

External Advisory Committee on School Choice

- ▶ **Meeting Materials for December 13, 2012
Summary and Recommendations**

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Limitations of a student assignment system

- ▶ Throughout the intensive process of reviewing student assignment options, one of our most important findings relates to agreeing upon and acknowledging both the limitations and potential of any school assignment system. We acknowledge that a school assignment system alone is limited in its ability and thus is likely unable to:
 - ▶ 1) In and of itself improve school performance;
 - ▶ 2) Guarantee every family access to the school they most desire; and
 - ▶ 3) Guarantee every family access to a high-performing school (particularly in the short term).

What a student assignment system CAN do

- ▶ Offer families a more predictable set of school choices;
- ▶ Offer a transparent, consumer-friendly process for obtaining school information and making informed choices about where families will send their children;
- ▶ Address some of the systemic barriers in the current system that diminish some residents' chances of accessing high-performing schools and provide families and BPS with a set of tools that will afford families who are disproportionately impacted by structural barriers to high-quality programming and school access (e.g., the uneven distribution of high-performing schools, the scarcity of strong inclusion options) some recourse in the assignment process should none or few quality options be available to them;
- ▶ Reduce average travel burden and, particularly, ameliorate excessive travel burdens required to access high performing schools, appropriate academic programming, and services that address the needs of particular children;
- ▶ Adjust to equitable access to a quality education without having to commission a redesign processes; and
- ▶ Set the stage for a rigorous community discussion – informed by transparent data – about priorities for district-wide school improvement and the most effective strategies for achieving desired quality across the district over time.

Assignment System Priorities

- ▶ Predictability
- ▶ Equitable access to quality schools (with higher-performance on academic metrics being one measure)
- ▶ Choice
- ▶ Closer to home where possible
- ▶ More rational transportation to ensure access where needed
- ▶ Transparency
- ▶ Ability to respond to school performance changes over time

Summary Observations and Findings - #1

- ▶ The EAC's assessment is that use of busing across wide geographic areas as a primary strategy for student assignment has limited strategic purpose in Boston's contemporary context. The data assembled by the EAC shows that busing is neither counteracting historical race and class inequities, nor is it counteracting current inequities. Busing is not guaranteeing that children who travel beyond their neighborhoods actually receive an adequate education at the end of their trips. At best, busing may be helping to promote diversity in neighborhoods in Boston that remain racially and/or socio-economically segregated. However, given Boston's changing demography since the desegregation era – and its emergence as a far more diverse city in many respects – busing may not have the import that it once did as a tool for advancing diversity, inclusion, tolerance, and equitable educational outcomes.
 - ▶ Today, 37% of students travel more than 1.5 miles each way, but not necessarily to attend a higher-performing school.
 - ▶ Access to seats in higher-performing schools is not evenly distributed by race or income: 84% of white students and 77% of Asian students access seats in higher-performing schools, compared to 52% of Black and 61% of Latino students. [Add same% for students eligible for free/reduced lunch.]
- ▶ Students in the current East Zone have only an approximately 40% chance of accessing a quality seat in their zone, compared to approximately 80% for the North Zone and approximately 75% for the West Zone.
 - ▶ Thus, while the current assignment system relies on large geographic zones, with free transportation and a wide range of theoretical choices for students, this system is not providing equitable access to quality seats.

Summary Observations and Findings - #2

- ▶ It should be assumed that middle- and upper-class families of all races and ethnicities may want to send their children to BPS. Through the assignment redesign process we have learned that while some assume BPS schools need significant improvement, others acknowledge the improvements that have been made and want to invest in ongoing improvement for their children and other families. Moreover, many families have a strong desire for their children to take advantage of the diversity and rich learning opportunities that BPS schools have to offer.

Summary Observations and Findings - #3

- ▶ BPS has made important improvements in school quality over the last 25 years. Significant improvements include recent improvements in the lowest-performing Level 4 Turnaround Schools. Since 2007, there has been a 36% decrease in the drop-out rate and corresponding nine percent increase in the high school graduation rate. Through the BPS Arts Expansion Initiative, 89% of elementary/middle school students have weekly arts and music experiences, up from 67% just three years ago. Additionally, Algebra is now offered in grade 8 at every school, and 84% of BPS students pass the 10th grade Mathematics MCAS on their first attempt, up 25% from 1998.
- ▶ There has also been a strong increase in Kindergarten reading performance. In 2008/2009, BPS students were entering Kindergarten and scoring 54% in reading readiness on the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). By the end of 2012, 76% of them had scored 57% on the DIBELS and were ready for first grade work. By the end of first grade in 2012, 67% of BPS students will be reading at or above grade level as measured by this DIBELS test.

