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Education Bill Important for Level 3 School Reforms

Importance for Level 3 reform in urban districts missed by focus on charter school cap

The education reform bill, which must be released from the Legislature's Joint Education Committee by Tuesday to be acted on this year, should be reported out by the Committee so that it can be debated in the House and Senate. This bill has received attention because it would raise the charter school cap, but equally important for Boston and other cities are the reform provisions for state designated Level 3 schools representing the lowest 20% in student achievement statewide.

This bill is important to Boston, which is a Level 4 system, because 60 of Boston's 127 schools are designated Level 3 schools and a majority of Boston's 56,000 students attend those schools. Many of these schools that need this support are in the Roxbury and Dorchester areas of Boston.

The reform bill would provide the tools to succeed to a subset of Level 3 schools by extending the intervention powers currently available to existing turnaround schools to Level 3 "priority" schools. These schools represent the lowest 20% in student achievement for the two most recent consecutive years and are located in a Level 4 district. Thus, the bill seeks to improve the teaching and learning conditions in the

underperforming Level 3 "priority" schools most in need, which would be a small segment of all public schools in Massachusetts.

This bill would grant to the Level 3 "priority" schools the authority to:

- Hire without regard to seniority
- Expeditiously dismiss or replace poor performing teachers and administrators
- Add additional time to the school day
- Re-open and amend collective bargaining agreements through an accelerated process in order to drive rapid improvement

This bill also eliminates the cap on the number of Horace Mann in-district charter schools in the lowest 10% of the Commonwealth's school districts. This provision of the bill would apply to Boston and 14 other school districts. Boston now has six Horace Mann charter schools which provide charter flexibility and are funded through the School Department budget so they do not cause state Chapter 70 funds to leave the system. The bill also provides that Horace Mann charter schools established in one of the lowest 10% performing districts could be renewed without approval of the local collective bargaining unit.