



**Schools on the Move:**  
A Look at High School  
Transformation in Action

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## INTRODUCTION

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Every student deserves a learning environment where they can thrive. With this vision in mind, EdVestors created the [School on the Move \(SOM\) Prize](#) to spotlight the most notable schoolwide improvement efforts happening across Boston Public Schools (BPS).

For nearly two decades, the SOM Prize has honored and raised awareness about exemplary improving schools in Boston, the birthplace of American public education. BPS currently [serves nearly 50,000 students](#), including more than 14,000 children in grades 9-12. BPS operates 119 schools, which families access through a school choice model, including selective-admission schools, pilot schools, and in-district charter schools with applications, and open-enrollment schools at the secondary level.

BPS is a vibrant community, serving a diverse population of students who bring rich cultural and linguistic assets to the classroom. The district is committed to unlocking the full potential of every student, which requires addressing challenges such as attendance, postsecondary readiness, and graduation rates to ensure equitable opportunities for all. Like many large urban districts, these challenges have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and leaders have launched several new initiatives to re-engage students and address the effects of unfinished learning through means such as increasing instructional relevancy and personalization. BPS Superintendent Mary Skipper has outlined a [comprehensive vision](#) for BPS high schools aimed at elevating student outcomes. This blueprint focuses on enhancing academic rigor, fostering robust community partnerships, creating clear college and career pathways, and investing in modern school facilities. By prioritizing these areas, the district seeks to transform high schools into dynamic hubs of learning and opportunity for all students.

Established by EdVestors in 2006, the SOM Prize has historically used data from the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) to identify schools where continuous improvement efforts were leading to concrete outcomes for students. However, in 2022, EdVestors decided to [broaden its recruitment criteria](#), issuing an open call for applications that invited schools to share more expansive data, including stories and strategies centered around



improving student outcomes in areas beyond state academic scores. This shift, coinciding with the declining availability of high-quality assessment data as a result of the pandemic, defined success more broadly and considered a range of measures alongside academic data related to school climate, social-emotional learning, student engagement, and college and career readiness. It broadened the funnel of schools that could apply, allowing EdVestors to learn about the improvement stories of a wider variety of schools.

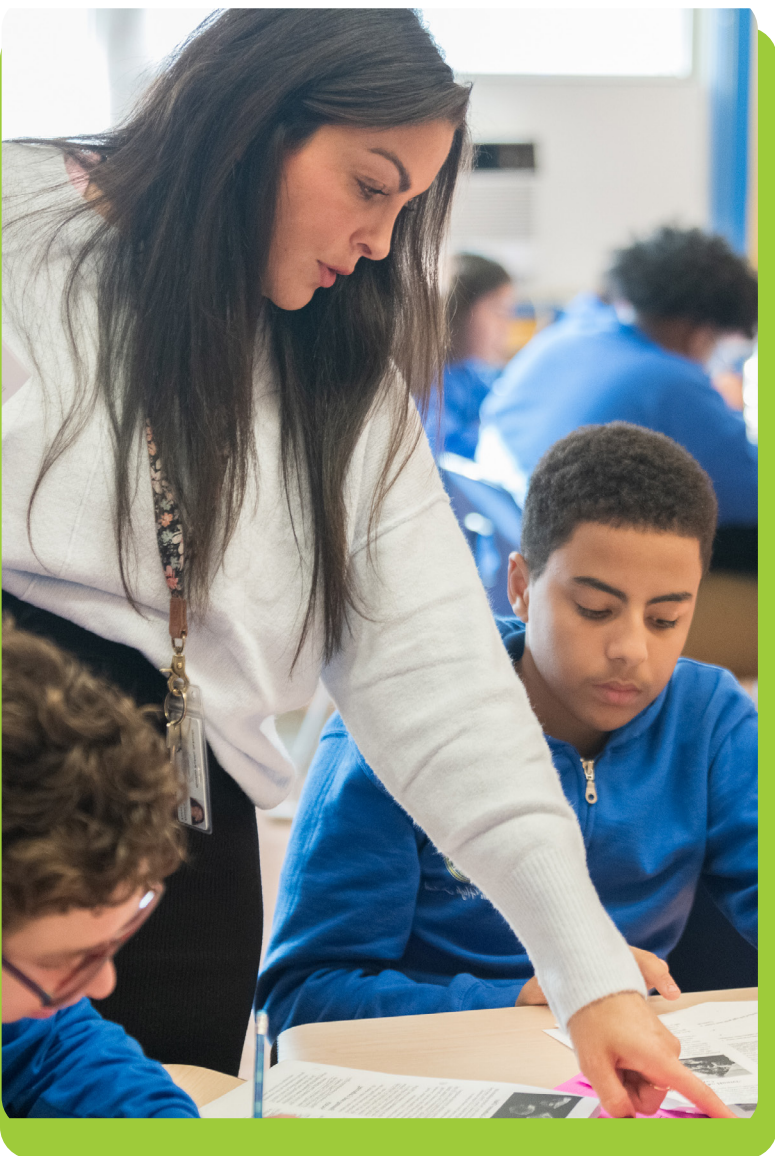
The 2023 SOM finalists were all high schools, though each operated a substantially different model and governing structure. The finalists included:

