The Role of a Third Party Organization in the Boston Pilot Schools Network

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Introduction and Thesis Statement

In recent years, intermediary organizations (Bay Area School Reform Collaborative, Chicago Annenberg Research Project) have helped schools negotiate the large bureaucracies of urban school districts. These organizations have functioned by inspiring vision, focusing change, lending support, and applying pressure externally (McLaughIin 2000; Newmann 2000). The Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) is an example of a third party, or intermediary, organization, at once situated outside of schools and school districts but working intensively inside schools and districts to promote change (McLaughIin 2000). As outsiders, CCE staff serve several roles that employees inside a school district bureaucracy cannot serve: they advocate for the school with the district, state, and other bureaucracies, and they have more flexibility to train and build networks with other schools (Hopfenberg 1995).

This paper describes the role of CCE in supporting a unique urban public school network, the Boston Pilot Schools Network. By informing the educational community of its strategies, activities, and challenges, CCE hopes to contribute to our understanding of how change promoted from outside the school can affect teacher and student learning.
The Center for Collaborative Education is a non-profit organization whose mission is to improve student learning in K -12 public schools and districts by promoting models of systemic reform. CCE's goal is to be a resource and catalyst for the creation of schools in which:

- ✓ Learning is purposeful, rigorous, and related to the real world,
- ✓ Assessment demonstrates that students can do important things,
- ✓ Teachers and students know each other well,
- ✓ Diversity is respected and equity is embedded in all practices,
- ✓ Democratic values are nurtured and modeled,
- ✓ Flexibility and autonomy enable decisions to be made as close to the learner as possible.

It is the Center's thesis that public schools, particularly those serving high percentages of low-income students and students of color, have a much greater chance of educating every student if they are members of a network of like-minded schools that receive intensive support .from a third-party, or intermediary, organization. Third-party organizations, because they are independent and not tied to a large bureaucracy, can be flexible and responsive to the multiple needs of schools engaged in reform. In order to be successful, the partnership between the third-party organization and the school network needs to be collaborative in nature, and have built-in mechanisms for continual reflection and adjustment of the partnership in order to ensure that each partner's needs are being met.

Further, the role of the third party organization must by its very nature be varied, including the role of advocate, facilitator, coach, and researcher, enabling them to maneuver both inside and outside a school district.

The Boston Pilot Schools: Creating Choices in Urban School Districts

> *What every principal or headmaster should have are the kind of conditions Pilots have. That's everything from size and scale to hiring their own staff to instructional flexibility to governance, the works.* " (Pilot School director; Neufeld, 1999)

Background

Today, there is a declining level of confidence and support in our nation's public schools, particularly for urban schools, evidenced in the increase of charter schools, rising enrollments in private and parochial schools, and calls for vouchers. Progress in raising student achievement has been slow and incremental. In particular, Black, Latino, and low-income students' test results indicate a stubborn gap in academic achievement with white and more affluent students. For example, the results of recent high stakes standardized tests in Massachusetts indicate that upwards of 70% of low-income, Black, and Latino students could be in danger of not graduating, over double the rate of white students.

The future success of public education is dependent upon crafting new models of learning communities within school districts, in which schools have increased autonomy to create classrooms of excellence in exchange for increased accountability. The Boston Pilot Schools Network is a unique endeavor that embodies these principles.

The Creation of Pilot Schools

The Boston Public Schools is an urban school district serving approximately 64,000 students from pre-school through grade twelve, with approximately 50% Black, 22% Latino, 10% Asian, and 18% White students. Twenty-two percent of the district's students are designated as special needs, and 14% are bilingual students. The district has been historically low performing on standardized tests, similar to most urban districts.

The result of a unique partnership among the Mayor, School Committee, Superintendent, and Teachers Union, Pilot Schools were created in 1994 through the Boston Teachers Union contract to promote increased choice options within the school district. This agreement came about largely in response to 1994 state legislation creating first-time charter schools and the subsequent loss of Boston students to area charter schools. *"The purpose of establishing pilot schools is to provide models of educational excellence that help to foster widespread educational reform in all Boston public schools."* (BPS, 1995)

Pilot Schools were selected through a district process in which groups of educators, parents, and/or community members could submit a proposal to start a new school. Starting with five schools in the 1994-1995 school year, the number of Pilot Schools has slowly grown. There are now 11 Boston pilot schools spanning grades K-12 and enrolling approximately 2,750 students, or about 4.5% of the total BPS enrollment. This includes three K-8 elementary schools, one middle school, six high schools, and one 6-12 school. Each Pilot School is small, democratic, and personalized, with enrollments ranging from 100-500 students.

While all Pilot School teachers are members of the union, receive union salaries and benefits, and accrue seniority, these schools have autonomy over budget, staffing, governance, curriculum, and the school calendar to provide increased flexibility to organize schools and staffing to best meet students' needs. These freedoms, Pilot Schools believe, are the conditions, along with the commitment to creating and maintaining small schools, that are necessary to promote successful learning.

A unique feature of Pilot Schools is that they create new models of teaching and learning <u>within</u> the Boston Public Schools, unlike charter schools. This attachment provides the opportunity for Pilot School practices and conditions to influence the larger BPS system, while providing Pilot Schools with economy of scale advantages such as facilities, payroll, and transportation. The

goal is that Pilot School practices will influence the larger system through "reculturing" it rather than restructuring it (Hargreaves 2000).

> "Young people experience the world through relationships. If schools develop the relationships, we can take kids that much further in their learning." (Pilot School director, New England Small Schools Network forum, 2000)

> "When you have a small school, the problems are still there, but the power of the community of a small school can help where the kids can be swept into a world that is not just their peers. ...Kids can join a grownup culture because the size is such that an adult intellectual culture can be built." (Pilot School director, NESSN forum, 2000)

> "[In my Pilot School], the principal is in your face all the time. In my old school of 1300 students, I saw a picture of my principal and knew his name, but in my two years there, I never met him. Here, I see my principal every day." (Pilot School student, NESSN forum, 2000)

Overall, the Pilot School enrollment matches that of the Boston Public Schools by race, gender, and income status. This is a critical factor in demonstrating that small, personalized schools can be more successful in raising student achievement and in engaging families than larger, more impersonalized urban schools.

Pilot schools are among the most frequently selected city schools by families. For example, when the first Pilot middle school, the Harbor School, opened its doors, more than 500 families picked the school as their first or second choice, despite there being only 60 slots for the first year. This outpouring of interest from families indicates the strong desire for small, personalized, and democratic schools.

Essentially, the Pilot Schools represent a different philosophical framework for how to create successful urban schools -provide schools with maximum flexibility in exchange for increased accountability. There is ample evidence that the Pilot Schools are educating many Boston students who otherwise would not be in the system today. Pilot Schools are creating a new vision of public schools and districts in which schools are provided maximum flexibility to create challenging learning environments, and the roles of school districts and teacher unions are recast to provide these schools with increased support.

The Early Years

Initially, there was little infrastructure of support for Pilot Schools from the district, nor were there any means to link them with other Boston schools. Understandably, because the Pilot Schools were breaking uncharted ground, neither the district nor the union had thought through the types of support that each new school would need in order to launch successfully. The district did appoint an assistant to the superintendent to assist the Pilot Schools in implementation, who has been helpful to the schools. However, while the conditions of Pilot Schools -autonomy over budgets, staffing, curriculum/assessment, governance, and the school calendar -demanded new ways of thinking and operating from the district, little was in place prior to launching the first round of schools. The first years of Pilot Schools were marked by immense institutional obstacles to launching new schools, barriers that made it difficult to focus on teaching and learning.

Virtually every Pilot School was beset by budget, governance, and facilities problems. Pilot Schools were supposed to have control over their budgets through lump sum budgeting. While the district did convert to lump sum per pupil budgets for the Pilot Schools, each school engaged in individual budget negotiations with the district, resulting in adjustments and widely varying

per pupil amounts that schools received, often due to the influence and leverage that the school leader carried.

