

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

March 24, 2010

Dear Boston Public Schools Staff,

I am writing to provide an update on our proposed budget for the 2010-2011 school year. Tonight, we will recommend a balanced budget to the Boston School Committee. This proposed FY11 Budget provides the financial blueprint for carrying out year two of our five-year Acceleration Agenda, which is designed to close achievement and access gaps and raise academic performance in every classroom of every school.

Despite the challenging economic climate, we are confident that we are moving in the right direction. Even after several challenging years of fiscal constraints, our investments and your hard work are showing significant results:

- Earlier this month, we announced that the dropout rate has reached its lowest point in two decades. In addition, the State recently released new four-year graduation rates, with Boston exceeding 60% for the first time.
- Boston students demonstrated significant gains in Mathematics, outscoring their urban peers across the country on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).
- Our students continue to make progress on the MCAS exams – not just at the passing level, but also in the “proficient” and “advanced” categories.

These outcomes are the result of the tremendous efforts of staff, families, and students throughout the city. I thank and applaud the teachers, administrators, and support staff who are helping our students reach new heights. **We are confident that the investments contained in this budget will continue to move the Acceleration Agenda forward.** Our budget prioritizes teaching and learning in the classroom, identifies resources for turning around our lowest-performing schools, and makes strategic investments to maintain and expand high-quality program offerings, such as arts and physical education classes, that families value.

We are grateful to Mayor Thomas M. Menino for his tremendous support and confidence in Boston’s schools and his commitment to this work. The increase of the City appropriation from the FY10 general fund budget is noteworthy at a time when the state is expected to reduce local aid and Chapter 70 support for education by up to 4%. Our general fund and our external funds budget enable Boston Public Schools to make investments that accelerate student achievement.

Still, these investments occur in a context of increasing costs and a challenging revenue environment. As such, this budget requires sacrifice. The proposed FY11 budget eliminates 292 positions from the general fund. We have prioritized teachers throughout the budget planning process; in some cases schools have lost positions, and in other cases schools are adding teachers based on programmatic need. These changes result in a net reduction of only 10.4 classroom teacher positions from school budgets district wide. As a result, central departments have taken a larger proportional cut than schools. These cuts to central departments follow reductions already taken in FY09 and FY10.

We recognize that some of you feel that schools have been stretched to levels where their ability to strive for a standard of excellence is compromised. It is important to note that reductions to school allocations, though difficult, represent a very small portion of the total reductions for next school year's budget. We also arrived at a balanced budget without having to go back to schools during the budget process for additional cuts. This required greater sacrifices from other areas, including a reduction of force for our custodial workers, men and women whose work we value as an integral component of school success.

In keeping with the Acceleration Agenda core strategy of providing effective, efficient, and equitable services, we continue to strive to spend our resources in more strategic ways. Significant savings were accomplished through transportation efficiencies, consolidation of academic administration and support, and the adoption of an outside vendor to co-manage our food services operation, which will eliminate a \$3.6 million deficit in that department alone. In addition, we have reduced our Evaluation Team Facilitator clerk positions in response to our district's technological advances, as well as the special education review and recommendations from the Council of the Great City Schools.

We are grateful to the families and staff who took time to make their voices heard at budget hearings this winter. Our revised budget reflects many of your comments and concerns. We also recognize the difficult decisions that school communities have made in order to balance their budgets. We appreciate the school leaders, staff, parents, and students who serve on School Site Councils for undertaking the painful but necessary work of identifying areas for reduction.

We know that even more difficult choices lie ahead. We simply cannot afford to continue to operate the school system in its current form. We must address complex, structural challenges that threaten our fiscal stability. We must reorganize or "right-size" the district to be more cost-effective – so that we can invest as many dollars as possible in our educational priorities.

Unfortunately, school closings remain a very real option. Dismantling a school community in any way – whether to reprogram, consolidate, or close altogether – always feels disruptive to those directly impacted. But in this environment – when the capacity of our buildings exceeds the number of students we serve and we have fewer resources to create educational programs that address the needs of our diverse students – we must address that inefficiency in order to put those wasted dollars back in the classrooms where they are needed most.

Thanks to Mayor Menino's additional investment, this year's budget does not require closing large numbers of schools for the 2010-2011 school year. To do so at this late date would be far too disruptive to families and staff. **However, we see no alternative to beginning a thoughtful and inclusive process this fall for closing and consolidating some schools in school year 2011-2012.**

Collective bargaining is another area where reform can help us improve quality and redeploy resources in ways that advance student achievement. We are preparing for contract negotiations with the Boston Teachers Union and all of our unions. We must work in collaboration with union leaders this spring and summer to negotiate a fiscally responsible contract that ensures fair compensation for hard-working staff, reflects the fiscal realities that confront us in the next few years, and grants flexibility to use funds where they will have the greatest impact on student achievement.

We will respond to the financial realities in FY11 and beyond by remaining focused on our students and retaining an unwavering commitment to provide all students with a world-class education. Please visit www.bostonpublicschools.org/budget for more detailed information. Thank you for your continued commitment and service to the children of Boston.

Sincerely,



Carol R. Johnson

Superintendent