High School Renewal in the Boston Public Schools: Focus on Organization and Leadership

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Boston's Approach to High School Renewal. With district financial support and with funds from the Carnegie Corporation and the Gates Foundation, the Boston Public Schools (BPS), along with its partners, The Boston Plan for Excellence in the Public Schools (BPE), Jobs for the Future (JFF), the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE), and the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC), designed and are now implementing an approach to high school renewal that attends to the major challenges these schools face: low literacy achievement, high absenteeism and dropout rates, and high student alienation from curriculum, instruction, and, too often, school personnel. Boston's approach adapts the district's strong, extant theory of action for whole-school improvement by adding to this basic theory the following postulate:

> *If the interwoven problems of alienation and poor literacy skills are acknowledged as the root problems and addressed intensively, then growth in students' reading comprehension will accelerate, and there will be fundamental changes in the relationships between teachers and students, students and students, and students and the adult world beyond school.* (Proposal to the Carnegie Corporation, p. 10)

Boston is addressing these interwoven problems of alienation and poor literacy skills by creating small high schools and small learning communities (SLCs) in which the small size and school organization will work in combination with effective, high quality instructional strategies to simultaneously reduce alienation and increase achievement. The work has been challenging from the outset and, as we discuss later in this report, it remains so. In light of the district's commitment to its ambitious approach to renewal, and in light of the importance of the work, we offer our evaluation findings with the hope of contributing to the improvement of high schools in the BPS.

Design of the Evaluation of High School Renewal. The evaluation, designed with the district's goals in mind, focuses on the following broad question.

> **How well and to what extent is Boston creating small schools and small learning communities that establish a) high quality, personalized human relationships and b) high quality literacy instructional practices that engage students in their secondary school education and accelerate their progress?**

To complete the second year of evaluation during the 2004-2005 school year, Education Matters collected qualitative interview and observation data from the two small high schools and four SLCs in our sample. The SLCs included two ninth grade SLCs, one tenth grade SLC, and the tenth grade of one cross-grade (10-12) SLC. Our school-based sample included ELA teachers and teachers of courses related to school/SLC themes, ninth and tenth grade students, school

administrators, coaches, and support staff. In the schools, we observed ILT meetings, CCL sessions, x-ray visits, and meetings designed to forward the development of SLC proposals.

At the district level, we interviewed key leaders from each of the HSRWG partner organizations and a sample of central office administrators from BPS. And, we observed several HSRWG and High School Renewal Coordinating Group meetings.

Organization of the Report. This report is divided into three sections. In Section II, The Organization, Leadership, and Implementation of High School Renewal, we describe and analyze the organization and leadership of high school renewal in order to set the groundwork for arguing that the organization and leadership are linked to the conditions in the schools and to the progress of high school renewal. We describe the role of the Deputies for Schools and Clusters with respect to high school renewal and the ways in which curriculum and instruction are addressed in the context of high school renewal. We consider how the organization and leadership of high school renewal are linked to the continuation of problematic conditions in the schools in our sample that, in our view, are standing in the way of their making further progress toward the district's goals.

In Section III, we focus on students by attending to their experiences in their small high schools and SLCs. We report their views on a) personalized relationships with adults in the school/SLC and the developing climates and cultures in these settings, b) the role/centrality of the schools'/SLCs' thematic focus on students' experiences in school/SLC, and c) their views of the status of instruction in our sample schools/SLCs. As part of the discussion of instruction, we review our findings with respect to the status of Workshop instruction and the development of the schools' signature/thematic courses that are meant to interest students and engage them in the academic focus of their high schools/SLCs. Throughout the discussion of instruction and signature courses, we link our findings to data we have collected about the organization and leadership of high school renewal. In Section IV we review our evaluation findings and offer some thoughts about "next steps" that might accelerate the progress of high school renewal in the BPS.

The Findings in Year II of the Evaluation.

First, based on our '04-'05 school year data collection and analysis, the findings related to school organization, teacher culture, and instruction, fundamentally, remained the same.

- Headmasters reported that, with respect to small high schools and cross-grade SLCs, they still had difficulty a) providing teachers in the same content areas and/or units with common planning time, b) bringing teachers together for collaborative conversations, planning, and case management, and, as a result, c) creating a sense of whole-school identity and purpose. Headmasters reported that their budgets coupled with staffing constraints related to their special education populations continued to make it difficult, if

not impossible, for them to fulfill the promise of cross-grade SLCs and small schools.[1] Headmasters spoke about the challenge of keeping cross-grade SLCs "pure" with respect to teacher and student assignment.

- Small schools and cross-grade SLCs were still struggling to develop their thematic foci and the "signature courses" designed to engage students and help them explore the theme of their small school or cross-grade SLC.

- We continued to observe little Workshop-based instruction. Three teachers were employing workshop instruction; two of them who were in our sample in the 2003-3004 school year appeared to have made improvements in this area of instructional practice. However, these teachers represent isolated examples of improvement within our sample. A few teachers in our sample implemented a mix of teacher-directed and student-centered instructional approaches within the same class period. Most teachers reported that they continued to find it difficult to keep students on-task when they were involved in small group or individual work.

- The main obstacles to creating viable CCL groups, in small high schools and cross-grade SLCs, remained scheduling, lack of administrator support, and, to some extent, lack of teacher support for this approach to professional development. Schools/SLCs developed some cross-content area CCL cycles that focused on reading strategies across the curriculum, an approach that was slightly more successful this year than last in one of the small schools. And, one SLC-organized high school used creative scheduling, video-taping of teachers' demonstration lessons, and after-school CCL professional development to implement a set of productive CCL cycles.

Second, in analyzing the data from focus group discussions with students in each of the small schools, cross-grade SLCs and grade-level SLCs, we concluded that students were not yet experiencing the hoped-for benefits of small schools and SLCs.

- In each of the small schools and SLCs, students identified teachers and/or other adults whom they thought cared about them and who could offer them support. Our data suggest, however, that students, with one exception, did not see nurturing and supportive school- and SLC-wide climates and cultures developing in their small schools and SLCs.

- Approximately one-quarter of the students in our sample reported that they participated in interesting, engaging thematic/signature courses. Three-quarters of the students in our sample reported little knowledge of or involvement with the thematic identities of their small high schools/SLCs. The signature/thematic courses, for the most part, were not

[1]Two headmasters reported that, due to reductions in their budgets, they lost teaching positions for the '05-'06 school year. Although we were told by Deputy Superintendents that schools should not have to lose teachers as a result of the budgets, the schools, indeed, have let teachers go. Despite several conversations with district administrators, we have not been able to explain this finding.

well-developed and/or available to these students. Data from teachers and administrators confirmed that signature/thematic courses had not received much support.

- Most of the students in our sample reported that they were minimally engaged in the majority of their classes and that they were not truly interested in what they were supposed to be learning. A few students described teachers, however, who were able to make the content relevant by a) helping students connect it to their lives, and b) demonstrating that they cared for the students by planning their lessons carefully.
- Students reported that their classes did not demand much work from them and it was fairly easy to get an A or a B. However, they also reported that, for the most part, they were content with passing rather than excelling in their classes.

These findings lead us to conclude at the end of two years of study that the schools in our sample have not moved closer to reaping the benefits the district hopes will be derived by small size, high quality literacy instruction, and a thematic focus. Why might this be the situation? We think the answer to this question lies in our next set of findings.

Third, based on our '04-'05 school year data collection and analysis of the organization and leadership of high school renewal, we have concluded that the organization and leadership of high school renewal are not adequate for achieving the initiative's goals.

- As the complexity and scope of high school renewal increased over the last few years, the district did not put in place a well-functioning organizational system with which to guide the work.[2] The district did not insure that the internal and external partners to the work developed a set of agreements about a) the nature, priorities, and goals of their work, b) how they would implement it, and c) how they would share responsibility for its outcomes. The district did not insure that within the BPS, the various units and divisions shared a) a common vision about the work, b) an agreed upon set of benchmarks by which its progress would be judged, and c) a process by which to assess that progress and, if necessary, make mid-course corrections. Key individuals from each of the partners associated with high school renewal, including the BPS, acknowledge that its organization and leadership are fragmented with respect to the process of designing and implementing the work.

- The absence of such an organizational structure has led to a situation in which the internal and external partners often pursue competing goals and use incompatible processes as they conduct their work and accomplish specific tasks. They do not work as a well-functioning team. They do not have a systematic approach to dealing with the extant conditions in the schools converted during the last few years and they cannot attend to the big picture of high school renewal, specifically, a) the conditions that still

[2]We stress the role of the school district, meaning the senior, line leadership, rather than the district along with its partners because, in the end, it is the district that is accountable for the status of its schools and their students' achievement. It is the district that has the authority to accomplish the necessary coordination and oversight.

undermine high school renewal, b) the need to improve instruction so that students' literacy skills greatly improve and schools become places in which students feel engaged rather than alienated.

- The absence of a high functioning organizational system led to a situation in which the work of high school renewal has proceeded quickly without a careful and sufficient assessment of a) what conditions the schools would need to have in place if they were to succeed, b) the likely conditions that would result from the conversions, c) the relationship between high school renewal and, for example, the policies and practices of Unified Student Services and the Office of Curriculum and Instruction, and d) a defined strategy for moving forward in light of those conditions. As a result, the small high school conversions in which the two schools in our sample participated, as well as the development and implementation of the cross-grade SLCs proceeded in contexts that could not support their development. These small schools and SLCs, in other words, did not have the initial conditions they needed to thrive. At the end of the 2004-2005 school year, they still lacked those conditions.

Conclusions. We think there are strong links between our findings about the schools and students and the organization, leadership, and implementation of high school renewal. The similar situations we identified in the small high schools and cross-grade SLCs did not arise solely as a result of school-based factors, although those factors mattered. We argue that they arose in the context of the district's a) policies and practices, and b) organization and leadership of high school renewal, coupled with school-based factors. We draw the links between them in an effort to help the district and its partners strengthen their important work.

Recommendations.

1. The district needs to take immediate steps where it can and use more long-term strategies where those are required to ameliorate the conditions in schools that stand in the way of progress toward the goals of high school renewal.

2. The district needs to bring instruction out of the wings and into the spotlight on the stage of high school renewal.

3. The district needs, most of all, to develop a strong, coherent, organization for high school renewal, an organization in which are embedded clear lines of leadership, authority, and accountability, an organization that demonstrates a strategy with which to guide high school renewal.

I. INTRODUCTION

With district financial support and with funds from the Carnegie Corporation and the Gates Foundation, the Boston Public Schools (BPS), along with its partners, The Boston Plan for Excellence in the Public Schools (BPE), Jobs for the Future (JFF), the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE), and the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC), designed and are now implementing an approach to high school renewal that attends to the major challenges these schools face: low literacy achievement, high absenteeism and dropout rates, and high student alienation from curriculum, instruction, and, too often, school personnel. Boston's approach adapts the district's strong, extant theory of action for whole-school improvement by adding to this basic theory the following postulate:

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The evaluation is designed with this understanding of Boston's approach to high school renewal, an approach that unites the district's whole-school improvement Essentials with the specific challenges posed by its high schools – low student literacy and high student alienation. With the district's goals in mind, Education Matters designed the evaluation to focus on the following broad question.

> **How well and to what extent is Boston creating small schools and small learning communities that establish a) high quality, personalized human relationships and b) high quality literacy instructional practices that engage students in their secondary school education and accelerate their progress?**

Design of the Evaluation. To complete the second year of evaluation during the 2004-2005 school year, Education Matters continued to collect qualitative interview and observation data from the two small high schools and four SLCs in our sample. The SLCs included two ninth grade SLCs, one tenth grade SLC, and the tenth grade of one cross-grade (10-12) SLC. Given the importance of students' first two years of high school and the focus on literacy, for the most

part, the teachers in our sample come from the ninth and tenth grades and teach English Language Arts (ELA). Because high school renewal focused on reducing alienation, in part, through the development of schools'/SLCs' thematic focus, we included in our sample teachers who teach signature courses and/or other courses that are closely related to the school's/SLC's theme.

During 2004-2005 school year, we completed 82 school-based interviews which included teachers, school-based administrators, coaches, and support staff and we observed 18 language arts classes and signature courses across the sample of schools/SLCs. Interviews with teachers and administrators were implemented, for the most part, twice during the school year. We also interviewed 13 focus groups of students in 21 interviews, including a total of 46 students selected from the classes of teachers in our observation and interview sample. At the schools, we observed a total of 14 ILT meetings, CCL sessions, x-ray visits, and meetings designed to forward the development of SLC proposals. And, we interviewed a sample of seven HSRWG partners and eleven central office administrators, some of whom participate on the HSRWG, once or twice during the school year.

The Findings in Year II of the Evaluation. After the first year of our evaluation, the 2003-2004 school year, we reported findings related to school organization, school community, and instructional approaches.[3] These findings reflected, for the schools in our sample, the early stages of becoming small during the initial phase of high school renewal in Boston. They highlighted the organizational and professional challenges these schools encountered and the dominant instructional strategies in use during the first year of the evaluation. Teachers and headmasters, we reported, understood the potential value of small schools and SLCs. However, they reported facing considerable obstacles on the way to becoming the small schools and SLCs they envisioned for themselves and their students. These obstacles were related to a) the process by which the small schools, in particular, were developed, b) the financial constraints that limited staffing flexibility in cross-grade SLCs and small schools, c) lack of common planning time and time for CCL work, d) in small high schools, large mainstream class size in light of the schools' large and diverse special education populations, e) limited physical facilities that did not match the schools' needs, and f) the absence of teachers' voices in the development and ongoing operation of the small schools and some SLCs.

After discussing these findings with the Superintendent and members of the HSRG, Education Matters sent three copies of the final report to each of the schools participating in the evaluation. We sent individual letters to each teacher and administrator in our sample to let them know that copies of the report were in their schools and available from their headmasters. We also gave them Education Matters' website address so that, if they chose, they could locate the report on line. In addition, we sent one electronic copy of the baseline report to each Deputy Superintendent and to the headmasters of each of the non-participating high schools. The baseline evaluation report now is also available from the OHSR's website.

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[3]See Neufeld, B. and Levy, A. (September 2004) *Baseline Report: High School Renewal in Boston*, Education Matters, Inc. Available at www.edmatters.org

Overview of the Year II Evaluation Findings. In light of the overarching evaluation question, Education Matters' focus for data collection in '04-'05 was quite similar to that of the '03-'04 school year. The focus of our report, however, is somewhat different given our goal of providing the district with data and analysis it can use to improve its work with high schools. In our baseline report, we focused on school-based factors that challenged/supported the development of small high schools and SLCs, and we provided a summary of our first set of findings with respect to instruction. Although we collected the data, we did not focus the baseline report on issues of leadership for high school renewal.

In this second evaluation report, we briefly update the status of the findings delineated in the baseline report in light of the new data we collected. Then, using two years of data, we focus on issues of organization and leadership for high school renewal at the district level. We do this because, based on careful data analysis, we have concluded that understanding organization and leadership for high school renewal in the BPS – at the district level – is essential for a) illuminating the school- based findings that have remained consistent over the last two school years, and b) taking steps that will lead to much needed improvements at the small high schools and SLCs. Following the discussion of organization and leadership, we summarize the data we have collected from student focus groups in order to take stock of the extent to which the small high schools and SLCs, from students' perspectives, are providing them with a personalized school experience and engaging them in meaningful, rigorous course work.

What Did We Learn in the Second Year of the Evaluation? The data we collected in the 2004-2005 school year led us to draw several broad conclusions.

First, based on our '04-'05 school year data collection and analysis, the findings related to school organization, teacher culture, and instruction, fundamentally, remained the same.

- Headmasters reported that, with respect to small high schools and cross-grade SLCs, they still had difficulty a) providing teachers in the same content areas and/or units with common planning time, b) bringing teachers together for collaborative conversations, planning, and case management, and, as a result, c) creating a sense of whole-school identity and purpose. Headmasters reported that their budgets coupled with staffing constraints related to their special education populations continued to make it difficult, if not impossible, for them to fulfill the promise of cross-grade SLCs and small schools.[4] Headmasters spoke about the challenge of keeping cross-grade SLCs "pure" with respect to teacher and student assignment.

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- The main obstacles to creating viable CCL groups, in small high schools and cross-grade SLCs, remained scheduling, lack of administrator support, and, to some extent, lack of teacher support for this approach to professional development. Schools/SLCs developed some cross-content area CCL cycles that focused on reading strategies across the curriculum, an approach that was slightly more successful this year than last in one of the small schools. And, one SLC-organized high school used creative scheduling, video-taping of teachers' demonstration lessons, and after-school CCL professional development to implement a set of productive CCL cycles.

Second, in analyzing the data from focus group discussions with students in each of the small schools, cross-grade SLCs and grade-level SLCs, we concluded that students were not yet experiencing the hoped-for benefits of small schools and SLCs.

- In each of the small schools and SLCs, students identified teachers and/or other adults whom they thought cared about them and who could offer them support. Our data suggest, however, that students, with one exception, did not see nurturing and supportive school- and SLC-wide climates and cultures developing in their small schools and SLCs.

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- Most of the students in our sample reported that they were minimally engaged in the majority of their classes and that they were not truly interested in what they were supposed to be learning. A few students described teachers, however, who were able to make the content relevant by a) helping students connect it to their lives, and b) demonstrating that they cared for the students by planning their lessons carefully.

- Students reported that their classes did not demand much work from them and it was fairly easy to get an A or a B. However, they also reported that, for the most part, they were content with passing rather than excelling in their classes.

These findings lead us to conclude at the end of two years of study that the schools in our sample have not moved closer to reaping the benefits the district hopes will be derived by small size, high quality literacy instruction, and a thematic focus. Why might this be the situation? We think the answer to this question lies in our next set of findings.

Third, based on our '04-'05 school year data collection and analysis of the organization and leadership of high school renewal, we have concluded that the organization and leadership of high school renewal are not adequate for achieving the initiative's goals.

- As the complexity and scope of high school renewal increased over the last few years, the district did not put in place a well-functioning organizational system with which to guide the work.[5] The district did not insure that the internal and external partners to the work developed a set of agreements about a) the nature, priorities, and goals of their work, b) how they would implement it, and c) how they would share responsibility for its outcomes. The district did not insure that within the BPS, the various units and divisions shared a) a common vision about the work, b) an agreed upon set of benchmarks by which its progress would be judged, and c) a process by which to assess that progress and, if necessary, make mid-course corrections. Key individuals from each of the partners associated with high school renewal, including the BPS, acknowledge that its organization and leadership are fragmented with respect to the process of designing and implementing the work.

- The absence of such an organizational structure has led to a situation in which the internal and external partners often pursue competing goals and use incompatible processes as they conduct their work and accomplish specific tasks. They do not work as a well-functioning team. They do not have a systematic approach to dealing with the extant conditions in the schools converted during the last few years and they cannot attend to the big picture of high school renewal, specifically, a) the conditions that still undermine high school renewal, b) the need to improve instruction so that students' literacy skills greatly improve and schools become places in which students feel engaged rather than alienated.

- The absence of a high functioning organizational system led to a situation in which the work of high school renewal has proceeded quickly without a careful and sufficient assessment of a) what conditions the schools would need to have in place if they were to succeed, b) the likely conditions that would result from the conversions, c) the

[5]We stress the role of the school district, meaning the senior, line leadership, rather than the district along with its partners because, in the end, it is the district that is accountable for the status of its schools and their students' achievement. It is the district that has the authority to accomplish the necessary coordination and oversight.

relationship between high school renewal and, for example, the policies and practices of Unified Student Services and the Office of Curriculum and Instruction, and d) a defined strategy for moving forward in light of those conditions. As a result, the small high school conversions in which the two schools in our sample participated, as well as the development and implementation of the cross-grade SLCs proceeded in contexts that could not support their development. These small schools and SLCs, in other words, did not have the initial conditions they needed to thrive. At the end of the 2004-2005 school year, they still lacked those conditions.

We think there are strong links between the organization, leadership, and implementation of high school renewal and our findings about the schools and students. The similar situations we identified in the small high schools and cross-grade SLCs did not arise solely as a result of school-based factors, although those factors mattered. We will argue, they arose in the context of the district's a) policies and practices, and b) organization and leadership of high school renewal, coupled with school-based factors. In this report, we want to draw the links between them in an effort to help the district and its partners strengthen their important work.

In drawing these conclusions, we are not saying that any of the people involved with high school renewal lack commitment to their work. To the contrary, they are dedicated, knowledgeable, and hard-working. Rather, we are saying that the organization and leadership provided for the work of high school renewal, coupled with the conditions in which the schools function, are not leading to the outcomes the district seeks for its high school renewal efforts. As a result, we are suggesting that it is necessary for the district and its partners to take a hard look at these conditions and operating systems, develop strategies for addressing them, and then hold themselves and one another accountable for their achievements. With such steps, it will become more likely that the district and its partners can reach the goals they value for Boston's high school students.

The rest of our report is divided into three sections. In Section II, The Organization, Leadership, and Implementation of High School Renewal, we describe and analyze the organization and leadership of high school renewal in order to set the groundwork for arguing that the organization and leadership are linked to the conditions in the schools and to the progress of high school renewal. As part of this section, we describe the role of the Deputies for Schools and Clusters with respect to high school renewal and the ways in which curriculum and instruction are addressed in the context of high school renewal. To conclude the section we consider how the organization and leadership of high school renewal are linked to the continuation of problematic conditions in the schools in our sample that, in our view, are standing in the way of their making further progress toward the district's goals.

In Section III, we focus on students by attending to their experiences as students in their small high schools and SLCs. We report their views on a) personalized relationships with adults in the school/SLC and the developing climates and cultures in these settings, b) the role/centrality of the schools'/SLCs' thematic focus on students' experiences in school/SLC, and c) their views of the status of instruction in our sample schools/SLCs. As part of the discussion of instruction, we

review our findings with respect to the status of Workshop instruction and the development of the schools' signature/thematic courses that are meant to interest students and engage them in the academic focus of their high schools/SLCs. Throughout the discussion of instruction and signature courses, we link our findings to data we have collected about the organization and leadership of high school renewal. In Section IV we review our evaluation findings and offer some thoughts about "next steps" that might accelerate the progress of high school renewal in the BPS.

II. THE ORGANIZATION, LEADERSHIP, AND IMPLEMENTATION OF HIGH SCHOOL RENEWAL

High school renewal in Boston is a complex enterprise with the work shared among multiple partners who bring expertise and strong commitments to it. This should bode well for its progress and ultimate efficacy. However, the data we have collected and analyzed lead us to conclude that, to date, no one has harnessed the expertise of the partners into a functioning organizational system in which participants work together as a team to achieve the goals of high school renewal. Rather, the absence of a well-functioning organization leads to frustration and discord within the district, among the external partners, and between the district and its external partners. We begin with a discussion of the partners who have joined together in this important work. Then we turn to a consideration of how they are organized to accomplish the district's goals.

The Partners. Responsibility for high school renewal in the BPS is located in multiple organizational units within the district and among the external partners who support the district's work. In order to situate the analysis of how the partners accomplish their work, we start with a brief overview of the key participants in the work.

Within the district, the Superintendent of Schools holds overall responsibility for High School Renewal. The Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning reports to the Superintendent and has formal authority and responsibility for the multiple units within the district that directly affect teaching and learning. For example, the Director of the Office of Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) reports to the Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning and is responsible for, among other things, a) the content of courses and their links to district and state standards, b) the development of new courses, c) formative assessment of student learning, and d) instructional coaching in content areas other than English Language Arts. The Instructional Leader for Literacy and Coaching, who supports the implementation of Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL) in the district, also reports directly to the Deputy for Teaching and Learning. Other units, for example Unified Student Services (USS) which supports schools in their efforts to provide high quality instruction for students with special needs reports to the Deputy for Teaching and Learning. The Special Assistant to the Superintendent for High School renewal reports to the Superintendent. The Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, however, stays attentive to the day-to-day work of the Special Assistant.

