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Also Inside:
- Waiting for "Superman": Thumbs up or thumbs down? (p. 4)
- Solving our national math problem (p. 10)
Dear Alumni and Friends,

Last spring, a teacher at a turnaround school in Boston told me of a student who said to her, “I heard you’re a bad teacher, and that’s why we’re not doing well.” What an awful thing for a professional to hear—awful and, frankly, untrue.

Around the country, schools are making drastic changes to turn themselves around. One model has taken hold in which a school board will fire a flailing school’s principal and 50 percent of its teachers. The theory is that a school that is underperforming for a number of years has developed a negative culture that affects both teachers and students, so one way to change that is to change the personnel. The belief is that as new teachers come in with new ideas and new strategies to effect change in kids’ lives, the school’s performance will improve. However, a school needn’t employ dramatic techniques to produce outstanding results.

It is heartening, therefore, to hear about a school that turns itself around without resorting to these kinds of drastic methods. South of Boston, some SED alums have been involved in a ground-up effort to improve teacher evaluation and student performance, resulting in exceptional progress at a traditional big urban high school. (See p. 6.)

At the same time, it is also inspiring to learn about a charter school that does something radically different by helping at-risk teens—and young adults—who have fallen through the cracks get a high school diploma. It is no surprise that there are SED alums at the forefront of this effort, too. (See p. 2.)

Education reform looms large in our national consciousness, and concern about teacher preparation puts pressure on schools of education to improve their performance. At SED we work very hard to continue our 60-year-old tradition of graduating informed, thoughtful, highly skilled, and hard-working educators who are making a difference in schools of all kinds and all sizes.

Hardin L. K. Coleman, PhD
Dean and Professor, School of Education
Boston University
2 Silber Way
Boston, Massachusetts 02215
617-353-3213 (work)
617-353-7777 (fax)
hardin@bu.edu

Congratulations!

W. Patrick Hughes (’70) has been appointed president and CEO of Fallon Community Health Plan.

The French Minister of Education named Mary Oussayef (’71) a Chevalier in the Ordre des Palmes Académiques.

Linda Herzog Snowdale (’74) was elected to the Cohasset, Mass., school committee.

Scott Turcott (’83, ’86) is now the vice president of institutional advancement at Eastern Nazarene College in Quincy, Mass.

The Fay School in Southborough, Mass., selected Lauren Ruby (’07, ’10) and Yuka Morita Tirado (’07) to launch its first preschool program. They’re designing a play-based inquiry curriculum modeled after their old SED practicum, the Early Childhood Learning Lab (see p. 12).

Assistant Professor Alejandra Salinas, Deputy Ng (’03, ’09), and Diana Chang (’10) were accepted into the National Science Foundation’s Service, Teaching and Research Program for Early Career Mathematics Educators. (Read about another NSF scholarship program for math teachers on p. 10.)

For class notes and other info, visit SED’s new and improved website, www.bu.edu/SED.

A volunteer in Peru

Having joined the Peace Corps shortly after graduation, Susan Lawton (’09) (above) is the volunteer coordinator for the Center for Special Education, Castillo, in Piura, Peru. She successfully raised funds for training and equipment to create a multisensory classroom for the school’s 32 severely disabled students. Lawton hopes the success of the program will encourage other local parents to enroll their own disabled children, currently languishing at home. For more information, contact Lawton at lawton.sue@gmail.com.

Whitewashing Twain

SED Dean Hardin Coleman has weighed in on the new editions of Mark Twain’s Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and Adventures of Tom Sawyer that erase the “N” word. Coleman condemns the editors’ “sugarcoating” as “very disturbing from the [standpoint] of intellectual honesty.”

For an article about the controversy, including a link to a video of Coleman’s commentary, see www.bu.edu/today/node/12253.

