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The solution, not the problem

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BOSTON IS facing a world of trouble. The problems include high rates of asthma and obesity, unskilled workers, high housing prices, and rising energy costs.
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But Greater Boston is also a microcosm of the world. It is full of the world's diversity, and able to capitalize on this. From neighborhoods, to campuses, to business, to new immigrants, Boston is full of solutions waiting to be unleashed.

How best to tap the power of the region's resources will be the topic at today's Boston College Citizen Seminar, with Mayor Menino as the keynote speaker. One premise is that many old systems -- of healthcare, education, and business -- no longer work. The region needs revolutionary change.

Calling this "one of the volatile periods in human history"-- an age of complex energy needs and of dominance shifting from the West and of influence emerging in nations such as China, India, and Brazil -- a new report from the Boston Indicators Project tallies up the Boston area's strengths and weaknesses, preparing the city to meet its global challenges. The indicators project is a civic effort sponsored by the City of Boston, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, and the Boston Foundation.

Time and again, the region's diversity points the way. Embedded in the immigrant community are people who speak more than 100 languages, according to the indicator report. They contribute locally with small businesses, and as a part of a thoughtful effort many could also help the city and the region make transnational progress in business.

A new understanding of diversity recognizes the potential in high school dropouts. Take just 20 of these teenagers, bring them back into the educational fold, offer them access to dynamic careers, and they could become symbolic and literal figures of how much positive change can be accomplished.

The new diversity also goes beyond asking who is black, white or Hispanic, to asking who is green. Which buildings have grass and solar panels on their roofs? What regions are reducing carbon dioxide emissions? And who -- whether it's MIT professors or children with bikes -- has new ideas about reducing national dependence on oil?

Diversity is also desperately needed in housing prices. While it's fun to read about multi million dollar homes in glossy magazines, cities have to offer young families real estate that's even glossier in its affordability.

One of the most important things today's forum can do is help advance diversity in leadership, stirring up conversations that engage people across ethnic backgrounds, neighborhoods, industries, political perspectives, and income levels. It should be a

discussion that grants generous common ground to all those seeking a bright global future for Greater Boston.

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