- [Boston Green Academy](#), a Horace Mann in-district charter school serving approximately 450 students;
- [East Boston High School](#), the 2023 winner, an open-enrollment school serving approximately 1,300 students; and,
- [Fenway High School](#), a pilot early college high school serving approximately 375 students.

**Each of these schools has developed distinct, innovative models, achieving results that challenge existing narratives and expectations for urban secondary schools. As such, they offer a unique opportunity for study: what might they tell us about what it takes to radically improve learning for high school students? How can they inform broader system improvement efforts and reforms?**

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This report, developed in partnership between [EdVestors](#) and a national education nonprofit, [The Learning Accelerator \(TLA\)](#), seeks to explore these questions. For readers, this report will illuminate the power of a reimagined school vision, aligned best practices that drive tangible change, and recommendations for how to support innovation efforts in their schools, systems, and neighborhoods.



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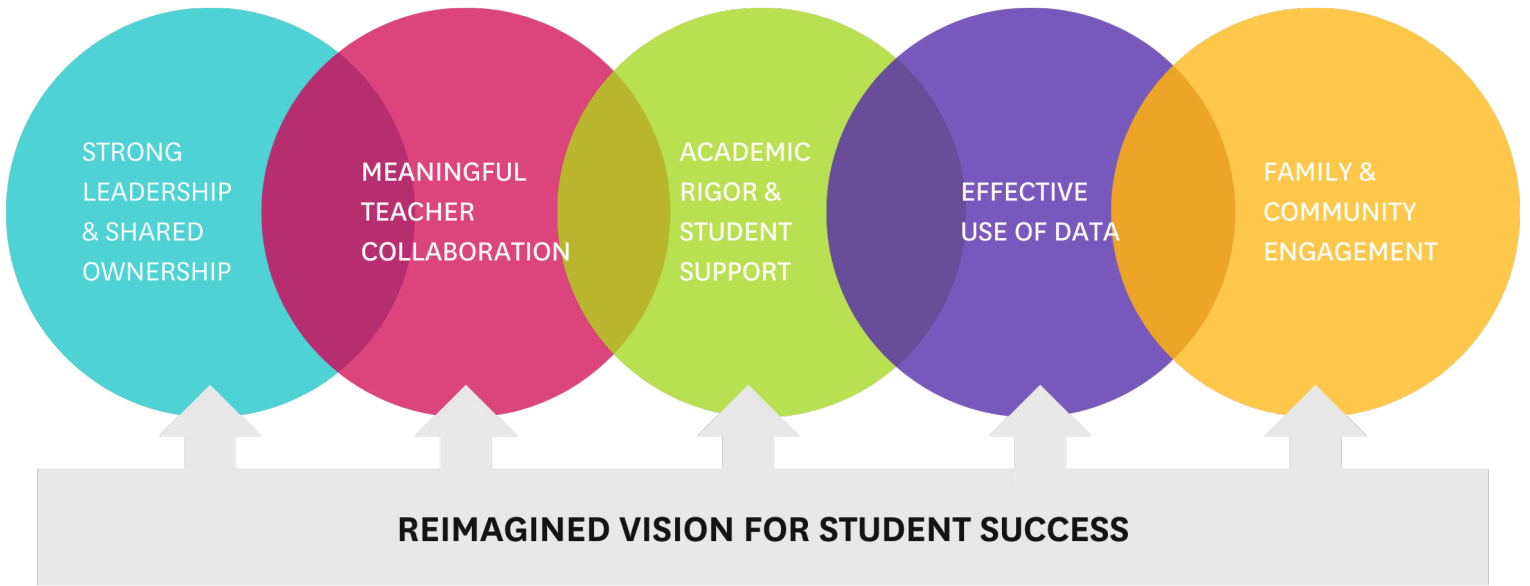
## DIFFERENT MODELS AND CONTEXTS, COMMON FOUNDATIONS AND LEVERS FOR CHANGE

