

Number of participants: **11 (not including BPS Staff)**

Introductions & Overview of Event

- The facilitators opened the session and participants introduced themselves. The following organizations and the roles of individual parents present were as follows:

Lee Academy Pilot School

Parent of a 4 yr. old who did not get a K1 seat this year

Catholic Charities, family/student advocate

Thrive & 5, school reading specialist and parent

Thrive & 5, Rep. from Early Education Component

Citizen Schools, specifically part of extended day at Orchard Garden School 6-7th

Citywide Parent Council

Boston Parent Advisory Counsel

American Civil Liberties

BPS Counselor

Urban Pride, ED

- the following comments were made in the opening segment:
- An early childhood education provider from Thrive in Five stated that she felt the discussion between BPS and community stakeholders is important because it creates a stronger relationship between BPS and community stakeholders and a common understanding between BPS and community programs related to "what kids come with."
- A representative from Catholic Charities noted that she works with the Cape Verdean community, often serving as a cultural and linguistic translator or "go-between" for families and the schools their children attend. She indicated that she would like a better understanding for her staff around services provided to ELL's.
- Jill, a BPS parent, stated that she had attempted to enroll her four year old son in one of the three BPS K-2 classrooms in her neighborhood (West Roxbury), but was unable to get him a seat because he did not attend K-1. She felt that she was left with no school choice for her son, and there are now no good choices in BPS. She also expressed that many others talk about the assignment process not being great, and that too many people don't get involved. She is here to get involved, and is frustrated at not having good school choices for her son.
- A community partner working at Orchard Gardens said that she was interested in hearing community voices to learn how to better serve students and families. This sentiment was echoed by another community partner, who represented an organization that hadn't yet been able to provide input into the Redesign and Reinvest process. The second speaker also stated that she communicates with many other community organizations, and wanted to carry the message from them that they felt that the timing of the stakeholder meeting was poor, given that many of them are on vacation in late August. These stakeholders, she said, asked to her to request that BPS provide another opportunity for them to provide input into the process in September. She also noted that she "goes home better off" after hearing the conversations at these meetings.

- One participant said that she felt like the “train is moving” on Redesign and Reinvest, and wanted to make sure that she was a part of the process.
- Another participant stated that her goal was to gain a better understanding of the Redesign and Reinvest process so that she could take information back to the community she serves.

Informing District Planning – Participant Dialogue

When you think of a high quality school for your child, what factors are most important?

The group was asked to look at the “Factors of High Quality Schools”. And they were invited to pose questions, thoughts, and ideas. There was a comment and response structure that played a role as this part of the meeting started. Non-BPS participants raised questions or points and often time BPS staff responded with clarity or information. A suggesting on additional factors came out of the discussion.

- The facilitators opened this segment of the session by asking for comments and questions on which factors stakeholder felt were most important?
- The first speaker requested clarification on what was meant by the term “K-8 Continuity”
 - Irvin Scott responded by saying that it can be thought of in two ways: 1) continuing to use K-8 schools as a strategy to improve student learning, and 2) parents' desire to keep their children in the same school over time.
 - Joe Shea noted that BPS is looking at different school models, and that one of the factors related to school continuity has been the district's effort to implement a consistent curriculum and assessments for ELA, math, science, and social studies across all BPS schools.
 - Ann Waterman Roy clarified by ensuring that participants understood the difference between curricular/assessment consistency and K-8 continuity.
 - Jill, a BPS parent, stated that it seemed that many students and families get “left in limbo” if the student can only attend a K-5 school and wants to begin at one of the exam schools in 7th grade. She noted that there are “so many variables” related to school choice, and that, in some cases, students may have to change schools several times.
- Dee Spinkston of Urban Pride stated that families of students that receive special education services don't feel that they have real school choice, and suggested that increasing school choice around inclusive options for students on IEPs was an important factor. John Verre suggested that this factor be framed as: affording choice to special needs students that is equitable to the choice that students without disabilities have.
- Someone raised a question asking whether “arts and music electives” is different from arts and music as a required part of the curriculum. Irvin Scott clarified that the two are in fact different and should be considered separate factors. Embedded Arts and Music was added to the list of factors.
- Katie Madrigal of Thrive in Five stated that high quality schools value meaningful family engagement both in their philosophies and actions.
- Someone asked for clarification on the definition of two-way bilingual programs. Dr. de los Reyes clarified, using the Hernandez as an example. Dr. de los Reyes also noted that as a result of the restructuring of services for ELL's and recent effort to train BPS teachers, that ELL's are able to receive sheltered instruction and ESL in any BPS school. Finally, she noted that ELL's are able to request a range of programs.

