

# THE BOSTON SCHOOLYARD INITIATIVE

Thomas M. Menino, Mayor  
City of Boston

*If I was a color I would be light red like a flower. If I was a sound I would sound like  
the wind blowing outside. If I was a smell I'd smell like a lilac that grows in the Spring.  
If I was a taste I'd taste like ice cream vanilla. If I was a touch I'd feel  
like sand on the beach.*

by Yvonne Tennyson

"Still Dreaming," a publication of the Youthworks/Artworks Program on Blue Hill Avenue  
reprinted with the permission of Urban Arts, Inc.

117]

pt

# Action Steps for Launching the Initiative

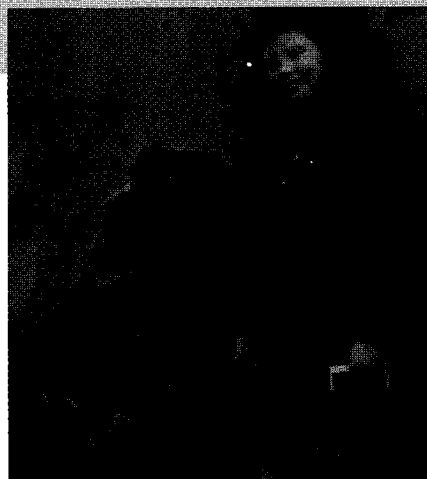
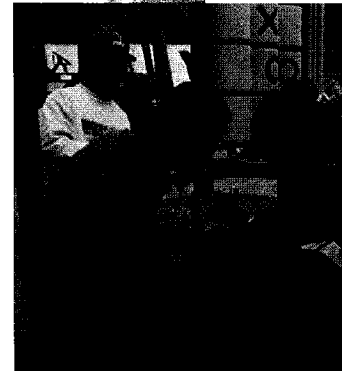
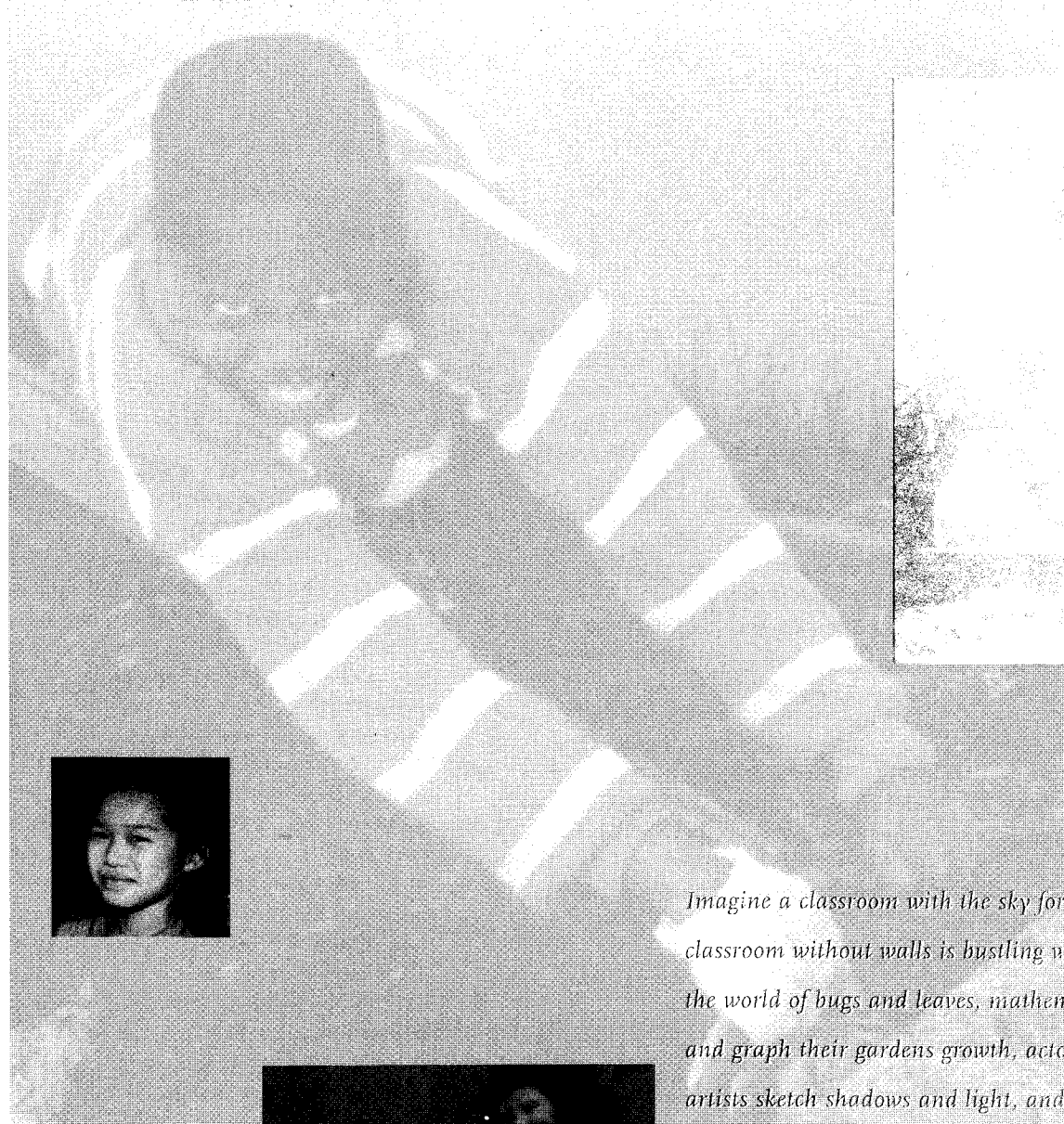
THE TASK FORCE RECOGNIZES THAT PUBLISHING ITS RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE BOSTON SCHOOLYARD INITIATIVE IS ONLY THE BEGINNING. THE REAL WORK LIES AHEAD. THIS SET OF "ACTION STEPS" GENERATED BY THE TASK FORCE PROVIDES A FRAMEWORK FOR GETTING THE INITIATIVE OFF THE GROUND.

- Make a presentation of the Schoolyard Initiative Recommendations and Draft Program Guidelines to the Blue Ribbon Commission for incorporation into the draft Master Plan.
- Develop qualitative and programmatic design guidelines for school yards at new and renovated schools developed under the Blue Ribbon Commission Master Plan.
- Identify and establish a Steering Committee. Responsibilities of the Steering Committee will include overseeing the Initiative, reviewing proposals, preparing an annual report, developing educational networks and coordinating future fundraising efforts, recognizing the best projects and most innovative programs and evaluating the Initiative after five years.
- Extend participation of the "Working Group" until permanent staff are in place. Responsibilities of the working group will include generating the Organizational Framework and Staffing Plan, finalizing the Request for Proposals and Applications, which include Program Guidelines, Selection Criteria and Selection Process, setting up financial systems and resolving legal and other outstanding issues.
- Provide outreach and information about the Schoolyard Initiative, the resources available and ways to access them to all prospective applicants.
- Meet with Police Commissioner.
- Identify and fund staff from City agencies and a community-based private organization. Staff will manage day-to-day outreach, provide technical assistance, meet with and support the Steering Committee.
- Identify and establish an Education Subcommittee (Subcommittee to the Steering Committee). Responsibilities of the Education Subcommittee will include developing educational networks, researching a more detailed range of educational programming possibilities, drafting language to include in the final RFP, and ensuring the Initiative provides funding and technical assistance for students at all levels, teachers, parents and other individuals interested in outdoor educational programming. The Education Subcommittee will gather and disseminate information on all sorts of ideas; each school community will design educational programs to suit its specific needs.



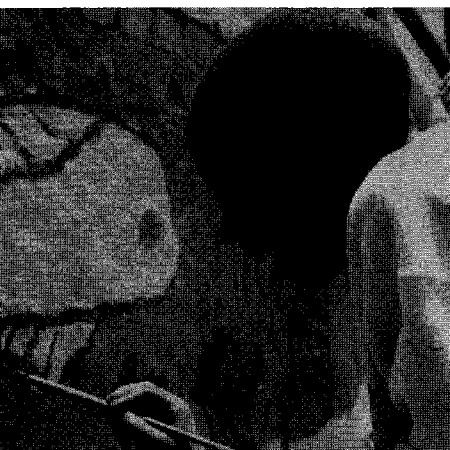
- Publish the School Yard News, a quarterly newsletter, to BPS principals, teachers, school parents' councils, school based management teams, student government representatives, and interested community based organizations.
- Meet with BPS Director of the Center for Leadership Development and BPS Curriculum Department Heads to discuss professional development for teachers.
- Hold work shops for teachers, interested parents and/ or residents to disseminate information and encourage their participation in the Initiative.
- Introduce the new School Superintendent to the Schoolyard Initiative.
- Review and revise the sample community maintenance agreement to be included with RFP. The maintenance agreement will address a renewal period and monitoring responsibility.
- Establish a subcommittee of the Task Force with maintenance expertise to make recommendations regarding the City structure for performing "baseline" maintenance.
- Assign departmental responsibilities at the City for schoolyard maintenance and submit a request for operating funds to the Budget Office for fiscal year 97. Ensure the assigned department defines a plan to provide baseline maintenance, which includes:
  1. Consideration of maintenance throughout design by:
    - a. using performance specifications for equipment and materials (to make baseline maintenance as easy as possible)
    - b. ensuring high quality construction by continuous and effective oversight by the project manager.
  2. A schedule for routine and emergency maintenance.
  3. A system of receiving and responding to constituent school and community requests for maintenance.
  4. Quality control systems.
  5. A strategy to encourage and support Yard Partners (like Park Partners) to form and remain active.
- Design a grant making structure acceptable to private funders and city officials, that is uniform and easy to understand, and which integrates the allocation of private and public funds into a unified plan.
- Designate city departments and hire staff to implement the Initiative and ensure coordination across participating city agencies. Designate at least one full time non-governmental staff person to support the Initiative.
- Compile Teachers' Resource Guide of curricular resources related to school yard learning activities, professional development opportunities and community service opportunities (Check with Environmental Services for contributions to the resource guide.) List sources of materials (vegetable seeds, tools, mulch, etc) for maintenance of enhancements.
- Develop a strategy for coordinating with public and community service agencies for maintenance training and jobs for youth.
- Continue working with public and private sector funders to sustain funding support (i.e. corporate breakfasts, presentations, etc.).
- Increase funding support through coordinated outreach to national funders.