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Between April and June 2024, TLA examined existing SOM application and school model artifacts and collected data on the schools' improvement journeys through additional interviews and research. The team sought to develop a clearer understanding of both common and divergent model approaches and strategies. Through learning more about their stories of change, we explored how and whether these three schools could offer a roadmap other decision-makers could use to support and drive change in their own communities and contexts.

Prior EdVestors' studies of SOM Prize winners, combined with an examination of national research, had led to the development of the organization's [Five Key Practices of Effective Schools framework](#). The 2023 SOM finalists' practices and models largely reflected the areas outlined in this predecessor tool with regard to strong leadership and ownership, meaningful teacher collaboration, academic rigor and student support, effective use of data, and family and community engagement. Each finalist school cited actions and practices in all of these areas.

However, what became apparent through interviews and a deep-dive into finalists' practices, applications, and artifacts was the fact these most recent finalists told stories of change that were first grounded in a new vision for teaching and learning as the prerequisite for change. Working with their broader community and tackling equity challenges, schools articulated new, compelling goals to work toward. They then drove coherent change, in similar ways, across all of the five key practice areas. Their practices were utilized in service of a reimagined vision for student success in a way that differentiated these finalists from other applicants.



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## SETTING THE **VISION**

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Effective school innovation is not about a single new program or exciting technology. Rather, it requires rethinking what school is, how it works, and for whom. The need for reinvention is particularly critical for high school students, who are increasingly navigating competing priorities, changing social, digital, and physical landscapes, and myriad college and career pathways, as well as lifestyle choices – and relevance increasingly matters. For a high school to address these needs, it must offer both a vision and an experience that both students and their families find meaningful, purposeful, and engaging.

In interviewing the school leaders representing the 2023 SOM finalists, it quickly became clear that each held a vision of success that included and went beyond an examination of standardized exam scores. These visions were developed in partnership with school community members, and they captured the unique aspirations, opportunities, and spirit of their context.

## Boston Green Academy



Born from a desire for change, [Boston Green Academy \(BGA\)](#) stands out as Boston's only school dedicated to sustainability and nurturing the next generation of environmentally conscious leaders. Founded in 2011 by passionate educators and community members, BGA initially set out to create a middle school focused on green education through utilizing curriculum and educational experiences focused on sustainability and environmental justice. However, when the district tasked BGA leaders with turning around a struggling high school at risk of state intervention, they rose to the challenge. This experience fueled their core mission: to empower all students through a rigorous and relevant education focused on sustainability.

BGA's vision is built on four pillars: high expectations with tailored support, a curriculum that connects to students' lives, a collaborative learning environment, and a culture of continuous improvement. The school utilizes a first-of-its-kind Environmental Science and Technology Career Technical Education (CTE) program

in BPS, in which passion for the environment translates into concrete careers in renewable energy, conservation, or sustainable agriculture. Equity is a core value; all students can explore environmental interests through daytime extracurriculars, all teachers are dual-certified in special education to support diverse learners (since students with disabilities make up one third of the school's population, significantly higher than the BPS average), and the Environmental Science and Technology CTE program utilizes a lottery system for fair access. The CTE program's students attend college at rates 15 percentage points higher than the rest of the school, and BGA is currently at work expanding this program to serve more students.

BGA's innovative approach has garnered national recognition as a Green Ribbon School, exemplifying sustainable urban education. Their approach fosters environmentally conscious leaders, making sustainability the foundation for a brighter future at BGA.

