

The Honorable Mayor Thomas M. Menino
Remarks to the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce
December 14, 2010

Prepared for Delivery

It's great to be among Boston's business community, especially when positive economic signs are stronger here than almost anywhere in the country. Many places are struggling to recover. In Boston, we're recovering from the struggle.

Boston has nearly \$1.5 billion worth of projects under construction, creating roughly 5,000 jobs. With \$4.8 billion of development in the pipeline, we're looking ahead to an even stronger 2011.

While other cities are losing jobs, we're creating them. Over the last year, greater Boston added over 21,000 jobs, and our city is second in the country for job growth.

The diversity of our economy has proven to be a great strength once again. And today, I am pleased to share our latest piece of good news.

Mass Challenge – the world's largest start-up competition – will be at Fan Pier through 2014. This year was Mass Challenge's first year on our waterfront. The competition brought hundreds of entrepreneurs to our Innovation District. I am delighted that our waterfront will continue to be their launching pad through 2014.

But this morning I'm not going to talk about what matters *a lot*. I will talk about what matters *most*.

When I was elected mayor, the first thing I did was visit a Boston public school – the Edwards Middle School in Charlestown – a school that has since won national recognition. On that day, my first as mayor, I saw kids charged with energy.

I'll never forget the feeling I got. I am sure you get a similar feeling when you look at a group of children – the mix of hope and concern. You look at these kids and you see all this potential, but you wonder if we will do everything we can to fulfill it.

That worry, unfortunately, is well-founded.

Among 30 developed nations, America now ranks 24th in Math, 17th in Science and 10th in Literacy.

In Boston, we have a school district where things are much better because the superintendent, the school committee, teachers, parents, the business community, and I work together to drive progress.

Four-year olds are receiving a strong foundation through full day kindergarten. 4th and 8th graders are making improvements that beat the national average. 2300 high school students are taking Advanced Placement classes.

Imagine if the City's leaders had a plan to replicate these kinds of results in every classroom in the school district.

Imagine if the biggest obstacle to the plan's success was the will to do it.

This, of course, is where our city and the Boston Public Schools stand today.

We have a track record of constant improvement. We have a plan that puts us on the threshold of citywide excellence. But our progress will stall if we don't take the right actions.

The question before us is this: Will we – as a city – have the courage to stop doing things that limit student achievement so we can grow the strategies that accelerate it?

Right now, the Boston Public Schools faces a \$63 million increase in costs next year. The gap will grow to \$90 million if we don't make smart decisions.

Why is this?

Fixed costs continue to rise. For example, the BPS's health insurance costs have climbed more than 100 percent in the last 10 years. They now spend one out of every 8 dollars on health insurance.

Stimulus funds from the Recovery Act cannot be used to plug the whole gap and will soon expire. And since 2002, state aid to Boston is down by \$180 million.

Boston Public Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson and her team have developed a comprehensive and responsible plan to confront these challenges and position the BPS for continued success.

Tomorrow night, the Boston School Committee will vote on this plan.

Now, some of you might be asking yourselves why I am talking about education and not the economy.

I'll tell you why: I believe the success of our public schools is directly connected to the success of our economy. I know you understand that, too.

Last year, you helped us pass landmark education reform that's already having an impact. Today, 6,000 students are receiving a better education because of the increased innovation and flexibility in their schools,

Thank you for your efforts.

But today I am asking for your partnership again.

We know that the city that does a better job educating its students today will be the city that enjoys more growth and prosperity tomorrow. So what's at stake with our education reform efforts is the very future of Boston. All children deserve and need a quality education.

Here's our plan to do it in Boston.

In every classroom there will be a highly skilled teacher whose salary is tied in part to his performance. At every school, we will have arts, sports, extended day programs, and mentoring for students. We will make it easier for those with special needs and English Language Learners to get the services they deserve. We will cut transportation costs and ensure that our kids spend more time in classrooms and less time on buses.

To make our plan work, we have to make some hard decisions.

Currently, there are 5600 empty seats in our school district. These empty seats are costing taxpayers over \$20 million a year. In order to expand the programs that drive

student achievement, we need to close 9 school buildings and merge 8 schools into 4. There is no joy in closing schools.

