



# Leading Learning

NEWSLETTER OF THE BOSTON SCHOOL LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE  
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## REFLECTIONS from the Executive Director

The first year of the School Leadership Institute (SLI) was marked by the common characteristics of a start-up. SLI started the year with a vision, clear goals and curriculum for all the Institute’s programming, and a committed and impressive group of partners. With all that in place, it was a challenge to stay one step ahead of the action. The learning curve was exciting and humbling. Throughout it all the vision, talent, energy, and learning of Fellows, new principals, and the experienced principals who served as mentors was inspiring.

In June, as the Boston Principal Fellows presented their Leadership and Learning Capstone, it was remarkable to see their clarity, conviction, and confidence as they wove together the themes of effective instruction, leadership, race and culture, management, and family and community engagement. They presented their personal theories of school leadership and action plans for implementation, which they developed through synthesis of the year’s course work, learning from the residency, and reflections on being part of the first cohort of Fellows.

At the same time the new principals were in the process of metamorphosis. Having nearly finished doing everything for the first time, they were able to envision year two. They had begun to make their mark as they reconfigured budgets, schedules, and curriculum, instruction, and assessment to respond most effectively to their schools’ needs. They were seeing shifts in school culture and in teaching practices, and were able to laugh at the challenges that had felt daunting in the fall. Most importantly, they talked enthusiastically about what would be possible in their second year.

Concrete highlights of the School Leadership Institute’s first year include: placement of 60% of the first class of Boston Principal Fellows as principals;

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## Screening for the Boston Principal Fellowship

On a crisp, sunny Saturday morning at the end of February, about thirty candidates and a team of twenty screeners and School Leadership Institute staff gathered at the Orchard Gardens Pilot School in Roxbury to take part in the second stage of the Boston Principal Fellows (BPF) application process, a half-day performance assessment. The performance assessment is the second and most intense component of the Fellowship application process. Performance assessment participants were chosen based on the quality of an initial paper application, which included the submission of two essays. In writing the essays each candidate was asked to comment on his or her core values of education and to develop a plan for addressing a real-world school leadership challenge, in this case the challenge was an achievement gap issue currently not being addressed in a school.

### A Look at the Saturday Performance Assessment

education, and leadership potential. On this Saturday, the thirty candidates hoping to demonstrate their instructional leadership skills trickled into the bright, new K-8 school building. The candidates varied in age, ethnicity, and professional backgrounds; there were teachers and assistant headmasters, program directors and central office supervisors, all here to move one step closer to being a Boston Principal Fellow. The team of screeners who would judge their performance was made up of BPS deputy superintendents, current principals, higher education administrators, and local experts on school leadership.

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## Programs of the School Leadership Institute

### EXPLORING THE PRINCIPALSHIP

introduces the principalship to people who have leadership potential and deep knowledge of instruction but have not had school administration experience and may not have considered becoming a principal. *Serves 35-40 annually.*

### BOSTON PRINCIPAL FELLOWSHIP

integrates coursework in instructional leadership, community leadership, and systems management with a full-time, full-year residency with one of Boston's most effective principals. *10-15 Fellowships awarded annually.*

### NEW PRINCIPAL SUPPORT

for first- and second-year principals addresses the challenges and obstacles that novice principals face and creates a community of learners who are developing their craft as principals. *Serves 25 first- and second-year principals annually.*



*New Fellows Rachel Bonkovsky, Naia Wilson, and Darrell Williams.*

## New Fellows

**S**elected at the end of April, the next cohort of Boston Principal Fellows (BPF) began their coursework in July and their residency the week before school starts. The new Fellows come from a variety of personal and professional backgrounds, but are drawn to the Fellowship program for some of the same reasons. Here is an introduction to three of the ten new fellows.

### BOSTON Principal Fellows

**Carrie-Ann Kerwin** grew up in New Jersey and came to Boston to earn a master's degree in education. She describes herself as always having been "an alternative program kind of girl," working in a hospital for kids with emotional difficulties and in educational programs for social service agencies. While Kerwin was an assistant principal at a private school for students with emotional disabilities, the special education laws changed in Massachusetts, sending her kids to in-district programs. "So I followed the kids," she says, "and wound up in Boston Public Schools (BPS) Unified Student Services, which provides special education and alternate programming." Having to travel to many different schools in her role as APD for a Cluster of schools,

Kerwin likes the thought of being connected to just one school as a Fellow.

Last year, she was encouraged to apply for a principalship, and it made her rethink how she wanted to serve kids. Coming from outside the Boston school system, Kerwin acknowledges that "knowing the Boston system, even without all of the typical principal duties, is a task in itself." Kerwin sees the Boston Principal Fellows program as a good place to learn about what it means to be a principal in Boston. Specifically, Kerwin is looking forward to the "integration of being able to do the practicum and classes that are directly related to it at the same time."

**Darrell Williams**, a Boston native and graduate of the BPS, received his master's degree in education from Cambridge College and has been teaching in the BPS for three years. As an English Language Arts teacher at Washington Irving Middle School, Williams has gained recognition as an exemplary teacher of Reader's and Writer's Workshop. He has a special connection with students and says he believes he has the "ability to provide opportunities for students to become who they were supposed to become."

