



**A Case Study of Brighton High School  
Boston, Massachusetts**

## **On the Cutting Edge of District Reform**

**By Lili Allen**

*In a high school library, teachers and administrators sit around a long table. Half-empty coffee cups and stacks of papers litter the surface. The final bell has just rung, and the group is getting down to business. It is Monday afternoon, and Brighton High School's Change Team—teachers and administrators who volunteer to lead the school's reform efforts—is using its weekly meeting to hammer out plans for new career pathways in the coming year.*

*"I like the proposal you've put on the table, Charlie," says one teacher. "But three periods a week of common planning time! If we're not careful, everyone will see it as a waste of time."*

*"That's why I like the idea of looking at student work during one meeting," says another teacher. "But we'll have to figure out how to encourage people to bring stuff in—remember how hesitant everyone was during the training?"*

*"That will be part of the job of the pathway facilitators," argues the assistant headmaster. He laughs. "We're going to have to crack the whip." More seriously, he goes on, "If we can make it comfortable for people to share the work their students have done, they'll do it. The Annenberg coaches could help, too. Maybe we should plan for them to help facilitate some of those meetings."*

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This seemingly mundane conversation signals a remarkable change at Brighton High School, one of sixteen comprehensive public high schools in Boston, Massachusetts. The faculty gathered around this table are determining how to structure time—arguably the most critical and contested resource in a school—so that teachers can focus on critical issues of student learning. It is too early, in this story's time frame (1998–99), to claim equally dramatic school-wide changes in student outcomes resulting from restructuring—but the school has laid the critical foundation by changing how teachers conduct their professional work.

Brighton High School is a large, Gothic structure that sits on a hill in a working-class neighborhood. In demographic terms, it's what one staff member calls a "typical urban school." The approximately 1,000 students reflect the diversity of Boston, with its large immigrant population. Under Boston's controlled-choice plan, students can apply to any high school in the city, with acceptance contingent on racial balance. The large number of students who leave their homes in far reaches of the city at 5:30 a.m. to arrive at Brighton High by 7:15 is testimony to the school's good reputation.

Walking into Brighton High School, a visitor is struck by how quiet the hallways are during class periods; even when classes change, students noisily pass up and down the stairs with little of the shoving or other annoyances that a newcomer to urban schools might expect. There is a sense of calm and respect among teachers, students, and administrators—a tone set by former headmaster Juliette Johnson, a no-nonsense administrator who speaks in soft, measured tones. Her recent replacement, Charles Skidmore, had been Johnson's highly respected and well-liked assistant headmaster.

Brighton High School is in the midst of a set of changes that have their roots in community and district policies initiated decades ago but that are also, in many ways, on the cutting edge of reform. In 1998–99, after years of steady growth of its school-to-career initiatives, all of Brighton High reorganized around school-to-career principles by moving to school-wide career pathways. The story of the school's progression to this moment resides not only inside the school walls but also in the school district and in the community institutions that surround and support the school.

The Brighton story is one of a forward-thinking school that has both capitalized on and helped shape community and district practices. Throughout the 1990s, Brighton took advantage of opportunities offered by the district and community partners to structure new kinds of learning opportunities for students—and it also played a leadership role in ensuring that the district did its part to make these changes workable. Brighton has been both "learning lab" and leader in Boston's citywide high school reform effort. In the long run, we can look to Brighton High School to help us understand a pressing question facing high school reformers: If a school moves from one or two successful career pathways to a whole school model, will student achievement rise across the school? Can small, successful programs be harvested for school-wide successes?

In 1998–99, the focus year of this story, Brighton High faced difficult decisions about how far and how fast to change. Because of groundwork laid over the previous decade, as well as more recent decisions, the change process was less wrenching and disruptive than it might have been. At the same time, the school faced significant challenges on several fronts. The roles of teachers and administrators were changing, in some cases dramatically and in ways that required new collaborative relationships among staff. New pathway structures cut across the traditional organization of faculty into academic departments. At the same time, new state-level assessments required broad content-area coverage. Teachers and administrators alike felt the tension

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between subject matter affiliation and the need, especially for newly formed pathways, to create their own strong curricular and programmatic identities. Finally, while Brighton’s incremental approach of rolling out structural changes over time was designed to make faculty feel comfortable with the changes, the school risked exhausting even the most ardent supporters with ever-new school configurations. This case study explores some of the ways in which Brighton High School’s approach to change mitigated some of these tensions and identifies some of the challenges that remained by the end of the school year.

## **A Decade of Momentum**

Whole school change at Brighton High School is grounded in reforms initiated decades ago. In 1982, business leaders, higher education institutions, and the Boston Public Schools created the Boston Compact, an historic community agreement to improve the educational outcomes of students. Revised several times since then, the Compact has formed the backbone of a community-wide commitment to improve and expand learning opportunities for young people in Boston. Implementation of the Boston Compact has rested with the Private Industry Council (PIC), which, in Boston, has become a forward-thinking employer association engaged in youth and adult education and workforce development.

