

RENAISSANCE

at the Jeremiah E. Burke High School



2016 BEST PRACTICE RESEARCH
from the School on the Move Prize



RESEARCH

Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy

Nina Culbertson, Lead Author/Senior Research Associate

Sinead Chalmers, Research & Policy Analyst

Simone Fried, Consultant

Jennifer Poulos, Associate Director

Chad d'Entremont, Executive Director

ABOUT THE RENNIE CENTER FOR EDUCATION RESEARCH & POLICY

The Rennie Center's mission is to improve public education through well-informed decision-making based on deep knowledge and evidence of effective policymaking and practice. As Massachusetts' preeminent voice in public education reform, we create open spaces for educators and policymakers to consider evidence, discuss cutting-edge issues, and develop new approaches to advance student learning and achievement. Through our staunch commitment to independent, non-partisan research and constructive conversations, we work to promote an education system that provides every child with the opportunity to be successful in school and in life.

PRODUCTION

EdVestors

Janet Anderson, Executive Vice President

Alison Stevens, Senior Director of School-Based Investments

Laura Perille, President & CEO

ABOUT EDVESTORS

EdVestors' mission is to increase the number of schools in Boston delivering dramatically improved education outcomes for all students. With a combination of strategic philanthropy, education expertise and implementation support, we work at the classroom, school, and system levels to help schools create the conditions for improvement. In partnership with our donors, we act as a seed funder for school improvement; develop & demonstrate best practices across schools; and coordinate major public-private partnerships to achieve city-wide impact in targeted focus areas - currently middle grades math and K-12 arts education, with new work developing in career technical education.



ABOUT THE SCHOOL ON THE MOVE PRIZE

EdVestors launched the Thomas W. Payzant School on the Move Prize in 2006 to highlight the public school successes that often go unnoticed amid the many real challenges facing urban schools. Each year a number of public schools document rapid student progress that outpaces the rest of the district, and there is immense value in reflecting on and learning from these improvement stories.

In 2015, as EdVestors celebrated the 10th anniversary of the School on the Move Prize, the Jeremiah E. Burke High School was named the Prize winner and recipient of the \$100,000 award. In partnership with the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy, EdVestors is pleased to release this case study, which tells the story of the Burke's extraordinary improvement.

“The School on the Move Prize remains one of the foundational elements of EdVestors’ work because it serves as an engine for learning how urban schools really improve.”

LAURA PERILLE, PRESIDENT AND CEO, EDVESTORS



PHOTO BY MICHAEL MANNING

RENAISSANCE

at the Jeremiah E. Burke High School

The halls at the Jeremiah E. Burke High School are filled with enthusiasm and camaraderie as staff and students gear up for the day ahead. Classroom doors stay open for staff and community partners to move fluidly between rooms, providing updates on students' daily progress and observing each other's practice. In class, students working in small groups check in with their peers, offering encouragement and advice. "It is an environment I want to be in," remarks one junior.

When walking these halls today, it is hard to imagine that six years ago the school was in a dire state. By the 2009-2010 school year, it had failed to meet state academic proficiency goals for three years straight, had a persistently low graduation rate, and had some of the highest dropout and mobility rates in the city of Boston. Faced with these alarming statistics, the state identified the school for turnaround (designated as among the lowest achieving and least improving schools in the state), bringing

flexibilities and resources to the school and spurring a process of improvement.

Since 1934, the Burke has served one of the most diverse and high-need student populations in Boston. Located on a main street in the Dorchester neighborhood, the school rebuilt itself from state-designated turnaround status in 2010 to the most improved school in the city in 2015. In fact, it remains the only high school in the state to exit turnaround status, and a greater proportion of students score proficient or advanced on the English language arts and mathematics Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) than Boston's district-wide average. While the Burke's academic growth is impressive, it is equally important to acknowledge that the school's growth extends beyond the academic realm. A comprehensive cultural shift occurred that has transformed the teaching and learning environment. The story of the Burke offers valuable lessons about whole school reform.