*Imagine a classroom with the sky for a ceiling. In this classroom without walls is bustling with life. Students explore the world of bugs and leaves, mathematicians measure plants and graph their gardens growth, actors script and perform plays, artists sketch shadows and light, and poets write poems a thousand words. The schoolyard is a classroom without walls.*

*-Kirk Meyer, Director of Education  
Boston GreenSpace Alliance*



Thomas M. Menino, Mayor



#### TASK FORCE MEMBERS:

**Michael Galvin** (co-chair) - Chief of Basic Services - Boston Basic City Services

**Suzanne Watkin Maas** (co-chair) - Executive Director - Boston Globe Foundation

**Hattie McKinnis** (co-chair) - Executive Director - City Wide Parents Council

**Henry Allen** - Program Director - Hyams Foundation

**Domenic Amara** - Principal - Warren Prescott School

**Amanda Amis** - Director of Curriculum - Boston Public Schools

**Nasri Bahnam** - Senior Associate, STV Group - Early Learning Center Parents Council

**Helga Burre** - Senior Naturalist - Massachusetts Audubon Society

**Edna Cason** - Principal - William M. Trotter Elementary School

**Stacey Chacker** - Community Development Project Coordinator - Neighborhood of Affordable Housing

**Cathleen Douglas Stone** - Chief of Environmental Services - Boston Environmental Services

**Robert Fleming** - Executive Secretary - City Trust Office

**Ann Fowler-Wallace** - Administrator - Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust

**Robert Frazer** - Chairman - Boston Plan for Excellence

**Neil Gordon** - Director - Boston Budget Office

**Charles Grigsby** - Director - Boston Public Facilities Department

**Valerie Gumes** - Program Director - Hennigan School

**Pat Harrington** - Commissioner - Parks & Recreation Department

**Peter Karroff** - Executive Director - The Philanthropic Initiative

**Justine Liff** - Director, Planning and Development - Parks and Recreation Department

**Melinda Marble** - Senior Associate - The Philanthropic Initiative

**Pat King** - Executive Director - Boston Urban Gardeners

**Myrtlene Mayfield** - Principal - Solomon-Lewenberg Middle School

**Ann McGuire** - (former) Chief Officer - Boston Health and Human Services

**Kirk Meyer** - Director of Education - Boston GreenSpace Alliance

**Magnolia Monroe-Gordon** - Parent/teacher - Dickerman Elementary School

**Elly Mae O'Toole** - Parent/teacher - Agassiz Elementary School Growthworks Program

**Evelyn Reisenberg** - Executive Director - Boston Community Centers

**Charles C. Clabaugh** - Deputy Director - Boston Community Centers

**John T. Ridley** - V.P. of Marketing - Houghton & Mifflin Company

**Gary Smith** - Sr. V.P. of Administration - Houghton & Mifflin Company

**Loretta Roche** - Executive Director - City Wide Educational Coalition

**Melissa Rodriguez** - Student - West Roxbury High School Agribusiness Program

**Robert Roy** - Director of Facilities Management - Boston Public Schools

**Charles Skidmore** - Assistant Head Master - Brighton High School

**Patricia Simpson** - Parent - Warren Prescott Parents Council

**Mia Valentini** - Student - West Roxbury High School Agribusiness Program

**Robert Wadsworth** - Program Director - The Boston Foundation

## ADVISORS:

**Alyce Lee** - (former) Chief of Staff - Mayor's Office  
**Alice Hennessey** - Director - The Menino Project  
**Martha Pierce** - Mayor's Liason to the Boston Public Schools  
**Diane Syverson** - Manager of School Programs - Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University  
**Nancy Wall Clark** - Program Monitor - Boston Community Centers  
**Paul Roche** - General Counsel - Boston Public Facilities Department

## CONTRIBUTORS:

**Antonio Barbosa** - Winship Elementary School  
**Stephen Barr** - Dorchester High School  
**Pat Brainard** - Boston Public Schools  
**William Buckley** - Public Facilities Department  
**Valerie Burns** - Boston Natural Areas Fund/Henderson Foundation  
**Kevin Canan** - Public Facilities Department  
**William Christopher** - Public Facilities Department  
**Helen Cummings** - Boston Public Schools  
**Lucia Droby** - Radcliffe College  
**Paul Evans** - Massachusetts Department of Education  
**Mark Fahey** - Public Facilities Department  
**Christine Green** - The Boston Foundation  
**Ann Hamadeh** - Boston Public Schools  
**Richard Heath** - Boston GreenSpace Alliance  
**Mary Knasas** - Public Facilities Department  
**Barbara LoCurto** - IMPACT II Teacher Network  
**Paul McNeil** - Boston Public Schools  
**Betsy Nichols** - Pierce Charitable Trust  
**Joy Reo** - Boston Park Rangers

**Julie Stone** - City Year  
**Charlene Sullivan** - Wheatley Middle School  
**Phil Veysey** - Boston Public Schools  
**Judy Weisenberger** - Dever Elementary School  
**Jason Webb** - Nubian Roots, Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative  
**Diane Willow** - Children's Museum  
**Darlean Lewis** - John Winthrop Elementary School  
**Dennis Galvam** - Mayor's Office  
**Carolyn Keefe** - Public Facilities Department  
**Robert Spurling** - Boston Park Rangers  
**Lyda Garvin** - John Winthrop School  
**Nadeen M. Correia-Gomes** - Boston Public Schools  
**David Medina** - Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative  
**Lee Ferris** - Allston-Brighton CDC  
**Junko Shiota** - Lincoln Filene Center, Tufts University  
**Larry Faison** - Boston School Department  
**John Arnold** - Student, O'Donnell School  
**Pietro Giacalone** - Student, O'Donnell School  
**Tay Thai** - Student, O'Donnell School  
**Rodrigo Montiero** - Student, O'Donnell School  
**Stacy Fox** - Student, O'Donnell School  
**Natasha Gosselin** - Student, O'Donnell School  
**Charles Gibbons** - Boston Plan for Excellence  
**Marien Evans, Esq.** - Boston School Department  
**Kelem Dederian, Esq.** - General Counsel's Office  
**Peter Farrell, Kristy Jennings, Heather Kramer, Clifford Stoltze** - Stoltze Design  
**Daria Fortunato** - Boston Public Schools  
**William Hannon** and the City Printing Department  
**John Copley** - Landscape Architect  
**Lynn Wolff** - Landscape Architect

## PHOTO CREDITS:

**John Berg**  
**Lauri Webster**  
**Stacey Chacker**  
**Kirk Meyer**  
**Elly Mae O'Toole**  
**Bruce Parkhurst**  
**George Vasquez**  
**AnnMarie Rowlands**  
**Gail Oskind**  
**Mary Kate Killea**

## COORDINATORS:

**Kirk Meyer** - Boston GreenSpace Alliance  
**Geeta Pradhan** - Public Facilities Department

## WORKING GROUP STAFF:

**Khadijah Abdus-Sabur** - Boston Public Schools  
**Kenneth Crasco** - Parks and Recreation Department  
**Judith Evers** - Boston Office of Neighborhood Services  
**Donald King** - Parks and Recreation Department  
**Carole Mathieson** - Basic City Services  
**Lauri Webster** - Public Facilities Department





# Table of Contents

THE CHALLENGE	8
OVERVIEW	10
TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS	12
<b>Partnership Approach</b>	14
Background	
Guiding Principles	
<b>Outdoor Learning and Educational Opportunity</b>	17
Background	
Guiding Principles	
<b>Maintenance Strategy</b>	20
Background	
Guiding Principles	
<b>Blue Ribbon Commision Coordination</b>	22
Background	
Guiding Principles	
<b>Funding for the Initiative</b>	24
Background	
Guiding Principles	
SUSTAINING THE INVESTMENT	27

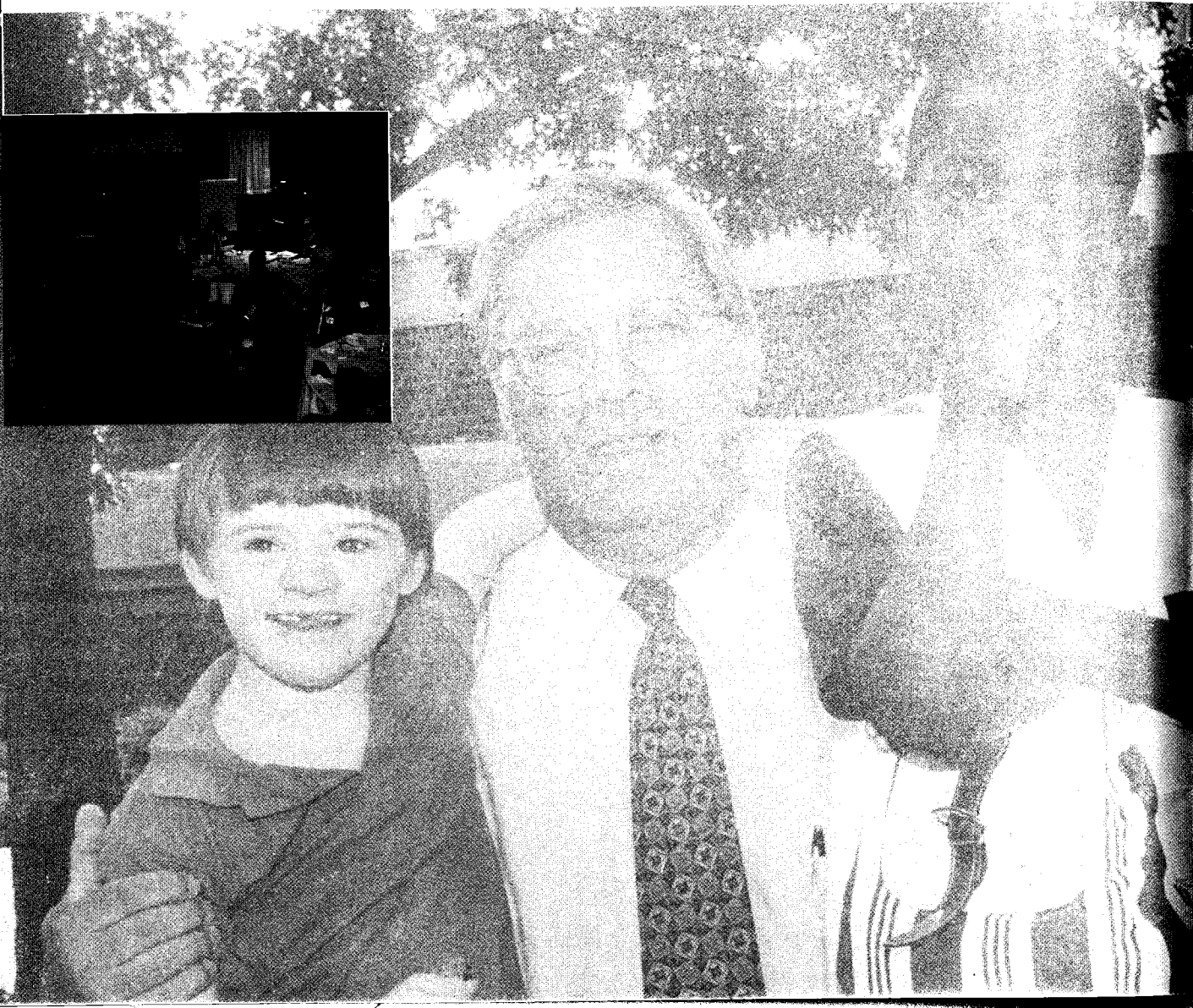
Enclosure - Action Steps for Launching the Initiative





