# RENEWAL INSPECTION REPORT

## BOSTON RENAISSANCE CHARTER SCHOOL
## BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

SchoolWorks

OCTOBER 3-6, 1999

## SETTING

Boston Renaissance Charter School, enrolling more than 1100 students in the 1999-2000 school year, is one of the largest single-site charter schools in the United States. It currently occupies eleven stories of a newly renovated building formerly used by the University of Massachusetts-Boston and plans to expand within this facility pending renewal of its charter. The campus faces Park Square, surrounded by downtown Boston's cityscape.

The school was founded as a coalition effort of the Horace Mann Foundation in Massachusetts and The Edison Project, an education management organization based in New York City. Dozens of interested individual Bostonians and corporations have contributed to the school's start-up, in the words of a founder, "to create a catalyst, an engine, a symbol of what you could have in an urban setting."

The Edison Project currently provides services to Renaissance and 78 other schools in all regions of the United States. Their partnership school design has been recognized by many educational commentators for its rigorous and innovative curriculum, professional development for teachers, and ambitious use of technology. Boston Renaissance was one of the first schools to contract with Edison in what was the first year of school operations for both organizations.

The Boston Renaissance Charter School's mission is to provide Boston schoolchildren in grades K-8 with a well-rounded, "world class" education reminiscent of the intellectual ferment of the Renaissance, from which the school takes its name. The school ethos is one of structure and purposefulness, and the campus is divided into three "academies"—Primary (K-2), Elementary (3-5), and Junior (6-8). Each academy is further subdivided into "houses" of approximately 100 students, each on a separate floor of the building. Students stay in the same house with the same team of teachers during their three years in each academy.

The student body is 73% African-American, 15% Latino, and 10% Caucasian. There is also a small number of Asian and Native American students. Students arrive at the school from a number of Boston neighborhoods. Thirty-eight percent of all students come from Dorchester, 13% from Roxbury, 13% from the South End, and 10% percent from Mattapan.

## INSPECTION TEAM

**Alan Fraker, Lead Inspector**
Mr. Fraker is Vice President of SchoolWorks and a Senior Research Fellow at Boston University. He was the Academic Dean at Deerfield Academy and a Senior Curriculum Consultant to the Modern Red Schoolhouse. Alan has directed summer institutes for the National Endowment for the Humanities and chaired the College Board's Test Development Committee in Advanced Placement United States History.

**Terry Mortimer, Quality Control Monitor and Inspector**
Mr. Mortimer is a registered OFSTED inspector and one of the two founding partners of Full Circle, a British inspection company. He has been a primary teacher and principal in England as well as a curriculum and management consultant. Terry has been an equal opportunity administrator and consultant with a particular focus on multiracial and multicultural issues in British education.

**John Collings, Inspector**
Dr. Collings is a registered British inspector with specialization in Science, Information Technology, and Mathematics. He has taught all science subjects in England through 'A' level and has been a curriculum coordinator, in-service trainer, and supervisor of rural science.

**Claudia Grose, Inspector**
Ms. Grose is a faculty member at Bank Street College in New York City and has taught courses and provided professional support for teachers in the area of early childhood and elementary literacy. She has recently completed a USDOE study of the implementation of an innovative literacy curriculum in an urban New England school district. Until recently, Claudia also served as a literacy consultant to the Boston Plan.

**Carol Keirstead, Inspector**
Ms. Keirstead is a research associate with RMC Research Corporation in Portsmouth, New Hampshire where she specializes in research evaluation, training, and technical assistance for educational and human service organizations. Currently she is a member of a service delivery team assisting schools in Trenton, New Jersey. Carol has served as principal of a tri-lingual PreK-4 public-university collaborative school, as a Title VII coordinator at the Center for Field Services and Studies at UMASS -Lowell, and was the Project Director for the Indochinese Refugees Foundation in Lowell, Massachusetts.

**Karen Laba Inspector**
Dr. Laba is a former elementary, middle school, high school, and college science teacher. She is a consultant to a range of science curriculum projects, including the Scientist as Humanist Project and FIRST Lego® League. She also supervises student teachers at the University of New Hampshire.

**Ledyard McFadden, Inspector**
Mr. McFadden is the President of SchoolWorks. He was the founding Director of Operations for City on a Hill Charter School, where he developed the school's management structure and budgeting processes. Prior to his work at City on a Hill, he was a founder and teacher at the Bridge School, a school-within-a-school at Chelsea High School in Massachusetts. Ledyard has taught English as a second language at elementary middle and high school levels in Costa Rica and in Chelsea, Massachusetts.

**Van Seasholes, Inspector**
Dr. Seasholes presently coordinates the China Studies Partnership. The Partnership involves 100 teachers and 12 Boston area school systems that have made a K-12 commitment to teaching about China. He retired in 1997 from Newton South High School, where he served as principal for 24 years. Van remains active in a number of professional organizations, including Primary Source, where he served as interim director in 1999, and the Harvard Principals Center.

**Michael Tatistcheff, Inspector**
Mr. Tatistcheff is an Advanced Placement Calculus and mathematics teacher at Northfield-Mount Hermon School, where he has taught for the last 20 years. He has won that school's award for teaching excellence (voted by the students), as well as regional and national awards from the College Board and GTE. Mike has studied and taught mathematics in China and Australia, is a curriculum consultant to schools within the region, and has served on his local school committee.

**Ronald Walker, Inspector**
Mr. Walker is the Associate Director of ATLAS Communities, a New American Schools reform project administered by the Education Development Center (Newton), where he is a Senior Associate. He has also been an elementary school principal and was co-principal of Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School in the 1998-99 school year. Ron has his own consulting company, *A Critical Friend for the Principal*, which provides assistance to principals across the state and the nation.

# RENEWAL FINDINGS

## Is the academic program a success?

1. **Student performance on external assessments did not achieve school expectations. Stanford 9 scores have generally declined between 1996-99. Grade 8 MCAS scores are below Boston Public School averages.**

   The school has implemented a comprehensive system of external assessment. A four-year aggregation of longitudinal data is available and has been used by the school to make major modifications in the reading program and to expand the network of tutors and other remedial academic services within the school. The scores themselves reveal below average performance on the entire battery of external examinations. Some improvement has been noted, however, among students who began kindergarten at Renaissance. Generally poor Junior Academy scores were one of several factors that led to the school's decision to postpone its Senior and Collegiate Academy (high school) expansion.

   **Narrative References:** 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13

2. **The school's adaptation of Edison's internal assessment design does not function effectively and systematically at present:**

   - **There is no Structured Portfolio System (SPS) in place.**

     Among other factors, a high level of teacher turnover has contributed to inconsistent, if not minimal, collection of student work. No evidence of school-wide or project-specific rubrics was found in student folders, and most work took the form of fill-in-the-blanks and short answers. The active project approach accentuated in the Edison design was not substantiated by student assignments collected for this inspection. Almost no work in history and science was included in the sample.