Founded in 1880, **East Boston High School (EBHS)** serves about 1,300 students in grades 7-12 and has transformed from being at risk of state takeover to providing a high-achieving learning environment for students. In just 10 years, EBHS has gone from a state ranking in the third percentile and a graduation rate of 56% to the 26th percentile with a 94% graduation rate. The school cites a relentless focus on collaboration and student success as its “secret weapon.”

EBHS prioritizes continuous improvement and coherent professional development experiences. Teachers work in professional learning communities (PLCs), through which they can earn graduate credit and conduct action research and curriculum reviews together. Here, professional learning goes beyond systems and routines; teachers have a strong commitment to sharing knowledge, analyzing data, and constantly refining their craft. Instructional rounds further this spirit of collaboration, allowing teachers to observe each other’s best practices.

Due to their unique geography, EBHS is able to function as a neighborhood school amidst a citywide high school enrollment system, allowing them to tailor programs to the specific needs of their community and ensuring

a fit between their curriculum and student aspirations. Forging strong relationships with students, families, and the broader community is an explicit priority. Many staff members, including the headmaster, are alumni, deepening the school’s personal and professional ties to the community. Strong collaboration and the commitment of leaders and educators to continuous improvement and a thorough understanding of their community are woven into EBHS’ vision.

EBHS is a cornerstone of the neighborhood of East Boston, profoundly impacting the lives of students and families. By providing a comprehensive support system that addresses both academic and personal needs, the school empowers students to reach their full potential. Utilizing on-site resources like a food pantry, laundry facilities, and mental health services, the school ensures students’ basic needs are met, creating a stable environment where students can focus on learning during their time at school. Strong community partnerships, family engagement initiatives, and an equity-focused “no-zero” grading policy foster a supportive and inclusive atmosphere where students feel valued and challenged with appropriate rigor. By equipping students with the skills and confidence to succeed, EBHS is preparing them for a bright future.

## East Boston High School





## Fenway High School

Founded in 1983 as a pilot school, [Fenway High School](#) has a strong foundation of embracing change and is Boston's first and only fully inclusive early college high school. Its 375 students in grades 9-12 experience a blend of academic rigor, personalized connections, and early college access and learning. The school's evolution has been shaped by shifting student demographics, a strong demand from families and students for increased access to college and career pathways, and a strategic advantage in its proximity to the Colleges of the Fenway, a collaborative of five neighboring Boston-based colleges and universities. The needs of the community, challenges of the pandemic, and a deep commitment to equity fueled their vision for improvement: to cultivate a socially responsible learning environment where every student thrives beyond graduation.

Fenway translates this into a set of skills and experiences, centered on intellectual development, self-esteem, and leadership geared toward college and career success. Early college opportunities are woven into the fabric of the school, where students can study social entrepreneurship at Wentworth Institute of Technology or Health Sciences at UMass Boston, earning up to 24 college credits for free while in high school. Recognizing the importance of math in STEM

fields, Fenway worked to increase the rigor of early high school math courses, ensuring equitable outcomes in crucial content areas and long-term workforce success. In 2022, Fenway's 10th graders had the highest growth in math scores in Boston, with Black students in particular having the highest growth of any student group in the state.

Fenway employs a unique "house system" that fosters strong student-teacher and student-family connections as teachers "loop" with students for a period of time, matriculating with the same students through two grade levels. Focused on student reflection, their Junior Review empowers 11th graders to advocate for themselves, presenting their progress and challenges to a panel of teachers, counselors, and peers as a culminating assessment and showcase of their work.

Fenway High School seeks to develop graduates who are not just academically prepared but also well-rounded leaders with the social responsibility to contribute positively to society. By integrating college coursework into the high school experience, the program builds students' confidence and accelerates their academic progress. The school believes that a focus on both academic and personal growth positions students to thrive in a rapidly changing world.



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## DRIVING COHERENT CHANGE ACROSS PRACTICE AREAS

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With their diverse histories, communities, and contexts, each SOM finalist took advantage of an opportunity to set a bold, unique, and community-aligned vision for their students, building upon and expanding traditional measures of success. By incorporating a broader set of outcomes, such as students' interests and needs, including strong academics, social-emotional skills, and practical skills for future endeavors, their visions became a north star and helped to rally students and the community behind in their improvement efforts.

