

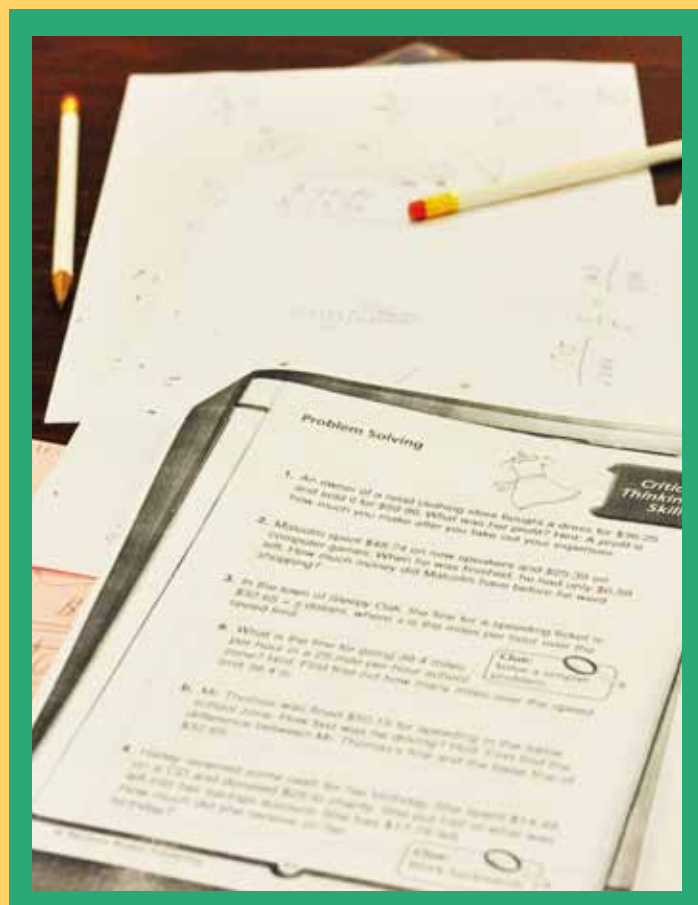
Learning Communities: *Guidebook for Boston Church-School Partnerships*



"Every child deserves an education that will enable them to succeed in a global economy. Faith and community groups are critical partners in this all-hands on deck moment."

- Joshua DuBois, Former Special Assistant to the President and Executive Director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships

Cover photos: Higginson-Lewis K-8 students, Roxbury Presbyterian Church Social Impact Center's Saturday School (2012); James P. Timilty Middle School; Peoples Baptist Church and the Timilty Mentor-Mentee Pair (2013; Rev. Liz Walker of the Roxbury Presbyterian Church Social Impact Center reading with Dearborn Middle School students (2012); Rev. Dr. Roberto Miranda (far right), Rev. Jonatán Toledo (second from the left) of Congregación León de Judá, Executive Director Rev. Sam Acevedo (far left) with Boston HERC staff at the English High School Passport Breakfast (2013)



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Guidebook for Boston Church-School Partnerships

The Guidebook has been compiled to help inspire, inform, connect, and equip the Church broadly for more sustainable and mutually effective, long-term partnership with the Boston Public School System

About this Guidebook

There is a unique opportunity today for the Church to expand and build on the long history of school/community partnerships. The Boston Church-School Partnership Guidebook has been compiled in direct response to:

- The Boston Public Schools' recent request for additional school/faith-based partnerships, and
- The desire of a growing number of Christian leaders within the Church to take a more active role in supporting public education.

In order to help facilitate additional partnerships between schools and churches, this guidebook is intended to help:

- Encourage and inspire churches to consider developing church-school partnerships;
- Remove barriers that currently hinder churches from responding to the invitation from Boston Public Schools for partnership; and
- Provide practical information, tools, and support that will help facilitate and nurture mutually beneficial partnerships.

Building on the Past*

The idea of community/school partnerships to support students in Boston is not new. In the early 1980s, major corporations and universities committed themselves to helping strengthen a school system traumatized by court-ordered desegregation and plagued by poor academic performance, patronage, weak governance, and frequent

battles between the mayor and the elected school committee. Over the years, systemic changes, such as an appointed school committee and teacher evaluation, helped to stabilize the schools. Cultural institutions and human service providers were encouraged to become more involved in the schools.

Across the country, churches also began to play a more direct role in education. In 1999, the US Department of Education's Partnership for Family Involvement in Education published a booklet called *How Faith Communities Support Children's Learning in Public Schools*. Just last year, Joshua DuBois, former special assistant to the President and executive director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, said, "Every child deserves an education that will enable them to succeed in a global economy. Faith and community groups are critical partners in this all-hands on deck moment."

Boston's public schools have changed dramatically since the turbulent days of busing. The Boston Public Schools' (BPS) graduation rate has increased every year for the past 6 years. For the class of 2012, 66% of the students finished high school in 4 years. Over that same period, the four-year graduation rate increased for every ethnic group, but the most significant increase was for African Americans (from 56% in 2006 to 65% in 2012) and Hispanics (from 51% to 59%).

The Opportunity Today*

While these improvements are significant, the fact remains that there is still more to be done. These graduation numbers, while improved, are still way too low. Scores on the state's standardized MCAS test are increasing but could be improved more. In addition, too many students of color who do enter college, leave before graduation.

“Success in today’s economy requires academic skills that signal college readiness in reading, writing, and math at a minimum. In addition, though, quality employers increasingly look for a broad set of non-academic skills...”

- Nellie Mae Education Foundation

“The Boston Church-School Partnership is a direct response to the Boston Public Schools’ desire for additional school/faith-based partnerships, and the desire by a growing number of Christian leaders for the Church to take a more active role in supporting public education.”

- Emmanuel Gospel Center

Nonetheless, academic attainment, important as that is, is not enough to ensure high school students will be prepared for successful professional Careers. Students also need a variety of skills. The Nellie Mae Education Foundation’s What it Takes to Succeed in the 21st Century – and How New Englanders Are Faring report (released in 2008) says, “Success in today’s economy requires academic skills that signal college readiness in reading, writing, and math at a minimum. In addition, though, quality employers increasingly look for a broad set of non-academic skills: intellectual skills such as critical thinking, problem-identification and problem-solving skills; practical work-related skills such as time management, the ability to work in teams, and the ability to adapt effectively to changing work situations.” These skills, the report says are, “increasingly valued by quality employers” and are essential for people who want to advance in their careers.

Recognizing that churches and other faith institutions are committed to helping children reach their full potential and have a long history of partnering with schools, the Boston Public Schools, under the direction of former Superintendent, Dr. Carol Johnson, created a community liaison position in 2010 to foster more school and faith-based partnerships in the BPS. She said, “Our students and families are depending on all of us – schools, businesses, colleges/universities, secular non-profit and community based organizations, and your faith-based institutions – to work together for their success.” The community liaison, who now works under the BPS Office of Community Engagement and Circle of Promise (CECoP), matches the needs of schools and the resources of community or faith-based institutions, and provides technical assistance as needed to the partners. For the past few academic years as well as the current year, Emmanuel Gospel Center, through its Boston Education Collaborative program, is collaborating with BPS to grow the number of community and faith-based school partnerships.

