

## BPS Releases Draft of Focus on Children II

Superintendent Thomas Payzant released a draft of *Focus on Children II* — the second phase of Boston's education reform plan. *Focus on Children II* covers the goals that the Superintendent has proposed for the next five years. The first *Focus on Children* plan was adopted in 1996 and outlined goals and plans for Boston Public Schools until June 2001.

The superintendent attended a number of Community Education Summits over the past two years and currently participates in School Committee meetings every other week to gather input from parents, families and the community. Dr. Payzant will incorporate feedback received from the public and other BPS stakeholders into the final plan. He will send the revised version to the School Committee for approval in late March. The final document should be available to the public by the end of May.

Changes in *Focus On Children II* were based on the experiences that administrators, teachers and communities gained over the past five years. Dr. Payzant summarized those learning experiences in five areas. First, all students can learn at an accelerated pace when teaching and assessment are aligned with high standards. Second, the school district functions as a part of the community and depends on the community interaction and support for success in the schools. Third, the whole school improves only when the whole school is involved in improvement efforts. Fourth, it is vital to use the networks of schools, fellow teachers and administrators to support daily, on-the-job professional development through coaching. Fifth, accountability is key to growth. All schools have developed specific, clear, and measurable goals and multiple methods for assessing student and school performance against those goals.

Based on these experiences, *Focus on Children II* sets four major goals for the next five years. The unifying principle or theme behind these new four goals is the expectation to see *continuous improvement*—in every school, in

every classroom, for every student. The four goals are specified below:

1. Accelerate the improvement of teaching and learning to enable all students to meet the high standards.

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2. Provide effective learning environments to support students to succeed in school.
3. Engage parents, families, and the community in improving teaching and learning for all students to meet high standards.
4. Enhance delivery of services to schools and the community through effective management and communications.

To achieve these four goals, the school district will emphasize incorporating the Six Essentials Plan for Whole School Improvement, strengthening school-community partnerships, closing the achievement gap, and providing unified services for student support. The Whole School Improvement Plan is a tool that provides a single process for planning, support, and accountability that all members of the school and community will use to strengthen schools. *Focus on Children II* recognizes that good progress has been achieved in the last five years, especially in the elementary and middle school levels. The Whole School



Improvement Plan hopes to carry that same success and progress to the high schools.

Engaging parents, families, and the community, Goal 3 of *Focus on Children II*, was a major issue of concern at Community Education Summits held over the past two years. (See "Sup't Payzant Addresses Parent Involvement in Boston Public Schools" in the December 2000 *Bulletin*.) The Black Ministerial Alliance (BMA) will continue to address this critical issue at future summits this year. The next Summit will be held Monday, March 13th at the New Hope Baptist Church, 740 Tremont Street, in Boston. If you would like more information about upcoming summits, please contact Dawn Swann, BMA Executive Director, at 617-445-2156.



## VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Parents' PLACE recently received additional support from the U.S. Department of Education Goals 2000 office to conduct violence prevention and awareness activities around the state. These activities include workshops for families, a half-day conference with the Youth Advocacy Project of Roxbury, and dissemination of 10,000 copies of *Bright Futures for Families: What You Can Do to Prevent Violence*. In addition, Parents' PLACE will publish a special edition of *Parents' PLACE Bulletin*, devoted to violence prevention and awareness, in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. For more information, contact Parents' PLACE toll-free at 1-877-471-0980.

# Helping Your Child Learn Science

**Editor's note:** With education reform efforts taking place throughout the state, it's important for parents to become familiar with the state education standards, called Curriculum Frameworks. In the last couple issues of the *Bulletin*, we have highlighted one of the seven subjects covered in the Curriculum Frameworks, and provided fun activities for families to strengthen skills in those areas. So far, the articles have covered history and math. This month, we focus on science and technology.

When you learn science, you build on what you already know. Children need to start learning early, at home, so that they have a firm base of knowledge to build on when they get to school. As parents, it is important to share what knowledge you have with your children. Science is in everyday activities: cooking, washing dishes, growing plants and much more. So, look around the house and out the windows and see that science is everywhere.

