



## SUMMARY OF THE REPORT:

### **The Road to Reform: Building a System of Excellent and Equitable High Schools in Boston**

Adria Steinberg with Lili Allen

#### *Abstract*

Adria Steinberg and Lili Allen focus their research on the past ten years of high school reform under Superintendent Thomas Payzant. The Boston Public Schools offers its students a variety of different high school settings across the district – small schools within a large high school complex, free-standing small schools, Pilot schools, large schools separated into smaller learning communities, exam schools, and alternative high schools run by districts and community organizations. Steinberg and Allen examine the strategies used for high school reform in Boston, the challenges Boston Public Schools face in reducing larger high schools into smaller schools, and recommendations for the new superintendent for future reform and improvement.

#### *Areas of Progress*

- The creation of a district Office of School-to-Career. School career coordinators were placed in designated high schools to help in the development of career pathways and project-based learning.
- Parents and students have a choice between several different high school models: small schools, Pilot schools, large schools separated into smaller learning communities, exam schools, and alternative high schools.
- Design of a new graduation policy to assist student reach the requirements for graduation as well as those students who repeat grades.

#### *Challenges*

- With collaborative planning in smaller schools and learning communities come differences in teaching philosophies and ideas. School leaders may have to manage the conflicts while instituting a common vision for instruction and learning.
- Increasing the inclusion levels and educational achievement of the Special Education and English Language Learner populations in Boston high schools.
- Evaluations and assessments for reform are not as consistent as they should be in order to collect and analyze accurate information on reform progress and actions.

#### *Recommendations*

- **Keep the Engines of Reform Humming.** To continue the improvement of Boston's high schools, the relationships and communications between key district offices and leaders will be important. There needs to be consistency between district offices and key leaders to ensure that the collaboration between such entities as the Office of High School Renewal and the High School Renewal Workgroup strengthens and continues to drive reform.
- **Commit to a Dual Agenda of High Standards and Low Dropout Rates, and Develop an Early Warning System for Struggling Students.** This agenda could ensure that students stay on track, meet education requirements, and successfully graduate in four years.
- **Address the Equity and Excellence Challenges of a Choice-Based Portfolio of High Schools.** This includes ensuring that parents and students receive enough information to make an informed decision regarding high school choice; addressing student assignments in order to ensure consistency throughout all schools in the district; and creating a data system to accurately monitor students throughout the district.