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## Learning Walk at Boston Arts Academy

**B**oston Principal Fellowship is a yearlong integration of coursework and residency preparing Fellows for school leadership. Learning walks are an integral part of this program's curriculum. These half-day visits to schools provide each Fellow with opportunities to refine his or her ability in assessing the effectiveness of instruction at a school, to discuss those assessments with peers, and to work through the next steps a school leader should take in guiding instructional improvement. The visits also offer Fellows opportunities to see a variety of schools, learn from the leaders at those schools, and continue to develop their own personal theories of leadership.

### BOSTON Principal Fellows

Early in the year, the Fellows decided that they would each facilitate a learning walk, so that they could practice and refine their skills. This is the third learning walk of the year, and as the Fellows gather in the Boston Arts Academy (BAA) library media room, Manuel Fernandez, a principal Fellow, and BAA parent, greets them, the School Leadership Institute staff, and a small number of BAA teachers who will join the Fellows for their visit. As the facilitator for this learning walk, Fernandez prepared a package of materials for the other Fellows, which included an agenda for the morning, and some information about the school. Commenting later on the value of learning walks, Fernandez said, "One can learn much about the school's focus and values from observing classroom instruction, looking at displayed student work, and talking with students, teachers, and administrators."

Sitting around the large table in the media room, the Fellows receive an introduction to Boston Arts Academy. Linda Nathan, this pilot school's principal, points out key features of the school, highlighting the emphasis on college counseling and the important role of the library as a center of learning. As if to illustrate her point, the media room surrounds us with music and films from a variety of genres. The

teachers, who have joined Nathan in welcoming the Fellows, give examples of how the arts and academics are integrated in their classrooms on a daily basis. They

As the tour concludes, the student-guides return to their classes. Meanwhile, the Fellows observe several on-going classes, and then reconvene in the media room for



*Boston Principal Fellows meet with Boston Arts Academy students.*

then answer questions from the Fellows on how challenges related to equity and diversity are resolved in a way that allows the school to maintain its instructional focus.

After the introduction to the school, the Fellows split into three groups for student-led tours. Fernandez is in a group led by Ebony, a tenth-grade theater major. She leads her group through the different venues used for theater, dance, photography, and costumemaking, then gives them a chance to see the diversity of classes at BAA, such as visual arts and calculus. The group takes a small detour to stop by the theater room where Fernandez's daughter, Shakora, a 10<sup>th</sup> grade theater major at BAA, is attending class. As the tour continues through halls filled with impressive student artwork, Ebony talks about the types of assessment at Boston Arts Academy and answers the Fellows' questions about her interests and how they match the school's programs.

an informal meeting with a panel of students. When asked about support systems for students and negotiating the balance between arts and academics, the students describe the availability of the faculty and how they transfer what they learn in the arts to their more traditional academic studies. One of the Fellows, Ligia Noriega, recalls later: "... this wasn't a selection of the perfect kids. They had their challenges, and they spoke highly of their school, took ownership of their own learning, and were able to reflect on it." Once the students have returned to their classrooms, Fernandez facilitates a discussion with the Fellows about what they have observed, asking them to reflect on their new knowledge of how the school's culture had been developed. They have seen and learned a lot during their tours, and as the facilitator, Fernandez wants to ensure that the Fellows have a chance to discuss it among themselves.

## Supporting New Principals

The New Principal Support System creates a learning community that responds to the most pressing leadership needs of first- and second-year principals. This program taps into the practical and theoretical expertise of higher

education faculty who facilitate the first- and second-year principal groups.

### New Principal SUPPORT

Irwin Blumer and Janice Jackson are

professors in education administration at Boston College. Among their extensive experiences in educational leadership, Dr. Blumer was superintendent in Newton, MA after years of teaching and being a principal. Dr. Jackson was the first deputy superintendent who worked with Superintendent Payzant in Boston. As part of the New Principal Support program, they meet monthly for two hours early in the morning with first-year principals and hold separate sessions with second-year principals. The focus of these sessions is reflection and inquiry into principals' practice.

The following is a conversation that SLI had with Irwin Blumer and Janice Jackson about their roles in the New Principal Support System.

*SLI: What has the work been like?*

IB: We start both sessions off by encouraging each principal to talk about something good that's happened and then talk about a challenge. So it's kind of a brief check-in, and I think people find that very helpful. Sometimes that raises an issue that resonates and we focus on it.

For first-year principals, it's more of an opportunity for them to safely surface issues that they're finding confusing or that they're grappling with. They don't have to worry about anybody making judgments or evaluating them. They present an issue, and then get an opportunity to get some support and insight from people around them. At particular times,

we'll ask people to come in and speak with them. For example, when it's the season to develop school budgets for the next school year, we'll ask people to come in from the budget office to talk about budget development.

The second-year principals don't seem to need central office resource people coming in as much. They've been through it; they understand it. For their meetings, it has been more of a check in, and then we'll do a consulting model. Somebody brings an issue to the table, and we use a very explicit protocol that Rachel Curtis, Executive Director, introduced. It allows the presenting principal to share a dilemma, then the other principals discuss the dilemma and give the presenting principal feedback. It really allows for a much more in-depth analysis of what they're doing.

