



# Bulletin

Parents Learning About Children's Education



## BPS Superintendent Payzant Responds to Boston Parents

The spring *Bulletin* reported on parents' recommendations gathered from ten Community Education Summits over the past two years. Led by the Black Ministerial Alliance, the Summits are a forum for parents and community members to discuss educational issues directly with Superintendent Thomas Payzant and other Boston Public School (BPS) staff. The parents' recommendations addressed specific issues in four areas: supports for students; parent involvement; hiring, training, and accountability; and testing requirements.

In his point-by-point response, Payzant addressed each issue and listed actions that the BPS has already taken, new initiatives, and plans for future steps. This issue of the *Bulletin* focuses on his specific responses to the seven recommendations related to "Supports for Students."

1. Agreeing that students must have the basics—a seat to sit in, textbooks, and materials—Payzant responded that "BPS is committed to providing the basics for every student in every school." He recapped recent efforts—funds for schools to buy books and materials and \$4 million per year of additional resources over the past four years. As for future steps, Payzant responded, "We will work with students and parents to convey the importance of replacing lost books so that all students will

continue to have copies to take home and use for homework."

2. BPS supports smaller class size, has reduced class size in grades 1 and 2 from 28 to 25, and will push for further reductions as resources allow.
3. The BPS's new districtwide plan for professional development of teachers began to be implemented on July 1, 2000. Intensive professional development for teachers in math instruction begins this year.
4. To help prepare the lowest performing students to pass the MCAS tests, BPS began Transition Services in 1999. For 10th graders who fail MCAS in English Language Arts or math beginning in 2001, BPS will provide additional academic supports during the school day and work to coordinate opportunities for out-of-school supports. Plans to help students pass MCAS before they complete grade 12 will be designed next year. [See also #6.]
5. To link community resources, BPS is working at the school level with churches and community agencies that provide academic support for students. At the district level, BPS works closely with the Mayor's 2 to 6 Initiative, community agencies, and the Black Ministerial Alliance.

6. In response to parents' concerns about students who may fail to pass MCAS as required to receive a diploma in 2003, Payzant asserted that "BPS is committed to ensuring that every student has the opportunity to prepare for and pass MCAS and the course requirements required to earn a diploma." BPS is working with community colleges and others to design a program for those who do not meet the standards to graduate in 2003 to continue to work toward a diploma.

Later, in his responses specific to "Testing Requirements," Payzant indicated that BPS was in support of multiple measures of achievement and would work with the state to include other kinds of tests with the MCAS. He also stated he was not in favor of deferring the MCAS diploma requirement until students had been educated under the new standards through their school years, as parents had recommended.

In response to parents' issues around holding schools, not just individual students, accountable for MCAS results, Payzant responded that schools and school districts with low performance on MCAS can be declared "under-performing" and be subject to intervention.

7. To help parents and students define after-high school goals, BPS will improve guidance counseling in the high schools. In addition to the above, Payzant announced initiatives in parent involvement (i.e., a Family and Community Engagement Task Force); in hiring, training, and accountability; and in testing requirements.

For more information, please contact Parents' PLACE at 877-471-0980.

## Outreach to Latino Families

The Outreach Coordinator to Latino and Hispanic Families has been outreaching to families around the state. She has developed a collaborative relationship with Latino agencies and faith-based organizations in Massachusetts. She has been doing workshops on School Reform in Spanish for families. She has attended educational forums, community meetings, family fairs, and festivals in order to have a more clear understanding of the needs of the community.

The Parents' PLACE list of resources for families continues to grow. Parent's PLACE has educational and parenting materials in Spanish ready to send to families, schools, churches, clubs, and local gathering places.

For more information in Spanish, to request a workshop, or to add your group, organization, or family to our mailing list, call Diana Rocha at 877-471-0980 ext. 171, or email your request to [drocha@fcsn.org](mailto:drocha@fcsn.org).

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

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# Let's Do History!

When your children ask, "Where was I born?" and "How old was I when I started walking?" they are asking questions about history. These two questions contain the two main meanings of "history":

1. *the story of people and events and*
2. *the record of times past.*

History helps us understand the past and how we got here.

Here are some things you can do at home:

- Share family history with your children. Share your memories, and help your relatives and friends share family stories, too. Encourage your children to tell their own stories.
- Read with your child about people and events that have made a difference in the world. Help your child pick others you both find interesting to learn more about.
- Watch television programs about topics related to the past with your children. Get library books on the same topics. Ask the librarian for help. Do the books and television programs agree?
- Get to know the history of the town or city where you live. Your newspaper may list parades, museum and art exhibits, children's theater, music events, history talks and walks under "things to do."

## History Activities

*Our Heroes*

For young children (pre K-3rd grade)

1. Children love to look at pictures. Choose a

photo of a person in your family or someone else you admire or respect.

2. Tell your child what the person did. Why do you admire this person? Talk about the results of the person's actions.
3. With your child, search for photos from newspapers or magazines about other people you admire. Your child might want to collect these or put them in a scrapbook.
4. Find a story about one or more of these people at the library. Be sure to ask the librarian to help find what you need.