Because Pilot Schools were a new venture, no one anticipated that schools would need assistance in creative governance bodies and establishing by-laws. Pilot Schools' governance bodies were to have increased decision-making power over the hiring of the principal (with the Superintendent's final imprimatur), approval of the school budget, and setting of school policies. Yet the founding teams of each school received little or no training on how to form and orient their governance bodies, nor any guidelines on how to transition from the planning team that wrote the successful proposal to a governance body that also met state requirements for school councils. As a result, numerous schools experienced struggles in forming their governance bodies.

Facilities were also at the top of the obstacles list. The district did not have a long-range plan for where most of the Pilot schools would be housed. In the first years, the schools were housed mostly in non-city owned and/or temporary facilities. One high school was housed in two separate larger, comprehensive high schools, with its administrative offices in a third location, making the creation of a unified learning community virtually impossible. As enrollments grew, two other schools expanded to housing students in separate locations. Non-city owned facilities, several in community agencies, were usually too small. Several schools were delayed in opening by a year or more due to lack of adequate facilities.

While Pilot Schools expected to have increased control over setting policies that affected teaching and learning, each time they implemented a new policy they received stiff resistance from the central bureaucracy. From implementing new course titles to narrative report cards, Pilot Schools heard a chorus of "No, you can't do that."

The Pilot Schools were founded with the intention of serving as a research and development arm for the district. Yet, there were neither a research and evaluation plan to track the progress of Pilot Schools, nor a process to identify innovative practices and policies that could be replicated to other district schools.

Shortly after the creation of Pilot Schools, the Superintendent of the district left, and was replaced by a new Superintendent who crafted and implemented a comprehensive district-wide reform agenda. Rather than serving as a key vehicle to drive reform throughout the district, the Pilot Schools became a reluctant inheritance, somewhat understandably because of the massive facilities issues.

These start-up difficulties and tensions created a "we vs. they," "us vs. them" mentality between regular district schools and Pilot Schools. Rumors abounded that Pilot Schools received more money than regular schools, that they selectively enrolled students and had the "cream of the crop," and that they didn't take their fair share of special education students. Many regular principals were envious that Pilot Schools had control over their staffing, as they struggled to create unified professional learning communities. On the Pilot end, principals were frustrated at spending so much of their time entangled in facilities, budget, and governance problems, and at the district's perceived lack of commitment to the Pilot Schools as a legitimate vehicle for reform. Many curtailed their participation in district activities, feeling as though leadership meetings and events had little to do with them. This response was interpreted by district officials as Pilot School leaders having a superior, devil-may-care attitude toward the rest of the system.

In many ways, in these early years each Pilot School was an island of educational innovation, separate from one another and from the larger district. While these years resulted in inconsistent practices throughout the Pilot Schools, the passion, commitment, dedication, and unwavering

persistence of the leaders and faculty of each Pilot School enabled them to slowly make progress in creating successful schools.

Forming the Boston Pilot Schools Network

During the 1995-1996 school year, the Center for Collaborative Education, which was founded by the co-directors of a Pilot high school, began providing limited assistance to the Pilot Schools. For the next year and a half, the schools operated as a loose federation. In the spring of 1997, the Center hosted a two-day leadership retreat to assess the progress of the Pilot Schools as a movement. Leaders recognized that their schools were continually in a crisis mentality, plagued by governance, budgetary, and facilities problems which prevented them from focusing on their key mission of improving teaching and learning. Pilot School leaders realized that, by remaining as individual schools, each negotiating separately with the district, they had less leverage than if they were to stand together. Individual negotiations often resulted in differentiated budgets and policies for schools, creating tensions among the school leaders. Finally, the Pilot School leaders realized that they couldn't accomplish the tasks of creating a new school, negotiating budgets and facilities with the district, forming and managing new governance bodies, and focusing on teaching and learning, without some third-party assistance.

Out of this discussion arose two key decisions. First, the school leaders agreed to form the Boston Pilot Schools Network, comprising all the Pilot Schools. This enabled the schools to take a unified stand in budget negotiations and policy deliberations with the district, with a goal of maximizing conditions of autonomy while achieving equity in resources among the schools. The leadership body agreed to focus more on sharing practices and learning from one another.

Second, the Pilot Schools agreed they needed a third-party organization to assist and support the new network. The Center for Collaborative Education was asked to become that organization. The relationship between the Center and the Pilot Schools was to be collaborative, with the Center's work on behalf of the Pilots defined together. The Center's role was to be a partner with the Pilot Schools Network in creating a high- performing network of visionary schools. *Essentially, the Pilot Schools recognized the power of a network, assisted in a collaborative partnership by a third party organization, in bringing about reform.*

The collaborative nature of this relationship between a network of schools and a third- party organization stands in marked contrast to the hierarchical roles of many other intermediary organizations with schools today, in which the third-party organization imposes its reform agenda on a set of schools. In the partnership, the accountability of the Center to be responsive to the Pilot Schools Network is high. Pilot Schools' teachers and principals are represented on the Center's Board of Directors. As well, because of the collaborative nature of the relationship, the Network can at any time say it is not pleased with the relationship or the performance of the Center and can terminate the partnership. Conversely, the Center may at any time determine that the Network is not helping the organization achieve its mission, and end the relationship. Therefore, built-in mechanisms to periodically assess the partnership and to make adjustments need to be in place.

At that retreat, school leaders agreed that, in order to become a network, a critical first step was to forge philosophical unity around a common set of principles that each school and the network as a whole could embrace and adopt. Over the next several months, the network crafted the following network principles to guide its work:

Boston Pilot Schools Network Principles

- ✓ Pilot schools should have high expectations for each and every student, and the education students experience should reflect these expectations
- ✓ The people closest to students should be the policy makers and decision makers, including teachers, administrators, parents, and students themselves. This calls for democratic forms of school governance and facilitative leadership
- ✓ Schools should be small and personalized, so that teachers and students know each other well
- ✓ The school culture should promote innovation and risk-taking, and professional development should be an integral part of daily school life
- ✓ Learning should be purposeful, authentic, challenging, and creative, and build students' capacity to take responsibility for their own learning
- ✓ Authentic forms of assessment, such as portfolios and exhibitions, are key to improving learning and teaching
- ✓ Families are critical partners in creating high performing pilot schools
- ✓ The people who are responsible for the learning and decision-making should be held responsible for the impact of the school in the lives of learners and of the community.

> [In the Pilot Schools Network], I have many colleagues who are in the same mind set and the same conditions, different contexts for the conditions, but adhere to certain principles and have certain visions. And that's really affirming…it's like a hub that provides a number of different supports. It provides services to the school that we're able to purchase, it provides a dialog, discussion, and a reflective mechanism…I've come to value the Network as…something that can create, that does create alternatives. Pilot School Director (Neufeld 1999)

While network decisions would be made by consensus among all the schools, it was also realized that often high impact, time sensitive decisions needed to be made that would preclude waiting until a leadership meeting to discuss. As a result, the network created an executive committee, consisting of three principals and the Center's executive director, that would have the power to make time sensitive decisions, with the proviso that everyone have the opportunity to give feedback via email, fax, or telephone prior to the decision being made.

Shortly thereafter, the Superintendent agreed to have the Center for Collaborative Education become the official "parent" organization for the Boston Pilot Schools Network. The Center's executive director was placed on various coordinating bodies for the district's overall reform agenda as the representative for the Pilot Schools.

Building the Network: The Role of the Center for Collaborative Education

Since the formation of the Boston Pilot Schools Network, as a third party organization in the partnership the Center for Collaborative Education has played multiple roles in supporting the network and its individual schools:

- ✓ Advocate
- ✓ Facilitator of the network
- ✓ Coach
- ✓ Researcher and evaluator

Having the independence, flexibility, and responsiveness to play these multiple roles has enabled the Center to help strengthen the network as well as each individual school, to advocate for greater autonomy, and to begin documenting the network's impact. In doing so, the Center has had multiple staff working with the network -the Center's executive director serving in an advocate role, program directors and associates building the network and serving as coaches, and the Center's evaluation team conducting research studies.