Here are some things you can do:

- Ask your children questions: how do you think the clock works? Why does a bird make a nest and what is it made of? How does electricity help us everyday?
- Have your children make predictions about the weather or how fast a plant will grow or how high a piece of paper will fly with the wind. Have your children then test to see if their hunches are correct.
- Have your children start collections of shells, rocks, or bugs, so that they can see similarities and patterns.
- Help your child look at how things are different. Take a walk around the neighborhood to see the different animals and plants that live and grow there. Help your child look at what causes things to change. What happens when a plant doesn't have water or sunlight?

## SCIENCE ACTIVITIES:

### **Bubbles** (for young children)

1. Mix 8 tablespoons of dishwashing liquid in 1 quart of water in a shallow pan.



2. Blow through a straw as you move it slowly across the top of the liquid.
3. When you've made a bubble, touch it gently with a wet finger. What happens? Touch another bubble with a dry finger. What happens?
4. Look at the bubbles. How many colors do you see? What do the colors remind you of?



### **Creepy Crawlies!** (for young scientists)

1. Search for bugs: in sidewalk cracks, on lights, on animals or plants.
2. Tell your child the names of the bugs you found. Did you find: ants, spiders, fleas, ladybugs, crickets?
3. Ask your child how the bugs are alike or different. Explain, for example, the difference between an insect and a spider (insects have 6 legs, spiders have 8).
4. Watch ants in an anthill or around some spilled food. Explain that when an ant finds food, it runs back to the hill to "tell" the other ants. As it runs, it leaves a trail that other ants in the hill can smell. The ants find the food by smelling their way along the trail.



### **Plants and Light** (for more advanced scientists)

1. Cut 3 paper shapes about 2 inches across. Circles and triangles work well, but you can use other shapes, too.
2. Clip these shapes with paper clips to 3 leaves of either an indoor or an outdoor plant, being careful not to tear the leaves.
3. Keep 1 piece of paper on the leaf for 1 day, a second piece on for 2 days, and the third piece on for one week.
4. Watch to see what happens to the leaves. Do they change color? What effect does the lack of light have on them? What effect does it have on the leaves when the paper is kept on for a longer length of time?

**Note:** plants use sunlight to turn carbon dioxide (in the air) and water into food.

*This article is an excerpt from Helping Your Child Learn Science. For more information, contact the National Library of Education, 1-800-424-1616, or read it online at the Learning Partners website: <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/LearnPtnrs>.*

## Find out what your kids need to know about science and technology

When parents are familiar with the state education standards set for their children, they can better help their children work towards the educational goals. The Curriculum Frameworks are currently available in mathematics, science and technology, English language arts, history and social sciences, arts, comprehensive health, and foreign languages. Here's a sample from the Science and Technology Curriculum Framework, on Life Science:

### **For Pre-K – grade 2, students should be able to:**

- Differentiate between living and non-living things. Group both living and nonliving things according to the characteristics that they share.
- Recognize that people and other animals interact with the environment through their senses of hearing, touch, smell, and taste.

### **For grades 3 – 5, students should be able to:**

- Describe the major stages that characterize the life cycle of the frog and butterfly as they go through metamorphosis.
- Differentiate between characteristics of plants and animals that are inherited (e.g., shape of leaves, color of eyes, number of appendages) and characteristics that are not inherited (e.g., browning of leaves from too much sun, ability to play soccer).

### **For grades 6 – 8, students should be able to:**

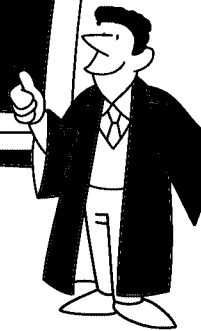
- Compare and contrast animal and plant cells, including major organelles (cell membrane, cell wall, nucleus, chloroplasts, mitochondria, vacuoles).
- Give examples of ways in which organisms interact and have different functions within an ecosystem that enable the ecosystem to survive.

### **For grades 9 – 10, students should be able to:**

- Provide evidence that the organic compounds produced by plants are the primary source of energy and nutrients for most living things.
- Describe the structure of DNA and distinguish between replication, transcription, and translation.

For a copy of the Massachusetts Frameworks, call Mass. Department of Education (DOE) at 781-388-330, visit the DOE website at [www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu), or call Parents' PLACE at 877-471-0980.

# Test Yourself: Eight Questions About Children's Success in School



## QUESTIONS

1. What percent of recent research studies indicate that parents *do* have an important impact on children's school achievement? What percentage *do not* indicate that parent involvement is important?