Editor
Patrick L. Kennedy (CDM’04)

Contributing Writers
Corinne Steindermesser (COM’06), Andrew Thurston

Graphic Designer
Garyfvieh Pagnis

Cover Photo
Cydney Scott

Produced by
Boston University Creative Services

| INSIDE |
Disrupting the theory

Nick Hofer is not your traditional school reformer. A senior vice president at Boston Private Bank & Trust Company, Hofer (‘05) spends his days talking high finance—helping venture and private capital groups find cash, giving wealthy customers sage advice on their investments. But he’s also a founding board member of Phoenix Charter Academy in Chelsea, Massachusetts.

Incorporated in 2006, the academy takes students aged 14 to 22 who’ve been neglected or abandoned by public schools (or who chose to check out) and pushes them toward a high school diploma. The 190 students at the academy check some sadly familiar dropout boxes: 13 percent are pregnant or parenting, 85 percent are eligible for lunch support, and 65 percent report prior attendance problems. Language and race are factors, too: Students represent 13 nationalities, and 83 percent are either Hispanic or African American—pupils statistically more likely to leave high school without a diploma.

Unlike lots of other charter schools, which are frequently accused of siphoning not just students but resources from the public school system, Phoenix has a good relationship with local superintendents.

“Charter schools are somewhat controversial because some say you’re taking the best students, you’re cherry-picking,” says Hofer. “What Phoenix Charter Academy does is take students who are dropouts. We’re disrupting the theory that charter schools are successful because they’re educating the best from each district.”

From banker to educator

If he hadn’t been a banker, Hofer would’ve been a teacher. In fact, he was for a time, taking two years out from his banking career to teach mathematics at a New York prep school. He returned to high finance in 2001 and signed up for SED’s part-time Master of Education program with a plan: “I went to BU fully thinking I’d either be a teacher or a headmaster at a private school. I’d do the bank, get the business experience, and go apply that to the classroom.”

Then an acquaintance started talking about plans for a charter school for the educationally underserved. Hofer’s interest in the concept had been sparked by a class on education reform at SED, and here was an opportunity to combine two careers in one. Looking back, he says that staying in business, while applying his knowledge to the classroom and education reform, was the right move.

“I feel like I have two missions, or two lives, if you will,” says Hofer of his current roles. He credits his employer for giving him the freedom to get involved in community work, and with Phoenix in particular: “On one side, I help successful people with their businesses, with their financial lives, and then my other life is helping better the educational system in America; I say that broadly because that’s how I truly feel.”

The first meeting of what would become Phoenix Charter Academy was the right move. The board started by approaching centers of influence—police officers, after-school programs—and letting potential recruits know, “We might be your last chance.” They also tried to squash any excuses for skipping school—the academy has included an on-site child care center from day one, for instance.

Recruitment is less of a challenge now. With fresh success stories being produced every year, there’s a list of students waiting to get in. Not that they’ll have an easy ride. The average school day runs from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. there’s a uniform, and loitering between lessons is not an option.

“For this type of population, every second is crucial,” says Hofer. “If we allow these students to go in, settle down, talk a little bit, laugh, it’s very difficult to control, and you’ve wasted valuable time.”

Hofer admits that can be rough for some young people, but says the discipline pays off, especially when the students are on track: "From a business perspective, it’s the blue ocean strategy: you’re开辟一个全新的市场。" The academy has included an on-site child care center from day one, for instance.

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Still Waiting for Superman and for answers to the problems plaguing our nation’s schools

The documentary film Waiting for “Superman,” from Academy Award-winning director Davis Guggenheim, features five public-school students, each hoping to claim one of the limited seats in a charter school in his or her school district. Interpersed with the footage of the children and their anxious parents are interviews with education reformers, including Michelle Rhee, who battled with teachers’ unions during her controversial years as chancellor of Washington, D.C., public schools.

Rogé Ebert gave Waiting for “Superman” 3.5 out of 4 stars, saying the film demonstrates “that quality education is possible for even the most disadvantaged students.” After attending a private screening hosted by SED at Brookline’s Coolidge Corner Theatre in October, several members of the SED community offered their own more critical reviews of the film.