Initially, the agreement held the business community accountable for providing employment for high school students, while the school system was responsible for improving students’ test scores, attendance, and dropout rates. It was the 1994 Compact (Compact III) that moved employers beyond support and advocacy to more intimate involvement in the educational process. In this Compact, employers pledged to promote a school-to-career system that would extend the classroom to worksites and to implement structured worksite learning experiences that would complement academic work in school. The PIC furthered this vision with staffing: by placing school-to-career coordinators in four of the city’s high schools—including Brighton—that were identified as having the most interest and capacity to move forward on creating and deepening career pathways and increasing the use of project-based learning in the classroom.

The following year, the Boston Public Schools (BPS) signaled its support of school-to-career by assuming the salaries of the school-based coordinators in the district budget. The school system also developed a new high-level leadership position—STC Director—to oversee the coordinators and to advocate and organize the adoption of school-to-career structures and pedagogies throughout the city’s schools.

Brighton was one of the first high schools to take advantage of community and district support for school-to-career, and by the time the school received funding for its STC coordinator, it already had a strong school-to-career program. In 1990, in collaboration with nearby St. Elizabeth’s Hospital, Brighton High had created the Medical Industries Collaborative, one of the first “career pathways” in the system. The collaborative clustered students in two science and career-related courses, and they participated in internships next door at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital. These students also had been among the first to participate in ProTech, launched in 1991 by the Private Industry Council, and PIC staff—“career specialists”—supported them with internships that featured work-based learning plans. As the PIC’s flagship, multi-year youth apprenticeship program, ProTech quickly became the “Cadillac” model of work-based learning, inspiring many other pathways across the system and, indeed, the direction of Compact III.

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Throughout the decade of district-wide scale-up of school-to-career, a key BPS strategy has been to designate a small number of schools as pilot, or flagship, schools, as a means to target resources effectively and learn what building a school-to-career system involves. Brighton High School has consistently been among the front-runners in this process. In 1996–97, as a designated Flagship School, Brighton High School launched the School of Business Services pathway to accompany its medical sciences pathway, and in 1997–98, it was one of only two schools to launch a pathway to introduce young people to careers in education. Throughout these years, with assistance from Jobs for the Future and other outside collaborators, teachers began experimenting with project-based and inquiry-based approaches to instruction, teachers and administrators worked on developing their leadership skills, and the coordination of efforts among internal and external partners was underway.

Specifically, both pathway and non-pathway teachers have attended intensive workshops on project-based teaching techniques, followed by on-site, classroom-based coaching and technical assistance on implementing projects in their classes. Teachers have learned to probe for understanding, using what Boston calls a “key questions” strategy, and they have also learned to develop exemplary student projects that illustrate how students could meet new learning standards for core subject areas through a school-to-career approach. These teachers, organized and supported by the STC coordinator and external coaches, have showcased their students’ work in schoolwide exhibitions. This, in turn, has helped to spawn interest in these pedagogies among more traditional teachers.

## **Peanuts in Outer Space**

How will humans produce their own food in outer space? This question poses a real dilemma for NASA scientists; it is also a challenge that eleventh-grade chemistry students confronted in one of the Brighton High School’s early forays into project-based learning.

Under the direction of teacher Russ Cook, students entered into a collaboration with Tuskegee University, a predominantly black school in Alabama, to explore ways to grow nitrogen-fixing crops, such as peanuts and sweet potatoes, hydroponically—that is, in a water-based medium.

Students were involved in preparing the hydroponic solution, germinating the plants, setting up computer programs to analyze data, maintaining electronic and other communication with Tuskegee, and developing systems to ensure the project’s smooth running. In addition to providing a powerful vehicle for students to learn a wide range of academic and “soft” skills, the connection with Tuskegee provided students with real adult role models in the scientific community.

What did students think about the project? They talked about it with genuine enthusiasm. “It’s better because it’s hand-on,” one student explained. “You’re learning, not regurgitating. We’re becoming more analytical, learning leadership, teamwork, integrating different subjects, like algebra, biology, English, physics.”

While Brighton teachers experimented with new pedagogies, the Boston Office of School-to-Career partnered with the Private Industry Council and Jobs for the Future to collect and disseminate data on the performance and engagement of students in career pathways. School-to-career coordinators used this data, which showed positive effects for involvement in school-to-career programs, to build support for pathways

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within the lead schools. Jean LaTerz, Brighton’s school-to-career coordinator, was one of the first to take advantage of this data, both to target appropriate services to struggling career pathway students and to share positive outcome data with non-career-pathway staff at the school. She held weekly “teacher coffees” where she would accompany the bagels and coffee with displays of school-to-career students’ work, statistics on college acceptance rates and other outcomes, or demonstrations of students’ skills, such as blood pressure checks by students in the health pathway.