*" We have the opportunity to help the children of Boston."*

Mayor Thomas M. Menino at the first meeting of the Schoolyard Task Force



# The Challenge

Thomas M. Menino, Mayor  
(Excerpt from letter from the Mayor to Task Force Members)

IN DECEMBER OF 1994, MAYOR THOMAS M. MENINO APPOINTED A TASK FORCE OF EDUCATORS, PARENTS, STUDENTS, SCHOOL DEPARTMENT AND OTHER CITY STAFF, COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS AND PRIVATE FUNDERS, AND CHARGED THEM WITH DEFINING A PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP FOR REVITALIZING BOSTON'S SCHOOLYARDS. THE CHALLENGE WAS TO DEVELOP A SCHOOLYARD PROGRAM THAT INCORPORATED ENHANCED EDUCATIONAL AND RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, COMMUNITY CONCERNS AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR LONG-TERM MAINTENANCE.

At the first meeting the Task Force members discussed goals for the School Yard Initiative:

- To address the pressing need for outdoor areas in the Boston Public Schools which are accessible, "clean, green and safe," and which include provisions for education as well as recreation;
- To create opportunity for educators, school children, parents and local community groups and organizations to develop a mutually shared vision for this important piece of their urban landscape;
- To develop a cohesive model for implementing and maintaining school yard improvements which is flexible enough to respond to unique community needs and yet transferrable in application so that efficiencies of scale, energy and time can be achieved;
- To stimulate environmental awareness and stewardship for natural resources in Boston school children by fostering the opportunity for educational links with nature and learning through adaptive reuse of the schoolyards as part of an integrated curriculum;

- To develop a program that considers short- and long-term applications for maintenance of schoolyards and that sustains community involvement throughout the useful life of the improvements;
- To coordinate the program planning of the Task Force with that of the Blue Ribbon Commission to ensure that the *School Yard Initiative* is integrated into the Commission's final recommendations.

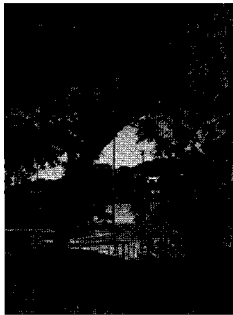
Over the four months that followed, members discussed and debated issues of community building, education and maintenance. The result was a nonprescriptive approach that recognized the distinctiveness of each school and its surrounding community. The Task Force repeatedly heard from those with experience in organizing schoolyard projects, that an inclusive community process helps to create the "sense of ownership" required to ensure long-term success. Education specialists underscored the usefulness of outdoor learning and pointed to several types of programming that lend themselves to a schoolyard environment.

Private funders met to design a Funders' Collaborative that would pool resources and streamline the application process for schoolyard groups. City agencies met to identify capital construction requirements and to foster inter-agency cooperation with regard to schoolyard design, construction and maintenance. Numerous experts were invited to attend Task Force sessions.

Some members of the Schoolyard Task Force also sit on Mayor Menino's Community Learning Centers Blue Ribbon Commission (BRC) which is generating a 10 year Master Plan for the capital needs of city schools. The *Boston Schoolyard Initiative* staff and advisory board will work closely with the BRC to make sure that the schoolyards are addressed in long-term planning efforts.

This document presents the conclusions of that four month intensive process. It outlines the five year *Boston Schoolyard Initiative* with recommendations for achieving its goals.

*Developed by the Boston Schoolyard Initiative  
in collaboration with the Blue Ribbon Commission  
and the Boston Public Schools  
with support from the Boston Foundation  
and the Boston Office of the Mayor*





*"...our beautiful  
ing black top you  
property would b  
cal program won  
children would b*

*...all the time  
...the schoolyard  
...the schoolyard  
...the schoolyard  
...the schoolyard  
...the schoolyard  
...the schoolyard  
...the schoolyard*

*It helps... when you see a beautiful tree and plants  
instead of a dirty, filthy, old polluted place...*

Matt Arsenault, Agassiz Elementary School

## Overview

There are 117 schools in the Boston Public School System. Each school day, 61,048 young people, representing 83% of Boston's school age population, occupy school property for the purpose of learning. We have high expectations of these children. We want them to have a vision of the world where they are active participants and where anything is possible. Too often they enter the school building by traversing a barren wasteland of cracked asphalt. What message does this send to students about our commitment to provide a positive learning environment? Is this an oasis, a special place where productivity and a thirst for knowledge are rewarded? Is this a place that inspires curiosity, playfulness and thought? Schoolyards can be dynamic centers for academic and recreational learning. Students can benefit from "outdoor classrooms" that encourage hands-on, experiential activities. Natural play areas and play

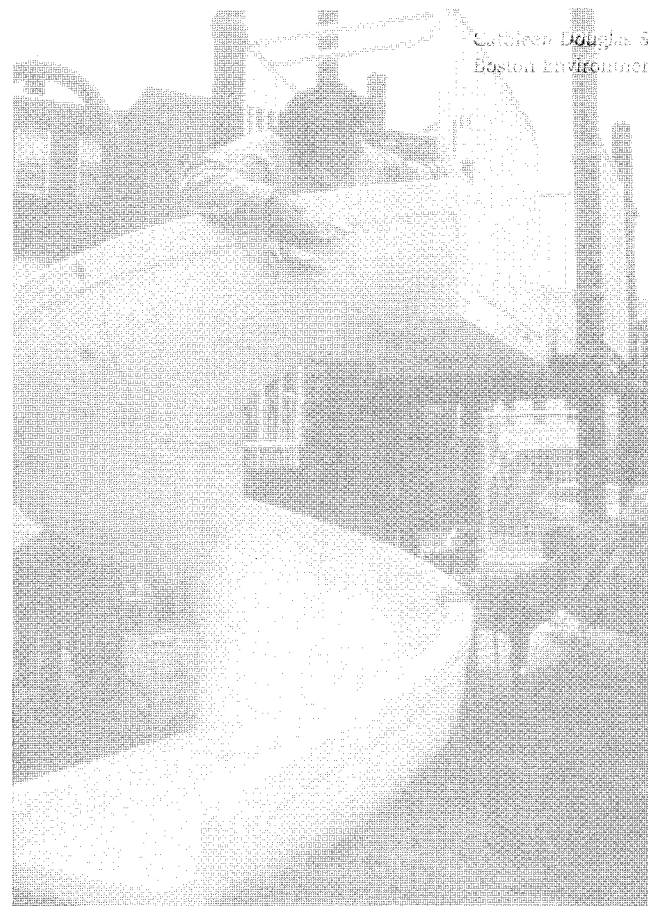
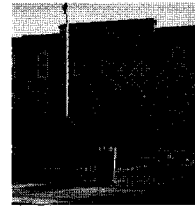
spaces can be educational assets that nurture the kind of well-rounded citizens we want our children to become. Educators have shown that outdoor learning can develop problem solving and critical thinking skills that are hard to teach through the abstract world of textbooks and class discussion. Often students with language or reading difficulties or learning disabilities thrive in an outdoor setting. Whether it is creative play, nature studies, an art project, math, language arts or special education, having an outdoor classroom adds another dimension of possibility to schools' teaching capabilities.

Over the past several years in Boston, groups of educators, students and residents have sparked a local schoolyard movement. School children have participated in educational programs centered in the schoolyard. Students at the Wheatley Middle School's Community Garden have learned about growing vegetables and have demonstrated social responsibility by donating produce to a nearby shelter. Likewise, Dorchester High School students are building a garden that will cultivate a sense of entrepreneurship when they sell their wares at the local farmers market. Advocates for new play structures at the Warren Prescott and Mary Curley Schools have held events to raise money and recruit volunteer assistance from the community. In addition to partici-

pating in the design process, neighbors helped install a play structure and students planted flowers at the O'Donnell Elementary School. Nearly half of the schools in the city have applied for, and received, small grants from the Boston Foundation and the Boston GreenSpace Alliance to initiate "greening" projects at their schools.

A handful of schools struggled over years to assemble sufficient funds to make all of the permanent schoolyard improvements desired. In several cases the youngest grades graduated before being able to play in a fully renovated yard. These grassroots efforts show what can be done. By learning from these efforts and with serious and systematic support of the City and its private sector partners, we can realize the full potential of these vital open spaces. The intent of the *Schoolyard Initiative* is to attract and coordinate funding, to provide technical assistance and to shorten the time necessary to realize the fruit of such dedicated labor.

Boston is a city of neighborhoods and its schools are often uniquely situated to function as centers of civic life. The emerging concept of schools as *Community Learning Centers* reinforces their importance in performing a function beyond that of delivering a public school education. Schoolyards, by virtue of being shared territory, have the potential to function as valued public open space for neighborhood residents. There are 250 acres of schoolyards attached to the Boston Public Schools, most of which are vastly under-used. Their revitalization will expand the amount of usable open space throughout the City by 10%. With communities playing an active role in the design and planning of open space, these enhancements will improve the quality of life for everyone. These long ignored lots will become aesthetically pleasing places that convey a sense of dignity and caring.



Cathleen Douglas St.  
Boston Environment

# Task Force Recommendations

SCHOOLYARDS ARE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF BOSTON'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS AS WELL AS SIGNIFICANT OPEN SPACES IN BOSTON'S NEIGHBORHOODS. REVITALIZING THE CITY'S PUBLIC SCHOOLYARDS MUST CELEBRATE SCHOOL AND NEIGHBORHOOD PRIDE, EMPHASIZE EDUCATIONAL AND RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND INCLUDE BROAD-BASED PARTICIPATION OF THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY AT ALL PHASES OF THE PROJECT, FROM ORGANIZING AND PLANNING THROUGH CONSTRUCTION, OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE.

