



**SUMMARY OF THE REPORT:**  
**Instructional Improvement in the Boston Public Schools: 1996-2006**  
Barbara Neufeld

*Abstract*

In her paper, Barbara Neufeld of Education Matters discusses the transformation in instructional practice that the Boston Public Schools has undergone with the help of its key partner, the Boston Plan for Excellence. As a result of Thomas Payzant's tenure as Superintendent, Boston school teachers now have a concrete instructional strategy that is system-wide. The district implemented Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL), a workshop model that maximizes student participation and learning. In this paper, Boston's theory of action for this instructional reform model is examined along with the standards-based changes the district has made in instruction over the years. Neufeld also discusses the role CCL plays in whole school improvement in Boston.

*Areas of Progress*

- The district has created and maintained a whole-school improvement agenda.
- The district was able to focus principals' and headmasters' roles on instruction within their schools by providing learning and training opportunities.
- There has been an establishment of a collaborative culture within the Boston Public Schools focused on instruction.
- The district has invested heavily in their coaches by providing regular professional development on a bi-weekly basis.

*Challenges*

- *Implementation of Workshop Instruction.* The theory of workshop instruction is not completely implemented or understood in all Boston Public Schools.
- *Workshop-Related Challenges at the Small High Schools and Small Learning Communities.* Due to the district's focus on restructuring Boston high schools, instructional improvements have not yet become central to high school renewal.
- *Insufficient and/or Weak Principal/Headmaster Leadership.* Insufficient principal or headmaster leadership has impacted the implementation of instructional programs and the workshop model in schools.
- *Implementation of CCL in Literacy.* There has not been cross-school consistency when it comes to CCL implementation across the district.
- *Coach Allocation and Supervision.* Principals will now be responsible for hiring and supervising coaches for their schools. As a result, it is possible that such principals will redefine coaches' responsibilities and/or the organization of their work in ways that do not support the CCL model of coaching and/or the model of workshop instruction.
- *Schools without the Support of Coaches in Key Instructional Areas.* Because of the reallocation of resources, some schools within the Boston Public Schools will now be without coaches for the coming school year.
- *High Quality Coach Professional Development.* Professional development for coaches may shift to include generic coaching skills thought appropriate for all coaches regardless of the content area in which they work.

*Recommendations*

- District administrators need to review workshop instruction by school and pinpoint the areas of limitation, and create support strategies and accountability procedures to bring all schools to a high level.
- The district needs to determine which factors are negatively affecting instructional improvement and address them with scheduling and staffing allocations, among other actions and alternatives.

- The district needs to focus on the ways in which principals and headmasters lead the instructional improvement work, determine what types of professional development is needed, and create a level of accountability for school leaders.
- The district needs to conduct an analysis of the CCL model and work with coaches to determine what adjustments need to be made.
- The district needs to develop a specific job description and evaluation process for coaches and clearly define these parameters for principals and headmasters.
- The district needs to determine the key challenges schools will face without instructional coaches and create specific strategies to improve instruction through other means.
- Coaches' knowledge, skill, future development needs should be analyzed along with the current design of coach professional development before creating a new system for professional development.