     **Narrative References:** 14, 17

- **The Edison Project has announced its intention to replace Annual Comprehensive Performance Assessments with monthly benchmark assessments.**

  No assessments were included in student folders and no summary information about these assessments was provided in the school's renewal application. Some CPA summary data appeared in the school's first annual report, but comparative and cumulative CPA data have not been widely disseminated since, including the school's first two site visits in 1997 and 1998. Edison is abandoning this annual assessment system in the 1999-2000 school year in favor of monthly benchmark assessments.

  **Narrative References:** 14, 15, 16, and 17

- **The volume of staff turnover and technological impediments has compromised student Quarterly Learning Contracts.**

  Quarterly Learning Contracts have not been consistently and effectively maintained for students. Most student folders do not have a complete set of contracts, and existing contracts devote more attention to general course description than to individual student progress. Only the rare contract establishes clear learning goals for a student for the next academic period. The school's new administration modified these contracts to include effort and performance grades, rather than adjectival ratings, but the entire system continues to lack coherence. Very few teachers have been able to monitor a student's progress for more than one or two years, and all faculty members suffer from the inadequacies of management software that frequently erases narrative entries.

  **Narrative References:** 14, 18, 19

3. **Scrutiny of student work and the observation of student classroom responses confirm that achievement is below standards set by the school and Edison.**

The Edison design requires an active inquiry mode for teaching most subjects and utilizes rich materials that have been selected because they are compatible with this pedagogy. The school's many new teachers have neither the experience nor the familiarity with these sophisticated curricula to implement them effectively. Teaching is routine and undifferentiated, regardless of student's needs. Student responses are mostly rote, and the individualization and stimulation prescribed by the design are as yet unrealized. Student work produced under these circumstances is often below Edison's grade-level expectations and frequently does not meet the expectations set for specific projects. In response, teacher feedback to students is terse and often unhelpful.

**Narrative References:** 17, 26, 27, 28, 29, 33, 34, 35

## Is the school a viable organization?

1. **The board of trustees has demonstrated its strong commitment and has played an appropriate role in the school's history. It recognizes that its fundamental responsibility is at the policy and not at the management level.**

   Four of the school's original five trustees remain active on the board, including its chair. When academic progress did not meet expectations, the board took swift action, creating at the end of the second year an oversight committee to monitor student achievement. The board's role in the early creation of a school presidency, charged with board/external relations and the selection of a new principal, also reflects its proactive stance. Its fiscal stewardship, particularly when faced with the staggering costs of renovating and eventually purchasing a center-city campus without state support, is extraordinary.

   **Narrative References: 41, 42, 43**

2. **The board of trustees, Edison Project staff, school administrators, and faculty do not share a common understanding of the Edison-Renaissance partnership and its lines of accountability.**

   The Edison Project put the school's original academic design and school leadership in place. Edison initially recruited the third-year interim head who had arrived at the school with the founding principal as one of her former colleagues. As the board intensified its oversight of the school's programs, including the identification of a president and principal during the third year, their role in the Edison partnership appears to have grown. The new principal has added a third dynamic to governance, as his recommendations have been added to the Edison-Renaissance dialogue. Lines of accountability and reporting established in the original contract have become blurred. Working drafts of a post-renewal contract address these ambiguities. These clarifications have yet to be carefully articulated to all constituencies.

   **Narrative References: 44, 45**

3. **The appointment of a new principal has been applauded consistently across every constituency. He has exhibited vision, thoughtful decision-making, and interest in the welfare of students and staff:**

- **The organizational system has been redesigned and strong professionals have been hired to fill positions within the new administrative structure.**

  The school has always had a complex organizational structure given its three academies and ten houses in a multi-story building. Each academy has a director and each house within an academy has a lead teacher. The new principal has been particularly effective in weaving these spatial and grade-level units together. A new Director of Guidance Services coordinates all student services throughout the building and a new Assistant Principal for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment coordinates the academic program, including professional evaluation and development. The school's President, the development officers, a Director of Community and Business Partnerships, and a Parent and Family Coordinator direct the school's external relations, freeing up the Principal and internal staff to accomplish their responsibilities.

  **Narrative References:** 44, 46, 47

- **Diversity of faculty and staff has increased commendably under his leadership, particularly the identification and retention of African-American male professionals.**

  The school staff was almost 90% Caucasian in its first year. More than a third of the staff is African-American in the 1999-2000 school year. Fourteen African-American males occupy a range of administrative and classroom positions within the school today.

  **Narrative References:** 47, 48, 49, 50

- **School climate and ethos have improved demonstrably during his brief tenure.**

  The school's main entrance has become an attractive and efficient operation, aided by the genial and professional security head and a busy central office. Students pour off a seemingly endless stream of buses in the morning and are guided by cheerful faculty and staff into carefully timed elevators. The process reverses itself with equal efficiency in the afternoon. Every adult in the community smiles at visitors. The school's tone is professional. Everyone in the building exhibits high morale and obvious dedication to children who may spend up to several hours a day in transit.

  **Narrative References:** 20, 43, 44, 46

4. **The school environment is now safe and orderly. At the same time, the amount of emphasis and time spent on behavior control has encroached on the academic program.**

   Beginning in its second year and continuing into the third year, student misbehavior subverted the academic program notably, particularly in the Junior Academy. The new principal and academy directors, particularly at the Junior level, have restored civility. Rule violations are met with suspensions and, when necessary, expulsions. A new dress code has also improved the school's climate. The unintended price of achieving appropriate standards of behavior has been erosion of instructional time in a number of classrooms. The school believes that this loss is transitory, while students internalize the new rules, but, at its present extreme, it has halved the amount of time available for teaching and learning in some classes.

   **Narrative References:** 20, 32, 43, 44

5. **The high turnover of faculty and shortage of veteran educators have compromised the mission of the school.**

   Only a handful of teachers have been at the school since its opening and only an equally small number have more than ten years of teaching experience. Turnover, on average, has been between 30 and 40 percent annually. New policies and incentives aim to stabilize this problem. Targeted recruiting by the new principal in his first year has brought experienced administrators and special educators to the school.

   **Narrative References:** 30, 31, 32, 33, 47, 50

6. **There is an acute need for professional development for all staff surrounding academic content, child development, the craft of teaching, and curriculum.**

   Instruction must be aligned with two sets of standards, elaborately interconnected, those of the Edison Project and those of the Massachusetts Frameworks. Curricula such as University of Chicago Mathematics and BSCS science, among others in the Edison program, require thoughtful implementation by teachers, even after initial training. Most BRCS teachers are both new to the building and relatively new to the profession. Appropriate pedagogical supervision and support have become critical. An expanded, pressing agenda of professional development begins to address this issue during the current school year by providing nine additional days of faculty training.