Within the district, three Deputy Superintendents for Schools and Clusters are responsible for more than 40 schools a piece that span the K-12 grade levels. High schools are a subset of each Deputy's overall portfolio of schools. Deputies supervise and evaluate principals and headmasters. A major component of their work is insuring that schools develop and effectively implement the district's Essentials of Whole-School Improvement. To this end, Deputies monitor the development and implementation of each school's Whole School Improvement Plan (WSIP). Deputies support schools that have been identified by the state as not meeting the state and federal guidelines for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), guiding them through the processes

required by the state. The Deputies for Schools and Clusters report directly to the Superintendent.

Within the district, the Office of High School Renewal (OHSR) is responsible for the organizational conversion work, the transformation of large high schools into small high schools and cross-grade SLCs, and for some of the supports provided to the schools during and after their transformation. The head of the OHSR, the Special Assistant to the Superintendent for High School Renewal, reports directly to the Superintendent. Within the district, the Special Assistant position has no formal authority to evaluate the work of the small high schools or SLCs. The Special Assistant, in other words, cannot hold school-based or district leaders accountable for their work related to high school renewal.

Within the district, each small high school has its own headmaster and administrative team. Each high school that has developed SLCs has one headmaster and an administrative team that includes, among others, the leaders of each of the school's SLCs. Schools in the districts are assigned to one of nine clusters; each cluster includes elementary, middle, and high schools and is led by one of the district's most skillful principals/headmasters. Three clusters comprise a triad and each Deputy is responsible for a triad of schools. The headmasters of small high schools and high schools with SLCs report to their triad Deputies

With the district, but organizationally external to it, are four partner organizations that bring considerable expertise to the district's work with high school renewal. These include a) the Boston Plan for Excellence (BPE), b) the Private Industry Council (PIC), c) Jobs for the Future (JFF), and d) the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE).[6] The BPE is the fiscal agent for the Carnegie Corporation's grant to Boston. JFF is the fiscal agent for grants from the Gates Foundation. Each of these partner organizations had prior working relations with the district, with the BPE and CCE having the longest and deepest involvement with the work of directly improving teaching and learning and CCE having the deepest involvement with developing new, small Pilot schools.

The Organization of the Partners. The development of the organization and partnership for high school renewal has taken place over several years. When the district determined that it would apply for high school renewal funds from the Carnegie Corporation, in keeping with the RFP guidelines, the BPS proposal was submitted as a partnership with community organizations. According to that proposal, the BPE was the "core" partner which meant it was fiscally accountable for the grant. The PIC and JFF were "supporting" partners to the district. The leadership team for the grant included the Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning and representatives from BPE, JFF, and the PIC. Their primary role at that point was to oversee implementation of the Carnegie-funded work. Members of the group quickly realized that, given the grant's focus on literacy coaching, the district's Instructional Leader for Literacy and Coaching should be added to the leadership team.

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[6]CCE became a partner once the Gates Foundation provided support for high school renewal to the district. It had not been a partner in the Carnegie Corporation grant.

Although the BPE was the fiscal agent for the grant, the question of who was actually "leading" the work was not clearly established. Officially, the BPS was to employ a qualified individual to lead the work from inside the district. To that end, it initiated a national search. Fourteen months later, after an unproductive search, the district determined that it had a qualified leader for high school renewal within the district. In 2002, the Special Assistant to the Superintendent for High Schools was appointed and charged with leading the work from the newly created Office of High School Renewal.

The OHSR was described as follows:

> Boston's **Office of High School Renewal**, in collaboration with its partner organizations and with generous financial backing from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, supports the creation of small, dynamic learning environments that promote student engagement, positive relationships among adults and students, and a love of learning. We seek to assist schools in the development of skilled, motivated, independent learners who graduate with a commitment to their communities.
>
> (The OHSR is) the school district's lead entity for driving high school renewal, including the development of small schools and small learning communities and overall school improvement. The OHSR ensures that new school designs and large school conversions are feasible, and provides extensive technical assistance and on-site coaching to new schools. The OHSR also assists the BPS central office to support high school redesign and ensures that facilities, student and staff assignment, and other cross-cutting issues are addressed quickly and effectively. (OHSR website)

This description specifies that the OHSR was to lead and support the conversion work and provide technical assistance to the schools as they were involved in this process. Although this description of the OHSR identified some aspects of the office's role, there was nothing that specified the way in which it would work with the extant partners, especially with the BPE which was accountable for the expenditures incurred for high school renewal work funded by Carnegie. There was, in other words, no formal organizational relationship defined for the BPE, the fiscal agent for the Carnegie grant, the OHSR, and the Carnegie leadership team.

In 2003, with the goal of creating additional small high schools, the district and its partners successfully garnered funds from the Gates Foundation. Like the Carnegie Corporation, the Gates Foundation required an outside partner to be the fiscal agent for its grants. JFF was given this responsibility and CCE was added to the leadership group due to its experience in creating the district's small, autonomous Pilot schools, some of which are high schools. The leadership team of partners became known as the High School Renewal Work Group (HSRWG). It now included two partners who had fiscal responsibility for two different high school renewal grants, the BPE and JFF, and the district's OHSR which was to drive the work but did not have authority over the external funds that would be critical to the effort. There was still no formal set

of agreements about how the partners would work together with the OHSR to forward the district's high school renewal agenda. As Education Matters began its evaluation of high school renewal late in the fall of 2003, we learned that the HSRWG still operated without an explicit leader or set of strategies and procedures for conducting its work.

Finally, one more group was created to provide oversight and coordination to the work of high school renewal, the High School Renewal Coordinating Group (HSRCG). This group, which is chaired by the Superintendent, includes workgroup members, members of the district's senior staff, and parent and community representatives. Deputies are members of the HSRCG, but all of them do not regularly attend the meetings.

During the two years of the evaluation, we have attended six HSRWG and two HSRCG meetings. In addition, we have completed eleven interviews with senior level administrators in the BPS, including the OHSR, and thirteen interviews with key representatives from each external partner organization in order to better understand the functioning of the two groups. As a result of collecting and analyzing these data, we have concluded that at no point, according to those we interviewed, did the groups successfully define their roles, priorities, authority, responsibilities or methods of operating with respect to one another and the district as a whole. The absence of agreements on these areas led, we have concluded, to a Work Group in which the partners are a) dissatisfied about their working relationships, b) have not been able to improve their roles, and relationships, and, as a result, c) have not been able to move forward in a systematic fashion with the areas of high school renewal that they choose to pursue. As we will note later, the response to the organizational reality that HSRWG members report has led a great many important issues to fall between the cracks to the detriment of the schools and the goals of high school renewal.

1. The High School Renewal Work Group (HSRWG). Our observations of HSRWG meetings led us to understand that the members of the group brought important issues to the table and discussed them, often at length. But, our observations and interviews also led us to conclude that discussions did not often lead to a clear consensus on next steps and, therefore, to decisions. As a result, some important topics were discussed repeatedly over time until one or more members of the HSRWG decided to take the next steps on their own. Other issues were never brought to the HSRWG because members decided that it was not a productive decision-making forum. Even when the HSRWG was asked to bring issues and information to the HSRCG, the process of the meetings often led the group to be unable to make recommendations or respond to such a request from the Superintendent. Over the two years of Education Matters' evaluation, the HSRWG was unable to come to agreement on, for example, a) a technical assistance strategy and plan for the high schools that housed SLCs, b) a focused approach to helping the extant small high schools with the difficulties they faced, and c) how to address the instructional needs of the schools. We have drawn these conclusions largely from the interview data we collected. Our observation data led us to the conclusion that the HSRWG was not a consensus building or decision-making organization. This finding was confirmed by interviews with work group members.

Before presenting the interview data from HSRWG members, we want to provide readers with examples of the discussions that have taken place in the work group. To do this, we present brief synopses of four meetings we attended during the last two years. The synopses demonstrate that the HSRWG had important issues on its agendas but, often, did not make progress in dealing with them. As the synopses also demonstrate, work group members were aware of the fact that they did not work as a cohesive group and, as a result, brought in trained facilitators to guide their discussions. From their perspective, however, the facilitation did not significantly improve their effectiveness.

For example, on November 24, 2003, members discussed the draft of a status report developed from visiting the district's larger high schools and considered the implications of their findings for recommendations they would make to the HSRCG. The issues critical at the time included, a) assignment strategies used for special education students and students returning from the Department of Youth Services that placed great burdens on several schools, b) unclear job descriptions for the program directors in schools with SLCs, c) lack of instructionally focused professional development for headmasters and other school-based administrators, and d) lack of advisories or other strategies for reducing student alienation. By the end of the meeting, however, it was not clear what decisions the group had made about revising the report. Most of these issues surfaced at other work group meetings during the two years of the evaluation.

At its April 5, 2004 meeting, a high school headmaster was added to the HSRWG for the first time to insure that the headmasters' experiences and views were included in the group's discussions. Then, part of the meeting time was spent on the challenge of developing job descriptions for the SLC leaders and other middle managers who might be in the small high schools. The latter group included department chairs, program managers, and school-to-career counselors, for example. This was important, according to the HSRWG member who led the discussion, because up to now the district "has been trying to layer additional job descriptions on top of jobs people already had," rather than attempting to revise the job descriptions to reflect the realities of the new small high schools and SLCs. There was no conclusion to the discussion. (New job descriptions were not available until June 2005.) Additional time was devoted to the a) challenges posed to the district and schools by numerous requests from districts, reform organizations, and consultants, among others to visit the district's new small high schools, b) scheduling a retreat for the HSRWG that would focus on "how we organize ourselves to accomplish the work," and c) developing an agenda for the next HSRCG meeting which would be held on April 7, 2004. It was not clear what the HSRWG would put on the HSRCG agenda at the end of the HSRWG meeting.

The May 3, 2004 HSRWG meeting was facilitated by a consultant from the Annenberg Institute whose role was to help members of the group stay on task and accomplish their goals. The facilitator was brought in by the group because members were frustrated by their inability to work together effectively. According to the agenda, the focus of the meeting was to be two discussions, one on the Small School RFP and one on "Small School and Small Learning Community Strategy Development." Twenty minutes were allotted on the agenda for the Small School RFP. Instead, the group spent the majority of the meeting on this topic, and tabled the

discussion of strategy development for the SLCs. During the discussion, it became clear that a) there was no system in place for HSRWG members to share and learn from members' visits to other districts or from other districts' visits to BPS, and b) communication with triad Deputies remained problematic with the result that Deputies were not part of the conversations about high school renewal. Throughout the discussions, the facilitator identified topics and issues that should be included in the HSRWG retreat scheduled for June 2004.

On March 28, 2005 the HSRWG met to discuss the Superintendent's request for a Technical Assistance plan for the SLCs and follow-up plan that would result from the Schools for a New Society (SNS) Learning Institute. The technical assistance plan was important because, throughout the 2004-2005 school year, it had become clear that the schools with SLCs were not receiving the support they needed to develop strong SLC proposals that reflected the conditions in their schools. Nonetheless, no technical assistance plan was developed to present to the HSRCG.

With respect to the SNS Institute, members of the HSRWG agreed that they had made poor use of what was a prime opportunity to make substantive progress with high school renewal at the Learning Institute they had attended. Members agreed that this was especially unfortunate given that two Deputies attended the meeting as well as a few Headmasters, teachers, and students. The Deputies, we were told, "were really open to the work." One member commented, "we are a tough group to facilitate," in recognition of the fact that, even with the skillful facilitator, they were unable to work constructively as a group. The HSRWG did not develop a follow-up plan related to the SNS, but agreed that a number of messages should be brought to the HSRCG meeting. These included recommendations to: 1) Broaden our thinking about how to get the Boston Teachers Union (BTU) back at the table to discuss high schools; 2) Make sure the messages to the high schools are consistent; 3) Develop a support plan for SLCs and small schools that involves the partners and then tell the schools the plan; and d) Help schools think "out of the box" about student engagement.

Much of the remainder of the discussion at the HSRWG focused on how to create a sense of excitement at the schools with respect to developing proposals for 9-12 SLCs that were due at the end of April. Members were concerned that proposals were being written as compliance documents in light of the district's mandate. There were no explicit conclusions drawn about a strategy for developing excitement at this late date. Instead, the Work Group considered a series of persistent challenges that had been raised at previous meetings: a) how to deal with the lack of autonomy available to the SLCs, b) whether their leaders should be teachers or members of BASAS, the administrators' union, which would give them supervisory authority, and c) when SLC leaders would be appointed so that teachers would know who was leading each one. Members clarified that decisions about whether the SLC leaders would be BASAS members should be made by May 15th, the day that BASAS needed to be informed. Additional time was spent considering how to get the high schools to think more creatively about serving their special needs students and how to get some advice on developing the SLCs since neither the district or its partners had expertise in this area. Again, no clear decisions resulted from the discussions.

These data, coupled with the interview data we present next, led us to conclude that the HSRWG members discussed important issues. But, little of a systematic nature was accomplished and members reported being frustrated by the process they repeated meeting after meeting. Many important questions were left unanswered. Few decisions were made. The group tried to improve its functioning with the assistance of a skillful facilitator at the SNS meeting and at meetings in Boston, but the results were minimal. As a result, no one from the BPS or the partner organizations suggested to us that the work of high school renewal at the end of the 2004-2005 school year was either well-coordinated or effectively led by the HSRWG. Rather, all of the individuals in our interview sample expressed frustration about the way in which the group operated and pointed to the need for greater clarity about roles, priorities, responsibilities, and processes.[7] We turn now to a discussion of the factors that seem to have created and sustained the functioning of the HSRWG.

First, there are multiple factors that complicate the work of the HSRWG members. These arise out of having on the group a) two different fiscal agents for two different grants, and b) members with different theories of change and change agendas. As Partner D notes, there are differences of opinion around how to sequence the work, develop instructional approaches, and even structure the schools.

> It's pretty hard to explain that group. It's very political, and it's very complicated, because we have funding streams coming to two different organizations, and we have essentially very different theories of change [among the different partners]. Given all that, I think it's really hard to keep moving forward with the change agendas. There is not just one change agenda, there are several different change agendas and sometimes we do better at it than other times. There was a moment last fall when we had to go through the whole district redesign thing that Boston's participating in, and we were asked to sort of envision: What would the district design look like if you were really doing what you wanted to be doing with high school renewal? And we had total and complete agreement in what it would look like. It was amazing. So, in terms of the district change part, I think we are very aligned. It's more the theory of change at the school level, and what kind of combination and sequencing, structure, culture, instruction – that's where there's more disagreement. And it's not even disagreement so much, it's just hard work, and it's very fragmented. I think it's just hard for us sometimes to get together and wrap our minds collectively around how to get the best leverage from all the stuff that people are doing. Partner D[8]

[7]With the help of a skillful facilitator, the HSRWG developed norms for running meetings. They were not able, however, to develop norms and associated strategies for conducting their work.

[8]In an effort to provide all participants in the evaluation with confidentiality, we use code names and refer to all participants using the pronoun "she."

Second, a related set of complications arise from the ways in which the differences of opinion about small high schools and SLCs get addressed in a group without formal leadership and agreed upon strategies. According to Partner A and many others, decisions about the two structural approaches, SLCs and small high schools, are not made by the work group as a result of reasoned discussion. Rather, they are made by the different partners in light of their preferences and the two funding streams. The result, in her view, has been a de facto priority on creating small schools first.

> The work of the small schools and the decisions about what to do about them do not get made by the work group or in the work group. They get made, I think, by some of the other partners. So, the work is siloed. I don't think it has to be, but it is. I don't think it's deliberate. I think it's a genuine point of view that we'll do certain things for the small schools first, and then we'll get later to the SLC work. Partner A

Other members of the HSRWG report that the work that takes priority reflects real differences of opinion within the work group about the value of having both small schools and SLCs. This next comment succinctly reflects a point of view shared by several HSRWG members.

> SLCs have been given zero attention by the high school renewal group until just recently, because we [other partners] just kept pushing on it. They [some of the partners] enjoy doing the small schools. They see that as fun while small learning communities are just a nuisance. If [those partners] are successful in making SLCs fail, they'll get to turn them all into small schools.[9] Deputy D

Clearly, these comments reflect a group that is not functioning in a unified manner and in which there is not a shared set of agreements about the value of some of the goals of their work.

Third, although the HSRWG started with a focus on literacy instruction and coaching support in light of the district's attention to improving teaching as the route to improving learning, it has moved away from coordinating the work of improving literacy instruction through coaching. Indeed, as Partner E suggests, speaking for all of those we interviewed, instruction is not currently on the agenda of the HSRWG.

> We talk about instruction all the time, without talking about how to do it. I find it sort of humorous that we constantly talk about the need to talk about instruction and then don't talk about it. What kind of instruction are we talking about? Do you want to talk about math? Or perhaps we should talk about science? Or social studies? I mean, we don't get there. That's because we don't have the curriculum people in the work group. I mean Curriculum and Instruction is running an entirely different operation here. There is no integration of the

[9]The headmasters of the high schools in our sample that house SLCs share this conviction. They see themselves as schools of secondary interest not only to the HSRWG but to the district as a whole.

> curriculum activity with the high school renewal effort, and how can you really talk about instruction unless you talk about math and English? The pathology is that people just talk at length about the need to focus on instruction as if there's a barrier to doing it. Partner E

Although this next point is not related to the actual functioning of the HSRWG, in light of Partner E's comment, it is important to keep in mind that the HSRWG does not include among its members either the Deputies for Schools and Clusters or the Director of Curriculum and Instruction (C& I). As a result, it is not surprising that instruction is not part of the discussion. From the perspective of many members of the work group, the absence of the Deputies and C & I has led to situations in which the direction of high school renewal has not aligned well with extant district policy.

> Certainly the Deputy's role is to help to guide schools and manage schools through the district's priorities and initiatives. And, the office of high school renewal needs to make sure that what it's asking schools to do is aligned with the district's priorities and initiatives, and I don't know that that's always the case. I think that's part of the problem. And, we as a workgroup, and I would say the Office of High School Renewal, need to figure out which parts of this work we are going to lead, and which parts of it do we need to follow behind central office and help them do. Partner B

During the last two years, members of the HSRWG recognized that they were not functioning in a productive fashion and tried, with the help of an external consultant, to develop a framework and process for conducting their work. The outcome of this support was not, however, a HSRWG that functions significantly better than it did in the past. As Administrator C notes, there is still no clear leader for the group. And, each partner uses its knowledge of how decisions get made in the BPS to lobby for its own priorities.

> I think we've been pleasantly polite to each other this year. But, I don't know who's leading the meetings. Is it OHSR? Is it the Deputy for Teaching and Learning? Because whoever tries to lead gets undercut. People run to the Superintendent [if they don't get their way]. No one can lead that way. They get shot down and get bitter about trying. No one should be able to run to the Superintendent and the Superintendent shouldn't be allowing it. But, he does. So that's the number one problem. Everyone runs to someone. There are four very strong partners. That's the good news; that's also the bad news. You would think with this wealth of partnership, we'd be maximizing it, but we get caught up in too much other stuff and there's too much history there between all of us. Everybody wants to run the show, so God help us. I'm happy when we can have

> a good meeting, setting the ground rules, getting some benchmarks so we can do the work. I'm happy when we can do that.[10]

Other work group members agree that there is no clear leader for the group and add that, as a result, there is no one individual or partner who can manage the work and make sure that members follow-through on tasks they agreed to complete.

> There's a fundamental problem that we have around the workgroup, and that is that someone needs to manage it with an understanding that everyone is a very busy professional person with many things to do. Managing that kind of group requires that, if you have priorities, you have to make it as easy as possible for people to do it, and I think that is not a management approach that is being taken at the moment, and I think it's a problem. . . . There's a problem of managing adults here that's not just like, give assignments to students and say, go figure it out. It's a problem, and I think that's – you hear a little frustration in my voice, I'm frustrated with that. Partner D

Reflecting on the absence of leadership, another frustrated member of the workgroup commented,

> We're not even competing for leadership of the group, we're competing for not being the leader. Partner E

The fact that the HSRWG operates without agreement about goals and priorities and clear guidelines and processes makes the work group meetings unpleasant, at times, for its members. However, it also has a deleterious effect on the headmasters who are charged with leading the small high schools and SLCs. As Partner C notes, they do not get a clear, consistent message from the district or the HSRWG about the trajectory of the work.

> I would say the main goal of the HSRWG is to coordinate the high school reform efforts at the district level, and among the five partner organizations, for better or for worse. Ultimately, I assume that the role of the workgroup is to bring forth significant issues to be discussed and decided upon by the Superintendent, and then hopefully to manage some of the implementation of decisions that are made. Being an external organization, working under the aegis of the OHSR, which has uncertain lines of authority with schools, it can be a very tenuous line at times. I wouldn't say that the HSRWG has been completely successful in communicating, either to the SLC headmasters or to the small high school headmasters [and telling them]: here is the structure, these partners are playing X roles and reporting to whoever, or this is the role of the high school renewal office versus the role of the

[10]This comment accurately captures the frustration of many members of the HSRWG. In the interest of preserving the individual's confidentiality, identifying remarks were taken out of this quote and we do not attribute it to a member using even the pseudonym.

> Deputy Superintendent. And the HSRWG becomes a very confusing group, understandably, to the headmasters. So we could stand to have a much clearer process and setup and lines of authority that can be communicated to the schools. Partner C

The work of high school renewal moved along in Boston during the 2004-2005 school year with the conversion of two large high schools into seven new small high schools and the elimination of grade-level SLCs in five other large high schools. But, this work was not really "led" by the HSRWG; it was accomplished by partners taking on the work they either wanted to do or felt had to be done. Partners who were excited by the conversion of large high schools into small schools shepherded that work and, when they had the opportunity, took for themselves the challenge of developing a set of Humanities courses for those schools.[11] Other partners tried to help the schools develop their SLC proposals because the work needed to be done. They did not, however, have expertise in this area.[12] This approach to completing the tasks associated with high school renewal resulted in a situation in which a) some important issues, and b) the provision of much-needed supports at the schools fell between the cracks to the detriment of the schools and the goals of high school renewal.

It matters that members of the HSRWG find their meetings frustrating and cannot develop a well-functioning organization. But, it matters more that the absence of such a group is thwarting the efforts to fundamentally transform high schools so that they meet the needs of the district's students.

2. The High School Renewal Coordinating Group (HSRCG). The HSRCG is chaired by the Superintendent and is designed to keep the Superintendent and key members of his staff and the community up to date on the progress of high school renewal. The HSRCG includes workgroup members as well as other members of the district's senior staff and parent and community representatives. The Deputy Superintendents for Schools and Clusters and the Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, for example, are members of the HSRCG as are the heads of Unified Student Services and the Deputy for Family and Community Engagement. The HSRCG meets monthly throughout the year although meetings are cancelled if there are no high school renewal issues that need to be brought to the Coordinating Group. The Superintendent, as leader of the HSRCG, can ask the HSRWG to focus its attention on issues that are of concern and/or in need of immediate attention and report its findings to the HSRCG. The HSRWG can bring ideas to the HSRCG and ask for its opinion on how to proceed. In practice, based on observation and interview data, it does not appear that the HSRCG works as smoothly as it is intended to work.

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[11] We will discuss the process for developing the Humanities courses later in this section.

[12] The OHSR now has an educator on board who can lead and support the SLC development process.

First, some members of the HSRWG consider that the Coordinating Group is primarily a sounding board for the Superintendent and a way for him to inform other central office leaders about the progress of high school renewal.

> The coordinating group is really the place where the Superintendent considers policy issues and uses the coordinating group as a sounding board around policy direction. It's also become a big tent meeting, in a way. He tries to expose his staff, the Deputies, other people in the central office [to high school renewal]. It's gotten bigger and bigger which in some ways makes it less functional, but the Superintendent also feels like that's been a good thing, because he's gotten some leverage from that, from other people in central office coming into these meetings and understanding that there's a big focus on high schools, there's a train here that you actually need to move forward with. Partner D

Other members of the HSRWG characterize the Coordinating Group as a sounding board as well as forum in which the competing ideas represented on the HSRWG can be contested.

> It's like we can test ideas and send them off to the Superintendent to see who wins. That's the difficult collaborative dynamic...Either the idea becomes so diluted in presentation [to the HSRCG] that the Superintendent doesn't see the disagreement or it gets decided one way and others, through other channels, let him know of their displeasure. And, either way, it doesn't move the way you would want it to move in an optimal situation. Partner E

Still others characterize the HSRCG as a sounding board but only for selected information. As a result, we were told, the Superintendent has an incomplete picture of the status of high school renewal. In addition, as the next member of the HSRWG notes, some issues are so complex that the district, and the HSRCG in particular, seem unable to grapple with them even though they have been repeatedly brought to its attention.