*"School Community" includes students, teachers, parents, principals and other school department staff, school site councils, neighborhood residents, local businesses and corporate friends, educational institutions, neighborhood organizations, and City Departments.*

## Recommendations

The Schoolyard Task Force recommends the establishment of a formal five year partnership between the City of Boston and its private sector partners, under the name of *The Boston Schoolyard Initiative*. The purpose of the *Initiative* is to build and maintain accessible, clean, safe, green and aesthetically pleasing schoolyards, which serve as important outdoor educational and recreational resources for students as well as for the community. The Task Force proposes that the Blue Ribbon Commission (BRC) adopt the recommendations of the *Initiative*, which can be summarized as follows:

### 1 PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

Create a program for revitalizing schoolyards based on a "community partnership model" where plans for each schoolyard are developed with an understanding of a shared vision of the *school community*. The *Initiative* must be designed to harness local initiative and truly stimulate local "ownership." Selection of projects will be based upon a competitive process that is fair, equitable and which recognizes different levels of readiness among participating school communities.



### 2 OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Incorporate educational opportunities within the *Boston Schoolyard Initiative* to encourage and support, at every stage, utilization of the schoolyard as a vehicle for learning. Educational programming targets public school students as well as neighborhood youth and community residents. Multi-disciplinary academic approaches, creative play and community service learning opportunities can be explored; educational collaborations can be formed and professional development for educators can be highlighted. Planned or active educational uses of the schoolyard will be considered when granting funds to schoolyard groups.



### 3 MAINTENANCE STRATEGY

The Task Force recommends the City perform baseline maintenance for all schoolyards, while other partners of the “school community” assume responsibility for maintaining enhancements. This shared responsibility will take the form of a maintenance agreement, which is established for each school yard project. The agreement will clearly identify roles and responsibilities so all partners can assume a measure of responsibility for the upkeep of each schoolyard. Maintenance agreements and “Yard Partner” programs will be employed to promote and support long-term interest and involvement by yard constituents, or those who use the schoolyard.

### 4 COORDINATION WITH THE BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION

Schoolyards are important educational and community resources and their integration as a critical component of the “Community Learning Center” will complement the Blue Ribbon Commission (BRC) Master Plan. The BRC’s acceptance of the *Boston Schoolyard Initiative’s* Recommendations will greatly enhance educational opportunities at schools constructed or renovated under the BRC Master Plan. The Task Force recommends the *Initiative* staff work closely with the Blue Ribbon Commission to coordinate schoolyard projects.



### 5 FUNDING THE INITIATIVE

The *Boston Schoolyard Initiative*, funded through a combination of public and private funds will award grants to organize strong schoolyard constituencies, design and construct schoolyard improvements, implement innovative educational programs and address on-going maintenance and operational concerns. Fundraising efforts will continue throughout the *Initiative*. Close ties will be maintained with the Mayor’s Blue Ribbon Commission Office to ensure all of Boston Public Schools have the opportunity to renovate their schoolyards over time.

*These recommendations are discussed in detail in the five sections that follow.*



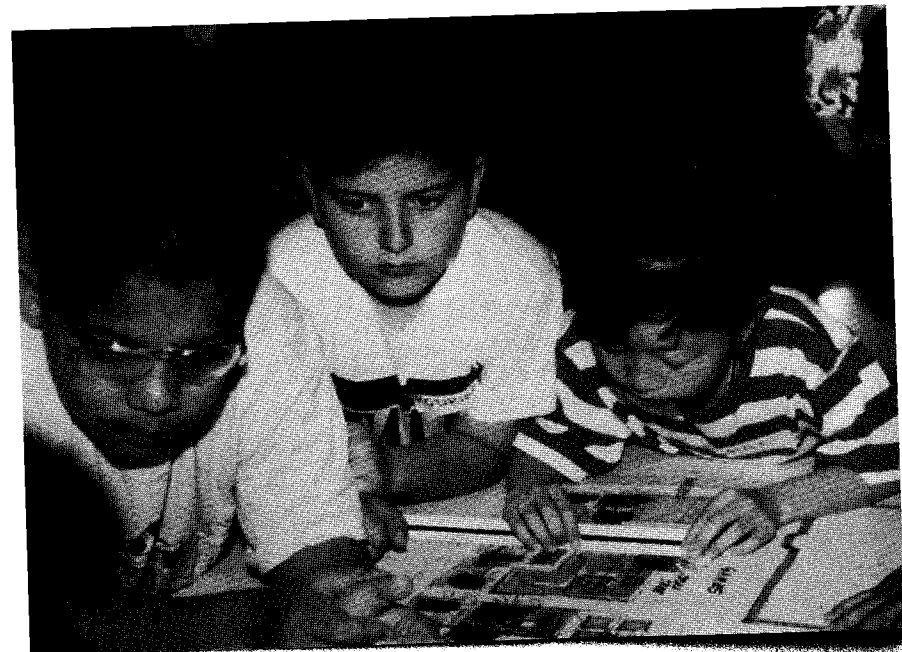
THE TASK FORCE RECOMMENDS THAT A PROGRAM FOR REVITALIZING SCHOOL-  
YARDS BE BASED ON A "COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP MODEL" WHERE PLANS FOR  
EACH SCHOOLYARD ARE DEVELOPED WITH AN UNDERSTANDING OF A SHARED  
VISION OF THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY. THE INITIATIVE MUST BE DESIGNED TO  
HARNESS LOCAL INITIATIVE AND TRULY STIMULATE LOCAL "OWNERSHIP."  
SELECTION OF PROJECTS WILL BE BASED UPON A COMPETITIVE REQUEST  
FOR PROPOSAL (RFP) PROCESS THAT IS FAIR, EQUITABLE AND WHICH RECOG-  
NIZES DIFFERENT LEVELS OF READINESS AMONG PARTICIPATING SCHOOL  
COMMUNITIES.

#### BACKGROUND

With the implementation of school choice, busing, magnet and theme schools  
and the changing mandates of programs such as bi-lingual and special educa-  
tion, a significant percentage of Boston Public School students do not live in  
the same neighborhood in which they attend school. Parents are most active  
in the schools where their sons and daughters go to classes. In some ways  
this diversification has created over-  
lapping but different school and  
neighborhood communities. Because  
Boston Public Schoolyards accommo-  
date what are currently two communi-  
ties, schoolyard projects present a  
challenge and an opportunity. By  
focusing on shared interests, school  
yard partnerships can re-integrate the  
school into the surrounding commu-  
nity by opening dormant channels of communication, thus creating a single  
school community, while also maximizing benefits of the investment, and pro-  
moting local responsibility for long-term care.

The building of community coalitions cultivates a sense of ownership that  
inspires civic pride and fosters partnerships which last throughout and  
beyond the life of a schoolyard project. Potential to build and strengthen part-  
nerships exists through two stages. The first, the development stage, which  
includes organizing, design and construction, galvanizes partnership inter-  
ests, defines a common mission, compels networking and forces a leadership  
structure to emerge. The second stage, the operations stage, which includes  
implementing educational programming and maintaining the yard, strength-  
ens and sustains community relationships.

The selection process will be simple and straight forward. School communi-  
ties will be selected to participate in the Initiative based on the proposal they  
submit in response to a Request for Proposals (RFP) issued twice per year.  
Only one proposal, endorsed by the school site council at each school, will be  
allowed in response to each RFP. Once a school community "wins," it will  
automatically progress to the next stage, after it fulfills the conditions of the  
grant requirements. Applications will be reviewed based on clearly stated  
selection criteria as well as recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission  
Master Plan. Selection criteria will be designed to respond to the different  
levels of readiness of different school communities. A Steering Committee  
and the Funders Collaborative will make funding decisions. If a proposal is  
not funded in the Fall, the school community will be able to apply again in the  
Spring. The extent of funding, however, will depend upon availability of  
resources.





## SCHOOLYARD INITIATIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR A PARTNERSHIP

**A.** Recognize the unique nature of all schools and the communities in which they exist. Each *school community* must be able to set its own priorities and balance its needs with its budget as it creates a site specific plan of action. This process will offer more local control and foster local responsibility. The *Initiative* will offer guidance and support in the form of a Kit-of-Parts and a project manager.

**\*\*** A kit-of-parts, included as a part of the Program Guidelines outlined in the Request for Proposals will establish a range of possibilities which help *school communities* think about what they want (outdoor classrooms, student and/or community garden, a small natural area or orchard, a maze, a sensory garden, a weather station, game courts, play and game fields, play structures, etc.), while providing some consistency for maintenance purposes. Technical assistance provided by a project manager from the City will assist groups throughout the project and ensure that proposed improvements meet standards and codes for safety, durability and accessibility.

**B.** Conduct outreach and offer technical assistance to schools that need help to organize and assemble an application.

**C.** Use a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process to select projects. Judge applications based on clearly defined selection criteria listed below, as well as recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission Master Plan.

- Phase I: Organizing grants consider need, geographic distribution and school and local interest in undertaking a schoolyard project.
- Phase II: Planning & Design grants are awarded based on strong community involvement, geographic distribution, readiness to proceed, and accomplishments to date.
- Phase III: Construction grants are awarded based on the overall strength of the proposal, which includes readiness to proceed, strong community involvement, presence of an educational plan and maintenance strategy, need, geographic distribution and accomplishments to date.

**D.** Award construction grants to all schools that successfully complete Organizing and Planning & Design grant requirements. The extent of funding will depend upon availability of resources.



**E.** Accommodate schools at different levels of readiness by awarding grants two times a year.

**F.** Make on-going community building, which is critical to success of school yard projects, an integral part of the *Initiative*.

**G.** Encourage connections with curriculum to maximize educational opportunities; extend education outdoors. Use the schoolyard for community service jobs and learning, and forge educational collaborations with organizations outside the school system.

**H.** Consider maintenance from the very beginning. Maintenance is an important guiding factor in the planning, design, construction and operations of a schoolyard project

**I.** Recognize participants for successful projects and innovative programs.

**J.** Involve community police officers and Crime Watch coordinators to address security issues.

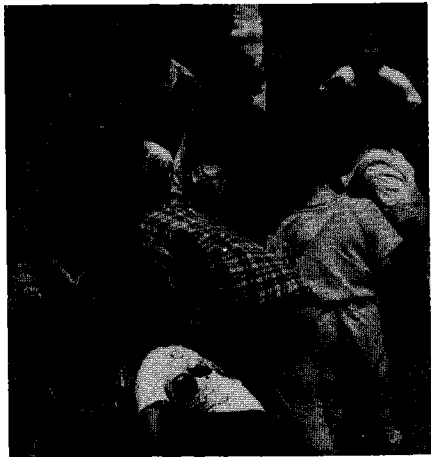
**K.** Review and evaluate *The Boston Schoolyard Initiative* at the end of five years. Make recommendations to perpetuate building and maintaining accessible, clean, safe, green and aesthetically pleasing schoolyards.