JJ: Both of us understand how complex the work is. New principals are thoughtful about the work they're doing, and that is very hopeful for me. The other thing is the way this program is designed; you're beginning to build a cohort. My hope is that as the principals progress beyond "new principal" status, they will continue to turn to one another.

I enjoy helping people problem solve, and we provide opportunities for folks to lay out what's going on and think through how to come to some solutions or how to manage the complexity of the work. I find it very exciting because I enjoy being connected to the schools and hearing what's really happening in schools.

*SLI: What have you learned from your work with new principals?*

IB: One strong issue is the importance of first-year principals having a mentor. Most of them have made some very good connections and have found that invaluable in terms of guidance through the first year. I think the program has allowed for mentors to meet more frequently as a group and to be more

explicit about what mentors are doing to support new principals, and they find that very helpful.

JJ: It is important that when people are being developed for these roles they have real insights of school experiences. During the principal preparation internship, it's really important for people to be in the role. I knew that, but it was so affirmed for me as I listened to the folks here.

*SLI: What are the next steps? In general, how do you think districts can best support new principals?*

IB: The principalship is an incredibly complex job, and I don't think anyone supports principals well enough. To give Boston its credit, they have tried to do that, and I think they're probably doing the best job in the state at this point. But it's still not enough. The role the central office plays in supporting new principals could be enhanced. It's a funny balance because you're supporting somebody and at the same time you're also going to be evaluating them.

JJ: Having three deputy superintendents that are responsible for supporting principals is also an idea I think is important. The key is whether they are supporting as well as being evaluative. The opportunity for that balance is there. Also, I think the cluster system, offering the opportunity of having a sitting principal coach other people, is a very important idea that can be used well.

IB: The principal should focus on instruction, which is what Boston says, and they're absolutely right about that. But you can't ignore operation pieces or the school will fall apart. So somebody needs to be there to deal with those issues so the principals can focus their time on the classrooms. While it is an issue of resources, what resonates with me is that we haven't been able to explain to the public well enough the importance of administrative roles.

JJ: Looking for opportunities to celebrate successes is important, particularly for the

## The First-Year Principal Mentoring Relationship

Michele O'Connell is finishing her first year as a principal at Holland Elementary School in Dorchester, across the way from Marshall Elementary School where her mentor, Teresa Harvey-Jackson, is principal.

O'Connell has dropped by the Marshall to meet with Harvey-Jackson and discuss the nature of their mentoring relationship. In the conference room tucked behind the front office, we sit at a large table.

### New Principal SUPPORT

The two principals take a deep breath to shed the morning's frenzy, and then check in with each other about their current work. The two were paired up by the School Leadership Institute in an effort to provide O'Connell with expert guidance through the challenges facing new principals. Although the match was only made last year, the two women seem as though they've been friends for most of their lives.

O'Connell says their mentoring relationship is a strong one because their leadership styles match. She and Harvey-Jackson are both practical, efficient workers, and from the beginning O'Connell felt that she could say anything to her mentor and it would be kept confidential. They enjoy each other's company, amuse each other, and share common problems – even common students who switch between their schools!

Harvey-Jackson defines the purpose of mentoring to be to make sure a new person is supported. "People come in with different strengths, and a mentor helps them with the things they don't want to get in trouble over." The trouble could happen in any area in which the new person has a weakness, from dealing with teacher supervision and evaluation to budgeting.

When Harvey-Jackson first started as a principal in 1993 schools had been "organized around what was important for teachers; kids were an afterthought." She worked to set her agenda focusing on student learning, and had support from a mentor principal. Harvey-Jackson's strengths were in teaching and learning, so the part she needed help with was operations.

O'Connell, on the other hand, had worked at the Holland school for 22 years as a special education teacher, so she was familiar with the faculty and how things worked. She turned to her mentor for more help with supervision and evaluation of teachers. In their first meeting, Harvey-Jackson gave her templates that she herself had used over the years. These included a letter to teachers

regarding expectations and a worksheet for doing teacher evaluations. O'Connell realizes that her mentor knows the job so well that she "knows what I need that I don't even know."

The mentoring relationship benefits Harvey-Jackson as well. "While I always give her advice, she always does something different with it to match her style, which is really cool to watch. It lets me see a different way of doing things. She's never taken anything I've given her and used it as is." For example, O'Connell had a dilemma when the teachers' union was under work-to-fairness and there was confusion among the staff about their participation in school meetings. In one of her "panic phone calls,"

According to Harvey-Jackson, two important things a mentor can provide are time and a sense of humor. Time does not always have to be given in the form of meetings. A mentor can be available for "panic phone calls," or just informally. When O'Connell drops by the school to get her mail from the Cluster office, she sometimes pokes her head in to wherever Harvey-Jackson is, and asks some quick questions. Harvey-Jackson loves the fact that O'Connell "can make all of her concerns fit on a little sticky note. When somebody shows up with a sheet that small, it doesn't feel overwhelming: If it's on there, we can handle this, no problem!"



Mentor principal Teresa Harvey-Jackson (left) and first-year principal Michele O'Connell.

