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Step UP leverages the combined resources of the Boston Public Schools and its five university partners to expand opportunities for BPS students. Learn more about Step UP through this bi-monthly newsletter.



Step UPdate

Update from Karen Daniels

Goals:

- **Goal 1-** Increase the capacity of the Step UP principals and school faculty to use data to inform meaningful instruction
- **Goal 2-** Support the Step UP schools' efforts to improve student performance in literacy and math
- **Goal 3-** Support Step UP schools to better address the non-academic barriers to student success and achievement
- **Goal 4-** Strengthen the leadership and collaboration, and organizational capacity of all Step UP stakeholders to effectively implement the initiative

Inside this issue:

Update from Karen Daniels	1
NU's summer programs engage Step Up students	2
On Camera: Using Video To Improve Teaching	2
Curley Professional Development at NU	3
A New Principal at Winthrop Elementary	4
BU Hosts Professional Development Day for English High Students	4
Harvard program helps Boston schools to launch new year	5
TIPS from HASI for Homework Help	5
Tufts Professor receives grant for Early Algebra Work	6
Reading & Writing + Fun at the RWC	7

I am happy to welcome you back to our fifth StepUP year! The literature tells us that it takes anywhere from three to five years to see significant changes in a school and I'm sure you will all agree that the Step UP schools we started with are not the schools of today. Our work with leadership, literacy and parent outreach has become the hallmark of our initiative and we are ever so proud of the relationships the university partners and the schools have built. This year, for the first time, Our Smart Smiles dental program is in all ten Step UP schools! I want to thank everyone who has contributed to the Step UP family. Your faithfulness and hard work have helped us to flourish.

This first issue of the Step UPDATE is all about getting started. The summer, work with teachers and students set the stage for a focus on teaching and learning. I also want to welcome Laurie Carr, the new principal at the Winthrop to the Step UP family and share my enthusiasm that we have already begun our work with our new school, the Hennigan, and Maria Cordon. These are exciting times for both schools. With strong leadership and our support, there is no doubt we will see growth.



Chittick 5th graders visited the Center for Engineering Education and Outreach (CEEEO) at Tufts University where they were asked to design lego robots they thought would push the most candy out of a square.



Two Chittick 5th graders work on their robot. The field trip to the CEEEO last spring also included lunch and a tour led by Tufts student tour guides

Speaking of growth, my hat is off to Maude Wright and her staff for their amazing work in bringing the E. Greenwood from despair to one of the top turnaround schools in the state recognized by Governor Patrick. They made AYP in the aggregate in both ELA and math and saw increased CPI scores at every grade level. The same kudos goes to Andrew Bott and his staff at Orchard Gardens who also made substantive gains in ELA and math. They too made the governor's list. Our hats are also off to Jeffrey Slater and his 8th grade teachers at the Curley K-8 for improving math CPI at that level by a 7.7 increase. Can we attribute our work within Step Up directly to the increases? Not really, but I'd like to think that we played a role in this through our leadership support and our work with teachers and parents.

We work within amazing schools and enjoy a strong commitment from Boston University, Boston College, Tufts, Harvard and Northeastern to seeing our Step UP family of schools succeed. Enjoy this first issue and stay tuned for more exciting news as we strive to improve.

Sincerely,

Karen Daniels, Executive Director, Step UP

Northeastern University's summer programs engage Step Up students

Hayden Codiga spent two weeks this summer water testing the Charles River, building wind turbines and eating lunch with an astronaut. Codiga, a sixth-grader at the Curley, was one of several Step UP students participating in Northeastern University's summer programs, the result of the Center for STEM Education at Northeastern actively promoting free programs to engage even more students from Step UP schools in our summer opportunities.



Hayden Codiga (center), a sixth-grader at the Curley K-8, counts the number of "spacesuit" layers a micrometeoroid has punctured during a material design activity at Northeastern's summer science camp.

Codiga was an energetic participant in Northeastern's Exxon Mobil Bernard Harris Summer Science camp, a two-week overnight camp for middle school students. He had the chance to explore STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) subjects through hands-on activities and field excursions, and stayed in a dorm with other students from the Boston area. Codiga even met former astronaut Dr. Bernard Harris, the first African American to walk in space and the camp's founder.

Hayden's mom, Katie Faulkner said, "Hayden had a wonderful time this summer - he has said many times that your camp was the high point of his vacation, and he continues to talk about the experience."

"The greatest gift you give (at camp) is self-confidence. As is sometimes the case with math/science-minded kids, they are perceived as nerds by their peers. The STEM camp made him feel part of a big group of campers, all of whom shared a passion for

science," said Faulkner. "He felt completely free to be himself, doing what he loves best."