I. The Role of Advocate

First and foremost, the Pilot Schools needed an advocate to help them wade through the tangle of policies and budget processes that were hindering their progress. A key role of intermediary organizations is to work with the district and state to enable the conditions that allow schools to flourish. A key quality of the advocate role is being an ombudsperson, that of translating the concerns of Pilot School directors and faculty to the district and negotiating solutions.

Creating Equitable Lump Sum Per Pupil Budgets

When Pilot Schools began, the district's Budget Office had to, for the first time, convert its traditional budgetary method of allocating people and specific resources to schools to an accurate lump sum per pupil formula by grade level. However, each Pilot School continued to engage in separate budget negotiations with the Budget Office, resulting in disparate lump sum per pupil budgets for schools serving the same grade span. With assistance from the Center, collaboration with the district Budget Office, and support from the Superintendent, a Fiscal Autonomy Committee was formed to iron out the budget process and to seek ways for Pilot Schools to gain additional autonomy.

The committee, which was facilitated by Center staff, began by adopting a principle to create a budget process that was equitable for all schools, and that could be replicated to other schools in the district. The committee began by analyzing the per pupil amounts that schools were receiving, and comparing them to the district averages by grade level. Upon close examination, six of the then nine Pilot Schools were receiving per pupil amounts under the district average, with several over $1,000 less per pupil. The committee decided that Pilot Schools would receive a consistent lump sum per pupil amount by grade level rather than a K-12 average, as it was the regular schools within respective grade levels to which Pilot Schools were to be compared. This meant that elementary, middle, and high schools would receive differentiated per pupil amounts, as this was the case for the district's regular schools (with elementary schools at the lower end and high schools at the high end). As well, the committee developed a consistent per pupil amount for roll-out costs (e.g., as schools added grades and had significant planned enrollment jumps) to allow for furniture, equipment, textbook, and materials acquisitions as students were added.

> ...we've been able to [use our budget flexibility to] keep a low student-teacher ratio and then commit to raising soft money for operating expenses. I wouldn't have been allowed to take that risk if we had normal funding or budget guidelines. (Pilot School Director, Neufeld 1999)

The committee then sought ways to create greater fiscal autonomy for Pilot Schools by looking at central district costs. After reviewing fiscal autonomy practices in other urban districts in the United States and Canada, the committee examined whether any central costs could be discretionary for Pilot Schools. Committee members adopted the principle that if the service was non-essential and not used by a Pilot School, the school should have discretion over whether they purchased the service from the district. If the service was not purchased, the per pupil amount for that service would be added to the school's lump sum per pupil budget. The district's Budget Office then analyzed the district's budget to determine per pupil amounts for every line item as well as sub-line items. Examples of discretionary line items included athletics, textbooks, district library/ A V services, and substitutes.

In 1998, the Massachusetts state legislature adopted legislation creating Horace Mann schools, which were modeled after the Boston Pilot Schools. This legislation provides the opportunity for schools across the state to gain an expanded version of the flexibility and autonomy afforded to Pilot Schools, while retaining membership within the school districts in which they reside. When the legislation passed, the Pilot Schools were still in the midst of negotiating increased budgetary and policy autonomy with the district. The network decided strategically to have a select number of Pilot Schools apply to become Horace Mann schools. Pilot School and CCE leaders reasoned that gaining Horace Mann status for a couple of schools would provide added leverage in district negotiations for gaining increased budget and policy autonomy for all Pilot schools. The Center worked with several selected schools to apply for Horace Mann status, and two schools were selected as Horace Mann schools.

The strategy succeeded, as the added budget autonomy afforded to these two schools spurred eventual agreements to provide Pilot Schools with increased discretion over designated central office costs. However, the strategy also raised further questions: Did the transition of two schools to become Horace Mann schools bifurcate the network, as two schools now have status and a relationship with a district that is fundamentally different than the other Pilot Schools? If so, did the strategy lessen the strength and power of the network in negotiating with the district?

This process, while providing Pilot Schools with significantly greater fiscal autonomy, has also benefited the district. The district now has a much more accurate and comprehensive picture of how district funds are allocated. As well, while still not an exact science, the budget conversion process to a lump sum per pupil amount has advanced far enough so that the district's Budget Office is now working to extend similar budget autonomy to a select group of regular district schools.

Gaining Flexibility with District Policies

> ...the size of scale, lack of personalization, structures, fragmented subject areas and on and on...and we would try to correct them and so the mission was almost from the get go, was two parts. It was one, build community for these kids and…two, break all the traditions, ask any questions, break the rules in pursuit of building that community. And the two were symbiotic and synergistic and inextricably linked. (Neufeld, 1999)

The central district bureaucracy was not prepared for the newly formed Pilot Schools. Large bureaucracies are most often designed to promote and ensure unifoffi1ity of practices and policies. Moreover, there is usually little communication from one department to another. Further complicating matters, the contract language that created Pilot Schools was not specific in detailing the district policies from which Pilot Schools were exempt. Predictably, the initial dynamic between central office staff and Pilot Schools was one of central office staff being inflexible to policy changes adopted by Pilot Schools, and Pilot School leaders being upset at perceived roadblocks being placed before them as they tried to craft innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

In confronting this dilemma, the Superintendent endorsed the creation of a Policy Committee, consisting of Pilot School leaders, the CCE executive director, and the Superintendent's special assistant in charge of Pilot Schools, which would identify those district policies that presented obstacles for Pilot Schools, and propose solutions for the Superintendent to consider. Over the next two years, the committee, which was facilitated by CCE staff, freed the Pilot Schools from a variety of policies, big and small, that enabled them to pursue more innovative teaching and learning practices.

For example, initially the district rejected the Pilot high schools' narrative report cards, as they could not be entered into the district's mainframe computer system that produced transcripts. With advocacy from the Center, the district agreed that the need to produce transcripts should not drive the commitment to create more meaningful assessments for students, and that Pilot Schools could adopt their own methods of report cards. The Center also helped negotiate exemptions from the following district policies:

- ✓ Initially, a number of Pilot high school course titles were rejected, as they were not on the approved School Committee list. This policy was changed to allow Pilot Schools to adopt their own course titles
- ✓ Pilot Schools were released from the district-wide promotion policy
- ✓ Pilot Schools were allowed to change the time of the year in which they administered the district-required Stanford 9 achievement test to dates that better fit their curriculum schedule

The Center also successfully advocated for the Pilot Schools to be released from adopting the district-wide reform model that all other schools followed. While all other schools adhered to a set of district-wide reform principles, the Pilot Schools crafted and adopted their own. While regular schools received reform grants to be used for district- determined purposes, Pilot Schools used reform funds in flexible ways that supported professional development and for network activities that promoted sharing and collaboration among the schools. While regular schools followed district-adopted learning standards, textbooks, and instructional minutes for math and literacy, Pilot Schools had flexibility to craft teaching and learning practices that would best help students be successful.

Navigating Special Education Flexibility While Ensuring Equitable Enrollment

Massachusetts has the highest special education rates in the country , and Boston has one of the highest rates in the state. Over one in ten Boston students are placed in substantially separate or more restrictive settings. Clearly, regular schools are not providing many students with the educational services and support that they need.

Pilot School directors and faculty argue that the solution to these astronomically high special education rates is to create small, personalized, and democratic schools that are much better able to meet the diverse needs of our increasingly diverse student population. They argue that the "very nature of their smallness" serves more students well, including those who might otherwise be classified as having special needs and even needing substantially separate settings in larger, more impersonal schools.

> "Pilot Schools believe that the very nature of their smallness -which includes lower class size, teachers knowing their students well, multi-year student-teacher relationships (looping, multi-age classrooms), multiple adults in the classroom, individual learning plans, and multiple assessments -is an integral aspect in providing students with a continuum of services. These aspects of small schools represent conditions that are often provided solely to special education students. This preventive model of schooling minimizes the over-identification of students with special needs." (Pilot Schools Network Special Education Principles, 2000)

Boston's high special education rate and high rate of students in restrictive settings is problematic when factoring the Pilot Schools' budget allocation formula. The lump sum per pupil amount that each school receives is the aggregate average of the percent of all regular education, bilingual, vocational, and special education students, including students placed in substantially separate settings but excluding students in out-of-district placements. Of course, the per pupil amount for special education students in substantially separate settings is significantly higher than the per pupil amount for other students, thereby raising the per pupil amount that Pilot Schools receive.