O'Connell asked for guidance, and Harvey-Jackson was very firm and direct in her advice, saying, "You have to tell them it's insubordination and they'll be disciplined." As a teacher, O'Connell had been threatened with insubordination and remembered how it had made her feel. Concerned about dividing her faculty after spending most of the year building relationships, yet still keeping Harvey-Jackson's advice in mind, O'Connell had her union representative call the teachers' union for clarification. After the phone call revealed that O'Connell was right in her understanding, the union representative volunteered to go around and tell the teachers.

Harvey-Jackson points out O'Connell's strengths, telling us that as a white female in a school that predominantly serves students of color, O'Connell went out of her way to make sure everyone understood her agenda of achievement for all kids. Even when someone raises her race as an issue, she knows how to deal with it because she deemed it important enough to have already thought it through. She remains focused on having high expectations for all students and treating them all well, so people realize her race does not inhibit her leadership ability and genuine care for her students. \*

## A New Principal in a New City

Situated on an industrial street in Roxbury, there is a small pink building that is surrounded by a high chain-link fence topped with barbed wire. The gate is flung wide open. This is Community Academy, an alternative high school program that serves

### New Principal SUPPORT

students who struggle in traditional academic settings. Students who have been suspended or expelled from other schools enroll here, so the student population is constantly in flux with kids entering and leaving at various times throughout the school year. Some stay for the full ten months; others are only here for three or four weeks.

On a gray spring morning, the school day is about to start. Inside the pink building, teachers and students fill the halls, preparing for a field trip to a marine science expo. In the front office, students come in and out, taking or replacing a bathroom key. A mother is registering her teenager to start this week.

This is Victor Diaz's first year as Community Academy's new principal, having moved to Boston from California, where he worked for ten years in a variety of alternative educational settings. His roles ranged from teacher-leader to director of technology, and his programs varied from state and county prisons to well-funded public schools.

After making sure kids get to their classes, Diaz shows us to his small, windowless office with piles of books and a couple of comfy chairs. He describes the school as he saw it when he arrived last July, "There was a sense of unhealthy chaos," he says, adding that people who used the building didn't care for it or respect it.

Diaz's ambition is "to bring a level of calmness and clarity and vision to the place," and then to figure out the best curriculum and assessment strategies for the students there. Because the population is constantly changing, one of the challenges of leading at Community Academy is cultivating a sense of ownership in the students and their families. One of Diaz's strengths is building relationships, so he has already taken steps toward that. Some parents have expressed an interest in enrolling their kids at Community Academy before a suspension or expulsion happens, and Diaz would like the discretion to accommodate them. He notes that based on his experience and research, "When you can create a fixed environment of kids that are there because they want to be there ... it'll start to change the culture of the place." He has asked the district for 15 additional seats so he can accept kids who are not suspended or expelled. Next year he is hoping for 40, in an attempt to create a more stable mix of students.

Another opportunity for school improvement lies in documentation. Right now, there is no way of knowing how many students Community Academy serves, retains, or transfers successfully. The transitory student population makes MCAS data inaccurate. Diaz is working on a system for collecting data and recording it so that the information can be accurate and useful to the school.

Diaz also points out that Community Academy has yet to be considered a full-fledged school. He says, "This school is still looked at as a program and not an actual school." Since it doesn't have a school code with the state department of education, it's difficult to acquire Title 1 resources<sup>2</sup> and other categorical grants. Diaz is working on getting the school coded, and developing and implementing a Whole School Improvement Plan, focusing on professional development.

He wants the school to successfully address the needs of the student population that it serves. The way he sees that happening is for the school to move toward being accepted as a small school, serving kids who want different pathways to graduation. Diaz would like to create a non-traditional path toward a high school diploma that includes some type of portfolio assessment that meets district standards.

Being new to Boston, as well as the principalship, Diaz both enjoys some opportunities and faces various challenges. One important thing Diaz has learned is that major decisions, such as which teachers to keep and how to budget the school's resources, heavily depend on previous actions taken by certain deadlines. Another key piece to being a principal is that teacher evaluations have to be done, with an emphasis on what is required by the teachers' union. This is where a mentor principal can be of great help. In describing his mentor, Suzanne Lee of the Quincy School, Diaz comments, "There is no question that you cannot ask, and not only is it going to get answered, but even if you don't have the question [clearly articulated] you can just run with it." She provided emotional support in addition to practical support, and he values that relationship highly.

Having worked in many different California districts, Diaz is impressed with how Boston "has put such a great emphasis on teaching and learning." He attributes the educational culture to superintendent Thomas W. Payzant, who Diaz says, "has really set an amazing tone." Boston's policies and the community, however, are new to him, and without previous information on the area, he struggles with figuring out where to go to recruit good teachers, and enlist support from community-based organizations. There are groups out there that work with schools on job training or placement. Their partnerships are often important in helping principals serve students well. Building those relationships is a priority for Diaz in his second year of the principalship. ★

<sup>2</sup> Title 1 of the No Child Left Behind Act provides funding to improve the academic achievement of disadvantaged students.

# Constructing a “Good”-Bye

## The Final Mentoring Meeting

It’s the end of May, and this Saturday morning hosts the final mentoring meeting of the year. The Boston Principal Fellows and their mentors join the first-year principals and their mentors in a large circle of forty people in the professional development room of one of Boston’s new schools. The closing of a formal

mentoring relationship can be emotional and powerful, and the two groups are meeting together so that they can share what they have learned between them and plan for the transition.