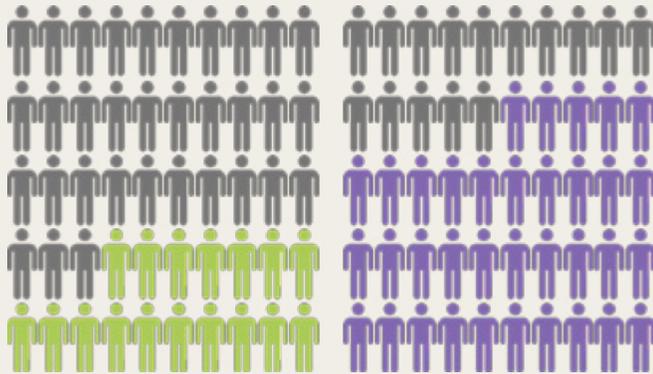


“Turnaround was painful, but it was also a blessing to create a climate and culture where teaching and learning could really take place. This was the start of the design of the new Burke High School.”

LINDSA MCINTYRE, BURKE HIGH SCHOOL HEADMASTER

BURKE IMPROVEMENT BY THE NUMBERS

Four-year graduation rates



35% 2009-2010 school year

71% 2014-2015 school year

Student demographics

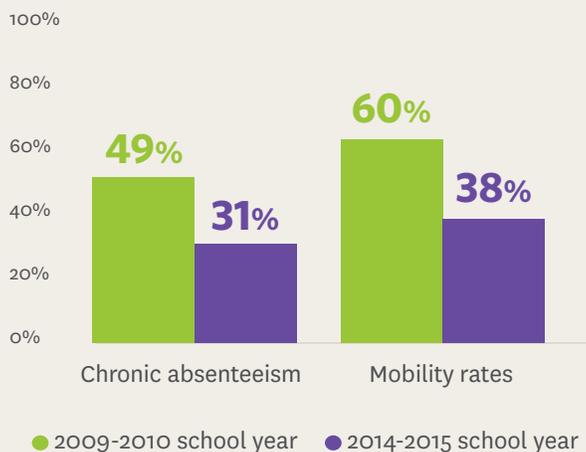
97% Students of color

30% English Language Learners

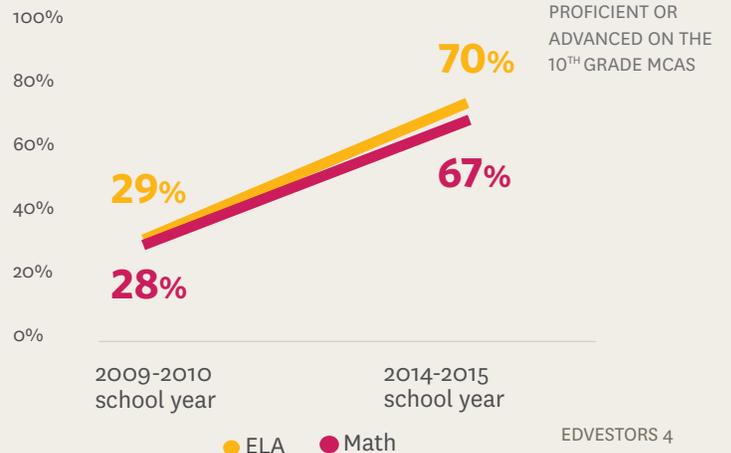
76% High Needs

539 Students

Student stability indicators



Academic gains



THE OPPORTUNITY OF TURNAROUND

Leaders and educators at the Burke leveraged the added resources and autonomy that accompany turnaround status in order to reinvigorate teaching and learning at the school.¹ To drive change and accelerate student achievement and success, headmaster Lindsa McIntyre and her leadership team embraced a range of deep academic and non-academic goals for the school and promoted a school climate that emphasized two major elements: whole child supports and new cultural norms for teachers. They supported this dual focus and cultural shift by implementing key strategies and structural supports to embed and reinforce these changes in practice.

Together, these key strategies and supports fueled the Jeremiah E. Burke High School’s transformation from one of the lowest-performing schools in the state to one of the most improved schools in Boston Public Schools. Below, we highlight three key changes in approach that led to outstanding results.