   **Narrative References:** 31, 32, 33, 34, 45, 47, 48, 49, 50

## Has the school been faithful to the terms of its charter?

1. **The academic program as presently implemented does not sufficiently challenge students to reach Edison-Renaissance standards and expectations.**

   Key elements of Edison's academic design have not been successfully implemented. The ineffectiveness of the internal assessment system hampers students' progress and parents' understanding of their children's learning. Teachers themselves are unable to measure student progress systematically in the absence of a Structured Portfolio System, criterion-based assessments, and anchor specimens as described in the Edison design. The study of World Languages has been temporarily shelved in the Junior Academy in favor of more reading instruction. Technology glitches, as discussed below, have limited instruction and prevented hoped-for e-mail between home and school.

   **Narrative References:** 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 17, 32, 33, 34, 35, 38

2. **The Edison aim to "use technology as a second language" is not being met. The school has taken the first step to begin to address this issue by installing new hardware.**

   The original technology system installed by the school, including computers for every teacher and family, is no longer operational. A new infrastructure has just been established by the school's current technology coordinator and nearly 100 new turquoise iMacs are installed around the campus. Students and faculty alike are beginning to learn how to use this second generation of machines as academic tools. Although this initiative is well behind schedule after a protracted and expensive beginning, it now incorporates the collective experience of other Edison schools. References were made during the inspection to a recent, Board-approved technology plan, but unfortunately no written document was produced for review.

   **Narrative References:** 18, 39, 40, 53

3. **Significant progress has been made toward the goal of involving the Boston community in all aspects of school life.**

   The cultural and corporate community of Boston has embraced the school from its opening days, in no small measure because of the activity of the Board of Trustees. Their fiduciary stewardship has been extended by an energetic, effective President appointed at the beginning of the school's third year. An equally able Director of Community and Business Partnerships has formed a host of close working relationships with citywide organizations for the benefit of the schoolchildren. Renaissance students are exposed to the full resources of the city of Boston, from mime artists to firemen, over the course of the academic year and into the summer.

   **Narrative References:** 21, 51, 52

4. **A newly established parent center and the addition of a new position, Parent and Family Coordinator, are significant steps toward the school's commitment to increased family involvement.**

   Parents have always enjoyed a representative role in the governance of the school through the Parent Advisory Council and membership on the Board of Trustees. The new Family Center invites all parents to the school during its hours of operation and runs a series of special programs and seminars for those interested. The far-flung nature of the parent body across the city of Boston is an impediment to easy communication, but this new initiative—especially if augmented by e-mail capacity as the school plans—has been much needed and well received.

   **Narrative References:** 22, 23, 39, 40, 53

5. **Parental support of the school is strong and represents general satisfaction with the school and its programs.**

Parents and students alike appear to have internalized the general mission of the school to provide a "world-class" education. Parents interviewed during the inspection were pleased that their children were enrolled in a school with such high expectations. While opinion surveys indicate that parents want more academic information and involvement in the academic program, their overall reaction to BRCS is positive and supportive. The school consequently enjoys one of the longest waiting lists in the state and receives an average of 300 applications a year for its kindergarten class alone.

**Narrative References:** 51, 52, 53

## If the school's charter is renewed, what are its plans for the next five years of the charter?

***Note: Given the prospective nature of this renewal question, there are no references to the school narrative.***

1. **The school, in its unusually candid and reflective response to this renewal question, identifies many of the same institutional issues remarked by the inspection team. Ambitious action planning, still to be prioritized and organized into shorter-term targets, clearly demonstrates the school's commitment to move forward toward its charter vision.**

   BRCS and Edison officials alike are the first to acknowledge that the application of a new, ambitious, and complex academic design to a fourteen-story school with more than a thousand students in nine grades has been a Herculean challenge. The collapse of the internal assessment and technology plans combined with disproportionate teacher turnover, the result of terminations, exhaustion, and confusion among young professionals, compounded implementation problems. Rather than implode around these initial difficulties, the partnership has responded with new leadership, new organizational systems, expanded staffing and training, and a consistently positive attitude. In its response to this last renewal application question, the school has identified for ongoing improvement just about every area considered a weakness by the inspection team. The school's plans for the next five years address these concerns more extensively than the last fifteen months have allowed. Most importantly, the school displays commendable willingness to take responsibility for what did not work and to learn from its mistakes.

## I. STUDENT

*Boston Renaissance Charter School employs the Edison Project's academic framework with high expectations and rigor consistent with the school's mission to provide a 'world class' education for urban students. These standards are slowly being adapted to the local context, but the school's capacity to measure student growth against them is limited at present. In the absence of a clear, consistent internal assessment system, the school's demonstrated academic performance defaults to external assessment results alone, which thus far have been disappointing given the school's ambitious goals. The school is clearly focused on these early program shortcomings and has dramatically improved its academic climate and redeployed its staff to pay much greater and more systematic attention to individual student needs, both personal and academic.*

### ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND GOALS

1 Boston Renaissance Charter School (BRCS) incorporates the academic standards and curriculum design of the Edison Project, the education management organization that provides the school with a broad range of management and technical services. These standards are the result of a careful, comprehensive study of major American and international curriculum frameworks and reflect a high degree of rigor and coherence. Separate standards for each of the school's three academies include the four core areas of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, as well as standards for World Languages, Character and Ethics, the Arts, and Physical Fitness and Health. Although not created specifically for this school, but rather chosen by BRCS founders as best suited among several competing designs, the Edison standards are consistent with the school's "singular mission to provide students from the city of Boston with a public education that is truly world class."

2 Student standards are expressed clearly and in considerable detail in each of four core subject areas of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, often with as much or more development than the state frameworks themselves. However, the Edison standards generally antedate the Massachusetts Frameworks, and alignment of the two sets of student performance benchmarks has been necessary. The resulting document, a three-column spreadsheet prepared by Edison specialists, links Massachusetts standards in the first column with Edison standards in the second, and with Edison academic levels and resources in the third. The human investment in this encyclopedic alignment is clear, but the product is not much in evidence and not much used by most teachers in the school. The exceptions are in language arts and mathematics, where the standards align intentionally with the sequential curriculum packages adopted by Edison. One promising alignment practice is the *Elementary Grade Level Handbook: Process and Content Skill Development* developed by teachers at BRCS as a shorthand guide to the Edison standards, the Massachusetts Frameworks, and the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System. Two-thirds of the handbook for grades 3-5 is now complete. It includes grade level curriculum guides, resources, and a continuum of skills. There are plans to include further grade level benchmarks describing stages of student growth and development. This laudable first step to adapt unwieldy materials to the local school setting, however, lacks differentiation by grade-level. The same skills are often repeated verbatim from one grade level to the next. School administrators have proposed further refinement of this guide and further attention to similar projects in all three academies to help teachers function more effectively within the standards-intensive environment of a Massachusetts Edison school.

3 Because the standards have been centrally developed and coordinated with instructional materials by the Edison Project, they remain consistent across all of the design's levels from kindergarten through high school. For example, the focus of the language arts standards in the Primary Academy (K-2) is literacy: learning to read and write. In the Elementary Academy (3-5), students are expected to apply their literacy skills to "gain knowledge, encounter new ideas, and construct meaning" from literature while continuing to write across the curriculum. Junior Academy (6-8) students are asked to refine literary skills with a broad range of "time-honored classics," "contemporary fiction," and "multimedia sources."