This guidebook is intended to help churches understand and respond to the unique opportunity for additional church-school partnerships today. Within the four major sections regarding: vision, existing partnerships, understanding the BPS, and getting involved, we hope this guidebook will help inspire, inform, connect and equip the Church broadly for more sustainable and mutually effective long-term partnership with BPS.



Rev. Liz Steinhauser from St. Stephen's Episcopal Church and other volunteers, 2013 MLK Service Day at the Blackstone Elementary School, coordinated by St. Stephen's (Photo courtesy of Janet Boswell)

Vision:

Local Church Leaders Share Why the Church Should Help Public Schools

The Boston Church-School Partnership Guidebook builds upon the long history of school-community partnerships to help facilitate additional partnerships between schools and churches

In this section, local leaders share about their vision for why and how the Church can and should help public schools. As these church leaders reflect on their theological understanding and recent experience with the Boston Public School system, a broader biblical vision and basis emerges to help inspire, inform and guide church-school partnerships

How Churches Can Make A Difference in the City of Boston

by Paul Atwater, Senior Pastor of North River Community Church



Pastor Atwater of North River Community Church and Rev. Dr. Wesley Roberts of Peoples Baptist Church

In 2005, I joined Dr. Wesley Roberts, Pastor of Peoples Baptist Church in Boston, for lunch in order to talk about lessons our church had learned by participating in a 40 Days of Community effort. This effort had allowed us to involve some 400 people from North River in 7 weekly small group meetings and Sunday services that were focused on teaching our church about biblical reasons for serving the communities around us. Our small groups got a taste of serving in local shelters,

blessing local fire and police stations, and about 100 of us turned out to rake, prune, clean up and rebuild facilities at the Herring Run Park in Pembroke. This effort changed the way our local town viewed North River for years to come. We went from existing as a self-contained church community on the edge of town to becoming an asset that the town could look to for help.

Over lunch that day, Dr. Roberts unveiled a vision he had for Peoples Baptist Church's 40 Days of Community effort, which involved serving a local school in the Boston area. But the leaders of Peoples Baptist were torn over whether to serve an elementary school that had fallen on hard times or to serve another elementary school that rising to become a model for progress in reading. Without giving it much thought, I blurted out, "What if North River partnered with you? Would there be room for us to come alongside?" Dr. Roberts immediately responded with open arms, saying, "That's a wonderful idea. If we do this together, we can bless both schools."

The Urban-Suburban Partnership between North River and Peoples Baptist began that simply. It was founded on the friendship of two pastors who love and respect each other. The teams of people from both churches who joined this effort followed our desire to work together and to brainstorm together. That first joint effort blew us all away. Together, we were able to exceed the expectations and promises made to each of these schools. And a friendship between our churches, that exist some 30 miles apart from each other, grew. When the Boston Herald decided to print a photo and half-page article on the front page, followed by the entire second page of the paper the day after our largest event at one of these schools was icing on the cake.

As we begin the fall of 2013, the Peoples Baptist and North River Partnership is entering the third year of another effort in serving the Timilty Middle School in Roxbury together. We wanted to measure whether our serving was having any lasting impact on the major goals of the principal at Timilty, which centered on helping more middle school students reach proficiency in math and English skills. Together we have prayed and planned. Together, we have met with the principal, administrators and staff members at Timilty to find ways in which the church could come alongside the school to encourage and lend a hand to help them strive toward this goal.

Projects that emerged have included providing a portable lap-top center with 30 lap-top computers for students, 5 personal computer stations for administrators, installing several white boards in classrooms, purchasing a popular series of books for each 6th grade student, sharing the cost of an education-based field trip to the White Mountains in New Hampshire for the entire 7th grade student body, putting on a Career Day for students and teachers where approximately 40 professionals from our two churches explained what they do today and the role that education played in that process. Of course, that is just a partial list.

These efforts led to other short-term partnerships along the way. Lion of Judah Congregation partnered with us to provide training for tutors and mentors. Tufts Dental School partnered with us to provide free dental screening for students who had not yet established a relationship with a dentist.

The lessons and outcome of these efforts are still emerging from this work. Here are a few of the lessons we have learned so far:

1. Serving in the Boston Public Schools allows us to become known for what we are for. How often we have heard that evangelical churches are too frequently known for what they are against. Serving in this way has allowed us to throw our weight into something that we all believe: that we are following the example of Jesus when we serve children. And this effort gives us common ground with the desires of the communities around us.

2. Serving in partnership enables us to more fully experience the richness of Christ's body. Peoples Baptist is a mostly African-American church in the city. North River Community Church is a mostly Anglo congregation in the South Shore suburbs. Serving together has enriched the faith and experiences of both churches. The friendships today go far beyond that experienced by the two founding pastors.

3. Serving as partners for the welfare of the Boston Public Schools allows us to prioritize a neglected portion of Jesus' mandate to the church.

Jesus said this in Acts 1:8, "...and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Jerusalem was the first major city where Christians were called to bear witness. That didn't mean that once they had told their stories of faith and transformation that the work in the city was over.

Today, while the global outreach of the church continues to focus on taking the gospel to the ends of the earth, there is still much work that needs to be done in major cities like Boston. It is easy for people who live in suburbs outside of the city to enjoy its sports teams, parks and business opportunities, while forgetting the on-going needs of urban communities. Our partnership efforts in the Boston Public Schools allows us to have a way to make ministry in the big city simple and personal. We like to think we are making a difference in the city for Christ, one student at a time.

In doing this, we are re-discovering the city-first part of Jesus' mandate.

4. Serving in this partnership engages us in a dream that is bigger than ourselves.

Through a handful of opportunities to tell the story of our two churches, we have become part of a shared dream of linking every church in the Boston area with at least one evangelical church or with an urban-suburban church partnership. One of the questions we are grappling with centers on whether or not we can share and impart a vision that leads other evangelical churches to re-discover the city-first aspect of that mandate. My belief is that Jesus was dropping a clue for future generations about the link between major cities and sustained evangelistic outreach.

5. Serving in this partnership provides a vehicle for participating locally in biblical justice concerns.

Some people recoil when I use the term "biblical social justice" because adding the word social can link this to political concerns or ideology. Yet the Bible calls God-fearing people to work for justice in both the Old and New Testaments. The minor prophets in particular called out communities for failing to care for their neighbors or even the country next door. Jesus summed all of that up when he told us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Who are our neighbors? People in the suburbs might be tempted to say that our neighbors are simply those who live next door, those who look like us and share the same local concerns. Yet Jesus pushed us to think farther than that when he answered the question, "And who is my neighbor?" His story of the Good Samaritan forces us to realize that our neighbor is often a person from the next city or province, who happens to either show kindness or need kindness from us.