Rather than allowing their visions to stand alone, these schools took a vital step by deliberately aligning their vision with effective educator practices, aiming to improve both student experiences and outcomes. To fully operationalize their vision, each school intentionally developed a unique set of strategies and approaches tightly aligned to it, executed across [five key practice areas](#). While their specific strategies differed, the schools engaged in similar “moves” to align resources and capacity toward their new visions, and did so in collaboration with students, staff, and community stakeholders.

1

### Strong Leadership and Shared Ownership: Investing in Buy-in and Sustainability

Schools all communicated their vision to their school community – but then took the work a step further, identifying and investing in key owners charged with driving specific pieces of the vision forward. Establishing this distributed leadership, grounded in shared accountability between all school staff, was noted as a critical moment in several finalist interviews. To make good on their promise to students and families, each SOM finalist school has invested in roles directly aligned to their priorities, as detailed here.



## Practices in Action

### Innovative Roles

- At **Fenway**, the Director of Early College, Early College Coordinator, and Ventures Coordinator are tasked with building and maintaining early college pathways.
- **BGA's** Director of Green Programs ensures a dedicated member of the team is responsible for seeking out community partnerships aligned to sustainability.
- **EBHS** prioritizes its vision of comprehensive support for students by employing roles such as a Behavioral Health Clinician, a GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) Advisor, and dedicated staff mentors.

### Distributed Ownership

- At **BGA**, as students and staff began to return to normal operations after the COVID-19 pandemic, leadership recognized a need to bring in a new perspective on their systems and structures. To lead this work, they hired a Director of Teaching and Learning and tasked them with overseeing the school's approach to instruction. This leader was responsible for building upon BGA's existing academic foundation to help students reach their full potential, which involved setting a clear vision for teaching and classroom learning, ensuring all staff were aligned on what the vision looked like in practice, and clarifying expectations from students to reach that vision. While the Director worked closely with the Head of School on this initiative, their level of ownership was noted as a key lever to the school's improvement journey.
- **EBHS** has developed a teacher-led culture of collaboration. Teachers are partners in understanding the vision of EBHS and are tasked with executing academic and student-focused priorities, leaning on one another for observation, feedback, and professional growth. By empowering broader staff – rather than just leadership – to become owners of academic culture, EBHS has ensured deeper investment, shared accountability, and stronger outcomes for students.

## 2

## Meaningful Teacher Collaboration: Focusing on Capacity and Practices

Each SOM finalist has provided dedicated resources to support teachers in making data-driven decisions about academics. Leaders focused on providing sufficient time for staff to collaborate on specific, vision-related challenges and develop new teaching methods, such as project-based learning, personalized learning, and other effective strategies. This also helped build buy-in and strengthen the work's credibility amongst staff.



### Practices in Action

#### Instructional Rounds

- BGA implemented [instructional rounds](#) designed to enhance classroom observation, improve teaching practices, and increase academic rigor. Their protocol includes a detailed schedule for classroom visits, feedback sessions, and a structure for debriefing meetings. To support consistency and focus, the protocol provides note-taking sheets and additional resources like rubrics and reflection prompts, enabling educators to systematically evaluate and improve their teaching.
- A [key strategy](#) for EBHS was also implementing instructional rounds that allowed teachers to learn from and support each other. These activities helped staff to break out of silos and work collaboratively to identify problems of practice, observe other classrooms, discover trends and patterns, and craft solutions to the challenges they observed. These rounds empowered staff to drive their own improvement and fostered a spirit of learning and growth among faculty members. The learnings and work resulting from these instructional rounds inform additional instructional strategies, such as action research and curriculum review cycles.