In the most recent citywide effort to reform Boston’s high schools—given direction by a High School Restructuring Task Force—Brighton once again stepped up to the plate to become one of the lead high schools. Launched in the fall of 1997, the Task Force, a collaboration between the Boston Public Schools and the Boston Teachers Union, developed recommendations and guidelines for significantly restructuring the city’s high schools. The Task Force was the product of an unprecedented agreement to embark in tandem on significant high school reform embedded in new teacher contract language, and it consisted of members jointly appointed by Superintendent of Schools Thomas Payzant and the union’s president, Edward Doherty. The membership drew upon many sectors of the community—teachers, parents, administrators, and community-based organizations—and was supported by a small “Resource Group” of educators that prepared materials and agendas for Task Force meetings. The Task Force included several members who had been closely involved in piloting school-to-career structures and pedagogies in Boston high schools, including high school teachers, Neil Sullivan of the Boston Private Industry Council, Bill Spring of both the Boston School Committee and the Federal Reserve Bank, and Kathi Mullin of the Office of School-to-Career.

As one of only two headmasters on the Task Force, Juliette Johnson articulated Brighton High’s experience with school-to-career initiatives and strongly influenced the Task Force’s conclusions and recommendations for action. In addition to championing the success of pathways, Johnson used this forum to raise district-level issues that affect a school’s ability to institute changes. For example, she successfully advocated for transfer policies that would abate the non-stop flow of incoming and exiting students throughout the school year, and she encouraged the district to address the disciplinary problems that can arise when students transfer in from court-mandated settings.

The Task Force report, released in the spring of 1998, outlined a far-reaching set of criteria for reforming high schools that clearly reflected Boston’s unique community partnership codified in the Boston Compact. Beginning in 1998, the school district charged all Boston high schools with engaging all school constituents in a significant restructuring process that encompasses ten “key practices” (*see box next page*).

While every Boston public high school would engage in comprehensive restructuring, the Task Force report offered two timelines for reform. In addition to a deadline for all schools, schools could apply for fast-track, “Option One” designation by writing a proposal detailing their reform plan and specifying which significant aspects of the reform agenda they would implement in the fall of 1998. Because of the groundwork laid over the previous decade in developing school-to-career as a model for restructuring, and the unusual and well-constructed alignment between BPS and the PIC, all five schools selected for Option One status proposed some variant of the school-to-career model. Like Brighton High School, most opted to cluster students into career pathways; others would combine career pathways with offering school-to-career courses as senior year electives.

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## Practices for High School Restructuring in Boston

- 1. Benchmarking Curriculum to High Standards:** Schools must align curriculum with citywide standards and eliminate low-level courses, and all students are expected to meet the same high standards regardless of the small learning communities they select.
- 2. Ensuring Effective Instructional Practice:** Teaching practices must focus across disciplines on literacy, applied and inquiry-based learning, and the use of problem-solving strategies.
- 3. Implementing Multiple and Ongoing Assessments:** Students should be assessed through a range of measures such as collaborative assessment, portfolios, exhibitions, and competency-based graduation, and these assessments should be used to give immediate and useful feedback to teachers.
- 4. Creating Small Learning Communities:** The large, impersonal high school must divide into smaller learning units, with a group of teachers responsible for a specific group of students. Options include school-within-a-school models, academies organized around a particular theme, career pathways, or multi-grade or single-grade clusters
- 5. Flexible Use of Time:** Alternative schedules, such as block scheduling or extended-day, make it possible for teachers to participate in common planning time and students to participate in inquiry-based instruction and student advisories.
- 6. Reduced Student-Teacher Ratio:** This can be achieved through alternative scheduling, course integration, reallocation of resources, inclusion of special populations, and engagement of all professional staff in teaching.
- 7. Extending the Classroom to the Workplace and the Community:** In collaboration with business and community partners, high schools should structure outside learning experiences, such as work-based internships, community service learning, and field-based projects connected to academic instruction.
- 8. Creating a Personalized and Respectful Learning Environment:** Schools should have clear codes of safety and discipline and should be organized to provide support services, such as advisories, mentoring, and health and social services, to ensure that all students can achieve high standards.
- 9. Developing and Sustaining a Collaborative Professional Culture:** Teachers must have opportunities for professional growth through ongoing coaching, developing curriculum, participating in study groups, and team-teaching.
- 10. Building Partnerships: Family, Community, Business, Higher Education:** Schools must develop strong partnerships with all sectors of the community to support student learning. Parents may be engaged in supporting learning at home or in school decision-making, business may be engaged through financial and technical assistance or mentoring, and higher education may be engaged through changes in college admissions, tutorial and mentoring support, and collaboration on curriculum.

*From the Boston Public Schools/Boston Teachers Union  
High School Restructuring Task Force, June 8, 1998*

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## Debating Full-Scale Pathways

Brighton High's primary administrative vehicle for moving toward full-scale pathways was its Change Team. Consisting of about 15 administrators and teachers from throughout the school, its task was to advise the headmaster. Created in 1996, this group had been organized by a "school coach" that Brighton obtained through a grant administered by the Center for Collaborative Education (a Coalition of Essential Schools regional center). The Change Team's legitimacy in the school is enhanced because it is voluntary (its members meet "religiously" every Monday afternoon, without pay) and is open to all faculty.