Summary Observations and Findings - #4

- ▶ However, these improvements have yet to significantly reduce historical achievement gaps across all groups and a number of schools have yet to see notable improvement. Thus, continued work is needed to increase the number of quality schools within the district. We assert that a primary responsibility of the district is to focus its effort on improving the quality of all schools, regardless of the student assignment system. Below we recommend the further development and refining of district plans for school improvement and to address racial, class, and ability achievement gaps.

Summary Observations and Findings - #4 (continued)

- ▶ Much of the available data on school quality is assessed by measures of academic performance. While the EAC developed a broad definition of school quality informed by community input, we acknowledge the lack of valid data measures to analyze quality against this broader definition. We have learned that families in Boston have a diverse opinion as to what constitutes a quality school and that such a definition is broader than academic performance. We also realize that there are some areas where data is needed and is currently incomplete: quality of leadership and instruction, various dimensions of students learning and social experiences, and of school community participation. We, therefore, include a recommendation below related to developing and analyzing a more comprehensive set of quality measures over time.

Summary Observations and Findings - #5

- ▶ To measure quality based on academic performance, for the purpose of analyzing potential student assignment models, we settled on the use of the BPS' MCAS Quadrant Analysis (or MCAS Snapshot) which captures two years' worth of MCAS data showing both student performance and student growth or academic gains. The quadrant analysis groups schools in four categories: (1) high performance/high growth, (2) high performance/low growth, (3) low performance/low growth, and (4) low performance/low growth. This analysis further allows a relative score to be given to schools depending on their quadrant, and for schools to be grouped as "high", "medium" or "low" quality based on this one comprehensive academic measure. Thus, we recommend that the district use the following formula for identifying quality seats and the district's improvement rate, using the quadrant analysis.
- ▶ For the purposes of designating schools as "high" or "medium" quality based on this one measure, we recommend that the district uses a threshold cut-off of [XX%] or higher, which effectively groups schools in "high" and "medium-high" OR we recommend that the district uses a threshold cut-off of [YY%] or higher, which effectively groups schools in "high" and "medium" as quality options, versus the "low" performing schools.

Quality Seats

- ▶ Quality Seats – As measured by MCAS Quadrant Analysis (student performance & growth):
- ▶ In 2012, the percentage of seats in quadrant 1 and 2 are considered quality seats.
- ▶ In 2012, the percentage of seats in quadrant 3 are considered medium quality seats but these schools should submit, and be held accountable, a plan that articulates their efforts to increase their student growth scores.
- ▶ In 2012, the percentage of seats in quadrant 4 is considered low-performing or low quality seats, based on this academic measure of student performance. All level 4 schools should be targeted for significant intervention

General Recommendations - #1

- ▶ The district continues to assemble, analyze and make public the large quantity of data requested by the EAC through the student assignment redesign process. This availability of data will provide ongoing accountability and progress related to the recommendations in this memo. More importantly, this data will provide accountability and transparency to the families, partners and many stakeholders concerned with ongoing improvements in our schools.
- ▶ **We recommend annual reports to the community documenting the impact of the student assignment system on students across a range of measures, including socio-economic levels, race, special populations (students with disabilities, English Language Learners, etc.), neighborhood, and school. This report will be compiled by BPS staff and potentially additional community stakeholders.**

General Recommendations - #2

- ▶ We operate on the assumption that this community has the capacity and will to increase the percentage of quality seats in the district from an average of 62% in 2011 based upon 79 K-8 schools to [XX] in 2017. Further, we recommend that any increases in quality seats be analyzed in terms of their impact on increasing equitable access to quality – specifically, by analyzing changes in access to quality seats, particularly for those populations whose access to high quality schools has been most restricted in the past.