Stacy Blake-Beard of Simmons College School of Management and Eileen McGowan, an independent consultant, have been working with the mentoring groups throughout the year, helping the pairs build and sustain their relationships. Today they welcome everyone and start the meeting by discussing its purpose. Noting that relationships often get pushed to the side in wrapping up the school year, the focus for the meeting is on reflection and deciding how to end the formal mentoring relationship.

After introductions, Blake-Beard talks about the phases of the mentoring relationship: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. Today the pairs are facing the separation phase, marked by preparation for transition. They need to construct a “good”-bye, as the facilitators call it, by talking together about how they hold each other in high regard, how to negotiate the end of the school year, and how they will redefine their relationship.

The pairs go off on their own to have this conversation about their relationships. Mary Hamilton, a Boston Principal Fellow, tells her mentor Vicki Megias-Batista how she held her in high regard. “You’re usually measured and even-keeled, but you use drama appropriately when you’re passionate about protecting your kids. I learned how that can be effective. In managing people, I also learned from you the balance between supporting and pressuring people to take responsibility.” Megias-Batista responds by saying, “Yes, you’ve become very good at that. Running meetings, you give people a framework and let them go. I like how you listen to students



Mentor principal Victoria Megias-Batista (left) and Boston Principal Fellow Mary Tormey-Hamilton.

and make sure they leave the room with a plan. I also like how you deal with parents, helping to your fullest extent. Even with an upset parent, you use the same demeanor: clear and specific.”

Following their separate conversations, the pairs come back together in a large group and share what they talked about. One Fellow says she appreciates her mentor’s confidence in opening her door and sharing everything about herself as a leader, including her imperfections. Mary

**CONSTRUCTING A “GOOD”-BYE,**  
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**First-Year Principals: Lessons Learned**

- anticipate the challenges of working with adults
- develop a strategy to manage operations and focus on teaching and learning
- know that working with the teachers’ union during “work-to-rule” is difficult
- appreciate trust and sharing of best practices as benefits of a cohort

**Mentors of First-Year Principals: Looking Forward**

- want a better definition of their role as mentors, with specific ways to help their mentees
- want more time at the beginning to explore personality style and strengths and weaknesses in order to work more effectively together

**Principal Fellows: Lessons Learned**

- understand that the principalship is a high-profile job, receiving scrutiny from many
- advocate for time with mentor
- expect shifts in thinking
- define and navigate relationships and expectations
- address conflicts immediately
- protect and respect the cohort group

**Mentors of Principal Fellows: Looking Forward**

- want better clarification of their role as mentors
- want to be engaged in teaching and coursework for the fellowship
- want a role in suggesting next steps for Fellows

### SUPPORTING NEW PRINCIPALS, from page 4

first- and second-year folks, to make sure they want to stay in the game!

IB: We do run the danger of principals exiting at the same rate as teachers leaving, unless the support structures are in place. We also need to acknowledge the fact that they have another life. They have families or friends or other interests, and one should not feel guilty for putting time into that.

SLI: *In your opinion, how does Boston compare to other districts in terms of principal support?*

IB: Oh, Boston's way ahead. Both in terms

of their attempts to prepare principals internally and then support them once they get in there. We had none of the formal structures in place in Newton the way Boston has. The notion of principals having the opportunity to get together and talk to one another was just beginning to be explored toward the end, when I left Newton.

The principal prep program and the Boston Principal Fellowship are elements of support. The system had the foresight to understand the need to grow their own

leaders. So instead of just putting people in slots, they recognized the need to help them understand what was expected of a Boston principal. They did limited internships initially and full-year internships this year with a lot of support built in. There is a tremendous payoff; when those people enter the system as principals, they have a wealth of knowledge that the system paid for and gave to them that they wouldn't have had otherwise. \*

### CONSTRUCTING A "GOOD"-BYE, from page 7

Nash says of her mentee Najwa Abdul-Tawwab, a first-year principal, "I was impressed with how she got her school connected to the community. She sent teachers out in racially mixed groups to go and meet the businesses in the area, which brought her faculty closer and got business connections. I've learned from her, and I admire her ideas and creative thinking."

The next breakout session focuses on the program. Everyone gathers in their respective groups: Fellows, First Year Principals, and two groups of mentors. This time, each group reflects on what they wish they had known coming into their roles, what lessons they have learned, and how the mentoring program could be improved.

When everyone has rejoined the large group, each of the four groups has an opportunity to share what they discussed. The chart on page 7 captures part of their collective "wisdom in a tube," as Blake-Beard calls it, summarizing some mentee lessons and mentor reflections that came out of those group discussions.

After each group shares their reflections, Blake-Beard and McGowan move the conversation toward a discussion of future steps. Says Blake-Beard, "You will not get to where you want to go by yourself. You need to actively build a developmental network." Prior to this meeting, everyone had been

asked to fill out a Developmental Network Questionnaire, prepared by Professor Monica Higgins of Harvard Business School. The goal of this tool is to help people identify and map the range and types of relationships they have built over the course of their careers. It also provides insight into how they can continue to build relationships that support their goals as leaders of school improvement. In this questionnaire, a mentor is defined as one who provides high levels of both career assistance and personal support. This is the kind of relationship that the twenty pairs in the room have been working at all year.