HARDIN COLEMAN
Dean
BU School of Education

It’s easy to get caught up—as this film does—in debates over teachers’ unions and charter schools, but that misses the point. This movie highlights the failure of our economy to create quality schools for poor kids. In the Boston area, we see great schools in wealthy suburbs such as Weston, Newton, and Brookline staffed with union teachers who are doing wonderful things for their students. Where we’re failing is in urban schools. In our urban areas—in predominately black and Hispanic neighborhoods—we see poverty, neglect, lack of family support, lack of jobs. We are failing to create the type of economic and social stability that students need to perform well in school. Instead of putting pressure on teachers and teachers’ unions—which were the focus of this movie—we need to be looking to our small business owners and to the way we use our tax code to create family-supporting jobs in our urban areas and throughout our country.

STEPHAN ELLENWOOD
Chair
Department of Curriculum and Teaching
BU School of Education

In Daniel Boorstin’s The Image, we’re warned about visual images, which often bypass the brain and go directly to the viscera. The images in Waiting for “Superman” are effective, real, and surely engage our emotions. The movie achieved its goal, but more careful analysis shows it to be only part of the story. Its grade should be incomplete. The full story is more complex and much more consequential than that.

Waiting for “Superman” is a fairly easy movie to make, as it would be to make a “mirror movie” showing wonderful public schools with teacher unions and scandal-ridden charter schools. That movie would also be incomplete.

Good schools come in all forms. We need to define “good schools” broadly and deeply to fully understand effectiveness. For example, our vision should look beyond convenient test scores. We’d do well to heed Robert Frost’s suggested wariness of a time or place “made simple by loss of detail.” Movies don’t always lend themselves to precise, detailed analysis. Universities are good at doing that.

LARRY KOZAKOWSKI ’(12)
Undergraduate Student, English Education
BU School of Education

The film juxtaposes underperforming public schools with high-ranking charter schools. Guggenheim, however, neglects to mention the overwhelming number of public schools in the country that outperform charter schools. While the message of the film as a whole is rather unfairly presented, individuals like Geoffrey Canada provide hope that maybe there is a “Superman” out there who will come in and save the day.

And it is in advocating this deeply flawed solution that Guggenheim reveals himself a captive of the current educational magical thinking: Charter schools are the solution for what ails public schooling. Bluminating the benefits of charter schools, without acknowledging some of the problems caused by charter schools that are hidden to the average viewer’s eye, is misleading. My fear is that the movie taps at the heartstrings of altruistic viewers without providing a more nuanced view of the larger U.S. public education landscape.

KELLY MCCARTHY ’(10, ’11)
Graduate Student,
Teaching English as a Second Language
BU School of Education

Viewers need to let go of the charter/public labels and start talking about the real issues. How have we let some schools become disgraceful centers for failure? What are features of effective schools that can be generalized and transferred to other populations? How are we going to provide all children with at least an adequate, if not equal, education? The answers to these tough questions are not found in the documentary. However, the film can and should be used as a conversation starter and eventually a catalyst for change.

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low-income households, and more than 30 percent speak English as a second language. In the 1990s, the school’s standardized test scores were abysmal, with only a quarter of its students passing the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). One in three students dropped out of school each year. Nowadays, the dropout rate is down to 3.5 percent. Up to 80 percent of graduating seniors in recent years have been going on to college, many on merit scholarships. And in terms of improvement on the MCAS English/language arts test, Brockton High students outperform 90 percent of their peers across the state.


Brockton’s story suggests that immensity is no impediment to improvement. And it shows that an underperforming school can make remarkable progress without mass teacher firings or a rancorous labor dispute. With a concerted, school-wide effort, the unionized faculty of a large, urban school can surmount the hurdles posed by students’ socioeconomic situations, and help them boost their academic achievement.