> First of all, I'm generally astounded by the information that the Superintendent 1doesn't get, in general, about what is and isn't happening. There's just so much that doesn't get through. I think part of it is people don't want to give him bad news; part of it is people don't want to give him bad news about what they themselves are doing or not doing; part of it is just the general problems of scale and communications that organizations have in general. Sometimes [in contrast] there are issues that are so big and complicated. We've been saying for two and a half years that special education is a disaster. Why haven't we done more, faster, with special education? I don't know. The work group and the coordinating committee have signaled that it's important. We have signaled the need for more attention. Administrator D

Overall, members of the HSRWG suggest that the HSRCG functions in much the same way as the work group: individuals argue their positions to the Superintendent outside of the formal meetings until someone's position prevails.

Second, as far as we could learn, the HSRCG does not hold the members of the HSRWG accountable for tasks they are asked to complete. For example, the Superintendent, during the 2004-2005 school year asked the HSRWG to prepare a technical assistance plan to support the SLCs. While this issue was discussed by the HSRWG, they did not develop a plan and, as far as we could learn, no one asked for it. In another instance, in order to provide the HSRCG with updates on the status of high school renewal, the HSRWG conducted a series of what they called "x-ray" visits to the extant small high schools. After visiting the schools and collecting data from the headmasters, the members of the HSRWG decided that they did not have a full-enough picture of the status of renewal at these schools. As a result, they chose not to share any of their findings with the HSRCG. No one on the coordinating group officially asked to see the results of the visits.

Third, key members of the group do not consistently attend its meetings. For example, the Deputies for Schools and Clusters do not come to all of the meetings and some, during the two years of the evaluation, stopped coming altogether. This has resulted in a situation in which Deputies are not "in the loop" about high school renewal even though they supervise and evaluate the high school headmasters. Those who do not attend report that the meetings are not useful.[13]

> Those high school coordinating meetings – I stopped going to those meetings, because nothing ever comes of them. It was incredible to me that we don't look at that data in depth to try to understand what the dynamics are in the schools. Deputy A

Others suggest that high school renewal is not high on the Deputies' list of priorities.

> Deputies don't come either. I mean, [one Deputy] shows more of an affinity for the discussion. But, they always have more important things to do than to come to either the work group or the coordinating committee. They don't come. They're not part of the high school renewal discussion [in these groups]. They're too busy, we're told. Partner E

These and other data we have collected suggest that for whatever reasons, the HSRCG does not seem to be serving the coordinating function for high school renewal. Therefore, taken together, neither the HSRWG nor the HSRCG truly leads or monitors the work of high school renewal in a

[13]Deputies may have conversations about their individual schools with the Special Assistant for High School Renewal. But, by not attending the HSRCG meetings they are not part of the larger district-based conversation about high school renewal.

focused fashion that allows the district a) to be sure it is pursuing a common set of goals, and b) to determine whether its actions are getting the schools closer to their goals.

Summary: The Organization of High School Renewal. It is important to point out that even without these groups functioning in what they consider to be a well-organized, strategic fashion, a great deal of activity has taken place in the district's high schools. The design teams at two large high schools submitted proposals for creating new small high schools. Seven designs were accepted and representative faculty members and administrators, with support from the OHSR and some of the partners, developed their small high schools designs during the 2004-2005 school year. Principals were appointed to the schools during the second half of the school year and the schools opened in September 2005. High schools with SLCs developed plans to convert their grade level and grades 10-12 SLCs into grades 9-12 SLCs. The small high schools in our sample and the cross-grade SLCs continued their efforts to develop meaningful thematic foci, workable schedules, and supportive school cultures.

However, accomplishment of these tasks, while a real achievement, left many administrators in the BPS and among the partners with unanswered questions about how the new small high schools and cross-grade SLCs would actually accomplish their goals and how the extant small high schools would overcome their challenges in order to achieve the goals associated with small size. For many, the questions arose because the achievements came absent any a) systematic organization and leadership of the work, b) strategy for identifying and dealing with many of the already-known challenges that the schools face or will face, and c) significant engagement of key educators within the BPS who might bring their expertise to the process of high school renewal.

To more fully understand the implications of the organization and leadership of high school renewal for the success of the enterprise, we turn to a consideration of two findings that exemplify the challenges posed by this organization: 1) the limited role that the Deputy Superintendents for Schools and Clusters have had with high school renewal, and 2) the process by which new courses were developed to meet the needs of high school renewal. Both of these issues highlight organizational patterns that, in our view, leave high school renewal disconnected from the organization and leadership of the BPS. They suggest that, to some extent, high school renewal has been out-sourced by the BPS to a set of interested educators who have developed an extra-district way of functioning. We present these two findings in light of our conclusion that this extra-district approach is unlikely to lead to a successful outcome for the district's high schools and high school students.

The Role of the Deputies for Schools and Clusters. The Deputies for Schools and Clusters are the front-line administrators who are accountable to the Superintendent for the progress of their schools. They approve the schools's WSIPs, and they evaluate the, headmasters, in large part, on the basis of their success in implementing the district's Essentials which place major emphasis on instruction. In the context of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), it is the Deputies who must work closely on instruction with schools that do not meet their AYP targets. It is the

Deputies who are accountable to the Superintendent for the progress of their schools with respect to student achievement.

By their own admissions, these Deputies have not been significant actors in the work of high school renewal despite their organizational position in the district. From their perspective, high school renewal is progressing in two phases and they are not needed in the first phase. That first phase, which is the responsibility of the OHSR, is the structural component of high school renewal, the phase when large high schools are converted into small high schools or SLCs. In the second phase, post-conversions, the Deputies see themselves as prominent actors who focus the schools on instructional improvement.[14]

One Deputy reported having the following conversation with the headmasters of some of the new small high schools to describe this two-phase process.

> [The headmasters at the new small high schools] asked, "So when do we stop listening to the high school renewal people and start listening to our Deputy? And I said to them, "Now! Because I don't do high school renewal stuff," I said. "My role is more the teaching and learning, the supervision and stuff like that. I'm beginning to enter because your school is evolving into that structure, now, and so if there are questions you have to ask for me around that, then you'd do that. But everything that high school renewal has put in place for you around professional development and around your training as leaders is fine with me." Now that they're up and running, I step in. Deputy C

Another Deputy understood that the approach to high school renewal was sequential but had some concerns about it and about the overall organization of the work. Her comment raises questions about having the OHSR's work "peripheral" to the main focus of the district's whole-school improvement agenda, instructional improvement.[15] Her remarks suggest concern, as well, about how the two pieces, organization and instruction, will be brought together.

> My understanding of the role [of the OHSR] is that it's supposed to be the organizational capacity building wing. I know there have been issues about, how to make sure that the high school renewal office is not just this peripheral department that's working on it. Boston always suffers from the fact that we have eighty million initiatives going on and can't figure how to bring them together and make it a coherent approach. It's always a bit difficult. But, from what I can tell, the OHSR's work has been more on the structural pieces, and that's natural from the standpoint that we're in an intensive structural phase of the reform. I'm

[14]There are some exceptions to this "phased" approach if a school has been identified by the state as in need of improvement. In such an instance, the Deputy will work with the school to improve its instruction even as it is going through organizational restructuring.

[15]This Deputy uses "peripheral" with much the same meaning that we have used "out-sourced."

> still wondering where the other piece, [instruction and school climate] comes in. Deputy A

These findings suggest that, for the most part, the critical work of developing small high schools and cross-grade SLCs is not the responsibility of the district's senior leadership who are, ultimately, accountable for the work at the schools. And, it acknowledges one precept of the district's working theory of change for high school renewal: attention to school structure *precedes* attention to instructional improvement.

In presenting these data, we are not saying that Deputies and those who work in the OHSR never interact. However, they have remained, as Deputy C notes below, "on the perimeter" of the restructuring work.

> We have worked very closely together, we've stayed on the same page, so I always know what's happening. And if there's something related to PD, they'll ask me, "Do you think there's something else you'd like us to do with them?" If there's something around leadership, I'll say, "Well, why don't you do this, or if you can include this, this would be helpful, because they really need to have this." So in that sense I've been involved. But, I've pretty much said, "Do what you need to do and I'll stay on the perimeter, and keep me informed of what's going on." Deputy C[16]

> [One of my colleagues and I] have had lots of conversations with the high school renewal office, and what their work has been. We've been pretty much kept in the loop and have been asked to strategize with them, and the principals of the new schools in particular around what their needs are and how we could make this transition time most effective for them. Deputy E

The data we have presented so far reflect the division of labor attached to organizational conversion work that was underway during the 2004-2005 school year that led to the development of seven new small high schools and grade 9-12 SLCs in five other high schools[17] The data suggest an approach in which central office administrators would increase their attention to the development of improved instruction in the small high schools and cross-grade SLCs once the conversion work was completed. However, our data lead us to conclude that, in practice, there is not a clear separation between conversion activities, the structural changes, and instruction.

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[16]In considering how the Deputies talk about high school renewal, in light of our focus on its organization and leadership, we think it is significant that they use words such as "peripheral" and "on the perimeter." These word choices seem, on the one hand, quite accurate, and on the other, quite telling about the location of responsibility for this important district initiative.

[17]Deputies were not involved in the initial conversion work at South Boston or Dorchester High Schools as these conversions were mandated by the Superintendent.

As we noted in presenting our baseline and year two findings, there are significant organizational and structural post-conversion conditions that continue to challenge the headmasters as they try to develop effective instructional programs in their small high schools and cross-grade SLCs. Although Deputies conduct walk-throughs of these schools and provide headmasters with feedback about progress with instruction and areas in need of improvement, Deputies do not focus on these structural and organizational challenges that have continued to be at the forefront of headmasters' and teachers' agendas. Indeed, as we argue throughout this report, it is not clear that anyone involved with the high schools is giving these issues their full attention.

In other words, we do not have any data suggesting that Deputies are helping headmasters develop more effective staffing and/or scheduling to take advantage of the benefits that small size are supposed to provide. We do not have any evidence that the Deputies work in concert with, for example, the capacity coaches at SBEC and DEC to help headmasters develop more engaging, thematically focused courses or determine how to effectively design and implement CCL cycles in light of scheduling challenges.[18] When asked about their involvement with the capacity coaches, Deputies reported little knowledge of their work. They would not be against working with them, but they report that their priorities do not leave them time for this kind of collaboration. In reality, it appears that high schools are not a priority for the Deputies given their overall responsibilities, even after conversion.

One Deputy, for example, reported that given an extremely large number of needy schools, she had to set priorities based on the district's obligation to meet its accountability targets under No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

> I'm not opposed to [meeting with the capacity coaches]. It's just that I've got to figure out how to do that and do it effectively. I've got [nearly 50] schools now and School X is still at the top of my list until I get the EQA report back from them. I've got a corrective action school that's getting ready to go through their two-year review next fall. Forty-some schools is a lot of schools, and I'm just trying to figure out how I can do a more effective job next year. It's just too many schools. With schools being identified as not making AYP, I've got to figure out where my focus needs to be. On the question of sitting down with [the capacity coach at a small high school] on a regular basis, I don't know that that's going to happen. I don't know that I can add another layer like that right now. Deputy C

Other Deputies echoed the challenges posed by responsibility for a large number of schools.

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[18]Each small high school has the services of a skilled individual called a Capacity Coach. According to the OHSR, the overall role of capacity coaches is to: 1. Facilitate change of structures, policies, practices, roles, and culture; 2. Build capacity of school leaders and faculty regarding governance, decision-making, policies, communication, documentation, program design and assessment; and 3. Provide an "outside" neutral perspective to the work and model the reflective practice required to sustain such long-term efforts. (Adapted from Draft Capacity Coach Job Description, 2/05.

> You have to understand that I don't beat myself up anymore, because [nearly 50] schools with 180 days, let's face it – there's just so much I know. Deputy B

> High schools are important, but they're one in a list of things. I've got a handful of high schools and some of them are undergoing restructuring or whatever, and then I've got [30-some] other schools, and to me, the bottom line is good instruction in the schools. The restructuring piece is not a high leverage piece of that and in some cases it's a distraction. [With respect to capacity coaches], it's not clear to me what they've been doing. Deputy A

Still another Deputy pointed out that high school renewal, while a focus of a great deal of activity in the district, does not get much attention even at the highest levels of district organization. She noted that the progress of high school renewal is rarely the subject of discussion at senior leadership team meetings.

> [We talk about high school renewal] not nearly enough. I'd say, an inordinate amount of our discussions have been around the achievement gap and helping principals lead the discussions – how can we support principals leading the discussions in their buildings. Last year, we identified the work at the high schools, in SPED, and math as priority areas, and we really haven't had the discussion that I envisioned us having about any of those, to be quite honest....In terms of bringing that discussion to the table and having a real strategic discussion, let's say, at leadership team level or even at Deputy level, that doesn't happen. Deputy E

Overall, the Deputies conceded that it would be a good thing for high school renewal if they began having conversations about high schools.

Many partners agree that the Deputies simply have too much to do to spend time at the high school meetings; they agree that the Superintendent has not made attending the HSRCG or HSRWG meetings a priority. From their perspective, however, the Deputies' absence from the table leaves them without up-to-date knowledge of the progress of high school renewal and the schools for which they are responsible.

> The Deputies have 40, 50 schools. They have, now, a huge burden with the AYP schools, state visits, federal visits, mandated reporting. They have an enormous burden. They simply do not have time [to focus on the daily conversion work]....To varying degrees, they don't have the experience. There are some Deputies who are remarkably skilled when it comes to this work. If they're given time or they're invited in to focus on it, they're remarkably skilled....[On the other hand], there are Deputies we have not seen all year, who cannot say in a meeting

> what the office of high school renewal is supposed to be doing, from the policy level dictated by the Superintendent and the school committee. Administrator D

Deputies are certainly concerned with high school renewal and instruction. On their visits to schools they conduct classroom walkthroughs, observe school climate and culture, examine student data, consider implementation of the school's WSIP, and the role of instructional coaches in improving teaching. They know that several of the schools in our sample are struggling to develop meaningful signature courses that engage students and to schedule appropriate CCL cycles. They do not, however, as far as we can tell, include in their work with headmasters, attention to the links between small school organization, constraints that result from small size, and the implications for instructional improvement. They do not, as a group of Deputies, discuss the challenges these schools are facing and develop strategies with which to address them.

As a result, from the perspective of the headmasters and others, the district's approach to high school renewal leaves the schools in an untenable situation: they have been required to become small; they are accountable for improving instruction; yet, from their perspective, they have no assistance in addressing the challenges to that goal that result from small size. Although the schools in our sample completed much of the formal work associated with the first phase of high school renewal, conversion to small units, some time ago, the support necessary for the next phase of the work, developing high quality curriculum and instruction in the context of small size, has not become the focus of anyone who supervises and/or supports their work according to the headmasters in our sample.[19] Put simply, the second step in the process, to date, is fundamentally missing.

Our data lead us to conclude, then, that although high school renewal is a critical focus of the district's whole-school improvement agenda, its organization and implementation are not only phased but bifurcated so that a) Deputies do not have an official role with the restructuring efforts, and b) the OHSR and the HSRWG do not have a prominent place in the ongoing work of these Deputies who are responsible for the quality of leadership, teaching and learning at the schools. The status of high school renewal has not been a top priority of the district's senior leadership during the last two years. While we understand that the Deputies may have too much on their plates, the fact that high school renewal has not been a priority for them, and that no one at the most senior level of the district has proposed an alternate organization that would provide high school renewal with ongoing Deputy support, indicates, in our view, a significant weakness in the organization and leadership of high school renewal.

We turn now to the second finding that exemplifies what we consider to be a weakness of the overall organization and leadership of high school renewal, the process that was used to develop a set of courses for the new, small high schools.

Addressing Curriculum and Instruction in the Context of High School Renewal. During the 2004-2005 school year, two comprehensive district high schools wrote proposals to convert

[19]No data from central office contradict these headmaster claims.

themselves into small high schools.[20] Their proposals were developed in the context of the district adopting a policy that included three Pathways to graduation. Pathway I was the traditional route that required successful completion of a series of discipline-based courses; Pathway II provided schools with the opportunity to develop thematically-focused Humanities classes that would replace the traditional English and History sequence required for high school graduation, and Pathway III enabled schools to develop their own sequence of courses, in light of the state standards and with rigor comparable to what should be seen in Pathway I and II courses. According to the policy, the BPS Teaching and Learning office would review the new courses for Pathway III; nothing was said about a review process for the Humanities courses at the time the policy was adopted.[21] Most of the new small high schools adopted Pathway II which meant they would have the opportunity to develop thematically focused Humanities courses. The courses would be designed to a) enhance the small high schools' thematic career focus and, thereby, b) increase students' engagement with academic content.

Although adopting Pathway II was an option in the request for small high school proposal document, there was nothing that indicated who would be responsible for leading the work of developing the courses. There was no process specified by which the Humanities courses would be developed. When the proposals were approved in the spring of 2005, there were only months until the September opening of the new schools; only months in which to get the curriculum developed, the materials in place, and teachers prepared. If the courses were to be developed, someone or some organizational entity would have to take responsibility for developing the courses.

The OHSR stepped up and took on the work of developing the Humanities courses because a) those who were most committed to the development of new small high schools felt that the courses were critical to the schools' ability to engage students immediately in thematically focused academic work, b) they were necessary if the new small high schools were to implement schedules that allowed them to offer advisories to students[22], c) there was no formal organizational unit available to develop the courses in the short time available, and d) there was tacit support from the Superintendent's office to put the courses in place at the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year even though doing so would challenge the accepted process used by the Teaching and Learning unit to develop new courses.

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[20]We note that the HSRWG put in place a process for school conversions that represented a distinct improvement over the mandated changes that had led to the creation of SBEC and DEC. The schools involved in this more recent conversion work had more than a year to plan their sets of schools and received targeted support as they continued to develop their proposals.

[21]A back-to-school memo given to all high school headmasters in August 2005 noted that Humanities courses would be also be reviewed by the Teaching and Learning Office and would adhere to the district's timetable for the development and approval of all new courses.

[22]By design, Humanities courses require less time than what is required to teach English and History courses separately. As a result, with Humanities courses in place, the new small high schools would have time available for Advisory classes.

The permission granted to the OHSR to develop the courses was not greeted with approval by all members of the HSRWG or by the Teaching and Learning unit and C & I. Examining the issues and conflicts associated with the development of these courses, therefore, provides another window into the challenges posed by the leadership and organization of high school renewal and, in this example, of the ways in which significant high school renewal work occurred outside of the traditional organization of the BPS and the HSRWG.

To begin, there were HSRWG members who were troubled by the fact that the Work Group did not discuss any of the implications of the Pathway II choice prior to the proposal writing process.

> [The Humanities course] is a way to deal with the Pathways, and I would have thought there would have been discussions about, a) what are the ways to deal with the Pathways, b) what is the work that needs to be done to give schools a basis on which to say, I'm going to do Pathway II or I'm going to do Pathway III, c) what are the steps that need to be taken, d) what are the tools the schools need, and d) what is the sequence of courses, etcetera? I would have thought there would be a discussion about these [questions]. But the OHSR viewed it as, we know how to do that and here is how we will do it, and they went ahead and did it. They didn't involve the Work Group in it. Partner A

But, as we have discussed in an earlier section of this report, it would have been difficult for the HSRWG to discuss and reach consensus on what might have been seen as difficult issues.

Others were concerned that C & I was not part of the discussion of new course development given that the Humanities course would be central to the district's new graduation policy. And, some HSRWG members were pleased that C & I was not involved with the initial design process because they felt that C & I a) was opposed to the development of Humanities courses and, therefore, b) would stand in the way of the courses' development even if they were a mandated component of the district's new graduation policy. If C & I were to oppose the development of the Humanities courses, then it made immediate and practical sense to locate their development elsewhere in the district.[23] As Partner C notes, it made sense to locate it in the OHSR even though that office had no particular authority to take on the work.[24]

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[23]We note here that in the context of what might have been significant differences of opinion, no one suggested that the relevant parties sit together and come up with a plan and timetable for developing these courses. Rather, members of the HSRWG and district senior leadership avoided dealing with the conflict and took on the work of developing the courses.

[24]We have reports from several different HSRWG members and district administrators that the OHSR was asked by senior-level district administrators to stop developing the courses, but we understand that, in light of the support provided by the Superintendent, they were able to continue their work. Were we to use individual quotes even with pseudonyms to document this point, we think the individuals quoted would be identifiable. Therefore, we have chosen to omit documentation of this point.

> Some of the tensions have been with the Curriculum and Instruction office, because there's some philosophical opposition, in the Curriculum office, to adopting a Humanities approach over a separate English and History approach. That's not necessarily a tension that the OHSR can resolve, because it doesn't have authority over the curriculum office. The OHSR is sort of in a funny position, because it's a shop that's supposed to shepherd the small high school/SLC process from within BPS, but it doesn't necessarily have any authority over most of it. Right now you have a central office where it's not completely in philosophical alignment with high school reform. Partner C

These comments, taken together, reveal once again that the formal organization and leadership of high school renewal, as located in the HSRWG, a) did not engage itself with issues of curriculum and instruction and b) other district actors who should have been involved with the instructional aspects of high school renewal, for example the Deputies for Schools and Clusters and C & I, were not part of the organization or leadership of this initiative.

For the record, the data we collected from Teaching and Learning and from C & I do not reveal that these organizational units were against moving toward a Humanities sequence in the new small high schools. Rather, they were against the rapid process being undertaken because they feared that a) high quality courses could not be developed and implemented in such a short time, and b) there were systemic issues associated with these courses that were critical, but had not been considered. As a result, Teaching and Learning and C & I would have preferred a more lengthy process for the development of such courses, a process that would have led to their being developed during the 2005-2006 school year and then taught during the 2006-2007 school year. In addition, both the Teaching and Learning unit and C & I were troubled by the fact that the OHSR, an office without any formal authority to develop curriculum and instruction, had been granted responsibility for developing these courses.

In light of the importance of providing high school students with high quality instruction in all courses, especially those that will be central to the success of the new small high schools, we think it is worthwhile to review the issues raised by C & I with regard to the Humanities courses.

First, C & I was concerned about the heavy demands these courses would place on teachers who likely knew one but not both content areas.

> The challenge of Humanities is that a teacher has to know the content, and more than likely, you're going to get a teacher who has expertise in one or the other but not in both. And it also means you have to have a sense of pedagogy and curriculum, in terms of where we're going with this course. I think it has great potential, but I think the planning needs to be intensive, and I think it relies a lot at this point on teacher knowledge....I think that's the concern, not so much that it's a bad idea but it will be a challenge. Administrator A

Second, a series of high school implementation reviews had led C & I staff to conclude that teachers varied considerably in the extent to which they were implementing the district's instructional strategies.[25] Overall, the reviews confirmed that many teachers were not yet skillful enough in the pedagogies desired by the BPS. Indeed, C & I concluded that it would have to provide additional professional development if teachers were to become more expert. With respect to English Language Arts teachers and Workshop implementation, those conducting the implementation reviews reported:

> The main thing we saw was just a range of skill. There were some teachers who had very strong knowledge of Readers' and Writers' Workshop, and the classrooms clearly reflected it. Other classrooms were far away from the Workshop model. I know one of our goals is moving towards having more discussions on the part of students, and we need to continue that focus, because it was obviously a struggle for teachers. We talked about the level of rigor in classrooms, that in some classrooms expectations were clear and they were high, and in other classrooms expectations were extremely low. Some classrooms were still very teacher centered. Most kids know that there's an expectation that they read a lot of books. How that independent reading is addressed, or the kinds of conversations they have around that, in terms of a learning experience, varies from school to school. I can think of, across the schools, maybe seeing <u>three</u> teachers who actually did conferencing in the way that we talk about it, where they kept notes on their conferencing and they sat with the kids and asked them questions about what they were doing. We also [need to] focus more on assessment, in terms of using conferencing, making observations, looking at student work, really building awareness of the ongoing assessment tools within the classroom. Administrator A

> We're not seeing an explicit objective being identified, something that is truly taught today. What you see at the beginning is more of an agenda: this is what we're going to do. It's not particularly targeted at a very explicit outcome that you would assess before you close the class to see if kids got there. Even if the teacher is going around and checking up on what kids are doing, it's more that kids are on task, doing something, rather than demonstrating that they've made progress towards a very particular objective. In the best of cases, you'll see a conference that is built on that, but that doesn't happen all that often. I'm seeing basically the same stuff everywhere, not a lot of rigor, not a lot of purposefulness. Administrator B

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[25]Implementation reviews involved C & I staff in visiting high schools to determine first whether or not the conditions were in place for good instruction to take place in the major disciplinary areas. Conditions included, for example, appropriate instructional materials, implementation of the district's assessment program, a well-developed professional development plan, and teaching schedules that took advantage of teachers' content expertise. Second, they observed each classroom and teacher to determine the kind of instruction being implemented. Observations were followed by detailed write-ups.