- The representative from Catholic Charities followed up and asked, in a SEI or transitional program is there the same amount of school choice? Dr. de los Reyes stated there are programs in a number of schools, but there are a limited number of programs.
- Jill expanded on the concerns that she had expressed earlier in the session, stating that because all of the schools in her neighborhood have the same number of K-2 seats as K-1 seats, that she felt pressured to enroll her son into K-1 even though he wasn't really ready for it; she also stated that it is unfair that BPS uses the number of seats in an optional program (K-1) to determine the number of seats in a non-optional program (K-2); as a results of not having her son enrolled in K-1, she will now have to send him to a non-neighborhood school, which is not her preference. She suggested that either K-1 enrollment should not be a determinant of K-2 assignment, or that BPS make K-1 available to everyone.
 - Ann noted that K-1 is an optional program due to a lack of funding from the state and federal governments; BPS offers K-1 because it believes in the value of early childhood education.
 - George Cox suggested adding "more K-2 seats" as a factor to be voted on.
- A guidance counselor stated that she felt that all of the factors listed were important, and that it wasn't so much of a matter of every school addressing every factor, but rather that each school does whatever they do well. This means providing social, emotional and behavioral supports for all students at all levels, and that each school have a problem-solving component that helps make it a good school. She also stated her discontent with the process of voting on any of the factors, and stated that BPS "make all schools good schools."
 - Ann noted in response that for the purposes of the discussion, high quality school leadership and effective classroom teachers are implied.

A representative of the ACLU suggested adding racial and socio-economic diversity as factor to be considered, noting that research indicates that diversity enhances student learning and that increasing diversity of the schools is the only way to ensure equity.

A participant went back to the point that voting on factors is undesirable and that all of the factors should be in all schools. This individual commented that we are struggling to balance this, we have to make some decision on what we will invest in, and It is a challenge to figure out how you weight this.

A conversation ensued by several participants about what makes a "high quality school" for one may not mean it is a high quality school in another's opinion. The parent of the kindergartener stated that she thought that a school close to her home was the best choice and stated that she was speaking of the life of her family and child.

Another participant commented that for some families their child(ren) are not close to their home and that the schools close to their homes are not option.

There was a comment to add a factor stating "values meaningful family engagement in their words and actions".

The suggestions made that were added to the list of factors include:

- Increased school choice for student with disabilities
- Values meaningful family engagement
- Social / emotional supports

☐ Art & music embedded

What ideas were most important for the group and had consensus of opinion?

- Based on the discussion alone, it was difficult to determine the extent to which there was consensus or significant disagreement among stakeholders, but the factors that were most discussed were K-8 continuity and K-1 to K-2 transitions/school choice.
- The discussion seemed to take place mostly as a back and forth between stakeholders and BPS administrators. Most of the discussion took place as a Q&A, with stakeholders asking for clarification around certain issues and BPS administrators providing their input. In other words, most of the participants did not respond to questions/comments raised by other stakeholders.
- Adding factors that were not represented was an key part of the conversation. There was some agreement on factors being important for all schools and the idea of having to choose factors.
- Several factors were not discussed at all.

*When you think of a high quality school for your child, what factors are most important?
(continued)*

What criteria should be used to make decisions regarding school closure, merger, and expansion?

- The first comment in this segment of the session was to suggest that preserving and expanding highly chosen programs be considered an important criteria.
- A participant asked if the term "Geographic Distribution" means meeting the needs of all communities? This led to a lengthy discussion on the issue of geographic distribution.
 - George responded to the question by saying that his interpretation of the term is that it means continuing to have schools in all neighborhood regardless of quality.
 - Ann opened up the discussion by asking stakeholders what do you think the term geographic distribution should mean?
 - Another participant responded by saying that she would like no other schools closed in Roxbury and Dorchester, as these are communities that have disproportionately impacted by school closures.
 - The representative of Catholic Charities stated that her organization serves students from Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan in schools that offer SEI. She said that BPS needs to invest in struggling schools, otherwise even more schools in these neighborhoods will be closed. She also noted that school quality is tied to both principal effectiveness and safety. She closed her comment by reiterating that BPS cannot just build on what is already working, but must commit to investing in struggling schools.
 - This sentiment was seconded by another participant, who also said that she would rather see language such as "maintaining high quality schools in all communities" as opposed to all students having "access to a high quality school," because "access" implies that a student can get a high quality education, but perhaps not in their own neighborhood. The participant stated that transporting students is problematic partly because of the cost, but also because it takes kids out of their communities.
 - A point was made that the Dearborn and Burke are an example of the issue with geographic distribution. Community members do not think that these schools should be closed, which is a bigger problem. It was noted that a lot of people pay attention to BPS building on what is working and in some ways we need to think about what is happening in more challenging areas. There are two ways of looking at this situation and each is different.
 - Others echoed this sentiment of High Quality School in all geographic areas.
- John Verre, in response to a participant comment, suggested that accessibility for children with social/emotional/behavior disabilities, as well as those who are perceptually impaired or have mobility challenges be added as a criteria.
- A participant asked if the criteria for preserving programs that have demonstrated strong academic performance also entails expanding those programs? It was clarified that, yes, expansion of strong academic programs was part of that criteria. Ann stated that the goal was to build on these programs, although it may not be immediately possible in every case.
- The representative from the ACLU stated that she was not comfortable with the process, and felt like the stakeholders were being asked to help BPS decided which schools to close. She said that it seemed like the people around the table were not comfortable with closing schools.
 - George suggested adding a "don't close any schools" option to the criteria list.

