

Boston Public Schools: Improving School Choice

Working with you to improve school choice and student assignment



January 30, 2013

Members of the External Advisory Committee,

Attached please find an analysis of the three school choice options BPS presented to you last week. The BPS Technical Team would like to publicly thank Dr. Parag Pathak and Peng Shi of the MIT School Effectiveness and Inequality Initiative for the remarkable work they have volunteered. In this analysis you will find data that compares the various options to the status quo across many benchmarks – including access to quality seats, equity, distance traveled, demographics, community and other measures.

Many EAC members have said from the beginning of this process that while there may be no such thing as a perfect plan in a system where currently there is uneven school quality, a more equitable, responsive and family-friendly system is certainly within reach. As this report demonstrates, each of the proposals **increases equity** overall while also offering families quality schools, closer to home.

As you will see in this report, each proposal:

- Increases – and better balances – access to quality schools, especially for students with the lowest-level of access today;
- Decreases the average distance a student would travel;
- Protects the diverse school communities we value today; and
- Increases the likelihood a child will be in the same grade in the same school as other children nearby.

We also know these proposals would give families a better opportunity to visit and explore schools before they make their choices, which, as the demand report also indicates, is an important factor for families. To have developed a series of proposals that simultaneously accomplish all of these goals is an accomplishment that should not be taken lightly. It is something the EAC rightly demanded and we are proud that it is something that can be delivered.

This report uses the demand model the EAC requested this winter. This innovative model allows us to measure and estimate access to quality based on choices families have actually made in the past. Among other things, we learn here that last year, approximately 57 percent of families selected a “high-quality” school as their first choice – represented in this metric as the 50 percent of schools in Tier I or II, based on MCAS performance and growth. Conversely, 43 percent of families selected a school as their first choice that was not in the top-50 percent group, which indicates that factors other than MCAS performance may have influenced their selection. This is consistent with what we have heard in community meetings and through surveys in our Family Resource Centers – that families define quality in many different ways.

This report uses school choice data from Round One of the assignment process for the 2012-2013 school year, which are the choices families selected and the assignments they received in the process that took place in January and February 2012. This data set was designed to show the effect of the new options on families that are new to BPS; in other words, families that are not taking advantage of sibling priority and who have no guaranteed assignment. Because the data are from a “point in time,” this report cannot account for many changes BPS made since the Round One student assignment process for the 2012-13 school year around school quality and access to quality, including expanding capacity in early grades at six Tier I or II schools, plus the Blackstone and Trotter, to meet significantly higher K2 demand last spring.

We believe this report represents a beginning for conversations about the models BPS has proposed and the quality interventions that are necessary (or are already underway) to increase access to quality. This report

helps highlight the same issues around access to quality that many families have raised throughout this process and which we continue to address. It does an excellent job highlighting exactly where access to quality must be increased – both through changes to the assignment system and also through needed interventions and school improvements. It also provides an important road map for the future, one that BPS is already following, based on what we have heard from families and on what we can see in school performance data.

Any student assignment system that moves away from the three-zone system we have today will also focus the options available to students. It is important that we understand not just the overall impact of a new plan on equity, but also attempt to estimate local effects as well. As we expected, any plan that offers families more predictable access to schools closer to home also involves changes in overall access to quality. As you review the data, please remember these three important points:

- **In the last few weeks, BPS has formally made two important quality interventions. These new changes are not examined in this report because they were only recently proposed.** First, we propose to continue to give students living in portions of Roxbury and Mission Hill access to the **Mission Hill K-8 School**, which was moved last year to Jamaica Plain. Second, we propose to **convert a higher-quality Allston-Brighton school to a magnet-like option**, which would allow students from other parts of the city – with less overall access to quality – to have a better option. We made these changes to address the same access-to-quality issues you will see highlighted in this report.
- Currently there are simply not enough schools in some communities that have reached the high-quality school bar – a reality that, while improving, will always impact immediate access-to-quality metrics. This is the reason that last week we proposed to create new in-district charter and Innovation Schools **to address and more quickly accelerate quality concerns in Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan and Hyde Park.** Space for **a school for downtown families** would also address many of these same issues. Regardless of what student assignment plan exists, we must prioritize the rapid creation of higher-quality schools so all families have great choices closer to home.
- This report uses all of last year’s Round One choice data, but focuses on results for incoming K2 students, new to BPS and with no older siblings in the system as a benchmark. This means it **continues to reflect the Marshall** as a school option for students in some communities. We have moved to turn this lower-performing school into a citywide In-District Charter School this fall. Since this report examines what would have happened had BPS adopted these plans last year, the report does not account for this future change. We anticipate the access to quality metrics for the proposed models would be higher for nearby students because (a) the Marshall would not be considered an available local lower-quality option under our proposals and (b) it will be a citywide school that we expect will become a high-quality option available to any student.

