

Paired Zone Plan

This plan is based on suggestions made by several people in the past. The basic idea is that each student would have a choice of several schools close to his or her home and several others which would be close to each other, but not necessarily close to the student's home.

One way this could be done would be to split the city into several small zones. Each zone might have three or four schools. This would probably look very similar to the proposed 23 zone plan.

Each zone would be paired with another zone. Ideally, paired zones would be geographically close or at least easily reached from each other via public transportation and yellow bus. Zones would be drawn and paired in such a way as to meet supply and demand needs, maximize diversity, and ensure equitable access to quality schools.

For example, if one zone had two higher-quality schools and one lower quality school, it might be paired with a zone with two lower-quality schools and one higher-quality school. Also, if one zone had more school capacity than children, the paired zone would have more children than capacity.

Students could attend any school in their home zone or within one mile (same as now), but families could also apply to schools in their paired zone. There could continue to be walk zone preference, or it could be dropped. Sibling preference would remain in place.

ELL and SPED students would likely need access to a larger group of schools, which could be achieved through the seven zone plans BPS proposes or other means like combining more than two zones for these students.

I see several advantages to this model:

1. Smaller zones mean many children go to schools close to home.
2. All students can have a chance to go to a quality school by pairing zones with quality schools with those without quality schools. No child would have a 0% chance at getting in to a quality school.
3. Students from a neighborhood can attend school together, even if they aren't in a neighborhood school.
4. Transportation costs and travel times are reduced even for students who are bused as buses can make a few stops in one zone and then go directly to the paired zone to drop off students at the schools there. Also, buses would be relatively full because there wouldn't be cases where just one or two children from one neighborhood attend a school in a distant neighborhood.

5. It will be easier for parents to get to their children's schools because paired zones will be chosen for their proximity and/or accessibility. Additionally, schools could easily arrange for transportation to the school for events since most parents from outside the neighborhood would be coming from the same area.
6. Parents who want to work together to improve an under-chosen school can do so even if there are no under-chosen schools in their neighborhood by selecting an under-chosen school in their paired zone.
7. Diversity can be enhanced by pairing zones with different racial, ethnic, and economic make-ups.
8. Capacity issues can be addressed by pairing zones with more children than school seats with zones that have excess capacity.

Integrated District/Charter Assignment

This is not an assignment plan, but could be combined with any plan selected. As the number of charter schools increase, they become an increasingly large factor in public education in Boston. However, each charter school has its own lottery which any child in the city can enter. This makes it difficult for parents who want to apply to BPS and several charter schools. It also requires complicated and expensive busing to accommodate students from all over the city attending these schools. Finally, charters are often accused of taking the best students as only parents who take the time to find those schools and apply to them individually will have their children admitted. While this last point may not be a fair assessment, it does raise questions of whether apples-to-apples comparisons between district and charter schools are possible.

I propose to integrate all charters in Boston into the BPS assignment system. Out of district charters would still be independently operated, but students would be assigned to them by BPS. Ideally, BPS would work with potential charter operators to locate new charter schools where demand is highest.

It's possible that this change would require legislative changes as I believe that charter admissions are covered by state law. However, the legislature has shown a willingness to pass education reform measures quickly, so this may not be a significant obstacle.

Advantages include:

1. Streamlining the school choice process for parents who want to apply to BPS schools and one or more charters.
2. Ensuring that district and charter schools are serving similar populations.

3. Whatever rules the new school assignment plan uses to allow more children to attend schools close to home would also apply to charters. This would allow even more Boston children to go to school close to home and further reducing transportation costs.

Submitted by:

Josh Weiss

BPS Parent

weissjd@gmail.com

Please feel free to contact me if you would like to discuss these ideas.