Over the last several years, members of the Change Team have, individually and collectively, spearheaded and facilitated formal and informal conversations on restructuring issues, through venues such as department meetings, pathway common planning time, parent meetings, and a school-wide "Information Fair." And when the time came to prepare an Option One restructuring plan, the existence of the Change Team placed Brighton in a unique position. The headmaster turned to the team to develop the plan, present it to the faculty, and gain faculty support for the school-to-career model.

During this time, the inclusion of a broad cross-section of the school was critical in the conversations about school change. "There were lots of opportunities for people to be involved," according to one teacher. "By the time we voted, it wasn't the administration presenting a fully developed package to a faculty that had never heard of it, but the Change Team presenting to school staff who had debated these ideas over the course of the year." After partnering with the Private Industry Council to investigate areas of economic growth in the Greater Boston, the Change Team proposed the creation of two additional pathways (Law and Government; Media Arts and Communication) to accompany the existing three (Health Careers, TeachBoston, and Business/Technology).

The restructuring plan called for each of Brighton's five pathways to be a semi-autonomous small learning community. Entering ninth graders would select one pathway and then be clustered with other students in that pathway for all of their major courses (math, science, English, and social studies), along with a pathway-specific career-related course. Students would mix with other students across the school for other courses, such as physical education and foreign languages.

The school made a philosophical commitment to offering students as much choice as possible. "If a student participates in a different pathway every year, and opens herself up to all those exciting and different learning opportunities, I consider that a success," says Johnson. This opened the school to future hard decisions about whether to turn students away from oversubscribed pathways or to curtail the selection process, maintain stable staffing levels, and create a feasible master schedule.

Each faculty member also had to make a choice. After the spring 1998 vote to divide the entire school into pathways, each faculty member indicated a pathway preference. Based on these requests, teachers were assigned to one pathway as their primary home. An administrator was assigned to each pathway as the pathway facilitator. The facilitators spent the summer of 1998 developing curricula for new career competency (career-related) courses.

During the 1997–98 school year, the primary question facing Brighton High staff, as they debated the move to pathways as an Option One school, was whether the well-documented success of students in ProTech's health careers and business pathways was due to the "specialness" of the program. To enter ProTech, students had to have a C average, 90 percent attendance/punctuality, and a successful interview with a

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teacher/employer team. Other pathways had open enrollment, although ProTech and non-ProTech pathways both expected students to maintain a C average and a strong attendance record to remain in good standing and become eligible for work-based learning placements. An added boon was that pathways teachers volunteered to participate in the program, which meant that they were enthusiastic about the opportunity. Students in career pathways across the system had significantly lower dropout rates, higher attendance rates, and better grades and promotion rates than their non-pathway peers. Would the success be diluted if the school expanded pathways across the school and were no longer able to control standards for student retention, or the enthusiasm of participating teachers?

According to a staff member, there was a feeling that “we have to try something” in the face of discouraging data on student outcomes of Brighton’s non-pathway students. “We didn’t need to look at test scores or see the attendance data,” said one teacher. “Our students weren’t showing up, and they weren’t achieving.” Said another, “Although some staff were skeptical about whether pathways could make a difference, we weren’t proud of our statistics. We knew we had to change.” A more disaffected teacher suggested that “there never really was a choice. It was only a matter of time before this school headed in this direction,” referring to the school’s long history of developing school-to-career pathways.

When the teaching staff voted on the Change Team’s restructuring proposal, 74 percent came out in favor of restructuring into pathways across the school. It is unclear, though, to what extent this vote reflects a solid endorsement of the pathway concept or a willingness to entertain change provisionally.

## **A Dramatic Change: Common Planning Time**

In 1997–98, while preparing for the roll-out of restructuring, Juliette Johnson and the Change Team made two critical decisions that have greatly influenced how the teaching staff has viewed the reforms: to emphasize teacher common planning time and to have administrators manage the pathways.

As any administrator of a large school knows, the master schedule is the “black box” of school reform. Master schedules are incredibly complex; one Boston teacher has described the school schedule as “a five-dimensional algorithm.” While Brighton’s school administration envisioned that the pathways would cluster students for their core courses, it decided in the first year to attempt only partial clustering (in a common competency course and at most one or two other courses). Instead, the focus that year was on scheduling so that teachers could meet together frequently with colleagues in their pathway to develop its identity and curriculum. The goal in future years would be to ensure that each pathway would have common students as well as a common set of teachers.

The primary result of the decision to start with common planning time for teachers was that teachers could “see and feel” the difference that restructuring would make for their work. With planning time scheduled for three periods per week, teachers could be professionals, meeting to discuss issues of student learning and engagement. In interviews, almost all teachers cited common planning time as the single most significant change in the first year of restructuring. One teacher described it as “revolutionary.” “People are all pulling in the same direction,” according to another person affiliated with the school. However, some teachers resented the sharp increase in meetings; one teacher took an opportunity to teach an additional class in order to remove himself from what he considered a waste of time.

