

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



August 29, 2008

Dear Boston Public Schools Families and Staff:

Welcome to a new school year! We look forward to greeting the children of Boston for a successful year ahead, with students in grades 1 through 12 returning on **Thursday, September 4**, and kindergarten students arriving on **Monday, September 8**. Remember: attending school every day is essential for academic success, beginning on the very first day of the school year!

As we begin a new school year, I also want to bring you up to date on a challenging but important process we are undertaking to ensure the strength and stability of our schools in the years ahead. We are fortunate to have the strong support of Mayor Thomas M. Menino and the Boston School Committee, who allocated significant increases to the BPS budget for this year. However, costs continue to escalate, and other sources of public and private funds continue to decline, leaving us with difficult choices to ensure that every child achieves excellence.

Last spring, to address the financial challenges, we identified more than \$20 million in reductions, most of them in central offices to minimize the impact on schools and classrooms. We also invested money to launch new initiatives in support of our Acceleration Agenda so that every child receives the support needed to perform at high levels and graduate from high school with the skills to succeed in college, career and life. With your help, we have made great strides in recent years, but we have a great deal more to do.

Unfortunately, due to the continued increases in the costs of services – particularly transportation and gasoline, food supplies, health insurance and staff salaries – we must continue to reduce our expenses in order to balance the budget. In addition, the school district has experienced a decline in enrollment over the last five years, in part because of a smaller school-aged population living in the city. As a result, we must make some difficult decisions this fall, some of which will take effect in September 2009, others in future years, about the **reprogramming of some schools and buildings**. These may include the expansion or relocation of schools that are proving to be successful and need room to grow, changing the grade configuration of some schools, as well as the phasing out of some schools or buildings that are not as viable or have excess capacity.

Rest assured that the School Committee and I take this responsibility very seriously, and we understand that conversations about changing schools as we know them can be difficult. We are guided by the thoughtful work of the Student Assignment Task Force in 2004 and the findings of dozens of community meetings that you may have attended. We are committed to working with families and staff to hear your ideas and concerns and to keep you informed throughout the process. *Our overarching goal is to make sure every Boston school student attends a quality school that provides a first-rate public education.* We want every one of our schools to become a desired choice for families.

The following timeline highlights our approach to these issues, and the various ways we will keep you and the greater Boston Public Schools community informed. Among the factors we will consider: the condition of school facilities, the school choices that families make, the size and capacity of our schools, the academic performance of schools and students, and the distribution of programs and services throughout the neighborhoods of Boston. These and other considerations will help us make informed recommendations to ensure the stability and success of the Boston Public Schools in the years ahead.

September 2008:

Data analysis: Continue to gather and analyze data about schools, buildings, family choices, student achievement, enrollment trends, and other important factors to help prioritize reprogramming recommendations.

Outreach: Schedule meetings and discussions with school communities, elected officials, and key parent, faith-based, and community groups.

Information and communication: Establish ongoing, two-way communication with families, staff and the community about the reprogramming process, using these and other tools and opportunities:

- Letters to families and staff
- Media outreach
- Emails to various community-based organizations and listserves
- Connect-Ed telephone messages
- School Committee meetings (televised)
- Redesigned BPS website, www.bostonpublicschools.org
- Feedback email address, feedback@bostonpublicschools.org

Framework and preliminary recommendations: Develop a framework for multi-year budget planning and determine specific savings and quality school improvements that could result from reprogramming. Devise preliminary recommendations to present to the School Committee on September 24, 2008 about various reprogramming options.

October 2008:

Community forums: Schedule a city-wide forum as well as meetings in school communities affected by proposed changes to share preliminary recommendations.

Revisions: Revise recommendations based on School Committee deliberations and feedback from families, staff, and the community.

School Committee vote: The School Committee will give final consideration to our recommendations by October 29, 2008.

November 2008:

School choice: Launch school choice process (School Preview Time, Showcase of Schools on December 13) for September 2009 assignments, reflecting true availability of programs and services.

Planning: Begin planning for successful implementation of changes.

January 2009:

School registration: Registration begins for school assignments for September 2009.

We remain committed to focusing our limited resources on programs that will help students reach their full potential. We hope you will work with us as we make the necessary changes to ensure excellence for all.

I encourage you to visit the new Boston Public Schools website, www.bostonpublicschools.org, for more information and for resources to get the school year off to a great start. Have a wonderful school year!

Sincerely,



Dr. Carol R. Johnson
Superintendent