



CITY OF BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS
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Mayor Menino, funders, school officials mark milestones and transitions for the Boston Schoolyard Initiative

*Ribbon-cutting ceremony at Higginson-Lewis School celebrates
\$20m public/private investment in 88 Boston schoolyards since 1995;
Funders Collaborative prepares to complete its involvement*

BOSTON – Eighteen years after the launch of the [Boston Schoolyard Initiative](#), Mayor Thomas M. Menino today joined private funders, Boston Public Schools officials, community leaders, parents and students at the Higginson-Lewis School to celebrate the initiative’s achievements in transforming schoolyards across the city and announce upcoming transitions for the program.

The Boston Schoolyard Initiative (BSI) began in 1995, when Mayor Menino convened a broad-based Schoolyard Task Force to devise a process for funding projects and using them for recreational and educational purposes. Eighteen years later, after a public-private investment of more than \$20 million in 88 schoolyards, two of the founding players of the initiative – the [Boston Schoolyard Funders Collaborative](#) and Mayor Menino himself – will conclude their involvement at the end of this year.

“In 1995, nearly all of our schoolyards were barren wastelands of asphalt, unsuitable for learning and unsafe for play,” said Mayor Thomas M. Menino. “Today, thanks to the pioneering work of the Boston Schoolyard Initiative, our schoolyards offer safe, welcoming, beautiful spaces for exercise and learning for students and neighbors alike. Boston is proud to be a national leader in outdoor education and recreation.”

In his remarks, Mayor Menino asserted that the Boston Schoolyard Initiative represents the largest and most sustained citywide public-private partnership of his 30-year tenure in City Hall. For his years of leadership and investment, the Boston Schoolyard Funders Collaborative presented Mayor Menino with a “Schoolyard Champion Award” during today’s event.

“Mayor Menino and the other founders of the Boston Schoolyard Initiative were ahead of their time,” said Kathy McHugh, Chair of the Boston Schoolyard Funders Collaborative and Executive Director of the Cabot Family Trust. “They executed a vision for promoting student health and wellness, preventing childhood obesity, engaging students in outdoor learning, and advancing green schools and STEM education – long before they became the front-page issues that they are today.”

Speakers at today's event called upon the City of Boston and the Boston Public Schools to continue the work of the initiative, including ongoing investment in schoolyards and outdoor classrooms, as well as academic programs for taking teaching and learning into the schoolyard.

"Today, we celebrate 18 years of astounding schoolyard renovations in every neighborhood of the city," said Myrna Johnson, Executive Director of the Boston Schoolyard Initiative. "Although our generous funders and visionary Mayor are now preparing to conclude their involvement, we are hopeful that the Boston Schoolyard Initiative – both its physical spaces and its renowned professional development programs – will continue to thrive in the Boston Public Schools."

Officials noted that this fall, the Boston Schoolyard Initiative will have achieved its goal of transforming every feasible elementary and K-8 schoolyard in the Boston Public Schools, an accomplishment few other cities can boast. The results include 32 outdoor classrooms, which provide a rich environment for teaching and learning, and two innovative BSI academic programs, [Science in the Schoolyard](#) and [Outdoor Writers Workshop](#). Teacher surveys and evaluations of BSI programs affirm that taking learning into the schoolyard increases interest in science, helps students become better observers, and shows particular promise for improving outcomes for English language learners and students with disabilities.

"In addition to providing spaces and structures for children to exercise and have fun, Boston's schoolyards have emerged as extensions of the school learning environment," said John McDonough, Interim Superintendent of the Boston Public Schools. "Through curriculum support materials and professional development programs, BSI has helped educators bring teaching and learning outside, encouraging children to find knowledge and inspiration in nature."

The event featured a ribbon-cutting for the new schoolyard and outdoor classroom at the Higginson-Lewis K-8 School in Roxbury. Principal Joy Salesman-Oliver welcomed guests and introduced student performances to celebrate the transformed school grounds. The \$378,000 project features play structures, basketball court, science experiment tables, performance stage and amphitheater, and a community garden.

Boston Schoolyard Initiative by the numbers:

- 88 schoolyards renovated (every feasible elementary and K-8 school in the city)
- 32 Outdoor Classrooms constructed
- 30,000 school children reached annually
- 850+ teachers engaged in professional development
- 130 acres reclaimed for learning and play
- 25 acres of asphalt greened (equal to the Boston Public Garden)
- 100 garden beds created
- 200 trees planted
- 75 play structures installed

For more information, visit www.schoolyards.org.

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