The meeting ends with a closing ceremony. The School Leadership Institute staff calls up each mentoring pair and hands them a gift to commemorate their work over the year. The relationships that began this year have enhanced the lives and work of both mentors and their mentees, and today they acknowledge this, celebrate it, and plan to keep supporting and learning from each other. On the overhead is a quote by Audre Lorde, from his book *Sister Outsider*: "The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers, which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them and lessens the threat of their difference." \*

### NEW FELLOWS, from page 2

Williams sees the BPF year as "a cooperative learning experience, in the field and in the classroom. It offers a merger of philosophy with the implementation of that philosophy." A fan of this model, he believes he will benefit from the combination of theory and practice, with thorough reflection on both.

**Barbara Ferrer** was born and raised in Puerto Rico, coming to the States for college, and winding up in Boston for her master's in public health and doctorate in social welfare policy. From door knocking to running statewide advocacy programs, Ferrer has been a community organizer for welfare rights, housing, homelessness, and income security issues. She has worked for years in public health policy, and left her role as the deputy director for the city's health department to become a Fellow. After spending the last 25 years in Boston, working to improve people's lives, Ferrer feels a commitment to the city's people, especially the children. She says, "We all have an obligation to make sure our communities are thriving and that everyone in our community has the ability to reach their full potential. In reaching it, you're talking about issues that are related as much to health as they are to education."

Without a background in the field of education, Ferrer knows she has a lot to learn. She hopes to develop skills around educational leadership, management of classrooms and buildings, and effective

## LEARNING WALK AT BOSTON ARTS ACADEMY, from page 3

For their final hour with Nathan, the Fellows decided to have a conversation focusing on how Nathan's leadership style and her choices impact various aspects of the school. This conversation proves to be an interesting and informative one. When asked about her role as an agent of change at BAA, Nathan responds by emphasizing the importance she places on teacher support. Nathan believes that to be a good leader, a principal must also be a good teacher. She is continually learning about the craft of teaching, aiming to improve by delving into areas that are most difficult for her. She also stresses the need to give teachers time to talk together about their practice. About her role as a leader, Nathan says, "At the end of the day, if I haven't made a teacher's life easier, I've failed."

Nathan's emphasis on support extends to the students. She has hired three librarians to help students with their learning, believing in the importance of strategically choosing where to put resources. Nathan goes on to address questions on how the mandatory MCAS<sup>1</sup> tests could impact the school's curriculum, a topic that all new principals will face in the coming years, and offered advice to the Fellows on ways to take a stand for their beliefs. Says Nathan, "School cannot be a preparation for life, school must be life."

Reflecting on the morning's learning walk, Fernandez later says, "There is a vibrancy at BAA. Students appear to want to be there and seem engaged and immersed in their academic and artistic craft. I appreciate the small community and the

advisory format that builds adult support for each student." Noriega adds, "There is a positive student culture here. You could tell when we talked with the student panel." Noriega was a founding faculty member and one of the curriculum coordinators at BAA. In her anticipated post as a principal, she hopes to "create a school just like that, with a rigorous curriculum and strong student culture."

The learning walks are a vital piece of the Fellow's preparation. Each school and each principal can offer the Fellows ideas on what elements of leadership contribute to student success. The Fellows can then take those ideas with them to inform their future work as school leaders. Their visit to BAA is the third of seven learning walks scheduled. These learning walks give them a unique environment for observation and inquiry so that they will continue to develop their skills by focusing on and discussing various aspects of instructional leadership. \*

<sup>1</sup> The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System to measure Adequate Yearly Progress as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act, and required for high school graduation.

## The Six Essentials of Whole-School Improvement

1. Use effective instructional practices and create a collaborative school climate to improve student learning
2. Examine student work and data to drive instruction and professional development
3. Invest in professional development to improve instruction
4. Share leadership to sustain instructional improvement
5. Focus resources to support instructional improvement and improved student learning
6. Partner with families and community to support student learning

## UPCOMING EVENTS:

*Exploring the Principalship Program Information Session:*

**Date:** Thursday, October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2004, 4:00 - 6:00 p.m.

\*RSVP by: Monday, October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2004

**Location:** Professional Development Room at New Boston Pilot Middle School, 270 Columbia Road, Dorchester

*EPP is an opportunity for strong educators, regardless of their current role within or outside of BPS, to explore the principalship as a career choice. Learn from district and school leaders, in a series of eight after-school seminars, focused on the changing role of principals and the power of the principalship in improving instruction and student learning. Details regarding EPP session topics, dates, and times will be announced at the information session.*

*Boston Principal Fellowship Program Information Session:*

**Date:** Thursday, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2004 or

\*RSVP by: Monday, December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2004

**Date:** Tuesday, January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2005

\*RSVP by: Friday, January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2005

**Location:** To Be Announced

*BPF is an intensive 12-month fellowship that integrates coursework in instructional leadership, community leadership, and systems management with a full-year residency with one of Boston's most effective principals. For more information about the fellowship and how to apply for the 2005-06 school year, please attend one of the two information sessions.*

\*To RSVP for any of the upcoming information sessions, please contact SLI Office at (617) 635-7754 or via email: mail@bostonli.org

## Recommended Reading

*These recommendations come from the Boston Principal Fellowship curriculum and from current Boston principals.*

***Hardball for Women: Winning At the Game of Business* by Pat Heim. New York: Plume, 1993.** Drawing on her extensive business experience and combining it with a variety of research, the author takes a look at the male business culture and uses insights to help women succeed. Using examples and language from sports, she breaks down the game of business to help women understand how to use the rules to their advantage.

