed by BPE coaches on the LASW working group.

***LASW and The Critical Role of the Facilitator.*** Teachers need on-going, and possibly additional, support to learn to have productive conversations and reap the benefits of LASW. The BPE-supported coaches are in an ideal position to do this work; they also have the capacity to coach the teachers and administrators who will eventually take responsibility for LASW. BPE should ensure the continued active involvement of a trained facilitator in LASW.

***Other Professional Development.*** Teachers in schools that have adopted a model for literacy instruction are more readily able to participate in focused professional development than are schools that do not have a model. However, many teachers are still not participating in meaningful professional development. The BPE should continue its efforts to identify literacy models for the upper elementary grades and the middle and high schools. Or, in the likely scenario that such models do not exist or are not appropriate for all schools, the BPE should continue to offer its support to schoolpeople as they develop home-grown models that meet the specific needs of their students. This work promises to be challenging for schools, especially at the middle and high school levels where a consistent approach to literacy instruction across content areas is far from the norm. To meet this challenge, schools will need continued support in the form of time and expertise.

The content coaches are well suited to this work, but their role will need to be expanded at large schools.

***Principals as Instructional Leaders.*** Principals need support in at least four areas if they are to become successful as instructional leaders.

**1. Knowledge and skill with respect to teaching and learning.** Most principals need to know more about instruction. Principal professional development is beginning to focus on standards reform and instruction. It is beginning to address what principals can do as instructional leaders. This emphasis needs to continue.

**2. Help with setting priorities and making good use of time available.** Principals in our sample want to have a greater role in instruction; often they do not know how to find the time to devote to this work. The principals' job description and the criteria on which they are evaluated are the responsibility of the BPS. However, we think that the BPE and BPS would do well to work jointly to figure out what can be eliminated from principals' workload and assigned to others. Jointly, they might consider how to create an administrative assistant position that would enable principals and assistant principals to focus more of their time on instruction. (We understand that the BPE will try to do this in a few schools during the 1998-1999 school year.)

**3. Support from a skillful team of administrators.** Principals cannot implement the instructional leadership role alone. They need support from assistant principals, directors of instruction and others who have administrative responsibilities. In the future, more attention must be paid to the expertise with respect to instructional leadership that these people bring to their positions.

**4. Re-design of the principal's role.** We are sure that some principals could make better use of the time they have. But we imagine that even the best organized principals will have a difficult time focusing on instruction if nothing is officially removed from their workload. Therefore, we suggest that the BPE and the BPS look toward "best practices" in other districts that have been grappling with how to provide principals with time to attend to instruction. Other districts may have found viable approaches to this problem that can be adapted to the Boston setting.

***Relationship Between the BPE and the BPS.*** We suggest that the BPE and the BPS continue to struggle jointly with the issues of reform. REACT, the team that was established this year to troubleshoot barriers to school improvement, is an ideal forum through which to conduct this work. We encourage this group to continue to take on the difficult challenges associated with systemic reform. Facing these challenges and crafting solutions is critical to the success of this effort.