Boston Opportunity Agenda Report Card finds steady improvement, underscores need for new action on key education indicators

Boston – Boston students are making progress on key education goals, but larger action is needed, especially at the beginning of the “education pipeline,” according to the Third Annual Boston Opportunity Agenda Report Card, which was released today at the Lilla G. Frederick Pilot Middle School in the city’s Dorchester neighborhood.

Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino highlighted the speaking agenda, and interim Boston Public Schools Superintendent John McDonough joined nonprofit and philanthropic leaders at the report card release Thursday afternoon.

“This latest Report Card shows the remarkable progress we have made in improving Boston schools for all our students,” said Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino. “But the work to improve our schools never ends. We cannot and should not be satisfied until we see even stronger results across the board, and to achieve those results we must continue to partner with organizations like The Boston Opportunity Agenda.”

Download the new report card at bostonopportunityagenda.org

The report showed that from 2008-2009 to 2012-2013, the percentage of Boston Public Schools third-graders scoring proficient or higher on the MCAS rose from 31% to 32%, far short of the Opportunity Agenda’s 2013-2014 goal of 75% proficient or higher.

In other areas measured by the report card, the news was more positive – with upward trends in all the other measured indicators, including early literacy, 8th grade enrollment in Algebra I, percentage of 10th-graders passing all MCAS tests, high school dropout and four-year graduation rates, and college completion rate.

“The goals of the Opportunity Agenda are ambitious, but the need to achieve them is equally high,” said Kristin McSwain, the Executive Director of the Boston Opportunity Agenda. “Progress has been steady in some areas, but in others like third-grade reading, we have not been able to make as significant an impact – and that’s a tremendous concern. The Boston Opportunity Agenda is excited to welcome a new superintendent who will work with us to dramatically transform outcomes for all students based on what we have learned thus far.”

Highlights of the Report Card
The education pipeline begins by building a solid educational foundation for all of Boston's children and continues through the entire K-12 system, effectively preparing Boston's students for high school graduation, college readiness and success. It also extends to adults, including parents and immigrants who have missed or been denied opportunities for education and job training.

The report card uses the 2008/2009 school year as its baseline and reports on progress over the last school year while measuring progress against goals the Agenda has set for the 2013/2014 school year-five years after its launch.

At higher levels, Boston students continued to make significant progress toward those goals. An estimated 38% of 8th graders were enrolled in 8th grade Algebra, an important measure that is critical to keeping students on a trajectory to college success – just shy of the goal of 40% set for 2013/2014. In 2008/2009, just 4% were enrolled.

Boston’s 10th- graders made progress on the MCAS, as well. The percentage of Boston Public Schools students scoring proficient or higher in all subjects on the 10th grade MCAS rose to 55%, while the disparity between African-American and white students decreased by 8 points in ELA and 7 points in Math.

And in post-secondary attainment, the current six-year college completion rate of 49.3% for the BPS Class of 2006 is at or ahead of the interim goals set to reach a standard of 70% college completion for the BPS Class of 2011.

“The data show that we are making progress getting students through high school and into college at higher rates – but our work is not at all done,” said Boston Public Schools Interim Superintendent John McDonough. "We must do more to create the conditions for success in all schools to ensure every student in every school receives a high-quality education. This requires us to effectively deploy our own resources and align them closely with our nonprofit, philanthropic, business and public partners."

**Literacy Expert Panel**

To more strongly tackle the challenge of improving 3rd Grade Reading Proficiency, Mayor Menino called for the formation of a Literacy Expert Panel at the 2012 Opportunity Agenda Report Card release, to review the data and recommend strategies that could impact this persistent problem. The panel, co-chaired by then-Superintendent Carol Johnson and Dr. Catherine Snow, Professor of Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, made five recommendations. Among them:

- Redefine professional education so that it increases adults’ capacity to support and assess children’s language and reading development. This includes organizing it, focusing it on good instruction, incorporating sufficient information about assessment, and getting teachers to participate;

- Develop models of curriculum that build students’ skill in using the English language while also enriching their world knowledge;

- Use data productively to inform instruction so that formative assessment is thought of as a process embedded in instruction;
• Provide prevention and intervention to students who fail to progress as expected in order to reduce student discouragement and referrals to special education; and

• Expand and strengthen partnerships with families to focus on improving children’s language and reading.

These will provide a guide for the Boston Opportunity Agenda, Boston Public Schools and others moving forward.

**Outreach to “Opportunity Youth”**

The Boston Opportunity Agenda sets a national standard for collaboration among business, philanthropic, higher education and nonprofit communities working with the City of Boston and Boston Public Schools around a shared set of goals, driven by data, and accountable through regular reports to the community.

In that spirit of collaboration, the Boston Opportunity Agenda and Boston Private Industry Council, with support of the Hyams Foundation, are spearheading an effort to build stronger pathways for “Opportunity Youth”, young people from the ages of 16 to 24 who are currently disconnected from both school and work. Earlier this year, the collaborative secured a grant from the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions to engage in a yearlong planning process that culminates in a citywide plan for Opportunity Youth, including the development of pathways from GED to postsecondary education and career.

“As the Opportunity Agenda continues to track our successes and challenges across the education pipeline,” noted Rev. Ray Hammond, who chairs the Boston Opportunity Agenda, “we must be implementing changes that accelerate our growth. Efforts like those to address 3rd grade reading and reach the thousands of young people disconnected from education and workforce opportunities are critical for our longer-term success. Our kids deserve nothing less than our full effort.”

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Launched in June 2010, **The Boston Opportunity Agenda** (BOA) is a public/private partnership among the City of Boston, the Boston Public Schools, the city’s leading public charities and many local foundations to ensure that all Boston residents have access to the education necessary for upward economic mobility, civic engagement, and lifelong learning for themselves and their families. We fervently believe that by combining our resources, expertise and influence around a single agenda, we will have a greater impact on Boston’s cradle-to-career educational pipeline.

Over the past several years, the Boston Opportunity Agenda member organizations have used three organizing principles to guide our collective work and network structure. These include keeping key performance measures in public to drive change, investing to produce immediate gains and long-term systems change, and a focus on collective impact to align resources, increase efficiency and achieve our goals. To learn more about the Boston Opportunity Agenda, please visit www.bostonopportunityagenda.org.