
*An educator's
educator
talks about the
future of BU's
newest college*

By Art Jahnke



A Merger for the Better

DAVID CHARD IS AN EDUCATOR'S EDUCATOR. HE IS A NOTED expert on the needs of students with learning disabilities and the author of many instructional programs on early literacy, language arts, and mathematics spanning K-12 educations, and a proven leader of educational institutions of higher learning.

Chard, who as Wheelock College president guided the school through its merger with BU from the time the agreement was reached last fall to its implementation June 1, is interim dean of the BU Wheelock College of Education & Human Development. He says the new college promises to advance the missions of both Wheelock and BU's School of Education.

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“Our early interactions as a combined faculty suggest that we share an interest in improving the world and in enriching the lives of the people we work with and for, and that we want to have a positive impact on the communities, families, and children with whom we work,” he says. “There also seems to be a fierce interest in addressing many of the inequities that haunt our systems of education and healthcare.”

Chard, who will serve as interim dean of Wheelock until July 2020, was dean of the Annette Caldwell Simmons School of Education and Human Development at Southern Methodist University from 2007 to 2016 and president of Wheelock

College until its merger with BU. Chard has served on the board of directors of the National Board for Education Sciences and was an associate dean at the University of Oregon College of Education. He also taught at BU’s School of Education from 1995 to 1997 and at the University of Texas at Austin, and worked with the US Peace Corps in Lesotho in southern Africa. He has a PhD in special education from the University of Oregon and a BS in mathematics and chemistry education from Central Michigan University.

Bostonia talked with Chard about the merger and the strengths of both schools.



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A Match Made in History

Wheelock and BU have always had a lot in common. They still do.

Wheelock College and Boston University officially merged on June 1, 2018, but the spirits of the two schools have been intertwined ever since Lucy Wheelock met Alice Stone Blackwell 150 years ago. The two students, who became friends at Copley Square's Chauncy Hall, one of the first schools at the time to admit girls, shared a partiality for progressive ideas. Blackwell was the daughter of founders of the American Woman Suffrage Association (and the niece of America's first female physician), and Wheelock was a close friend of noted transcendentalist Elizabeth Peabody, who taught, with Margaret Fuller, a journalist, feminist, and another transcendentalist, at Bronson Alcott's famous Temple School.

So it's unsurprising that when Wheelock founded Miss Wheelock's Training School—where kindergarten teachers learned how to teach—in 1888, she married some of the most progressive practices of educators in the United States with the radical ideas of the German founder of the kindergarten movement. At roughly the same time, BU, whose departments were housed in buildings all over Boston, became the first institution in America to combine the concept of a New England undergraduate college with the more diverse offerings of a German graduate university. Other progressive ideals followed, such as BU's willingness to admit applicants regardless of religion, race, or gender. So did progressive students, and among them was Alice Blackwell (CAS1881, Hon.'45).

For decades, the two Boston schools followed similarly peripatetic paths, moving from building to building in different parts of the city, with Wheelock settling in on the Riverway in 1914. The same year, BU appointed a professor

Bostonia: What do you see as the most important outcome of the merger of BU and Wheelock?

CHARD: The most important thing is that in creating the merger, Boston University has committed to investing in the new Wheelock College of Education & Human Development in the form of new faculty positions, new strategic investments, and freedom to create something new that can bring the best of what both institutions have to offer and opportunities to create new programs that are very much needed in our community and around the world.

Is there also a downside?

Every merger involves loss—loss of jobs, traditions, places, relationships, and shared memories. And, of course, with loss comes sadness. We all mourn the loss of our two schools as they are. However, what follows this loss is opportunity to grow and to bring pride and development to our new college.

What areas of research are particular strengths of Wheelock and will offer the new college advantages that it would otherwise not have?