Makeisha arrives at school at 7:30 in the morning after two bus rides across the city from her home in Boston's Mattapan neighborhood. She joins other students from her health pathway in homeroom, where Mrs. Garada leads a short check-in on their reports on their internship placements, due that Friday. Makeisha isn't worried; she interviewed her supervisor and another colleague last week and wrote her report on their career paths over the weekend.

Makeisha stays with her pathway peers for anatomy and physiology and for her class on health professions, then joins friends from all across the school for Spanish and gym. Her final class, English, is with her pathway again; they're writing another draft of papers they started a month ago.

Her school work finished for the day, Makeisha jumps on a cross-town bus and heads to Beth Israel Hospital, where she works in the radiology department. "I've watched lots of x-rays and even saw a little baby on an ultrasound. My supervisor is letting me practice on her—she lets me try to find her liver and her kidneys."

"I like this pathway, because I think this is what I want to do in the future," she says. "I'm thinking of going into medicine. I tried the business pathway, but I realized after doing the internship that I don't want to spend my days with computers and numbers. It just wasn't me!"

Makeisha has little patience for students who don't take advantage of what pathways have to offer. "Some of them wish we didn't have pathways, because they have to work harder. They can't get away with just coasting any more—they have to focus. But I prefer it. It's good experience."

Common planning time was designed to focus on case management during one day per week, and on teaching and learning two days per week; in all but one pathway, this protocol has been followed. Several people familiar with all the restructuring schools in Boston commended Brighton High School for maintaining this design throughout the first tumultuous year of change, perhaps due to the presence of school coaches funded by the Annenberg Challenge. During case management meetings, the Student Support Service Coordinator, the directors of the Special Education and Bilingual Programs, and pathway guidance staff attend as needed. Staff identify and discuss students who are struggling, and they determine actions, such as counseling, course changes, or disciplinary action, to address the student's issues.

Those whose names reappear and who warrant further attention are referred to the Student Support Team, which can make recommendations for staff action. For example, the Student Support Team helped staff of one pathway to understand that a particular student needed firm, consistent limits; the staff had thought she was "fragile" due to outside circumstances and needed some leeway in completion of course work. In another pathway, however, a teacher complained that he never got any feedback on students referred to the student support team.

To some degree, the case management approach has had less impact on students than it might have if the teachers at the meetings together shared all of their students, instead of just some. For example, students who are discussed in pathway meetings are not necessarily students of all teachers in that pathway. Still, most staff interviewed for this case study agree that the emphasis on case management has been important in focusing the staff to look at students' academic, social, and behavioral needs as a whole.

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Similarly, the effort to direct the other two weekly common planning meetings toward issues of teaching and learning has “changed the conversation” among staff at the school. The school coaches, funded by the Boston Annenberg Challenge, attend each pathway meeting and help facilitate the discussion. These meetings are spent on several activities: 1) developing pathway “signature” projects, for completion in the pathway competency courses; 2) preparing teachers to assist students to achieve on the Stanford 9 and MCAS<sup>1</sup> tests; and 3) looking at student work to develop a common set of criteria for competent reading and writing skills. Unfortunately, teachers remain limited in the interdisciplinary projects they can undertake because pathway students are not fully clustered for all of their courses.

During the weekly meeting devoted to looking at student work, the teams use protocols and rubrics introduced by the Annenberg coaches. Once again, not all student work examined during the allotted time is the work of students who are common to teachers in that pathway, but the emphasis on looking at student work has caused many teachers to try, or consider, different teaching strategies.

Teachers agree that the common planning time focused on teaching and learning has been the locus of some of the most productive, as well as the most contentious, conversations. As one person affiliated with the school puts it, “The conversation around teaching and learning can bring out the best in teachers, or it can bring out their worst fears: ‘am I a bad teacher?’” In some pathways, the Annenberg coach managed to use the process of looking at student work as a way to encourage even the most traditional teachers to consider different teaching strategies. Teachers in one pathway devoted multiple meetings to analyzing serial drafts of a student’s work, discussing what the teacher did to scaffold the work and help the student move to a final draft. In another pathway, the pathway facilitator feels that the staff can now lead themselves in the process of using student work to promote conversations around effective pedagogy.

In other pathways, teachers have complained that they felt “talked at” by outside facilitators and that the introduction of new teaching strategies, at a time of massive restructuring, has been overwhelming. Teachers in one pathway avoided substantive conversations about teaching and learning for several months, perhaps in part because the staff were uncomfortable with exposing their practice to others. In a worst case scenario, a teacher who volunteered to bring student work to a pathway meeting was treated poorly by another teacher, who rather roughly critiqued her presentation of the lesson. The interchange had a chilling effect on sharing within the group.

Brighton High School teachers face the dilemma of teachers across the country, who must manage simultaneous mandates to prepare students to meet testing requirements while combating student disengagement by making education more relevant. Teachers have felt confused about the simultaneous focus on literacy across the curriculum (a major district initiative in 1998–99), the MCAS (which emphasizes content knowledge in English, history, science, and math), and the applied-learning and cross-cutting competencies called for by the move to pathways. This confusion emerges in the plea by some faculty for more focused professional development. “The coaches had teachers trying to do Bloom’s Taxonomy, which was much too complicated.<sup>2</sup> People tuned out. The school needs a simple, straightforward, consistent staff development approach that all staff can agree on and buy into.”