You know, it's been said that I've met half of Boston's residents. But the most important part of meeting half of Boston's residents is not that they know me. It's that I know them.

So, calling for difficult changes in our schools is tough when I personally know so many students, parents, principals and teachers and their passions for our school communities.

However, I believe it's much better to invest in the arts, athletics, and mentoring programs. These are the things that help children learn. Spending money on empty seats does not.

Public education was founded in Boston, but some of our rules are clearly outdated.

We must lead a reform effort that's focused on the needs of today's students. Putting a great teacher in the classroom is the best thing we can do for our children's education.

That's why a new teacher contract must do four things.

One, give principals and headmasters the flexibility to put the best teachers where they are needed most. If there is a teacher who is qualified to teach English Language Learners, then a principal should be able to put that teacher into a classroom where there is a need for her skills. Right now, we don't have the flexibility to move teachers to where they are needed. We have to hire and train new ones. That's not right, and it has to change.

Two, the new contract must reward our best teachers for outstanding results in the classroom. We value years of teaching experience and masters degrees, but some compensation has to be linked to student performance.

Three, extend the school day. Boston has one of the shortest school days in the Commonwealth. A longer school day will allow for more instruction time for our children, provide more convenience for working parents, and keep the Boston Public Schools competitive.

Four, the new contract has to reform our teacher evaluation system. We must change this complex process so it can be carried out efficiently with the focus on student achievement. If we do so, we can attract and reward the best teachers.

I know the Boston Public Schools are filled with many great teachers. I get to meet them when I visit their schools.

A teacher in one of our classrooms is as important to Boston's economy as a researcher in the Longwood Medical Area, a venture capitalist at one of our financial service firms, or a small business owner in one of our neighborhoods. But we need the tools to remove ineffective teachers and reward our best ones.

At the same time, we have to reform outdated management policies and practices because they also have an impact on student performance.

Finally, I want to make a point on school transportation costs. The Boston Public Schools spends more than \$300,000 thousand per day on transportation. These costs are crowding out investments in other important areas. For every dollar the BPS spends on transportation, they spend just one nickel on school supplies.

More importantly, our students spend too much time on buses, taking away valuable minutes in the classroom.

We must put our resources into books, not buildings; quality teachers and training, not buses and diesel fuel.

As we move forward, Superintendent Johnson will work with the community to develop a new student assignment zone plan that preserves choices for parents and cuts costs for taxpayers.

We all need to understand that our ability to reduce transportation costs is directly linked to our success in eliminating empty seats and gaining reforms in the teacher contract. These actions will increase the number of quality schools for parents to choose from, which is essential to really making a difference on transportation costs.

I am under no illusion that implementing our education reform plan is going to be easy. But nobody should be under any illusion that it's not necessary.

The BPS has a 61 percent graduation rate. That's one of the highest in urban America. But the city of Boston – the founder of public education and the capital of higher education – cannot accept the fact that more than a third of our kids don't graduate.

Let me finish up by saying this. There is a myth out there that says public education can't work in cities. Don't believe that – not for a second.

I've watched 8th graders at the Rogers Middle School in Hyde Park tackle rigorous math equations.

At the Orchard Gardens School, one of our turnaround schools, students came up to Superintendent Johnson saying their school is literally a different place thanks to the steps taken by Principal Andrew Bott and his team.

At the Quincy Upper School in Chinatown, I checked out their International Baccalaureate programming, a designation that is rare and commands respect across the globe.

I was dazzled by arts performances at the Boston Arts Academy in the Fenway and wowed by the Kenny School marching band in Dorchester.

Public education is working in many of our city's schools. Now, we need to make it work in *all* of our schools.

In 1996, I came before the Chamber, like today, and spoke about just one topic: public education.

At that time, I explained why Boston needed to keep its appointed school committee. We fought hard to maintain an appointed school committee because we knew they could focus solely on what's best for the children of Boston and set everything else aside.

We knew they would understand that the right decisions aren't always the most popular decisions.

We knew they would face important moments like tomorrow night when they will vote on Superintendent Johnson's reform plan.

Most of us can look back to when we were children and be grateful for the education the adults in our lives provided us. Let's ensure that years from now today's children can look back at us and deliver the same judgment.

I wish you and your families a happy and healthy holiday season.

Thank you.