

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

February 6, 2009

Dear Boston Public Schools Staff:

I am writing to provide you with the latest facts regarding the Boston Public Schools' proposed budget for the 2009-2010 school year. As you no doubt are aware, this is the most challenging budget crisis we have faced in years – one that will require creative ideas, new ways of doing business, and sacrifice from all of us.

On Wednesday, February 4, I presented to the Boston School Committee a preliminary budget of nearly \$787 million for Fiscal Year 2010. First, I'd like to assure you that this budget, though not ideal, is designed to continue advancing our mission of a high-quality public education for all students. It also includes a variety of new strategies outlined in our "Acceleration Agenda" to build on the fine work already underway, while enabling us to take our students to the next level of excellence. These investments include:

- An ambitious citywide approach to K-12 literacy instruction;
- Expansion of challenging learning opportunities – especially Advanced Placement courses – in every Boston high school, and increasing access to algebra in every middle school;
- Dropout prevention and recovery initiatives, such as credit recovery programs and a new Transition Center to welcome back students who have dropped out;
- A Newcomers Academy for students with little or no English who arrive in the country during the school year;
- Enrichment opportunities to develop well-rounded students with a range of academic and non-academic skills and interests;
- Expansion of K-8 schools and high-performing pilot schools, in response to parental demand; and
- Investment in early childhood education, including expansion of pre-kindergarten classrooms.

However, this budget also reflects a decrease of 5.5% from our current budget to reflect the economic realities we face. Among them:

- An appropriation from the City that is \$46.2 million less than what we receive this year, primarily because of less money from the Commonwealth and decreases in traditional sources of revenue, such as excise fees;
- Rising costs that total \$61.4 million because of step increases due to collective bargaining and higher prices for employee benefits, fuel, utilities, and other costs.

This translates into a \$107.6 million gap that we must close, and we have begun to do so by taking the following steps:

- Finding efficiencies and savings in transportation spending that total nearly \$4.8 million;
- Reducing central office spending by nearly \$46.5 million, including reduction of nearly 220 positions;
- Reducing school budgets by more than \$36.5 million – adjusted by size, level, and program – including 372 teaching positions and 326 non-teaching positions in schools.

It is this last item that most deeply affects our mission. We are a “people business,” and our work is a labor of love – a profession, certainly, but more than anything, a calling. Day in and day out, our teachers, administrators, and staff go above and beyond the call of duty to educate, nurture, and inspire the children of this city. And yet we are not immune to what some have called the most severe economic crisis since the Great Depression. The very factors that cause us to spend more wisely and cut back on expenses in our own households are affecting our school district, too.

I recognize that these are not just numbers on a page. Many people’s lives will be affected, and we risk losing many talented, dedicated teachers and staff members who work tirelessly for our students. I have received dozens of phone calls, emails, and letters about how difficult the budget process in schools has been this year. The choices before us are difficult, and no option will be easy or popular.

What can be done? Although it will be painful, I join Mayor Menino in calling on the twelve Boston Public Schools collective bargaining units to accept a one-year wage freeze for the sake of the children and the families whom we serve. This sacrifice would save \$29.4 million next year – the equivalent of 335 teachers and 70 additional staff. A one-year delay in salary increases would help close the deficit and enable the Boston Public Schools to begin to reinvest in schools. It would reduce the impact of layoffs on provisional teachers. And it would help maintain and build on the academic gains we have achieved.

Second, we must re-examine all spending that does not directly support classroom instruction. We can no longer afford to spend more than \$70 million on yellow bus transportation, and we may no longer be able to maintain our current three-zone student assignment system. A new approach to transportation is not a matter of having or not having school choice. We are committed to giving all families a range of options for their children’s education. But we must ask ourselves, “How much choice is *enough* choice?” Above all, the foremost priority must be ensuring high-quality schools across the board, in every community of the city, where families are proud and excited to enroll.

Third, the Mayor has proposed a legislative package that includes several revenue-generating options, such as local option meals taxes and greater reimbursement from the Commonwealth for special education expenses. We believe that the package will help generate much-needed revenue for the City.

In the weeks ahead, all of our stakeholders will have opportunities to weigh in on our budget proposal. For a schedule of budget hearings and other updates, please visit www.bostonpublicschools.org/budget. The School Committee will vote on the budget no later than March 25, 2009.

Finally, I ask you to continue to do what you do every day: keep teaching and learning first and foremost in your mind, and continue to push your students to excel to even greater heights. We will overcome this crisis and emerge as a stronger school district ready to face the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Sincerely,



CAROL K. JOHNSON
Superintendent