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<sup>1</sup> Through the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, all students are assessed in grades 4, 8, and 10 and must pass the 10th grade assessment to graduate from high school.

<sup>2</sup> Bloom’s Taxonomy is a method of analyzing and developing students’ literacy skills.

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At the same time, the focus on teaching and learning has facilitated changes in student outcomes that many of the staff have found exciting. For example, the Annenberg coaches analyzed the MCAS and Stanford 9 tests to determine what literacy skills are assessed, then worked with teachers to include more reading and writing in the curriculum. Teachers also have used common planning time to develop key questions for the mid-term in each of their classes. Coaches and teachers were excited about the quality of student work generated through these activities and the prospects for more strategically targeted literacy assistance as a result.

In addition, with the move to pathways facilitating the development of community partnerships, it is the common planning time that has made it possible to begin to integrate those partnerships into the curriculum. For example, when the law firm Burns and Levinson approached the Private Industry Council about developing a relationship with a school, the PIC made arrangements for the firm's representatives to visit a common planning time of Brighton's Law and Government pathway. What followed was a new kind of partnership for the school. Rather than simply creating student internships, Burns and Levinson invited pathway teachers to visit its offices and shadow lawyers to learn about the firm's structure and organization. Together, teachers and lawyers developed a mock trial activity for the students, and the staff from the firm joined the school's push for higher test scores by regularly attending tenth-grade classes to coach students on test-taking strategies in preparation for the MCAS. Because the partnership began with a conversation with all members of the pathway team, the partnership moved well past the bounds of traditional internships and into meeting the students' needs beyond job exposure.

Similarly, what might have been a one-shot field trip became a long-term project with the *Boston Globe* on the impact of technology on journalism. Common planning time enabled teachers in the Media Arts and Communication pathway to do extensive preparation of both *Globe* staff and Brighton students for several activities: a visit to the newspaper plant, guest speakers in the school, follow-up interviews, and the creation of a school newspaper issue devoted to the topics of technology and diversity.

The use of common planning time to change the relationship between teachers and outside partners has not been uniformly successful, though. In the health pathway, when asked to visit a hospital to understand what work students were undertaking as part of their internships, some staff questioned the need for such a visit: "We all know what a hospital looks like," said one teacher.

"When I came to Brighton High School in eleventh grade, I didn't know anyone. I was so glad to be in the TeachBoston pathway. It really helped me get to know other students," says Danielle, now a senior.

"I did my internship with Rosa," she remembers. "It seemed like we'd learn something in class, and the next day we'd use it in the internship. Or we'd see our supervisor, the fifth grade teacher, do exactly what we were learning. It was weird.

"Rosa and I both loved the internship. It was like we didn't have a choice: we had to learn this stuff so we could teach! I had to learn to communicate better. Rosa and my teacher helped me figure out how to make a lesson interesting, how to listen to the kids. Rosa is a natural; I had to work at it. I learned a lot about myself.

"Next year? College, for sure. I hope I get in to Boston College because they have a good teaching program. A lot of kids from my pathway want to go there. It'll be nice to go to a school already knowing a bunch of people."

## A New Student

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## Clustering Students

Two structural changes made in the 1999–2000 school year support a fuller clustering of students within pathways. First, there are now four pathways instead of five; Law and Government and TeachBoston have been combined due to under-enrollment in the latter. Second, Brighton has instituted a separate ninth-grade cluster for all freshmen, in response to a district-wide mandate to support the transition of students (especially those under-performing on the system wide standardized tests) from the middle grades to high school. The pathways have become grade 10–12 programs. Many faculty believe that this will help students make well-grounded decisions about which pathway to enter.

Brighton High's gradual progress toward clustering tenth through twelfth grade students for all of their major courses presents new opportunities and new challenges. On the one hand, teachers can experiment with interdisciplinary projects that reflect the pathway theme, and each pathway is freer to develop a more distinct "identity." On the other hand, students indicate that they enjoy the opportunity to interact with students from other pathways during some of their class periods. They suggest that some electives, such as foreign languages and physical education, should be integrated classes with students from all pathways. As Juliette Johnson has noted: "We're a family here. The school is not so large that we need to divide into totally separate schools."

A remaining challenge is the involvement of limited English proficient (LEP) students in pathways. Schools with small learning communities face the dilemma of determining how best to allocate their limited number of bilingual staff across the pathways to meet the needs of students who are partially mainstreamed.

Although Brighton High was one of the first schools in the country to extend its pathways to LEP students, it is struggling to provide adequate staff to the newly expanded pathway programs. Before moving to full pathways, the school had offered two parallel, native-language pathways in health and business. Minority language students took the same competency courses as their mainstream peers and participated in job shadows and other work-based learning opportunities. Brighton also began a Dual Language Health Careers program, through which English-language and Spanish-speaking students take competency courses simultaneously and meet together for projects.