4 The expectations for numeracy go hand-in-hand with literacy in the Primary Academy, with an emphasis on "real-life situations." This emerging "facility in working with numbers and mathematical ideas" is extended through projects and a continuing "everyday" approach in the Elementary Academy standards. Topics such as decimals, percents, ratio, proportion, and patterns require students to build on fundamental computational skills. Junior Academy mathematicians, again through a project approach, are expected to move into more sophisticated arithmetic, pre-algebra, and pre-geometry, building upon concepts introduced in the Primary and Elementary Academies, but working at a level of abstraction needed to prepare for a traditional high school mathematics sequence.

5 History and social science standards in the Primary Academy, consistent with the Massachusetts Frameworks, establish a broad, episodic introduction to people and places throughout history and around the globe using stories and other multimedia sources. Students in the Elementary Academy are asked to refine their research skills in a broad range of sources, including charts, graphs, tables, and maps. Beginning in fifth grade and thereafter, expanded content standards reflect the curriculum's grade level by grade level focus on extended chronological study of one or more civilizations. In order, the United States; a two-year study of Ancient, Classical, and World civilizations; and another year of United States history through the Civil War (again consistent with the detailed 'core knowledge' component of the Massachusetts Frameworks) comprise the history/social science program in grades five through eight.

6 Fledgling scientists in the Primary Academy are introduced to the scientific method through hands-on investigations in their kitchens, backyards, and neighborhoods. Standards lead them to begin to develop conceptual understandings in the earth, physical, and life sciences that form the foundation for more sophisticated collection and analysis of data in the Elementary Academy. Students at this level are asked to learn how to use standard scientific instrumentation—computers, hand lenses, and thermometers—and begin to study the factual knowledge and terminology necessary for deeper scientific understanding. Junior Academy science is integrated and thematic, expecting students, for example, to examine patterns of change and diversity across the sciences. The inquiry approach of the Edison science standards requires students to ask increasingly sophisticated scientific questions and to answer them through increasingly sophisticated scientific investigations.

7 The research base of all of these Edison academic standards, as well as those beyond the required academic core, is both extensive and impressive, representing the work of approximately 30 full-time employees and many consulting experts. The academic standards and parallel curriculum "place a premium on active learning, or the constructivist approach to education." But, to sound a recurring theme throughout this inspection, the implementation of the design within a large urban school results in a noticeable gap between blueprint and practice. Most students and parents perceive the school as rigorous, but are not familiar with specific academic standards, and how these standards relate to assignments and projects is not evident in most classrooms. Although adaptation of the standards has begun, as previously noted, systemization and communication of standards throughout the school community has still to be accomplished.

## ATTAINMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

8 BRCS utilizes a broad battery of external assessments to measure student achievement and improvement, especially to measure acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy skills. As the full complement and calendar of Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System examinations develop, many of the school's temporary measures may be dropped in favor of the one unified assessment system for all of the state's public schools. Meanwhile, the school has used both the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test and the Durrell Analysis of Reading Difficulty for its early studies of reading in the Primary Academy. In order to compare itself with Boston Public Schools, BRCS administered the Metropolitan Achievement Test, 7$^{th}$ edition (MAT-7) until Boston switched to the Stanford Achievement Test, 9$^{th}$ edition (SAT-9), in 1997. It has also administered the Iowa Test of Basic Skills reading assessment for the last three years in compliance with statewide policy.

9 Grade-level longitudinal data (all students, both new and returning, who sat for the test in a particular grade in a particular year) are available for the reading and mathematics sections of the SAT 9. (Scores below the third grade are not comparable given variations in the assessment protocol.) Attainment for the period of the study is consistently below the national average (a normal curve equivalent score of 50 is roughly equal to the 50$^{th}$ percentile). Following a class from one year to the next, e.g. 5$^{th}$ grade to 6$^{th}$ to 7$^{th}$, reveals little or no growth from year to year. Although there is some annual fluctuation of scores, the total score for every grade level is lower at the end of three years (i.e. 1999) than in the beginning.

**Grade Level Study of 5th Grade Class (AY 1998-99)**

| Mean Normal Curve Equivalent Scores | MAY '96 | MAY '97 | MAY '98 | MAY '99 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total Reading** | 48.7 | 49.3 | 43.6 | 42.3 |
| **Total Mathematics** | 48.2 | 49.7 | 46.6 | 42.1 |

**Grade Level Study of 6th Grade Class (AY 1998-99)**

| Mean Normal Curve Equivalent Scores | MAY '96 | MAY '97 | MAY '98 | MAY '99 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total Reading** | No data | 46.6 | 48.2 | 43.8 |
| **Total Mathematics** | No data | 47.7 | 43.6 | 44.5 |

**Grade Level Study of 7th Grade Class (AY 1998-99)**

| Mean Normal Curve Equivalent Scores | MAY '96 | MAY '97 | MAY '98 | MAY '99 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total Reading** | 56.3 | 24.4 | 49.2 | 39.0 |
| **Total Mathematics** | 49.9 | 27.6 | 43.6 | 39.7 |

10 Individual level data (average attainment and improvement for the sub-group of students who attended the school for *both years* of the study period) demonstrate overall improvement for a one-year period. Although there is no evidence of longitudinal growth in reading and mathematics (as reported above), improvement in reading is statistically significant (minimal increase of 5) in two of four grades studied from May of 1998 to May of 1999. Mathematics scores are positive in every grade and statistically significant in three of the four grades during the same time period.

**Individual Level Study of 5th Grade Class (AY 1998-99)**

| Mean Normal Curve Equivalent Scores | MAY '98 | MAY '99 |
|---|---|---|
| **Total Reading** | 34 | 39 |
| **Total Mathematics** | 38 | 40 |

**Individual Level Study of 6th Grade Class (AY 1998-99)**

| Mean Normal Curve Equivalent Scores | MAY '98 | MAY '99 |
|---|---|---|
| **Total Reading** | 39 | 41 |
| **Total Mathematics** | 29 | 40 |

**Individual Level Study of 7th Grade Class (AY 1998-99)**

| Mean Normal Curve Equivalent Scores | MAY '98 | MAY '99 |
|---|---|---|
| **Total Reading** | 35 | 32 |
| **Total Mathematics** | 28 | 35 |

**Individual Level Study of 8th Grade Class (AY 1998-99)**

| Mean Normal Curve Equivalent Scores | MAY '98 | MAY '99 |
|---|---|---|
| **Total Reading** | 41 | 50 |
| **Total Mathematics** | 25 | 37 |

11 1998 BRCS performance levels on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (Grade 3 Reading) are comparable with those in the Boston Public Schools but lower than the statewide results (no district or state comparisons were included in the 1999 test report). Forty-four percent of the BRCS third graders are proficient or advanced compared with 45% of third graders in the Boston Public Schools. Sixty-eight percent of third graders in the state are proficient or advanced. Overall grade level improvement, using the national percentile of the average score, was statistically significant between 1997 and 1999, resting slightly above the national average third grade score in both vocabulary and comprehension.