By all means, let's send Christ-followers to the ends of the earth. At the same time, let's remember the-first part of Jesus' mandate to the church.

Why Are We Here?

by Bryan Wilkerson, Senior Pastor of Grace Chapel



Pastor Bruce Wall of Global Ministries Church and Pastor Bryan Wilkerson of Grace Chapel

One evening last spring my wife and I fought rush hour traffic into Boston to attend a dinner celebrating a year of partnership between two churches – Grace Chapel and Global Ministries Christian Church – and the Trotter Elementary School in Dorchester. We arrived to find the Fellowship Hall at GMCC packed with faculty and staff from the Trotter School, along with a handful of volunteers from the two churches. Between dinner and dessert I had the opportunity to address the “Why?” question. As in,

Why are we here?

Why are local churches getting involved with public schools?

Why are suburban churches investing in urban neighborhoods?

Why are pastors and principals talking so enthusiastically over dinner?

I answered with three simple statements:

1. We’re here because we believe that education opens the door to a more promising future. We know this to be the case in developing nations all over the world. As I’ve had opportunity to travel to such places in recent years, I have seen again and again the sacrifices families will make to get even one of their children a modest education. I’ve seen children willing to walk or bike many dangerous miles each day to go to school. These families and children recognize that an education can dramatically change the trajectory of that child’s life – and the family’s life.

What’s true around the world is true here at home, as well. The best way to keep a child off the streets, out of jail, and on the road to a better future is to get them through school successfully.

2. We’re here because we believe that as our cities go, our culture goes. All over the world, people are flocking to cities. Here in the US, immigrants are settling in urban centers. Cities are becoming the financial, commercial, and artistic “nerve centers” for entire regions. What happens in the cities – culturally, intellectually, and spiritually – will shape life and thought in this 21st century. Suburban and urban communities must recognize their inter-dependence, and enter into genuine partnership for the welfare of the city.

3. We’re here because we believe that children matter to God. Throughout the Bible, we find children being included in God’s plan and purposes. God calls on the community not only to provide for and protect children, but to nurture their minds, hearts, and spirits. As followers of Jesus, we are inspired and challenged by his love for children, and by the value he bestowed on them with his words and his attention. When we work to improve a child’s health, happiness, and opportunities in life, we not only bring a smile to their face, but to God’s, and ours, as well.

Boston Churches:

Existing Boston School - Church Partnerships

This Guidebook builds upon the long history of school/community partnerships to help facilitate additional partnerships between schools and churches. In this section, we include information about the educational landscape of the Boston Public School system and its mission, initiatives, goals and standards.

A Case Study from North River Community Church and Peoples Baptist Church: 40 Days of Community and Partnering Together for Educational Excellence

Peoples Baptist Church shares the story of how they engaged in a 40 Days of Community Campaign in 2005 as a part of a year-long church celebration that unexpectedly set in motion a church-school partnership between Peoples Baptist Church, North River Community Church, and the Boston Public Schools System which continues to collaboratively serve local schools.

In keeping with the theme of Peoples Baptist Church's bicentennial "Faithful Past, Hope-Filled Future", we selected a project that would have an impact on our church in the future. Given the history of the church in starting the first school for black children in Boston, we wanted to engage in a project that reflected our continued commitment to the education of children of color in Boston.

At the same time, God led our pastor, Dr. Roberts, to partner with Pastor Paul Atwater and North River Community Church to engage in 40 Days of Community project. Together, our two churches—one urban and one suburban—adopted two elementary schools within the Boston Public System. We shared together in fellowship and prayer, met together for weekly project planning sessions, and then worked together to carry out each task involved in the project.

During this community service project our two churches accomplished far more together on behalf of the Mattahunt Elementary School and the and Henry L. Higginson Elementary school, than either church could ever have accomplished on their own. The unique combination of our time, talents, and gifts stands as a testimony to how we are all truly better together!

Working together, the accomplishments of our community service projects with the Henry L. Higginson Elementary School and the Mattahunt Elementary School are summarized on the following pages.

The community service project at the Henry L. Higginson Elementary School:

- Purchased 175 winter coats for students each embossed with the school logo and the school name
- Cleaned up the school yard
- Planted flowers and bulbs, landscaped the school yard
- Purchased books for students to read at home, to supply classroom libraries and to build the collection of books in the school library
- Catalogued and shelved books in the school library
- Built shelving and completed other small maintenance projects
- Painted murals in the school
- Purchased school supplies and book bags for every student in the school
- Purchased classroom supplies for teachers
- Hosted a parent and teacher appreciation dinner
- Donated furniture for classrooms, and other areas of the school building
- Installed a battery-powered clock in each classroom

The community service project at the Mattahunt Elementary School:

- Provided funding for the purchase of 100 school uniforms for students who cannot afford them.
- Cleaned up the school yard
- Planted blubs and landscaped the school yard
- Purchased books for students to read at home, to supply classroom libraries and to build the collection of books in the school library
- Catalogued and shelved books in the school library and school book room
- Built shelving off site and delivered them to the book room
- Painted 2 large thematic murals
- Purchased school supplies for students
- Purchased classroom supplies for teachers
- Hosted a parent and teacher appreciation dinner
- Purchased 16 beanbag chairs for the school library
- Purchased 50 folding chairs for special occasions

In 2011 our churches embarked on a second urban-suburban church partnership. In keeping with the history of Peoples Baptist Church in involvement in education and promoting educational excellence for children of color in Boston, we again chose a project involving partnering together with a Boston Public School. We are honored to be partnering with the James P. Timilty Middle School and Principal Valarie Lowe-Barhemi for the current Partnering Together for Educational Excellence urban-suburban church project.

Utilizing a school project development format similar to the one used in the development of the 2005 project, leaders from both Peoples Baptist Church and North River Community Church met together in planning meetings throughout the summer and fall of 2010, to develop the Partnering Together for Educational Excellence project. We have continued to work together in monthly project meetings at alternating sites (alternating between the Timilty Middle School, Peoples Baptist Church and North River Community Church) to further define project and implementation procedures.

Each of the areas of the project was assigned a project champion. Project champions continue to work together in urban-suburban church “pairs” to organize and coordinate the involvement of both churches in the individual project areas.

Prior to proceeding with Partnering Together for Educational Excellence, we met with the Timilty Middle School principal, Mrs. Lowe-Barhemi, teachers, and parents, to gain an understanding of the needs of the school and to gain an understanding of the ways in which we could support the goals of the school in promoting educational excellence for students at the school.