“You don’t have to be afraid. Everyone says hi and everyone cares. It is very different from the perception. My friends [in other schools] say negative things, but they have never been here.”

BURKE STUDENT, GRADE 11

BREAKING IT DOWN

How the Burke transformed its school climate

KEY CHANGES IN CLIMATE

KEY STRATEGIES

WHOLE CHILD SUPPORTS



Trauma-sensitive practices
Relationships and engagement of teachers with students
High degree of partner integration into school community

CULTURAL NORMS TO MAXIMIZE TEACHING AND LEARNING



Leadership as a catalyst
Strategic hiring (using autonomy)
Teacher buy-in to whole child approach
School-wide goals focused on rigorous academic instruction

STRUCTURAL SUPPORTS



Grade cohort academies
New scheduling (block schedules)
Dedicated time for teacher collaboration
Data use to ensure whole child is supported

KEY STRATEGY 1:*Focus on the needs of the whole child*

Lindsa McIntyre, the Burke's headmaster since 2009, arrived at the school with a strong sense of urgency around prioritizing the needs of the whole child to drive academic achievement. The majority of students entered the high school several years below grade level academically, so Dr. McIntyre and her leadership team focused on identifying and addressing the root causes of previous academic failure: past or ongoing trauma, poverty, and a lack of connection to appropriate social supports. The Burke school staff reported many students had been marginalized and underserved in their early years and were already disengaged in their learning prior to arriving. In addition, prior to 2010, staff treated student behavioral issues punitively through suspensions and expulsions. Under the turnaround plan, school leadership embraced a new idea that students cannot be academically successful without appropriate supports and began to build strategies and structures that addressed specific student needs.

The major strategy on which school leadership focused their early efforts was building trauma-sensitive practices into the Burke's redesign. A trauma-sensitive school is one in which all students feel safe, welcomed, and supported, and where addressing trauma's impact on learning is at the center of its educational mission.² The trauma-sensitive model relies on a foundation of building relationships and engagement with students (e.g. adult-to-student, peer-to-peer, and

community-to-school), in order to create an environment where it is possible for children to “forge strong relationships with caring adults and learn in a supportive, predictable, and safe environment.”³ Research on trauma-sensitive schools suggests that the model needs to be comprehensively adopted across the school-wide infrastructure, rather than on an individual student or classroom basis, in order to most successfully help educators address the barriers to students' learning.⁴

Using the trauma-sensitive model, the school embraced a climate of support. The Burke committed to meeting students' academic and non-academic needs and leveraging students' strengths through a tiered system of supports and developed partnerships with social workers and youth development workers to provide much-needed services. Professional development, including a summer retreat for teachers, incorporated a focus on collaboration, collectivity, nurturing, and whole-child pedagogy. Staff reported the school community changed from a negative, teacher-directed environment to one that is positive, student-focused, and flexible depending on student needs. To achieve this shift, educators and partners focus on identifying the root cause of students' decisions and actions. Rather than punishing problem behaviors, students are directed to appropriate counseling and support services. One teacher explained, “I am not just a math teacher and you are not just a student. I am making sure that I find time to talk to students beyond teaching.” School staff are fiercely protective of their students and work hard to ensure all students have a strong relationship with at least one adult in the building.

**INSIDE THE BURKE:***Building strong community partnerships to support the whole child*

Alongside the development of a whole child mindset, school leaders engaged community-based organizations as part of the support system for students and educators, creating a high degree of partner integration into the school community. Several of the Burke's new or expanded practices—such as Early Warning Indicator meetings, family engagement, counseling, health and trauma services, student mentoring, and others—are supported by a vast network of community partners, many of whom are embedded in daily school life to the extent that students perceive them as part of the educator team. Staff and students at the Burke regularly collaborate with over 60 community-based organizations to engage and learn in dynamic ways. The school year begins with a staff retreat where Burke leaders and partners model learning for educators. Throughout the school year, partners participate in home visits and meetings to review barriers to students' attendance and offer supports like tutoring, one-to-one mentoring, college application and financial aid planning assistance, social work and counseling, coordination with external healthcare services, and, as one partner stated, an “all hands on deck, open collaboration to serve the students' needs.” Community partners boost the school's capacity to provide every student with a close relationship to a trusted adult. This level of strategic collaboration with partners, supported by a dedicated full-time staff position to ensure coordination of services at the Burke, places the student at the center and helps meet the individual needs of more than 500 students.



