

Separate Together?
Working Group 2 (December 4th, 2008) Notes

Introduction:

The purpose of this workgroup is to identify ways that churches and public schools can work together to improve achievement in the youth of Boston and reduce the achievement gap. The first Separate Together Working Group meeting was held on September 25, 2008 at the Roxbury Boys and Girls Club and presented the audience with a range of church and para-church histories of engagement with public schools. The invited panelists for the first evening were Rev. Bernadette Hickman-Maynard of Roxbury Renaissance Center, Chris Troy of Boston Urban Youth Foundation, and Sam Acevedo of Higher Education Resource Center. The result of that working group was to have more sessions and invite the public school administration to the table so that churches can get information.

On December 4, 2008, neXus Boston sponsored the second Separate Together Working Group meeting at the Center for Urban Ministerial Education. The invited speaker was Irvin Scott, Academic Superintendent for High School of Boston Public Schools.

Attendance:

Interest and excitement have increased about this topic and this is evident in the attendance. There were 14 attendants at the September 25th workshop and there were 30 RSVPs and approximately 28 adult attendants. There were headmasters, BPS officials for after school programs, ministers, community representatives, and to our surprise and delight, there were two high school students in attendance as well.

Summary:

Irvin L. Scott began the session with his personal story of how a 9th grade English teacher changed his life by meeting him where he was and not only not lowering expectations, but challenging him to do more than he had previously done. She offered him support and confidence. He became an English teacher and now works to improve Boston's high schools. He introduced the BPS plan for high schools, which can be found on the website (<http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/node/756>) in a concept paper. He described Superintendent Carol Johnson's *Acceleration Agenda's* two components:

1. Raising Rigor - making sure things are challenging
 - a. Access - get more kids in
 - b. Retention - keep kids in
 - c. Achievement - get AP scores and college credits
 - Advanced Placement (AP)
 - International Baccalaureate (IB)
 - *80% college graduation rate compared to BPS 30% graduation rate
 - Dual-Enrollment Courses

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2. Building Safety Nets - changing structures in the school to ensure that there are supports for students who need it
 - a. Implement Full-Year Online Credit Recovery Courses for truants and those at risk for dropping out that should be system-wide in three weeks. There is a focus on 9th graders so that they do not get frustrated but it will be expanding in course options. Currently, Credit Recovery is at Madison Park, Hyde Park, East Boston, English High, and Community Academy High Schools.
 - b. Starting Reengagement Centers for truant/drop-out students
This will be centers where students can go to get reconnected to the system and transitioned back into classrooms or programs that meet their needs.

In the question and answer session, the advice given to churches and community organizations is to identify the part of the BPS plan aligns most closely with the work that an individual church does and to be persistent. He also encourages anybody in contact with the students of BPS to use the language of rigor and ask questions about achievement, AP classes, and attendance at school. He asks us to find out if the schools our students attend have AP courses, and if they do not, call his office at 617-635-6739 and leave a message.

Brainstorming Session

After the Q & A, we held a brainstorming session to see what direction this working group should take in focus, and had participants answer the following questions:

1. What characteristics of churches and schools make partnerships easy?
2. What characteristics/logistics of churches and schools make partnership difficult?
3. What resources do we have?
4. What information do we need?

The results of that session will be published under separate cover and integrated with suggestions from the concept papers from BPS. Evaluation forms are still saying that churches would like concrete ideas on how to partner and engage schools, so the forthcoming document will have ideas and strategies included as well.

In our closing announcements, we were informed that the King Middle School is in serious need for support with school supplies and after-school programming.

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Brainstorming Questions:

1. What needs do our children have?
 - Mentoring
 - Affirmation
 - To be held accountable
 - To be celebrated
 - To be loved
 - To be heard/understood
 - To be motivated
 - To have caring teachers
 - Counseling
 - Exposure to cultural events
 - Field trips
 - Culturally relevant education
 - Opportunities to dream
 - Preparation for college
 - Support services
 - Safe schools
2. What characteristics of churches and schools make partnerships easy?
 - Mutuality/commonality of purpose
 - Genuine trust in each other
 - Friendly conversations and trust building
 - Transparency in relationships
 - Shared responsibility
 - Commitment/communications
 - Goal to have young people thriving in our city
 - Cooperation
 - Shared visions
 - Clear roles
 - Sincere
3. What logistics could inhibit partnerships between a church and a school?
 - Institutions have different agendas
 - Unrealistic expectations
 - Ways to assist are not clear
 - Lack of knowledge of Boston Public Schools
 - Relationship-building
 - Everyone is an expert in their field and do not share common learning space
 - Churches may not have clearly defined goals
 - Challenge to measure success or create timelines for assistance
4. How can we get together?
 - Education Day at churches

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- Services/ministries centered around education
- Volunteering parishioners
- Church member 'experts' offering talks/workshops/labs to students at schools
- Lending church performance space to schools for theater
- Cooperative outreach together (marches, meetings, community walks)
- Quarterly meetings
- Share resources
- Ask schools what prayer needs they have
- Offer childcare during PTA meetings/report card days
- Workshops and roundtable discussions