Six Curley students attended MathPOWER's Algebra Plus Summer Academy, run at Northeastern's campus to give participants the skills and confidence to succeed in math, acquire a love of learning, and prepare for their future educational aspirations.

On Camera: Using Video To Improve Teaching

Professional athletes have been watching themselves on video for decades in an effort to improve their performances. Why not teachers?

With a new \$150,000 Collaborative Fellows grant from the Lynch School of Education, Boston College Assistant Professor of Education Patrick Proctor and Boston University School of Education Professor Jeanne Paratore and 12 teachers from the Russell and E. Greenwood elementary schools will use video recordings of classroom lessons and online video-sharing tools to examine the impact of professional development.

Proctor and Paratore have worked with StepUP schools for the past two years, assisting principals and teachers in a project focused on improving literacy instruction. With new funding from the BC grant, Proctor and Paratore are adding video recordings to the program, which focuses on literacy instruction.

Six teachers from each school will videotape themselves as they teach students, then post the video to an online social network designed by

Boston College Information Technology Systems that will allow members to review videos.

For Proctor, reviewing videotape will give him a chance to measure the effectiveness of professional development for teachers through the work of teachers themselves and, ultimately, the performance of their students.

"Research shows that even in the long term, large-scale professional development initiatives don't have a huge effect," said Proctor. "What the video and the website will allow us to do is see if we can build a deeper level that allows teachers and principals to reflect on the practice of teaching."

Next year, the project will begin measuring the impact of the teacher training and self-critique on student performance. "That is the gold standard by which professional development must be judged - student performance," said Proctor.

Curley Professional Development at NU leads to strategic plans



Principal Jeff Slater engages with Curley teachers and staff during two days of professional development at Northeastern University.

In late August, nearly 100 teachers and staff from the Curley K-8 School gathered on Northeastern's campus for two days of professional development to discuss, reflect, and plan for the upcoming school year.

Step UP leadership coach Paula Finklestein spent both days with the Curley staff, and led a session summarizing and explaining the school's MCAS scores and comparing the Curley's progress to schools across the district and state.



Curley teachers and staff discuss strategies for the upcoming school year on the Centennial Quad at Northeastern University.

"We talked about performance strengths, challenges, gains and data trends. We did a root cause analysis of the MCAS data to use for short term strategic planning focused on increasing student achievement," said Finklestein. "I did a lot of student performance analysis with the entire group, then had them analyze the data, compare subgroups, find trends, and look at achievement gaps and growth."

Teachers are currently using the data shared at the summer professional development to develop action plans for their classrooms, finding areas where students need improvement and planning lessons and

strategies accordingly. Finklestein attends grade level team meetings where she is able to check on action plan progress and provide ongoing support and feedback.

The MCAS data is used to help improve student achievement and to make adequate yearly progress, and Finklestein has been at the forefront of that push. "In addition to working with the teachers, I've been attending instructional leadership team meetings and debriefing with the principal and assistant principal. We're all working together as a community of learners to identify goals and address them for this school year."



Curley teachers and staff gather at Northeastern University for two days of professional development.

A New Principal at Winthrop Elementary

The Winthrop Elementary School has a new principal, veteran Boston Public Schools principal Laurie Carr.

Carr, who has spent more than 20 years in education, was the principal of the Philbrick Elementary School in Roslindale for the past five years. She replaced Walter Henderson, who was named principal of the PJ Kennedy Elementary School in East Boston.

"I'm passionate about education in general and urban education in particular," says Carr.

While Carr began her career as a Teach for America teacher in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, it was her work at a private school in Switzerland that focused her career path on helping students and schools succeed in urban neighborhoods.

"Academics are the primary piece," says Carr. "But there are important opportunities all students should have to make them confident public speakers, help them announce their names with pride. These are part of the 'social capital' some children might not get that we can give them in school, along with an educational program focused on academic achievement."

One of the first projects Carr undertook was to create a new website for the school at www.johnwinthropschool.com in order to deliver clear information to parents and expand relationships to help the school achieve its goals.

One initiative Carr brought with her from the Philbrick is a t-shirt campaign designed to help teach students about the importance of receiving a college education. Carr is asking colleges and universities to send school t-shirts in children's sizes to be worn by Winthrop students.

"Talking about colleges and universities and talking about what's possible for our students in ways that are age-appropriate help students, even at the kindergarten level, develop and understanding of what college is and what it means to go to college," she says.



BU Hosts Professional Development Day for English High

From August 29 - September 1, faculty and staff from English High School (EHS), City Year Corps members and BU faculty members convened at the City Year headquarters in the South End to engage in four days of professional development activities.