The Superintendent has had a legitimate concern that, if the Pilot Schools are to receive a lump sum amount that includes special education students, they should enroll their fair share of special education students, including those who would otherwise be placed in substantially separate settings. Conversely, the Pilot Schools have argued that solely counting the number of students identified as having special needs is misleading, as Pilot Schools have consciously chosen a different philosophical framework than the district in constructing their schools. Thus, while they may enroll a similar demography of students with diverse needs, their actual numbers of students classified as having special needs and of needing substantially separate educational settings will be characteristically lower than regular schools. A key question, they argue, is: What do schools look like that best meet the needs of diverse students?

The Superintendent authorized the creation of a Pilot Schools Special Education Committee to address this dilemma, whose membership includes the BPS Special Education Director and other central office special education staff, the BPS Budget Director, CCE staff, and Pilot School leaders. During this process, the Pilot Schools have crafted a set of network-wide principles for special education that clearly states their commitment to serve all students, including those with special needs:

Boston Pilot Schools Network Special Education Principles

1. We believe that all children have strengths and challenges and that Pilot Schools work towards meeting each student's individual academic, social, emotional, and physical needs.

2. Some students' challenges are defined as special education disabilities that therefore entitle them to services and additional supports which meet their specific needs.

3. Pilot Schools honor and embrace the moral and legal obligation to provide all students with a continuum of services, which range from typical to atypical.

4. One goal of the Pilot School Network is to provide services to students to the maximum feasible extent in inclusive settings with flexible groupings.

5. Pilot Schools believe that the very nature of their smallness -which includes lower class size, teachers knowing their students well, multi-year student-teacher relationships {looping, multi-age classrooms), multiple adults in the classroom, individual learning plans, and multiple assessments -is an integral aspect in providing students with a continuum of services. These aspects of small schools represent conditions that are often provided solely to special education students. This preventive model of schooling minimizes the over-identification of students with special needs.

6. Pilot Schools support all teachers in providing a continuum of services to students in inclusive classrooms. This includes common planning time, professional development, child study, student support teams, and teaming.

7. Pilot Schools believe in a strong pre-referral system that identifies a student's challenges and articulates needs and appropriate strategies to be delivered in inclusive settings. In doing so, Pilot Schools are committed to working collaboratively among faculty, administrators, families, and the student to determine a child's strengths and challenges, and any services the student may need.

8. All students should have access to Pilot Schools regardless of disabilities consistent with the access to all Boston Public Schools. We recognize that students and families need to be appropriately matched with schools that can meet their needs, and that in some cases there may be agreement that a student's needs may be more effectively and appropriately addressed in another school or educational setting.

In addition, CCE and Pilot Schools committee members have crafted a proposal to the district that would require each Pilot School to document the school's services and support provided to all students, including those with disabilities, and, using an alternative form to the more cumbersome state form, document students' disabilities and the services and support that are

being provided to meet each identified student's needs. Through this annual process, the Pilot Schools will document their enrollment of students with disabilities. If the documentation reveals that the school is not within a specified enrollment range of students with disabilities, the Pilot School will set aside a mutually agreed upon number of enrollment slots, and work with the BPS Office of Special Education to ensure that these slots are filled with students with moderate special needs. In return, the Pilot Schools are requesting that the district provide them with a consistent team of special education staff to work exclusively with the Pilot Schools, so that these individuals become acquainted with the unique nature of these schools.

Negotiating Terms of Pilot School Status

The district has sought to establish legal memorandums of agreement with each Pilot School that spell out the terms and conditions of the school's Pilot status, including for facilities, hiring of the principal, staffing, budgets, renewal of Pilot status, and termination of the school. Initially, memorandums of agreement were negotiated separately with each individual school, resulting in different conditions of Pilot status being agreed to for different schools.

The Center has worked with the Pilot Schools' leadership and the chairpersons of their respective governing bodies to negotiate one template language of conditions for all future Pilot School memorandums of agreement. The Center's executive director has negotiated standard language with the district's Legal Office, and then gained ongoing input and feedback from the Pilot School leaders and governing body chairpersons. While the negotiations are ongoing and not yet finalized, some of the language that the Center has successfully argued for includes increased responsibility by the district for facilities maintenance, agreement to seek autonomy in selection and hiring of staff in custodial and secretarial unions, flexibility in staff evaluation guidelines, increased commitment from the Superintendent to hire Pilot principals recommended by the school's governing body, and agreement to base any consideration of termination of the school upon the network's school quality review accountability process. As with the budget process, by banding together and having the Center participate in the negotiating process, the memorandum of agreement language has been strengthened to benefit all Pilot Schools.

II. The Role of Facilitating a Network

> By talking to other colleagues, you learn things about yourself and about your teaching and you grow as individuals, so we've always talked about wanting to have some friends outside of our school just to talk about what they're doing. And we shared enough common beliefs that we could learn from them and they could learn from us. We knew they had a special interest in math and science, and we in social studies. How could we have the types of conversations to make both of our schools stronger? (Pilot School teacher, Disney Learning Partnership report, 2000)

Practitioners learn best from other practitioners, school leaders and teachers alike. In the Pilot Schools Network, the Center creates and facilitates opportunities for teachers and principals to engage in collaborative dialogue, share practices, problem solve, and learn from one another. In supporting these and other network meetings, a critical role played by Center staff is taking on the basic administrative tasks that enable meetings to be successful, and for which Pilot School directors and faculty do not have time - scheduling meetings, developing agendas with input, sending out meeting notices and reminders, ordering food, facilitating the meetings, taking and sending out minutes.

Leadership Support and Developing New Leaders

Pilot School leaders need regular time to share practices, engage in network professional development planning, and discuss district budget and policy decisions that affect them. The

Center hosts and facilitates monthly leadership meetings, attended by the principals and other school leaders. These meetings are used for a variety of purposes. Some meetings are used to share practices, for example, special education models and services, teacher support and evaluation, student assessment, and school governance. Others are used for debating network-wide policy decisions and negotiations with the district, including annual budget negotiations, the district-wide promotion policy, and student testing practices.

> It's a whole different conversation…in the Pilot School stuff...we're reading books, we're reading articles, we've talked about solving the educational problems. We're talking about policy. We're talking about critical friendship. We're talking about the issues that we really should be contending with. Pilot School Director (Neufeld 1999)

As well, the Center hosts and facilitates an annual two-day spring leadership retreat, in which the network assesses its progress over the past year, identifies its challenges, and sets goals for the coming year. This is also a time when the relationship between the Pilot Schools and the Center is revisited, reassessed, and recommendations made for strengthening it, a collaborative discussion that serves to reaffirm the partnership while ensuring that the Center is serving the networks and individual school needs in the best manner possible.

> The Network provides an opportunity to meet with "peer schools" who provide meaningful feedback, as well as greater accountability than bureaucracies We often grow much more intimate with our Network colleagues even though they may be farther away geographically than with our co-workers at the district level. Pilot School Director (Neufeld 1999)

Over the past year, leadership meetings have also focused on issues of race, diversity, and power within the Pilot Schools Network, structured conversations that one would rarely if ever hear among most cohorts of school leaders. With outside facilitation provided by the Center, the Pilot Schools Network has admirably explored such questions as: Who has the power in the network? How does it correspond to one's race and gender? Who speaks up and who doesn't? Who gets listened to and why? How do we build a more diverse, inclusive, and respectful network of leadership? These conversations have helped to strengthen the leadership commitment to the network, while also expanding the number of leaders from each school that attend and participate.

The Center has also been active in nurturing new leadership for Pilot Schools. As the number of Pilot Schools increase and as the current Pilot Schools begin to experience leadership transitions, the need for leaders well versed and embedded in Pilot and small schools philosophy and practices will increase. As well, the district has committed to creating at least three new Pilot Schools in the coming few years. The Pilot Schools Network will soon need a steady stream of new small school leaders to take on new and current Pilot Schools.