***Young, Gifted, and Black: Promoting High Achievement Among African-American Students* by Theresa Perry, Claude Steele, and Asa G. Hilliard III. Boston: Beacon Press, 2003.** In their three essays, the authors paint a picture of the unique challenges facing African-American students due to their social and cultural position. The publisher writes that they “argue that a proper understanding of the forces at work can lead to practical, powerful methods for promoting high achievement at all levels.”

***Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform, with foreword by Theodore R. Sizer.* Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004.** This book outlines 31 recommendations for school leaders who have taken on the challenge of reforming their high schools. Sizer offers successful research-based practices, real-life examples, step-by-step approaches to changes, obstacles to avoid, and countless resources.

***How to Make Collaboration Work: Powerful Ways to Build Consensus, Solve Problems, and Make Decisions* by David Straus. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2002.** This book introduces five principles of collaboration that can be used in any scenario to help groups make decisions and function more effectively. The author uses examples from various organizations to show how each principle addresses group challenges.

***Accountability For Learning: How Teachers and School Leaders Can Take Charge* by Douglas Reeves. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2004.** Rather than a concept that invokes panic and confusion, accountability can be a constructive process that benefits students. The author argues that by creating student-centered accountability systems, teachers can uncover the story behind the numbers that other test scores don't reveal, leading to improved student achievement.

***Assessing Educational Leaders* by Douglas Reeves. Sage Publications, 2003.** The publisher writes, “This book contains the information and tools necessary to successfully evaluate all types of educational leaders and improve individual and organizational performance.” The author draws on best practices of leadership, current research and theory, and personnel evaluation in organizations.

***Be the Dream: Prep for Prep Graduates Share Their Stories* compiled by Gary Simons. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2003.** Because a Bronx elementary school teacher believed race and poverty should not inhibit a bright and determined child, Prep for Prep was created to identify gifted children and give them access to high-quality education. Some of those who have gone on to succeed in top universities and contribute to their communities share their life-changing experiences in this book, showing that education makes a powerful difference.

***Finders and Keepers: Helping New Teachers Survive and Thrive in Our Schools* by Susan Moore Johnson. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004.** Based on a longitudinal study of 50 new teachers, this book looks at why they entered teaching and what they encountered, and tracks their career decisions. The author illustrates the crucial role of principals and experienced teachers in the successful hiring and retention of new teachers, and

provides insights on how to support them and better serve their students.

***Teaching With Fire: Poetry That Sustains the Courage to Teach* by Sam Intrator and Megan Scribner. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003.** Each poem in this collection comes with a story from a teacher explaining its significance in his or her work. Accompanying the collection by well-known poets is an essay describing how poetry can help one grow both personally and professionally.

***Leadership Capacity For Lasting School Improvement* by Linda Lambert. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2003.** This book follows Lambert's previous work, answering many of the questions that have been raised. In this new publication, she outlines the five major prerequisites for leadership capacity. Lambert also draws on her discussions with educators and includes helpful rubrics and surveys for use by teachers and administrators. This book probably speaks most strongly to aspiring and new principals. \*

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### NEW FELLOWS, from page 8

ways to organize a school so students can learn. Having extensive management experience under her belt, Ferrer is looking forward to exploring educational ideas. She knows the BPF program is a good fit for her, saying, “I know I learn best in a group setting, sharing experiences with others, and coursework makes the most sense when I'm able to take it and directly apply it in the real world. There is phenomenal leadership in the BPS, so the program is an incredible opportunity to learn from people in the district about how to best meet the educational needs of students in this city.” Her own three children have gone through the Boston school system, and as a mother she is impressed with the teachers, principals, and staff. “It's an honor to be part of that,” she says. \*

**BOSTON PRINCIPAL FELLOWSHIP, from page 1**

The first activity consisted of a school observation and presentation. Candidates were asked to assume the role of a newly hired principal and to present to a group of screeners their overall impressions of the school. In preparation for the presentations, the candidates and screeners conducted an “environmental walk through,” moving through the rooms, quietly jotting down notes of key observations. Next, the candidates did a more thorough walk through, taking note of desk arrangements, student work on the walls, and other displays in order to prepare their own assessment of teaching and learning.

Each candidate presented his or her impressions of the school and an analysis of what had been gleaned from the observation to a team of three screeners. Two women waiting their turn looked at each other with eyebrows raised and, with nervous chuckles, commented on the pressure. One candidate hoped aloud that she wouldn’t have to present to a deputy superintendent. As the conversation moved to teaching and other familiar topics, nerves seemed to eventually calm.