Education Matters collected little data about the teaching of history given our focus on literacy, but we learned that within the Teaching and Learning unit, there was considerable concern that many history teachers were not yet skillful with the pedagogy for their content area. This led C & I staff to be concerned about the quality of curriculum and instruction that would prevail in the new Humanities courses.

> We have a ton of history teachers who are not very good history teachers. Now they are going to be responsible for teaching history and English language arts. And no support has been given to them to do that. . . . So teacher qualification and ability to do this was a concern. Deputy D

Those administrators charged with improving content and pedagogy wondered how they would address the combined challenges posed by teachers' needs to learn a second content area as well as improve their instructional practices in time for the opening of schools in September 2005.

> All these folks are challenged in pedagogy. We're just glad that we can at least grab onto that and say, OK, you are an English teacher, you have content background, let's work on the pedagogy. [With Humanities] we can't even do that. Administrator B

District administrators and Deputies did not think it was possible for anyone to design and implement appropriate professional development so that teachers would be adequately prepared to teach the Humanities courses at the start of the school year. They thought it was fundamentally impossible to prepare teachers to teach adequately in two content areas in just a few months. Yet, assuring high quality teaching and learning in the Humanities courses was paramount to those in C & I who were concerned with increasing teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge and skill.[26]

Third, some members of the HSRWG as well as administrators in C & I were troubled by what they saw as students' reduced opportunities to learn in light of the fact that the proposed Humanities courses would be taught in less time than what was available for the traditional English and History courses when they were taught independently.

> We were going to be cutting the time in half. And when the high school renewal folks shared with the supervising Deputies this proposal, the supervising Deputies left with the impression that this was actually going to give them more time, because we have four years of English language arts in the traditional program but only three years of history, and now they were going to have four years of Humanities. And they left thinking, "Wow, this is more time." I said, "No. That [traditional program] was a period of history and a period of English. Now you're going to one period [for both]. You're going to be losing time." Deputy D

[26]Pedagogical content knowledge refers to what teachers need to know about teaching specific content. It is to be distinguished from general pedagogical knowledge that is not discipline-based.

> Let's even say you know your content. Let's say you know history and English. What time do you have? Now [a teacher has] 80 minutes to teach both. She used to have at least 120 minutes to teach this content [an hour for English and an hour for History]. Now she's going to do it in 80 minutes. And, she may not even know it, understand it, or know how to synthesize it. Administrator B

Time was an important variable for at least two reasons. First, reducing the absolute amount of time to engage students with required content did not seem a likely approach to helping them increase their mastery of the content. Second, reducing the amount of time available made it seem to those in C & I and other departments that teachers would be unable to use the Workshop strategies designed to support individual student learning.

Others argued that time was not a key variable. As one member of the HSRWG said,

> Time cannot be the only factor in a student's success. You can have all the time in the world and have the worst pedagogical approach and the worst curriculum content because the teacher doesn't know it, and you could kill kids sitting there for 90 minutes, or you could have a well thought-out, well-planned [shorter time], with a lot of good materials for Humanities, where teachers are engaged because they've developed them, and they can do it in 60 minutes, and the kids could do better. Administrator C

As with the other contentious issues surrounding the development of the Humanities courses, there was no forum in which to debate the questions of time and reach a consensus on how to proceed.

There were other issues that administrators from with the Teaching and Learning unit and C & I wanted addressed before the courses were designed and implemented. The first related to the fact that Humanities courses were being developed to reflect each small school's thematic focus. As a result, the Humanities courses would differ from school to school. While this approach was understandable, it posed what appeared to be insurmountable problems in a number of areas.

First, there was the challenge of adequately developing so many courses in a short period of time and insuring their quality. Second, there was the question of what a school would do with students who entered/transferred into one of the small high schools mid-year or after the freshman year. What would such students take to fulfill the English Language Arts and History requirements for graduation? Third, what would a student who failed a Humanities course take in summer school to make up the credits and learning? The notion of creating summer school for each Humanities course, one idea proposed by the OHSR, seemed unrealistic from the perspective of C & I. Fourth, given that the district had been developing mid-year and final assessments for required courses, where would the Teaching and Learning area find the capacity to development a great many new assessments in light of the proliferation of courses? And, who would tell the Teaching and Learning office what students should have accomplished by mid-

year and by the end of the year? As the curriculum development work continued, we were told that these questions were left unanswered.

Finally, there were questions about the absence of a timely review process that would insure that the new courses provided students with opportunities to become proficient in the state and district standards associated with both English Language Arts and History. Course outlines for the first semester of the school year were not available for C & I review until just before school started. When the course outlines were reviewed, concerns were raised about the extent to which the courses would enable students to master the knowledge and skill associated with the History and English Language Arts Standards.

> They either put all the English language arts and history standards in the courses, they've got them all in there, and there is no way that they're going to be able to teach them because of the time that's available. Or, they included areas that they felt were important, but left out major areas that they need to acknowledge are in the curriculum standards. So somebody decided to not do any US History 1, any of those standards [in the new course]. There are things like that, standards that are completely missing. Others have jumps from the Pilgrims landing to the Industrial Revolution or to the Civil War. There are major gaps in some of these plans.[27]

In presenting these concerns and competing viewpoints, we are not taking a position on the value of Humanities courses or even on whether it was reasonable to try and develop them and prepare teachers to teach them in such a short period of time. We are not taking a position on the quality of what was developed and we do not know the extent to which the courses are being implemented at this time with high quality curriculum, pedagogy, and student engagement. Our focus is on the organization and leadership for high school renewal in the essential area of developing thematically-focused Humanities courses.

From the perspective of the BPS, the Humanities courses were not developed through the standard processes and formal organizational units in place for this purpose in the district. And, they were not developed out of a consensus arrived by members of the HSRWG or even with direction from the HSRCG. Rather, one of the partners to the work, the OHSR, with support from a few other partners and the superintendent, took on the task, and, thereby, bypassed dealing with most of the contentious issues and the safeguards that might have been associated with developing the courses. Consequently, it succeeded in accomplishing work it thought needed to be done.

The concerns raised by the Teaching and Learning unit and by C & I and others did not significantly influence the process by which the OHSR continued with the curriculum

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[27]We are not attributing this quote to an individual in light of our intention of maintaining the individual's confidentiality.

development work. The fact that the OHSR was not the unit charged with responsibility for developing courses did not seem to matter. Once again, tasks were accomplished, but they were not accomplished within the structures established for high school renewal or within the normal processes of the BPS. The work was accomplished by avoiding the district's processes as well as the organizational structures intended to guide high school renewal.

Why does this matter? We think that the way in which the district accomplishes its high school renewal work matters because the organization and leadership it relies on is insufficient for accomplishing more than short-term tasks. It is insufficient for dealing with endemic problems that seem to be pressing in the older small high schools and cross-grade SLCs because dealing with them requires a sustained, coherent, broad organizational response. The HSRWG does not have the capacity or authority to take on tasks that require such organization. The OHSR, which developed the Humanities courses cannot likely use the same approach to deal with the challenges posed by the large special education populations in some of the schools, for example, or the scheduling challenges that seem to stand in the way of implementing high quality CCL cycles.[28] These issues should become the province of those who have formal authority for them within the district. At the present time, given what we have described about the organization and leadership of high school renewal, it appears that the district has not invested individuals or units with the authority to lead this work; it has not required multiple departments or offices to support high school renewal as part of their ongoing work.

To further strengthen our point that important instructional issues are not being addressed by the extant organization and leadership for high school renewal, we turn to a short discussion of two additional issues raised during interviews with BPS Deputies, central office administrators, and members of the HSRWG. These concerns highlighted a) the diminished capacity for content area supervision in math and science at the new small high schools, and b) the scant opportunity for same content area teachers to meet and work collaboratively to improve instruction.

1. Diminished Content-Focused Supervisory Capacity at the Small Schools and SLCs. There are questions being raised at the Deputy level and from those in central office leadership positions in C & I about how to supervise and evaluate content area teachers due to changes in school organization that result from small size.[29] Specifically, small high schools no longer have department chairs. As a result, there may be no one in a school with, for example, science or math expertise who has the authority to observe and evaluate teachers and teaching in these content areas. Deputies and central office administrators worry about the impact of the situation on students' opportunities to learn math and science, in particular.

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[28]In fact, the OHSR has taken on many tasks that, in principle, fall outside its domain, for example negotiating the new SLC leader positions with BASAS, in order to get them accomplished. While this approach has been successful, it stretches thin the capacity of the OHSR and does not seem to be an effective, long-term strategy.

[29]We understand that the math department has hired additional program specialists to help address this problem. These are not, however, school-based positions.

> We now have a dearth of math and science administrative people to evaluate, to supervise, support, and lead the work in those areas. I think that across the district, you can count on one hand the headmasters and principals that have math and science background. As we've broken into small schools and small learning communities what's happened is that when you lose that department head structure, I think we're losing some teacher support and accountability because we don't have that supervisory piece in place. I think that some of that has come from the fact that we don't have that department head structure in place that really is able to support the teachers better. And I've really worried that we're going to have kids that we graduate who pass the MCAS but who don't have a lot of knowledge. Deputy E

These district leaders also worry about the burden this situation places on headmasters who do not know these content areas but must evaluate and support their science and math teachers.

> We're breaking into small schools and so now we have all these headmasters who have to do all of the content areas. We have no specialists anymore who can do this work. And we don't have, particularly, department specific specialists. A lot of headmaster are anxious about going into a science class if they know nothing about science. [They ask,] how am I'm going to write the evaluation on that person? I think it takes someone who's got quite a background and a lot of confidence to do that outside of their subject area. Administrator B

The concern about the absence of content-specific expertise is an issue for SLCs as well as for small schools. While it may be easier for these schools to share administrators with content expertise across SLCs, we were told that identifying and appointing SLC leaders to insure that, as a group, they had such expertise was not part of the SLC design process.

> Interestingly, the headmasters aren't sure whether or not or the extent to which those small learning community leaders who have specific content expertise will work across learning communities. At least that's what they said the last time I was with them, which was when we were looking at the designs. Which I thought was interesting, because having that expertise and being very strategic and deliberate about making sure that the administrative team represented the spectrum [seems important.] The plan [could be], even though I'm the head of small learning community one, I'm a math person so I'm going to evaluate the math people across the building. They weren't so sure they were going to do that, but that potential was there. Deputy E

From our point of view, it is interesting that the district's design process, regardless of who was involved with it, did not include attention to the challenges that would be raised if SLC leaders did or did not support and evaluate teachers in their disciplinary area across the schools. It is interesting that such decisions, if they matter, were left to the discretion of individual headmasters. We wonder what guidance headmasters were getting on this point and who, if

anyone, had recognized that insuring content area expertise should be a priority for the schools. Finally, if such content area expertise was deemed important for the schools with SLCs, we wonder what advice the headmasters of the new small schools were getting about how to supervise and evaluate teachers across the content areas since they would not likely have sufficient content-area expertise.

2. Scant opportunities for same-content area teachers to meet in small high schools. In our baseline report, we identified the absence of common planning time for same content area teachers as a problem for the small schools and cross-grade SLCs. Our focus was primarily on English language arts due to the focus of the evaluation. However, our data collection during the 2004-2005 school year led us to hear about this problem in other content areas. Science and mathematics were cited as areas in which the absence of time for same-subject area teachers to meet might weaken teaching and learning. The question that was posed to us as in need of an answer was: who can teachers meet with to discuss teaching their content absent content specific colleagues?

> If you bring up that question in a [HSRWG] meeting, people will say, well, "We'll create opportunities for all the biology teachers in this building [across small schools] to meet together." So you say, "Great. Show me a schedule. When is it? Do you meet once a month, the second Tuesday – what is it?" There's no answer. Those are the kind of things that, when you bring them up as challenges, there's an easy response, but nobody's actually mapped it out....I think this is part of the reason why high school renewal continues to say that they're going to need these capacity coaches who are going to be the people who are going to sit down with the three or four headmasters at the new places or at the old places, to work out these details. Deputy D

Again, the same scheduling challenges arise for content area teachers in the cross-grade SLCs as Deputy C notes.

> I think the other thing that will be a challenge [to improving instruction] is that teachers are not able to meet in their content areas. I think it's probably a scheduling [problem]. If you have ELA teachers and they're not on the same schedule within the learning communities, some meet and some don't. I think that's the challenge. Deputy C

As late as the summer of 2005, when we collected these data, Deputies and central office administrators remained concerned that teachers in the same content area would not have opportunities to meet and discuss teaching strategies again during the 2005-2006 school year. They reported having raised the issue in a number of settings without gaining any clarity on who with responsibility for high school renewal would address this issue which has been raised with respect to the initial set of small high schools and cross-grade SLCs and would likely be raised in the new small high schools.

It may be that the solution to the challenges posed by having one biology, one physics, and one chemistry teacher in a small high school will be solved by having teachers meet across small schools and, perhaps, teach students across the small schools. Indeed, some administrators are suggesting that sharing teachers across schools will be necessary to insure high quality instruction in light of staffing constraints that will arise in some of the small schools.

> First, all of the headmasters need to get together and say, "We've got to share resources and we've got to share professional development, and we've got to make sure that the kids have teachers who know their content." That would mean if [I'm a headmaster and] I'm a chemistry section short, I ask, "Can either of you two headmasters share a chemistry teacher for just one section? I don't want to take her out of your school for the rest of her life, but can I get her for one section?" We've got to get some of these initial principles taken care of, and we have to share in order to do that. We can't have a biology teacher at small school X who never gets to talk to the biology teacher at [small school Y] or [small school Z]. Administrator B

Such sharing already takes place when small high schools in the same building have some students who are prepared to take Advanced Placement (AP) courses, but not enough of them to justify adding an AP class in each small high school. In such instances, two or three small high schools may form an AP class that draws students from across the schools. Adopting such a strategy, however, requires the small schools in the same building to share a common schedule.

> We know that if we don't have enough kids in one school for an AP course, [the course is] going to go across schools. But if you've got different schedules in one building, how's this going to work? I don't have the answers to any of these questions. These are things I keep bringing up and I'm told they're working on it. Deputy D[30]

With respect to the challenges that may occur in providing appropriate courses due to scheduling differences among small high schools, Deputy E noted the advantage that the SLC strategy has over that of the small schools strategy.

> At least one of the advantages, and it's a significant advantage, that the small learning communities have over the small schools is really being able to have your highest qualified and skilled teachers for the higher level courses teaching them, and making the adjustments in the schedules across the learning communities, so you can get kids in to fill up the courses, as opposed to, in a small school, either having to make the deals across schools, or having people

[30]At the present time, small schools have the autonomy to develop their schedules independently of one another. However, we know that there are some cross-school considerations regarding schedule given that schools must share, for example, their cafeterias and gyms.

> who might be a pretty good calculus teacher teach that AP course, as opposed to the excellent person [available in another school]. Deputy E

The HSRWG as well as district administrators who do not have much involvement with high school renewal have recognized these instructional challenges posed by small size and they have offered possible options with which to address them. Those options, for the most part, rest on sharing faculty and/or students across small schools. However, there are also suggestions for resolving such problems by altering current ideas about teacher qualifications.

> It might still be a question of, as time goes on, hiring people who have a breadth of science knowledge that's greater than any of the current faculty. So when you ask me, what are some of the ways [to deal with having only one science teacher in each specialty], one of the ways is you get people who are more generalist in science and have a breadth of knowledge. Administrator E

Administrator E's comment was made in response to a question about one particular small school. However, it could easily be applied to other schools and other content areas.[31]

Given the need for "highly qualified teachers" under the NCLB legislation, we imagine that the more likely solution to the problem of teacher isolation would be cross-school opportunities for conversation and collaboration. This being the case, we wonder whether a) there are weaknesses to the current policy regarding the size and/or autonomy of small high schools that ought to be addressed, and b) whether the district might not be better-advised to create cross-grade small high schools and SLCs which have the same schedules and, therefore, facilitate the kinds of teacher learning/collaboration opportunities that may be missing in the small high schools. If small high schools find themselves needing to share teachers across content areas and having to have teachers meet in content areas across small schools, then we wonder what benefits accrue to those small schools when compared to cross-grade SLCs with respect to autonomy around scheduling and teacher assignment.

In concluding this discussion, we remind readers that we have highlighted these issues not only to identify what may be stumbling blocks to further instructional improvement, but to indicate that, even at the highest levels of the BPS leadership, no one was clear about who was responsible for a) determining the significance of the concerns, and b) guiding their resolution. Although theses concerns were deemed important by many BPS and HSRWG members, they have not been addressed and, we were told, there are no plans for addressing them. Organization and leadership remain, for us, the reasons for identifying these issues even as we recognize that resolving them will be of considerable importance for the success of high school renewal.

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[31] Education Matters is presenting, but not endorsing this idea. We present it to indicate that the problem posed is on the table and it is being discussed. But after several years of experience with small high schools and the September 2005 opening of seven additional small schools, there is, as yet, no agreed-upon solution to it.

We turn now to a discussion of multiple issues and conditions that remain problematic at the small high schools and cross-grade SLCs in our sample. We do this to indicate how the organization and leadership of high school renewal are linked with what appears to be the district's inability to deal in a timely manner with long-standing conditions at the small high schools and SLCs that appear to be obstacles to their making progress after converting to smaller sized units.

The Relationship Between the Organization and Leadership of High School Renewal and Conditions in the Schools. High school renewal, as we stated at the beginning of this report, is moving forward in the sense that the partners are accomplishing tasks. As a result of their work, seven more small schools opened in September 2005 and five high schools opened with grade 9-12 SLCs. The OHSR continues to develop course syllabi for a series of Humanities courses so that some of the new small high schools can implement Pathway 2 as their graduation policy. It hired a coordinator to support the further development of the cross-grade SLCs. But, these accomplishments, while significant, are by no means the heart or totality of high school renewal. What is most important is what stands as the central reason for creating smaller high school units: personalizing relationships and providing students with high quality instruction. Our data lead us to conclude that these conditions do not yet exist and that the district and its partners have not yet been able to focus their attention on improving the negative conditions in the older converted small high schools that still stand in the way of their achieving the district's goals for high school renewal. We think this is the case due to the organization and leadership of high school renewal in the district that has not yet attended to these concerns.

More specifically, high school renewal, as an organized effort, has been unable, to date, to address the underlying conditions that thwart the work of high school renewal at SBEC and DEC and some of the cross-grade SLCs. The challenges that stand in the way of greatly improving teaching in order to significantly improve learning remain on the periphery of high school renewal work. And, for the schools and SLCs in our sample, there is little if any direct help that addresses how the schools can reduce students' alienation and increase their engagement with school and school work. In our view, it will take a well-functioning high school renewal organization to enable the district and its partners to move more rapidly toward developing and implementing solutions to these problems. We turn now to a review of the conditions that appear most challenging in the converted small high schools and cross-grade SLCs in our sample.

Challenges Associated with the Conversion Process. Most of the research about the benefits of small high schools comes from studies of newly created small high schools. In the BPS, the creation of new small high schools took a considerably different route. The district converted its existing comprehensive high schools by mandate and/or forced choice into new small high schools or SLCs.[32] SBEC and DEC, importantly, were converted by mandate. As a result of this

[32]This contrasts with the process used in Boston to develop Pilot schools, the district's in-district charters. Although Pilot schools may be conversions, achieving Pilot status requires an initial two-thirds vote by the faculty which then releases the school from key contract obligations related to the process of staffing schools and of developing schedules and working conditions.

strategy, the teachers affected by the conversions have not necessarily supported them and, in many cases, have vehemently objected to their new schools. Certainly, they did not vote for them. In the end, although they could not stop the conversions, they brought their disappointment and displeasure with them to the early phases of the development of the new small high schools and SLCs. Given the conditions that remain a daily presence at the schools, which we described in our baseline report, teachers have not become more content with their schools.

The Influence of the BTU Negotiated Agreement. The conversion process, of course, required the district to abide by the terms of its negotiated agreement with the BTU. Most relevant to this discussion are the contract provisions related to "attachment rights" and working conditions. With respect to "attachment rights," teachers retained the right to a teaching position in the buildings that housed the newly converted schools. Most teachers chose to stay in their buildings rather than transfer to other schools even though they resented the conversions. This condition contrasts with the more usual situation found in the Pilot schools and new schools in other cities where the school's principal/headmaster has the authority to select teachers who supported the new school's vision and mission.

With respect to working conditions, the negotiated agreement between the BPS and BTU requires headmasters to garner two thirds of the faculty's agreement for any change in the school's schedule, for example the change from traditional to block scheduling. While there was agreement by the leaders of high school renewal that the small high schools and cross-grade SLCs would need to develop new schedules in order to meet their educational goals, schools could not achieve the change without the approval of the teachers. For the most part, teachers have rejected proposals to create longer teaching blocks. These contract provisions were agreed to by the BPS, but they posed challenges to the headmasters of the small high schools and SLCs. The absence of teacher buy-in and, indeed, opposition to the conversions and schedule changes that were to accompany them meant that headmasters faced the challenging task of building new schools with reluctant, even angry faculty members.

In the case of South Boston, there is an added complication: the BTU never recognized the three small high schools housed in this building as independent entities. Therefore, the building is still the unit that elects representatives to the union rather than each of the small high schools.[33]

As the partners to high school renewal note, these extant conditions were not conducive to the development of a strong set of small high schools and SLCs. For the most part, the conditions remain unchanged and continue to thwart the efforts of the schools' headmasters.

> I think it's incredibly difficult to convert a large school building to multiple small schools, or SLCs for that matter, and create a defined faculty and student body, and be able to transform it into a culture of professional collaboration with

[33]While we have verified that this situation exists at SBEC, we have not been able to learn why the district has not achieved a different outcome in talks with the BTU.

> integrated, interdisciplinary, project based curriculum that's meaningful and relevant and rigorous for kids, with a veteran faculty that you inherit, and with the BTU requiring a two-thirds vote for any change to the schedule. It does make it very difficult, particularly when there's still only one union rep for all three schools in the building, instead of one for each of the small schools....So I think it's trying to transform a culture with one hand tied behind your back, or even two hands. Partner C

> It looks like these headmasters are just screwing up. And they're really not. Mostly, they're doing incredible work to try to move their schools, but you're in the South Boston complex, and people there still think the old high school lives. All they have to do is wait out another few months, years, whatever, and they'll be back to Southie. That's still very much alive. They don't even do their union reps by school there, they're doing them across the whole building. That would be like taking two different elementary schools and saying they should share union reps. There are three different schools in that building. I don't understand how they can legally do that, frankly. But anyway, knowing all that, I think it's helpful context [that adds] to understanding what is and isn't happening. Partner D

The Challenge of the Physical Facilities. Conditions related to facilities also challenged the development of small high schools and SLCs. These small high schools and SLCs were formed with the assumption that it would be beneficial to have defined spaces for each small high school/SLC so that students and teachers could form a community of familiar faces within a circumscribed physical space. However, the comprehensive high schools' buildings were not designed with this kind of space use in mind.

