


# BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



## OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

### MEMORANDUM

TO: Chairperson and Members  
Boston School Committee

FROM: Dr. Carol R. Johnson   
Superintendent

DATE: June 3, 2009

SUBJECT: Pathway to Excellence - Phase III Proposal

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On April 29, 2009, we presented to the School Committee *Pathways to Excellence, Phase III*, which included a set of academic and operational recommendations designed to accelerate academic achievement and provide the most efficient and effective operational services to achieve the Boston Public Schools' mission:

“We welcome the children of this city into the Boston Public Schools, where effective teaching and learning prepare all of our students to achieve at high levels, and where the entire community works together to focus on children.”

Pathways to Excellence - Phase III proposed recommendations focused on five key areas of improvement:

1. Academic excellence
2. Student support services
3. Family engagement
4. Student assignment (operational efficiencies)
5. Transportation (operational efficiencies)

and were guided by the three (3) guiding principles of expanding excellence, increasing access, and ensuring equity for all of Boston's students.

In response to previous work completed by the Student Assignment Task Force (2004) and more recent input from the community during our Graduation for All (2007-2008), and Budget Hearings (2007-2008 and 2008-2009), we determined that families considered the following values as key:

- quality schools;
- school choices (particularly ELL programs);
- walkable communities when possible;
- family friendly and welcoming schools;
- extended learning and enriching program;
- school start times and transportation services;
- educational continuity / fewer transitions,

We sponsored five (5) community hearings

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>
Thursday, May 7 <sup>th</sup>	Umana Middle School Academy
Tuesday, May 12 <sup>th</sup>	Edison Middle School
Monday, May 18 <sup>th</sup>	Lewis Middle School
Wednesday, May 20 <sup>th</sup>	McCormack Middle School
Tuesday, May 26 <sup>th</sup>	Irving Middle School

In addition, we listened to parents at additional neighborhood meetings:

Quincy School, Chinatown Community

South Boston Moms Association

Roslindale Community (parents from Haley, Conley, Philbrick, Bates, Mozart, Irving, Sumner)

BPON, Special Education / ELL parents

Beacon Hill, Back Bay, West End, North End, Downtown parents

Community Partners

Haitian Community Members

as well as Boston City Council Hearings.

## What we heard:

We appreciate the time and effort that students, families and the community spent in reviewing the Pathway to Excellence recommendations, Phase III. The feedback we received surfaced important questions in five (5) key areas and will be the focus of our work and analysis over the next 6-8 months. We are proposing to bring forward to the School Committee both some short-term / more immediate analyses of these questions and recommendations for action as well as a long-term multi-year plan of action informed by external review and study.

September / October 2009    Revised Recommendations

January 2010                      Recommendations for multi-year strategy

## Selected questions / topics:

### School Quality:

1. How will we turnaround the lowest performing schools and ensure equitable access to high quality options for all families?
2. If the quality of teaching is what really matters, what steps are being taken to improve teaching, and how will you ensure that the best teachers and leaders are in the lowest performing schools?
3. What specific changes are planned to create quality middle school experiences and increase the high school graduation rate / reduce drop-out rate?

### Achievement / Access Gaps:

1. If zones 3 and 4 have a disproportionate number of schools identified as not making adequate yearly progress, what investments will be made to upgrade quality options in those zones?
2. How do we offer ELL families an array of program options in every neighborhood and ensure that all ELL students are well served?
3. How will the achievement gaps that exist across various sub-groups be addressed through Pathways to Excellence?

### School Choice:

1. How will we guarantee quality school choices in every neighborhood?
2. What “grandfathering” provisions will allow the school department to minimize the social and educational disruptions of the plan, while at the same time offering quality choices at reduced transportation costs?

- 3 How will we support single and working parents' needs for extended learning time and educational continuity?
- 4 How will you increase the likelihood that families get one of their first (3) choices?

Transportation:
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1. What transportation savings might be realized through an examination of current routing, consolidating / combining bus routes, implementing current walk-zone restrictions and other steps without rezoning?
2. How might changes in academic program options, such as Special Education (inclusion programs), AWC classes, and ELL impact the overall costs of transportation without significantly changing the zones?
3. What can be done to improve school start times?

Fiscal:
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1. How will you ensure that any savings from these changes will do directly to improving the academic programs in the zones?
2. What are the consequences of doing nothing / making no changes?

So tonight, I recommend that the School Committee not take action on June 24, but rather give me and my team some time to follow-up on the questions and comments we have heard.

We'll continue to move forward with some aspects of the academic agenda, then come back in the fall with an improved proposal for assignment, transportation and school choice. We will also review and analyze ideas that have come from parents / school communities that were not included in our original proposal.

I thank you for your leadership and participation in this vital community process. I look forward to continuing our work together to address the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Cc: Mayor Thomas M. Menino  
City Council  
Executive Staff  
Principals / Headmasters

Attachment