## Time Capsule

For older children and the whole family (3rd-6th grade)

1. Have the children collect pictures and some examples of a few important things from their life. Explain to them that items will be put in a time capsule so that when people find the capsule later, they can learn something about your children and the time they lived in.
2. Examples might include lists of slang words, current events, popular movies, heroes, games, and toys. You might also include ads of popular items cut out of magazines or newspapers, descriptions of television shows, pictures of popular fashions, as well as copies of poetry and speeches.
3. Have your children write and include a letter about life today to the person who opens the time capsule.
4. Have a "show and tell" of all the items.

Talk with your children about what has been chosen and why.

5. Label all the items by name and add any other important information about the item to the label.
6. Place the items in a container, seal the container, and find a place to store it.

*Reproduced from Helping Your Child Learn History with permission from the U.S. Department of Education. For your own copy of Helping Your Child Learn History, visit [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov) or contact Parents' PLACE.*

## Get to know what your kids need to know about history

With education reform efforts taking place throughout the state, Parents' PLACE staff think it's important for parents to begin to become familiar with the education standards set in Massachusetts. Called Curriculum Frameworks, these standards are currently available in mathematics, science & technology, English Language Arts, history and social sciences, and foreign languages. The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) bases its tests on the frameworks.

Here's an example from the History and Social Science Curriculum Framework. It is in the area of Society, Diversity, Commonality and the Individual.

**For Grades 5-8:** Students learn the nature of stereotyping, commonly from racial, ethnic, religious identifications; they learn the reasons stereotypes are logically and factually mistaken, and the reasons stereotyping is wrong. They consider the capacity of determined individuals sometimes to achieve success even amidst adversity and in the face of unjust treatment.

**Example of Student Learning:** Students read "The Education of Frederick Douglass" and write essays on Douglass' success in covertly learning to read and write, despite all efforts to prevent literacy among slaves.

**For Grades 9-10:** Students understand the rights of individuals in conjunction with the ideals of community participation and public service.

**Example of Student Learning:** A student reads the autobiography of Golda Meir and describes and analyzes the conclusions she drew from suffering anti-Semitic persecution in Russia, gaining educational opportunity in the United States, and becoming a political leader of profound international stature.

To obtain a copy of the Curriculum Frameworks in History and Social Science, Mathematics, Science & Technology, English Language Arts, and Foreign Languages, call Mass. Department of Education (DOE) at 781-388-3300, visit the DOE website at [www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu), or visit Parents' PLACE website at [www.pplace.org](http://www.pplace.org).

## Upcoming Parents' PLACE Workshops

If you would like a workshop, let us know! Pre-registration is required for all programs. Contact T.J. Hutson at 617-236-7210 ext. 113 for more details.

### September

- "Education Reform" *Springfield Women's Shelter* – September 7th.
- "The Importance of (Grand) Parental Involvement in Ensuring that Children are Successful in School" *Senior Center, Reading (Grandparents Raising Grandchildren)* – September 27th.

### December:

- "Helping Children Be Successful in School Through Effective Parent Involvement" *Radisson Inn, Hyannis (JTEC)* – December 19th.

### The following workshop topics are available through Parents' PLACE:

**For parents:**

- Parents Are Powerful
- Education Reform in Massachusetts
- Ensuring Your Child's Success in School Through Effective Parent Involvement

**And for schools:**

- Parent Involvement: What the Research Shows
- Creating Family-Friendly Schools
- Opening the Door: Building Partnerships with Families Through the Front Office
- Effective Parent/Teacher Conferences
- Raising Student Achievement: Parent Involvement Really Works

# Your Right to Know

As a parent, did you know that you have a legal right to see your children's school records?

Since the start of school, teachers and administrators have been compiling information about your child's academic growth, potential, behavior, attendance, mental and physical health, as well as social skills. Much of this documentation can be considered personal and sensitive. What parents may not be aware of is the devastating results if these records are mishandled or if they end up in the wrong hands.

Now, thanks to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which was passed by Congress in 1974, parents of present or former students have the right to examine all records a school maintains on their children and question their accuracy. Schools are prohibited from releasing records or other personally identifiable information about a student, with some basic exceptions, without written permission of the parent (or the student if they are over 18). This act applies to public school and to private schools which receive public funding.

It's never too soon or too late to make a phone call to your child's school and make arrangements to inspect your child's records. Some of what you see might surprise you. The Parents Union for Public Schools of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a parents' advocacy group, offers these tips:

- In addition to having the right to examine the records, you can also bring a parent advocate with you, get copies of records (for which you may have to pay) and question false or misleading information.
- Plan to spend between 30 minutes and two hours. The law requires schools to tell parents what information is in their child's file, so someone will probably explain the various forms to you. Then go through them yourself, by taking notes or arranging to have copies made.