In the other room, the screeners considered each candidate’s presentation skills and listened to the ways in which the observations addressed issues of instruction, student work, school culture, facilities, and expectations for students. They also listened for how well each candidate analyzed his or her observations: whether he/she made judgments, and how well the evidence supported those judgments. Of this first task, one candidate remarked, “Going into classrooms to assess what type of learning happens there, that’s what principals do. It’s something we’ll need to do in our career, not a whole bunch of theory, but actual practical skills. So it’s effective to use that to test whether we’d be ready.”

After the short individual presentations, candidates moved to the computer room, where the second assessment took place. Candidates were to choose one of three

topics and to draft a letter to parents about it. These topics were: the opening of a Family Resource Center, an incident of violence at a train station near the school, or the school’s inability to meet the requirements of No Child Left Behind. When asked why this activity was chosen as part of the assessment, SLI Executive Director Rachel Curtis responded that, “as a principal, one often has to write letters home to parents. In this exercise we were trying to understand each candidate’s ability to develop a persuasive, well-written letter that demonstrates an understanding of and commitment to collaborate with parents and address their interests and concerns.” During the break following this task, one candidate exclaimed, “All I could hear was furious typing!”

The group task came next. Six to eight candidates gathered around a table to respond to a scenario in which they were all principals asked to collectively decide on the focus for their schools’ professional development. They were to come to consensus on which of two proposed recommendations they should adopt. Through this task, candidates had the opportunity to show how they work collaboratively. Groups grappled with balancing different philosophies of teacher development and limited resources, while screeners sat outside the circle, noting how individuals functioned as part of a team and the overall dynamics of the group.

**REFLECTIONS, from page 1**

and a retention rate of 88% among first- and second-year principals.

Experienced Boston principals and SLI faculty were the Institute’s critical partners in all of this work. They brought deep expertise, profound commitment, and wonderful curiosity and enthusiasm for the work of bridging theory and practice. Whether in the classroom or the school, they created rich, authentic learning environments, and they made their practice public and their teaching trans-

One candidate later reflected that his group worked well overall, saying, “Although we had differences of opinions, we agreed to disagree and come to a conclusion.”

In the fourth and final assessment, candidates watched a videotape of a teacher teaching a class. After the observation, candidates rated the teacher’s instruction and identified strengths and weaknesses, supported by evidence from the video. Then, posing as the teacher’s principal, each candidate wrote what questions he or she would ask the teacher to better understand her instruction, and to support her in reflecting and improving on her practice. One candidate found the task fascinating and enjoyed the challenge. Although she had no formal K-12 teaching experience, her higher education teaching experience and her role as a mother of BPS students gave her a sense of what kind of teaching works for kids. Knowing that teacher evaluation is a critical skill for a principal, she welcomed the opportunity to develop competencies that would make her a good instructional leader.

While the candidates breathed sighs of relief, the screeners gathered in another room to discuss, in groups, how each candidate performed. Based on their performance, twenty of the thirty candidates were chosen to participate in the final stage of the application process, an individual interview. \*

parent. They modeled leadership and they helped the SLI learn the lessons of the first year, and ensure that those lessons inform the second year.

It is with this strong foundation that SLI embraces the second year of its work.

*Rachel Curtis  
Executive Director*

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## Recent Research In Brief

**Drago-Severson, Eleanor.** *Helping Teachers Learn: Principals as Professional Development Leaders.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education. April 2004.

This nationwide study explored how leaders at 25 schools address the challenges of supporting teacher learning. The schools in the study include public, Catholic, and independent schools with varying financial resources. The paper draws on interviews and document analysis to describe four common practices that school leaders employ to support teacher learning:

- Teaming
  - Providing leadership roles
  - Collegial inquiry
  - Mentoring
1. Teaming can provide contexts for collaboration, where teachers can examine their assumptions and develop innovative techniques. Teams of teachers often review the school's curriculum, but they can also review student work together to determine student needs. Specially focused teams can offer ways for teachers to explore diverse perspectives and give the school feedback. Partnering with

external organizations can enhance teacher learning with new ideas, and visits to other schools bring a broader perspective to the teacher teams.

2. Providing leadership opportunities for teachers can allow them to build stronger relationships and strengthen the school community. These roles support teachers' learning by encouraging them to exchange their expertise with others and broaden their perspectives. Some effective avenues for teacher leadership can include running technology workshops for professional development or serving on accreditation teams that assess other schools.
3. Collegial inquiry can occur when principals explicitly ask teachers to reflect on their practice in a formal setting. For example, teachers mapping a curriculum can explore differences in teaching and implementation, resulting in a stronger awareness of their mission. Some principals devote time in faculty meetings to elicit from teachers ideas and strategies for improvement in their practice.

4. Pairing new teachers with experienced mentors can benefit both teachers. The purposes of a mentoring program can vary from exchanging information to emotional support. Mentoring offers a more personalized and informal learning option while allowing both teachers to construct knowledge from their experiences and break teacher isolation.

The author discusses the developmental principles underlying each of the practices, giving them a theoretical framework. These four practices were employed across all school types, meaning that each can be adapted by school leaders in different settings. Supporting teacher learning directly relates to improving teaching and student achievement. School leadership that focuses on teacher learning as well as student learning can help the adults in the school manage the complexities of teaching, learning, and leadership. \*