#### Vision for Staff Learning

- Fenway's [vision for professional development](#) focuses on building a robust support system for students through collaboration among teachers, counselors, and college partners. The school provides targeted training on the effective use of advisory periods, office hours, and tutoring. To address literacy and comprehension challenges, teachers engage in inquiry groups that develop instructional strategies like creating text sets, scaffolding complex materials, and enhancing vocabulary. Fenway's partnership with higher education institutions helps to bridge the gap between high school and college-level coursework. Through this collaboration, Fenway's teachers are able to sit in on college-level classes to see what concepts might pose a barrier for their students and can be built upon in high school.
- EBHS prioritizes teacher collaboration and professional development through [professional learning communities](#) (PLCs). Their PLCs, which offer graduate-level certification, are central to the school's efforts to create a collaborative and inclusive teaching environment. Teachers participate in instructional rounds, peer observations, and action research cycles, focusing on key instructional priorities like setting high expectations for students. This collaborative culture supports EBHS's [Unified Vision for Success](#), emphasizing a teacher-led approach, consistent systems for curriculum and assessment, and strong relationships that shape the school's positive culture.



### 3

## Academic Rigor and Student Support: Realigning Practices to New Visions

To improve academic outcomes, SOM finalists reimagined instructional approaches, utilizing innovative learning materials and experiences to drive instructional rigor. By incorporating meaningful partnerships, schools were able to increase relevance and rigor while still upholding their commitment to serving all students.

- EBHS employs the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework to create engaging and effective learning experiences. Teachers collaboratively [develop units](#), focusing on clear learning outcomes, essential questions, academic language, and skills, ensuring vertical alignment through content-transfer goals. This broadens the purpose of learning to include both content and academic knowledge, language, and skills alongside content standards.



## Practices in Action

### Community-Connected Learning

- Through the [BGA Green Line](#), students journey through an innovative schoolwide curriculum centered on exposure, engagement, and hands-on learning experiences, each focused on real-world environmental issues. BGA partners with local organizations to offer field trips, opportunities for corporate community service, green elective programming, and outdoor exploration and leadership, increasing relevance and broadening perspectives. Taking part in an internship in a green industry is a graduation requirement for all students. This immersive approach not only deepens students' understanding of environmental science but also fosters a sense of responsibility and connection to their local ecosystem.

### Expansive Curriculum and Competency Design

- In pursuit of bringing their vision to life, [Fenway's portrait of a graduate](#) takes meaningful but broad categories (e.g., critical thinking, problem-solving, effective communication, hidden curriculum, social-emotional learning) and breaks them down into [competencies](#) and layering in rationale and a plan for gradual release across grade levels.



## 4

### Effective Use of Data: Selecting the Right Sources for New Objectives

To measure the effectiveness of their efforts relative to their vision, each SOM finalist defined student success to encompass more than just standardized tests. They considered social-emotional learning, college and career readiness, and real-world skills, and took into account a broader set of artifacts, including surveys, grades, project work, social-emotional measurement data, and student and family feedback. By looking at the bigger picture of student growth, teachers and leaders made adjustments to meet academic goals.



## Practices in Action

### Action Research Cycles

- At EBHS, PLCs meet weekly and are used alongside instructional rounds to support adult learning and drive meaningful collaboration around instruction. PLCs utilize data from instructional rounds to identify an area of interest and then engage in an [action research cycle](#). This process integrates 7-11 peer observations that help teachers gather data and document what is happening in their classrooms, and then prompts teachers to research solutions and refinements and then re-teach to improve outcomes.
- Fenway's teachers work with UMass Boston staff to analyze student data in [early college](#) math courses. This partnership not only improves instruction – it also ensures students can receive personalized support to strengthen their success. Students then receive targeted assistance from academic advisors and math tutors during weekly sessions.

### Experiential Learning

- To reach beyond content-based assessments, Fenway has incorporated structures to prioritize critical student competencies. Their [Junior Review](#), a culminating assessment and showcase of student work for 11th graders, engages students in meaningful reflection

about their learning journey and future plans, prompting them to build 21st-century learning skills through a presentation format. During [Project Week](#), students engage in community-building and experiential learning to develop and deepen social-emotional learning skills.

- BGA offers Boston's only federally funded [Environmental Science Career and Technical Education \(CTE\) Program](#), providing students in grades 9-12 with in-depth coursework, field trips, and industry partnerships. During the school's Project Week students have a chance to explore differentiated experiential opportunities through project-based learning opportunities outside the classroom. Students are able to engage in learning experiences that earn industry-wide certifications, opening doors to future college and career pathways in the sustainability field.