We also presented our project proposal to Boston School Superintendent,



Rev. Ayn DuVoisin of North River Community Church with her Timilty mentee (2013)



Mentor Match Day at the Timilty with parents, mentors & mentees (2012)

Dr. Carol Johnson, who endorsed our project and demonstrated her support by attending the project kick-off service along with Mayor Menino and the school principal, Mrs. Lowe-Barehmi.

Key points in our partnership and project development:

- The Partnering Together team met with Boston Public School Superintendent, Dr. Johnson on Friday, September 16, 2011. During this meeting, attended by members of the project leadership team, Dr. Johnson provided support for our project and highlighted areas of need for middle school students in the district
- The combined team visited the Timilty Middle School on Thursday, October 20, 2011. During this visit to the school our team toured the building, observed classes, and met with school.
- On Saturday October 22, 2011, members of the team attended a Saturday tutoring session prior to a scheduled Parent Council meeting at the Timilty Middle School, where the project was officially introduced to Timilty Middle School parents by Mrs. Lowe-Barehmi. Pastor Roberts and Rev. Keith provided the history of the collaboration and provided an overview of the Partnering Together for Educational Excellence project.
- The team introduced the project to Timilty Middle School staff during a staff meeting on Friday, October 28, 2011. Staff members were also provided with an opportunity to ask questions about the project. Pastor Roberts & Pastor Atwater gave remarks during this meeting.

We are currently in the third year of our Partnering Together for Educational Excellence with the James P. Timilty Middle School. We are honored to continue in partnership with the Timilty Middle School principal and staff as they tirelessly work to nurture the educational excellence of their students.

The 2005 40 Days of Community project was created to fit into the 40-day time frame of 40 days of Community Campaign. As a result, the focus of that project was limited to short-term projects that could be completed within that time frame. In designing the Partnering Together for Educational Excellence project, we wanted to expand both the length of our commitment and the focus of our commitment in a way that would allow us to develop a deeper relationship with a school that would be sustained over time. We also wanted to support the school in ways that we thought might be more closely associated with educational outcomes - in addition to engaging in projects that would provide tangible resources to the school as we did during the 40 Days of Community project. To that end we continued with projects such as providing books and supplies to teachers and students, and added projects such as the development of tutoring, mentoring, and parent engagement projects.

The current school project was also designed to allow us to deepen our relationship with the school over the years. Thus, we are committed to supporting the cohort of grade 6 students we began with through their graduation from Timilty Middle School in grade 8. At that time, we make a decision about beginning with a second cohort of students in grade 6.

The church-school partnership between Peoples Baptist Church, North River Community Church and the Boston Public School System continues to develop in response to the diverse and dynamic needs of the schools. Along the way and in the process, the partnership has been able to identify six project areas they have and will continue to address.



Tutoring at the Timilty (2012)

Introduction to the Boston Public Schools:

What Churches Should Understand About the Boston Public School System When Partnering

This Guidebook builds upon the long history of school/community partnerships to help facilitate additional partnerships between schools and churches. In this section, we include information about the educational landscape of the Boston Public School system and its mission, initiatives, goals and standards.

The mission of the Boston Public Schools is to “transform the lives of all children through exemplary teaching in a world-class system of innovative, welcoming schools. The BPS partners with communities, families, and students to develop in every learner the knowledge, skill, and character to excel in college, career, and life.”¹ To achieve its mission, the school system seeks to foster collaboration and partnerships between schools and community organizations, including churches. The city school system and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education have developed more specific goals within their overall mission. These goals are detailed in various achievement frameworks, standards, and agendas. Schools and students are assessed on their progress toward these goals and the overall mission using evaluation measures and student assessments. Community partners can play a significant role in this mission of transforming the lives of children and also in working with schools and students to achieve their more specific education goals. In order to make significant contributions, partners need to gain a basic understanding of the educational system, its initiatives, needs, and specific goals.

Massachusetts Department of Education

At the state level, the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks outline specific expectations, skills, and understandings that students need to know or be able to do to be successful in college and careers. The frameworks do not specify teaching methods or strategies, but they do provide guiding principles of effective curricula.

Using its Curriculum Frameworks, the **Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)** includes a series of standardized tests administered to 3rd - 8th and 10th grade students. “As required by the Education Reform Law, students must pass the grade 10 tests in English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics and one of the four high school Science and Technology Engineering tests as one condition of eligibility for a high school diploma (in addition to fulfilling local requirements). All students who are educated with public funds are required to take

the MCAS tests. The definitions of the four achievement levels are as follows:

Advanced - “demonstrate a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of rigorous subject matter and provide sophisticated solutions to complex problems.” (scores of 260-280)

Proficient - “demonstrate a solid understanding of challenging subject matter and solve a wide variety of problems.” (scores of 240-259)

Needs Improvement - “demonstrate a partial understanding of subject matter and solve some simple problems.” (scores of 220-239)

Warning/Failing - “demonstrate a minimal understanding of subject matter and do not solve simple problems.” (scores of 200-219)

In addition, the MCAS program is used to hold schools and districts accountable, on a yearly basis, for the progress they have made toward the objective of the No Child Left Behind Law that all students be proficient in Reading and Mathematics by 2014.”

As the Massachusetts standards and tests make the transition toward national standards, partners will need to become familiar with the Common Core State Standards. “The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort that established a single set of clear educational standards for kindergarten through 12th grade in English language arts and mathematics that states voluntarily adopt.” Massachusetts has revised its English Language Arts and Math Curriculum Frameworks and MCAS tests to align with the Common Core State Standards. For more information on the Massachusetts process: www.doe.mass.edu/candi/commoncore For general national information on the CCSS: www.corestandards.org

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education uses the **Progress and Performance Index** (PPI) as an annual and cumulative measure that combines data on a group, school, or district about its trends in reaching its education goals. The main indicators used in the index are (1) Narrowing proficiency gaps in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science; (2) Growth in student performance in ELA and mathematics; (3) Annual dropout rate; and (4) Cohort graduation rate. Although the calculations are fairly complex, the basic idea is to measure how well groups of students and schools are progressing in reducing the gap between their 2010-2011 MCAS proficiency scores and their goals for the 2016-2017 school year. The state classifies schools and districts using the following levels:

Level 1 - Schools meeting the gap narrowing goals

Level 2 - Schools not meeting the gap narrowing goals or not having 95% MCAS participation

Level 3 - Lowest performing 20% of schools

Level 4 - Those lowest achieving and least improving schools that have been classified into Level 4 by the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. Currently only Level 4 schools are given the flexible powers for change as "Turnaround Schools."