However, the move to school-wide pathways has made staffing these specialty initiatives even more difficult. Because bilingual students have the same options as every other student in their choice of pathways, they are scattered throughout the school. Providing native-language teachers for competency courses has been nearly impossible. In addition, Brighton lost its Vietnamese program to another high school because its numbers dropped. Consequently, the bilingual program lost ESL teachers, who would have served both Spanish- and Vietnamese-speaking students. If the school still had a large concentration of students in its bilingual program when it moved to full pathways, it would have the flexibility of a large bilingual teaching staff to mitigate the scheduling dilemmas.

This situation is complicated by the fact that the changing demographics of Brighton's student population are creating a need for different educational services. Students from other countries are now entering the Boston Public Schools with less formal schooling; students who are not literate in their native language require far more academic assistance, for longer periods of time, than do students who have learned to read and write in their native language. According to Carmen O'Connor,

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Brighton’s bilingual department head, approximately 40 percent of students with the lowest literacy are in eleventh and twelfth grades. “We used to get students who could jump literacy levels and be mainstreamed pretty quickly,” she says. “Now we’re not seeing that.” These older students, who would benefit from hands-on, relevant coursework, are less likely to be placed in career-related courses because they must focus their time on gaining basic literacy skills.

Thus far, bilingual staff have been attending common planning time with pathways with which they do not necessarily share common students or curricula. Nevertheless, it has been important for them to be a part of the schoolwide focus on teaching and learning, and they have assisted pathway teachers in appropriately addressing the issues of bilingual students in the pathway. The move to a separate ninth grade cluster and to four pathways is facilitating the deployment of bilingual staff across pathways because there are fewer pathways for the bilingual department to staff. Still, the bilingual department head struggles to find time for her bilingual team to meet as a group to manage the process of helping students to progress more quickly towards the mainstream. The cost has been high to her and her staff: while the school moved forward with restructuring, they often felt as though their concerns about adequately serving limited English proficient students were secondary.

## **Pathway Administration**

Another ongoing challenge as Brighton High rolled out its reforms has been the management of the pathways. When the pathway structure was first established, the Change Team decided to make administrators responsible for managing the pathways. Pathway facilitators work with the Private Industry Council to develop and manage new partnerships and to develop appropriate work-based learning activities. The facilitators also manage common planning time, oversee administrative issues for the pathway, and ensure that competency courses align with work experiences.

The Change Team, and Juliette Johnson, decided to wait a year before changing the job descriptions of the administrators designated as pathway facilitators, in order to see what their new positions would require. As a result, in 1998–99, department heads managed two pathways; the assistant headmaster ran one, and a newly hired school-to-career coordinator managed two. In the summer of 1998, these administrators received training in facilitation, including how to write agendas and set norms for meeting, two skills they deemed extremely valuable.

While the experiences of these administrators have varied, in general they report being overwhelmed by the task of managing a pathway in addition to their other responsibilities. Also, some feel that the lack of time makes connecting with businesses difficult. And not all facilitators came to the task with experience with school-to-career. “I didn’t even know what a competency course was,” said one. Almost all agree that teaching and learning have suffered as a result.

The level of purely administrative detail work has been exhausting: “I could use some clerical help,” says one pathway administrator. Another suggests that the staff did not have enough time to adequately plan, complete, and assess projects with their business partners. In 1998–99, teachers in one pathway invested personal time to make possible a new partnership; in subsequent years, when restructuring is no longer new, such goodwill might not be readily available.

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For the two department heads, the challenge of managing a pathway has coincided with the sharply increased focus on content-area standards. As a result, they have been expected to attend district-wide meetings with greater frequency as the state has introduced curriculum frameworks and standards for English language arts, math, and science.

The decision to assign department heads to facilitate pathways may appear to run counter to the more democratic, less top-down structure implicit in the pathway model. To some teachers, this has been confusing. When administrators have brought them proposals from the Change Team on various school issues, teachers have not always known if they are to have input in a decision or if they are simply hearing about a decision already been made. One staff member suggests that administrators should have been more directive in the first year of restructuring, “without pretending that the staff will make decisions.” This person believes that a complex and difficult pilot year of change calls for more top-down decision-making; more democratic decision-making could follow in later years. Others feel that the move toward increased staff input in school direction has been key in gaining staff buy-in of the reforms.

In 1999–2000, teachers are facilitating the pathways. This plan allows department heads to be instructional leaders within and across pathways: the teacher-facilitators manage the development of partnerships and the integration of partnerships into curricula. School coaches continue to facilitate the common planning time that is devoted to teaching and learning. As Johnson points out, this structure requires teachers to use their department heads as a resource on instruction. “It is up to the teachers to call in a department head to a pathway meeting to consult on curriculum issues. It is not a hierarchical system—and that’s a change we have to get used to.”