**Iowa Test of Basic Skills (May 1998)**
**Reading Comprehension Performance Levels**

| | No results | Pre-reader | Basic | Proficient | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **BRCS** | 4 | 10 | 41 | 40 | 4 |
| **BPS** | 5 | 13 | 36 | 38 | 7 |
| **State** | 5 | 6 | 21 | 47 | 21 |

**Iowa Test of Basic Skills**
**Grade Level Average Standard Scores (National Percentile)**

| | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Reading Vocabulary** | 48 | 42 | 52 |
| **Reading Comprehension** | 44 | 40 | 51 |
| **Reading Total** | 45 | 40 | 51 |

12 Reading results for BRCS third graders on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the SAT-9 corroborate general trends observed by the school in its own Primary Reading Studies (K-2) using the Woodcock and Durrell assessments through 1998. In both 1996 and 1997, students who completed grade 2 in that school year were *not yet reading at grade level*, having begun their Renaissance education after at least one year at another school and already from 20 to 25 percent behind grade level expectations. In 1998, for the first time, students in 2nd grade (who began their education in Kindergarten at BRCS) were reading on grade level. These positive trends have led the school to conclude that, based on these test data, the earlier a child enrolls at Renaissance and the longer he or she remains at the school, the greater the gain. In consequence, applicants in the lower grades are now given priority when openings occur.

13 MCAS results for May 1998 (1999 results are due in schools in December) were mixed to negative. Grade 4 results were virtually identical with Boston Public Schools, consistent with the 1998 Iowa reading scores comparison for third graders, and again well below state averages. Grade 8 scores were significantly below *both* Boston Public Schools and Massachusetts averages.

**Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System Results (May, 1999)**

| | English | Mathematics | Science |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Grade 4** | | | |
| **BRCS** | 223 | 219 | 224 |
| **BPS** | 222 | 219 | 223 |
| **Massachusetts** | 230 | 234 | 238 |
| **Grade 8** | | | |
| **BRCS** | 224 | 205 | 205 |
| **BPS** | 228 | 214 | 211 |
| **Massachusetts** | 237 | 227 | 225 |

14 Edison design documents describe an elaborate, well-articulated set of internal assessment instruments and practices. Students in all Edison schools (grades 2-8) are to be benchmarked nationally using a set of *Common Performance Assessments* (CPA) in writing and mathematics, administered in the winter of each school year. (CPAs are given in history and science at several indeterminate grade levels.) To further calibrate the consistency of teacher evaluation of student work throughout the year and not just during this annual assessment, teachers are urged to apply the same CPA criteria to student portfolios, part of a classroom *Student Portfolio System* (SPS). CPA results and specimens are also to be included in individual student portfolios to provide "structure" for ongoing teacher evaluation. The results of these continual assessments should be added periodically to a student's *Quarterly Learning Contract* (QLC), along with goals for attainment and improvement in the next school quarter. The design's technology plan further supports both the collection of student work in electronic portfolios and the preparation of teacher comments for electronic transmission to parents.

15 The implementation of the Edison internal assessment system at BRCS has been problematic from the school's opening days and remains so. In the school's first annual report in 1996, confusion surrounded appropriate grade level administration and reporting within the school. CPA analysis was not included in further annual reports. The report of the school's first annual site visit (1997) noted that "it is not clear what the school considers academic success and how it is measured." No CPA data or analysis was made available for the next site visit in 1998. No CPA data or analysis was included in the school's renewal application, and no analysis was made available to the renewal inspection team. (Nor were any CPA specimens clearly and consistently identified in student portfolios.)

16 During the inspection, representatives of the Edison Project indicated their intention to abandon the CPA system in favor of monthly *Benchmark Assessments* (BA) for all Edison schools in both mathematics and reading. These assessments, of both the norm and criterion-referenced variety, are designed to provide schools with more frequent and current data about student attainment and improvement. For each reading assessment linked to a criterion, usually one of the strands or standards, Edison will provide follow-up activities and teaching notes. The inspection team examined samples of these new assessments and related activities. Although not yet available, other BAs are under development for history and science.

17 SPS guidelines call for the systematic collection and evaluation of student work longitudinally, including the integration of CPA specimens into the portfolio with other classroom projects. At present, there is simply no SPS at the school. Individual teachers were able to produce current school year samples of student work, but there were no CPA results to be seen anywhere, nor much collected work that represented more than a month of two of student activity. Almost all of the specimens included in portfolios were answers to quizzes and sentence completions, with scant evidence of the active learning and project philosophy of the Edison design. There was little or no work in either history or science in most folders. School administration has attributed much of the failure of the SPS to teacher turnover, which is particularly troublesome in a system designed to keep teacher teams and students together in houses for three years. Reintroducing and strengthening the SPS is one of the three major priorities of the newly appointed Assistant Principal for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

18 Quarterly Learning Contracts, the reports of student progress toward Edison standards, are consequently based more on a teacher's impression than on any calibrated and controlled system of measurement. When coupled with the school's teacher turnover rate in excess of 30% for each of its first four years, the reliability of teacher impressions becomes still more tenuous. Sets of QLCs on file in students' permanent folders are incomplete and more often than not offer generic comments about a program of study rather than specific commentary about individual student progress. Finally, software glitches have further compounded student reporting, because a teacher's errors on one section of a QLC often lead to the erasure of all teachers' reports on that student.

19 The Edison internal assessment design has yet to be realized at BRCS and is a major priority of both school leadership and the senior staff of the Edison Project. A new technology infrastructure and faculty orientation have the potential to ease previous hardware and software crashes. Professional development in assessment design and portfolio evaluation is also underway. Edison, for its part, continues to refine the assessment design (witness the new BA system) and promises to develop a system for more careful, data-driven planning of each student's course of study. The internal assessment system, in the words of one senior Edison official, has been a "multi-year failure" that is addressed honestly and openly in the school's prospective action plan for the next five years.

## INDIVIDUAL NEEDS AND DEVELOPMENT

20 Under new leadership, the school has made remarkable strides towards creating a school climate that is ordered, purposeful, and respectful. Among other things, the sheer logistics of getting more than 1,000 children into and out of a multistory facility requires the active participation of the entire staff daily. Expectations of individual students on campus, a school uniform code, and a host of signs and posters displayed prominently remind children of their purpose in school. The school's rapid expansion to more than 1,000 students in the second year—particularly the addition of older students in the Junior Academy—led to frequently disorderly, if not occasionally chaotic, classrooms. Now, with a veteran urban principal and administrative staff, common and classroom spaces are under control, and students go about the business of education.