**L.** Consider educational, recreational and aesthetic needs of students and community as a priority over parking in the schoolyard. The Task Force proposes the Blue Ribbon Commission address transportation issues, including the need for parking alternatives, in its Master Plan.

**M.** Adopt the goal to improve all schoolyards, but acknowledge that funds may fluctuate over time. Use the RFP process to recognize and support school communities who make their schoolyard a priority. Conduct outreach to organize school communities who have great need, but who need help in submitting a proposal.

We went outside to measure the school yard so we could see how much space we had for equipment. When we measured we had to measure the basketball court because we had a non basketball court. Also we had to spray paint the ground and used chalk. Before we did all this we played a game of kickball (to see how far we kicked the ball).

John Arnold and Tay Tui  
BPS students, 5th grade



## Outdoor Learning and Educational Opportunity

THE BOSTON SCHOOLYARD INITIATIVE MUST ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT, AT EVERY STAGE, USE OF THE SCHOOLYARD AS A VEHICLE FOR LEARNING. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING MUST TARGET PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS AS WELL AS NEIGHBORHOOD YOUTH AND COMMUNITY RESIDENTS. MULTI-DISCIPLINARY ACADEMIC APPROACHES, CREATIVE PLAY AND COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES CAN BE EXPLORED; EDUCATIONAL COLLABORATIONS CAN BE FORMED AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR EDUCATORS CAN BE HIGHLIGHTED. PLANNED OR ACTIVE EDUCATIONAL USES OF THE SCHOOLYARD WILL BE CONSIDERED WHEN GRANTING FUNDS TO SCHOOLYARD GROUPS.

### BACKGROUND

Boston public schoolyards are an important component of our urban open space. Along with parks, playgrounds, urban wilds and community gardens, they enhance the quality of life for city residents. Because schoolyards are so immediately accessible to students, they play a vital role in broadening our children's educational horizon.

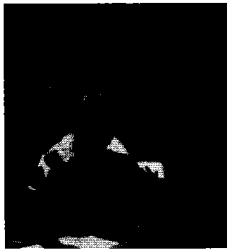
The benefit of hands-on experiential learning has been well documented by professional educators and has been shown to be effective in teaching subjects offered in school. Although school grounds historically have been under-utilized for teaching, the *Boston Schoolyard Initiative* offers us the unique opportunity to design spaces that will serve as multiple use outdoor classrooms.

Natural areas lend themselves to scientific observation and an understanding of the causal relationships in nature. Measuring, mapping, graphing or planning a garden plot can reinforce math concepts with real world applications. Poems and journal writing, sketching and collage making can easily be part of any outdoor project. A small amphitheater can offer a breezy alternative to

indoor dramatic productions or academic presentations. Of course, play structures and exercise areas can develop motor and social skills, promote health, and burn off energy that will otherwise find an outlet in school hallways. As schoolyard sites are designed and constructed, we must support efforts to weave outdoor learning into the formal curriculum, enhance professional development for teachers and create linkages between community based organizations with educational resources and the schools.

In addition to academic and recreational skills, the care and maintenance of outdoor areas will teach our youth about stewardship of the land and give them a sense of being part of the larger neighborhood. As the newly designed Boston Public School Community Service Learning Program is implemented, students who work to maintain open space, or assist teachers by serving as mentors to other students, will learn useful skills while actively participating in building their communities.

As we look toward extended school days, more supervised after school programs, and the evolution of public schools into lifelong "Community Learning Centers," we must not miss the opportunity to add the schoolyard to our educational assets.





*...there is a need to change things at the school where I went and where my sister goes now... the Boston Public Schools must change education wise... at a "youth meet" I met some kids from New Hampshire and felt like they were way ahead of me..*

Jason Webb  
BPS student

*Last year we went on a trip with the students. We went to all kinds of playgrounds. We saw swings, slides, slides, glides and the swings. We saw a lot of things. I thought was best for me. I saw a picture of a picture on cardboard of our school. When I got home, I was going to go. We were in a schoolyard meeting. And the children. We really enjoyed it. I was in it.*

Monisha Gosselin and Jason Webb  
BPS students - the girls

## SCHOOLYARD INITIATIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR OUTDOOR LEARNING

**A.** Include students, educators and other individuals interested in educational programming in planning, design, construction and on-going maintenance of a schoolyard to maximize educational opportunities and to develop a "sense of ownership" and stewardship toward the property.

**B.** Encourage participants to connect curriculum and the proposed schoolyard improvements to extend multi-disciplinary learning outdoors. Explore the use of the school yard environment to provide practical applications which reinforce concepts learned from books, making the learning experience both meaningful and enjoyable.

**C.** Support teachers, parents and other individuals who forge educational collaborations with outside organizations and institutions such as museums, nature centers, colleges and universities.

**D.** Encourage Jobs & Community Service Learning Programs that build community awareness and a community service ethic in students. Encourage links between work-study, vocational education and after school programs with community service.

**E.** Work with the Department of Education, School Committee, Boston Public School administration, school based management, School Site Councils, teachers and community based organizations to emphasize linkage between statewide curriculum frameworks and schoolyard learning activities.

**F.** Encourage institutions of higher learning to include outdoor learning into pre-service training of student teachers and develop intern teaching relationships with Boston Public Schools.

**G.** Work with Boston Public School Department, the BPS Center for Leadership Development and the IMPACT II Program to expand professional development opportunities for teachers.



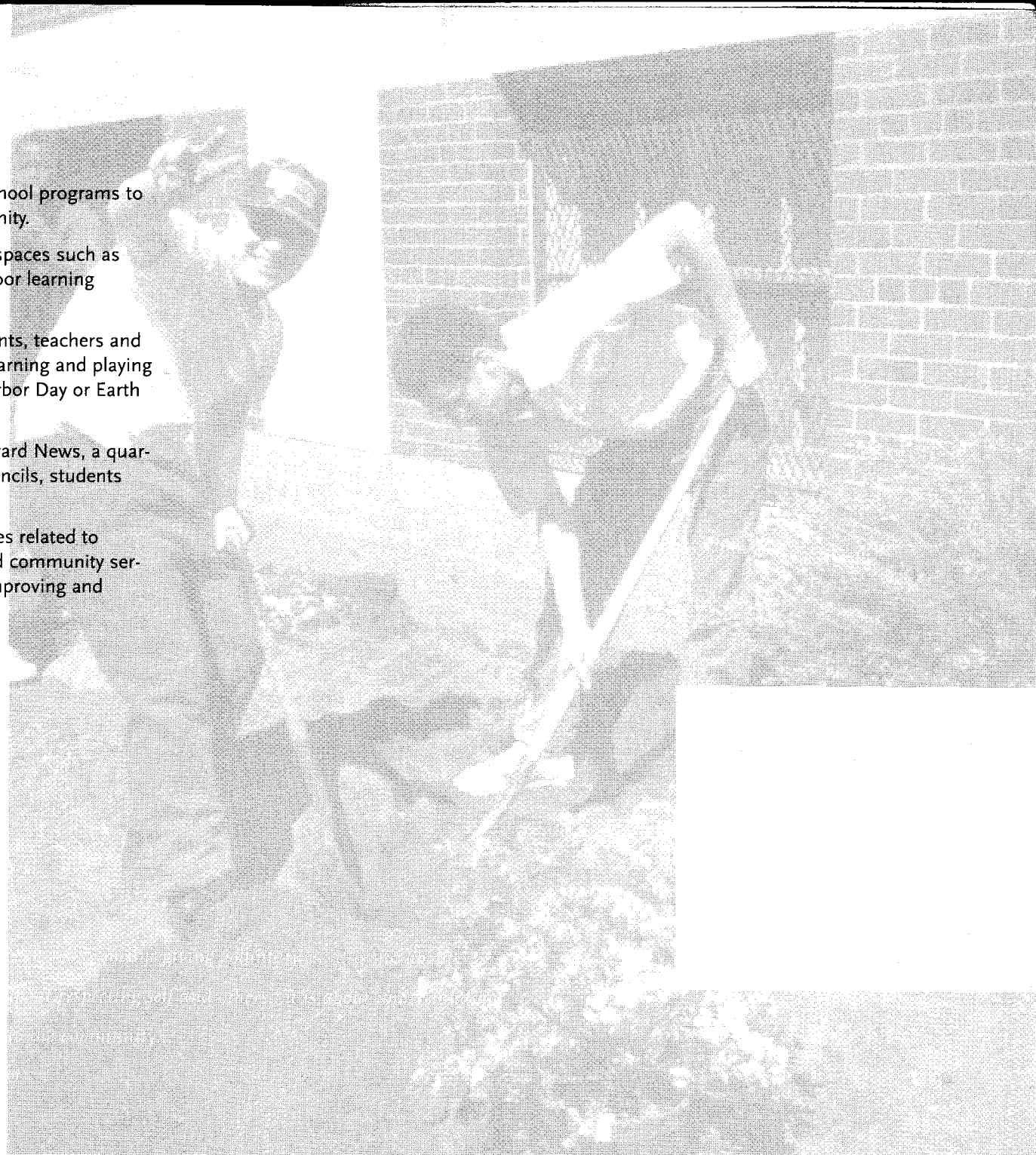
**H.** Work with Boston Community Centers and other after-school programs to encourage schoolyard use by BPS students and the community.

**I.** Encourage schools to explore other neighborhood open spaces such as parks, urban wilds and community gardens to expand outdoor learning experiences.

**J.** Establish a Boston Schoolyard Day, where students, parents, teachers and neighborhood residents “dress down” and spend the day learning and playing in the schoolyard. Use schoolyards for outdoor events on Arbor Day or Earth Day.

**K.** Gather and disseminate information through the Schoolyard News, a quarterly newsletter, to BPS principals, teachers, School Site Councils, students and interested community organizations.

**L.** Publish a Teachers' Resource Guide of curricular resources related to schoolyard learning activities, professional development and community service opportunities. List sources of material assistance for improving and maintaining schoolyards.