Level 5 - Chronically underperforming schools or districts as determined by the

Commissioner. Schools that could be assigned a new leader or "receiver" to implement the Commissioner's turnaround plan for the school

For detailed information see: www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ayp/2013/SchoolLeadersGuide.pdf or www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ayp/2013/LEAbrochure.pdf

Boston Public Schools

One of the key bridges to the school system for faith-based organizations wishing to partner with schools is the **Office of Community Engagement and Circle of Promise** (CECoP). The mission of BPS Office of Community Engagement and Circle of Promise (CECoP) is to act as a catalyst to expand the participation of families, students, school leaders, and neighborhood and faith partners, in the improvement of educational quality, equity and access, and opportunity for all students in Boston Public Schools. This office is committed to bridging relationships between schools, families, the community, Boston's faith institutions, and activists.² It fosters partnerships between schools and various organizations, including faith-based institutions. The resources, skills, and strengths of these community non-profit groups are matched with the needs of schools and students. The partnerships are strengthened through technical assistance, training workshops, consultations, and collaborative community meetings. The **Circle of Promise** is a student-centered and neighborhood-based strategy concentrating on

a specific five square mile area of Boston including parts of Roxbury, North Dorchester, South End, and Jamaica Plain. Within this geographic area, CECOP has a responsibility to focus on coordinating and aligning resources to serve schools, students and their families. Through the City Departments, "the Circle of Promise initiative leverages public and private resources and partnerships to conduct targeted intervention and non-academic service delivery." The central objective is to break the cycle of poverty and develop high student achievement as measured by the Boston Public Schools' Acceleration Agenda. To reach this objective requires efforts to help students' families become economically stable and self-sufficient. The area includes 61,458 households, and 75.9% of the students (non-exam school) are low income. For fall 2013, within the Circle of Promise area, there are 46 schools and over 160 youth and family focused nonprofits. While not all the schools in the Circle of Promise area are low performing, many should be a high priority for faith-based partnerships. CECOP is committed to identifying faith partners for all schools within the Circle of Promise.

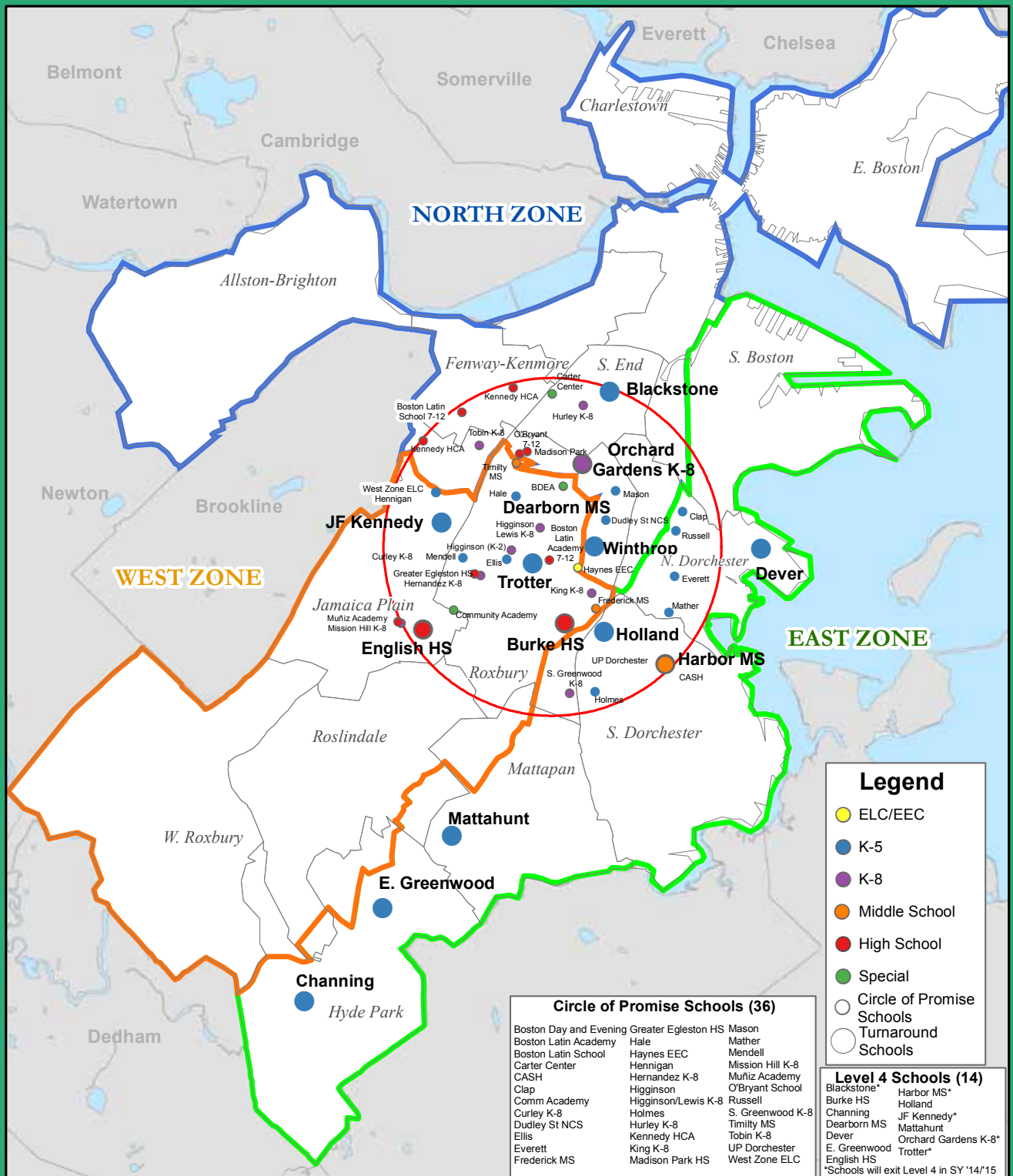
As schools, community organizations, and faith-based organizations unite around a common objective for young people in the Circle of Promise area, they will be more effective in having an impact. The unifying goal is high student achievement from early learning through college and career success. The BPS' Acceleration Agenda and their vision of what a BPS graduate should look like provide benchmarks and goals that are valuable for faith-based organizations to understand and align with.

The **Acceleration Agenda (2009-2014)** is a five year strategic direction to transform the Boston Public Schools. The major goals are (1) Ensure all students achieve MCAS proficiency; (2) Close access and achievement gaps; (3) Graduate all students from high school prepared for college completion and career success. The strategies to achieve these goals include:

1. Strengthen teaching and school leadership
2. Replicate success and turn around low-performing schools
3. Deepen partnerships with parents, students, and the community
4. Redesign district services for effectiveness, efficiency, and equity

The Acceleration Agenda includes nine academic targets through 2014:

- Reading by the end of Grade 1
- Reading to learn in Grade 3
- Skillful, analytical writing in Grades 4-12
- Algebra 1 in Grade 8
- English Language Learners acquire academic language mastery and fluency
- Significant academic growth for students with disabilities



- “On-track” to graduate by the end of Grade 10
- High school graduation
- College-ready and success-bound

All of these goals and strategies are explained in detail in the May 2010 Acceleration Agenda proposal available at <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org> keywords **acceleration agenda**

In addition to academic targets, the BPS also seeks to develop young people who possess cognitive, personal, and social skills that prepare them to be healthy, contributing citizens of their communities. These characteristics can also serve as areas for the faith institutions to focus on supporting.