21 As BRCS claims, "sophistication is not about money; it's about exposure." Its students, it follows, are effectively exposed to their heritage as Boston citizens. Children participate in an extraordinary range of cultural and civic events, both at the school and around the city. Particular attention is paid to the African-American experience in both history and contemporary culture. The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater has been in residence. Students have heard the jazz of Wynton Marsalis and the Thelonius Monk Institute. History comes alive at the African Meetinghouse and the Underground Railway Theatre. Science students travel to the Museum of Science, the Arnold Arboretum, the New England Aquarium, and the Franklin Park Zoo. The resources of the Boston Public Library, the Museum of Fine Arts, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, and the State House also enrich the curriculum.

22 Students are also welcomed into before and after school programs operated by the school without state support. These programs cost more than $100,000 in each of their first three years, but a gradual reduction in demand, combined with programming efficiencies and parent contributions, has brought the cost down to a more manageable $35,000 in the current school year. The program initially served in excess of 120 students and offered a wide range of recreational and arts activities which required hands-on instruction. Today, only 90 students participate in these programs, which have become "more closely aligned with school." Afternoon activities now include a homework session with tutoring. Parents are invited to school to support all these activities.

23 All students are also eligible for services provided by the Family and Student Support Team (FASST). Its broad range of services include classroom modification and teacher consultation, special education services, mental health counseling, community referrals, occupational and physical therapies, speech and language services, and the tracking of students with excessive absences. A veteran urban educator, the first to occupy the newly created position of Director of Guidance Services, oversees the team as part of his responsibilities. Beginning in the summer of 1998, a Coordinator of Special Education began to systematize the assignment of special educators throughout the school. There are 13 full-time special educators on staff and 4 paraprofessionals.

24 Concerns about individual students begin at the house level and move through house team meetings to a conference with FASST. An initial two-week period of observation and consultation with a lead teacher begins the process and, if house-level solutions fail to change behaviors, an academy level FASST discussion may produce more effective interventions. Monitoring the student and feedback to special education personnel continue, and further referrals for testing, counseling, therapy, and program modification may result. The number of students with a state-mandated Individualized Education Plan (IEP) has been steadily in the range of 100-125. The school began as a 'full inclusion' environment for all students in 1995, but currently operates two 502.4 rooms for students who need periodic pullouts in what is now described as a 'modified inclusion' or 'responsible inclusion' approach.

## II. CLASSROOM

*The Edison curriculum frameworks and their rich range of instructional materials guide teaching and learning at BRCS. Once again, however, the gap between the original design and on-site realities is considerable. The sophistication of the materials for so many new and inexperienced teachers each year has limited the utilization of many instructional strategies recommended by Edison. The inability of the school to successfully implement the Edison internal assessment system, as already discussed, has limited academic feedback to students and their parents. Delays in the Edison technology initiative, with so much computer-based instruction and assessment, further compromise the instructional program.*

### CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

25 Edison's academy and house structure aim to provide students with a consistent team of professionals who, during a student's stay in a three-year academy, will provide them with personalized counseling and instruction. This combined with a longer school day (seven hours in K-2; eight hours thereafter) and a longer school year (200-205 days) supposedly adds several extra years of schooling to the time it takes to graduate from traditional American schools. Students who accelerate their basic education in this fashion will ostensibly have more time for Edison's "liberal education" in other domains like the arts, ethics, practical arts, physical fitness, and health.

26 Edison Project curriculum guidelines have been developed, and curricular materials chosen, to support such a plan. *Success for All*, an introductory reading program based on careful research and field testing by Robert Slavin of Johns Hopkins University, is the core instructional component of the Primary and Elementary Academies English and Language Arts curriculum. The curriculum is carefully sequenced, and teachers follow detailed instructions as they work with students who have been grouped according to their performance in prior learning activities. Tutors also work one-on-one with young students who are having difficulty learning to read. For those whose encoding and decoding troubles persist, Edison uses *The Wilson Reading System*, an Orton-Gillingham phonics-based approach. Although not part of the Edison design, BRCS used *Project Read* literacy materials for the entire Junior Academy in the 1998-99 school year in lieu of Spanish. All students in grades 6-8 received one extra period of reading each day using this program for a five-month period.

27 The mathematics curriculum is also based on a highly regarded national curriculum from the University of Chicago School Mathematics Project. Both *Everyday Mathematics* in the first two academies and *Transition Mathematics* in the Junior Academy recommend the extensive usage of manipulatives and calculators. The curriculum is project-rich with many assignments forging a home-school connection and requiring applications in the "real world." Many assignments and activities are conceived to integrate study of several disciplines across the curriculum.

28 The science curriculum chosen by Edison emphasizes investigation. All science materials from grades K-8 have been developed by the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study (BSCS), a forty-year old non-profit academic research organization. Primary and Elementary Academies use *TRACS (Teaching Relevant Activities for Concepts and Skills)*, which consists of a sequence of guided scientific inquiries in the students' world. Students keep individual journals, engage in scientific conversations, and collaborate whenever possible. In the Junior Academy curriculum they explore major concepts in the various scientific fields. Scientific principles such as the theory of plate tectonics, the particle theory of matter, and the theories of chromosome inheritance and evolution, provide students with a conceptual basis for the traditional study of science in high school. A technology component, including systems and cost-benefit analysis, is embedded in the curriculum. Middle school students who complete the *BSCS Middle School Science and Technology* program should appreciate the ambiguity and complexity of the scientific enterprise as they learn to persevere in a search for answers to their questions.

29 The Edison History and Social Science curriculum relies less on widely disseminated and respected curriculum programs. Edison has created its own *History-Social Science Curriculum* for grades K-5, and schools select World History and United States History texts and materials for the Junior Academy. Children are expected to make frequent use of classroom anthologies and libraries in the Primary and Elementary Academies. Some literary materials have been chosen in for their biographical and historical content. One elementary textbook series, Joy Hakim's *History of US*, has been adopted in the Edison design.

**TEACHING**

30 Edison's instructional design is commendable in its attempt to put high quality instructional materials into the hands of teachers who will, in turn, work with the same set of 100-125 students throughout a three-year period in an academy. However, inordinate teacher turnover has subverted that central instructional goal at BRCS. The curriculum materials Edison has identified require extensive and ongoing training, but fewer than ten teachers remain from the school's original staff. Monies invested in training to use these materials and teaching strategies have "walked out the door" with departing teachers. Similarly, the notion of retaining students in the same house in order to keep them with the same team of teachers has never been realized. No more than one-sixth of the current teaching staff has completed a three-year cycle in any one house.

31 The professional attitude and work ethic of the current faculty at BRCS is quite positive. More than 30 teachers are new, and few if any have more than a decade of public school experience, with the notable exception of some veteran special educators. Morale remains high for this inexperienced staff under new leadership, and hunger for professional development and support--especially in content areas--is readily apparent.

