



TONY CABRAL *Building a better, stronger New Bedford*
MAYOR

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Reform through Accountability

A Plan to Reform Our Public Schools and Improve Student Performance

As a former teacher, I understand the challenges we face in the New Bedford schools: limited funding, hard pressed parents, state and federal demands on resources, language barriers among many parents and students. They are daunting and frustrating. But our greatest challenge is the widespread acceptance of the status quo and the assumption that we cannot do better. We can, we must and we will do better. Other schools have done it. New Bedford will too.

New Bedford public schools have produced exceptional graduates who go on to prosper here in our city and across the country – but we still leave too many behind.

Despite the challenges of educating a diverse, urban

student body, we must adapt, and we must succeed. We need to take steps now to ensure that future generations of New Bedford students will prosper.

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Within my first 100 days as your Mayor:

1. I will host a series of public meetings to bring together the school committee, the superintendent, administrators, teachers, parents, students and interested community members. At these meetings, we will discuss best practices from successful schools, realistic goals for our schools, and the best way of achieving those goals and improving student performance beginning with the 2012-2013 school year. Participation will be with the understanding that the school committee will have the final say on the details of the plan.

2. After the completion of these public meetings, I will work with the school committee and superintendent to draft and present a three-year plan to reform our schools and improve student performance. This plan will contain goals with quantifiable benchmarks and deadlines for the system as a whole and for each individual school and their principals and administrators. Our plan will take into consideration the recommendations of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education's May 2011 report on the New Bedford Public Schools.

As Mayor, I will drive these conversations, and I look forward to public input. But I will bring my own ideas to the table as well. The following plan outlines and explains my ideas for improving New Bedford Public Schools.

Reform through Accountability

The overriding principal and value that I intend to instill throughout the New Bedford Public Schools, from students and parents, to teachers and elected officials, is **accountability**. All of us should know specifically what we are being asked to do and when, and should then be held accountable for our performance.

Focusing the school committee on policy, accountability, and performance to develop a vision of academic excellence.

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Perhaps the biggest complaint about our school department over the years has been that the school committee has been too focused on personnel and administrative matters, and not enough on performance. That is a culture and a reputation that I plan to change. With my leadership, the school department will focus on policy, accountability, and performance. Additionally, I believe that the superintendent needs to be held

accountable for New Bedford's educational success. We will set reasonable, achievable goals, but if our schools continue to underperform, I will hold school

management accountable. Accountability starts at the top, but it must trickle down throughout our school system. If teachers or administrators underperform, their evaluations and improvement plans must be included in their records, regardless of transfers or position changes.

We also need to open the door to better communication. Principals must have more input in the staffing of their schools and greater flexibility to effectively plan their school year and class schedules. School committee members should have a better view of classroom policies that work, and those that don't. And we must do a better job of communicating our success, because for every problem with our schools there are major triumphs. We need to ensure those stories are told.

Specifically, I will:

- Use my position as Ex Officio Chairman of the New Bedford School Committee to keep the Committee away from personnel and administrative decisions and focused on measuring success.
- Insist on regular evaluations of each level of administrators.
- Increase each principal's role while ensuring opportunities for teacher advice and input.
- Ensure that School Committee meetings focus on evaluating the success of schools, staff, programs and techniques.

Applying best practices from successful schools and adopting new strategies that will work for New Bedford.

There are tremendous case studies on educational success in urban areas. Some come from cities in other states and some from other parts of Massachusetts. In each case, there are lessons to be learned and strategies to be mimicked. We need to examine the best examples and identify tactics that might work for all our schools.

Specifically, I support:

- Establishing committees of teachers, parents, and administrators to identify successes—successful practices, programs, teachers, and students—in New Bedford schools and elsewhere.
- Using technology to streamline the sharing of information on best practices within the school system.

Prioritizing resources on reducing class size, particularly in grades K through 3.

I do not believe it is possible to make a bad investment in a young child. We have learned again and again that services for young children are to the benefit of the community. We know, without question, that early childhood education is in the best interest of the city. But it's also in the best interest of the child.