These activities, conducted in preparation for the new academic year, provided Boston University School of Education (SED) faculty member, Julie Coppola, and EHS English Language Learners



Department Head, Bud Lariely, the opportunity to present an overview of their ongoing work with English as Second Language (ESL) teachers. The goal of the workshop was to significantly

improve literacy assessment and instruction in the ESL and Sheltered-

Immersion (SEI) Content classrooms.

Over the course of the program, Dr. Coppola, who directs the Language Education Programs at SED, shared with all content-area teachers instructional strategies they may use in their classrooms to promote their English learning students' academic language skills.

"This is an exciting time to be at English High," said Dr. Coppola. "I appreciated the opportunity to collaborate with a group of teachers and administrators who wished to deepen their knowledge about how to best meet their students' academic language and literacy learning needs."

In addition to improving ongoing ESL literacy assessment and instruction practices, Dr. Coppola and the ESL staff plan to establish model ESL classrooms in order to provide their colleagues with opportunities to observe best practices in action.

Harvard program helps Boston schools to launch new year

Parents are parents. Of course they want to help their children to learn, but some parents may not have the tools or tips on hand to offer good homework help at home.

Enter Harvard and the Boston Public Schools, which have partnered again this fall to lend a hand.



As Boston Public School principals, teachers, and parents launched a new year at back-to-school nights in September, the Harvard Achievement Support Initiative

(HASI) helped by providing 11 local schools with 3,000 bags filled with homework enrichment materials. HASI is a university program that aids teaching and learning in the Boston schools, including those in the Step Up partnership, through training, professional development, and research-based learning resources and strategies.

The HASI SmartTALK bags contain everything from crayons, markers, and magnetic alphabet letters for youngsters to play clocks, rulers, dictionaries, and calculators for older children, along with bilingual directions. The tools can help children to learn their letters, count, write, and do math. The tools are also a catalyst for parents and children to explore learning together.

This theory was demonstrated at the back-to-school nights, during which classroom teachers introduced the materials and parents heard firsthand how they could help support learning at home.

For principal Maria Cordon, who had used the materials in the Agassiz School for four years, the SmartTALK bags and a Harvard-sponsored dinner helped her launch the learning season at the freshly painted Hennigan School in Jamaica Plain.

“It was the right thing at the right time,” said Cordon, who welcomed hundreds of students and their families to the school on Sept. 28. “It really launched our new season together, and we all said to ourselves: ‘We’re here. We’re a community. Our children are going to be successful, and we’re going to do this together.’”

To read the full article go to: <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2011/10/hasi-lends-a-hand/>

TIPS from HASI for Homework Help

Pick a homework station together: Look for good lighting and a desk or table and chair. Put only those things your child needs to do homework there.

Supplies and organize: Homework space should have paper, pencils, a ruler, a dictionary, a calculator and other grade specific materials. Cover recycled shoeboxes, tin cans or cereal boxes in colorful paper together. It’s a fun activity and they can help your child organize pencils, papers and homework supplies.

Hang a calendar: Mark down important dates for school and daily life, as well as any longer term assignments that are due and hang it in your work space. Marking dates together helps your child learn to organize time and to plan ahead.

Quiet or sound: Talk to your child about the right amount of ‘quiet’ they need to do homework efficiently. Some children need complete silence while others work better with a little background noise, but T.V. and texting should be off limits.

Fill the tank: Your child may need to refuel before starting homework. Provide a light snack like milk and apple slices, juice and cheese or other healthy favorites so their focus is sharp.

Help, don’t ‘over help’: Give your child support but be careful not to ‘over-help.’ Often, the best way to help is to ask good questions that help your child move past roadblocks as they work. Questions like, “What do you already know in this problem?” and, “What do you need to find out?” are valuable starters. When you ask your child a question, be sure to give “Think Time” ...at least five seconds before providing additional clues or support.

Teacher talk: Communicate regularly with your child’s teacher to ensure understanding about the homework policy and expectations for home support.



Tufts Professor Receives \$418,000 grant for Early Algebra Work at Marshall School

Most children don't see the word "algebra" on their class schedules until middle school. Dr. Bárbara Brizuela thinks that's too late.

Brizuela, Ed.D., chair of the Department of Education at Tufts University, has spent her career studying ways to incorporate basic algebraic principles into the traditional elementary school math curriculum, which focuses almost solely on arithmetic.

"The approach known as Early Algebra is based on the idea that students will gain a deeper understanding of mathematics if they are exposed to contextualized problems and multiple representations such as line segments, function tables, and algebraic symbols at a young age," Brizuela says. "Although these concepts may seem too complex for younger students, our research suggests older elementary school students are able to grasp basic algebraic principles. In fact, when we gave questions from the 8th grade MCAS to Boston 5th graders who had been exposed to an Early Algebra experience in grades 3, 4, and 5, they usually outperformed the older students who took the test."