To this end, the Center for Collaborative Education, in collaboration with the Boston Pilot Schools Network and Northeastern University, launched a School Leadership Project, with the goal of creating new small schools leaders. This program, which is a regional affiliate of the Rhode Island-based Big Picture Company's Aspiring Principals Program, is an apprenticeship-based certification program for aspiring principals. Aspiring principals spend 12-18 months housed in an existing Pilot School under the tutelage and mentorship of the school's principal, designated a distinguished principal, and engage in the real-world work and complexities of the school. This field-based experience is supplemented with summer institutes and school-year seminars to bolster competency in select areas, such as school law and budgeting. Each aspiring principal develops an individual education plan in consultation with their distinguished principal to ensure that each required program competency, aligned with state certification requirements, is met. Aspiring principals must successfully complete a portfolio exhibition before a panel of

reviewers, that demonstrates their mastery of knowledge and skills in each competency area, in order to graduate.

In its first year, there are 10 aspiring principals and seven distinguished principals in the program, with five of the school sites being Pilot Schools. In this way, the Center is ensuring that there will be a continual supply of new Pilot School leaders.

Teacher Sharing Opportunities

While the Pilot Schools Network began by focusing on strengthening leadership, it soon included opportunities for teacher sharing, with the realization that there were exemplary practices within each school from which teachers could learn if there were structured forums to do so. Center-sponsored after-school sharing meetings transitioned into an annual Pilot Schools Network Teacher Sharing Conference, for which Pilot Schools coordinate their fall early release day. This annual teacher-planned and facilitated conference highlights innovative teaching and learning practices within the Pilot Schools, for example, graduation standards in the humanities, project-based math, creating a union of art and science, and making connections and mapping curriculum.

As well, Center staff work with Pilot Schools to partner in exchanging school visits and peer observations. In one such partnership between two K-8 schools, two teachers "noted that building a relationship with a colleague at another school over time is important because it creates a safe environment to conduct peer observations and provide feedback across schools." (CCE Disney Learning Partnership Report, 2000)

> [Regarding peer observations] That's one thing that I got really excited about because you can have professional development as a staff which is excellent, and then you have these professional development meetings where people come from outside, and sometimes they haven't ever been a teacher but they're teaching you about something to put into your classroom. It's so incredible and empowering to get information from a colleague, from a peer, that you know has been in a classroom. And it's respectful. It's saying, why not go to the source? Why not go to somebody who's been doing it and trying it and let's see how that works?
> Teacher (CCE Disney Leaming Partnership Report 2000)

> It's always great to get out and see what someone else is doing in their classroom. Both schools are using TERC Investigations math curriculum. How is another school interpreting what TERC is saying? It's so important to see other teachers. You might have learned something and put it so far on the back burner, you haven't forgotten it but you just left it there. And you go "oh yeah, I'm going to try that." Teachers have come here and seen stuff and gone back and done it. What's changed my teaching is, we always have visitors, but I'll make more time to talk if we have a connection. So for example if they have a question about why I'm doing something, I'm more eager to answer. It's not that I think they're judging me, it's that I'm more relaxed, like "oh, let me tell you about why I'm doing it." So I'm more aware about everything I'm doing as well. Teacher (CCE Disney Learning Partnership Report 2000)

While these activities represent a beginning, the network and the Center realize we still have a long ways to go in developing rich, ongoing teacher sharing across network schools. How can we increase our teacher sharing opportunities to reach more teachers in an ongoing way?

Competencies and Assessment Committee

> "If we are focusing solely on preparing for standardized tests, we miss the boat on human development." (Pilot School director, NESSN forum, 2000)

In 1993, Massachusetts enacted an omnibus education reform legislation, a component of which was to establish a comprehensive system of academic standards and assessment that included

graduation standards. This legislation has been interpreted by the state board of education, which is controlled by a local conservative think tank organization, to focus on developing a single, on demand, paper and pencil, high stakes test that detennines graduation from high school. This test runs contrary to the network's belief that assessments should be multiple and should help students demonstrate essential knowledge, skills, and habits of mind in varied ways. Ultimately, the network believes that this test will only serve to further harm students of color and low-income students whom state legislators and the state board of education purport to be helping.

As a response to these state decisions, the Center for Collaborative Education and the Pilot Schools Network are working to create a network-wide set ofK-12 competencies and assessments. The goal is to ensure consistency in required competencies across all Pilot Schools and in the assessment measures that are used to determine whether students have met them. Ultimately, the network hopes to put forth its network competencies and assessments to the state department of education as an alternative to MCAS.

> The science design team has been exciting because I sometimes feel what we do there is helping two schools. I feel like we're doing something in a small school but it's bigger. . In Pilot Schools, there are math and writing competencies that they've been working on. One thing that has been kind of exciting is to think of ourselves as almost like doing that for the two schools for science competencies. It's not something that's been completed but it's something that got me excited and motivated to think about science through the different grades and does it have to look like BPS's curriculum where they're all doing the same thing every year or could it be something that's on a four year cycle that's rotated and maybe they did it twice during their school careers. Teacher (CCE Disney Learning Partnership Report 2000)

Over the past year, the Center has facilitated a committee of teachers, representing each Pilot School, in this work. Teachers first collected and examined their respective schools' competencies and assessments. From this, they crafted a set of Assessment Principles that were adopted by the network, as well as a set of competencies in literacy and math for grades five, eight, and twelve. They are now in the process of collecting teacher assignments and student work that reflect these competencies, and will use them to create a set of broad assessments that can be flexibly implemented by each school, yet that will ensure that each school has consistency in its assessment process. The final competencies and assessment system, along with examples of aligned teacher assignments and student work representing mastery over the competencies, will be placed on a website for each Pilot School to use.

Resource Bank

This past year, at its annual spring leadership retreat, the network realized that the Center could never meet all the needs of individual schools, and that there was a great resource that was going untapped -that of the schools themselves. In the entrepreneurial nature of the network, the Center is assisting the Pilot Schools to set up a network-wide resource bank, in which Pilot Schools will share their expertise with one another. Each Pilot School has committed six person days to the network, to be accessed by other Pilot Schools that need particular expertise. Three person days from each school are devoted to serving as panel reviewers and judges on student exhibition and portfolio reviews, in which every Pilot School engages. The other three person days are left up to each Pilot School to identify an area of expertise, for example, readers' and writers' workshops, teaching inquiry-based mathematics, managing budgets, creating student exhibitions, or setting up advisory groups. Once set up, Center staff will publish the resource bank opportunities, and manage the process of accessing resources from other schools. The Pilot Schools Resource Bank is one more innovative way in which the Center is assisting the network to collaborate and thereby strengthen each individual school's practices.

Creating a Model of Accountability

The Boston Pilot Schools are the only district schools that are held to high stakes accountability - that is, they undergo a review every four years to determine their effectiveness, and based on the results, their Pilot status is renewed by the Superintendent and School Committee. Originally, the district intended to assess each Pilot School's status by hiring an independent consultant to visit each school up for review and provide recommendations to the district. At its first spring leadership retreat, the Center and the Pilot Schools Network decided that such an evaluation method was not only a cursory way to make a high stakes decision on renewing a school's Pilot status, but would provide each school with little helpful data to improve.

> The question before them was: What should this process of evaluation look like? To answer this question, Pilot School directors returned to one of the guiding principles of their network: Those closest to the students should be the decision makers. (Pilot Schools Network School Quality Review Self Study Guide, 2000)

Center staff then engaged in discussions with the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, which was "interested in working with Annenberg Challenge sites in designing new models of school accountability that would serve as both a school improvement and an evaluation tool," about assisting the Network to create a more comprehensive accountability system. The goal of this system would be to provide evidence to the district of a Pilot School's progress, while also providing valuable information to the school to aid in growth and improvement. The Center and Pilot Schools then requested, and the Superintendent agreed, to have CCE, the Pilot Schools Network, and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform work collaboratively with the BPS Office of Research, Assessment, and Evaluation to develop and implement this system.