General Recommendations - #3

- ▶ The district further develop and refine plans for school improvement that will also address racial, class, and ability achievement.
- ▶ **We recommend that the district clearly articulate school improvement plans for all level 3 and 4 schools with clear metrics and expected timelines for improvement. This will be reviewed and presented on a yearly basis with the School Committee.**

General Recommendations - #4

- ▶ The district speed the development of capacity to track and analyze a more comprehensive set of quality measures and that BPS school improvement and strategic plans more explicitly focus on improving overall school quality and not just performance.
- ▶ **We recommend that the district, by December 2014, develop and publish valid measures for the eight indicators of quality articulated by the EAC.**

General Recommendations - #5

- ▶ Parents who do not receive their first choice in the initial round of the lottery be allowed to participate in a parent compact that would involve attendance in a level 3 or 4 school.

General Recommendations - #6

- ▶ The district increase the number of two way language K-8 schools as a way to effectively serve ELL students.

General Recommendations - #7

- ▶ The district pursue an independent study (through the provision of outside funding) that includes implications of the assignment plan, incorporating existing data on school quality, facilities/building utilization, and access to all school choices (e.g. district, pilot, and charter schools).

Analysis on Grandfathering and Sibling Priority

Grandfathering and Sibling Priority

What is grandfathering?

- **Grandfathering will allow current BPS students to remain in their schools after a new student assignment plan is in place, even if those schools fall outside their new home assignment areas.**
- Current students could opt-in to the new plan by voluntarily entering the choice process and selecting a different school.

What about younger siblings not yet in school?

- The assignment algorithm offers sibling priority so families can attend the same school. BPS recommends this policy continue.
- The same policy works in reverse and BPS recommends that this also continue. This means families receive a priority to bring older sibling(s) into the same school as the younger, *incoming* child, who attends school within the family's new assignment area.
- If BPS were to apply grandfathering to younger siblings who are not yet in school, then those students could use sibling priority to select the same school as their older sibling even if it is outside of their new assignment area.
- This would add an additional school to the menu of options for every incoming student with older sibling(s) already in BPS.

The number of students who would access out-of-area sibling priority would fall over time...

Model type* (for basic analysis only)	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
6 zones: Siblings out-of-area	618	602	520	413	321
as % of new students	15%	14%	13%	10%	8%
9 zones: Siblings out-of-area	779	761	659	523	407
as % of new students	19%	18%	16%	13%	10%
11 zones: Siblings out-of-area	805	788	683	542	422
as % of new students	19%	19%	16%	13%	10%
23 zones: Siblings out-of-area	1034	1011	875	693	536
as % of new students	25%	24%	21%	17%	13%

The number of out-of-area siblings within the ‘Grouped Schools’ model would most likely be between the 9- and 11-zones estimates.

For this analysis, BPS examined the number of siblings current students have in school. This allows us to project future trends.

We used the original 6, 9, 11, and 23 zone models to identify siblings who attend schools that are outside their home attendance areas. With this data we projected the number of siblings who are not yet in BPS who could be affected.

***The original models are used as a reference to estimate the range of impact; this analysis has not been performed for updated model possibilities.**

...with new out-of-area enrollments continuing through approximately 2029.

Model type* (for basic analysis only)	Total siblings predicted to enroll out-of-area, 2014 to 2029
6 zones	3,200 – 3,500 (=145 - 159 classrooms)
9 zones	4,000 – 4,500(=182 - 205 classrooms)
11 zones	4,200 – 4,600 (=191 - 209 classrooms)
Grouped Schools**	4,400 – 4,800 (=200 - 218 classrooms)
23 zones	5,200 – 5,800(=236 - 264 classrooms)

*The original models are used as a reference to estimate the *range of impact*; this analysis has not been performed for updated model possibilities. Classroom estimate based on current 22-student general education class size limit in early grades.

**Grouped Schools is a tentative estimate based on the average number of schools available to students. It is the closest to the 11 zone model but has slightly less average schools.

Per the EAC's request for guidance, BPS recommends allowing sibling grandfathering for future out-of-assignment-area siblings

What does BPS propose regarding sibling grandfathering?

- We recommend that students currently attending schools that will fall outside of their assignment area be able to pull in younger siblings.
- BPS would offer out-of-assignment-area sibling priority through the 2019-2020 school year.
- This means that all students will be able to remain at their current schools through the highest grades.
- BPS transportation will be provided through at least school year 2019-2020.
- We do not anticipate this recommendation to cause transportation costs to increase significantly in the near-term because younger siblings “grandfathered in” will be added to an existing bus route that is currently taking the older sibling.
- However, this recommendation would require more students to be transported out of their assignment areas until transportation phases out following the 2019-2020 school year.