## 5

### Family and Community Engagement: Addressing Holistic Needs With New Partnerships

For each of the SOM finalists, achieving their vision required a collaborative ecosystem. Strong partnerships between families, community groups, and schools were key to creating a welcoming and engaging climate while also expanding options and offerings for students. For these finalists, collaboration provided students with significantly expanded academic, athletic, and student-support programs, increasing relevance and connections across the school community and experience. Intentional student support partnerships ensured that these opportunities were accessible to all students, prioritizing inclusion alongside relevance.



## Practices in Action

### Student Support Collaboration

- **BGA** uses social-emotional learning (SEL) principles to promote social justice through personalized support and restorative justice practices in its advisory system. This approach helps students express themselves, resolve conflicts, and build a supportive community. SEL is also integrated into the curriculum, covering essential skills like emotional regulation and effective communication to foster empathy and understanding.
- **Fenway's** Student Support Team (SST) provides comprehensive support services focusing on students' social, emotional, and academic well-being. By offering a range of programs and resources – such as college fairs, financial aid workshops, health and wellness workshops, and mentorship programs – Fenway's SST creates a supportive environment that empowers students to succeed.

### Commitment to Partnership and Inclusion

- Community is central to **EBHS'** identity, and partnering with families is a cornerstone of their work. To make this vision for centering the community of students and their caregivers a reality, they have created a [Parent and Family Center](#) and invested in both a Family Liaison and a Family Center Coordinator role to manage it. These roles ensure families have dedicated contacts to support their needs and ensure sufficient capacity is allocated to manage these needs.
- With a significant number of their students receiving special education services, **BGA** knew that achieving their vision of each student receiving personalized support would not be possible without dedicated staffing. To meet this need, they have developed a [Student Development Team](#) consisting of seven full-time staff members. Current roles range from school counselors, to a family liaison, to a re-engagement coordinator, and leaders have plans to add three inclusion specialists in the upcoming year.



- **Fenway** prioritizes student well-being and success through a dedicated Student Support Team. Through initiatives like college fairs, financial aid workshops, and peer mediation, the team cultivates a positive school climate and empowers students to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

### Focus on Postsecondary Readiness

- **BGA** fosters a "college-going mindset" beginning in middle school. Their College and Career team provides individualized support for students navigating the college application process, helping students better understand and prepare for college selection, standardized testing, and financial aid. In partnership with school counselors, they offer activities such as academic progress reviews, student data reviews, writing labs, and workshops to connect academic success with future careers. Students can also receive college credit via dual enrollment at Quincy College.
- After piloting early college with 25 students during the 2023-24 school year with Fisher College, **EBHS** was approved to expand their program in the years ahead.
- **Fenway**, a wall-to-wall early college high school that grants almost all students access to college-level instruction, has been a pioneer in the district's early college initiative. Their innovative "Year 13" program offers an additional year of high school – alongside up to 30 free college credits at UMass Boston. This early start on college coursework significantly reduces the time and cost required to complete a college degree.

### Community Resources and Services

- **EBHS** partners with nearly 15 organizations to ensure students have the chance to explore extracurricular, community service, and career opportunities across several fields and industries, including athletics, local businesses, and more, while supporting basic needs surrounding health and wellness, nutrition, and social and community connections.
- **BGA** works with [several community partners and organizations](#), helping students to explore their interests and make connections with individuals and groups outside their school. Some focus areas for their partnerships include leadership, sustainability, writing, volunteering, internships and employment, debate, and many more. In the spirit of equity, BGA offers students clubs and activities during the school day to ensure all students have the opportunity to participate – regardless of their after-school commitments or transportation challenges.
- [Fenway Partnerships](#) aims to provide students with a well-rounded education that extends beyond textbooks. Their network of nearly 40 partners strengthens student success from entry to graduation and beyond, with a focus on college and career pathways and enriching extracurricular activities. Every day, Fenway sends students off campus to the Museum of Science, Museum of Fine Arts, The Possible Zone, and/or Harvard's MedScience program for career readiness classes. This allows Fenway to function both as an early college and early career high school.



