



# The Research Bureau

## Why Wait? We're Ready for Readiness Schools Now

Last month, Governor Patrick released his eagerly awaited Readiness Project report, a ten-year plan for public education, which is the product of a yearlong effort by a 168-member planning group and 13 sub-committees. One of its featured proposals is the Readiness School, “a new kind of teaching and learning experience” that will “enhance the flexibility and independence typically found in the Charter sector.”

According to the Governor’s report, “Readiness Schools would have increased autonomy in five areas: staffing, budget, curriculum and assessment, governance and policies, and school schedule and calendar. The leadership of each Readiness School would establish the operating standards in each of these five areas, with significant input from faculty and staff.”

But in order to start such schools, apparently we have to wait for the Readiness Finance Commission to make its financing recommendations in the FY10 budget which won’t be approved for another year.

Why wait? Our students need to benefit now from what we know works. We can’t afford to wait another five years which is the Governor’s timeframe for having forty Readiness Schools across the state. A seventh grader today will be graduating from high school in five years.

For the past two years, The Research Bureau has been writing about and sponsoring forums on higher performing urban schools that share the defining characteristics of the Readiness Schools. (*Choosing a New School Superintendent to Address Worcester’s Challenges* <http://www.wrrb.org/documents/WRRB08-03.pdf>, *Benchmarking Public Education in Worcester: 2008* <http://www.wrrb.org/documents/CCPM08-01.pdf> and *Improving Student Performance Under Education Reform: Practices in Urban Schools* <http://www.wrrb.org/documents/WRRB07-01.pdf>) These characteristics are found in charter schools across the nation, in pilot schools in Boston, and in Worcester’s very own University Park Campus School (UPCS). UPCS has succeeded against the odds because of its tenacious leadership, commitment to its mission of high expectations for all students, and its partnership with Clark University. UPCS has been cited in the national

media and publications as a successful urban school operating within the constraints of a large district.<sup>1</sup>

So here's the proposal: each of the area colleges should adopt one school (75% of the Worcester Public Schools are in need of improvement, corrective action or restructuring, according to the Mass Department of Elementary and Secondary Education) or start a Charter school, all of which have the desired characteristics identified by the Governor, but aren't governed by school committees and district and union regulations. The colleges should develop a partnership with a local business and the neighbors where the school is or will be located, and spend the next year learning from Clark and UPCS faculty how to replicate the UPCS model. They should determine what costs (or additional costs for existing schools) are involved as well the in-kind services provided by Clark University faculty, students, and administration, and by any other sources of in-kind services. They will need to determine whether any of these (additional) costs can be accommodated through shifting expenditures within the Worcester Public Schools budget and/or through business partnerships and grants, or through in-kind services. By 2010 or 2011 at the latest, Worcester could have ten Readiness Schools up and running. Charter schools, which have the "flexibility" and "independence" desired by the Governor, should be encouraged and count as Readiness Schools, rather than being capped as is currently rumored.

We owe it to our children now to provide them with the kinds of schools that have a proven record of educating students with their demographics. It is not only their future, but that of the City that is at stake. The Research Bureau challenges the Worcester Public School teachers, administrators, parents, students, School Committee members, business and community leaders, and the greater Worcester community as a whole to embrace the Governor's Readiness Schools now!

***Roberta R. Schaefer, Ph.D.***  
***President & CEO***  
***The Research Bureau***

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Massachusetts Office of Educational Quality and Accountability and UMass Donahue Institute, *Gaining Traction*, April 2007, <http://www.donahue.umassp.edu/docs/gain-trac-report>; Karin Chenoweth, *It's Been Done: Academic Success in Unexpected Schools*, Harvard Education Press, 2007.