No right to fail

The modern Brockton High School opened in 1970, an enormous concrete building boasting a planetarium, greenhouse, indoor pool, and a television studio, among other amenities. For years, the school enjoyed a good reputation for academics, vocational education, and sports.

By the ‘90s, the school’s student body reflected the changes in its community, which became more diverse and impoverished in pockets. Brockton High today is roughly 50 percent black, 30 percent white, and 13 percent Hispanic, with many of the students hailing from abroad, and most qualifying for free lunch. Veteran teachers struggled to teach kids with distracting home lives or a beginner’s grasp of English. Morale dropped.

“Kids were told they had a right to fail,” says Linda Frutkin (‘86), who has been teaching at Brockton High for 21 years. Some even slept during class, unchallenged. “Then, Sue said, ‘No. No one has a right to fail. Everyone has to do the work.’” Sue Szachowicz, today the school’s principal, was a teacher in the ‘90s and head of the social studies department. A graduate of the school herself, she had taught there since 1975. And in 1998, Szachowicz, Frutkin, and other teachers were appalled by Brockton’s results on the MCAS: 44 percent of students failed English, and 75 percent failed math.

“That’s a report card we didn’t want to get,” says Szachowicz. “We were stinking up the place.”

“No right to fail” is the modern Brockton High School’s motto, applied not to just its test scores, but to its students’ attitudes as well. “We’re very familiar with students who are not going to college. And we’re going to push them to go.” Szachowicz adds.

With a school-wide literacy initiative, Brockton High halved its failure rate on the English MCAS in one year, and has continued to improve since. It started when a teacher-faculty committee identified four core learning skills and resolved to focus on them in every class. Source: Achievement Gap Institute

The BIG TURN-AROUND

When the chips (or test scores) were down, Brockton High bucked up instead of splitting up.

In the past decade, many urban districts have given up on big high schools, breaking them up into smaller, career-themed academies. Critics see just another fad, but proponents say that the old big schools have failed—they’re unwieldy, unmanageable. But something unusual has been happening in Brockton, Massachusetts.

With a population of 100,000, Brockton is a small city, but its sole public high school is big—the biggest in the state, and one of the largest in the country. A building the size of an aircraft carrier, it serves 4,300 students in four grades. About 70 percent of the kids are from (An underperforming school can make remarkable progress without mass teacher firings.)
all measured. It’s a high-stakes test. If you fail it, you don’t get a diploma.” The scores were not yet binding in 1998, but if things kept up the way they were, the state would have to start denying diplomas to 750 seniors every year from 2003 forward.

Szachowicz and Paul Laurino, then head of the English department, decided to organize a turnaround. “They were respected folks with a lot of leadership potential, and they were dedicated to the school,” says Bonnie Lee Howard (’97), who worked as a consultant for the district in the ‘90s. “The test scores weren’t looking good, so people were very motivated to figure out a strategy that would change that trajectory. The principal gave them space to actually think clearly, and Sue had the right kind of force and personality to do that.”

“We work together, across the disciplines, on the same objectives.”

The idea Szachowicz pitched was a school-wide literacy initiative. If kids could learn to write clearly, they figured, they could think clearly, and it would translate into gains in all their subjects. Her colleagues didn’t all jump on board outright, she recalls. “In education, we’ve been through an awful lot of initiatives. So there was a cautious mindset at first: ‘You’re gonna have to show me this will work.’” But in the face of that dreadful failure rate on the English/language arts MCAS, most were willing to give it a shot.

Collaborating on lesson plans, teachers folded writing into every single class in the school, from biology and algebra to phys ed and auto shop. And that was just the beginning. With Laurino and Szachowicz as co-chairs, a group of teacher leaders and administrators known as the restructuring committee promoted a plan to roll out lessons in reading, writing, speaking, and reasoning across all disciplines.

Nursing teacher Sara Kelly (SON’82), for example, says that her students “write essays and talk about medical issues in society. They read articles on medical subjects, give PowerPoint presentations on diseases. . . . We’re constantly pestering them, ‘Spell that correctly, use the proper terminology.’”

