

BUILDING

for boston's future

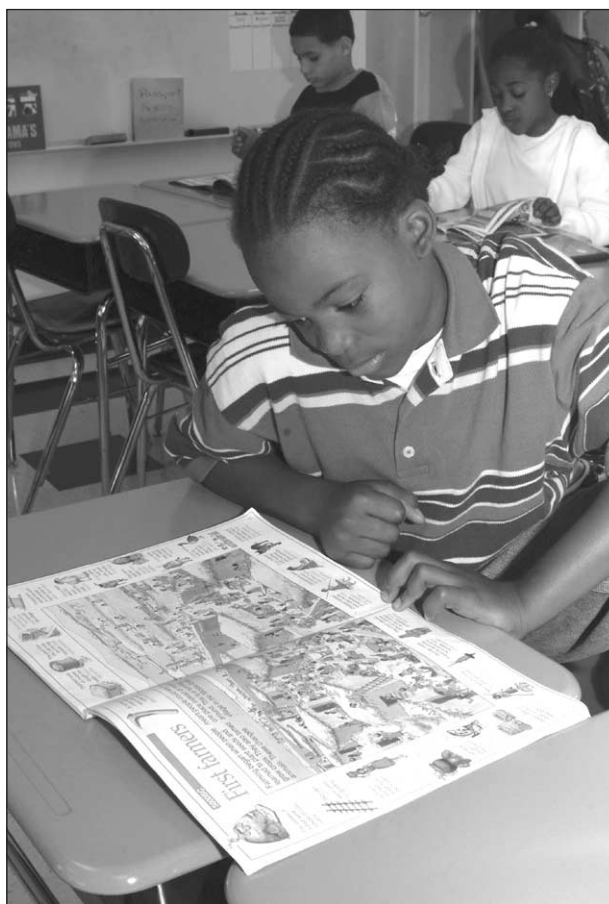
Pilot schools are taking off in Boston

Different types of schools work well for different types of students. Therefore, Boston Public Schools is committed to providing students and families with a portfolio of different options.

Students in the public school system can choose among many types of schools, including small schools, pilot schools, alternative schools, comprehensive schools, exam schools, and effective practice schools in order to find the type of learning environment in which they can be most productive.

The High School Renewal and Small Schools Initiative and the Boston Pilot Schools Network are part of Boston Public Schools' commitment to providing students with a portfolio of choices.

"We can learn from each of these types of schools," said Kathi Mullin, special assistant to the superintendent. "There is more than one way to educate students because different children need different things. The important thing is to continue to provide good standards based within those different models."



Luis Murray reads "The Great History Search" in class at the New Boston Pilot School.



Chris Dejarnette, a sixth-grader at Orchard Gardens School, works on an art project.

In 1994, the Boston Public Schools and the Boston Teachers Union embarked on an education reform effort to foster innovation and counter the notion that only charter schools could be laboratories of new educational practices.

As a result, pilot schools were born. Since then, this unique group of schools has continued to grow, with new pilot schools opening each year and existing schools converting to pilot status.

"Research suggests that pilot schools foster improvement in student performance," said Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Chris Coxon. "This is one more option that we provide to students in the community."

By next year, the 10th anniversary of the contract that created pilot schools, Boston will have 19 pilot schools, including two Horace Mann Charter Schools approved by the state but operated within the Boston Public Schools.

Last spring, after successful votes of the faculty and approval by the joint BPS/BTU Steering Committee and the Boston School Committee, four existing schools converted to pilot status. These schools are in a transition period this year before adopting full pilot status in September 2004: the Samuel W. Mason Elementary School, Another Course to College, the North Zone Early Learning Center and the Joseph Lee Elementary School, which will open a pilot school to operate in the same building as the existing school.

"Based on our experience of working with public schools over the years, we believe that they need more independence from central controls and regulations to function optimally in an increasingly demanding and competitive environment," said Paul Grogan, President of the Boston Foundation, which funded the schools' work to explore conversion to pilot status. "We hope that pilot schools will be another important way to stimulate better practices and give Boston parents, students, faculties and school administrators a wide range of options so that every

student can be successful."

"The support from the Boston Foundation provided us with the resources to conduct a serious exploration of the pilot school model," said Janet Palmer-Owens, principal of the Mason School. "Now, as we move forward, we are looking at our options to enhance our college and university collaborations as an urban lab-type school."

Pilot schools in Boston are granted autonomy from many district and union regulations in five key areas: staffing, budget, curriculum and assessment, governance and schedule. By offering these five autonomies, the district hopes to encourage best practices that can be replicated to other schools in the system.

"Building and leading a pilot school has allowed me and my faculty to take risks with curriculum even in a time of increasing top-down accountability," said Linda Nathan, headmaster of Boston Arts Academy, the city's pilot high school for the visual and performing arts. "We have the opportunity to pay attention to national, state and city standards and still to carve out what we think works best for students and families."

The Center for Collaborative Education serves as the coordinating organization for the Boston Pilot Schools Network. By bringing these schools together to exchange ideas and compare practices, CCE helps ensure that successful innovations in one school can be replicated in another.