The most straightforward approach to having defined spaces seemed to be to house each small school or cross-grade and grade-level SLC on its own floor. This approach worked to some extent, but analysis of the real space available on each floor led to the realization that the spaces were neither identical, equivalent, nor equally suitable for the needs of the new smaller units. Rooms on one floor might be smaller than those on another. Indeed, there might be more usable rooms on some floors than on others. Lunchrooms, libraries, common meeting spaces, auditoriums, and other facilities were not equally available on each floor in every building. As a result, space needed to be shared among schools or SLCs, a fact that meant that students would travel outside their floor for some parts of their days and, to some extent, schedules would need to be coordinated across the small schools in a building. Four years into the conversion work, most of the space-related challenges remain to be addressed. They raised concerns, as well, for those involved with the latest set of conversions.

> And I guess I would say that, depending on where schools are in the process would determine who's paying attention to space. At [one school] they have been trying to pay attention to space, and there's a consultant to help schools figure out some answers about space. But some of it is the facilities themselves, the condition of facilities. And some of it is that some people have never had to have

> class in the basement. Who gets the basement? So, I think the facilities issues are important, and critical. And I think there'll be some capital planning dollars to do some of that work, but from what [I heard], there's not major money to do major work. Partner B

The Demands on the Headmasters. From the outset, then, the newly assigned headmasters for the small high schools, in particular, were asked to develop small units without many of the conditions in place for them to do so successfully. However, when they agreed to take on leadership of the new small units, these headmasters reported that they were quite naive about the challenges they would face in developing the new schools/SLCs. They were unprepared for the organizational complexities that accompanied their work and the conditions under which they would struggle. But, they learned quickly. Headmaster Y identified the key issues that stymied the work at South Boston High School, in particular. Headmaster Z echoed her sentiments in describing the results of their first months on the job.

> The Superintendent had asked us to break up into four small learning communities. He had in his mind that we'd have one that was totally devoted to 9th grade, and then the other three would be 10-12's, with some kind of pathway.[34] He told us what the pathways would be. But this was just thrown at us, in a way. We had no prep, no sense of what all that meant or how it would work curriculum-wise. We spent the entire summer trying to, 1) physically divide the building, 2) divide the staff, and 3) divide the students. And we did the best job we could do, but we really did not do a great job of creating small learning communities. And part of that was because of our special needs population. They were in classes all the way across all SLCs and that just created a nightmare. It just didn't work. [Nothing worked.] A lot of it had to do with the culture and climate of this school, it had a lot to do with previous norms and patterns of discipline and behavior in the school, it had to do with BTU having such strong representation in this building. Teacher morale, you name it, it was just awful. A lot of factors during that first year caused us to fail in terms of breaking into small learning communities. Headmaster Y[35]

> I walked into this building June 28th, along with [the other leaders], and was told by the Deputy, "OK, you have a big task ahead of you, but you need to get teacher schedules out by July 28th." We had blueprints of the school blown up, because we didn't know how we were going to divide it. And the themes weren't really clear. We were lucky we were able to open the place. By November, there

[34]The term "pathway" used here does not relate to the district's current pathways toward graduation. It refers to the thematic focus that the small schools were to have. In this use of the term, pathway refers to a career oriented theme for the school.

[35]In the interest of preserving confidentiality, we have given this headmaster and the next one quoted different pseudonyms in this section of the report than in other sections.

> was a lot of resistance from the faculty. They were not happy to see us. They were downright angry and hostile, because we were these interlopers coming in to their school. Staff still felt that they were being used as guinea pigs. So the first year was extremely difficult. But by November, we [leaders] made a joint decision that if the Superintendent didn't give us what we thought we needed, we would all leave. The pressure and the frustration was just too much. Headmaster Z

These issues were quite similar to those faced by the headmasters who led the conversion work at Dorchester High school, as well.

The headmasters of the first set of conversion schools were new leaders who were given a task that none of them had previously accomplished. Indeed, none of the district's headmasters had ever led such conversion work. As a result, headmasters had to develop a new, positive school culture and instructional program tied to a theme, and they had to engage teachers in this work under the conditions we described. Our data suggest that the district underestimated the challenges posed to headmasters by these conditions and did not provide them with the policy context or the professional development and support they needed for this work. As one partner explained,

> I use the analogy of a head of a corporation that has to change dramatically to stay competitive, but still has a staff that's very wed to old ways of doing business. That's a very particular leadership dilemma, and [the headmasters of the small schools] just don't have the tools and resources to manage that. There are some among them who are just better at it naturally, but I think there are some who are really seriously challenged by that, and the district has not done well by them. Also, headmasters don't think they should have to have a vote on a school schedule as long as they stick to the contract, number of hours and minutes and preps. They would like the district to renegotiate that. Short of that, headmasters need to know how to act as a political leader as well as an instructional leader. Because managing a school to get a vote is a very particular set of skills that they're getting absolutely no support on how to do it. Nobody, nobody helps them do that.[36] Partner D

The headmasters of the small schools at SBEC and DEC, in particular, encountered these conditions immediately upon taking up their new roles.

In addition, soon after beginning their work, headmasters at both these small schools became aware of other district policies and practices that added challenges to the work of developing a coherent community of students and teachers working together in a well-designed instructional

[36]The headmasters of the new set of seven small high schools participated in professional development designed to help them develop the requisite set of skills for the work they would be required to do. The headmasters of the five original small schools did not have such support.

program. We use the example of special education to highlight the way in which the district's policies and practices have been at odds with the needs of the new small schools and have significantly influenced the schools' organization, staffing, and, thereby, instructional programs.

Challenges Associated with Special Education. Three interlaced factors related to special education posed and continue to pose significant challenges to the district's new small high schools and cross-grade SLCs in our sample: a) the proportion of the total school population with identified special needs; b) the range of disabilities presented by the students; and c) the staffing formula for allocating teachers to schools.[37]

With respect to the first two factors, the proportion of students with special needs and the diversity of their needs, we have been told repeatedly that, historically, students with special needs have been distributed unequally across the district's high schools. Some schools have always had much higher proportions of such students than have others. The first two comprehensive high schools to be converted into small high schools were schools with disproportionately large numbers of students with special needs in comparison to other district high schools.[38] The proportion of students as well as the diversity of their needs pose challenges for their schools.

> There are 300 students in the school and of that a huge number are special education. I think we have 28 lab cluster students, and we probably have 30 OSDC students, and over 50 students that are special education but not either one of those designations. At least a third of my school is special education. We now only have three lab cluster teachers which aren't enough to schedule what all of these kids need, so either the lab kids get mainstreamed into regular ed classes, and for some kids that works. Or we simply have to drop them into other special ed classes [where] I'm not sure it's the best mix. We're still looking for better ways to do this. Headmaster C

> SPED is certainly an issue that's a killer in SBEC and DEC....I think what it does in a small school is that it skews your staffing pattern, for one thing....[given current approaches to serving these students] they take up a lot of space, take up a lot of staff, and consequently a lot of your budget. Administrator E

[37]The proportion of English language learners in a school also poses challenges for small schools and cross-grade SLCs. In this report, given that our purpose is to provide examples rather than all instances of a problem, for the reasons cited earlier, we have focused on special education.

[38]We know that the district has tried to address some of these issues, but during the two years of our data collection, nothing changed significantly in the schools in our sample.

The headmaster of one small high school pointed out that, of the entire faculty at the school, one-fourth of the teachers were designated to special education as a result of the needs of their diverse and large population of students with special needs.

> We have a very large SPED population. The model for SPED is we have a SPED English class, SPED social studies [and so on]. We don't have resource teachers, so these are SPED teachers – all across the subject areas; we have SPED teachers teaching subject-specific. Headmaster D

While it might be possible for schools to meet the needs of their students with special needs with fewer separate classrooms, by the end of the 2004-2005 school year no one, we were told, had offered these small high schools options they could try.

> They [the schools] are not getting the support they need to rethink special needs programming and professional development for their teachers to address their special needs populations. And, they continue to be over distributed [in these schools]. And, there's the particular problem that small high schools are having with many different prototypes within the same small school. It's very difficult to deal with when you don't have much staff. Partner D

At the April 2005 meeting of the HSRCG, the Superintendent confirmed that the hoped for improvements that were to accompany policy changes had not yet been achieved.

> Whenever you get into talking about Special Education in BPS, it's a challenge to take a piece of it without getting overwhelmed by the bigger systematic issues. We need to chip away at it. I think we need to start with where we are as a result of the conversations around the first issue [unequal assignment], and get some things on paper. There may be issues like those that [the headmaster] reported that pop out and say, "This needs attention. We're not there yet." Critical is that we need engagement from headmasters – there needs to be something on paper about what practices are now, and how they've changed or moved. Next – there's this great policy, and guess what – there's a wide-ranging variety of implementation, and exceptions become the expectation. Thomas Payzant 4/05

Complicating the conditions posed by large proportions of students with special needs is the fact that some special education students are returning to schools from the juvenile justice system. Such students tend to be less permanent and less engaged members of the school community, a reality that further complicates any school's ability to meet their needs. The challenges are especially daunting in small schools.

> The special education department keeps dumping on them, sending them more and more special education kids every other day. It's like a revolving door. They've asked for help with special education programming. They've asked to be able to have the revolving door stopped. Administrator C

> I think some of the student population is challenging. I think there are a good number of kids that are involved in the revolving door of, in [small school X], out of [small school X] into lockup, out of lockup, back to [small school X] so it's a revolving door. That's an issue. Deputy C

Without question, the BPS faces considerable challenges when attempting to place students in schools when they have special needs and when they have special needs and have been involved with the juvenile justice system. However, district practices that place these students disproportionately in only a few of the district's high schools create school-based conditions that make it difficult for the schools to establish themselves and provide a high quality education for all of their students.

Larger high schools have greater capacity to staff substantially separate classrooms for students with special needs because they have more flexibility as a result of having more students and teachers. This leads to a level of efficiency in creating classes and schedules. For students who can be mainstreamed, a school schedule that provides multiple mainstream classes at the same grade-level provides multiple options for scheduling special education students. In small schools, the so-called economies of scale are gone.[39]

> Certainly scheduling is another challenge. Because you have kids who are in all parts of the continuum [of special needs]. They might be pulled out for one class, two classes, three classes. They might be almost entirely separate/mainstreamed and there are kids who are entirely separate. And again, the more diversity of schedule that you have to offer [to meet their needs]...your ability to meet anybody's needs, your ability to bring any part of the school to a very high level of quality is diminished by that. It's not diversity per se; it's diversity of structures and structures that are competing. Administrator E

Each high school in Boston gets its teacher allocation on the basis of the number of students enrolled. We have been told that there is no adjustment in the allocation in light of the number of students with special needs. If 25% of a small school's students have special needs that require separate classes in the four core content areas, then the school must have four teachers out of its teacher allocation devoted to those students. Most of the time, this results in special education classes that are, appropriately, quite small. But, it results in mainstream classes that are quite large.

If the school has students who require substantially separate classes for English and math but can be mainstreamed for science and social studies, then the mainstream classes, which were not small to begin with, reach or exceed the limit allowed by the BTU contract. The total impact is felt in a) space challenges related to the limited number of classrooms that exist in the small high

[39]In making this observation, we are not suggesting the district return to large high schools. Rather, we are noting a challenge that has arisen in the context of the district's efforts to create high functioning small high schools and cross-grade SLCs.

schools, and b) large numbers of students in mainstream classes due to the number of mainstream teachers available to the school.

District policies and practices related to the assignment of students with special needs posed staffing, scheduling, and programmatic challenges to the headmasters of the new small high schools. Yet, students were assigned to them as if the new small schools could provide the broad range of programs and services available in large, comprehensive high schools they replaced. This was not possible. Disproportionately large populations of students with special needs challenged the schools' ability to develop smaller classes and flexible scheduling for mainstream students. If the district was unaware of the challenges that meeting the needs of students with special needs would present at the small high schools prior to their conversion, surely they were aware of them soon after the headmasters began their work. Yet, changes in district policies and practices seem still to be lagging behind district restructuring policies.

Unanticipated Challenges. The policies and practices that led to the conditions we have described up until this point – schools were mandated to convert into small high schools, BTU provisions insured teachers' positions in the new small schools with rare exception, changes in schedules were dependent on two-thirds of the faculty agreeing to the change, and the assignment of special education students was not equitable across the district's high schools – were well-known to everyone involved in high school renewal or should have been well-known certainly to the BPS. As a result, it is reasonable to suggest that the district should have alerted the partners to them and developed strategies for dealing with them prior to mandating the conversions.

However, two other significant factors that led to difficult conditions for the schools were unexpected and out of the district's hands initially: 1) severe budget cuts in the 2003-2004 school year, in light of the considerable downturn in the economy, and 2) the passage of the Unz amendment, a referendum item that changed the ways in which English language learners would be taught. As the result of the referendum, bi-lingual services were greatly reduced and many students who were English Language Learners (ELL) were placed in mainstream classes.

Put simply, the district's budget shortfall influenced all of the schools and the referendum led to the loss of teaching positions in those schools that had significant English language learner populations. At the high school level, the loss of teachers had a negative impact on the staffing flexibility available to the district's high school headmasters regardless of the organizational structure of their schools.

> When we first began, each SLC had an administrator and each of them also had a teacher leader, who taught one less class and assisted the administrator in a variety of ways. Since budget cuts, no one wants to be a teacher leader. They don't get one less class anymore. So nobody wants the job now. The second piece has to do with the purity of the SLCs. Before, we were somewhere between 85% and 90% pure, kids taking classes with teachers within their small learning communities. And that allowed us, if we think back to last year, it allowed us to

> really start building connectedness in the small learning community, individual and personalized attention. We tried to reduce alienation, all these different things that the Carnegie grant called for and the Superintendent's policy did. This year, we lost ten teachers right off the bat due to Yes on Question 2 [the bilingual referendum] and then an additional two. We also lost quite a bit of integrity on the small learning communities. What you're going to find across the cross-grade SLCs, I would venture a conservative guess, that we are back to where we started the first year [when there wasn't much purity]. Even the signature courses are mixed now [with students from across the SLCs]. They're not as much mixed as there aren't enough of them. It's a staffing issue, which results in a scheduling issue. Headmaster E

> Basically, the budget cut at the end of last year meant that our small learning communities [within the small school] were kind of put on hold. We did not have small learning communities this year. We had them last year and the year before but not this year. They gave teachers a greater chance to connect and talk about students and stuff like that. I think that's been a real bummer about this year. Headmaster F

While the district could not have anticipated the passage of the referendum and the downturn in the economy, these two factors had a considerable impact on the small high schools' and cross-grade SLC's ability to meet the goals of high school renewal. At the school/cross-grade SLC level, the reality was that headmasters were being asked to serve the same number of students with significantly reduced resources. In fact, they could not sustain, let alone improve their functioning under the conditions that were at hand. The district held to its high expectations for high school renewal but expectations were not sufficient to help the schools determine how to meet them.

Summary: Conditions. We have detailed some of the conditions that accompanied high school renewal in its early years in order to encourage the district and its partners to come face-to-face with: 1) the conditions and challenges that the headmasters and teachers face as they go about the work of improving their schools, and 2) the fact that the current organization and leadership of high school renewal has been unable to make significant improvements in the schools given the conditions. The question the BPS and its partners need to answer at this time is: Despite the conditions we have described at the small high schools and SLCs in our sample, are there sufficient supports and other conditions in place to insure the success of high school renewal as it has been conceived and implemented to date? If the answer is "yes," then the district needs to provide the small high schools and SLCs with far more and different support than they have provided in the past because the evidence demonstrates that the schools have not been able to achieve what the district says is possible. In fact, the continuing presence of the challenges posed by the conditions have led teachers and headmasters to doubt that the district is fully behind high school renewal.

> The faculty sensed full well the mixed messages from the leaders of special ed who still treat the building like it's one big building in how they assign kids and how they assign FTE's. They are still treating the building as if it's one school. The union certainly sends a message that it's still one building. And so I think for the faculty, they see the Gates money, they see high school renewal, they see the partnerships and the capacity coaches and things. And they get the message: this district wants us to change and has provided supports. But then the district puts so many obstacles in our way that maybe they don't really want us to change. And so I think that has a huge impact on the extent to which they will vote [for the schedule and other changes]. I think that the headmasters across the city have gotten way more than their share of blame for the no votes on advisory, the no votes on block scheduling, the no votes on this and that. Some of them could have done better processes. Some of them could have done better plans. But some of them have done a lot of process and had very good plans, and the faculty still voted no, partly because of the union and partly because they still don't trust that this isn't a show. They still don't believe that the Superintendent is actually firmly behind it. The logic goes, if the Superintendent truly meant for the small schools to be part of his legacy in Boston, he would have dealt with special ed. Administrator F

If, on the other hand, the answer to the question we posed is "no," and the district and its partners conclude they cannot achieve the goals of high school renewal given the conditions described, and if they cannot change those conditions, then the district and its partners have to adapt their initial strategies so that the goals are achievable given the conditions in the district and schools. Without the district and its partners pausing to consider the issues raised in this section of the report and considering how to address them, we imagine that the schools will continue to struggle and fail to meet the district's goals, headmasters and teachers as well as the partners will become increasingly frustrated, and students will have no greater rates of success than they had prior to high school renewal.

Summary: Organization and Leadership of High School Renewal. Without question, the Superintendent, Deputies and others involved with the work of high school renewal know that its organization and leadership has not been as focused as it should be. They recognize that the schools face challenges and inconsistencies as they try to work with each of the parties to high school renewal. Headmasters have not been shy about reporting their frustrations to us and, as it turns out, to members of a research team that is part of the Public Education Leadership Project (PELP) in which the district participates. Researchers with this project interviewed four headmasters with respect to the district's high school renewal work. In a memo to headmasters dated July 21, 2005, written in partial response to the PELP findings, the Superintendent wrote:

> Many of the comments in the interviews [with headmasters] called for greater consistency, clarity and alignment among the various entities providing support and supervision to large district high schools reorganizing into small schools and

> small learning communities. The Headmasters noted the challenge of receiving direction and technical assistance from various central offices as well as partner organizations, without clear guidance about where the authority for decision-making ultimately rests. (Page 6)

In this memo, the Superintendent and his senior leadership team provided headmasters with an overview of high school renewal that clearly linked it with the district's reform agenda, *Focus on Children II*, and reviewed two key additional strategies that are specific to high schools: a) small schools/small learning communities, and b) a new graduation policy that provides schools with a choice of three "pathways" to high school graduation. The memo also reiterated district requirements and school-level flexibilities. Finally, the memo identified the areas for which key members of the BPS are responsible.

This memo, known familiarly as "the coherence document," was crafted to help headmasters understand the extant organization. As such, the memo lays out the responsibilities and authority of the Deputy Superintendents for Clusters and Schools and that of the Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Leaning. It is this memo that identifies the process and timeline for developing new courses and it is this memo that suggests a more prominent role for the Deputies for Schools and Clusters with high school renewal.

Nonetheless, the specific roles and responsibilities of the OHSR and the partner organizations remain unspecified. For example, the memo notes that the Headmasters have access to "technical assistance and support from a variety of central offices and external partner organizations" and offers headmasters the following definitions of the roles of two key groups on which we have focused this evaluation report.

> The **Office of High School Renewal (OHSR)**, which plays a pivotal role in helping schools conduct strategic planning and implementation of reorganizing into smaller units;
>
> Several external organizations that have been highly engaged in our high school renewal work: the **Boston Plan for Excellence**, **Jobs for the Future**, the **Center for Collaborative Education** and the **Boston Private Industry Council**; (Letter from the Superintendent dated July 21, 2005)

We are not sure that these definitions offer much clarification because they do not specify what each group can offer nor do they tell headmasters whether one or the other groups has precedence or authority over the other. The information provided does not enable headmasters to delineate an organizational chart of roles, responsibilities, and lines of accountability so that they and the partners understand the organizational structure and leadership for the next phases of the work.

It is important that the district has recognized the challenges posed by its extant organization and leadership with respect to high school renewal. However, given the depth and breadth of the

problems posed by the current operating system and given the level of frustration expressed by many involved in this work, it is not surprising that there are some in our sample who wonder about the extent to which the "coherence document" will lead to real changes in organization and leadership. Many participants in high school renewal among the partners, headmasters, and district leaders reported their hope that by recognizing and naming the challenges posed by the high school renewal work, the district will realign it so that its goals can be achieved.

III. STUDENTS' VIEWS OF SMALL SCHOOLS AND SMALL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Boston is converting its large high schools into small high schools and SLCs because it has concluded that small size facilitates the kinds of experiences that will enable high school students to be successful. The district has concluded that the qualities associated with smallness would help to reduce students' alienation from school, from teachers, and from other adults associated with school, and help students to dramatically increase their literacy skills. The district's rationale was re-stated in 2004 in the "Small High School Development Request for Proposals" and "District High School Redesign Proposal,"

> The Superintendent understood that small school size is a necessary, but not sufficient, component in high school student success. Distinctiveness, a nurturing and personalized culture, high level instruction, and a challenging academic curriculum are all attributes that improve learning environments for students and teachers. ("Small High School Development RFP Draft," 5/5/04)[40]

In light of these desired outcomes for students, Education Matters interviewed a total of 46 ninth and tenth grade students in the small schools and SLCs in 13 focus groups and 21 focus group interviews. We asked questions in order to learn about their experience in these small schools and SLCs with respect to 1) the relationships teachers had developed with students and the extent to which students thought teachers cared about them, 2) the culture and climate in their small schools and SLCs, 3) their perception of their schools/SLCs as having specific identities, and, 4) the interest and rigor of their academic course work. We greatly appreciate students' willingness to participate in focus groups and to share their thoughts about their experiences in small schools and SLCs.

Our student data lead us to conclude that from the students' perspective, small schools and SLCs have not yet created the "distinctive" environments, "nurturing and personalized culture, high level instruction," and "challenging academic curriculum" which BPS associates with high school student success. This conclusion should not be surprising in light of the school-based data we presented in our baseline report and the data we have presented so far in this report. After all, if high school renewal has not yet achieved the conditions that are posited to be associated with positive school environments, and if, fundamentally, instruction has not improved in ways desired by the district, it would be unlikely to find that students identified these features in their schools. Therefore, while the findings from students are disheartening in light of students' needs and the goals of high school renewal, they can serve to remind everyone involved with high school renewal of the reasons for this important work.

[40]The "District High School Redesign Proposal" used similar language to describe the rationale for creating small learning communities within district high schools.

We turn now to a more detailed discussion of our findings with respect to 1) personalized relationships and school/SLC-wide culture, 2) distinctive identities of small schools and SLCs, and 3) student engagement with instruction.[41]

Personalized Relationships and Small High School/SLC Culture. One of the key reasons for breaking large schools into smaller units was to foster the creation of personalized, supportive relationships between students and adults and between students and other students. Smallness, it was hypothesized, would create the possibility of personalizing relationships by avoiding the student anonymity prevalent in large high schools. In large high schools, the district argued, it was too easy for students to progress through high school with little individualized social, emotional, and academic support. Without such social and academic supports, too many students failed to achieve and many dropped out of school altogether.

Therefore, the district included among its criteria for small schools and SLCs in the first set of conversions the following requirement: "Each student has a mentor. Schools should develop their plans to assure that each student has a close and continuing relationship with at least one adult who can provide guidance and support." ("Report on Status of Redesign of Boston's District High Schools," no date.) The district elaborated the guidelines for "meaningful relationships among students and adults" for the newest set of small schools to include "at least one adult who can provide or broker guidance, individualized instructional support, and post-secondary counseling" ("Small High School Development RFP Draft," 5/5/04). As a result of the proposal requirement, we understand that many of these small schools are implementing "advisories," small groups of students who regularly meet with the same adult, in order to meet these guidelines.[42]

The small high schools and SLCs in Education Matters' evaluation sample, however, were unable to find the time for advisories or other school- or SLC-wide mentoring programs in their schedules during the 2004-2005 school year. These schools did not have the option of developing Humanities courses as a way to find the time because a) the Pathway graduation policy had not yet been adopted, and b) teachers would have to vote to accept the schedule change required for the Humanities courses or any other scheduling change that would provide time for advisories and, as a result, change the working conditions agreed to in their contract. As we explained in the previous section of this report, teachers in the schools in our sample were not apt to vote for such schedule and course changes

Therefore, when we interviewed students, we did not expect to learn about formal advisory or mentoring programs. Rather, we were interested in learning about the relationships students had developed with teachers, administrators, and other adults in the small schools and SLCs, and the

[41]Unless otherwise indicated, our data reflect the views of students in small high schools, cross-grade, and grade-level SLCs.