The strategy is commonsensical, says education consultant Jon Saphier (’80), who trained Brockton High administrators and teacher leaders in this effort. “A general good teaching behavior is to check frequently for understanding,” Saphier explains. “And one way to check is to require students to write. . . . Have students keep a learning log in which they have to write, for three or four minutes at the end of each period, a summary of what they’ve learned, and something that they’ve still not clear on. So writing becomes a vehicle for good generic instruction in every academic content area.”

Ensuring these exercises happened in every classroom entailed a whole-school effort. More and more teachers and department heads volunteered to take part in the planning. A data analytic team formed to identify areas of weakness. Each department established a steering committee—for example, Frutkin sits on the steering committee for the bilingual education department—to review and revise curricula and programs, and to define quality student work. Monthly two-hour, all-faculty meetings, previously routine-business snooze fests, turned into professional development workshops. A system of oversight—classroom monitoring and review of student work—guaranteed that teachers used their new training.

“We’re all on the same page,” says Frutkin. “We work together, across the disciplines, on the same objectives.” Moreover, through regular meetings and conversations, “Teachers have a voice. Everyone can express what they think works and doesn’t work.” Administrators support teachers, and teachers support one another, pooling their knowledge and sharing advice.

The faculty’s transformation from cautious participants to committed partners was sealed in 2001, when students’ failure rate on the English/language arts MCAS dropped from the previous year’s 43 percent to 23 percent. The state education commissioner visited the school to deliver the message to a cheering assembly: Brockton High was the most improved school in the state.

The failure rate has since dropped to 5 percent, and the percentage of kids scoring advanced or proficient soared to 79. When it comes to improving students’ results on the English test between 8th and 10th grade, Brockton High now outperforms 90 percent of all other Massachusetts high schools.

“What I think is amazing, as an ESL teacher,” says Frutkin, “is that kids who come in with a year or two of English can manage to pass or even score proficient on the MCAS. I had one kid last year who scored 252—and 260’s advanced. What we’re doing really works.” (In 2007, the Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy recognized Brockton as one of three schools statewide making strides with English language learners.)

Brockton’s math scores have also improved, but still lag behind the state average, so the school has redoubled its efforts over the past couple of years, focusing on graphing and analytical problem-solving, areas of weakness the data team has identified. Along with the improvement mission, a sense of school spirit has taken hold. When SED visited the school last fall, students talked about Brockton High as a safe place where everybody gets along, and where exciting electives and extracurriculars abound.

Robotics students heatedly discussed technical arcana. Seniors disclosed their college plans: engineering studies, a music major, culinary school, and so on.

“You don’t see kids sleeping at their desks anymore,” said business and office technology teacher Kathleen Quigg (SAR’77). “It’s more of a community than it used to be.”

Focus on the teachers

One key ingredient in Brockton’s turnaround has been Saphier, the consultant with an EdD from SED who runs Research for Better Teaching. “The school relied heavily on Jon Saphier’s ‘The Skillful Teacher’ course,” wrote Harvard economist Ron Ferguson in his report How High School Become Exemplary.

As a teacher, Szachowicz had taken a Saphier course and “loved it,” she says. “It was some of the best training I’ve had—and I’ve taken a lot of graduate courses.” When she was promoted to associate principal in 2001, she says, “I began looking at the evaluations, and noticed a big inconsistency among the administrative leaders in how they were evaluating teachers. And
Solving Our National Math Problem
With the Noyce scholarship program, SED is preparing tomorrow’s leaders in math education.

**Distance = rate × time.**
Karen Levin and her students are solving travel problems. As she creates a new challenge from scratch, Levin asks one of her students to pick a number: “How fast do you travel to school? How many miles per hour?”

“5,” the girl replies.

“Oh, my God,” a classmate says, snickering.

“I walk,” asserts the girl, defiant.


