On the morning of November 13, 2014, over 100 families from KIPP Massachusetts boarded buses headed to Boston’s Faneuil Hall for the 77,000 Reasons Rally, which called for a bold new plan to make Massachusetts the first state in the nation to eliminate racial and socio-economic achievement gaps and offer every child a world-class education. The rally was attended by over 2,000 parents, students, school leaders and community activists from all types of schools represented at the rally. Parent leaders are quick to say that bold change must include more than just an expansion of charter schools and have actively worked to build a movement of parents from all school types.

Event organizers hoped to focus attention on a troubling reality for families in Massachusetts: 77,000 children across the Commonwealth currently attend persistently failing schools, where fewer than one-in-three students can either read or do math on grade level. Analysis shows that these schools overwhelmingly serve low-income children of color. Low-income students make up 85% (over 65,000 students) of all children who attend failing schools, while 71% (over 55,000 students) of students in failing schools are African-American or Latino.

Rosemary Rojas, whose son Julian is an 8th grader at KIPP Academy Lynn, joined the rally for the 77,000 students in need. “I want the same opportunities for these kids as my son has been lucky enough to receive. Coming together as a large group increases our visibility and shows politicians across the state what we want.”

Many of the parent advocates who gathered on Thursday send their children to the Commonwealth’s high-performing charter schools but there was a diversity of parents from all types of schools represented at the rally. Parent leaders are quick to say that bold change must include more than just an expansion of charter schools and have actively worked to build a movement of parents from all school types.

KIPP:MA currently serves students in grades 5-12 in Lynn and grades K2 and 5-7 in Boston. We hope to serve more students Lynn next year at KIPP Academy Lynn Elementary School, pending approval by the DESE. At the present time, we have no KIPP based options for our future 9th grade students in Boston. Although our aim is to provide a full K-12 education to the students in Boston, we are, for the time being, unable to do so due to the current legislative cap on charter school seats.

As they enter their final semester in high school, 95% of the senior class of 2015 have submitted a total of 772 college applications! Though it is still early, seniors have already received 110 college acceptances and two have been awarded full-tuition scholarships through the Posse Foundation. We introduce you to those Posse Scholars, Anaydyis and Jose, on page 3. As our seniors prepare to enter college, our KIPP Through College (KTC) team is ready to provide the support they need to persist through college and career. Already working with KIPP 8th grade completers who left prior to the creation of the high school in Lynn, the KTC team is working to ensure that all our students have the supports necessary to graduate from a post-secondary program and lead a life of choice. We highlight the incredible work they are doing in our quarterly focus on the Six Essential Questions on page 3, and their efforts to retain and attract graduates through social engagements.

Our littlest KIPPsters at our Boston elementary have made huge gains since they joined us in August. In a recent STEP assessment, an early literacy assessment tool developed by The University of Chicago, the number of KIPP kindergarteners reading at or above grade level increased 70% from August to January. These results show the importance of starting our work with kids as young as possible. In Lynn, we are awaiting a vote by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) on our proposed charter expansion, the outcome of which will determine whether we are able to open an elementary school in Lynn next school year.

In Boston, the current charter cap prohibits us from opening a high school to serve our future 8th grade middle school graduates. Despite the current environment, we remain committed to providing a full K-12 education to students in Boston and Lynn to ensure that every child has access to an excellent education. We are not alone in this fight. It is the parents and families of Massachusetts’ students who are leading the charge. In November, over 2,000 parents, students and community members attended the largest rally for public education in Massachusetts’ history. You can read about that inspiring day, and the over 77,000 Massachusetts students attending failing schools, on page 4.

We hope you enjoy this edition of Juntos. As always, thank you for your continued support over the last 10 years.

Many thanks, much love,

Caleb Dolan
Executive Director, KIPP:MA

Help KIPP:MA go green! Would you prefer to receive our newsletter electronically? If so, please send an email to lkennedy@kippma.org to be added to our e-newsletter list.
Mr. Pinsky has authored nineteen books of prose and poetry, including his critically acclaimed translation of Dante’s Inferno, and served as editor for five poetry anthologies. Shortly after being appointed to the post of Poet Laureate, Mr. Pinsky created The Favorite Poem Project, which is dedicated to celebrating, documenting and encouraging poetry’s role in Americans’ lives. One of its main goals is to enhance and be appreciated and to work, told the students, “The poem, inherently and by the nature of its medium, is on an individual and human scale.”

After meeting with the larger group, Mr. Pinsky attended AP Literature class, where the students had prepared for his visit by reading a number of his poems. Again, Mr. Pinsky allowed the students’ questions to lead the discussion. He shared his own poetry and discussed the inspiration behind some of his work. When asked how he would counsel a student struggling with writer’s block Mr. Pinsky, with poetic ease advised, “Put syllables together and see what germinates.”

“Having a famous poet whose work we have studied and discussed come in and speak about his process is invaluable. Mr. Pinsky is known as one of the great poetry teachers in America and to have him in our classroom was something my students and I will never forget,” said Josh DoBell, whose AP Literature class Mr. Pinsky attended.

At KALC, we offer seven AP course options. Additionally, the overall pass rate on all AP exams taken by the Class of 2015 was 55%, compared to a nationwide average of approximately 33% of public high school graduates. Mr. Pinsky was in regards to his feelings about poetry as spoken versus written word. Mr. Pinsky, who believes poetry must be heard to be appreciated and to work, told the students, “The poem, inherently and by the nature of its medium, is on an individual and human scale.”

Help support KIPP:MA Boston Marathon runners.

Through the John Hancock Marathon Non-Profit Program, KIPP Massachusetts has received two guaranteed entries for the 2015 Boston Marathon. Our Executive Director and avid runner, Caleb Dolan, will be participating in what will be his first marathon. Having completed multiple half marathons, he is excited for the challenge of running 26.2 miles to raise funds for KIPP Massachusetts. Running with him will be Hillary Paul, Biology and Engineering teacher at KIPP Academy Lynn Collegiate High School. Hillary ran her first 10K just last fall, finishing with an impressive sub-50 minute time. She is excited to run her first marathon and can’t imagine a better race in which to start!

Caleb and Hillary’s fundraising pages can be found at www.crowdrise.com/KIPPBoston2015/

Nearly 35 alumni, home from college or other post-secondary commitments, came together to reflect on their 2014 accomplishments and toast the new year (with sparkling cider, of course).

KIPP:MA would like to thank The Tavern in the Square for generously donating a portion of the cost of the delicious three course meal in kind.