Do \_\_\_\_\_ %      Do Not \_\_\_\_\_ %

2. What is the relationship between the amount of money spent on instruction and student scores on achievement tests? Do studies indicate that there is *no* relationship, *little* relationship, *moderate* relationship, a *strong* relationship, or a *very strong* relationship?

3. Put the following seven factors in the proper order of their influence on a child's school success: (1 for most important, 7 for least important):

- \_\_\_ Pupil-Teacher Ratio
- \_\_\_ Class Size
- \_\_\_ Family Background
- \_\_\_ Teacher Salaries
- \_\_\_ Hiring Good Teachers
- \_\_\_ Pre-School Educational Experience
- \_\_\_ Teacher Participation in Developing School Curriculum

4. A recent intensive study was made in Michigan of the relationship between student test scores and a variety of forces affecting student success. What factor stood out as "the most frequently recurring theme in high-scoring districts"?

5. A review of all family-involvement research found three most common elements in the homes of successful students. What are those three most common elements?

6. Many early childhood experts and research findings agree that the most critical years for learning begin when?  
Age \_\_\_\_\_

7. Most early childhood experts agree that lifelong patterns for failure or success are set between the ages of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

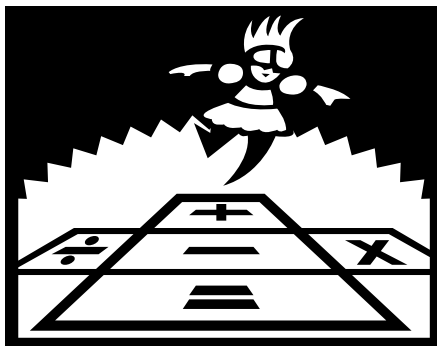
8. We know that language ability is the single most important skill for good school achievement and for lifelong success. Studies show that a child understands about 70 percent of everything he will use in conversation for his entire lifetime by what age?  
Age \_\_\_\_\_

## ANSWERS

- 1.) Do=100%, Do Not=0%
- 2.) Little
- 3.) Most to least important: 1—family background, 2—pre-school educational experiences, 3—hiring good teachers, 4—teacher participation in developing the school curriculum, 5—teacher salaries, 6—class size, 7—pupil-teacher ratio
- 4.) Intensive involvement of parents in their children's schooling
- 5.) a.) A home environment that encourages learning, b.) high but realistic parental expectations for their children's achievement and future careers, c.) parental involvement in their children's education at school and in the community
- 6.) Birth
- 7.) Ages 3 and 8
- 8.) Age 3

*Adapted from "Eleven Questions about Children's Success in School," a presentation by Dr. John H. Wherry, President of The Parent Institute, www.parent-institute.com.*

## MassPIP Involves Families in Math and Science



Massachusetts Parent Involvement Project (MassPIP) helps families and kids get excited about math and science. Its mission is to increase parents' involvement in their children's mathematics, science and technology education so that parents can:

- engage with their children and the community
- advocate for high quality education, and
- lead in promoting the development of programs, services, and skills in math, science, and technology.

Currently, 59 Massachusetts communities are involved in MassPIP. Each "coalition" focuses on the needs of students and parents in their community and develops activities to meet those needs. For example, members of the Lawrence coalition focus on involving families in MCAS preparation. They established a partnership with McDonalds and sponsored an "MCAS at McDonalds" event, where families participated in games and activities to strengthen math and science skills needed for the MCAS. The Lynnfield coalition focuses on parents of high school students. Monthly activities for a Mentoring Program help kids and parents make the transition from middle school to high school. In addition, forums on colleges and industries help high school seniors prepare for the life ahead of them.

Parents' PLACE met with leaders from MassPIP in January to plan collaborative activities. For more information about MassPIP, call Glenola Mitchell, at 781-388-3300, x708, visit their website at [www.doe.mass.edu/pip](http://www.doe.mass.edu/pip).

## Upcoming Parents' PLACE Workshops

For more information about any workshops, please call Diana Rocha or Sandy Blanes from Parents' PLACE at 800-471-0980. If you would like to request a workshop, let us know! Pre-registration is required for all programs.

