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## Significant School Reform in Teachers' Contract Still Expected

*Urgency for systemic change requires a leap rather than small steps for BPS reform*

The fact that the Boston Public Schools (BPS) and the Boston Teachers Union (BTU) negotiating teams were not able to reach agreement on a reform contract in their "marathon session" after 21 months of discussions is disheartening. What this means now is that in planning for next year, seniority will continue to be an important factor in transfers of permanent teachers and more teachers will be administratively placed with little if any principal and school involvement.

Business, civic, public leaders, elected officials and Boston parents and students should continue to expect strong systemic reform to improve student achievement and should raise their voices to demand such reform. Too much is at stake for the parties to settle for a contract that does not address in a significant way the issues of teacher evaluation, more say at the school level over teacher assignments, what incentives drive teacher compensation, school scheduling, parent and student involvement in school decision-making and extended time. This must be achieved in a contract that is economically sustainable.

What makes substantive reform in this contract so urgent is the importance for the Boston schools to improve student achievement to be competitive with the growing number of charter schools in Boston, the need to demonstrate improved quality in all schools for the success of a new student assignment plan and despite important improvements in the past few years, the still

unacceptable high student achievement gap, four-year cohort dropout rate, and the number of BPS students not graduating.

**Teacher Incentive Fund** - Unnecessarily complicating the teacher contract process was the BTU's insistence that the decision about how \$9.4M in federal Teacher Incentive Funds (TIF) would be distributed to teachers in the 11 Turnaround Schools in Boston be included in the contract. The federal TIF funds were intended to be an incentive for good teachers to teach in underperforming schools based on their evaluation and classroom success. This matter is totally outside the BPS-BTU contract negotiations and should have been dealt with separately as was the case in Springfield. Now these funds will support reform elsewhere.

**Mediation Process** - The BPS and BTU have petitioned the state Board of Conciliation and Arbitration (Board), within the state Department of Labor Relations, for a determination of the existence of an impasse. The Board has 10 days after receipt of the petition to render a decision. A mediator will be appointed within five days of the decision either by the two parties jointly or if there is no agreement, by the Board. The mediator will work with both parties to help resolve the outstanding contract issues with no time limit, but the mediator can only report his progress to the Board and cannot enforce an agreement. This process should not be an excuse for failing to agree soon on strong systemic reforms in the contract.