


BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

MEMORANDUM

TO: BPS Staff

FROM: Carol R. Johnson
Superintendent 

DATE: February 11, 2011

SUBJECT: Fiscal Year 2012 Preliminary Budget and graduation rate update

As snow piles grow higher and parking spots grow smaller, the ordinary work of coming to school has been a challenge for many of us this winter. As you know, we have been forced to cancel school five days so far this season. The current last day of school is June 28. We want to thank you for your flexibility and your diligence over the last few weeks as we have struggled with snowstorm after snowstorm. Our custodial staff and Facilities teams have worked especially hard to keep our sidewalks, parking lots and rooftops clear.

At central office, we have been engaged in a near-blizzard of our own as we work to help our schools to achieve the goals outlined in the five-year Acceleration Agenda. These changes are happening at a rapid pace, and we wanted to brief you on some of the work that is underway.

Last week we submitted a balanced **FY12 preliminary budget** to the School Committee. This is the first time in nine years that our budget has been balanced at this point in the process. To get there, we turned to a team of sixty school leaders and central office staff to address long-term structural issues while enhancing quality, equity and transparency. We balanced the budget through tough choices that put the needs of students ahead of the needs of adults or buildings.

Once we balanced the budget, we turned to what John McDonough calls the “engine” for school allocations. He has advocated for a **weighted student funding** system for many years, and in the Acceleration Agenda, we promised to make the change. It will take two years to fully implement this process and we are working with principals and headmasters to finalize individual school allocations now. Once this process is complete, we will post these allocations – and the method we used to calculate them – on the BPS website so everyone can see how we reached the figures.

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Under this system, dollars follow students. It is an **equitable** system because it no longer matters where a child chooses to attend school or what neighborhood he or she is from; we will provide that child with the right resources wherever they attend school. It is a **transparent** system because teachers, school leaders, School Site Councils, School Parent Councils, students and parents will be able to understand exactly how each school is funded and can see where every dollar goes. It is an **empowering** system because schools gain control over their own futures: any school can bring new resources to the table by engaging the community, attracting more students, and scheduling more efficiently.

I hope you will spend some time examining our proposal, which is posted on our website at <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/budget>.

Many urban school districts, like New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore, have already shifted to this system of school allocations. This is also how Massachusetts public charter schools receive money from the state. Taken alone, a weighted student funding system does not actually improve outcomes for students. It simply creates an environment that allows us to redirect our resources to focus on children first, and buildings and adults second.

Our strategy to improve outcomes for students will never be bound to a budget. It is already underway in our classrooms, where we are ensuring that every child has a great teacher. At central office, we are working to support our dedicated teachers with professional development, meaningful evaluations, the right curriculum, useful student data, and enough materials and technology to enable them to inspire students every day. Despite the economy, we are investing in improvements in each one of these areas because it is the right thing to do and the best way to ensure that every BPS child is on track to graduate ready for college and career success.

At the core this work are our shared efforts to help more students earn a high school diploma. We are pleased that the latest figures, released yesterday afternoon, show **we have raised the graduation rate for the fourth year in a row, to 63.2 percent**. The dropout rate has also declined for the fourth year and is now at 5.7 percent, a level we have not seen in a generation. Now, the work gets even more difficult as we strive to reach our Acceleration Agenda goal of an 80 percent graduation rate by 2014. Many of these students will be the first in their families to earn a high school diploma. It's our job to help them chart a new course. This work will require renewed determination from all of us, shared urgency in every school and department, and pride in the knowledge that together we are building a bright future for all of Boston's children.