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## WHAT'S NEXT? RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DECISION-MAKERS

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The SOM finalists have communicated a compelling vision that transforming the high school experience is possible in partnership with students and the broader community. Ultimately, these schools have demonstrated the potential for all schools to create impactful and empowering high school experiences – but they first must clearly articulate a compelling, equity-connected vision for change and then coherently and systematically drive change through all key practice areas. System leaders and decision-makers can utilize key lessons and ideas from these schools to lead innovation and change in their own settings:

**Focus on a shared vision and the flexibility to actualize it.**

Empowering schools to develop a vision tailored to their unique context and student needs fosters a sense of ownership and fuels innovation throughout the larger school community. This vision – encompassing academics, postsecondary exploration, and social-emotional learning – creates a roadmap for a more holistic and relevant high school experience. Schools given appropriate flexibility can then experiment with new approaches and best practices, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for all students. System leaders and decision-makers should not only encourage schools to create this vision but also support the process to ensure sustainable implementation. By involving school leaders in the decision-making process, providing adequate resources and training, and tailoring support based on school-specific needs, districts can create a more stable environment for schools to thrive.

**Broaden perspectives and measurement of success.**

Looking beyond state assessment data is essential for a more holistic understanding of student success. While annual summative assessments, like MCAS, provide a valuable and important snapshot of academic progress, they fail to capture a fuller picture of success aligned with student needs and outcomes. Leaders should proactively seek out a wider range of metrics encompassing academic achievement, social-emotional learning, college and career readiness, and real-world skills (both soft and technical) to paint a more accurate picture of how well schools are preparing students for the future. By expanding metrics for success, system leaders ensure students' diverse strengths and achievements are recognized, while schools identify areas for improvement and demonstrate the full impact of their programs.



## Build ecosystems for supporting holistic practices.

While schools can strive to fully meet diverse student needs, tackling this alone is challenging. Community partners can offer support, but doing so on a school-by-school basis can be inefficient. System leaders can bridge the gap by connecting schools to a rich landscape of resources and entities – including community organizations, higher education institutions, and career pathways – to help schools tap into expertise and resources beyond their walls. These partnerships can lighten the load and maximize impact for schools, while empowering students to explore diverse interests and chart a successful path before, during, and after graduation. Community members and organizations gain the opportunity to invest in the future generation, strengthening the social fabric and fostering a thriving community.

## Invest in storytelling and networks of practice.

Each of the SOM finalists was able to articulate and drive changes needed for improvement. Leaders of these initiatives often report a high degree of isolation as well as the challenges building innovation from scratch. Investment in the capture and dissemination of emerging practices (both those that work as well as lessons about those that don't – and why) is critical to helping other schools build upon prior innovation work. Further, by networking this learning, school leaders can collaborate on shared problems, speeding up the pace of critical change.

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There's no one-size-fits-all approach, but by creating the **right conditions for support and partnership**, decision-makers can help schools create an environment where innovation flourishes, **shaping vibrant schools that empower every student to thrive.**



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## CONCLUSION

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The 2023 SOM Prize finalists – Boston Green Academy, East Boston High School, and Fenway High School – offer valuable insights into reimagining high school education in urban settings. These schools demonstrate that by developing a compelling vision rooted in equity and community needs, and then aligning practices across key areas, significant improvements in student outcomes and experiences are possible. Their success stories highlight the importance of strong leadership, meaningful teacher collaboration, academic rigor coupled with robust student support, effective use of diverse data, and deep family and community engagement.

As education leaders and policymakers seek to drive positive change in their unique contexts, the lessons from these schools provide a roadmap for creating more relevant, engaging, and effective high school experiences that prepare all students for future success. By fostering environments where innovation can flourish and empowering schools with the flexibility to tailor approaches to their communities, leaders and educators can work toward a future where every student has the opportunity to thrive.



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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### About Edvestors

[EdVestors](#)' mission is to advance equitable, meaningful education that prepares every Boston student to activate their power and shape their future. We drive toward our vision by 1) activating people and resources, 2) learning and iterating in context, and 3) influencing system change. We believe that continuously attending to all three drivers ensures our programs and initiatives will create impact.

### About The Learning Accelerator

[The Learning Accelerator \(TLA\)](#) is building an education field where everyone learns faster and changes systems together to ensure every child reaches their unique potential. TLA served as a partner to Edvestors on this initiative, conducting and sharing research on effective practices from the 2023 School on the Move Prize winner and finalists.



Photography by Michael Manning