### March 2001

3/1, Quincy, *Parents are Powerful, in English*  
3/7, or 3/8 (TBD), Roslindale, *Raising Student Achievement, in English*

3/17, Boston,\* *Parents are Powerful, in Spanish*  
3/17, Boston,\* *Parents are Powerful in American Schools, in Portuguese*

3/21, Medway, *Parents are Powerful, in English*

\*Special conference; paid registration required.

### April 2001

4/2, Fall River, *Things Kids Do that Drive Us Nuts, in English*

### Workshop Descriptions

**Parents Are Powerful: A workshop to promote family involvement in education.** Research shows that children do better in school when families are involved. **Parents are Powerful** provides an overview of the benefits of parent involvement in children's education, discusses educational standards and what schools are doing to meet them, and summarizes the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and its effects on schools and students. Most importantly, parents learn strategies for maximizing their involvement in their children's education and the key role they play in ensuring their children's success in school.

**Parents Are Powerful in American Schools: A workshop for new immigrant families.** This workshop is for families new to the U.S. that are eager to learn about American schools but may not know where to get the information they need. It

familiarizes participants with the American school system, including enrollment, the grading system, the differences between public, private, and religious schools and the rights of English-language learners. Most importantly, parents learn strategies for maximizing their involvement in their children's education and the key role they play in ensuring their children's success in school.

### **Raising Student Achievement: Family Involvement Really Works.**

Current research indicates that the family makes critical contributions to student achievement. This one-hour workshop explains the different types of family involvement, teaches innovative ways to communicate with parents or teachers, and offers strategies to develop collaborative relationships between families and schools. Parents learn what teachers suggest parents do and parents, in turn, can share their own suggestions for teachers.

**Things Kids Do that Drive Us Nuts: For parents of 3-5 year olds.** Explore why children engage in frustrating behaviors. Gain positive discipline strategies that you can use in responding to teasing, hitting, whining and other troublesome behavior. (presented by Families First)

### Other Workshops Available:

- Families and Schools Together: How families can partner with schools to ensure that children receive a quality education
- Creating Family-Friendly Environments in Schools
- Opening the Door to Family-Friendly Schools: Building Partnerships with Families through the Front Office

### Coming soon...

- MCAS: High Standards and High Stakes for Students and Schools
- Family Involvement: From Research to Practice

## Parents' PLACE Resources

"Kids and Negative Behavior: Why Children Fear their Badness." Article by Kathleen Reagan, *Boston Parents' Paper*; January 2001.

"Parlez-Vous Français?: Benefits Abound for Kids Who Learn a Foreign Language." Article by Christine Ridout and Maggie Head Meehan, *Boston Parents' Paper*; January 2001.

*Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools: Beginning of the School Year Activities.* Free booklet published by the U.S. Department of Education.

*Helping Your Children Navigate Their Teenage Years: A Guide for Parents*, December 2000. Free booklet published by the U.S. Department of Education.

*Ready to Learn: Essential Tips for Early Literacy.* Free booklet published by the U.S. Department of Education.

### Recursos em Português

*Como Posso Obter Ajuda Através do Programa de Saúde Mental e de Abuso de Droga Folheto Educativo.* Publicado por o Departamento de Saúde Pública de Massachusetts

*Ensino Bilingüe em Massachusetts.* Página Informativa sobre a lei e os direitos de receber ensino Bilingüe. Publicado por as Escolas Públicas no Manual do Aluno

*Sugestões de Leitura de Verão Para os Pais.* Página Informativa. Re-impresso com a permissão da Companhia de Coordenação dos deficientes em Aprendizagem

*Atenção Pais e Mães que Desejam Ajudar Seus Filhos nos Estudos.* Página Informativa de Coordenador de Programas Bilingües. Escolas Públicas de Framingham – Marcus Anthony Baptista

### Recursos en Español

*Como Ayudar a Su Niño a Prepararse para la Escuela.* Publicado por el Departamento de Educación de los Estados Unidos, 50 páginas.

*Pongase en Acción: Materiales para Actividades después de la Escuela.* Preparado por el Departamento de Educación de los Estados Unidos

*Desafie las Mente de los Jóvenes: 50 Maneras de Mejorar la Educación.* Publicado por el Departamento de Educación de los Estados Unidos, 19 páginas

*Early Childhood Digest: Ayudando a los Padres a Comunicarse Mejor con las Escuelas.* Publicado por el Departamento de Educación de los Estados Unidos



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