BURKE TEACHER

“The important thing is that teachers are able to build relationships with students. The collaborative spirit is essential. This work is really hard and you can’t do it by yourself. Success is going to look different but collaboratively we are on the same page to push the school from good to great.”

KEY STRATEGY 2:

Change in school culture to support teaching and learning

Perhaps the biggest initial challenge to the Burke’s academic growth was changing the school culture from one of teacher isolation and punitive discipline policies for students to one of trust among educators and meeting student needs. As they sought to spark a cultural shift, the Burke community wove together mission-driven educators and local partners in a framework of trauma-sensitive supports and consistent, open engagement with students, with the goal of supporting all students to achieve at high levels. The vision of the headmaster and leadership team served as the primary catalyst for this cultural change.

Prior to turnaround, little attention was paid to the holistic needs of students or educators at the Burke. Educator behavior was teacher-centered and content-driven; staff who were at the school prior to turnaround report that “students were invisible,” and “there was no feedback or accountability for teachers to grow, adjust, or adapt.” School leadership sought drastic shifts in the way educators engaged students; they began to elevate instruction in a way that put students as primary stakeholders of teaching and learning. The autonomy of turnaround designation allowed school leaders to focus on incorporating students’ needs through all aspects of teaching and learning, and leaders sought to elevate student learning by establishing school-wide goals focused on academic rigor coupled with teacher buy-in to the whole-child approach.

Through strategic hiring, clear expectations about student learning, and targeted professional development planned by the teachers themselves, leaders assembled a cadre of educators who believe their role is to ensure students receive the supports they need to successfully access rigorous academic content in the classroom. The Burke developed a hiring process that began by introducing candidates to the school culture through walk-throughs, observations, and explicit description of the school’s mission. Building on their turnaround plan, school leaders worked closely with local residency-based teacher preparation programs to place pre-service teachers at the Burke, thus developing a pipeline of potential hires who fully understand the school culture. Expectations for the rigorous academic content is clear to all teachers and students, and educators participate in regular professional development and trainings to ensure they are fully equipped to address those expectations in their teaching practice and through whole-child supports. Educators are transparent about their teaching practice and welcome constructive feedback in their classrooms and in collaborative meetings with colleagues.

All educators at the Burke—including teachers, support staff, and community partners—now share the mindset that student success is their responsibility. They are thoughtful and strategic about how they engage students. This cultural shift has empowered educators and students alike. Both report the school is a welcoming, safe space that nurtures student success and teacher growth.

KEY STRATEGY 3:*Introduce new structures to support the culture shift*

The Burke's leadership team introduced new structures that undergird the school's cultural shifts, which in turn facilitate the delivery of comprehensive student supports and a collaborative environment for educators to change their practice. Key structural changes include the development of grade cohort academies and block scheduling implemented with a high degree of fidelity. Teachers and school partners report they fully support these structures.

Grade cohort academies serve as small learning communities, allowing students and educators to develop deep relationships, as well as provide space for educators to receive feedback from their peers to improve their work. The educator team within each academy (freshman, sophomore, and upper) collaborates to review Early Warning Indicator and performance data, plan lessons and curricula, observe peers' classroom practice, and brainstorm interventions for students. When teachers collaborate in weekly meetings, their discussions are guided by an agenda and agreed-upon protocols; these structures allow school leaders to transfer ownership of school-wide goals and strategies to teachers.

School leaders believe purposeful block scheduling is an essential element of the school's structure that allows educators to fully engage with student learning and provide tiered interventions. Each student's daily schedule—comprised of four long blocks for content and one shorter block for enrichment—is designed to intentionally address individual needs. If first term assessments reveal a student's

schedule is not well-suited for his or her needs, teachers will work with the school registrar and the student to reconfigure his or her schedule without waiting for the semester to end. The block schedule also includes a daily planning period to support teacher collaboration.