32 The school's current emphasis on control and behavior management finds nearly every student disposed towards instruction and the classroom teacher firmly in charge. But there is also a negative corollary to behavior management. The disciplinary strategies and techniques employed by teachers eat away at instructional time. Most teachers consume at least ten to fifteen minutes establishing classroom parameters and delivering instructions. In several classes, this process took thirty minutes or longer, half or more than half the instructional period.

33 The quality of instruction throughout the school is mixed. Although the inspectors saw some fine teachers in some classrooms, more than sixty observations during the three-day inspection suggest that many teachers rely heavily on detailed how-to manuals that come with packaged curricula. Following instructions more or less verbatim may contribute to average competence and adequate coverage of necessary material, but also supports a stilted, plodding style that is further exacerbated when the teacher is lacking in knowledge about the subject. Many teachers were teaching units and using materials that were new to them; few, therefore, were able to differentiate instruction to meet the various needs of individual students in the classroom. Too often, in all disciplines, student questions and comments were not addressed because they are not in the script provided for the lesson or because the teacher had not anticipated such a question when using the guidebooks to prepare for class.

34 The most prevalent instructional practice across every discipline and every academy is question-and-response, usually involving recall from reading or an earlier activity. This reliance on short verbal responses does not allow students to practice higher level thinking and communication skills, let alone frame their own questions and pursue lines of investigation, which are central to Edison's constructivist approach. An over-reliance on specific closed questions creates too many subdued and passive classrooms at BRCS. Particularly in math and science, the "real-world" inquiry-based promise of the design is not fulfilled, as students engage in little or no discussion of concepts and no conjecture about possible examples drawn from their own experience.

35 Most student monitoring centers on classroom behavior with inadequate academic feedback, either oral or written. Student mistakes in class are rarely, if ever, noted and corrected, and most written feedback consists of a score with no narrative or marginalia. Rubrics, either attached to assignments or publicly posted to guide student performance, are not in evidence. Students are clearly aware that the school has high expectations for them, but they are not aware of and are not referred to specific Edison academic standards and goals in each subject of the curriculum.

**RESOURCES**

36 The campus building is architecturally complex and the school has spent over $12,000,000 on its attractive, functional renovation. Ornate wall decorations from a bygone era and unusual nooks and crannies characterize many of the public spaces and classrooms. Earlier dissatisfaction with the maintenance and cleanliness of such an elaborate facility has been remedied by the service delivery system implemented by the new principal. Open space for exercise and recreation is limited within the building, but a new combination gymnasium/auditorium in the basement will alleviate the situation. The absence of a playground is an unfortunate but necessary reality for center-city school.

37 Most classrooms are bright and cheery and occasionally feature support beams, which teachers have converted to kiosks. Teachers have decorated their rooms carefully and fully, often following layout guidelines established by Edison. Student work is featured prominently in a number of classrooms. Outstanding graphic arts projects grace the elevators and the school's main foyer. The new principal's behavioral initiative is omnipresent, too, through signs and posters reminding the children of the do's and don'ts of a large, diverse school community.

38 The school is in the process of establishing a functional library in a central location, but its resources are not yet widely used by students as both they and their teachers begin a new school year. The collection is limited to approximately 1,000 volumes, is not well lighted, and abuts an active computer laboratory. A newly hired librarian has just completed a library handbook and seeks ways to increase student and faculty exposure to this facility. Classroom libraries are neither as extensive nor as current as the main library. Most classrooms have no more than one supplemental shelf or cart of books, and many of these are dated. Some science teachers have not yet received their BSCS textbooks, and several literature teachers are eagerly awaiting a long-overdue trade book shipment. Improving the organization and distribution of materials on so many different floors is an ongoing logistical problem for the school. A number of teachers supplement classroom resources by buying materials and supplies themselves.

39 The Edison design proposes computers in the "hands of every teacher" and the "home of every student." Accordingly, every Renaissance classroom was outfitted with four computers, a TV, a VCR, and a telephone when the school opened. Computers were distributed to every teacher and every student soon thereafter, as the school forged toward the Edison goal of "technology as a second language." The school installed 6 servers and additional scanners. Digital cameras, video cameras, and computer-projectors for TV and multimedia presentations are available throughout the school.

40 This abundance of hardware was unable to overcome the human factor in the early implementation phase at BRCS. Students, their families, and the faculty simply did not know how to use the equipment in the first place, let alone integrate it into instructional and evaluative practices. The school's first technology director was replaced by a second in 1997 and a third in 1999, all subject to an "immense workload" complicated by "lax monitoring controls." The technical staff has grown steadily, too, and the new director and his

associates reorganized the school's infrastructure during the summer of 1999. Many new iMacs are in evidence everywhere around the school; the first generation of laptops is being recalled; and plans have been made to phase-in a redistribution of laptops to the community--but only after required seminars have taught people how to use them. In effect, the school is restarting its technology initiative after a disappointing first four years.

## III. SCHOOL

*A healthy management tension between Edison and the trustees has always existed. The appointment of a strong, successful urban principal in the school's fourth year converted this dyad to a triad. His leadership and decision-making, especially his reorganization of administrative and support staff, puts the school on much stronger footing, even as the academic program begins to stabilize. Professional standards and more frequent and intense professional development are already in place, and the faculty applauds these initiatives. Parents and the community are equally enthusiastic. The school continues to reach out to many organizations and constituents in downtown Boston and gains increased recognition as a community asset.*

### ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

**41** BRCS began as an Edison Project partnership school—one of the first—and remains an Edison partnership school. In the winter of 1998-99, an independent consulting firm reviewed this relationship and recommended that the school's trustees continue their relationship with Edison pending charter renewal. The balance between Edison authority and school control appears to have shifted somewhat as the relationship has matured. For example, the school opened with a principal and assistant principal both chosen by Edison from the Rochester, New York, schools. (The assistant principal went on to become interim principal in the school's third year.) The curriculum and the academic design were entirely Edison's.

**42** Since then, the Board of Trustees has become more active in the oversight of academic performance at the school. As their concerns increased at the end of the school's second year, the board created an Educational Achievement Committee to monitor the academic program. The committee's specific charge is to review educational standards for the school, set annual performance goals, and monitor academic progress. Each year, it publishes an Annual Report on Student Achievement for the board. Working with Edison administrators and the school staff, this committee raises important student performance concerns and directs subsequent evaluations of progress. To facilitate this oversight, the board named a school President at the beginning of the third year of operation, a senior administrator charged with the school's external affairs and development activities. This liberated the board to pursue its governance function and the interim principal to focus on the daily operation of the school. Also during the third year, board members played an active role in the identification and recruitment of a highly successful Boston Public School principal.

**43** The appointment of the school's third principal has further increased the school's local authority. His mandate, from both Edison and the BRCS board, was to turn around a declining campus climate and poor academic performance in many areas, particularly the Junior Academy. Immediately he established clear and indelible lines of authority to the principal's office. Systematic changes followed, consistent with his previous administrative success in an urban setting , including the annual evaluation of all staff and the introduction of more support services and staff for special needs students in each house. The authority of each academy director was strengthened, and lead teachers within each house were chosen for their experience and competence. All of these short-term changes funnel into his

overarching long-range objective: the development and maintenance of a professional team dedicated to the education of Boston schoolchildren.