The majority of students who have participated in Brizuela's research are from minority and first generation immigrant families in the Boston area. Starting this fall, Brizuela will expand her scope to include grades K-2 at the Marshall Elementary School. The work is funded by a \$418,000 grant she received from the National Science Foundation (NSF).

"We are particularly interested in finding out how K-2 students understand concepts associated with algebraic functions," says Brizuela. "Although there is a body of research on Early Algebra, most of it focuses on students in grades 3 through 5. Our work at the Marshall is unique in that it involves the youngest elementary school students."



Brizuela and a Tufts graduate student will spend two years

working on the project. For a period, they will be present in Marshall's K-2 classrooms working with the teachers and students on Early Algebra teaching experiments and conducting one-on-one interviews with students.



Marshall teachers work on an algebraic problem during a professional development workshop led by Dr. Bárbara Brizuela, chair of Tufts University's Department of Education

"We are so excited to be part of Dr. Brizuela's work, which will enhance the mathematics education of our K-2 students and deepen their teachers' knowledge of the subject," says Principal Teresa Harvey-Jackson.

Harvey-Jackson shares Brizuela's belief that algebra has a place at all levels of the elementary school math curriculum. Last year, she drafted Brizuela to teach three professional development sessions to her entire faculty.

At one of the sessions, Brizuela stands next to an overhead projector challenging a cafeteria full of teachers to answer to the problem on the screen, which involves a boy named Raymond whose grandmother offers to double the money she gave him or triple it and subtract seven dollars. The teachers have to decide which option will make Raymond more money.

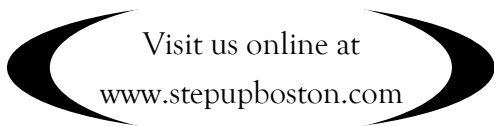
Brizuela suggests the teachers use different representations to arrive at the answer, such as functional notation, tables, or graphs. They determine Raymond is better off taking the first deal if he has less than seven dollars, taking the second deal if he has more than seven dollars, and that at seven dollars both deals are equivalent.

In another session, Brizuela shares videos of teachers and students putting their Early Algebra lessons to use in the classroom.

It all clicks with Anne Gillespie, a lab cluster teacher at the Marshall. "It makes us more comfortable teaching," Gillespie says after she successfully works her way through one of Brizuela's word problems. "This, the videos are awesome."



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An unprecedented collaboration among five private universities, the City of Boston, and the Boston Public Schools...

University Partners:

Boston College
Boston University
Harvard University
Northeastern University
Tufts University

School Partners:

Curley K-8 School
Elihu Greenwood Elementary School
English High School
James J. Chittick Elementary School
John Marshall Elementary School
John Winthrop Elementary School
Louis Agassiz Elementary School
Orchard Gardens K-8 School
William E. Russell Elementary School
William Monroe Trotter Elementary School

Reading & Writing + Fun at the RWC

Over the summer, students from the William Monroe Trotter in Dorchester and the Elihu Greenwood Leadership Academy in Hyde Park worked on improving their reading and writing skills at Boston University's Donald D. Durrell Reading and Writing Clinic (RWC). The RWC helps students improve their reading and writing skills through activities focused on the six domains of literacy: motivation & engagement, word study, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and writing. Students attended a three-week session, three hours a day, four days per week.

One first-grade student from the Trotter and three third-grade students from the Greenwood attended the RWC through a special scholarship program offered by the RWC. The students participated in a number of reading and writing activities designed to highlight their individual interests while also supporting literacy learning. For example, one BPS student investigated the world of bats through reading, research, and writing activities that culminated in a poster presentation to other learners and their teachers. Another student chose his favorite basketball players as subjects for his research, creating a report that identified personal qualities, like perseverance, that help these athletes and other successful people achieve their goals.

"The combination of intensive instruction that addresses all aspects of literacy learning including word study, vocabulary, fluency,

comprehension, and composition, with engaging texts and tasks led to notable student progress over the course of the summer," said Evelyn Ford-Connors, the associate director at the RWC. "Students work hard, but they grow as literacy learners in a process that is deeply satisfying to both students and their teachers."

In addition to investigating individual topics of interest, the students worked together to present weekly performances of scripts and poetry at "Readers' Theater," a favorite activity at the clinic, according to Ford-Connors. The mix of activity and instruction excited students and motivated them to read and write. Ford-Connors recalls one student from the Greenwood at the beginning of the clinic, hated reading and writing. By the end of the clinic, his mother told Ford-Connors, "I don't know what you are doing, but he wants to come every day and he wants to read and write."



RWC students performing at Readers' Theater