Strong articulation of the school-wide goals is a key piece of the school's commitment to excellence. The goals drive an ongoing conversation about educator efficacy, strategies, and interventions that hold teachers and students accountable for their learning. These goals are developed and articulated through feedback from the previous school year's instructional rounds (visits to classrooms by other Boston Public Schools educators and Harvard University faculty) and a summer retreat for educators. This retreat is designed to guide pedagogy and develop a collective energy for the school year. The introduction of these new structures to the Burke strengthened instructional practices and sustained authentic relationships between educators and students.

“The systems here facilitate answering problems as they arise.”



**BURKE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP
TEAM MEMBER**



SUSTAINING MOMENTUM*Innovation moving forward*

The Burke's staff and leaders acknowledge challenges and opportunities in sustaining the school's success. Students and educators are striving to build a positive public reputation that reflects the dramatic improvements to academic performance and school culture. School leaders also struggle to fit appropriate academic and social support services into a school day under six hours long. Our prior research on Boston schools observed the importance of five key practices in driving school improvement: shared leadership; meaningful teacher collaboration; effective use of data; academic rigor combined with student support; and effective family and community partnerships.⁵

The Burke has many of these “improving” practices solidly in place—particularly teacher collaboration and student support. The research on sustaining school improvement shows that the most successful schools over time build a culture of continuous improvement among educators and seek new ways to tackle ever more challenging questions around student learning.⁶ The Burke has intentionally taken on these challenges over the past several years. Schools that sustain improvement over time also find meaningful ways to engage families—something Burke leadership has initiated with family cookouts and communication in multiple languages—but acknowledges needs stronger connections to more deeply involve families in school decision-making.

As the Burke continues in its post-turnaround era, and the loss of some of the autonomies and resources that accompanied turnaround status, the leadership and teacher teams are continuously exploring strategies to deepen learning opportunities for their students. These opportunities include the addition of new programs, such as enrichment programs to address learning challenges, dual enrollment with area colleges, and community service. School leaders now aim to have all students graduate and attend a four-year college. The Burke continues to explore thoughtful and creative ways to sustain a culture focused on meeting the needs of each student and build upon their extraordinary growth of the past several years.



The most successful schools over time build a culture of continuous improvement among educators and seek new ways to tackle ever more challenging questions around student learning.

ENDNOTES

1 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2016). Description of M.G.L. Ch 69, Section 1J: An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap Process for “Underperforming” Schools. Malden, MA: Author. Retrieved from: <http://www.mass.gov/edu/docs/ese/accountability/turnaround/level-4-legislation.pdf>.

2 Cole, S.F., Eisner, A., Gregory, M., and Ristuccia, J. (2013). *Helping Traumatized Children Learn: Creating and Advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools*. Boston, MA: Mass Advocates for Children and Harvard Law School. Retrieved from: http://nysteachs.org/media/TLPI_Creating.and.Advocating.for.Trauma.Sensitive.Schools.pdf.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 EdVestors and Rennie Center for Education & Research Policy, (2010). *Charting the Course: Four Years of the Thomas W. Payzant School on the Move Prize*. Boston, MA: EdVestors.

6 EdVestors and Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy, (2015). *Staying the Course: Sustaining Improvement in Urban Schools*. Boston, MA: EdVestors.



2015 PRESENTATION OF THE SCHOOL ON THE MOVE PRIZE

An emotional moment when the team from the Jeremiah E. Burke High School learned they had won the 2015 School on the Move Prize at the EdVestors' annual prize ceremony and breakfast.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

EdVestors would like to recognize and thank our contributors to this project:

- The hard-working members of the School on the Move Prize selection panel
- The teachers and school leaders of the Jeremiah E. Burke High School who generously shared the important work they do on behalf of the students in their school.

Design by Katherine McNerney
Photography by Michael Manning
Printing by Kendall Press