[42]We remind readers that it was, in part, the requirement to provide advisory time that led some of the new small high schools to adopt Humanities courses and Pathway II for their graduation policy.

extent to which students thought the small schools and SLCs had developed personalized and supportive climates and cultures.

In each of the small schools and SLCs, students identified teachers and/or other adults whom they thought cared about them and who could offer them support. Our data suggest, however, that students, with one exception, did not see nurturing and supportive school- and SLC-wide climates and cultures developing in their small schools and SLCs.

Students in each small school and SLC in our sample described individual teachers and, in some cases, guidance counselors, Student Development Advisors[43], custodians, disciplinarians, and administrators whom they thought cared about them and who could offer them support. When asked, they were explicit in offering examples of what these adults did that they understood to be evidence of caring and support.

First, with respect to teachers, nearly all students in our sample described specific teachers' efforts to help them master academic content as evidence of caring. For example, students in our sample noted teachers who took extra time either during class or after school to explain difficult concepts to them. They described teachers' efforts to use a variety of instructional approaches to appeal to different students' strengths and needs. And, they described teachers' enthusiasm for teaching and their persistence in helping students to understand academic content as factors they associated with caring. Several students noted that the teachers who cared were those who pushed them to achieve at higher levels, even if students were at first resistant to the push.[44]

> It was like, I didn't, in the beginning, when I first got here, I just could not-- I never got along with her. It was like I came from middle school and I was just used to like, if I didn't want to do my work then I wouldn't do it. It wasn't like that with her. It was like you're going to do it regardless of whether you want to do it or not, or just get out of my classroom. So after a while realizing it's going to be the same thing everyday if I don't do her work, I finally [thought], all right let me just start doing it. And it was like she pushed me beyond what I was used to. And it made me see that I'm capable of more. So to me in the beginning I would say she wasn't my favorite teacher, she was my least favorite. But now when I look back at it, it's like she pushed me so much that next year I'm going to be in Honors English. SFG A

[43]The Student Development Advisor position combined the responsibilities of guidance counselor and student support person into one position in the small schools.

[44]Key to numerical modifiers with respect to student focus group data: We interviewed 46 students in 21 focus group interviews during the 2004-2005 school year. We define here our use of numerical modifiers that might otherwise be unclear:"a small number" or "a few" indicate 2-4 students; "several" indicates 5-10 students; "some" indicates 10-20 students.

> I think every teacher should be like Teacher G and Teacher H. Teacher G's class, I seriously learn something. If every class was like Teacher G's, I think this school would be – Teacher G's class, I'm not saying everybody's like, "Oh, she's a bad person," but everybody knows they learn something in there, and if they get a bad grade, they deserve it. Everybody's just lazy, because she gives a lot of work, and everyone complains about it. You got to know the work, because if you don't know the work and you just sit there and don't do anything, it seems like [it's hard] . . . But as soon as you start getting into the motions, then it's easy. She doesn't play around. . . . Teacher G's the one. She's preparing everybody, she's really serious about her job. She's serious about everything she does. That's why I like her. SFG B

> Student 1: I learned a lot because Teacher I, she's great. She is really into it. Like really, really into it. She is a really good teacher. I think she is one of the best. She connects with us. She makes class fun. Like she doesn't make it boring. Student 2: Like we had another teacher but she recently-- She didn't choose to leave but she was told that she had to leave because when they had to go the layoffs. Teacher J was one of the best. She was strict but she was one of the best. She taught history. And she made it fun. But she knew her boundaries. She knew how to discipline us. SFG C[45]

Students provided us with clear examples of what teachers did within individual classes to express the fact that they cared.

> She picks on the quiet people, so you know she cares. If you're too quiet in the class, you can fail the class, if you're not participating. Participation is a major part of your grade. SFG D

> She makes an effort – like every time we do something new, she always tries to explain it. . . . And she shows that she really cares because the class is disruptive, but she still tries to talk over them and help you. And if you are not doing so good, she will try to get you to do better. And she will make sure that you don't fail her class. SFG E

> Student 1: She makes it fun. She makes it seem exciting. It is not like, "Oh, today we are going to do this and this." She explains what it is about and why we are doing it. Student 2: When she talks she is excited. Student 3: She is more excited than we are. Student 2: She is a really great teacher because she is so enthusiastic. Student 1: And it's not like when she gives us homework we are the only one that's doing homework. I think she is doing research and all that

[45]When more than one student speaks in a quotation, we have numbered them sequentially within each quotation. The numbers are not pseudonyms for specific students.

> stuff, too. I think she does a lot, too. I can imagine her staying up until like one a.m., going on the computer, researching the [topics we are studying in class]. SFG C

> That's why I like [this teacher]. Because she actually shows – even though it gets on my nerves when she's in my face telling me to do my work and come to class, it doesn't bother me because I know she cares. You know what I'm saying? Whenever she thinks I'm failing or anything that's going to affect my grade, she keeps me aware. SFG F

With respect to pedagogy alone, students told us that they preferred classes in which teachers a) employed a variety of instructional strategies, including hands-on activities, b) allowed them to make their own choices, and c) provided them with opportunities to talk and share their opinions. What stood out in students' comments as more important than pedagogy, however, were the links students made between pedagogy, the effort they put into their class work, and their perceptions of their teachers' engagement with teaching them. What mattered to students was that teachers demonstrated that they cared about them through how they ran their classes and what they demanded.[46]

Given the importance students attributed to teachers' demonstrating that they care about students' learning, it is possible that this teacher characteristic, coupled with pedagogical practices that enable students to engage in different kinds of learning activities, could go a long way toward improving student engagement and learning. The students in our sample suggested that while some teachers met these standards, most did not.

Secondly, our student data suggest that, for some students in our sample, it was teachers' and other adults' ability to relate to them that showed that they cared. Our data suggest that by "relating" students meant that teachers and other adults took the time to learn about them and to listen to them. Teachers and other adults who could "relate" to students also treated the students with respect.

> . . . she treats us like young adults, the way we should be treated. She talks to us . . . like she would to any normal person. She would tell us what happened to her yesterday, and then we tell her what happens to us. Every morning she tells us, "What happened to you guys?" Or, "Tell me something interesting. Like, what are you going to do over the vacation?" SFG D

[46]Without question, there are many students who do not come to school regularly, students who are troubled and create difficult situations in classes regardless of teacher knowledge and skill, and others who are trying hard to learn. The students in our focus group sample most likely represent the latter group. They are the students who were selected for the focus groups because a) they attend school regularly enough to suggest they would be in school for the interviews, and b) they were able to get a parent's or guardian's signature on the permission slip. As a result, they likely do not represent the entire population of ninth and tenth graders in these schools.

> Student 1: [Teacher I is] just cool. . . . You can tell her anything. Student 2: She's nice, she's understanding. Like she's a teacher, at the same time as she could be like your mom. She listen to us. SFG G

> I mean Teacher K is another great teacher, too. Like she doesn't down you. She talks to you with respect all the time. As soon as you disrespect her, she loses respect for you, but she will still speak to you respectfully. And it's like she is a really great teacher. She helps you out when you need help. SFG C

A small number of students mentioned teachers' ability to understand their racial or ethnic background as an important factor in relating to them. However, such teachers did not necessarily share the students' race or ethnicity. For example, several African-American and Latino students in our sample described teachers of varying backgrounds who "understand black students," for instance (SFG A) or who had made efforts to learn about their neighborhoods and backgrounds, as teachers who could relate to them.

At the same time, one or two of these students wished for more teachers who shared common backgrounds with them. An African-American student who reported that most of her teachers were white expressed why it mattered to her to have more African-American teachers. To do this, she described a relationship with an African-American adult in the school who held a non-teaching position on the staff.

> See, if we had teachers like her, work would be – I'm not saying it would be easier. It's just that it would be better. . . She's black. She's real cool. . . . Her personality reminds me of people that's in my family. You can relate to her. . . . She lived in places like where we live right now. Like the most places we live – like I live in [a specific Boston neighborhood]. She lived around the neighborhood I used to live. Then most of the neighbors that I know and I chill with, she's been there, she knows people from there. So we could relate to her. SFG A

Teachers' and other adults' demonstrations of caring by a) helping students academically, and b) relating to them were not mutually exclusive. Students often described teachers and other adults who did both.

In contrast, students were clear in expressing their thoughts about behaviors they perceived as showing that teachers and other adults did not care about them. Several students in our sample perceived teachers who could not control their classrooms or who placed what students considered to be too great an emphasis on control as teachers who did not care about them. One student, for example, described a teacher who had lost control of the classroom as a teacher who had "given up." (SFG C) If the teacher had only put forth effort, this student suggested, the class would have been orderly and students would have been able to learn. A few students reported feeling patronized and badgered by teachers and administrators who maintained what they saw as too strict of control over school and classroom rules. We are not suggesting that the teachers

and administrators in these examples did not care about their students. Rather, we are reporting what some students in our sample perceived as actions associated with a lack of care and respect for students.

Students in most focus groups reported that only specific teachers appeared to care about them. Other teachers and adults in their small schools or SLCs, they reported, did not seem to care about them and did not support them. A small number of students reported that they thought almost all of their teachers did not care about them. Students in two of the SLCs, however, reported that nearly all the teachers in their SLCs regularly demonstrated caring through the way in which they taught students and/or related to them.

However, even in the SLCs where students reported that most of the teachers cared about them, we learned of few relationships between teachers and students, other adults and students, or students and students that provided the "close and continuing relationship" including on-going "guidance and support" that the high school renewal designers envisioned. We would expect such support to include teachers or other adults knowing students well, keeping abreast of students' academic, social, and emotional needs both inside and outside of the classroom, and providing or brokering on-going support in all of these areas.

Students' comments suggested, rather, that while it was extremely important to them to have teachers and other adults in their schools/SLCs who demonstrated caring behaviors, these behaviors generally did not extend beyond what one might find in any school, large or small.[47] The data do not lead us to conclude that many students thought that their teachers knew how they were doing in other classes or what significant factors were challenging to them outside of school, for example. Students reported that while in some instances their guidance counselors or Student Development Advisors intervened to address academic or social concerns in their lives at key moments, at other times the students had minimal contact with these individuals.

School Climate and Caring. We turn now to brief descriptions of the climates that students described in their small schools and SLCs. We begin with a description of an SLC in which there was evidence that a positive and supportive climate was beginning to emerge. We then turn to a description of a small school in which students provided differing assessments of the climate. Finally, we describe a small school in which students in our sample consistently described a troubling and caustic climate.[48] We are not suggesting that the climate and culture in any of these schools or SLCs is linked to their structure – whether small school or SLC. Our

[47]There are always some teachers who connect well with students and students recognize such teachers whatever the school context. For the most part, these are teachers who push students academically and get to know the students within their own classrooms.

[48]We have chosen to use the word "caustic" to indicate that destructive character of the climate and culture in this school. Teacher data would lead us to the same conclusion. Teachers report that the adult culture in the school is destructive of adult relationships and stands in the way of improving the culture as well as instruction in the school.

data do not suggest such a link. Rather, we are describing the range of climates students experienced in the small schools and SLCs in our sample during the 2004-2005 school year.

In one of the SLCs in which students had reported that nearly all their teachers cared about them, students reported, as well, that they had begun to form supportive relationships with peers within the cross-grade SLC.

> Student 1: This community made me come to school every day. . . the students, your friends. . . . This community is like a family, everybody is together. . . .
> Student 2: The whole community. . . they single you out right away – it's a lot more tutoring. When I was back in middle school, everything use to be all hectic, the teacher didn't always get to you. SFG H

According to these students, the relationships they had formed with teachers and students made the SLC an appealing place for them and contributed to their ability to learn through the academic push and support that teachers provided. These students' comments suggest that beyond individual relationships, a climate of support was evident to them across their SLC. This is a promising finding from one SLC.

The findings with respect to school culture and climate in other small schools and SLCs within our sample were different. In one small school, for example, students were mixed in their assessments of the school climate and culture. About half of the students reported that teachers cared about them and that the small size of the school created more order than they would expect to experience in a larger high school. However, the other half of students reported that they "don't like the environment" and that most "teachers don't care" about them. (SFG C)

In the second small school, students reported that, in spite of the efforts of some teachers to establish positive climates within their classrooms, the climate that pervaded the school was caustic.

> [The school] is nothing, nothing but fighting. You don't learn nothing because everybody is ruining things. You don't even go on field trips or nothing. They think that just because some people ruin it, that everybody should be penalized. SFG E

> I don't want another [assembly in our school]. You know, we have a guest speaker and we're all rude to her. She's going to tell other people, "Don't go to that school. It's corrupted. They won't listen to you. They don't care." It just puts more [of a] bad name onto our school. SFG I

> It's been hectic. . . . It's been crazy. A lot of people been getting into fights. Kids don't listen. They're acting crazy, running through the halls. . . . . It's all throughout the school. SFG J

Students reported that they could not learn in many of their classrooms due to constant disruption. Other students reported that they were part of the disruption.

The following student's comment sums up what many expressed about their perception of their school.

> I'm a kid that wants to learn; we're kids that want to learn. If the teacher came late, that would be an issue because you're depriving kids of their education. But, because kids don't care about education in this school, who cares if the teachers come late? SFG F

Regardless of whether they themselves cared about their education, there was a pervasive sense that students and teachers in the school did not care about students' education nor about the students as dynamic individuals with a range of social, emotional, and academic needs.

We reported above that student data from one SLC led us to conclude that the SLC had begun to develop the supportive, personalized climate and culture that the district and its partners desire. However, other SLCs and the two small high schools in our sample were far from developing such a climate and culture. Furthermore, in two of the small schools, our student data suggest that one of the obstacles to creating personalized relationships and a supportive school/SLC culture, from the perspective of the students, was headmaster leadership style. Some students in our sample from the small high schools perceived that their headmasters did not care about them. They drew this conclusion from specific headmaster behaviors.

Students in each of these schools noted that the headmasters spent little time interacting with students in order to establish relationships with them. In addition, students in one of the schools noted that the headmaster did not take students "seriously," a conclusion they drew as the result of the headmaster's inconsistent enforcement of school rules.[49]

> If the guidance counselor cares, then the students care. The same goes for the principal. I mean if she is going to be in her office like the whole five hours and one hour she is going to walk around, not saying anything, why would the students care. If she is not doing her part, why should the students do their part? SFG C

> Student 1: Let me tell you something, if I ever got in trouble in school, and the teacher told me she was going to report me to the principal, I'd brush it off like, I don't care. But if she said, Headmaster S, then I'd be like, "Whoa, oh my God," and get all scared. Because she's the only one that really enforces the rules, or comes and sits in our classes. Student 2: Exactly. If she is in a class and we need

[49]Teachers in our sample described similar headmaster behaviors. They did not, however, draw the conclusion that headmasters did not care. Rather, they suggested that the headmasters did not have the requisite leadership skills.

> help, then we get extra help. We never see [the headmaster]. Headmaster S should be the [headmaster] because she's doing everything that Headmaster R should do. Like, it's the end of the year and [the headmaster is] walking through the hallways trying to regulate stuff. And that's why nobody listens to her. Student 1: Exactly, kids disrespect her all the time because she doesn't have a relationship with her students that much. SFG F[50]

These comments reflect focus group data from both small schools. In addition, multiple students in one of the schools reported that, although the school had established mechanisms through which students could have a voice in the school, for example, the student council, when they attempted to use these mechanisms in order to plan student activities, the headmaster rebuffed or ignored their efforts.

> In the beginning we wanted to plan a lot of student activities and stuff like that, but in a way it's kind of hard for us to organize some of those things. We wanted to have a bake sale, but it was hard to do some of those things. We didn't have much support [from the headmaster]. We even planned a big meeting with her and the other teachers, and she forgot to remind the teachers. And we tried to reschedule it, but she never put the letter in the teachers' boxes. So what does that make us think? She never really wanted to do it. SFG F

Students' frustration with these headmasters is evident in the language they used to describe them. They wondered why they should listen to or respect headmasters who, from their perspective, did not listen to or show respect for them.

Students' perceptions that their headmasters do not care about them would be important in any schools. These perceptions, however, are especially salient in the context of small high schools and SLCs that have been designed with the goal of creating more personalized and caring relationships among students, teachers, and other adults in the schools. Headmasters in all schools can set the tone for the climate and culture through the behaviors they project and through the behaviors they accept, or do not accept, from others. The headmasters in these small schools, the data lead us to believe, have not consistently modeled positive norms of behavior for students and teachers nor have they held students and adults in their schools accountable for behaviors associated with positive school climates. Whereas positive, supportive climates might well reduce student alienation and increase students' attachment to school, our data suggest that when students in these schools perceived the climate as negative, uncaring, and, in the case of the second school, caustic, they reported little attachment to their school. They did not want to attend and they reported often feeling that, as a result of the disruptions, they could not learn.

Distinctive Identity/Thematic Focus. Designers of high school renewal required that "each small school or learning community must have a distinct and compelling vision, mission

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[50]To preserve the confidentiality of the headmasters, we have used new headmaster pseudonyms in this quote.

statement, goals, objectives, and identity that clearly communicates its overall direction and focus." ("Report on Status of Redesign of Boston's District High Schools," no date.) Distinct identities were considered important because they could a) increase school's appeal to students, b) offer them a range of choices among multiple high schools and SLCs, c) serve as a focus for building community in each school, and d) have the potential to engage students with academic work through connections between the identity of the school and core subject matter. In the small schools and cross-grade SLC within our sample, this identity has been linked to distinct school- or SLC-wide themes. These themes were in place in all the small schools and cross-grade SLCs in our sample during the 2003-2005 school years and, in some cases, had been in place for several prior years. The grade-level SLCs in our sample did not have thematic foci by design.[51]

Therefore, we asked students in our focus groups in the small schools and cross-grade SLCs to describe their experience with respect to their own school's/SLC's thematic focus. We learned that approximately one quarter of the students in our sample had chosen their small school or high school with SLCs based, at least in part, on their knowledge of the thematic focus. The remainder of the students, three quarters, had not chosen their small school or high school with SLCs based on their themes. These students' understandings of the schools'/SLCs' thematic foci were largely shaped by their experience in the schools, rather than by prior knowledge or interest.

Some students in one small school and the cross-grade SLC reported that they had experienced strong connections to the school or SLC theme. These students encountered the theme either in signature courses or in a specific subject area course directly related to it. We learned from students, teachers, and administrators that connections to the theme were seldom made in other courses.

Students, for the most part, reported that the connections, when they occurred, were interesting to them. The following student expressed her interest in thematic connections forged by two teachers:

> I think it is good because they do a lot of stuff with the [theme]. Like [Teacher X], she does the [activity related to the theme]. [Teacher Y], she does a lot of trips. And she works with [an external partner] a lot. There's a program that we went to and it was like a field trip. . . . I like it because they do a lot of stuff with the [school's theme]. It is interesting. SFG C[52]

[51]We noted in our baseline report about the ways in which grade-level SLCs had focused on providing a supportive environment for students and orienting them to high school.

[52]We have omitted specific examples from the section on small school and SLC themes in order to avoid identifying the schools and SLCs.

Likewise, students in a signature course in the cross-grade SLC spoke excitedly about the numerous units and activities related to the theme their teacher had organized. They noted their interest in the theme itself, in the connections she made between the theme and a particular academic content area that was of interest to them, and in the interactive activities, such as debates, group work, and field trips that focused on topics related to the theme.

A small number of students in both the small school and cross-grade SLC reported that they were involved in extra-curricular activities related to the theme, as well. In this way, the theme extended beyond the classroom for these students.

> [We] went on tours. . . . Well yeah, I did learn more, like more stuff [about the theme]. I mean, I've been living in Boston all my life, but I never been [there before]. So I never knew there was a [location of the trip]; I love that. It was like history. SFG G

More than half of the students who had encountered some connection to the theme thought that they would benefit from greater integration of the theme into their classes and across the school. These students noted that the theme lent itself to hands-on activities and/or projects that would help them to engage with their work by making it more interesting and easier to remember.

> Yeah, [I would like to see more focus on the theme] because I actually like [the theme]. The way it is now, I don't learn nothing. It's just boring. It depends on what kind of stuff is it. If I find it interesting, I'm more prone to keep it in memory and memorize it, and study more often. But if it's just something that I don't find interesting, it's just like in one ear, out the other. So I think if we did more [with the theme] and had more hands-on [activities related to the theme]. I think I would learn more and it'd be more helpful to us. SFG G

This is a promising finding, in that it suggests that students who were engaged by their small school or SLC theme saw how the theme could be used to help them to learn, and wanted to take part in high quality instruction related to the theme.

However, more than three-quarters of the students in our sample who attended small schools or cross-grade SLCs reported that they experienced few, if any, connections to the theme in their small school or SLC.

> It's like, [the theme is X]; we don't do any of that. We're not learning that. SFG B

> I don't see [the theme as] interesting. I don't really think about it. I just see it as something that they labeled the school. I don't see how we focus on that a lot. I don't really know. SFG G

> Student 1: I don't even know what the theme is. Student 2: I heard about it [from other students]. But you're not going to learn about it until eleventh and twelfth grade. SFG J
>
> But the school doesn't offer any [extra-curricular activities related to the theme] – or at least I don't see it posted in our school . . . or a contact number or anything, I don't see it. SFG I

These students were enrolled in signature courses and core content courses that, in theory, could have strong connections to the theme. Why then did they report so little knowledge of the themes as compared to their classmates quoted above? We learned of several factors associated with these students' lack of encounters with the thematic foci of their small schools and SLCs. There may be other factors, as well, of which we are not aware.

First, teachers and administrators in one of the small schools reported that the school leaders and faculty had not clearly defined the theme for themselves. Although some professional development time had been scheduled to address integration of the theme into the school's academic courses and some theme-related programming for upperclassmen had been implemented, adults in the school still remained unclear about its meaning.

> It's still this amorphous thing [to the students]. What is it? What does it mean? And, so I think we have to do a better job at communicating what we are and who we are so the kids – so if you would stop the kids and say, "What is [the meaning of the theme]? What is it about?" that they could actually give you a coherent response. I don't think we've done a good job of helping kids to articulate that. . . We had planned to spend [professional development] time in the spring working on the theme, and then we ended up spending time on [other issues]. We didn't shift to the focus on the theme. I think, in order for the students to get a sense, the adults need to have a sense. We need to start with us, and we don't have a clear sense of what our school is about. Headmaster D

Second, we learned from teacher and administrator data in both the small school described above and the cross-grade SLC that the curricula for signature courses varied significantly from teacher to teacher, even among signature courses with the same title. We learned of several instances in which new teachers were left to develop signature course curricula on their own without access to existing materials and without the support of colleagues. In addition to developing curricula that diverged from that of their colleagues, given this process, teachers developed curricula with varying degrees of connection to the school or SLC theme.[53] Finally, one of the signature courses in the small school described above did not include any direct links, by design, to the school's theme. This further reduced the opportunities ninth and tenth grade students had to learn about their school's theme.

[53]We will discuss challenges to developing thematically focused courses later in this section of the report.

Third, in the other small school, which did not offer signature courses, school leaders intended for connections to the theme to be made in core content courses and in a few special theme-related courses. We learned, however, that most thematic connections and projects related to the theme were offered in only a small number of sections of a particular course. For example, if a math teacher taught four sections of ninth grade math, she would incorporate theme-related connections into only one section. Most of the time, the section with the theme was the "honors" section of the course.

School leaders suggested that they wished to make thematic connections available to more students. However, they encountered obstacles to expanding access to thematic projects. One obstacle was lack of funding for enough materials to supply all students. In addition, they could not figure out how to include all students at a given grade level in field trips related to the theme because of logistical challenges related to the number of adults who needed to attend field trips and the need for substitute coverage when teachers were away on field trips.

