IN PERSON
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EXECUTIVE PROFILE | PAMELA CIVINS

The next chapter

AFTER YEARS OF HELPING BRIDGE THE EDUCATION GAP WITH BOSTON PARTNERS, CIVINS WILL GRADUATE TO NEW THINGS

BY SEAN TEEHAN
Special to the Journal

Pamela Civins, executive director of Boston Partners in Education, at the Josiah Quincy Elementary School in Boston's Chinatown.

▸ CLOSER LOOK

Pamela Civins

Title: Executive director, Boston Partners in Education Inc.

Age: 52

Education: Bachelor's degree, English literature, University of Colorado Boulder, 1986; Master's degree, Intercultural and International Management, School for International Training, 1998; Master's degree, education, Harvard, 2003

Residence: Dorchester

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Teaching English as a second language in a small rural village in Nepal during the early '90s taught Pamela Civins, then a 20-something Peace Corps volunteer, two things: She absolutely wanted to pursue a career in education. But absolutely not as a teacher.

"(In) my first class, I had a group of third graders, and I had 60 kids in my class," Civins recalled with a chuckle. "I'm a fairly patient person, but I think that for a first experience – a class of 60 – it was challenging for me."

After spending nearly a dozen years as executive director at Boston Partners in Education Inc., Civins is leaving Boston Partners at the end of December, and pursuing opportunities, possibly in higher education, she said.

Boston Partners is a nonprofit that matches students – mostly at elementary, K-8, middle and high schools within the Boston Public Schools district – with academic mentors.

The position has provided her with a wealth of experience in education, which she hopes to translate into a non-teaching job – think student affairs – at a college or university. Civins isn't ruling anything out, she said, but doubts she will work as executive director for another nonprofit.

"I love my job (at Boston Partners)," Civins said. "I just don't know if I can do this same job for the next 10 to 15 years of my life."

Higher education has long been an interest of Civins. The first woman in her family to receive a college degree, Civins said her mentors over the years helped impress upon her the value of one-on-one help from adults who care.

"A lot of the kids just really need to build their self-confidence, and their self-esteem," Civins said. "People from our community, people who want to commit their time ... just provide them with that extra boost of confidence."

Civins took the helm at Boston Partners in 2006, after serving as co-executive director of The National Center for Fair and Open Testing (FairTest) in Boston. When she started as executive director of Boston Partners – a nonprofit that was founded in 1966 – her annual budget stood at about $657,000, she said. On its current annual budget of just over $1.46 million, Boston Partners oversees some 600 volunteers who help individual and small groups of students in nearly 70 Boston schools, Civins said.

An annual contract between the nonprofit and the school district amounts to just over $70,000.

Boston Partners' workforce of 13 full-time staffers, a part-timer and three AmeriCorps volunteers field teachers' nominations of students who may benefit from the program.

They go on to recruit and train volunteers and match students with mentors. The district provides the necessary background checks on volunteers who then commit at least one hour per week to tutor students in school during the school day.

Jonathan Sproul, Boston Public Schools director of school-community partnerships, oversees Boston Partners' program within district schools. He says the relationships fostered benefit mentors and mentees alike.

Sproul, who worked as a program manager for Boston Partners for two years ending in 2004, hailed the program as providing academic and social support for students, and a sense of fulfillment and community engagement among volunteers.

"From a social, emotional, and relationship development, having another positive support in their lives" is beneficial to students, Sproul said. "I really think it's important to stress that you see it both ways; you see that same impact ... in how much the students impact the volunteers."

Academic mentors generally fall into three categories: college students, retired people and professionals working at corporations that partner with Boston Partners, Civins said.

A sponsorship initiative called The Big Cheese Reads Initiative brings C-level executives (or "Big Cheeses") into Boston middle school classrooms to read aloud to students, and talk about how literacy is important to career success, and how it's contributed to their success. It culminates each year with a gala.

During the school year ending in 2016, more than 100 executives read to more than 2,000 students in 23 Boston schools, according to the nonprofit's annual report for fiscal 2016. The program, including the annual Big Cheese Gala, raised more than $610,000 that year.

Last year, the 2016-2017 school year, Boston Partners served more than 3,700 students, and the organization has a goal to serve 750 more students in mostly one-on-one and small group matches over the few years.