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The Challenge of Level 3 Schools in Boston

Of 96 BPS schools ranked by the state on performance, 50% are Level 3 schools

Students enrolled in the BPS represent 5% of all public school students in the Commonwealth but 15% of public school students attending the low-performing Level 3 and 4 schools. Level 3 schools, as designated by the state, represent the bottom 20% of the state based on student performance and half of Boston's schools ranked by the state fit into this category. That is why there was urgency in achieving systemic reform in the new teachers' contract, why educational equity is an important issue in any new student assignment plan, and why further legislative reform is now needed to provide low-performing schools with needed support and flexibility.

There are 288 Level 3 schools statewide and 48 or 16.7% of them are in Boston. The BPS also rates its schools and 21 fall into its lowest performing category, representing 16.9% of its total student enrollment.

Boston currently has 128 public schools, 96 of which were assigned a state Level in 2012. Of the 96 schools, 12 are Level 4 (12.5%) and 48 are Level 3 (50%). The 32 excluded schools provide adult education, various support programs, early education, are too new to have four years of data, are in-district charters, or are considered part of another school.

Massachusetts School Levels

Massachusetts designates public schools into five different Levels. Starting in 2012, schools were assessed on a Progress and Performance Index (PPI) based on four years of MCAS scores, dropout rates, and graduation rates, among other measures. Level 1 schools are in the top 80 percentiles of achievement and meeting their goals; Level 2 schools are included in the

80%, but are not necessarily meeting all goals; Level 3 schools are the bottom 20% statewide; and Level 4 schools are selected by the Commissioner of the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Schools (DESE) from the list of Level 3 schools, representing no more than the bottom 4% statewide. Level 5 denotes state receivership and Lawrence is the only district designated as such. The Level system unifies federal and state accountability systems and helps allocate assistance, such as some grant eligibilities.

BPS Also Ranks Schools

Unlike the state's accountability system, which relies on four years of data and weighs performance four times as much as student growth, BPS has a resource allocation system based on two years of data, with equal weight given to student performance and student growth scores. Consequently, this system reflects school improvement more quickly, registers short-term improvement or declines more prominently, and uses the BPS' schools as the norming group instead of all schools across the state. Also in contrast to the state system, the BPS differentiates among types of special-needs students and levels of English language acquisition. The BPS system places schools in four different quadrants, and this year 21 schools that fall in the lowest quadrant are considered most in need of additional support. The difference in the two systems is demonstrated by the Curley K-8 school which is labeled a Level 3 school by the state, but placed in the high-proficiency, high-growth quadrant by the BPS.

What support is provided to these 21 BPS schools will be explained next.