> You also have to remember, too, that [teachers are] also thinking that when they leave the school – and this is the down side of the model, this is the big down side – when they leave the school, we have to get coverage for the rest of their classes. So if they take all their classes out during the week, all those kids are missing classes. . . . If I teach four classes of English, and I decide I'm going to the library, and I take each class to the library, that's four days out of the classroom, because I'm out at the library with my kids. [If they were to take all the students at once, that is about 90 students] on the bus. One chaperone per ten people, ten kids. So you can see the logistics, they're very difficult. . . . Where do you get those [nine] adults without leaving classes uncovered? Headmaster G

Our data suggest that school leaders had not figured out how to overcome these obstacles by the end of the 2004-2005 school year.

Finally, in both small schools and the cross-grade SLC, we learned that teachers had little common planning time in which to discuss and/or plan how to integrate the theme into signature courses or core academic courses. The following teacher reported that although the school theoretically allotted time for collaborative planning of thematic projects, in practice the administration did not protect that time or structure it to support the planning of thematic projects.

> But I know the mission statement [including the thematic focus] is certainly a framework, but at this point the connection, the way curriculum is planned, the way that daily lessons are planned, I would definitely. . . not say that that's an emphasis. The time has been set up, in theory to provide for collaborative thematic work in each grade level. So, from the outside it definitely appears that that could be a priority, but there has not been a whole lot of involvement from the administration in those meetings, or those free periods, and beyond that

> there's also been a lot of other initiatives that have seemed to conflict with those periods. Teacher G

Headmaster G concurred that sufficient common planning time was not available to teachers, due to staffing constraints.

> [Teachers collaborated to plan thematic projects in the past] because they had common planning time. Common planning time is critical and yet, with the staffing we have right now, we cannot schedule for it. Headmaster G

In addition, several teachers in our sample reported that, even if they could find time to plan thematic connections, they were not able to fit those connections into their courses as a result of the district's pacing demands and/or the need to prepare students for MCAS.

> [The theme] rarely is part of the class actually, to be honest. Because with, and it is becoming more and more this way where the content that we teach, because of district testing, is not so much in our control. Teacher D

> I do have to admit that the curriculum that has been placed on me this year is so specific that I've been forced to focus more on covering the basics than on what I'd rather teach. I would have liked to start the year out doing [a unit that incorporates the theme into my content area]. I didn't have time to do that. It was on my curriculum map, and I had to take it off because I'm too stressed trying to figure out a way to get the plays and the speeches done before MCAS time. Teacher E

We have no evidence to suggest that administrators or anyone else helped teachers to think about how to integrate the thematic foci into their courses without compromising the district and state requirements, or, indeed, if this could be done.

Our data suggest that opportunities to connect deeply with small school and SLC themes were unavailable to the majority of ninth and tenth grade students in the small schools and SLCs in our sample. However, reports from the one quarter of students in our sample who experienced connections to their school's or SLC's theme suggest that themes have the potential to engage students and to foster their interest in academic content and in school itself.

In our baseline report we presented teachers' views on their schools'/SLCs' thematic foci and wrote the following:

> Despite the fact that each of these schools/cross-grade SLCs had developed its theme carefully over several years, teachers reported that they were not yet well enough developed as a public presence to entice many students. As a result, teachers in the small schools were not sure that students had a clear sense of what was special or unique academically about the school they were attending; . . .We

> do not yet know why it has been difficult for the schools to establish their themes and create a set of theme-focused activities that will increase student engagement. However, teachers and administrators agree that they have not yet done this; they have not yet established activities that enable students, from the first day of school, to experience what it means to be in a small high school with a focus. (Baseline report, p. 33)

One year later, we can report that teachers' perspectives are shared by their students. These small high schools and cross-grade SLCs have not yet created thematic foci that most students can identify and which engage them with their academic learning. Combined with our finding that students' personalized relationships with teachers and other adults in school do not differ significantly from the relationships they would likely find in any school, our data suggest that the small schools and SLCs in our sample have not yet created cultures and climates that are associated with the benefits of smallness.

District Data Related to the Status of Signature/Thematic Courses. In an effort to shed more light on the reasons for the status of signature/thematic courses, and with the goal of informing their improvement, we turn, once again, to the organization and leadership of high school renewal. What we learned, put simply, was that the development of these key courses had not been given attention by those most deeply involved with high school renewal. Rather, their development and implementation had been left to the schools where, given all that the schools had to manage, the courses have lacked ongoing, careful attention.

To provide evidence for this conclusion regarding the district's role in the development and support of signature/thematic courses, we begin with the perspectives of those closely involved with the work of high school renewal. Two key leaders of high school renewal agreed that, by and large, signature/thematic courses are weak in the district's small schools and cross-grade SLCs because the district has not provided support for their development.

> There are plenty of challenges [to developing these courses]. First: highly qualified. There's no such thing as a highly qualified signature teacher. So it's usually someone that has an opening in their master schedule that can pick up a section. That's the way it is. Two: there isn't coherence to program development or curriculum development, and that needs to happen. We have not, the district has not outlined who's in charge of that, who will support it, how we will bring about the curriculum support, materials, adoption, all of that. So when you don't give it the professional development training or the development work, you get what you get. And third: the courses are all over the place. They're popping up all over the place and schools don't even know why they're asking to have some of these courses developed. Some schools do, and some don't. But, there's no one really sitting down with schools and saying, "OK, what is your focus and why do you think it should be this?" And then, "What would you like to see happen in three months and how will we know we got there? Six months – how will we

> know we got there? A year out from now?" There's no benchmarking along the way, there's no sitting down with people to do that. Administrator C

> And then there's the other whole aspect of the signature courses being the newest courses and having the least resources available and the least developed curriculum. I think that's generally true for all schools that are new. Personally, I'm glad that central office is not defining what those courses are, but on the other hand, they're not fully developed, and so I think it's harder work for the teachers and the kids, and in some ways for the administrators too, to stay on top of that, because there are so many other things going on developmentally in the schools. Administrator E

The data from teachers assigned to teach these courses confirm that: a) the courses were often being developed as they were being taught; b) they were a fill-in course for many teachers; and, c) there appeared to be no curriculum associated with the courses from year to year.[54] For example, the teacher we quote next had been teaching for only a few years and was new to her school. For Teacher B the signature course completed her schedule. There was nothing in place, however, that described the curriculum when she began at the school.

> I am teaching U.S. History I, which is exactly what I want to teach, and a course that we are designing called [X], which apparently has been taught for a number of years. But apparently there is absolutely no curriculum, which is a big mystery why there is no curriculum. Teacher C

Teacher B a first-year teacher in a different school, was also assigned to one section of a signature course.

> I actually designed my own course this summer. I was given no prior [information], nothing, zero, about it, just the topic. I decided I'd create the whole course, and I did this summer. I was given the curriculum, probably, a week after I started. Like, ideas for a curriculum. Teacher B

Teacher B then described the history of this signature course in her school.

> Let's see. It gets tossed around. A teacher who was assigned to it last year was retiring, and gave it entirely to [someone else]. I know Teacher F taught it, but now she's teaching a different history of course. I think she taught it for awhile, this other teacher, Teacher E taught it as well, but that was two years ago. Teacher B

[54] As we noted earlier and based on student and teacher data, a few sections of signature/thematic courses were better developed than others and some teachers were eager to teach them.

"Tossed around" describes well what we learned about the assignment of signature courses during the two years of our data collection. Such an approach to developing and teaching the courses that are meant to engage students in the themes of their schools and, thereby, in their school's academic focus seems unlikely to produce good results. As we reported in the discussion of students' views of their signature/thematic courses, teachers may be trying to develop these courses, but most students are not yet finding them engaging.

Teachers who incorporated their school's theme into core courses did not face the same challenges. They had the opportunity to develop and improve what they were teaching and its links to the school's theme.[55] In contrast, teachers who taught the "stand-alone," signature/thematic courses were apt to tell stories of their course's development like those told by Teacher C and Teacher B.

Some administrators at the district level remain unconvinced about the value of such stand-alone signature classes for engaging students. Perhaps it has been this lack of conviction that has stood in the way of further development of these courses and of their having a somewhat marginal place in the schools' course offerings.

> We go back and forth about whether or not the signature course is the place where engagement is really going to happen. And, when we talked about signature courses, we have a special jargon for them, but I think in some ways they are the elective courses in most of our schools, and are treated that way, approached that way, by students, and at this point in development, by many staff as well. And what that does, I think, is, in a certain way, it can lead to a mentality of ceding interest. Saying, you know, the kids are going to get their juice out of their signature course classes, and by default, what that tends to mean is that the core classes don't have to be that interesting. So in many ways that thinking is problematic. Administrator E

We were told of two other challenges associated with designating these courses "electives." First, in the schools/SLCs in our sample, they were not truly electives; students could not opt in or out of them. Indeed, they were dubbed "required electives" in one small school. This pseudo-elective status irked students who wanted what they spoke of as "real" electives, art and/or music, for example. Second, if these courses were categorized as electives, then, we were told, students did not have to pass them in order to graduate from high school. As a result, the thematic/signature courses may have been further marginalized by being officially deemed as less important for students. Assuredly, neither of these findings contributed to strengthening the courses or students' interest in them. As one Deputy noted, placing the courses into the school organization in this way may have "siloed" them.

[55] As we discussed, however, such thematic courses were not available to all students.

> I don't think [the theme] has been integrated into the content, and I think that's one of the questions that a lot of the small school leaders are asking: How do I take this theme and weave it into English language arts or Humanities or math or so forth? I would suspect that some of it was happening [at this small school], but it was probably a little bit more siloed than more of an integration. Deputy C

However, we were also told that there were significant challenges to making a small high schools'/SLC's themes visible and important to students even when the themes were addressed in core courses.

> [The theme] is not something that permeates the school. You don't walk into the school and know immediately that there's a specific theme going on. A couple of classes are doing some stuff, but from the evidence I've seen, which I'm sure is limited, it doesn't seem like anything that's really taken off. I think there might be some pockets by a couple of teachers who do some good things, but to me if it was really a theme-based school, you'd walk into English classes and social studies classes, things like that, and you'd see the links, see the connections, you'd see some kind of evidence that that's what's going on, and you don't see that in the school. Deputy A

And, we were told that it may be that the district, in its high school renewal effort, is placing too much emphasis on the ability of such courses to engage high school students.

> I tend to think that in some ways, again, the identity of the school, like [X], for example, is only part of its identity, and I think properly so. Only part can be derived from any kind of thematic approach to the curriculum. I think more rightly, the identity is, what are the relationships like within the school? Do kids enjoy coming to that place as a school? Do they identify with that school as their school and want to continue there? Do they find the relationships with their peers worthwhile? Because I sometimes think that these themes that schools have can be a red herring for identity. I actually think that's a part of their identity, but I don't think it can stand for a large part of the school's identity. Administrator E

From our perspective, the bottom line is that the district and its high school renewal effort has asked schools to develop signature/thematic courses without sufficient support. At the moment, as these data demonstrate, too much signature/thematic course development is unsystematic, idiosyncratic, and dependent on the individual efforts of teachers. It is not, at the present time, embedded in a well-led, unified effort. Therefore, if these courses are deemed essential to engaging students, then their development requires greater support by those who support high school renewal along with those who are subject area specialists in C & I.[56] Our data, coupled

[56]We were told that newly hired personnel in the OHSR may take responsibility for the development of signature/thematic courses. While such individuals might have the requisite expertise for this work, we would argue that adding this course development component to the OHSR which has already taken on development of the

with what we know about whole school improvement and the needs of adolescents, lead us to conclude that without an intentional change in the way 1) student/adult relationships are established, and 2) thematic foci and other distinctive features of the small high schools and SLCs are developed, it is unlikely that these district's high schools will make significant progress toward engaging more students with their schools.

Student Engagement With Instruction. During the 2004-2005 school year Education Matters observed ELA classes to determine the extent to which teachers were using Workshop as their primary instructional strategy and we observed signature classes to learn how the schools'/SLCs' themes were expressed within them. We interviewed most student focus groups immediately after a classroom observation.[57]

As we stated at the beginning of this report, we continued to observe little Workshop-based instruction in ELA classes. Two teachers who were employing Workshop instruction during the 2003-2004 school year appeared to have made improvements in this area of instructional practice. One teacher who was new to our sample using Workshop quite fully in her ELA classes. A few teachers in our sample implemented a mix of teacher-directed and student-centered instructional approaches within the same class period. Most teachers reported that they continued to find it difficult to keep students on-task when they were involved in small group or individual work. We do not present any data, however, that speaks directly to ELA classes because students did not identify factors in those classes that differentiated them from classes in other content areas.

The signature classes we observed did not reflect what one would call "ambitious instruction." A small number of teachers attempted to engage students in thinking critically about what they were learning, but most were teacher directed. We saw scant evidence of student interest in these classes other than what we have reported in the previous section. This is not surprising given that the small schools and cross-grade SLCs in our sample were still struggling to develop their thematic foci and the "signature courses" that they expected would engage students and help them explore the theme of their small school or cross-grade SLC.

Therefore, we have organized our data about students' engagement with instruction around two themes: 1) what students like and dislike about the content of their classes, and 2) their views of the rigor of course work and the expectations of their teachers for high quality work.

Students' Reactions to Course Content. The students in our sample did not say much about the content of their courses even when we had specific questions because we had just observed. Some said that content was repetitive of what they had already learned in a previous grade and,

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Humanities courses, suggests de facto changes in the role of C & I. Such a development would likely add to the frustration already present in the BPS with respect to the organization and leadership of high school renewal.

[57]We had one teacher who did not agree to be observed and one teacher who was never able to schedule an observation time. In these cases, we asked students about their classes without having observed.

as a result, was not interesting to them. A few reported instances of being confused by the content, and a few talked about content that interested them. As a result, we have scant interview evidence of students' engagement with specific course content.[58] Students were more likely to tell us what they liked about a teacher or comment on pedagogy.

However, students spoke about content in general terms saying, for example, that they were learning to become better writers or were learning how to identify a theme in a piece of writing.

> I could organize it [my writing] better because he taught us that. Like I didn't notice before how when the writer writes, how the writer organizes it. Like, papers from the newspapers I noticed that. So she taught us that: how to read articles and see how the writer organizes his articles. Like how one sentence leads into another, that the one paragraph has to stay on topic. Do not use that much details, but enough details to explain your answer-- Yeah and topic sentence. But if you use too much details you'll probably come off track. SFG B

> [We're learning] how to find a theme in a book. We're learning how to make our essays be good, better. In the correct format. And how to write quotes. We're learning how to understand a book better. Like when you read something, you just don't pass by it. You understand it, you read it over, and just talk to somebody about it. SFG D

Students also made general comments about disliking some English, science, or math classes because the content was boring.[59] In contrast, a few students, as we noted in the previous section, were quite engaged with specific thematically-focused courses but felt that there were not enough of them in the school. Other students reported that they would be interested in courses related to the schools' theme, but did not have such courses available.

However, two small pieces of data point to links between how teachers structure lessons and students' reports of their interest in the content. In the first example, below, the students represent ninth graders who objected to studying "old" books or plays. Virtually all students read *Romeo and Juliet* during ninth grade in our data set; very few students were intrigued by the play or saw its relevance for themselves.

> I think [*Romeo and Juliet*] is boring. It's old. Who wants to learn about old stuff that we already heard about and know about? Like, we heard about it. We know

[58]Observation data suggest little student engagement in classes. However, as we noted in our baseline report, most classes had a small number of students who attempted to do the assigned work and participate in discussions.

[59]We know that "boring" is a word many adolescents use to describe school and a host of other areas. Therefore, while we want to report their reactions, we recognize that this adjective does not provide much insight into students' thinking.

> that they die at the end, they get married, their families don't like each other. We already know that. Basically, we know the plot of the story and what is going to happen. SFG K

Students in this class reported that the content, coupled with pedagogy, left them uninterested.

> Student 1: Sometimes she just lectures and sometimes, when we read, I just really don't find it interesting so I just fall asleep. Student 2: We have some hard workers, but the majority of the class likes to play around. Because there is no -- there is nothing that is interesting in the class, or they just say jokes and stuff to try to make the class more better, or make time go by. SFG K

However, in contrast, a small number of students spoke about the content of their classes with enthusiasm and indicated that they had reason to think that what they were learning was important. In the example that follows, it was the assignment, along with the text, that grabbed the student's interest.

As part of a lesson on the play *Antigone*, a student reported that Teacher E read a selection about the role of women in Sparta and in other ancient Greek city-states. She then asked students to write in their Writers' Notebooks about the role of women, giving them the option of writing about the role of women today in comparison to the role of women in ancient Greece. The following student was able to make a connection between her own experience and the experience of women in Sparta.

> [I wrote] about women in Sparta, how I connect with them more because I'm the type of person who – women in Sparta, they were independent and they were strong women. And like I said in class, I really don't need a boy to depend on. I would like them there, don't get me wrong. But I'm more of an independent person. I'm more of a person that you come to when you need somebody to depend on. I'm not really that person that goes to someone else to depend on. SFG H

This student's efforts to clarify her own position about what it means to be an independent woman suggest that she found the assignment engaging. The assignment, in this case, enabled the student to connect the "old" text to her current experience and she did not report that it was boring to read such an old text.

In a second example, one student explained how their work was engaging because it was important preparation for a significant guest speaker who would visit the following week.

> It's important because it's a really big thing that is happening Monday. I mean not every school or everyone gets a chance to sit down and talk with the head of the [new facility]. There are a lot of politicians involved in that. And it's very hard. Even news reporters can't even talk to her because she would refuse to,

> you know. But I know it would look bad on her part if she didn't show up at our school and talk to us. SFG C

The teacher had conveyed to students the magnitude of the opportunity that they had been given and, at least according to the students in this focus group, the message engendered in them the desire to be well-prepared.

Students in SFG H noted that their teacher gave them an assignment that had another quality they appreciated: they were able to choose how to express their learning. Choice, we were told, mattered to the students in our focus groups. Choice indicated to them that teachers had an interest in what they were thinking.

> Well, you just have to write a play about an idea that we have. We get to pick one of the things that we collected and we get to nurture it, which means we get to write out our ideas about what happens in our plays, how many scenes it is going to have and things like that. And then we go and we start doing our drafts on it. SFG H

From the perspective of a student in a different focus group, the absence of choice contributed to negative feelings about course content.

> I think that they should do more things that we like. They don't even take our opinion on what we want to do or what we might be interested in. They just choose everything for us and say you have got to do it. But half the time, students don't even like the stuff that they choose for us to do. SFG K

These student comments suggest that it is not only the content that matters, but the ways in which teachers succeed in generating student interest in topics related to the content and provide them with some choice in assignments. These examples suggest that if teachers framed the activities in interesting ways, ways that encouraged students to make connections to themselves or to see an activity as special or important, then they engaged with them. When teachers did not do this, or did not do it well, students regarded everything as "boring" or "disconnected."

Most students in our sample reported that they were minimally engaged in the majority of their classes and that they were not truly interested in what they were supposed to be learning.[60]

Achieving Good Grades/Academic Rigor. If students are going to achieve at levels considered necessary for success in post-secondary education and/or work, then their schools must engage them in producing high quality work that represents the academic rigor desired by the district and required for a score of "Proficient" on the state's assessment. The data we collected from

[60] The teacher data we collected during the two years of the evaluation support the students' reports on their levels of engagement in their classes.

the students in our sample suggests that, from their perspective, not only were most classes unengaging, for the most part, a) their classes were not rigorous, and b) it was easy to get an A or a B in most of them. However, students also reported that they tended to do as little work as necessary for some to get a B or a C and for others to pass. The rare exception to this pattern was found among students who were in some of the classes described in the previous section that linked pedagogy and personalization.

According to the students in our sample, in order to get an A or a B they needed to come to school, complete the assigned work, and make an effort. Students did not generally mention the quality of their work in their discussions of what it took to get a good grade.

> Student 1: Just do the work. Yes, do all your homework, do all your projects, come to school. Student 1: As long as you do it. As long as you do it, because I don't think I do my work, like sometimes, I do my work but I don't think I do it to the best that I know that I could do it, so I do it enough that I know that I could get by, and I still get a B. SFG K

> It's different things [to get a passing grade]. Like you have to take notes. It's not like normal classes where it's all about homework, and tests, and quizzes. It's effort, conduct, participation. You have to be-- like you don't do projects because it's math. But we do do certain projects. Yeah, like once you participate and he sees that you're trying, even if your test scores and your quizzes are not that good, she won't fail you. She won't pass you because of pity, like, "Oh, I feel bad for you so I'm going to pass you." She'll pass you if you try hard. Just if you show improvement, that's how she'll pass you. SFG A

> Do all your work. Participate. And keep up with your notebook. . . . It is not that she gives you a grade. You get what you deserve. You earn your grade. You work for what you get. SFG C

> Do all your work. There's really nothing to do. Like she said, if you do all your work, it's an easy A. All you have to do is just do it. You might not do every single assignment, but you do your work, because that's all you basically have to do. There's no extra things you have to do, as long as you just do your work, you'll get it easy. SFG G

> Basically you have to participate in class discussions. Have all the notes in notebooks. Have your notebook together, have all the notes with the dates, and she has to make sure you understand what you were taking about. And that's basically it. So it's pretty easy. SFG L

Students in our focus groups often noted that they could get better grades if they worked harder, but this knowledge did not motivate them.

> I think I know that I could pass every class with an A and every teacher says that to my mother, but I just do what I can get by with, like get Bs or Cs, because it's like, that -- I really, I do not want to have to go to summer school, and those are fair enough grades that I could like at least get into college with. SFG K

Not going to summer school was a more effective motivator, from the students' perspective, than the intrinsic value of doing their best. Getting the minimal grades necessary for college admissions or to pass was good enough in their view.

A Word About Honors Classes.[61] There was little difference in these findings about academic rigor when we spoke to students who were enrolled in classes that had the designation "honors." With respect to honors classes, students still reported that completing the work was the main influence on their grade. A small number added, however, that they had more work in honors than in regular classes.

> [You have to do] all of it [the work]. You have to do practically all of it. It's honors. You have to take that really into consideration. She is like, "This is honors. You have to be doing it twice as much as any other regular English class." SFG K

> She's teaching us college level. . . . Yes, college level non-stop writing, lots of reports, lots of homework. . . . Lots of essays every week. . . . And we have like an essay every week with like, we have to turn in rough drafts, concept work, peer editing, final copies, all kinds of stuff. SFG L

Nonetheless, the overwhelming finding with respect to honors classes was that students did not consider anything about them to reflect their view of what "honors" might mean. As these students' comments demonstrate, a) the academic demands did not seem to be different than the demands in other classes, b) students appeared to be assigned to honors classes, in part, as a result of teacher recommendation and, in part, as a result of scheduling, and c) honors classes were large, diverse and, at times, difficult for teachers to manage.

> I like it, but I don't feel like I'm in honors, because there's really nothing honors about. If anything, it was slower. The classes are so big – we're honors, right, and we're supposed to be advanced. We're supposed to do things one class ahead of the other classes, or two classes. But, in some classes, we're behind. I don't feel that it's the teachers' problem or whatever, I think it has to do with the class sizes and with us kids. If we could shut up and be quiet for once in a while, we'd learn something. And plus the class sizes are so big. It gets so crowded in the class, you can't help but to not learn anything, and the teachers are so busy

[61] Just over one-third of the students in our sample were enrolled in honors sections.

with everybody else, by the time they get to you, the class is over with. And while you're waiting, you might forget about your work and talk. SFG G

Like [the other student] was saying, it's a lot of kids in the classroom, and most times we're behind the regular classes, so we're really not advanced or honors. The teachers from last year, they tried to put together kids who they thought would be able to work together and get their work done at a faster pace, or who were advanced, but some of the kids are and then others aren't, so they're a distraction. SFG G

Honors English isn't honors English anymore, because there's too many students in there. You wouldn't call that honors English. My brother's honors English had 30 students, and most of them aren't supposed to be in there, but they stick them in there because of the schedule. That happens to every single class. They just stick them in there because of the schedule. SFG I

It's not like we were a real honors class anymore, because there's so much people in there. And she said we would take some college course lessons. I don't see anything college about what we're doing now because, they're really easy to me. If that's college, I must be a genius. SFG I

I don't know how I got in that, because I failed English last year. The teachers had actually hand-picked us. Honors English teacher at this school. . . . They get our grades. SFG F

Student 1: My English teacher from last year recommended me to it. I'm not sure why. Student 2: Same thing with me. But to tell the truth I didn't want to be in honors. Student 1: Me either. Not because of work, because I think I need – I have to learn more to go to honors. SFG H

I'm going to tell you, if I was us, I would scratch out the honors part. Because we are practically doing the same thing as a regular class is doing right now. Trust me. I don't blab to people, "I'm in honors class. I'm in advanced and you are not." Because I'm doing the same thing you guys are doing. Because sometimes I have it through my friends asking, "What are you guys on?" And I want to tell them I'm ahead of them because they know I'm in honors. I'm like, "I'm on the same topic as you." SFG H

In one small high school, teachers and administrators explained that they created the honors distinction to encourage students to learn. Students assigned to honors sections were not necessarily those who had shown outstanding ability, but rather those who teachers thought had the potential and/or work habits that could lead them to succeed academically. They were placed in honors sections with the hope that a climate of academic focus and teacher encouragement would lead them to greater effort and, thereby, greater achievement. Our data

from the other small high school and the SLCs suggests similar reasons for establishing an honors designation.