A few words of encouragement later, Levin asks a question, answering it herself: “We have to think about the relationships among distance, rate, and time when solving problems.”

For most of the period, the freshmen are busy solving problems. They teach geometry and precalculus upstairs from Levin at City on a Hill.

“Math is an important way of thinking,” says Willwerth. “Students learn to look for patterns and make conjectures and think logically. Ten years from now, they may not be using precalculus, specifically, but they will have learned mathematical habits of mind that can serve them well beyond the classroom.”

And some students do want to become mathematicians. When a Noyce scholar encounters such students, he or she encourages them to come to BU for the annual Math Field Day or the Program in Mathematics for Young Scientists (PROMYS) summer course.

It was, in fact, PROMYS’s program for teachers that brought Willwerth to SED. Since then, she has taken three courses (while teaching full-time), including Chapin’s course on professional development, elements of which she has begun to implement with her colleagues at City on a Hill.

**Talking the talk**
Math teachers teaching one another. That’s a prime ingredient in the Noyce program.

At Chapin’s monthly seminars, past and present Noyce scholars network, trade tips, and hear from SED faculty about the latest research in the field. One recent topic was “the teaching and learning of slope and linear equations.” Chapin says, “We had presenters speak, activities that involved using motion detectors, videos that showed students solving problems that involve slope—and the confusion that came about—and we discussed how to address those students’ confusion.”

Chapin has also presented her own research on the role of discourse in the teaching and learning of mathematics. Disseminated in the Noyce scholars’ methods course as well, “productive talk” is an idea Chapin developed with Professor Catherine O’Connor, the chair of SED’s literacy and language department. (Their book, “Using Math Talk to Help Students Learn,” was re-released this spring, packaged with a DVD showing clips of successful classroom discussions.)

In action in both Willwerth’s and Levin’s classrooms, it is a means of ensuring and improving students’ comprehension of math concepts by drawing the answers out of the kids in their own words.

“One of the biggest problems in math classrooms across the country is there’s a lot of teachers telling students how to do stuff, and students memorizing procedure, which isn’t really very meaningful,” says Willwerth. “Math talk gets the kids talking to one another and gives them a way to construct their own knowledge and learn from one another.”

“That was a huge benefit for me,” Levin says of Chapin’s teaching on math talk. Last year was my first year teaching, so I focused on basic classroom management. But this year I focused on how to get the kids to talk. ‘I disagree with that; I agree with that and here’s why.’ I use that in all my classes.”

**Mathematics value**
If today’s American children are to grow up into a competent workforce able to compete in tomorrow’s global marketplace, they’ll need to start doing better in math soon. That’s why the Noyce program is a vital national resource. “This is one of the president’s big priorities right now,” Chapin says. “It has the potential to make a difference in the lives of so many people who need it.”

SED’s Noyce scholars can see the difference they’re making in their own students’ understanding of mathematics—and of the importance of mathematics to their futures.

“I think they see the value in problem-solving,” says Levin. “They see the value in taking open-ended problems, organizing the information, taking wrong turns and realizing they’re in the wrong place, and getting themselves back on track.”

For more information, visit www.bu.edu/sed/noyce.
Play With a Purpose

The School of Education’s on-site preschool turns out better-equipped children—and teachers.

At first, it sounds like bedlam. But after one listens for a time, the loud, happy chatter of twenty young children, between the gentle prompting of four calm adults, clariﬁes into intelligible bits of dialogue. What initially looks like pell-mell zagg-zaging takes on a pattern as children cycle among a pretend room, inviting one another to play, and politely asking their teachers if they can enter the designated areas.

“What does the sign say?” responds one teacher.

“Art.”

“And how many children are in this area now?”

“1, 2, 3, 4.”

“So can you play here?”

“Yeah.”

“Right. But put your name on the turns list and we will let you know as soon as there is space.”

The children oblige, marking the paper, some with scribbles, some with conventional letters, all understanding that the marks represent names.