What about transportation?

Grandfathering

- ▶ We recommend that all current students assigned to BPS schools as of September 2013 retain their school assignments (i.e., be “grand-fathered” into existing school) with transportation provided as needed. Their families will have the option of choosing to enter the new student assignment lottery and request a new assignment, but they will retain their current assignment unless they accept a new one. This “grandfathering” with transportation will continue through **[EAC to decide: 5th grade, or the highest grade served in that school]** unless the family chooses to change schools.
- ▶ **EAC to decide on sibling grandfathering (see slides 21-24)**

Special Populations

- ▶ The EAC commends BPS for systematically addressing the needs of students who come from situations that make it challenging to succeed in the classroom, particularly students who come from poverty, students who are English Language Learners, and students who have special educational needs. The EAC commends BPS for creating and implementing the weighted student formula which we agree “is more equitable, transparent and predictable, enabling schools to make greater academic progress regardless of the economy. Under a weighted student funding formula, dollars follow students. This means that BPS anticipates what each student needs each year and then delivers the appropriate funds to the school that student attends. Dollars no longer follow programs, buildings or schools. Instead, we allocate budgets solidly based on student need.” The EAC commends BPS for identifying schools that are in need of improvement as well as developing and making public explicit change strategies for these schools.

Free and Reduced Lunch Students

- ▶ We recommend that any school assignment process has a clear articulation as to how it will seek to ensure that FRL students are matched/assigned to high quality academic programming that is closer to their home, provides minimal disruption in their schooling, and provides predictability for families.
- ▶ We recommend that the BPS and School Committee create a standing committee of engaged citizens to which an annual report will be made on a) the ability of the school assignment process to provide equitable access to a quality education, b) report on the educational outcomes for FRL, ELL, and Special Needs student, and c) report on the progress of schools that are designated in need of improvement.

Overlay Maps for Special Populations

- ▶ The BPS proposed a series of overlay maps to address the assignment process of specific student populations, including middle school students, students who are English Language Learners (with an ELD Level of 1-3 requiring special services), and students with disabilities requiring special education services. These maps are designed to function regardless of the student assignment system used to place enrolling students in general education seats. The next set of recommendations by the EAC relates to these overlay maps for special populations.

Overlay Map for Students Requiring Special Education Services

- ▶ Our first recommendation is that any school assignment process provide for and include the “placement” process that is required by Federal and State laws and regulation for students with disabilities who have individualized education plans (“IEPs”), and which comports with the purpose and letter of the special education laws that requires students with disabilities to be educated with their non-disabled peers in the least restrictive environment to the maximum extent appropriate. Students with disabilities need to have the same opportunity to be educated in their neighborhood schools as their non-disabled peers under any new assignment process, and this necessitates that specialized services and programs be expanded throughout the District. BPS needs to decrease the current level of 46% of students with disabilities being educated in segregated settings by reserving seats in “inclusion” for students with disabilities (who are currently in substantially separate settings) to allow for inclusion during part or all of the school day for students with disabilities. Each student’s IEP Team needs to determine the appropriate amount of inclusion time for each student and have the ability to implement each inclusion decision through available classroom seats. BPS’ long-standing practice of assigning seats in its “assignment process” to only non-disabled peers has effectively excluded many children with IEPs from classrooms and programs because they receive their assignment/”placement” through their special education Teams in a completely different and parallel process. BPS has also historically assigned “resource-room” students who are considered partial-inclusion students as if they are non-disabled students, which is contrary to laws and regulations, and one impact of these “assignments” has been the over-saturation of certain classrooms and programs with a greater than 50% population of students with disabilities, instead of their natural proportion distribution of 30% or lower.
- ▶ BPS needs to change its past practice of separating students with disabilities by creating more K-8 full-inclusion programs (like the Henderson and Mary Lyon schools), creating more K-8 inclusion seats, and establishing a higher percentage of integrated seats for students entering the system at age three. Any endorsement of the proposed overlay must thoughtfully and comprehensively address all of the aforementioned issues.

Overlay Map for Students Requiring English Language Learner (ELL) Services:

- ▶ See attached document “EAC ELL Recommendations”

Overlay Map for Middle School Students

- ▶ Our third recommendation is that we endorse the district's proposal concerning middle school feeder patterns as long as parents of 5th grade students have the option of entering a lottery system for open seats.