A summer retreat and follow-up design meetings were then held throughout 1997 to construct an accountability system that was built by and for the Pilot Schools "focused on student learning; respectful of each school's autonomy; builds capacity for school improvement; and provides the school and the district with the best possible information with which to make decisions. The system provides an opportunity for mutual learning among the Pilot Schools and other Boston Public Schools."

The network has now developed an accountability system based on a school quality review model to assess and provide public evidence of the quality of education being provided to students. The network developed a set of benchmarks by which to assess each school, grouped into five categories:

- ✓ Vision
- ✓ Governance, Leadership, and Budget
- ✓ Teaching and Learning
- ✓ Professional Development and Support
- ✓ Family and Community Partnerships

Schools undertaking the process engage in a self-study period using the benchmarks, with assistance from CCE staff, that results in the development of a school portfolio providing evidence of the school's progress in each benchmark area. This self-study process is also used as a databased inquiry and decision-making tool to assess the school's current strengths and areas of challenge, and to develop plans of action for addressing the challenge areas. The goal is to prepare each Pilot School under review so that when the second stage of the school quality

review visit occurs -the external review visit -the school has been fully reflective and will encounter no surprises. The school then hosts a three-day, onsite visit by a School Quality Review team, which collects evidence about the school in relation to the benchmarks, resulting in a report of findings and recommendations. The report and a school response to the report are then forwarded to the Superintendent and School Committee for review and renewal.

> The Center has been very helpful with helping us evolve the development of the school so that when we come to our School Quality Review progress report, which is due this spring. They're kind of helping us facilitate that as an outside eye looking at the process. And helping us make sure that we have a timetable so that work is getting done. ...And so the Center has been very helpful at coming in and saying you need a timeline for this, you need to have a list with specific people assigned to specific tasks of who's going to do this and that. Pilot School Director (Neufeld 1999)

At this time, three cycles of school quality reviews have been completed. The process has been indicative of the nascent growth of the partnership, in that early on some Pilot Schools felt that the Center did not have the full capacity to adequately coach the first round of schools undertaking the process. This capacity has grown over time. At the same time, the evidence indicates that the process has been successful in its twin goals of providing the schools with in-depth feedback to use in improvement, and of providing the district with valuable information to make an informed decision about the renewal of
Pilot Schools. Each school that has undertaken the process has valued the self- assessment process, and received valuable information and recommendations about its progress. One of the first schools to undertake the process received a "tough love" report of findings from the School Quality Review team, which was chaired by another Pilot School's assistant director, which resulted in the school receiving only a one-year renewal from the district. Center staff worked closely with the school to address the areas of concern cited in the report. When the same team visited the school one year later, significant improvement was found, resulting in a recommendation and granting of a four-year renewal.

Largely because of the success of this process, the district has since adopted the school quality review model of accountability for all schools, although it has encountered the familiar dilemmas of large-scale replication of scaling up too quickly, quality and consitency across reviews, and lack of support for schools undertaking the process.

Due Process Guidelines

When teachers elect to work at a Pilot School, they maintain union salaries, benefits, and seniority status, yet give up all other work conditions. Each Pilot School sets its own work conditions, including the length of the school day and year for both faculty and students. Early on, several Pilot faculties expressed that many schools had no due process guidelines in cases of a teacher complaint. With agreement from the Pilot directors, the Center convened a network-wide due process committee of Pilot faculty to develop guidelines on due process and on setting annual work conditions for all network schools to consider adopting. Eventually, the committee developed a set of guidelines, which was adopted by the Pilot School leadership. All Pilot Schools were strongly encouraged to use the guidelines to develop and adopt individual school due process guidelines to be adopted by the respective governance bodies. This was later reinforced in amendments to the BTU contract language on Pilot Schools.

Managing Resources

Pilot Schools are entrepreneurial by nature. In a society that does not fully support its urban schools, all schools are resource hungry. When schools are small, this is magnified. Pilot

Schools, because of their smallness, their being rooted in communities, and their conditions of autonomy, attract a different breed of leader, one that is often out of the mainstream channels of principal leadership. Often, these leaders are entrepreneurial themselves. The result is that Pilot Schools are often successful in raising considerable funds in addition to their district allocated budgets.

The question becomes where to house these funds. Most large school bureaucracies present enormous obstacles to schools in housing and accessing funds, creating extensive paperwork, time delays, and frustration for Pilot School directors that are intent on maximizing their time to focus on teaching and learning. The Center for Collaborative Education, at the request of a number of Pilot Schools, now houses and administers their external funds. Being a relatively small non-profit organization enables the Center to have a streamlined process for administering and managing Pilot Schools' funds in a timely manner, which can relieve Pilot Schools of significant time and paperwork. This became another example of the Center having to expand its capacity to serve Pilot Schools; initially, there was some frustration as the Center did not have the full fiscal capacity to handle external funds, resulting in the eventual hiring of an experienced comptroller to better serve the schools.

III. The Role of Coach

Pilot Schools are trying to simultaneously launch a new school, build a professional collaborative culture, establish governance bodies, create family and community partnerships, establish a school vision, and focus on learning, teaching, and assessment. Accomplishing these tasks is an enormous undertaking, one that can often benefit from the lens and assistance of a third-party organization. The Center for Collaborative Education provides Pilot Schools with this lens for reflection through onsite coaching.

The Center's Pilot Schools staff consists of former teachers and small school leaders, including a founding Pilot School director, who bring a deep understanding of the scope of Pilot School's issues that each school faces. Center staff provides Pilot Schools with coaching across a range of areas. In their coaching role, Center staff plays multiple roles - facilitator of meetings and conversations, offering a lens to help the principal and faculty reflect on their practice, a guide and professional developer in engaging faculty in specific practices, a resource broker to identify and obtain additional assistance, and an advocate with the district and state.

School Reform

Seven of the 11 Pilot Schools are members of the Center's Massachusetts Coalition of Essential Schools Network, a national school reform model in which schools organize themselves around a set of 10 Common Principles. As the statewide regional CES Center, the Center for Collaborative Education coaches each of these schools in the adoption and implementation of the CES Principles. This includes working with the full faculty on creating and adopting school-wide habits of mind and exhibitions, facilitating individual team meetings on looking collaboratively at student and teacher work, consulting with the principal and leadership team on guiding the CES change process, and preparing the schools for the CES membership process.

School Start-up Issues

Virtually every Pilot School has encountered start-up dilemmas, from governance to hiring to budget issues. Center staff has provided coaching to Pilot Schools on the full range of these issues. For example, one school became engulfed in a feud between teachers and the teacher

leader management team about what it really meant to be a teacher-led school to the point where tensions threatened to throw the school into disarray. Center staff, in collaboration with the district, negotiated with the teacher management team, the faculty, and the school council to better define in writing the school's governance and decision making structure and process. Once this was agreed upon, Center staff arranged with the Superintendent to ensure that any teacher, including provisionals, could voluntarily transfer to another school if they did not philosophically agree with the adopted structure.

A second school didn't create their governance body for almost one school year, resulting in difficulties when the principal wanted to make staffing changes at the end of the first school year. Center staff negotiated with the faculty and the director to create and launch the school's governance body, and assisted this body to then make decisions about the process for staffing changes for the subsequent school year. In a third case involving two schools housed in the same facility, tensions arose over the shared use and administration of the facility. Center staff met weekly with the two directors for over one year to facilitate discussions and make decisions about the shared use of the building, and to build mutual trust and respect among the two directors.

Teaching and Learning

Pilot Schools have also sought Center coaching to strengthen teaching and learning. For example, one school solicited coaching from the Center to work with math teachers to articulate a curriculum sequence and to strengthen classroom instruction. Two other schools have received coaching on strengthening both math and science as part of a Center-sponsored initiative to ensure that every student was engaged in a rigorous course of studies in math and science, and were receiving the support to be successful.