Again, we would like to thank the report’s authors for their commitment to this data-driven, transparent and thoughtful process. Together, we can create a new school choice system that helps us achieve the goal of meaningful access to quality schools for every student – and make BPS the very first choice for Boston’s children and families.

Sincerely,

Carleton Jones
Executive Director, Capital and Strategic Planning
Boston Public Schools



MIT Report snapshot:

Access to high-quality seats by neighborhood

This document summarizes the neighborhood metrics provided in the MIT report and highlights what BPS is already doing to increase access to quality for families. In some cases, the report lags behind steps BPS has already taken; in other cases, access to quality would increase due to changes that are proposed or currently underway.

Overall, each proposal:

- *Increases – and better balances -- access to quality schools, especially for students with the lowest-level of access today;*
- *Decreases the average distance a student would travel;*
- *Protects the diverse school communities we value today; and*
- *Increases the likelihood a child will be in the same grade in the same school as other children nearby.*

In his State of the City address on January 29, Mayor Menino announced a new \$30 million investment in BPS Quality Improvement Funds which, combined with the Mayor's call for new flexibilities and school improvement tools through state legislation, will support the quality and capacity changes outlined below.

Allston-Brighton

Allston-Brighton currently has some of the highest access to quality seats in Boston, which would increase under all the models. In addition, Allston-Brighton schools have extra capacity and can welcome more students. BPS proposes converting an Allston-Brighton school to a magnet-like option, which will preserve Allston-Brighton's access to quality while also offering seats to students from other parts of the city that have lower access to quality.

Back Bay-Beacon Hill-Central Boston

This report finds access to quality is reduced under the proposals because there is not sufficient high-quality supply to satisfy current demand. These metrics do not include the K2 expansion at the high-quality Harvard/Kent and Eliot K-8, which occurred after the choice round studied in this report. This expansion means additional high-quality seats are already available to these families, but are not reflected in the report. In addition, BPS is committed to identifying additional space and seats to serve downtown families, which would improve overall access to quality and make BPS an attractive option.

Charlestown

The report finds a slight decrease in access to quality for families in Charlestown. However, these metrics do not include the K2 expansion at the high-quality Harvard/Kent and Eliot K-8, which occurred after the choice round studied in this report. This expansion means additional high-quality seats are already available to Charlestown families, but are not reflected in the report. In addition, opening space for a school available to downtown families would have a significant and positive impact in Charlestown due to decreased competition for the high-quality seats in Charlestown.

East Boston

The report finds a decrease in access to quality across the proposals. We know that approximately 70 percent of the seats in East Boston are considered high-quality; this report indicates that constraints on capacity would result in lower overall access due to increased competition. However, since it is based on Round One, the report does not include new K2 classes added after Round One at Mario Umana Academy and Guild Elementary, which are both considered high-quality schools. Had these been included, overall access to quality would have been significantly higher. Moving forward, BPS is exploring expanding the high-quality Montessori program at the East Boston EEC into the former Alighieri building, which would add additional capacity in early grades for East Boston families.

Fenway-Kenmore

The report finds access to quality is increased under the 10 zone proposal and is decreased under Home-Based A and B. Providing access to a high-quality Allston-Brighton School would raise access to quality in Fenway-Kenmore, as would a new school option for downtown families.

Hyde Park

The report finds overall access to quality increases under the proposals; with greater increases overall with Home-Based A and B and greater access to quality for the student with the lowest levels of access today. Beyond this, there are some decreases in access to quality for other students within the 10 Zone proposal. BPS has already named four schools in Hyde Park as High Support Schools, which are receiving extra support around data, teacher evaluations and professional development, and are receiving priority partnerships for in- and out-of-school learning opportunities. In addition, BPS has committed to creating at least one new Innovation or In-District Charter School in Hyde Park to raise overall access to quality.

Jamaica Plain

The report finds that median access to quality increases significantly for students in the 10 Zone proposal and Home-Based A, and remains the same in Home-Based B. There is a statistical decrease in access for the student with the lowest access to quality in the 10 Zone proposal and, to a much lesser extent, in Home-Based A and Home-Based B.

