

September 2014

Underperforming BPS Schools Remain a Challenge

Boston shows slight improvement, but 64% of ranked schools are underperforming

The September 19th report on 2014 school performance levels by district from the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) shows a slight overall improvement for Boston from 2013, but still an unacceptable number of underperforming schools. This year 65 Boston schools (63.7%) ranked by the state are classified as underperforming, (Level 3 or below) down from 69 schools (68.3%) in 2013. Next year Boston will adopt the PARCC assessment in place of MCAS and the state will hold most BPS schools harmless for a year while the test is implemented.

Boston currently operates 128 public schools, 102 of which were assigned a state Level in 2014. Of the 102 schools, 55 are Level 3 (54%), eight are Level 4 (8%) and two are Level 5 (2%). The 26 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 80th percentile 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 DESE from the list of Level 3 schools, representing no more than the bottom 4% statewide. **Level 5** denotes state

receivership. In 2013 the state took over the Dever and the Holland schools. The state and the BPS are working on a plan for the Dearborn School to allow the BPS to bring in an outside partner while still retaining control as a Level 4 school.

Over the past year the City has been moderately successful at improving school performance. The BPS reduced its number of Level 3 schools from 60 in 2013 to 55 in 2014, with three schools improving from Level 3 to Level 1. Of note is that the Burke High School was the first high school in the state to exit the turnaround process by improving from Level 4 to Level 3. As a result, Boston's share of the state's underperforming schools decreased from 20.4% in 2013 to 19.3% in 2014. However, nine Level 1 schools were downgraded, a troubling sign, but in line with a larger statewide trend.

PARCC Assessment

Last year Boston was one of the municipalities to test the Partnership for Assessment for Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) Assessment. On October 1st the School Committee voted to replace MCAS with PARCC for all students, except 10th graders, in the next school year. This computer based test is more closely aligned with the new Massachusetts Common Core Curriculum and is designed as a better measure of college preparedness. While MCAS will continue to be a graduation requirement through the class of 2018, the state has indicated that a next generation test will be implemented for future classes. By implementing PARCC now Boston students and teachers will be better prepared for a future generation of standardized test.