THE TASK FORCE RECOMMENDS THE CITY PERFORM BASELINE MAINTENANCE FOR ALL SCHOOLYARDS, WHILE OTHER PARTNERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAINTAINING ENHANCEMENTS. THIS SHARED RESPONSIBILITY WILL TAKE THE FORM OF A MAINTENANCE AGREEMENT, WHICH IS ESTABLISHED FOR EACH SCHOOLYARD PROJECT. THE AGREEMENT WILL CLEARLY IDENTIFY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES SO ALL PARTNERS CAN ASSUME A MEASURE OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE UPKEEP OF EACH SCHOOLYARD.

**Baseline Maintenance** refers to basic issues of safety, cleanliness and repair. It includes: performing routine inspections; removing trash and graffiti; cutting and trimming grass; raking leaves; aerating, fertilizing, over-seeding and lining play fields; cleaning out drainage structures; repairing equipment, fences, signs and other site furniture, replacing site lighting; cleaning, sweeping and repairing paved areas, pruning or removing trees, and removing snow from public sidewalks and walkways to and from main entrances and fire exits and coordinating activities with Yard Partners.

**Community-based Maintenance** refers to the additional improvements that partners in the school community elect to include to make their schoolyard special. These include planting and maintaining bulbs, flowers and garden areas; planting commemorative "class" trees; weeding, edging and mulching plant beds; pruning or replacing shrubs; participating in seasonal clean-ups; painting fences; watering; protecting the resource from vandalism and misuse; coordinating activities with the City.

## BACKGROUND

The general decline of schoolyards is linked with the need for maintenance and concerns of safety and liability. These concerns have brought about the development of standards and guidelines that promote and ensure safety and security. The schoolyard planning process proposed by the Task Force allows for maintenance awareness and planning to be built into the planning and design process. An awareness of concerns and questions that respond to the School community's concerns, along with standardized well designed and well maintained equipment will go a long way to manage risk to the extent possible.

As schoolyards establish links with education and become symbols of pride for the *school community*, their on-going maintenance must become a major priority. The challenge of competing fiscal demands affirms the need to forge new and creative strategies for the maintenance of Boston's Public Schoolyards. The on-going maintenance strategy proposed by the *Schoolyard Initiative* will continue the spirit of collaboration and partnership into the Operations Phase. The intent of this continued partnership is to focus resources, energy and initiative of all partners to protect and fully utilize the investment.

## SCHOOLYARD INITIATIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR MAINTAINING SCHOOLYARDS

- A. Adopt the maintenance agreement as a model for developing and implementing maintenance agreements at each school site. Build in a mechanism for renewing and monitoring the agreement.
- B. Ensure the City of Boston carries out "Baseline" maintenance for these public spaces and encourage school and community partners to take responsibility for on-going maintenance of desired enhancements. Ensure the responsible department employs a maintenance strategy which includes the following:
  1. Consideration of maintenance throughout design and construction by:
    - a. using standard equipment and materials (to make baseline maintenance as easy as possible).
    - b. ensuring high quality construction by continuous and effective oversight by the project manager.
  2. A schedule for routine maintenance and mechanisms to respond to emergencies.

3. A system of receiving and responding to constituent school and community requests for maintenance.
4. Quality control systems.
5. A strategy to encourage and support Yard Partners (like Park Partners) to form and remain active.

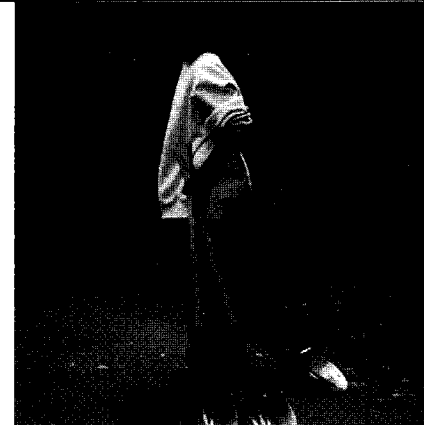
**C.** Involve students in thinking about maintenance in as many different ways as possible. Have students participate in the planning, design and construction of the schoolyard. Use curriculum related lessons in the schoolyard. Integrate community service learning with maintenance by teaching students about civic responsibility toward the school property. Train and pay stipends to students to perform specific maintenance tasks in the schoolyard as part of a work study or summer jobs program.

**D.** Initiate a Boston Schoolyard Day. Conduct activities in the schoolyard all day (on a week day). Establish and formalize relationships with volunteer organizations to coordinate city-wide schoolyard cleanups.

**E.** Reward local initiative and participation in maintenance. Award prizes to students of schools for the best kept schoolyards.

**F.** Establish a maintenance fund at each school that raises and/or receives funding for maintaining enhancements, paying stipends and financing events.

**G.** Recognize, reward and support "Yard Partners." Staff a constituent request line, deliver requested materials (i.e., trash bags, tools, mulch) and pick-up debris from special events. Disseminate information about the successes of other groups, provide accessible technical assistance, arrange for workshops tailored to small friends groups relative to structuring organizations, developing leaders and resolving disputes.



Don King  
Director of Maintenance Services, Boston Parks Department

it gets boring after  
classroom. We can  
by identifying an  
watering plants.

Marie Bradman  
BPS Student 8th grade

Thank you, Thank you, Thank you for the work you did to the John  
Marshall School playground. The addition of mulch and wood chips to the  
playground will mean a lot for the kids, parents and teachers.

Edith Spilane, BPS School Nurse

## *Working Closely With The Blue Ribbon Commission*

SCHOOLYARDS ARE IMPORTANT EDUCATIONAL AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND THEIR INTEGRATION AS A CRITICAL COMPONENT OF THE "COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTER" WILL COMPLEMENT THE BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION (BRC) MASTER PLAN. THE BRC'S ACCEPTANCE OF THE BOSTON SCHOOLYARD INITIATIVE'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOLYARDS WILL GREATLY ENHANCE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AT SCHOOLS CONSTRUCTED OR RENOVATED UNDER THE BRC MASTER PLAN. THE TASK FORCE RECOMMENDS THE INITIATIVE STAFF WORK CLOSELY WITH THE BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION TO COORDINATE SCHOOLYARD PROJECTS.

### BACKGROUND

In an ideal world, school life and the life of the surrounding neighborhood should be closely linked. Schools and their yards should be centers of civic life, utilized by students during the school day, and by local residents during after school and weekend hours. In order to realize this vision, the Community Learning Centers Blue Ribbon Commission is preparing a Master Plan for the evaluation, renovation and construction of school facilities to meet the educational needs of the students and accommodate community needs and concerns. The Schoolyard Task Force is proposing a public-private partnership to develop improvements to Boston's Public Schoolyards.

The *Schoolyard Initiative* is designed to help unite the school community, highlight the academic and recreational lives of our children and be a source of pride worthy of care and respect. The challenge of coordinating these separate yet complementary efforts is heightened by their different time lines and approaches - the BRC Master Plan is a ten year capital plan while the five year *School Yard Initiative* takes a non-prescriptive approach. This will require consistent communication and systematized coordination between the two.

Managed coordination of schoolyard projects that enhance educational opportunity and strengthen neighborhoods can support the mission of the Blue Ribbon Commission's "Community Learning Centers."

### SCHOOLYARD INITIATIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR COORDINATING WITH THE BRC

- A. Consider BRC Master Plan and time lines when making project selection decisions for the *Initiative* to make sure resources are used effectively.
- B. Develop criteria for the selection of new school sites and design guidelines for the development of schoolyards to be built or renovated under the Blue Ribbon Commission Master Plan.
- C. Work with BRC to ensure the process for developing schoolyard projects is uniform throughout the city. This will provide consistency in community building, maintenance planning and educational programming for the schoolyards.
- D. Appoint one member of the BRC Office who oversees the BRC Master Plan to the *Schoolyard Initiative* Steering Committee to ensure effective coordination.



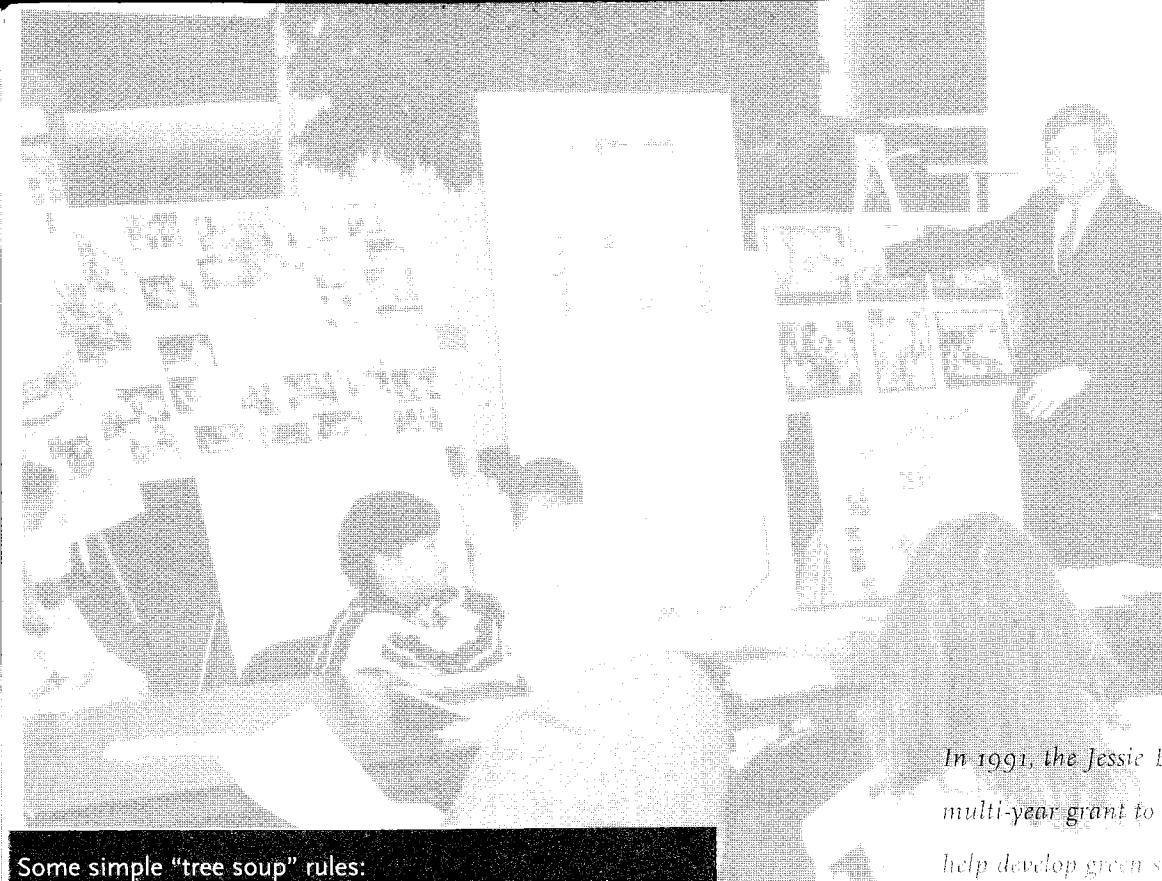




*A school's climate helps to increase participation of students, parents and community. by climate I mean*



4. To Build Community Learning Centers for Families
5. To Build Community Learning Centers for Neighborhood Residents
6. To Build Community Centers for the 21st Century



## Funding the Initiative

THE BOSTON SCHOOLYARD INITIATIVE, FUNDED THROUGH A COMBINATION OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FUNDS WILL AWARD GRANTS TO ORGANIZE STRONG SCHOOLYARD CONSTITUENCIES, DESIGN AND CONSTRUCT QUALITY SCHOOL YARD IMPROVEMENTS, IMPLEMENT INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND ADDRESS ON-GOING MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONAL CONCERNS. FUNDRAISING EFFORTS WILL CONTINUE THROUGHOUT THE INITIATIVE. CLOSE TIES WILL BE MAINTAINED WITH THE MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION OFFICE TO ENSURE ALL OF BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO RENOVATE THEIR SCHOOLYARDS OVER TIME.