Boston's pilot schools are different from Commonwealth charter schools in Massachusetts because they remain funded by and part of the Boston Public Schools.

"This way, pilot schools still have the benefits of peer-sharing and having the functional work, like payroll, cleaning, and other operational services available to them," said Special Assistant to the Superintendent for High School Renewal Kathi Mullin.

"This system gives families the opportunity to send their children to a charter-like school while remaining part of BPS."

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Gates grants \$13.6M

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation will provide Boston Public Schools with \$13.6 million in grant money to create new small schools and further develop existing schools to serve a total of 10,000 students.

The Gates grant comes only three years after the Carnegie Corporation of New York awarded Boston \$8.25 million for similar high school reform.

Founded four years ago by Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates and his wife, the Gates Foundation is a philanthropic organization devoted to improving equity in global health and learning. The foundation has an endowment of approximately \$24 billion.

The Gates grant is designed to increase the number of schools where students can receive a rigorous and personalized education in a supportive atmosphere. In four years, 30 percent of all Boston high school students will be enrolled in one of those schools.

"This grant will build on the work we have done over the last decade of guaranteeing that all students have access to a solid education, no matter their race, income level or neighborhood," said Superintendent Dr. Thomas W. Payzant.



Freshman Monique Warren gets one-on-one instruction from English teacher Rusty Young at the Economic and Business Academy in the Dorchester Education Complex.

City high schools reorganized to provide more options

BY KAITLIN RAHL

Goodbye, Dorchester High School. Hello, Dorchester Education Complex.

Dorchester High has been transformed to house three small high schools: the Academy of Public Service, the Economics and Business Academy, and TechBoston Academy.

Dorchester High is one of two large comprehensive high schools in Boston to be broken down into three smaller schools. Also this year, South Boston High School became the South Boston Education Complex, the home of three small high schools: Odyssey, Monument, and Excel.

Boston's effort to create smaller learning environments is based on the conclusions of several national studies on school reform. These studies indicate that students who attend small schools enjoy school more, have lower transfer and dropout rates, and perform better academically.

According to Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Christopher

Coxon, these factors can probably be attributed to the closer relationships between students, teachers and families that small schools foster.

"One of the challenges in Boston is that large comprehensive schools are impersonal. The lack of relationship building among peers and between students and teachers affects learning and is unhealthy for teachers as well," he said. "Smaller schools facilitate improvements in instruction and allow collaboration among teachers."

The two explicit goals for the creation of small schools are to improve the literacy of ninth-grade students and create a system for students to have better opportunities for interaction. Other important features are small learning environments, improved instruction, focused community partnerships, and post-graduation planning.

Funding for the High School Renewal and Small Schools Initiative is provided by the Gates Foundation and the Carnegie

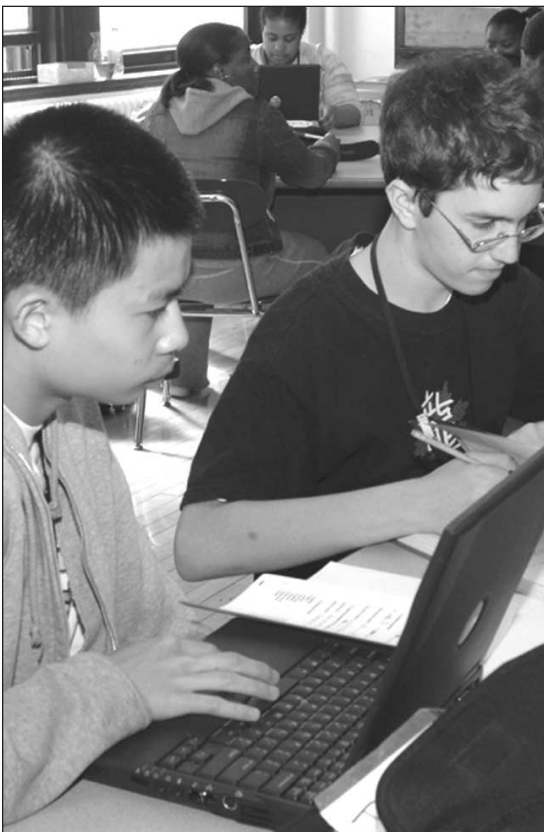
Corporation.

Boston Public Schools is working with four core partner organizations to design and support the new small schools: Jobs for the Future, Boston Plan for Excellence, Boston Private Industry Council, and the Center for Collaborative Education.

"All of these organizations bring a level of expertise in the areas we are trying to focus on," said Coxon. "We tap into them for assistance with the raw design of the small schools, and they have the skills and expertise to provide us with technical support."

One priority for the new small schools is to address the specific needs of teachers and students in the district.

"We have to look at the data and determine what teachers need in terms of professional development," said Kathi Mullin, special assistant to the superintendent for high school renewal. "We also want to know who the kids are and what their needs are."



Tony Wen, left, and Steven Moreno study at TechBoston Academy.