- A BPS parent commented that the problem is that people want to choose their child's school, and some schools remained under-enrolled. What do we do we these schools?
- Another stakeholder added that there are also budget issues to consider.
- The Guidance Counselor suggested adding the criteria having the appropriate "problem solving method" in place at all schools. This is so that schools can address the need of students, in their building and at the building level, who not performing well.

The question was raised: What about schools that are half filled? This individual noted that part of the challenge of the 5 zone plan is/was that it is/was so large and there would be schools that remain under enrolled in certain neighborhoods. How do you fix the problem of schools that are under enrolled, with out just closing them; what do you do with them?

The Guidance Counselor made the point of increasing taxes, saying yes absolutely she'd support this. She made a comparison to other institutions and stated, when do we say we can't do it like this any more? She referred to housing and health care and schools.

Dee from Urban Pride made a comment about the criteria being the over all essentials for a high performing school. And that all children should be able to participate in all programs regardless of prototypes, language, or level of family engagement. She further stated that "This shouldn't be anything we are voting about", for example safety should be an automatic criteria at all schools, why are we taking it as a possible option for schools to consider.

- George Cox recognized that not all the participants in the room were entirely comfortable with the process, but suggested that the group move forward with voting on the criteria.

What ideas were most important for the group and had consensus of opinion?

- Much of this time was spent discussing Geographic Distribution and the fact that low performing communities continue to have schools close. This causes a loss of programs to children most in need, i.e. SEI and increased transportation. There is a concern among stakeholders that a lack of investment in these schools will result from expanding programs that are more successful.
- There was a reiteration that all schools should be expected to have all criteria listed. There was an emphasis on safety for all and special service available in all communities/all schools. It was also clear that at least some of the participants are not comfortable with the idea of closing schools, particularly in Roxbury and Dorchester.

What was the tone of the discussion?

- The discussion in this segment of the session seemed to evoke strong feelings among stakeholders.
- In this part of the dialogue stakeholders had more of a sense of urgency in the statements and messages they offered. More ideas where shared than with the first voting round, and more conversation between stake holders themselves vs. the back and forth with BPS staff and stakeholder like in the first voting round.

What criteria should be used to make decisions regarding school closure, merger, and expansion? (continued)

Prioritize Factors / Criteria

Please add any factors that were listed & the number of votes that each factor earned

Options	Points
a. K-8 for continuity	2
b. K1 early learning/ more K1 seats, more K2 than K1 seats	8
c. Montessori	0
d. Pilot school status	
e. Before / after-school programs	4
f. Two-way bilingual	1
g. Art and music electives	0
h. International Baccalaureate	0
i. Advanced Work Classes	0
j. Advanced Placement Classes	0
k. Special Education Inclusion Programs	5
l. Academic Performance (e.g. test scores, student attendance, graduation rates, etc.)	2
m. School Reputation	4
n. Principal Leadership	4
o. Effective Teachers	20
p. Close to home	6
q. Strong relationships with the community	6
r. School building is in good condition	2

s. Other: Increased school choice for students w/ disabilities	9
t. Other: Values meaningful family engagement	11
u. Other: Social/Emotional Supports	11
v. Other: Arts/Music Embedded	2
w. Racial/Socio-economic diversity	13

Please add any criteria that were listed & the number of votes that each criteria earned

Criteria	Points
a. Academic Performance: Preserve programs that are delivering strong results	22
b. Demand: Preserve highly-chosen programs (higher # of seats offered due to demand)	13
c. Empty seats: Target under-utilized programs for closure or consolidation	2
d. Geographic distribution: Maintain equitable access to programs	14
e. Minimize disruption to students: Optimize program placement for continuity and ensuring the least possible disruption	2
f. Operational & facility costs: maximize potential savings for reinvestment in the Acceleration Agenda	0
g. School Safety	7
h. Other: Increased accessibility for students who receive special education services	7
i. Other: Do not close any schools/add supports	8
j. Other:	