The Boston Public Schools graduate...

1. Loves to learn, views the world as a classroom without walls, and thinks critically about the issues within it.
2. Succeeds academically in college-level courses across content areas.
3. Masters verbal and written expression in English, with emerging proficiency in a second language.
4. Uses mathematical skill, scientific inquiry, and state-of-the-art technology to invent new solutions to persistent and unanticipated problems.
5. Exhibits growth, self-discipline and reflection through innovative expression and artistry.
6. Acknowledges and respects people with diverse backgrounds, histories, and perspectives.
7. Assumes personal responsibility for physical and emotional well-being by making healthy choices.
8. Contributes confidently and positively in professional and social settings, both independently and as a member of a team.
9. Demonstrates resourcefulness and resilience in the face of setbacks and obstacles, relying on personal assets and support from others to achieve goals.
10. Participates actively in a democratic society as a responsible, courageous leader who challenges injustice.

The BPS is guided by policies and standards established by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The state provides support, guidance, and special initiatives for schools in general; and regulates, approves and reviews charter schools. Both the state of Massachusetts and Boston have school performance ranking systems with defined levels. These levels can be helpful to know because they can guide volunteers and partners toward schools which may need more help.

Based on low MCAS scores and lack of improvement, the state designated 12 Boston schools as “Turnaround Schools” in 2010. These were schools which had been “significantly underperforming over several years.”³ In other words these schools were categorized as Level 4 schools. The majority of these Turnaround Schools were located inside the Circle of Promise. The 2010 education reform law which led to this designation allows new flexibility in changing leadership and teaching staff, and making other changes in the schools. The expectations for improvement are at least a 10-point gain in the schools’ English Language Arts or Mathematics Composite Performance Index. By fall 2013, five schools had made sufficient progress to exit level 4 and turnaround status while three schools entered that status and one closed.⁴

The BPS has pushed to have some Level 3 schools also designated as High Support Schools that they believe could make rapid academic gains if given priority for additional district support and resources. The BPS also has a committee working on a new School Performance and Opportunity Index.

In addition to the different levels of schools categorized by performance, there are several different types of public schools in Boston. These include the traditional public schools, Pilot Schools, In-District Horace Mann Charter Schools, Innovation Schools, exam schools and Commonwealth Charter Schools. Not counting the last group, for School Year 2013–2014, there are 128 schools including 21 Pilot Schools, six In-district Charter schools, six Innovation Schools, and three exam schools. The fall 2013 student population of the BPS is estimated at 58,000.⁵ The number of Commonwealth Charter Schools in Boston is 25, with some schools grouped in networks.

The BPS has three exam schools which base admission entirely on student grades and test scores from the Independent Schools Entrance Exam (ISEE).⁶ The three schools are Boston Latin School, Boston Latin Academy, and the John D. O’Bryant School of Mathematics and Science, where students are enrolled respectively based on their test results. Students are accepted into the exam schools for grades 7 and 9.⁷ Students applying to and attending exam schools must verify that they are Boston residents. For more information see: www.bostonpublicschools.org/exam

Beginning in the spring of 2013, the BPS reorganized all schools under its governance into networks that each had a network superintendent to provide oversight and support. There are eight networks labeled with letters A–H and one group called Educational Options which includes the alternative educational programs. The networks include one high school network, one vocational school/program network, and one for charter schools. See the 2013–2014 School Organization chart at www.bostonpublicschools.org keyword: **organization**

When seeking to form partnerships with the schools, faith institutions should seek the approval of the principals or headmasters. However, the principal or headmaster might designate a school staff person to serve as the school liaison for the partnership. Some schools have staff whose

role is to coordinate partnerships. Others utilize guidance counselors, family and student engagement coordinators, or even teachers to serve as the school liaisons.

Students applying to enter Boston Public Schools will have a new student assignment plan beginning fall 2014. The new plan is called the Home Based School Choice Plan. “The new plan eliminates the three large zones and helps students attend quality schools, closer to home. In its first year, it will serve students entering the transition grades: K0, K1, K2 and 6, with additional grades added each year after that. High schools will remain as citywide options for all students. . . . The plan will offer a customized list of school choices for every family based on their home address. It includes every school within a one-mile radius of their home plus, as needed, nearby schools that have the highest levels of MCAS performance and growth. This ensures that every family has access to high quality schools, no matter where they live.”⁸ Each family will have at least six schools on their list, although most will have 8 – 14 schools. A new website has been launched, www.discoverbps.org, to help families navigate the new student assignment process.

The Boston Public School system is governed by a seven member school committee appointed by the mayor from among nominees recommended by a broad-based nominating committee. The school committee hires and evaluates the superintendent and sets policies and practices for the schools. It also approves the budget and how funds are used with the school system. The committee also plays a role in defining the vision, mission and goals of the BPS. Commonwealth Charter Schools are not governed by the school committee although they receive public funds.

The Boston Education Landscape: Facts about Schools and School-aged Children

Boston Public Schools / 28 Court St. / Boston, MA 02108-2505 www.bostonpublicschools.org

Boston Public Schools⁹

- 128** schools in the BPS
- 7** Early Learning Centers (K-grade 1 or grade 3)
- 46** Elementary Schools (K-5)
- 27** Elementary and Middle Schools (K-8)
- 9** Middle Schools (6-8)
- 2** Middle and High Schools (6-12)
- 25** High Schools (9-12)
- 3** Exam Schools (7-1)
- 7** Special Education Schools
- 2** Alternative (at-risk) programs

Included in the above numbers are:

- 21** Pilot Schools (models of educational innovation with more flexibility and autonomy)
- 6** Horace Mann Charter Schools funded by the BPS
- 6** Innovation Schools (based on Pilot School models)

Boston Public School students

- 57,100** total students (2012-2013 school year)
- 28,100** students in pre-kindergarten to grade 5
- 11,800** students in grades 6-8
- 17,200** students in grades 9-12
- 58,000** estimated enrollment for 2013-2014
- K0-grade 2 enrollment is expected to increase by about **1,000** over 2012-13

Student demographics

- 40%** Hispanic
- 36%** Black
- 13%** White
- 9%** Asian
- 2%** Other/multiracial

English Language Learners

- ELL students speak more than **85** different languages as their home language and come from more than **100** countries.
- **27,000** (47%) speak a language other than English as their first language
- **17,300** (30%) are Limited English Proficient (LEP) or English Language Learners
- **10,500** (61%) of English Language Learners were born in the U.S.
- The top nine non-English first languages spoken are:

Spanish **Haitian creole** **Cape Verdean creole**
Chinese **Vietnamese** **Portuguese**
Somali **Arabic** **French**

Other Boston Schools and Students

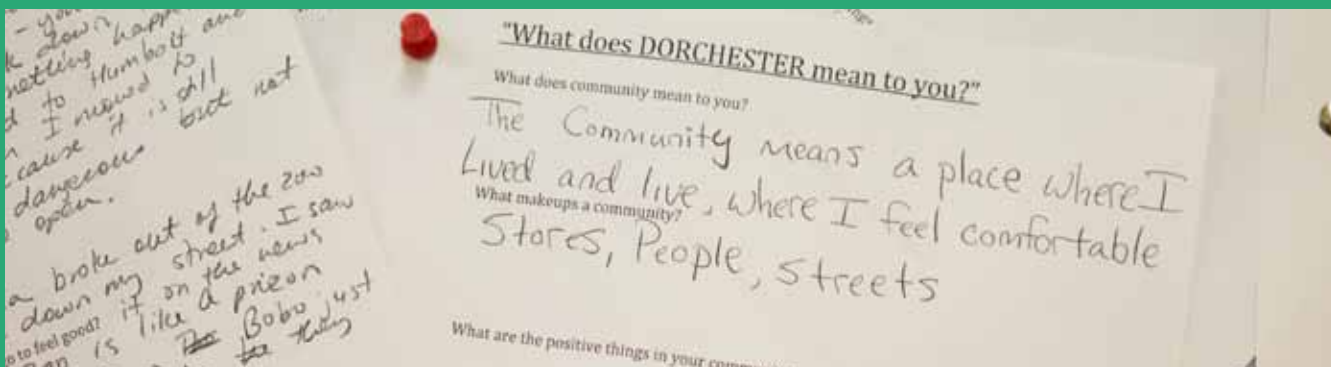
- **20,100** – number of school aged children in Boston who are not in the Boston Public School system (26% of 77,200 school aged children)
- **5,550** – students attend parochial schools
- **4,200** – students attend private schools
- **3,070** – students go to suburban schools through METCO
- **6,680** – students attend public charter schools
- **450** – students are placed by the BPS Special Education Dept. in non-BPS programs and schools
- **150** – students are home schooled

Notes

1. Boston Public Schools, "Introducing the Boston Public Schools: Guide for Parents and Students," 2013, 1.
2. Boston Public Schools Office of Community Engagement and Circle of Promise (facebook page) <https://www.facebook.com/BPSCECoP> (accessed 1 Aug. 2013).
3. Boston Public Schools, "Turnaround Schools," <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/turnaround/level4/>
4. These five schools are Orchard Gardens (K-8), Trotter Elementary, Blackstone Elementary, John F. Kennedy Elementary, and Harbor Middle School. The Mattahunt Elementary School was added in 2012.
5. "Boston Public Schools at a Glance: 2012-2013," April 2013. Information on the number of students enrolled for the 2013-2014 school year is from the communications office of the Boston Public Schools (October 3, 2013).

"Boston Public Schools at a Glance: 2012-2013," April 2013.

6. The essay component of the ISEE is not included. Grades and ISEE scores are weighted 50% each. See <http://erblearn.org/parents/admission/isee> for more information on the ISEE tests.
7. The O'Bryant School also accepts a few students into grade 10.
8. Improving School Choice, "Quality, Close to Home: The Home-Based School Choice Plan" <http://bostonchoice.org/> (accessed 8 August 2013).
9. "Boston Public Schools at a Glance, 2012-2013," BPS Facts, No. 19, April 2013, <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org> keywords **at a glance 2012** Statistics and facts are from this source except for total student enrollment Fall 2013 and the addition of the Higginson K0-2 School which is from the Communications Dept. of the BPS, Oct. 2013).



Roxbury Presbyterian Church Social Impact Center's Saturday School reading group, helping Dearborn students to improve their English Language Arts skills (2012)

Art project for a Burke High School art class. Students from the class answered this question and drew paintings based on their responses. Their paintings are displayed at the Intersection Church which also donated the canvases that students used. (2013)

Getting Involved:

Practical Recommendations to Help Start and Sustain Effective Partnerships

This Guidebook builds upon the long history of school/community partnerships to help facilitate additional partnerships between schools and churches.

In this section, we provide recommendations to churches to help start and sustain effective partnerships. This includes ways churches can get involved, including contact information, principles for involvement, and potential program designs.

Getting Involved

Churches that want to support and partner with the Boston Public Schools (BPS) should seek to understand and respect BPS district-wide policies and objectives. They can learn from many existing local models of BPS-church partnerships and do not have to “re-invent the wheel” when forming such partnerships. The BPS’ Office of Community Engagement and Circle of Promise (CECoP) serves to cultivate relationships and acts as an intermediary that supports best practices in forming partnerships, such as assessing partner resources or school needs for matching purposes and the use of the CECoP template for a Memorandum of Understanding that should be utilized for all school community/faith partnerships. CECoP operates by the Guiding Principles of Authentic Community Engagement to engage all stakeholders in the work with BPS schools and families. Emmanuel Gospel Center is collaborating with CECoP to grow and support community/faith-based partnerships with schools and will continue to document case studies that can be helpful for churches to learn from.

In this section, we will share guidelines, insights, and steps to forming partnerships with Boston Public Schools, but much of the information can be applied as best practices to forming partnerships with any public high school in the U.S.

Understanding the Separation of Church and State

To work with the BPS, churches must understand the federal laws regarding separation of church and state and be willing to partner with schools to support the schools’ agenda, priorities, and goals, not pre-conceived notions of how to help.

At the U.S. federal level, there are centers for neighborhood and faith-based partnerships (www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ofbnp/offices/federal), including one at the Department of Education (www.ed.gov/edpartners). According to the U.S. Department of Education’s Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships’ website, the

mission of the center is “to promote student achievement by connecting schools and community-based organizations, both secular and faith-based.” The U.S. Department of Education provides guidelines for school and faith-based partnerships.

Adapted from Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, “How Faith Communities Support Children’s Learning in Public Schools,” U.S. Department of Education, Washington DC, 1999

1. Make sure that all programs and activities have a secular purpose.
2. Select student participants without regard to religious affiliation.
3. Allow students the free expression of their religion, provided the speech takes place within the reasonable limits of orderliness.
4. Refrain from participating in student-led religious activities while operating in your capacity in the educational activity.
5. Encourage civic values and positive character development without preaching directly about your faith.

For faith-based volunteers, be mindful of the First Amendment rights of students and families. On one hand, do not preach about your faith, pray or conduct religious activities during your volunteer session with them. On the other hand, do not discourage or infringe on the rights of the students and families to speak about their religion, to say a prayer or read Scripture, provided that this is done within the reasonable limits of rules for orderliness, talking, and congregating that are set for other speech and activities.