Welcome to the Early Childhood Learning Lab (ECLL). On SED’s ﬁrst ﬂoor, it’s a ﬁeld placement site for students majoring in early childhood ed. There, says lab director Jane Lannak, SED students learn how to use play-based experiences to support not only young children’s social, emotional, and physical development, but also their cognitive and intellectual development.

The early childhood education program prepares students to achieve Massachusetts state licensure for teaching preschool through second grade, and moreover to become consistent in saying we have to make a plan of assistance. It isn’t just a dump of ‘things that are not just here to play with the kids.’

The checks are welcome—despite budget-cutting “pretty conservatively,” Hofer says there’s always a funding gap between expenditure and money from the state—

but it’s the hands-on involvement that appeals to Hofer.

“I think our generation has the power to change,” she says. “You don’t want that to be the way things are. I think the main point about that isn’t superior to all the others, because it looks like in a classroom.”

Saphier says. “The conversation is not about the school movement may not be the perfect solution to the problem of how much they’ve struggled in conventional schools.

no matter how much they’ve struggled in conventional schools. For now, they have proven that everybody has a place in society,” no matter how much they’re struggling in conventional schools.

“We have an adage at Phoenix Charter Academy,” says Hofer. “Proving it’s possible.” If students aren’t learning, that doesn’t mean they don’t have the capacity to learn. You just have to ﬁnd a different way to teach them.”

If we want teachers all working at the same level, we should have the same expectations for ourselves.

“So I called Research for Better Teaching, and Jon set up a training. Jon helped dramatically. All our admin team and teacher leaders were trained in how to observe and analyze teaching. It was huge. We all got on the same page about what good instruction looks like in a classroom.”

Ferguson wrote that Saphier’s course helped Brockton “deﬁne instructional non-negotiables. That gave everyone who provides feedback to teachers the opportunity to build courage and conviction around the core learning the school wanted to stress. . . . Department heads now use the same criteria to evaluate all 300 teachers across the school. And those criteria are no longer about classroom management. . . . They now focus on instruction.”

To address teachers who fall short on those criteria, Saphier also gave leaders a course in having diﬁcult conversations, based on objective facts gleaned through their observation and analysis. “You have to have very good and speciﬁc data about what’s going on that’s not working for the students,” Saphier says. “The conversation is not about a personal accusation but about what needs to be changed.”

Skills needed in those conversations, Saphier says, include “being a good listener to the teacher’s point of view, but also being per- sistent in saying we have to make a plan of assistance. It isn’t just a dump of ‘things aren’t working’ on the teacher. It’s giving them the support they need to improve.”

Overall, this approach paid oﬀ. “Some diﬁcult conversations did happen—and some people did leave,” but not many, says Szachowicz. “We didn’t have a big turnover—you don’t want that to be the way things change,” she says.

Size doesn’t matter

Brockton High is large, but it does have a system for managing 4,300 students in a building a third of a mile long. For all four years, students belong to one of four sec- tions, or “houses,” where they go for home- room and take many of their classes. Each house has its own library, cafeteria, study center—and housemaster and even assistant housemaster.Obviously they travel for gym, ﬁne arts, and other classes, but it is like having four schools within one big school,” says Frutkin. “They go to their housemaster for discipline. Teachers get to know the kids in their house.”

At the same time, though, students across the school come together in clubs and sports teams as well as electives and voca- tional classes. They identify themselves as Brockton Boxers. “Their lives really are still entrenched in all the activities of a big school,” says Saphier.

Does this system represent a kind of middle ground between the traditional big school and the break-East-Side-High-into-separate- little-schools-with-funny-names strategy?

“Think the main point about that isn’t so much middle ground, but that big schools can do just as well as small schools if attention is paid to the right things,” says Saphier. “The heart of the matter is improv- ing instruction and creating an environment where all the students feel that the adults know them and care about them. You can do that whether you have a big school or a small school.”