Based on the experiences of the pathway administrators in 1998–99, the teacher facilitators will likely need a place to bring their challenges and successes in this task. Some current facilitators could have used more ongoing support on how to manage the common planning time. Teacher facilitators will require at least as much support, and some suggest that their facilitation issues will be even more complicated because they will have less authority than administrators. “They will need to learn to lead in a different kind of way,” says one interviewee.

Another change this year is a slight increase in Private Industry Council staff at the school, reflecting the school’s successes with that partnership. The alliance between the school and the PIC has been strong for years, and that track record helped in the first year’s transition, as new pathways struggled to form relationships with partners. PIC staff met weekly with the four pathway administrators, and the coordinator of ProTech felt that the new pathway structure vastly improved the possibilities for partnerships. While she initially felt great pressure from the Brighton High administration to “deliver” work-based learning opportunities to the pathways, she found that the conversations with pathways facilitators were focused and realistic about what the community could deliver and what the school, in its first year of restructuring, could handle. “The facilitators recognized that teachers need to learn how to adequately prepare students for work-based learning experiences.”

This regular meeting has been a venue for PIC staff to educate new pathway facilitators on how to guide their pathway in preparing for and structuring work-based learning, such as for the connection with the *Boston Globe*. It has also been a place to discuss such issues as how to equitably match students with placements for the citywide Job Shadow Day.

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## Future Challenges

In the ProTech model of work-based learning, schools provide serial field trips, or “rotations,” in students’ junior year, and more structured internships in their senior year. This is an ambitious model to implement school-wide, but Brighton High has nevertheless made this its goal. “It’s bringing ProTech to scale,” the ProTech coordinator says. She and the Private Industry Council face a dilemma, however: Brighton High would like to offer the ProTech experience—with its intensive case management and structured learning plans—to all students in the Health Pathway. Currently, a subset of students participate in ProTech and have to meet the program’s attendance and grade requirements. There is strong concern among some PIC staff that foregoing these requirements will water down the program.

As Brighton High moves toward wall-to-wall pathways, the bilingual program’s struggles to staff pathways serve as a useful reminder of another challenge: giving students such a range of choices could create a logistical nightmare. Johnson insists that offering all students the option to switch pathways from year to year is a priority, and this has not been a problem to date. However, if no system is in place for managing those transfers, the school could run into issues concerning teacher placement and the stability of the pathways could be threatened. In particular, if the size of pathways does not remain stable, faculty cohesion within pathways could be threatened and interdisciplinary projects might not be sustained. Instead, the school may need to institute some sort of application process for transfer.

On the pedagogical front, the Change Team now functions as an Instructional Leadership Team, providing guidance to the school on issues of teaching and learning (see *application for participation in Instructional Leadership Team, on next page*). Its major challenge is to align the three school-wide foci on literacy, preparation for the MCAS, and pathway curricula so that teachers no longer see these as competing initiatives. The school will have made a major leap forward if it can figure out how to give each pathway a strong curricular identity through “signature projects” at the same time that teachers prepare students for the high-stakes MCAS.

Brighton and other schools face a major tension here, however: as a state-mandated test, the MCAS detracts from many teachers’ sense of efficacy in their classroom. At the same time, the move to pathways can be viewed as further taking curriculum issues away from individual teachers and instituting a more collaborative approach to teaching and learning. Teachers are likely to feel this tension and may wish for the “good old days” when they could close their classroom door and “just teach.”

The role of department heads will change as well. With classroom teachers now responsible for administering pathways, department heads can focus more on curriculum issues. “We have to get away from looking at curriculum in discrete units,” says Johnson. She hopes the department heads will become a resource to small learning communities, brought in as “consultants” to help pathways implement new instructional strategies.

Department heads will play a critical role in helping teachers align the disparate initiatives that have come to shape their teaching practice; the Instructional Leadership Team will have to help them address this head-on.

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Brighton is in good stead with its current faculty. “Brighton has a culture of teachers taking responsibility for the school,” a district administrator pointed out. “If they’re in a meeting, and the bell rings, every teacher will get up to help monitor the halls. You don’t see that in other schools.” Others concur: “I love working with this school,” said a consultant who has worked with Brighton High for years. “The staff is definitely committed. You have the feeling here that the school really is on the right track.”

## Brighton High School Instructional Leadership Team—Application Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_

1. Why are you interested in joining the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT)?
2. What skills/experiences do you feel that you bring to the ILT?
3. What goals do you hope to accomplish by participating in the ILT?

The ILT will have faculty representatives from pathways, programs, and academic disciplines. Please check the area which you would most like to represent on the ILT.

- Pathway \_\_\_\_\_ (name of pathway)
- Academic discipline \_\_\_\_\_ (name of subject area)
- Program \_\_\_\_\_  
(name of program, i.e., Bilingual, SPED, Support Services)

***Please be aware of the following:***

- Professional Development Points will be offered to members of the ILT.
- Participation on the ILT will give you the opportunity to improve classroom instruction and to develop and implement school-wide goals.
- The ILT currently meets once per week after school for approximately 1 hour and is projected to meet at similar intervals for the upcoming year.
- Two days of summer training are provided for ILT participants.