

# CAMBRIDGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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Dear Cambridge Public Schools Community,

It is my great pleasure to share the very good news that thanks to the remarkable efforts of our students, staff, families, and community, the Cambridge Public Schools has achieved significant improvement over the past year, as determined by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Under the state's accountability system, which ranks districts and schools from a high of Level 1 to Level 5, CPS was designated as a Level 3 district for the past two years. CPS was ranked as Level 3 because districts are assigned the level of their lowest performing school, and three CPS schools were designated Level 3: Kennedy-Longfellow, King Open, and the Putnam Avenue Upper School. A Level 3 designation indicates that a school is among the lowest performing 20% of schools or student groups in that grade span. I am proud to announce that in 2015, all three of these schools succeeded in rising to Level 2 status. Today, CPS is once again a Level 2 district.

This achievement by our schools and district is particularly impressive within the state context. Cambridge was one of 65 Massachusetts districts designated as Level 3 in 2014. Only five of these districts succeeded in rising to Level 2 in 2015, including Cambridge. Of the 25 districts in the state's Urban Network, Cambridge was one of only three districts in that group that achieved Level 2 status in 2015. Cambridge is, therefore, among the highest ranked districts in the Urban Network.

What led to this critical improvement in students' learning at these three Cambridge schools? First and foremost was the urgent, strategic, and courageous work of these school communities. I would like to acknowledge, praise, and thank the principals, staff, students, and families of the Kennedy-Longfellow, King Open, and Putnam Avenue schools. This success is, above all, their success.

Leaders of these schools cited a number of strategies as instrumental to their communities' success, including establishing a shared vision and instructional focus, increasing educators' effective use of assessment data, developing shared leadership and a collaborative culture, and setting high expectations. Principal Christine Gerber asserted that improvement at the Kennedy-Longfellow school was "largely due to really focusing on creating meaningful structures for staff collaboration and professional learning that were focused on data-driven instruction." Upper School Head Mirko Chardin described improvement at the Putnam school in a similar way, noting that the Putnam community "spent a lot of time looking at data and making sense of what were skill gaps that our students had and what were areas in which teacher instruction needed to improve. We used data inquiry cycles to fuel this work." The Putnam Avenue community also established a new vision statement and, according to Head of School Chardin, "committed to growth mindset work."

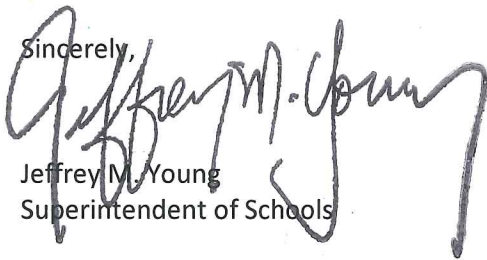
Principal Darrell Williams also reflected on the collaboration and learning that the King Open community engaged in as part of its improvement process, observing that, "being able to plan, collaborate and learn from each other has been a very powerful medium through which we have been able to look at student work, observe each other's practice and create a deeper level of accountability to each other, our students and the families we serve." Principal Williams also cited the essential role of families in the King Open's process: "The support that we have from our families is equally important to our progress. Without families working with the school to advance student learning, the task of meeting student needs would be more difficult to achieve."

Essential to the success of the work occurring within the walls of these schools was the targeted support from a variety of talented educators across our district, including our Teaching and Learning Team, curriculum coordinators, district coaches, and others. Across the district, we prioritized the improvement of our Level 3 schools and worked together to improve them. Improved district practices in school improvement planning, data analysis, and assessment—including our expanded Response to Intervention program—were key to these schools' success. In addition, the implementation of the district's more rigorous standards-based curricula, and our focus on instructional improvement across the district, supported by Jon Saphier and his team at Research for Better Teaching, were essential.

These school communities also benefitted from the strategic investment and financial support provided by the School Committee through a budget initiative directed to Level 3 schools, as well as support from a state grant awarded to Level 3 districts. State support also included an array of professional services provided by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's District and School Assistance Center for the Greater Boston area.

Through these many partnerships—all focused on strategic improvement initiatives identified by honest and sometimes difficult conversations—our community succeeded in doing the work required to better serve our students. I am grateful for and humbled by the courage and commitment of all members of our CPS community, and I hope you will join me in celebrating this achievement with them.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey M. Young  
Superintendent of Schools

*For more information about the accountability status of the Cambridge Public Schools, please visit the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's profile page:*

<http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/>

*For more information about accountability results for the state, please see the Department's press release:*

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=21346>