In a partnership among two Pilot K-8 schools, the Center wrote a grant to secure three- year funding from the Disney Learning Partnership to build creative learning communities, with a focus on integrated humanities and math-science curriculum. Through this partnership, Center staff provided coaching on launching cross-school peer observations and in-school protocols to look collaboratively at student and teacher work:

> One tool is the Consultancy Protocol, a formal process to help teachers focus on instructional dilemmas and receive feedback from their colleagues. Teachers have become more comfortable with using the Consultancy Protocol, not only among colleagues, but also within their own classrooms. One teacher used the protocol in his classroom to have the students reflect on their writing. "It requires self control. The process changed their work; they rewrote what they had done, incorporating the feedback. It improved their writing dramatically" (Young Achievers teacher). The primary factors that have affected teachers' instructional practice have been the cross-school sharing, feedback from classroom observations, additional materials and resources such as trade books and plants, human resources such as curriculum consultants and interns, as well as tools to help reflect on practice, assess student work, and map curriculum. One teacher stated, "to do the protocols, I didn't realize how much it helps to improve teaching." (Disney Creative Learning Communities report, 2000)

> Classroom observations by the CCE coach and teachers from the partner schools have provided valuable feedback to teachers as well as tangible suggestions on ways to improve instruction. Teachers have been open to feedback and have shared their intentions to implement new approaches based upon what the teacher/coach shared. (Disney Creative Leaming Communities report, 2000)

IV. The Role of Researcher and Evaluator

The Center and Network believe that Pilot Schools are a significant answer to the dilemmas and eroding public support currently facing urban public education. However, because of multiple complexities -a top-down district-wide approach to reform, teacher union concerns about conditions of autonomy granted to large numbers of schools, resistance of large bureaucracies to granting schools autonomy in exchange for accountability, the absence of a district plan to research and evaluate the impact of Pilot Schools -the Pilot Schools continue to remain on the fringe of district-wide reform.

In order to protect the Pilot Schools and to thrust them into the public spotlight as a legitimate and credible movement for urban school reform, the Center launched an extensive research and evaluation agenda to document the impact of Pilot Schools. As the Center has built its capacity, the organization has created a new research and evaluation team charged with this mission. In collaboration with the Pilot School directors, the Center has launched three studies on the Pilot Schools:

Longitudinal Database to Measure and Track Progress

The Center is engaging in a comprehensive documentation of the impact of Pilot Schools on student learning, teacher quality and retention, attracting families to enroll in urban public schools, levels of family involvement, and college enrollment. This data will be used to:

- ✓ Document the impact of Pilot Schools on student achievement and success;
- ✓ Provide valuable data to each Pilot School to use in improving teaching, learning, and assessment practices.

In cooperation with the Boston Public Schools, the Center is creating an extensive longitudinal database that will track the progress of each Pilot School over time on a wide range of student, teacher, and school level indicators. Individual student data will be included in order to track academic achievement progress from year to year. Such a database will enable the Center to construct a comprehensive profile on the progress of each school as well as on the Pilot Schools Network as a whole.

Current indications of the impact of the Pilot Schools are positive:

- ✓ Pilot Schools represent a similar racial and economic enrollment pattern, as do regular BPS schools
- ✓ There are promising signs that Pilot School students are doing well on standardized achievement tests at all grade levels. A number of Pilot elementary, middle, and high schools score at or near the top of the district for all non-examination schools on both the Stanford 9 and Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests
- ✓ Pilot School students are doing well on other indicators, with higher attendance at the middle and high school levels than regular BPS schools, and lower mobility, suspension, voluntary transfer, and dropout rates
- ✓ Waiting lists for Pilot Schools tend to be higher than the average BPS school
- ✓ Teacher attendance at Pilot Schools is higher than the district average

This database will enable the Center to publish an annual progress report on the Boston Pilot Schools to use in advocating for the creation of additional schools with Pilot status.

Budget Study

The Center is conducting a study on the Pilot Schools' use of budget autonomy and flexibility, using the following research question:

How has budget autonomy assisted the Pilot Schools to improve conditions of teaching and learning for their students?

To answer this question, Center researchers are collaborating with the district to analyze each school's budget to identify patterns of resource allocation, and then interviewing Pilot School directors on ways in which funds are used flexibly to focus on teaching and learning. In conducting this study, the Center is collaborating with a district study team, which hopes to use the study findings to advocate with the Superintendent for greater budget flexibility for regular BPS schools.

Authentic Assessment Practices

The Center is also conducting an ongoing study to document innovative educational practices that are enabled by the unique conditions of Pilot Schools. The first phase of this long-term study is to identify authentic assessment practices in Pilot Schools that promote student learning. For example, each Pilot high school has competency-based diplomas, rather than the traditional graduation standards of course counting and seat time. Each high school has identified competencies that all students must master in order to graduate, with demonstrations of mastery in the form of exhibitions and portfolios before both internal and external reviewers. Most Pilot middle and K-8 schools are putting in place similar competencies for exiting eighth graders.

This initial study will document these and other assessment practices in each school, with the intent of adding value to the school reform field by highlighting the scope of assessment practices that schools can adopt in order to strengthen teaching and learning. Further focus areas of this ongoing research to document innovative educational practices will be use of time for both students and faculty, student support practices, and family involvement strategies.

V: Lessons Learned and Implications

1. Third party, or intermediary, organizations can be a critical change agent in supporting networks of schools engaged in reform work and in influencing district practice to support the reform.

Urban schools which operate in a vacuum, which do not receive sustained support from other sources, which are not networked with other like-minded schools engaged in reform, face an almost insurmountable challenge in successfully educating its students and in sustaining that success over time. District central offices are often too encumbered with bureaucracy in order to facilitate successful change within schools themselves.

Third party, or intermediary, organizations have the potential to be an essential partner in facilitating change among groups of progressive, like-minded schools because of their outsider status. This status allows them to be critical through a broader lens, to provide support when no one else has the time, to bring expertise which the district or school do not have. Likewise, these third party organizations can be valuable in facilitating change within district practice in order to better support networks of reform-minded schools through their advocacy for network schools.

In fact, if urban school reform is reconstructed around decentralization of practices and greater school autonomy in exchange for increased and multiple forms of accountability, then third party organizations may be absolutely essential. Districts are not structured to support groups of schools that embrace uniqueness yet are bonded by common principles, much like most classrooms are not structured to meet the diverse needs of diverse groups of students. The Center has been successful in supporting the Pilot Schools Network because they have the understanding and flexibility to serve the diverse needs of each individual Pilot School and of the network as a whole, while uniting network schools around common principles and interests.

2. Collaboration is an essential foundation to any third-party collaboration with a network of schools.

Mutual partnerships bring mutual benefits to both parties. The partnership between the Pilot Schools and the Center for Collaborative Education was founded out of mutual interests -the desire to create a successful movement of small, democratic, and personalized schools that could serve as a legitimate alternative for urban school reform to the current emphasis on district-mandated reforms which require all schools to adopt the same practices and policies. At the same time, the partnership serves the unique needs of each partner. The Pilot Schools needed a third-party organization to provide them with an infrastructure of support, assistance, and advocacy; the Center for Collaborative Education, through becoming the parent organization of the Boston Pilot Schools Network, came closer to achieving its mission of supporting networks of progressive-minded, urban schools.

Early on, it was critical to realize that the Center was not engaged in working with the Pilot Schools for reasons of benevolence and charity; rather, the Center furthered its own agenda by ensuring that the Pilot Schools were successful. Expressing this agenda helped ease the initial mistrust that some Pilot leaders had about the Center's role within the network. In this way, the foundation of collaboration was set early on as the cornerstone to the partnership.

The decision making process was a critical starting point for the network. Pilot Schools were understandably cautious about the Center making decisions on their behalf. The establishment of the principle of decision making by network-wide consensus, and the formation of an executive committee empowered to make interim decisions, were key turning points in building the initial base of trust for the partnership to flourish. Just as top-down, mandated reform is not likely to be successful in winning the hearts, minds, and souls of teachers, similarly third party organizations which govern and make decisions for networks of schools is not likely be successful in transforming them.

Being in a collaborative partnership requires third party organizations to build its knowledge, skills, and areas of expertise. For example, when many Pilot Schools requested the Center to manage their external funds, the Center did not have the financial capacity or expertise to manage school funds. This forced the Center to hire a skilled comptroller who could understand and manage multiple school accounts, thereby expanding the Center's base of expertise.