Steps to Forming Partnerships

Before a church goes to a school to explore a partnership, it should prepare itself internally to be ready to build a sustainable partnership. CECoP and Emmanuel Gospel Center’s Boston Education Collaborative

(BEC) program can provide support to help a church strengthen its internal infrastructure and build connections with schools. CECOP and the BEC can also share best practices and tools as well as connect the church to greater network of school partners (both faith-based and community-based) that can serve as additional resources.

Adapted from Boston Public Schools Office of Community Engagement and Circle of Promise's Faith-based Partnership Guidebook (2012) and Ten Steps for School Partnerships, created by Liz Steinhauser, Jennie Msall and Meg McDermott, St Stephen's Church (South End, Boston) for the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, B-PEACE for Jorge Antiviolence Campaign (2013)

Step 1 - Internal Assessment

Pray and Assess. . .

- The interest and source of motivation from both leadership and the congregational level to partner with a school
- Existing internal interest, capacity and resources to provide or develop support and resources to schools, students, and families. Use the CECOP Resource Assessment Survey as a tool to foster dialogue amongst leaders and congregants.
- Internal capacity to build and sustain a healthy, long-term partnership in the areas of leadership and resources

Step 2 - Building Internal Infrastructure

1. Identify a lead person from the church to serve as a liaison and coordinator for the partnership team, ideally someone who is not the senior pastor.
2. Recruit additional members with various giftings for the team which can help to handle tasks and mobilize other church members
3. Set up a structure and schedule for team communication and planning
4. Connect with Boston Public School (through CECOP), EGC's Boston Education Collaborative, or community resources to access CORI/SORI forms, templates for Memorandum of Understanding, volunteer training, etc.
5. Learn about various school and faith-based partnership models and consider which ones fit the internal resources and giftings of church members

Step 3 - Identify and Communicate with Potential Partners

1. Identify the geographical area that you want to pursue. Potential school partners can be either in the immediate vicinity of your church, be a school that some of your church members work in, or a school with needs that match well with the church's resources.

2. Initiate contact with the identified potential partner through CECOP staff. Depending on the school organization, a good point person at the school could be the principal, but sometimes, there are staff members who serve as partnership coordinators and are better suited as the liaison to work with. Various BPS roles such as Family and Community Outreach Coordinators, Community Field Coordinators, Partnership Coordinators, or even Guidance Counselors serve to build partnerships for a school. While a church can initiate contact with school leaders at any point, soliciting the help of the CECOP staff could make the navigation process easier since each BPS school has its own organizational structure which can change year to year.
3. Contact CECOP so that the office can support you in scheduling an exploratory meeting, help in the formation of the partnership, and invite the church to the events that it offers for schools and their partners
4. Schedule a meeting with the school liaison and/or principal to discover existing common areas for support or to consider resources that the church may develop to target existing school needs. Evaluate whether the needs/resources as well as leadership style align to make this partnership a good match.
5. Schedule a subsequent meeting to determine whether to partner after a period of consideration for each institution.
6. Begin drafting the content of the agreement of the school and the church of how you will work together if the decision is to move forward. Otherwise, seek out another potential partner and repeat the process of setting up an exploratory meeting.

Step 4 - Build a Sustainable Partnership

1. Form a partnership steering committee with members from each institution to create a vision for the partnership that honors the individual school and church and aligns to the goals of the Boston Public Schools.
2. Set short-term and long-term goals for the partnership. Build trust and capacity through beginning with small projects and expanding your engagement in scope and number as you experience successes.
3. Identify the desired outcomes from the partnership and ways to measure those outcomes. While the partnership can initially start with meeting the schools' material needs, in the long-run, work towards identifying ways in which the partnership can support increased academic achievement for all students.

4. Organize teams or individuals from the church who will be responsible for the operations, resource development, communication, and program evaluation of partnership activities. Schedule regular team meetings.
5. Provide training for volunteers so they understand the school's priorities and requirements.
6. Draft a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the school, church, and CECOP to ensure that each is clear on the expectation and boundaries of the partnership in moving forward. The CECOP has a MOU template that all partners should use.
7. Keep the CECOP informed on the development of the partnership
8. Schedule regular meetings with school leaders to assess the partnership and to conduct ongoing evaluation of the partnership:
 - Measure and report progress towards the achievement of planned outcomes and objectives.
 - Modify plans based on results and feedback.
 - Expand the scope and/or number of activities based on successful implementation of activities.

Step 5 - Networking with Other Schools / Faith Institutions

1. Participate in the CECOP network and events to share and learn from the models of various partnerships, successes, challenges, and best practices.
2. Invite additional churches to partner with the same school or a different school to increase the level of resources to support the school, students, and families, toward increased student academic achievement.



English High School students attended a school breakfast that launched the first junior and senior Passport cohorts run by Boston HERC, a college readiness program from Congregación León de Judá (2013)

Models of Local Partnerships

The CECOP identifies six areas of support that community and faith-based partners can provide for schools: Academic, College & Career, Health & Wellness, Parents & Family, Resource & Capacity, and Afterschool & Recreation. The school needs and faith-based resource assessment surveys break these categories down into more detailed subcategories.

Some of the most common existing partnership models include:

- Service projects
- School events volunteering
- Space sharing
- Donations of clothing, books, supplies, gift cards, or money
- Mentoring
- In-class tutoring or reading buddies Afterschool academic and enrichment program
- MCAS bootcamp
- Saturday School
- Parent Council support
- School and community advocacy

As a church, you can choose to:

- Form your own partnership with either an unmatched or matched school
- Contact CECOP to find out if which schools are currently unmatched or matched
- Partner with another church to support a current school partnership
- Contact EGC's BEC program to find out what churches or Christian organizations need volunteers to support their programs.
- Some churches include Black Ministerial Alliance's Victory Generation programs, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, and Roxbury Presbyterian Church.
- Partner with a secular organization to support a current school partnership
- Organizations such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters (mentoring), Generations Inc. (reading buddies), and Boston Partners in Education (in-class tutors) seek volunteers from churches to participate in their school partnerships

Some Do's and Don'ts

Do

- Connect with CECOP and its network of BPS schools, BPS departments, community organizations, and faith-based institutions
- Learn from existing models and best practices
- Share your successes and challenges with others
- Be patient and flexible when working with schools because leadership and circumstances are never static
- Listen well to schools as they express their needs (leaders, staff, parents, and students)
- Put your partnership agreement on paper with a signed MOU
- Be reflective practitioners
- Respect government laws regarding separation of church and state as well as BPS school policies

Don't

- Reach out to schools before your church has: 1) completed an internal CECOP resource assessment, 2) found key leaders to work on a partnership and, 3) had an initial conversation with CECOP to facilitate finding potential school partners
- Approach schools with an agenda or your own ideas of how to partner. Let the schools tell you what they need and be ready to partner with a heart of servanthood.