Students comments about these classes – their perception that they were not learning at high levels – suggest that honors classes have not achieved their goals. And, the student data taken as a whole suggest that these classes could likely be made more challenging in order to better engage the students. Teachers might also establish with these students new dimensions for honors-level work and new norms for the expectations of students in the classes.[62]

Student focus-group data, coupled with formal observations of many of the students' classes have led us to conclude that, at the present time, there is little rigorous instruction underway in the ninth and tenth grade classes in our sample and there are few academic demands placed on students. Students know this and their comments reveal that they are not pleased with how little is expected of them. This is not to say that they are seeking additional work. As we reported, students say they do what they have to do to pass and avoid summer school. But, these data strongly suggest that the schools have a long way to go if they are to create the kinds of academic cultures in which a) students perceive that teachers care about them and their learning, and b) the academic demands reflect high standards. As Deputy A noted:

> [There is] very limited, very limited [instructional improvement] in these schools. In general, I think the strategy we're using is a structural strategy that we know clearly from research and experience, doesn't do it on its own. And it's interesting to me that people haven't looked very closely at what's gone on at [the first set of converted schools], before scaling this up across the district, because [one small high school is] in better shape than it was, but only nominally. The quality of instruction is nothing to write home about, and the student-adult relationships are not great....I would say the progress with instruction is very limited, the quality of instruction is not high. Deputy A

District Data Related to the Findings About Workshop and Other Instructional Issues. Throughout this section of the report that focuses on student's views of their small high schools and SLCs we have addressed findings about instruction. We have noted that the students' perspectives on instruction are quite congruent with those we have drawn from our observations, and those that were reported by C & I as a result of their implementation reviews. While there can be many reasons for what one sees in one or two unique classrooms, what stands out in the data is a pattern of instruction that does not match the district's expectations for instruction in its high schools. Because the pattern appears in all of the small high schools and SLC classes in our sample, in ELA as well as in signature/thematic courses, we have tried to use our data to generate some hypotheses about the finding. We begin with a discussion of Workshop instruction.

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[62]Although the reasons for creating honors classes may be compelling, we want to note that removing such students from regular classes may have a negative impact on the climate, culture, and expectations for student achievement in them.

As we stated in our findings at the beginning of this report, only three teachers in our sample used a full Workshop approach in their ELA classes. Of the three, only two had the students engaged during class. We drew this conclusion based on observations of a) student participation in the class, and b) their comments about the teacher and class during focus group interviews. Other teachers used Workshop structures – mini-lessons, independent reading, and Readers' notebooks, for example – but did not yet seem comfortable with them. Students in these classes, if they participated at all, went through the motions of completing tasks without much apparent purpose or engagement.[63] Again, we based this conclusion on the combination of observations and student focus group interviews.

Boston has been engaged in helping teachers and schools create high-quality language arts classes for many years. High school teachers have participated in professional development in a number of venues and they have had the support of literacy coaches and Collaborative Coaching and Learning cycles. Headmasters have participated in professional development focused on Readers' and Writers' Workshop and they are expected to support their teachers in implementing the associated instructional strategies. Indeed, they are to hold teachers accountable for using the instructional strategies and the Deputies for Schools and Clusters are expected to hold headmasters accountable for insuring that their teachers are improving their skill with Workshop strategies. Given all of this, what might explain the status of Workshop instruction in the small high schools and SLCs and, therefore, our observations, those of C & I, and those of the students? We turned to the data we collected from the district's leaders, primarily, to generate possible answers.

Our district-level data lead us to conclude that multiple factors may have led to this finding. First, headmaster leadership has not been sufficient to the task of establishing Workshop as the schools' dominant instructional approach in ELA, in part, because headmasters' have not spent enough time in classrooms.

> I think when there are expectations in terms of what teaching and learning should look like, you go back to the leadership. So the question [for the headmaster] is: How often are you in classes? How often are you giving informal feedback to teachers with recommendations? Not as often as she needed to be [is the answer]. She was in classrooms, I won't dispute that, but not as often....It should have been increased, her level of being in classroom. Deputy C

Because they spend so little time in classrooms, headmasters may remain unaware of the status of instruction in their schools.

Second, even if headmasters spent time in classrooms, district administrators reported that they did not always have a clear enough grasp of Workshop to provide their teachers with needed, appropriate support.

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[63] In this regard, the observational data we collected is similar to what we learned from those members of C & I who conducted the implementation reviews.

> If a principal or headmaster doesn't have a knowledge of Workshop or what kinds of suggestions to give to move the work forward, it can create tension in the school, because then Workshop gets the name of something that's kind of creative and loose and the kids are doing a lot of reading, but they're not focusing on real skills. Same with Writers' Workshop. Administrator A

Third, even when they were knowledgeable about Workshop, not all headmasters agreed that it was a beneficial approach to literacy instruction for their students.

> Maybe half the department uses Workshop. No, most of the teachers use Readers' and Writers' Workshop, but not every day. It's just not appropriate. Students need a lot more direct instruction than the mini-lesson allows, and they need to read more books as a group rather than, we'll each read our own book and then we'll write in our journals and discuss these things among ourselves. I don't believe that works. I believe that if they're going to be accountable for certain skills, they need direct instruction with the class. Headmaster B

Fourth, even when headmasters understood Workshop and agreed that it was the right instructional approach, they reported low implementation. Some low implementation, they reported, was a result of teachers' resistance to using the strategies.

> Based on conversations with the administration, some of it has still been teacher resistance. I think that's a big piece of it, because most of the teachers there have had some kind of training in Readers and Writers' Workshop. And I think this challenge with workshop, because it is not a program, it's finding agreement across all parties of what it should look like. And I think those kinds of gaps create gaps in holding teachers accountable. And I think that's not just [one high school], I think that's been a concern across the district. Administrator A

Some low implementation was attributed to teachers' inability to bring a "sense of urgency" and importance to their classes. This point about the sense of urgency and importance was prominent in the students' comments reported earlier.

> My concern is the same as C & I's, when they walk through here: teachers need to impart a sense of importance and urgency to what is happening in their classrooms, that every minute is important, and that anything you give a student to do, you're giving it to them for a reason. I think that to me, the key element that I think I've learned, that's missing here for some teachers – not everyone – is planning. There's still a lot of winging it, or I'll use the book, I'll just follow the curriculum, or whatever. There are some teachers who plan everything, and you can see it because the class goes bing-bang-boom. And the kids know, like, in so and so's class, I am busy, and I won't miss that class, that's important. In this other class, I can almost go to sleep. That's still a concern. Headmaster H

Certainly, the student data we presented earlier support the idea that when teachers demonstrate engagement with their classes, when they seem to have planned, when they expect students to do the work, then students notice and are more likely to participate. Headmasters, we have been told, have not been able to convey the importance of this classroom feature to their teachers.

Finally, headmaster professional development, whether provided as part of Cluster work or in other organized settings, has not focused sufficiently on improving instruction. Given the district's focus on the achievement gap during the 2004-2005 school year, principal and headmaster professional development, we were told,

> has been more talking about achievement gap issues, with kind of the overall district approach. They've been doing readings and having discussions about issues of race and culture and language and things like that, and sometimes it'll be more focused on operational issues that are affecting the schools. But it's not typically a place where they'd have much space to talk about high school stuff, because they'd be the only high school in the cluster. Deputy A

As Deputy A notes, as well, Cluster professional development is focused at all grade levels. There has been little professional development targeted for the principals of the district's extant small high schools and SLCs. In addition, given their schedules and number of schools, Deputies, we have been told, do not have the time to individually coach principals to become more proficient at helping teachers improve their instruction.[64]

For Education Matters, the question at this point is: Why are these the answers? What explains why Deputies note that headmasters should be in classrooms more often, but are not? What explains why there are headmasters who are accountable for supporting implementation of Workshop when they are unfamiliar with this instructional strategy? Why have so many years passed by without teachers learning of the importance of planning and making good use of the time available with students?

Our data lead us to propose several answers, each of which should be further explored. First, the amount of time that Deputies for Schools and Clusters can spend with headmasters in each of the high schools may be insufficient to the schools' needs. For example, one Deputy reported that she did not know until the spring that one of the high schools in here triad was not implementing CCL, the coaching strategy designed to help teachers improve their use of Workshop strategies.

> I didn't know about it until very late and I don't know why, and that was a concern of mine. When I went to the school, probably in March, they had just

[64]Deputies report that they visit schools and walk through classrooms with headmasters. Then they write up what they have seen and make recommendations. However, there seems to be little capacity at the Deputy level to insure that headmasters have the knowledge and skill with which to use the suggestions in a productive manner. Nor is their time for Deputies to teach those skills, if that is what headmasters need.

> done their first CCL, and I had no idea. If I had known about it before, I could have sat down with someone, but I had no idea. I just didn't know. So my comments were made when I found out, but it's almost the end of the year. I don't really understand why that was happening. And it wasn't communicated to me. Deputy C

Administrator G pointed out that in another small high school, one supervised by Deputy A, it took three years to establish CCL.

> [The school] is doing multiple CCLs, and things are moving along quite nicely there. This is the first year at [that small high school]. Now, if you think how long we've been trying to do this, this is the first year I feel we have made some changes – with the coach and the headmaster more in sync than they ever were before. They like the coach very much this year, and she's doing quite wonderful things with the staff, which hadn't happened in the past. So it's just beginning, and it's taken almost, I'd say, almost three years to get us moved there. Administrator G

We reported earlier that Deputies have been unable to devote as much time as they might like to high school renewal as a result of the large number of schools for which they are responsible. It is likely that this heavy load is one significant factor that contributed to the Deputies remaining unaware of the absence of CCL at high schools where teachers needed to improve their use of Workshop.

Second, perhaps in light of the time available to them, Deputies may have developed expectations for the schools' progress that are quite low. We wonder about this possibility in light of Deputy C's comments about improvements in instruction in one of the small high schools in her triad.

> The good thing about this year is that teachers were teaching and kids were engaged, in most cases. And the concern was the level of engagement and whether there was rigor in the instruction. So in some classes, it was there, in other classes it wasn't. [For example], kids can be engaged and can be doing an assignment out of a textbook, and there's no accountable talk, it's just the kind of rote, literal work that happens. When you have kids that are engaged in the work they're doing and you hear them talking about the content and discussing what they've learned that day and what was taught. There wasn't that level in lots of the classrooms. In terms of the rigor, is it just basically asking kids literal questions and getting a literal response, or as a teacher, forming or formulating questions of a higher order, questions that will cause kids to think to a very high level, and then be able to give their opinions, their thoughts, that kind of thing? I didn't see a lot of that. I expected to see it across all grade levels, so again, it was – it just wasn't there yet. Like I said, it was evolving but it wasn't there. Deputy C

This Deputy clearly understood what should be happening in classes. She knew that students' would not be able to learn what they needed to know and develop into adults with strong critical thinking skills unless they gained knowledge and skill in their classes. And yet, the quote suggests that "evolving" to a situation in which "teachers were teaching and kids were engaged, in most cases," even if the level of engagement and quality of work was minimal, was an acceptable indication of progress.

Others, too, suggested with some equanimity that classes were not engaging students and that, therefore, they needed to improve.

> What I always felt, what I felt last year and this year is that there's not enough student talk happening. And I have to be honest, a lot of it is based on me going in, not on a regular basis or just walking by; I'd walk by some of these classrooms anywhere from five to ten times a day. And basically you don't see a lot of student engagement or student talk. Coach A

No one suggested a plan for making the needed instructional improvements. Some even suggested that it was unreasonable to expect significant changes given the conditions with which headmasters had to cope on a daily basis.

> Leadership at the building level is so oppressed by demands and so under-resourced that it's hard to be a learner. So if you can't be a learner, how are you going to lead this? I don't think it can happen. Administrator D

As we discussed earlier in this report, the conditions do overwhelm headmasters. Therefore, if the data we have presented are compelling, it behooves the district to address the conditions and then turn to the task of helping headmasters and teachers improve teaching and learning.

Given the data from this evaluation, we have concluded that this slow pace of implementation is a reflection of the organization and leadership of high school renewal. Given its organization and leadership, given that the Deputies for Schools and Clusters are not integral to the process, and that C & I has not played a prominent role with high school renewal, there is no forum in the district in which the progress of each of the high schools with respect to the instructional agenda of high school renewal can be reviewed on a regular basis. There is no forum in which, for example, the Deputy, literacy coach, capacity coach, math coach and others relevant to the improvement of instruction in a school can meet, share experiences, and discover in a timely way that schools are or are not making progress with instruction. There are administrators in the district who are aware of this gap and have thought about how to eliminate it.

> There should be local instructional support teams. I would have a local instructional support team that I would target for those schools in most need, and I would have members clearly be trained and understand that that's their work and that's where they're working. Administrator C

While such a suggestion might well lead to the improvement of teaching in the district's small high schools and SLCs, we would argue given our findings about the organization and leadership of high school renewal, that such teams must connect regularly with the Deputies for Schools and Clusters, with those responsible for coaching, and with the relevant content specialists in C & I, and Unified Student Services, for example.

Second, although there are administrators who are alarmed by the slow pace of instructional improvement and raise their concerns to others in the district and, at times, to the HSRWG, there does not appear to be any setting in which the concerns can be discussed and then addressed. As we noted much earlier in this report, instruction has not been part of the discussion in the HSRWG. It is, however, a pressing issue for those involved with the further development of high quality instruction. As Administrator G notes, even when there have been discussions about serious inattention to instruction in the small high schools and SLCs, they have not led to any changes in practice.

> I said, this [headmaster leadership around instruction] is bad, and if we all know this, then why aren't we doing something? There's got to be a plan that's closely monitored, in terms of – not just watching what the leader does, but watching the impact. So that you don't find in a school, classrooms where teachers aren't teaching and you don't find in a school teachers who have no sense of going from here to there and how you get there. I said, for too long we've just left people to their own devices, and as long as kids aren't killing each other in the classrooms, we feel pretty complacent. Administrator G

Others talked of having developed plans that could be used to help headmasters keep track of instruction in their schools and that would provide Deputies with timely information. No plans, however have been adopted. This is not surprising given that there is no organizational structure in which it would be possible to design a plan, have it adopted, and then determine the extent to which it was effective. In the same way, there has been no forum in which to discuss the possibility of providing differentiated, targeted professional development for headmasters so that they learn the knowledge and skill they need in order to better monitor and support the improvement of instruction in their schools.

Summary: Students' Views of Small Schools and SLCs. Small schools and SLCs have now had several years to develop their identities and cultures and to address the challenges associated with smallness that have emerged. In our baseline report one year ago, we described the challenges that still remained for the district in developing these features in the high schools in our sample. Our focus was primarily on the impact of high school renewal on teachers.

In this section of this second evaluation report, we have focused on the way students experienced their small high schools and SLCs. Our data lead us to conclude that the district still has a great deal of work to do if its small high schools and SLCs are to become the schools it imagines will support improved student literacy and increased student engagement.

Because engagement is a key goal of high school renewal, we suggest that schools and the district should carefully consider the efforts they have made to create engaging, personalized, and supportive small schools and SLCs for their students. Without careful attention to developing these attributes of the small schools and SLCs, we do not think these smaller units will be capable of realizing the increases in student engagement and achievement they seek to foster.

Similarly, the district needs to focus sharply on the quality of instruction in the schools, determine a set of priorities for improvement, and develop supports and accountability mechanisms that insure the implementation of high quality curriculum and instruction. As several district administrators have noted, the district has placed a great deal of its attention on structure even while it recognized that structure was only a setting for the more important work that had to be completed. It is certainly time for greater attention to the improving the key qualities of the district's high schools so that students have genuine opportunities to learn, to develop as competent, caring individuals, and to pursue meaningful post-secondary and work opportunities when they graduate from the district's high schools.

IV. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As part of our baseline data collection effort during the 2004-2005 school year, we interviewed relevant BPS central office administrators, Deputies, partners, and the Superintendent about how they worked individually and as a team to accomplish the goals of high school renewal. Everyone with whom we spoke told us that there was too little organization to the work, too little time to work together, and too much frustration associated with trying to work together. We were encouraged, one might even say urged, by those involved in the work to pay attention to the organization and leadership of high school renewal during the 2004-2005 school year. We were told that the district and its partners would not accomplish the remaining goals of high school renewal without improving the organization and leadership of the work.

Therefore, during the 2004-2005 school year, we gathered more data relevant to the organization and leadership of high school renewal while we continued to focus on the schools and added students to our school-based interview samples. This report represents the fruits of our inquiry. It likely tastes unpleasant. We present it, however, with the goal of helping the district and its partners take the steps that need to be taken to increase the odds that the district's high schools will become places in which students blossom socially and academically.

In Section II, we described the organization and leadership of high school renewal, and we indicated the frustrations of everyone in our sample who was involved with this important work during the last two school years. No one in our sample, and our sample includes all of the key stakeholders, suggested that the organization and leadership of high school renewal was sufficiently effective. The interview data provide the district with a clear picture of a complex enterprise that is not yet a) achieving its potential, b) supporting the small high schools and SLCs in our sample, or c) building the district's capacity to sustain and strengthen its work with high schools. The district's Deputies, central office administrators, Headmasters, and partners did not mince words when talking about their work and what stands in the way of their making more progress.

In Section III, we presented data that confirm what all educators know: that schools, through the actions of their teachers, headmasters, and other adults have the capacity to engage students as individuals and as learners or leave them alienated from their schools. We turned to students' voices to demonstrate that teachers' instructional strategies can engage students, as can the themes of their small high schools and SLCs. We highlighted areas of positive, school culture and climate that demonstrate the promise that can be fulfilled in small high schools and SLCs.

We also provided troubling data about negative school climates and cultures that students attributed to the way adults, even headmasters, behaved toward students. And, we presented student data indicating that for most of the students in our sample, there is as yet little that intrigues them about their schools, the adults in their schools, or their class work.

We think it is time for the district and its partners to listen to their own words, the words of the students, and the words of the headmasters and teachers whose voices we presented in the baseline and current report. These words suggest the need for action.

- **The district needs to take immediate steps where it can and use more long-term strategies where those are required to ameliorate the conditions in schools that stand in the way of progress toward the goals of high school renewal.** The schools are embedded in a set of district and school-based policies and practices that stand in the way of their making use of small size. Indeed, small size may aggravate the impact of extant policies and practices. These conditions have not gone away during the last two years and, at the end of the 2004-2005 school year, we saw no prospects for any significant change in them in the future. Some of the issues associated with the conditions need to be addressed in talks with the BTU; others require conversations with specialized district units. Without meaningful changes in the conditions, however, we see no reason to think these schools will accomplish the goals of high school renewal.

- **The district needs to bring instruction out of the wings and into the spotlight on the stage of high school renewal.** There is sufficient data in this report to convince most readers that there has been scant attention paid to the development and teaching of the schools' signature/thematic courses. And, despite many years of attention, the data in this report suggest there is far too little high quality Workshop instruction in place in ELA classes; far too little ambitious instruction apparent in other content areas. The explanations for this situation may well vary from school to school, but the bottom line is that Boston's high school students are not engaged in their academic work and, by their own admission, are not asked to perform at high levels.

- **The district needs, most of all, to develop a strong, coherent, organization for high school renewal, an organization in which are embedded clear lines of leadership, authority, and accountability, an organization that demonstrates a strategy with which to guide high school renewal.** In our view, if the district does not address the weakness of its organization and leadership for high school renewal, all of the hard work supplied by the Deputies, central office administrators, the partners, and those who work in the schools will not lead to significant improvements for the district's students.

The data we have collected and analyzed regarding high school renewal during the last two school years leave us with the same conclusions we presented in a confidential report to the Superintendent in January 2003. (*The Impact of District Support on The Scale-Up of Whole-School Improvement in The Boston Public Schools*).

Our analysis led us then to conclude that there was a core problem standing in the way of the district having greater success in scaling-up high-level implementation of its whole-school improvement agenda. The core problem, we stated, was that the district had not yet established a set of implementation strategies, timelines, and benchmarks to guide the work of the then new organizational structures, the cluster and triad system organized by Deputies, and the role of the

Instructional Leaders (ILs), now called Assistant Superintendents. The organization made a lot of sense in that it had the potential to provide the schools with coherent attention from the district. However, the district, we argued, had not yet put in place the operational standards that need to accompany the structures. As a result, we saw no impact of the organizational changes at the schools. We stated the problem in the following way:

> Boston needs but does not have a central office-focused strategic plan – a theory of district action – that enables it to utilize its organizational structures by prioritizing goals and strategies, in order to take actions designed to further those goals, as well as assess the efficacy of its work.
>
> The district seems to have a strong preference for relying on organizational structures alone to transform policy into practice, and, as a result, it developed its new organizational structure without developing a companion set of strategies and assessment/accountability mechanisms that would give those working within the structures a theory of action from which to work.
>
> The district also seems to have a strong preference for relying on individuals to improve what are complex, organizational problems. We see this preference in the ways in which the deputies, hired for their competence, are left free to establish their own ways of working with their ILs and school clusters. We see this preference in the district's approach to improving schools by replacing their principals and then leaving these principals free to lead.

Following these conclusions, we wrote:

> Without question, appointing high quality leaders is essential to district- and school-level progress. And, giving such high quality leaders some autonomy over their work is necessary in order for the organization to take advantage of their knowledge and skill. However, our data analysis leads us to conclude that these preferences for highly individualized leadership result in the idiosyncratic transformation of policy into practice which works against creating a "team" of central office administrators who share a common set of values, beliefs, and practices about how the district's work should be accomplished. The absence of a set of common understandings works against the development of a central office in which high level administrators and those who work for them are working from the same set of assumptions, and are internally accountable to one another for the implementation of the district's work. This absence of a common set of understandings prevents the district from learning from its own work. And, it leads those who work in central office as well as in the schools to experience district policy in widely varying ways. If the district is to achieve the goals present in *Focus on Children I and II* and embodied in the Essentials and the district's revised Whole-School Improvement Rubrics, then it is

> imperative for the district to attend to this missing, core component of its own work.

From our perspective, these words still ring true. They are all the more important in the complex organization of high school renewal that includes roles for multiple, talented, internal and external partners. We think it is axiomatic that the BPS must develop its own central office-focused theory of action, with its own central office-focused Essentials that describe high quality central office work, a Whole-District Improvement Plan (WDIP) that parallels the Whole-School Improvement Plan (WSIP) required of the schools with its own set of associated rubrics, and a process for generating and using formative and summative data relevant to progress at the schools. We know that such new organizational components, by themselves, will not solve the district's problems. To achieve their purpose, they must be used to determine central office priorities, develop implementation strategies, establish benchmarks, and hold people accountable for meeting them.

In writing this report and laying out the weaknesses identified in the current organization and leadership of high school renewal, in particular, Education Matters has taken a considerable risk. We anticipate that the district and its partners will not appreciate the public documentation of the organization and leadership of high school renewal. Nonetheless, given our commitment to the improvement of teaching and learning as well as organization and leadership in the BPS, we have written what we believe needs to be said in light of the data. We have written the report because in the end, it is the students who attend the district's high schools who matter. It is the students, after all, for whom the district and its partners want to succeed. We have written this report to contribute to the success of the district's efforts with high school renewal.