Wheelock is a college that has since its early days focused more on teaching excellence than on research. However, our faculty members do develop questions from their practice that drive their research. Some of those areas include effective interventions for improving the literacy outcomes of middle-grade readers, effective mentoring practices of young teachers, and leadership development in early childhood programs. Other faculty members have focused their scholarship in specific innovative practices in teacher science in early childhood and in supporting the development of bilingual learners in special education.

What about teaching practices or areas of teaching expertise? Does Wheelock have particular strengths that haven't been the focus of work at the School of Education?

There are many areas in which SED and Wheelock overlap, including teacher preparation at the early childhood and elementary grades as well as in special education. It is notable that Wheelock's programs are nationally accredited. There are also several unique programs that Wheelock offers that will be part of the new college. These include our child life graduate program. Child life professionals are prepared to support families and their children who are experiencing chronic or terminal medical conditions. Wheelock was an early pioneer in the preparation of child life professionals and remains one of the most respected and selective programs in the country. Another unique → 52



Wheelock was a pioneer in the preparation of child life professionals.”



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named Arthur Wilde to teach education at the College of Liberal Arts, where, administrators estimated, fully 70 percent of students intended to become secondary school teachers. Wilde looked at that number and persuaded those administrators that BU needed its own school of education. The BU School of Education opened in 1918, and its reputation flourished, aided in the 1920s by a joint program with Harvard that offered bachelor's and master's degrees from either school. In the 1930s, as course offerings at both schools expanded, Boston University found a new home along the Charles River, just blocks from Wheelock, which officially became Wheelock College in 1941.

Through it all, both schools remained true to their progressive missions. "Wheelock College and BU's School of Education share a legacy," says David Chard, interim dean of Boston University Wheelock College of Education & Human Development, which was born

of the merger of the two schools. "And it continues. In more recent decades, they have both developed programs in the helping professions of teacher preparation, early childhood development, and literacy and numeracy development."

Catherine O'Connor, who served as SED dean ad interim for the 2017–2018 academic year, believes that over the years, the two schools have grown more similar. "Wheelock grew from its foundational focus on early childhood education to become an institution that trains professionals who support children and families in roles well outside the school system," she says. "There's a parallel there with how SED evolved from a fairly traditional teacher prep school into a place that prepares professionals to make a positive impact across a range of educational and social settings."

At SED, community involvement started in 1920, when the school worked with the Boston Board of Superintendents

to create a master's program that trained college grads to teach in Boston schools. More than a dozen other programs followed, including a historic 1989 agreement with Chelsea, Mass., to revitalize its struggling public schools. During that 20-year partnership, test scores improved and the percentage of high school seniors who planned to pursue a college education rose from 53 percent in 1989 to 81 percent in 2007. While the partnership officially ended in 2008, SED remains involved in the Chelsea schools.

Wheelock too has had many partnerships with Boston public schools, from Jumpstart, which pairs students with preschoolers, to Science Learning Teams, which brings Wheelock faculty to public schools to develop plans to improve science teaching and learning. More than 85 percent of Wheelock undergraduates engage in community partnerships with local schools, hospitals, and social service agencies.

"Lucy Wheelock's commitment to serving communities of immigrant families created a spirit of service and social justice that Wheelock College never moved away from," O'Connor says. "There's a harmony between that spirit and the work SED students and faculty have been conducting for years—beyond our involvement in Boston's school desegregation efforts, our students were forming politically progressive groups in the 1940s, tutoring in East Boston and leading inclusion efforts for students with special needs in the '70s, and taking classes that educated them to better understand racial prejudice as early as the 1920s."

Chard agrees. "There is a shared interest in identifying and helping to improve the way our policies and practices disproportionately disadvantage poor students and students of color," he says. "In this sense, the mission of Wheelock College, though perhaps evolved in the way it is stated, remains as important today as it did in 1888."

