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Boston Takes Advantage of Education Reform

Late designation of eligible schools creates a tight timeline for fall implementation

The Boston School Committee and Superintendent Carol Johnson are planning to use provisions of the recently passed education reform legislation, [Chapter 12 of the Acts of 2010](#), this spring to advance the Superintendent's Acceleration Agenda. Chapter 12 was signed into law on January 18, 2010, meeting the deadline for the state's Race to the Top federal education grant application but creating a tight timeline for school districts to use the legislation in the next school year.

Chapter 12 provides superintendents and the Commissioner of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) new authority to turnaround underperforming schools and allows Boston to create four new Horace Mann in-district charter schools without union approval. In addition, the legislation lifts the cap on charter schools in underperforming school districts, allowing them to expand starting in FY12.

However, the authority to review and dismiss staff, alter working conditions and request expedited contract waivers is only available to superintendents for schools that have been designated as underperforming by the DESE. Final designations are not expected to be released by the DESE until late April, though tentative designations are expected in March. After designation, the process to develop a turnaround plan can take up to 225 days, though the Commissioner can expedite the process for schools previously designated as underperforming.

The BPS is planning to use this expedited process to implement reorganization plans for some of the 14 underperforming schools singled out in the Superintendent's Acceleration Agenda for turnaround. Most of these 14 schools are expected to be designated as underperforming by the state in April. The Superintendent announced preliminary plans to utilize Chapter 12 in the following ways:

- Establish six "fresh start" schools in which all staff will be required to reapply for their positions for the 2010-2011 school year, with the Superintendent making the final hiring decisions. Staff could also be dismissed for good cause.
- Negotiate contract waivers under an expedited arbitration process to change working and learning conditions in certain schools for the 2010-2011 school year.
- Create up to three new Horace Mann in-district charter schools for the 2011-2012 school year.

Implementing changes by next fall is an aggressive goal that will require focused execution. Negotiating contract waivers alone could take up to 63 days to complete and therefore, strategic planning and union cooperation are key. The Superintendent must also have solid turnaround plans ready for School Committee approval when the DESE announces its designations. The Superintendent's team is beginning to review staff in expected targeted schools in order to meet strict contract deadlines for the transition of personnel.