## BACKGROUND

The Mayor's Schoolyard Task Force was formed, in large part, at the request of private sector funders and advocates who were interested in revitalizing the City's schoolyards, strengthening neighborhoods, and expanding educational

and recreational opportunities for youth. The prioritization of these issues has been reinforced by the city's commitment to unify communities and improve the Boston Public Schools. The emerging partnership will provide funds for community building, educational programming and capital improvements through complementary public and private grant processes.

Private funds from foundations, corporations, businesses and special event fund raisers will flow through a "Funders Collaborative" currently in the making. This collaborative will

have the ability to coordinate both restricted and pooled funds. These funds will focus on organizing and educational programming, with some funds available for capital improvements. Public funds, also available through a grant program will be available for design consultants, capital construction and other project related costs. Grants will be supported with Technical Assistance from the *Initiative*. City and private grant programs will be coordinated to ensure an adequate revenue stream for projects that have begun the schoolyard improvement process.

*In 1991, the Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust awarded a multi-year grant to the Boston GreenSpace Alliance to help develop green spaces in Boston public schoolyards, and to promote a comprehensive approach to environmental education in the schools. We are proud that our earlier grant has helped to spur the creation of the Boston Schoolyard Initiative and has encouraged the extension of classroom learning to the outdoors.*

*Ann Foster Wilcox  
Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust*

## Some simple "tree soup" rules:

- Everything that you need for your project can be asked for in-kind from your local community, as well as from the extended community where... people work and socialize;
- Psychologically, people find goods and services in-kind to be cheaper than donating cash;
- Fundraising at the local level is more efficient because you can deal with the decision makers;
- There are lots of people willing to donate their time and skills to a community project because they can see tangible results;
- The benefits of the whole project to the community are much larger than the sum of the parts contributed.

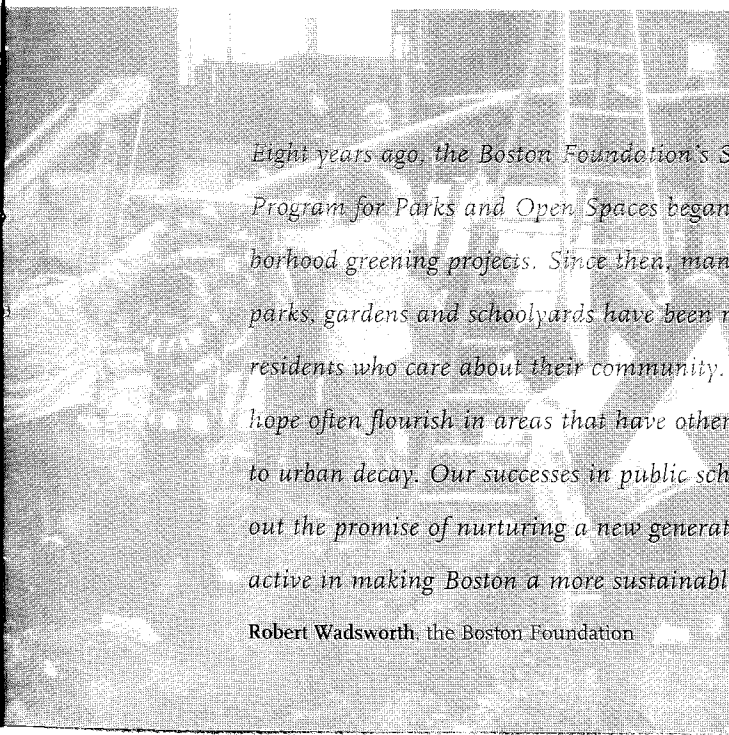
Kevin McLaughlin, Director The Evergreen Foundation, dedicated to restoring and preserving natural areas in the urban environment through education and planting projects.

*Other kids and I looked up all the prices of the playground equipment. Also the other group looked up how big and large the area of the school yard was to make it fit. We had to take some equipment out because we didn't have enough money.*

Rodrigo Montiero and Pietro Giacalone, BPS students, 5th grade

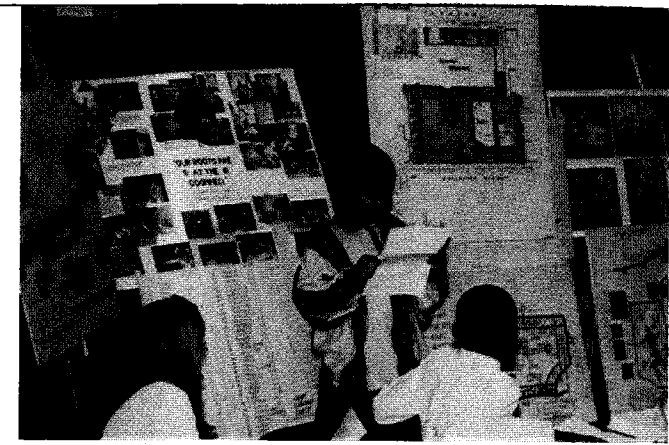
The *Boston Schoolyard Initiative* will work closely with the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Commission, which is in the process of creating a ten year Master Plan to address BPS infrastructure needs. In some cases, schoolyard capital improvements will be sequenced to complement capital construction recommended by the Blue Ribbon Commission. As the BRC seeks future funding for school construction and renovation, the pool of funds for schoolyards may be expanded.

Efforts underway will define grant guidelines, design applications, and create a measured flow of funds that will be uniform, easily understood and aimed at encouraging school communities to participate in the process. Appropriate fiscal management, complete (but not onerous) monitoring and reporting procedures, and regular evaluation of program objectives will be built into the grant making structure.



*Eight years ago, the Boston Foundation's Small Center Program for Parks and Open Spaces began funding neighborhood greening projects. Since then, many lots, public parks, gardens and schoolyards have been reclaimed by local residents who care about their community. These islands of hope often flourish in areas that have otherwise succumbed to urban decay. Our successes in public schoolyards hold out the promise of nurturing a new generation that will be active in making Boston a more sustainable city.*

Robert Wadsworth, the Boston Foundation



#### SCHOOLYARD INITIATIVE - GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR FUNDING THE INITIATIVE

- A. Ensure funding is available to organize a constituency, initiate and complete an inclusive design process, construct capital improvements, develop and implement educational programming and consider ongoing maintenance and operational needs.
- B. Make the grant application process simple and straightforward. Conduct workshops and/or give technical assistance on preparing grant proposals.
- C. Require all recipients of schoolyard funding to be, or to partner with a 501(c)3 tax exempt organization. Applications must be endorsed by the school site council.
- D. Respond to severity of need and geographic parity through "organizing phase" grants, outreach and technical assistance.
- E. Fund both public and private full time staff to support the *Initiative*. In addition, the City should delegate responsibilities to appropriate staff in collaborating city agencies and provide funding as needed.
- F. Ensure the City of Boston underwrites and performs "baseline" maintenance for schoolyards. Encourage school community partners to offer in-kind donations of materials or labor to support and maintain enhancements. Groups may set up programs and apply for grants to pay youth stipends to maintain enhancements.
- G. Provide funding for small capital improvements during the organizing or planning phase to gain momentum through small victories.
- H. Continue to identify and raise funds for the *Initiative* through the Blue Ribbon Commission Master Plan legislation as well as through private outreach.



To those of us who can look back a generation or more and remember...the modern playground... with its specially trained superintendent... its numberless varieties of games... and methods of play... all of which have made it an important part of the public school curriculum, it is certainly a revelation. This movement has assumed such proportions that in this country, as well as across the water, there is not one large city without its playgrounds. A little over two years ago an increased impetus was given to the [playground] movement when some of our leading educators and philanthropists formed the Playground Association of America...with Mr. Joseph Lee, "Father of the American Playground" and a member of the Boston School Board...

Kate Stevens Bingham  
"The Playgrounds of Greater Boston"  
New England Magazine, April 1909





## Sustaining the Investment

⌘ In the latter part of the nineteenth century American cities were already suffering the environmental consequences of the Industrial Revolution. Air and water pollution went unchecked. Urban centers became crowded with workers seeking employment in newly constructed factories and manufacturing plants. Educators were concerned that children were losing touch with the natural world and were becoming disconnected from their country's agrarian roots.

In 1880, psychologist G. Stanley Hall conducted a study of Boston elementary school pupils and discovered that seventy-five percent had no concept of seasonal change and ninety percent had no understanding of an elm tree or a field of wheat or the origin of cotton and leather. City children imagined a world in which "spools of thread grew on bushes, meat was dug from the ground, and cows were the size of mice." He concluded that "those who grow up without knowing the country are defrauded of that which childhood can never be complete or normal" (Brian Trelstad, "A History of School Gardens in America").

A popular movement began which encouraged children to plant vegetable gardens on school grounds and other public spaces. Supported by liberals and conservatives alike, and administered by local settlement houses, these gardens were thought to teach children about nature, reduce juvenile delinquency, and instill the work ethic in the growing immigrant population. In 1891, the Massachusetts Horticultural Society introduced a school garden prize in its annual horticultural exhibit. A consistent winner for the first ten years of the competition was the George Putnam School in Roxbury.