**44** What was described early in the school's history as a tandem leadership and management structure has now become, from the viewpoint of all stakeholders, a more complex "triangulated" one. Everyone in the school community has supported the new principal's decisiveness, even when his recommendations have required a departure from original design elements. World Languages have been dropped from the Junior Academy. Reading time has been increased. Additional teachers, tutors, and specialists have been added to the staff, and a Learning Center has been created for all students with academic needs. These changes have been expensive, approximately $250,000 in the fourth year alone, but the board and particularly Edison have willingly absorbed the "lion's share" of these costs.

**45** The balance of authority and responsibility in this new triangle—Edison, board, school administration—is still defining itself, but the direction of the transition seems clear. For example, one BRCS administrator describes Edison as a "consultant." A board member describes the relationship with Edison as "arm's length." An Edison official claims that BRCS is a "city school, while other schools see themselves as Edison schools." Another Edison official believes that Edison is "responsible and should be held accountable for the performance of the Renaissance School." This "healthy three-way tension," as one Edison employee described the situation, appears to have been valuable for both Edison and the school. For example, the Edison administrative design now includes a regional Vice President with specific responsibility for the schools in that region. The new BRCS contract with Edison includes specific academic performance objectives for the school. The principal, meanwhile, takes his stand firmly behind "the kids" in the school and urges both governing bodies, Edison and the Board of Trustees, to make joint decisions in the students' best interest.

**46** Administrative reorganization, along with the aforementioned changes, has been one hallmark of new leadership. These changes have dramatically improved the day-to-day logistics of running a large school and have put in place key people and procedures intended to monitor and improve student performance. An Assistant Principal for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, himself a veteran Boston educator, has just been appointed and has already begun an ambitious program of curriculum management and professional development. He meets regularly with three academy directors, who in turn meet with lead teachers and house teams within the respective academies. A new Director of Guidance Services has begun similar management and professional development initiatives related to the full spectrum of children's needs. A new Parent and Family Coordinator has assumed responsibility for the equally new Family Center and the activities of the Parent Advisory Council.

## FACULTY AND STAFF

47 Professional turnover has been one of the school's greatest problems, one shared by many charter schools confronting the considerable task of creating a viable program from scratch. Annual turnover has been in the 30% to 40% range, attributed to the sophistication of the Edison curriculum, the academic neediness of the student population, a longer school day, and a longer school year without equivalent compensation. Although Edison has provided all its teachers with extended summer orientation and periodic professional workshops, only a handful of educational staffers remain from the school's opening. There are 34 new teachers in the current school year and two-thirds of the faculty have been at the school less than two years.

48 The continued high rate of turnover following the principal's first year, the school's fourth, includes those teachers who were evaluated carefully for the first time and did not have their contracts renewed. Remaining staff, in the opinion of the school's administrators, meets the newly stiffened requirements of professionalism and commitment. Additionally, this principal has worked hard to hire a more diverse staff, taking full advantage of his life-long, career-long network of associates in Boston. The school began in 1995 with a faculty that was 90% Caucasian. Today, there are 37 African-Americans on an educational staff of 99, including 14 African-American males.

49 To compete with other Boston Public Schools for talented and experienced educators, BRCS has shortened its school year by approximately two weeks. The salary scale has also been revised to compare favorably with local school districts. Finally, especially at the ongoing request of the current faculty, the school has added two early dismissal days each month to provide teachers with professional workshops to address a spectrum of concerns and needs.

50 Nine additional days of professional development each year help a new and inexperienced faculty implement a rich and sophisticated curriculum in an urban school. The Assistant Principal for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment has begun to prioritize this additional training with the three academy directors. The effectiveness of reading instruction is currently under classroom observation and review. As the new technology system comes on line, teachers will be introduced to the instructional and administrative software. Finally, the Student Portfolio System is being revived as faculty members learn how to create rubrics and score student work consistently. Faculty reception of this additional training has been enthusiastic and appreciative. Much remains to challenge the faculty, but this newly coordinated and centralized support system *across all of the academies* clearly addresses the need for more stable and effective instruction.

## PARENTS AND COMMUNITY

51 BRCS has formed many important and lasting partnerships in Boston, particularly with educational organizations and corporations who support the school's mission. One indication of the school's success in this area is the first $1,000,000 gift from a single donor to a Massachusetts charter school, which will be used to build a cafeteria/auditorium/gymnasium in the basement. Prior to that extraordinary gift in the last fiscal year, the school had raised $900,000 in its first four years. Community members volunteer their time at the school in a range of para-professional services, with an average 9000 hours logged for each of the last three years.

52 The Director of Community and Business Partnerships continues to develop and expand these associations. Arts partners like *Project Discovery* bring professional dancers to the school to perform and instruct. Promising young BRCS dancers will be invited to the project's six-week camp next summer. One class of students will join the *Triple Helix Project* over a series of four or five visits to participate in piano trio composition and learn how a myth may be captured in music. The *Warburg Courage Curriculum* involves students in writing contests and provides a supplementary curriculum in language arts emphasizing noble human conduct. All of these BRCS partners report that their experience with the school is extremely positive and that students are consistently enthusiastic.

53 Communicating with parents is complicated by the sheer geography of metropolitan Boston and the diverse work schedules of many parents in a large school community. The school organized a Parent Advisory Council to help bring parental input into the life of the school in a systematic way. Each of the school's ten houses is represented within this body, and several parents serve on the Board of Trustees. A new Family Center, in response to parental requests for more involvement in the school's programs, opened in September 1999. The position of Parent and Family Coordinator was also created. Already this fall, a series of parent orientations and presentations has attracted nearly three-quarters of the school's parents. A second round of computer training, followed by a phased-in, multi year distribution of computers to families, will renew the school's capacity for more frequent two-way communication. Parental interest in the school remains high. BRCS receives 250-350 applications annually for the kindergarten alone and maintains a waiting list in excess of 1000 students.

54 The increasingly mature and effective partnership between BRCS and Edison has not shied from feedback about the new school, from its elaborate external assessment battery to annual Gordon Black opinion surveys. Both parties have made and continue to make program refinements as an outgrowth of these evaluations. Modifications in the Edison design reflect feedback from BRCS and other similar partnership schools. Changes in the BRCS program profit from similar experiences in other Edison schools. When judging themselves, Edison and BRCS have been consistently tough and critical. The Edison Annual Report rates every school in its network, and the 1999 report gives BRCS only "mixed" achievement, ranking it near the bottom of the system. This candor and willingness to collect data, however good or bad, to inform subsequent decisions is everywhere apparent at the school. Now, with administrative restructuring and increased staff, the prospect for BRCS sheds an illuminating backlight on its complicated beginning.