Mattapan

The report finds that students in Mattapan would experience an overall increase in access quality under all the proposals, with the 10 Zone proposal showing the largest increase and the Home-Based proposals showing smaller changes. In Mattapan, the Mattahunt Elementary has recently been named a Turnaround School, with flexibilities that will help drive improvement. In addition, BPS has committed to creating new Innovation and In District Charter Schools in Mattapan to raise overall access to quality for these families.

North Dorchester

The report finds the 10 Zone and Home-Based A proposals would increase for students who currently have the lowest access to quality, while Home-Based B slightly reduces it. Beyond this, the 10 Zone proposal shows no statistically significant changes and the Home-Based A and B proposals each demonstrate a slight decrease in access to quality overall. However, this is because the report considers the Marshall Elementary as a local lower-quality future option for these families. BPS has moved to re-launch the Marshall as a high-quality citywide In-District Charter School this fall, which means North Dorchester families have overall higher access to quality than this report indicates. EdVestors has partnered with students and staff at the

Russell Elementary to rapidly improve outcomes. BPS has also committed to opening additional Innovation or In-District Charter schools in this community.

Roslindale

The report finds the 10 Zone proposal brings a significant increase in access to quality for students; Home-Based A and B show no change for the student with the lowest access to quality and generally minor decreases in access for other students. This appears to be due to some lower-performing schools in Hyde Park becoming available to Roslindale families; these are schools where BPS is already intervening to increase quality with one Turnaround school and four High Support schools. In addition, BPS has committed to creating new Innovation and In-District Charter Schools in Hyde Park.

Roxbury

The report finds the 10 Zone and Home-Based B proposals would slightly increase access to quality for students who have the lowest access to quality today; the Home-Based A proposal indicates a very slight decrease. Beyond this, the report finds access to quality among the various proposals could be reduced. It is important to remember that BPS has proposed additional quality interventions within the 10 Zone and Home-Based proposals that are not reflected in this report and which would significantly improve access to quality for these families: BPS will offer broader access to the Mission Hill K-8 for students in parts of Roxbury under all proposals and a high-quality magnet-like option in Allston-Brighton would also be available to these students. In addition, new school space available to downtown families would also become an option for many Roxbury students, especially in the northern parts of Roxbury, as an option under the Home-Based proposals. This is an area targeted for at least one new Innovation or In-District Charter School, in addition to Trotter Elementary, which is currently finalizing the process of becoming an Innovation school. Already in Roxbury, BPS has created the successful Dudley Street Neighborhood Charter School and Orchard Gardens K-8 has become a national example of our ability to successfully turn around underperforming schools. At the Mendell, EdVestors has partnered with students and staff to rapidly drive progress for students.

South Boston

The report finds overall access to quality increases across all proposals. Our High Support School strategy also prioritizes partnerships, data, teacher and school leader evaluations and out-of-school learning time for many South Boston schools to improve quality even further. At the former Gavin Middle School, UP Academy has demonstrated remarkable progress for students and EdVestors is working in partnership with students and staff at the Condon Elementary to make quality improvements.

South Dorchester

The report finds the 10-zone proposal increases access to quality overall. For Home-Based A and B, the student who currently has the lowest access to quality today would have higher access with very slight decreases elsewhere. BPS has committed to creating new innovation and In-District Charter Schools in Dorchester, which is also experiencing capacity issues. Adding additional seats in currently high-performing schools would significantly increase overall access to quality in South Dorchester.

South End

The report finds overall access to quality is reduced in the South End, but access here remains higher than in the majority of communities across Boston. Continuing improvements in schools such as the Blackstone,

which is in the final stages of securing innovation status to allow it to continue to accelerate progress, as well as success at the Hurley K-8 are important quality options to consider.

West Roxbury

The report finds access to quality is generally unchanged under Home-Based A, with slight decreases under Home Based-B and a more significant decrease under the 10 Zone proposal. These changes are generally due to lower-performing schools in the Hyde Park area appearing on choice lists. These are schools where BPS is already intervening to increase quality with one Turnaround school and four High Support schools. These schools are receiving extra support around data, teacher evaluations and professional development, and are receiving priority partnerships for in- and out-of-school learning opportunities. In addition, BPS has committed to creating at least one new Innovation or In-District Charter School in Hyde Park to raise overall access to quality.