Collaboration is not without its challenges. Center staff sometimes experiences the frustration of slow or no responses from schools that are enmeshed in the everyday life of school, even when actions have been agreed to. Likewise, Pilot School leaders sometimes experience annoyance when decisions are made in between meetings without full consultation with every school. These are frustrations that wouldn't be experienced in a hierarchical third-party relationship. However, these frustrations, which can seem mighty when they occur, are minute when placed in the context of the successes of building a collaborative partnership between a network of progressive schools and a third party organization.

3. In supporting networks of schools, intermediary organizations need to play multiple roles, including that of advocate, coach, researcher, and facilitator.

Schools must operate on multiple fronts. Negotiating budgets and policies with the district, creating professional development opportunities within the school and with other like-minded schools, strengthening curriculum and instructional practice, and assessing the impact of the school are just a few of the areas schools must navigate.

Through the partnership between the Center for Collaborative Education and the Boston Pilot Schools Network, the Center has served varied roles in strengthening the network and its individual schools. The Center has been an advocate in negotiating for increased budget and policy autonomy, a coach that assists individual schools to improve teaching and learning, a facilitator of network-wide leadership and professional development initiatives a researcher for documenting the impact of Pilot School practices and policies. The Center has had to build its capacity, knowledge base, and expertise in order to respond to the varied needs of the network.

Some of these varied roles are planned, such as the Center's role in developing the network's school quality review and accountability system, when the Center can more deliberately find and acquire the necessary knowledge and expertise. Other roles arise out of immediate need and thus require the Center to have the flexibility and adaptability to quickly develop new areas of expertise. One example was an immediate and unforeseen need by the schools to have the Center manage their external funds.

4. Third party organizations need to have the capacity to maneuver inside and outside the school district.

While seemingly contradictory roles, being an advocate on behalf of schools and collaborating with the district are both key to successfully supporting networks of progressive-minded schools. Bureaucracies are designed to maintain the status quo and to ensure that all schools receive the same resources and follow the same procedures, which is their unique definition of equity. Networks of progressive-minded schools are constantly seeking to push the edges of conformity; they become expert at maneuvering within the system, sidestepping and cutting comers around required bureaucratic practices in order to be more innovative.

With the conditions of autonomy they have been granted, Pilot Schools embody the conflicts, strains, and tensions between a group of innovative schools and the larger district of which they are members. The district often perceives their lack of conformity as arrogance, while the Pilot Schools perceive the district's attempts to make Pilots conform to district practice as impeding true district reform.

In order to balance these tensions, Center staff have maneuvered both inside and outside the system, balancing a fine line between pushing the system without alienating them and losing influence. As advocates, the Center has facilitated negotiation sessions with the district over budget and policy autonomy, resource allocation, and facilities. Simultaneously, the budget work has required the Center to collaborate with the district's Budget Office, which has become an invaluable partner, in order to construct the budget model and lump sum per pupil formula that would benefit Pilot Schools and provide them with increased budget autonomy.

5. It is important to build in regular opportunities for mutual reflection, assessment, and adjustment in any relationship between a network of schools and an intermediary organization in order to build trust and ensure effectiveness.

Any successful sustained relationship, including between organizations, is marked by ongoing reflection and assessment of the successes and trials of the relationship, and a process of adjustment that further strengthens the relationship. As the partners in a relationship grow and mature, new needs emerge. The vibrancy of a partnership is directly related to the ability to continually gauge whether each partner's needs are being met, and to make adjustments if they are not.

At their annual spring leadership retreat, the Pilot Schools and the Center always assess the nature of the collaboration, focusing on what is working, what is not, and how the Center can better meet the needs of the network and its individual schools. For example, one year, network leadership made a strong recommendation for recruiting experienced leaders of color to the Center's Pilot Schools staff positions. In return, they committed to assisting in the interview and selection process for these positions. Another request was for the Center to increase its capacity to do research and evaluation of the impact of Pilot Schools, in order to build the political credibility to advocate for increased numbers of schools with Pilot status. Similarly, the Center has requested of the Pilot School leaders to empower the Center to make timely decisions on behalf of the network in key situations, and to strengthen Pilot representation on key committees.

Conclusion: Promoting: Intermediary Organizations to Support Urban School Reform

Public education, and urban education in particular, are at a crossroads. Powerful corporate and business interests are intent on dismantling the current structure of public education for the purposes of recreating a more privatized education system of vouchers and for-profit charter schools. At the same time, the mania of high stakes testing and standardization of instruction are creating increased conformity of practice, even while pushing up dropout rates.

To counter these forces, we need to develop new models of urban public education that are responsive to families' needs and desires and that address long-standing concerns about the lack of personalization and academic rigor in schools serving high percentages of low-income students and students of color. In doing so, we cannot expect that urban districts or individual schools can be successful alone. We need to create networks of progressive-minded schools engaged in deep reform and "reculturing" around common sets of principles and vision, that are supported by third party organizations that can provide them with an infrastructure of assistance. In order to be successful, these partnerships need to be collaborative in nature, and have built-in mechanisms for continual reflection and adjustment of the partnership in order to ensure that each partner's needs are being met. Further, the role of the third party organization must by its very nature be varied, including the role of coach, advocate, facilitator, and researcher, enabling the organization to both maneuver inside and outside the district.

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APPENDIX: Center for Collaborative Education

The Center for Collaborative Education is a non-profit organization whose mission is to improve student learning in K-12 public schools and districts by promoting models of systemic reform. CCE's goal is to be a resource and catalyst for the creation of schools in which:

- ✓ Learning is purposeful, rigorous, and related to the real world,
- ✓ Assessment demonstrates that students can do important things,
- ✓ Teachers and students know each other well,
- ✓ Diversity is respected and equity is embedded in all practices,
- ✓ Democratic values are nurtured and modeled,
- ✓ Flexibility and autonomy enable decisions to be made as close to the learner as possible.

Currently, the Center coordinates four school reform networks and a principal preparation program:

- ✓ *Boston Pilot Schools Network*
- ✓ *Massachusetts Coalition of Essential Schools Network* (a K-12 reform model based on a set of 10 Common Principles)
- ✓ *National Turning Points Network* (a New American Schools-approved middle school model)
- ✓ *New England Small Schools Network* (assists urban districts to create and support small, autonomous schools)
- ✓ *School Leadership Project* (an apprenticeship-based principal preparation program affiliated with the Big Picture Company's Aspiring Principals Program)

It is the Center's belief that schools, particularly those serving high percentages of low-income students and students of color, have a much greater chance of successfully educating each and every student if they are engaged in the following processes:

- ✓ *Conversations that lead to creating a unifying vision that the school community is committed to achieving.* Each of the Center's four school reform networks has as its foundation a set of principles that guides the work of each member school
- ✓ *Establishing the habit of reflection to continually examine the school's beliefs and practices* .I' *Participation in a network of like-minded schools that provides opportunities for networking, sharing, critical friendship, and problem-solving.* Each network brings schools together in structured opportunities to share practices, engage in joint problem solving, and participate in collaborative professional development through Critical Friends partnering, school visits, summer institutes, and school-year network meetings
- ✓ *Flexibility and autonomy over areas such as staffing, budget, governance, curriculum/assessment, and the school calendar*
- ✓ *Seeking support from external sources to provide the school with a lens for reflection, onsite coaching and professional development, and advocacy for the school at the district and state levels.* In each network, member schools receive sustained onsite coaching and professional development from experienced Center staff, while at the district and state level, the Center advocates for policies, which enable greater autonomy and flexibility to be innovative.

Within the school, the Center believes that the two cornerstones for successful change are (I) building a professional collaborative culture that is highly focused on improving learning, teaching, and assessment through such practices as looking collaboratively at student and teacher work, peer observations, text-based discussions, and shared leadership, and (2) data-based inquiry and decision making in which schools make thoughtful, deliberate decisions for school-wide improvement. In working for sustainable change, schools need to have the twin goals of high student achievement (high performance) and ensuring opportunity and success for every student (equity).