Lucy Wheelock died in 1946, but she lived long enough to see her old friend Alice Stone Blackwell awarded an honorary doctorate from BU in 1945. In her commentary to the BU community, Blackwell noted that in her opinion, Lucy Wheelock deserved a doctorate as much as she did.—AJ



Since its founding, Wheelock has had a strong connection with Boston and the public school system.”

📍 **ONLINE:**

Learn more about the merger at bu.edu/bu-wheelock-merger/faqs.

program is Youth Justice and Advocacy. This program focuses on the development of individuals who work with youth in social service agencies, nonprofits, and schools to support positive development, particularly with youth who are disadvantaged. It is likely that this program will merge with BU’s program in Positive Youth. Wheelock also offers a graduate certificate in STEM education online that we hope to continue beyond the merger. This program, though relatively new, has attracted students from the United States as well as from other countries.

And what research expertise or practices does BU’s School of Education bring to the new college?

BU’s School of Education has a long and rich history of research and teaching in many areas that Wheelock does not offer. These include the well-known program in deaf studies, secondary education in multiple content areas, and education leadership and policy studies. Additionally, SED has a program in counseling psychology with specializations in school counseling, clinical counseling, and sports psychology. The PhD program is accredited by the American Psychological Association. And, of course, SED offers doctoral programs in other areas across the school that are not offered in a small college like Wheelock. SED has recently received numerous research grants from private foundations and state and federal agencies. BU’s Research 1 status certainly offers the new college an opportunity to expand its research presence and to impact the evidence across a number of professional areas that are important to the faculty of the new college.

I recall that before the merger, Wheelock had expressed a desire to remain in Boston. Why is that important?

Wheelock was founded in Boston out of a desire of Lucy Wheelock to help immigrant families who were not benefiting from the economic development of the late 1800s. (See sidebar on page 50.) In effect, she believed that these families were disadvantaged and that early childhood development was a way to ensure that these families would have a brighter future. Since that founding, Wheelock has had a strong connection with Boston, the public school system, social service agencies, hospitals, and clinics. We have also worked closely with similar agencies in local communities, but our location in Boston created a special relationship. Boston officials have always known Wheelock as a place established to focus on the preparation of teachers, social workers, and clinicians, and they continue to encourage us to strive to fulfill the mission for the good of Greater Boston.

What was the reaction at Wheelock when students learned of the merger?

The initial reaction to the merger was one of confusion. As you can imagine, the decision to merge was not planned before the summer of 2017. When students returned to campus or arrived for the first time, we were just finishing negotiations on the initial intent to merge. We announced the intent to merge during the first week of new student orientation. I believe it took many months, several town meetings, and multiple written communications for students and their families to realize what this might mean for them ultimately vis-à-vis their options for transitioning to an academic program in the new Wheelock College of Education & Human Development, elsewhere at Boston University, or to another institution.

What do you think are the main concerns of former Wheelock students who are now enrolled at Boston University Wheelock College of Education & Human Development?

Students are concerned about many things. They worry about moving to a larger school where they may have trouble accessing the support that they got in a small college. They worry about making new friends, finding leadership opportunities in clubs and sports, and where they’re going to live. They also worry a lot about the cost of college. Everyone knows BU is more expensive, and despite the commitment that BU has made to maintaining Wheelock’s tuition rate for our current students, they are worried that there will be hidden costs. They are also concerned for the welfare of our faculty and staff who may lose their jobs as a result of the merger. Wheelock attracts students who care about others. Since the merger was announced, our students have been asking about the future of the folks who support them, who take care of our campus, who cook and serve their food.

Are there great Wheelock traditions that can be transplanted to the new college?

There are many traditions at Wheelock. Some are similar to those of the School of Education. We have a candle-lighting ceremony that we do when our undergraduate students enter Wheelock and again when they graduate. We participate in global service. We host an annual Passion for Action Awards gala, where we honor individuals in our community and across the nation who demonstrate the mission of Wheelock in their work. We also have many clubs and associations that have their own traditions. I look forward to observing how our campus cultures will unite.