That's why, as our economy improves, I will focus any new educational resources on what I believe should be our priority: reducing class size, particularly for early education.

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Reducing the dropout rate and improving performance, simultaneously, by keeping students engaged in class.

As Mayor, I will create a culture of high expectations in our schools and in our communities, so that every student, every parent and every teacher truly believes that there are no alternatives to graduation.

We need to ensure that ALL of our students remain on the path to graduation. At the same time, we must graduate students who are ready to succeed in higher education or in their chosen careers. That means our students need to be engaged in their education, starting at an early age. If we can reach them when

they are young children, we can graduate them when they are teenagers, and watch them blossom when they are adults.

I have been fighting on Beacon Hill to expand early education and full-day kindergarten, and to increase the state's mandatory school attendance age to eighteen. As Mayor, I will continue those fights. But beyond just expanding their *time* in school, I will work to ensure that we have policies and curriculums that expand their *confidence* in school. If class instruction is meaningful, even if it isn't always fun, we can keep kids in the classroom.

For example, On August 25, 2011, Sol Garfunkel, the Executive Director of the Consortium for Mathematics and Its Applications and David Mumford, an emeritus professor of mathematics at Brown, published in *The New York Times* a call to change the standard math curriculum to ensure that students are learning math skills that will be useful to them, improving math instruction by focusing on real life problems. They argue, for instance, that math and science should be taught together.

It is this kind of innovation that can keep students engaged and in class until graduation.

At New Bedford High School, teachers, administrators, volunteers, and parents have been working with the National Academy Foundation to recruit local business leaders to organize an Engineering Academy for interested students at the High School. Models such as this, including innovation schools and autonomous schools, offer solutions. With leadership, these efforts can start changing our students' lives.

Finally, if we can remove distractions, while also working to remedy distracting behavior, we can focus on instruction. It can be done, and it is being done in school districts across the country, and even in nearby communities such as Brockton. If we commit ourselves to a culture of high expectations, of positivity, and of creativity, I know we can make New Bedford schools successful.

Specifically, I support:

- Organizing and training teams of teachers, administrators, and aides to deal with attendance and suspension issues. These teams will identify absentee problems, monitor in-school suspensions, and quickly provide students who fall behind because of illness or other temporary setbacks with intensive study to allow them to quickly reintegrate with their class.
- At the secondary level, assign each student a teacher to serve as their academic advisor.
- Training staff to better connect classroom instruction with students' interests and daily lives, setting measurable standards for these activities, and insisting that principals and administrators hold teachers regularly accountable to these standards.
- Continue to fight to increase the state's mandatory school attendance age to 18.

Renew our commitment to success by bringing parents, teachers, students, and administrators together to support what works, and reform what's broken.

Every morning our teachers welcome a student body that is as diverse as New Bedford. Their students arrive from families with a broad range of resources and possess a wide range of skills and abilities. If we are going to ask teachers to engage with such a varied student body, we have to give them the training and tools they need to succeed.

As Mayor, I will work with teachers to implement programs that emphasize best practices, improve classroom management, encourage common planning, and help to spread successful strategies throughout the district. We will give our

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teachers more tools, but we also need to recognize that they cannot do this alone.

In a city like New Bedford, much of the responsibility for education falls on the teachers. This needs to change. Our children cannot be successful unless their parents are involved in their schoolwork. As Mayor, I will reach out to parents and bring them into our public schools. I will ensure that the school department fosters stronger communication networks with parents at every grade level, and that our parent-teacher organizations assume the role that we envisioned for them when we passed the Education Reform Act in 1993.

Specifically, I support:

- Implementing aggressive professional development programs that identify best practices from other schools, improve classroom management, encourage common planning and teamwork, and implement successful approaches in the classroom.
- Working with parents, teachers, administrators and the community to find ways parents can comfortably monitor and participate in their children's school and classroom.

New Bedford's public school teachers and administrators care about their students and want them to succeed. Like all of us, they too want to be successful. My son is a graduate of our public schools, and my daughter will enroll in our schools soon. I want to ensure that my daughter and her classmates have the greatest possible opportunities for success. With leadership and accountability, we can, we must and we will do better.

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