Boston was also an early leader in the construction of public playgrounds. Again, civic leaders were concerned that the city was devoid of open spaces for recreational use and that unsupervised children were forced to find their pleasure in the streets. In 1898, Mayor of Boston, Josiah Quincy, by legislative act, authorized the creation of more public parks and playgrounds. One experimental playground on Columbus Avenue in the South End became known as the "model playground of the United States" and attracted visitors from far and wide.

Recently Mayor Menino's Task Force Working Group surveyed nine major American Cities to determine "the state of the art" for schoolyard improvements. These interviews did not paint a pretty picture. Lack of funding, fear of lawsuits, and uncertainty of changing federal regulations were given as reasons why very little was being done. The City of Boston is clearly in a position to take on a national leadership role given its proactive approach to revitalizing schoolyards.

As we stand ready to renew our open space commitment to Boston's youth, we should reflect upon the programs of the past. We may glean ideas from earlier efforts but we must, in the end, ask why traces of this movement have virtually disappeared. Sustainability is the key to permanent social change. During the tenure of the *Boston Schoolyard Initiative*, we must build the capacity of both the community and city government to sustain schoolyards over decades.

*Increasingly foundations are realizing the important role public policy plays in their grant making programs and the need to work with and inform public policy makers. The evolution of the Schoolyard Task Force began at the community level, then drew in the funders and the city policy makers. This collaboration has informed each partner and created a program for schoolyard improvement that will benefit children and neighborhoods. Not one of the partners could have accomplished this without the others.*

Suzanne Watkin Maas  
Executive Director Boston Globe Foundation and Co-chair, *Boston Schoolyard Initiative*

Three areas of concern stand out as keys to schoolyard sustainability:

#### MAINTENANCE OF THE PHYSICAL SITE

Through a combination of baseline City services and community efforts, school grounds must be kept clean, safe and hospitable. If strong constituencies are formed during the improvement process then these "friends of the schoolyard" can be enlisted to perform light maintenance, clean-ups and simple but frequent chores. Likewise, it is not unreasonable to expect care of the schoolyard to be part of learning activities conducted at the site. Even the youngest children can be taught to discard their trash in a receptacle or to water a flower. Community pride in community spaces should be a tangible part of schoolyard lesson plans.

As owner of these public properties, the City of Boston will perform baseline maintenance, supply police and fire protection, and will coordinate the delegation of support services to community groups. If we encourage "low maintenance" design for initial capital improvement, implement burden-sharing maintenance schedules, and utilize schoolyards for the betterment of the community, then we can minimize costs while maximizing our return on the investment.

#### SCHOOLYARD PROGRAMMING

With the exception of limited recreational use, Boston's schoolyards have not begun to realize their potential as outdoor classrooms. Fortunately, local colleges and universities, community based organizations, and government agencies have expressed interest in working with Boston Public Schools to develop strong outdoor programs. The Boston Park Rangers, the Arnold Arboretum at Harvard University, the Massachusetts Audubon Society and Project Learning Tree are but a few eager educational partners. The Growthworks Program at the Agassiz Elementary School in Jamaica Plain was developed by parent educators and serves as a model for other schools in the system.

Boston Public School teachers will want enrichment workshops and professional development opportunities in order to acquire teaching skills and to feel comfortable in taking their classes outside. The School Department's newly formed Center for Leadership Development should play a pivotal role in providing an infrastructure for teacher enhancement. As we work closely with schools to design and construct learning areas, we must consult

closely with educators to ensure that schoolyards meet their needs. As models are created, and outdoor instruction becomes a more formal part of school life, teaching efforts will become more sustainable.

Attention should also be given to after school, weekend, and summer programs which may well increase as schoolyards become a valuable community resource. Continued collaboration between community groups, private sector funders and city government may be necessary to underwrite quality programming.

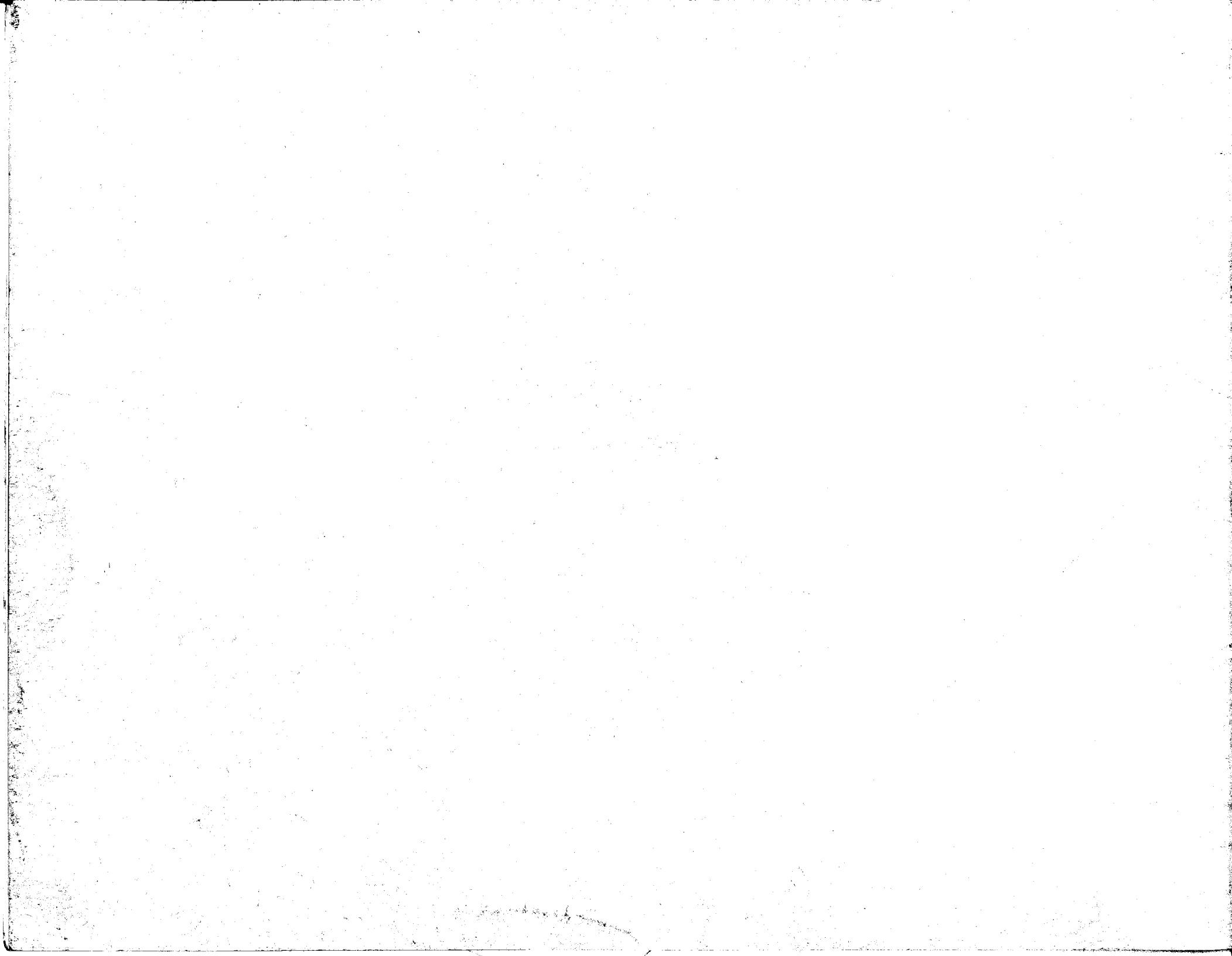
#### COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

In the long run, no one can watch over neighborhood projects more effectively than those who live there. This is an ongoing process and the key to building a sustainable city. Small amounts of funding, coupled with the brainpower and volunteer labor of residents, ensure that local projects become permanent community fixtures. If the channels of communication remain open between government and the community, potential problems can be addressed before they require complicated and costly solutions. The initial hard work of building strong coalitions will pay for itself many times over as apathy gives way to focused involvement and action.

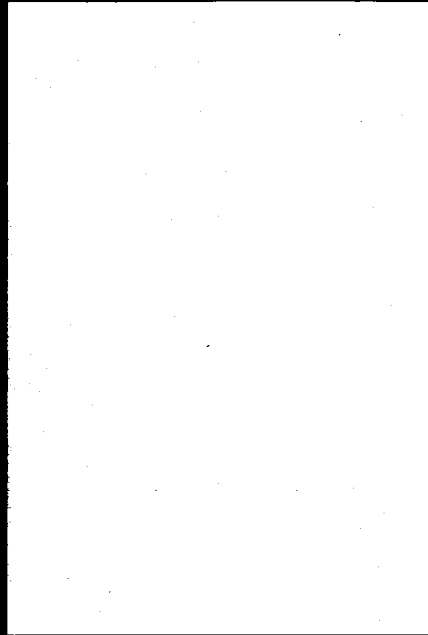
The Boston Public Schools have had many early successes in improving City's schoolyards. We now have the opportunity to build upon these grassroots efforts and indeed, to lead the nation into a new era of outdoor education. A strong and diverse Steering Committee will guide the Initiative and make an annual evaluation of its progress. As we gain expertise, learn from our successes and failures, and invent innovative programming, we will be able to formalize a process that will touch, over time, every schoolyard in the City of Boston.

The *Boston Schoolyard Initiative* may be envisioned as a five year project but the schoolyards will be here forever. In an age where budgetary constraints shadow all decision-making, we must make an inventory of our assets and determine how to put them to best use. Boston Public Schoolyards represent approximately 250 acres of prime urban real estate. Through the best efforts of community and government, and with the educational futures of our children in mind, these parcels can become the most productive land in our city.









Sit on the grass and draw a tree. Wax and press leaves, make a collage using objects found in the schoolyard, design and paint a mural, read poetry. Write a haiku, present an oral report "through the eyes of a bird," translate names of objects, seasons, or directions. Measure school yard areas, map out your garden, estimate and count the number of seeds in a pod, count the number of carrots planted in a square foot and multiply the answer by the number of square feet in a yard. Turn the soil for a planting, do somersaults, mimic a frog hopping or a duck waddling. Learn about photosynthesis and nutrient cycling, identify tracks in the mud or snow, build a weather station, learn what causes acid rain (and is it falling on the school yard), experiment with solar radiation and energy transformation, learn how sound travels, measure decibels, think about who was president when that tree was planted (and what was happening around the world).



Artist: Joanie Klink

Art Teacher: Daria Fortunato



Printed on recycled paper