## Q. What's in this file?

A. Most records will be in the student's main file or pupil pocket. These records should include:

- test results
- attendance records
- grades
- teacher comments (optional)

Related records including medical, counseling, psychological and disciplinary records can be on file in the school nurse or counselor's office.

## Q. What if I see false or misleading information?

A. If you find any incorrect or misleading information, you are advised to ask that it be removed. If school officials refuse, you can insert your own written statement in the file to present your child's side of the story.

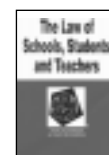
## Q. Can my school release information about my child?

A. Schools can release some information without parental permission and it's the type of information commonly found in a year-book or sports program. It includes names,

addresses, dates or places of birth, major field of study, participation in school activities and sports. Parental permission isn't required to release students' records to other educators who need them, to certain government or accrediting agencies or to appropriate persons in case of emergency. Otherwise, schools cannot release personally identifiable information without parental written consent.

## For further information:

*School Rights: A Parent's Legal Handbook and Action Guide*, by Thomas Condon and Patricia Wolff (Macmillan, \$14.95)



*The Law of Schools, Students and Teachers in a Nutshell*, by Kern Alexander and M. David Alexander (West Publishing, \$20)

## Or consult the following agencies:

U.S. Department of Education's Family Compliance Office, 600 Independence Ave, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20202.

The Parents Union for Public Schools, 311 South Juniper St., Room 200, Philadelphia, PA 19107.

*Adapted from Family Life, Winter 1996-97, by the Title I Dissemination Project.*

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**Mark/Marka**

I'd like to receive the Bulletin in English.

Quiero recibir el Boletín en español.

Quero receber o Boletim em português.

Return this form to/Envie esta forma a:  
 Parent's PLACE at  
 The Federation for Children with Special Needs  
 1135 Tremont St., Ste. 420  
 Boston, MA 02120



The U.S. Office of Justice Programs (OJP) has just announced a new website that offers parents information on topics such as child care, education, health and safety. The site, "Parenting Resources for the 21st Century," [www.parentingresources.ncjrs.org](http://www.parentingresources.ncjrs.org), is part of a joint effort by several federal agencies to promote a national agenda for children and foster positive youth development.

According to Attorney General Janet Reno, "This website covers everything from caring for a newborn to finding college scholarships . . . [and] will provide quick and easy access to a broad array of information that parents need to meet the challenges of raising a child."

### The site is divided into eight categories:

- *Child and Youth Development*: information about common behaviors and developmental milestones, emotional and physiological changes at different stages of a young person's life.
- *Child Care and Education*: information on skills children should master at each grade level, how to support children's learning, how to help children transition between schools, guidance on home schooling, alternative schools, and standardized tests.

- *Family Concerns*: information on gangs, hate crimes, school safety, domestic violence, child abuse, substance abuse, tobacco, mental health and suicide.
- *Family Dynamics*: information on types of family relationships such as single, two-parent, and multi-generational families; special circumstances such as the incarceration of a family member; and work and family issues.
- *Health and Safety*: information on exercise and nutrition guidelines, preventive approaches to health, and strategies for dealing with chronic ailments. The links also deal with topics such as Internet safety and caring for aging parents.
- *Out-of-School Activities*: information of activities to do at home and in the community, including sports, arts, volunteering and employment.
- *Resources* information on new parenting-related developments, research, publications and events.

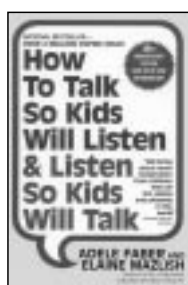
## Parents' PLACE Lending Library

Parents' PLACE is pleased to announce these recent additions to the lending library:



*Will There Be a Lap for Me?* By Dorothy Corey, Illustrations by Nancy Poydar, published by General Publishing Limited, 1992. 22 pages.

Kyle loves his mother's lap, but the baby on the way takes up more and more room until finally there's no lap at all. In a reassuring conclusion, Kyle finds his mother just as eager as he to spend time together. The obvious message is tempered by humorous and realistic details in both the text and in the cheerful illustrations depicting a mostly African-American cast of characters.



*How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk*, by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, Illustrations by Kimberly Ann Coe; published by Avon Books, 1999. 286 pages

This book is an excellent source on communicating with kids! Based

on a series of workshops developed by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, *How to Talk* provides a step-by-step approach to improving relationships in your house. The "Reminder" pages, helpful cartoon illustrations, and excellent exercises will improve your ability as a parent to talk and problem-solve with your children.



*1-2-3 Magia: Disciplina Efectiva para Niños de 2 a 12*, by Thomas W. Phelan Ph.D.

This newly revised second edition provides a fine coverage of effective discipline choices for children ages 1-12. From handling sibling rivalry and arguing to avoiding self-defeating syndromes and reactions, *Magia* provides parents with plenty of solid tips that work. (Spanish only.)



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All borrowers are responsible for any item(s) lost or damaged. Replacement costs are the actual cost of the item(s) to Parents' PLACE. A late charge of \$1.00 per day will be charged directly to you for any item not returned on time.

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