

# Boston Public Schools Middle School Transportation Program

Mid-Year Program Assessment and Recommendations

3.11.15

# About this Presentation

- This presentation synthesizes the work of the Middle School Transportation (MST) Advisory Committee.
- The School Committee- and Mayoral-appointed advisory body is tasked with assessing the first year of the BPS Middle School Transportation (MST) Program implementation and providing recommendations on program improvement.
- Following we provide detailed information on the program and data on program participation, student attendance and tardiness, student safety and costs and savings. Finally, this memo provides recommendations related to program continuation and program improvement.

# Overview of the Middle School Transportation Advisory Committee

## Committee Membership

**Matt Cregor**, Attorney, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Economic Justice

**Mary Driscoll**, Principal at BPS Edison K-8 School

**Nia Evans**, Vice Chair, Boston Branch of the NAACP Education Committee

**Mark Gillespie**, MBTA Transit Police, Stop Watch

**Todd Johnson**, Head of Operations, MBTA

**Jorge Martinez**, Executive Director, Project RIGHT

**Johnny McGinnis**, BPS Teacher, Black Educators Association of Mass

**Kimberly Rice**, Chief Operations Officer, Boston Public Schools

**Tom Sexton**, BPS Police, Boston Police Department

**Rahn Dorsey**, Chief of Education, City of Boston

## The charge of the Advisory Committee is to:

- Identify and review program performance data;
- Monitor and provide feedback on Middle School Transportation Program implementation;
- Identify student transportation safety standards to guide the current program and future student transportation initiatives;
- Highlight the conditions that favor Middle School Transportation Program expansion ; and
- Develop recommendations for expanding the transportation program to 7<sup>th</sup> graders.

# BPS Faces Ongoing Transportation Cost Challenges

- The Middle School Transportation plan was developed to better manage BPS transportation costs, which accounts for about ten cents of every dollar in the BPS Budget for SY13-14 (or 10% of the total BPS Budget)
- The Middle School Transportation Plan projected approximately \$11 million in savings for FY2014-2015, which served as a significant strategy to help address the \$107 million BPS Budget challenge:
  - (~\$8M) Provide MBTA passes instead of yellow buses for 7th and 8th graders with corner-to-corner service;
  - (<\$1M) Reduce MBTA “shuttle” service to BPS high schools within 1 mile of a major MBTA hub;
  - (~\$1M) Continue process of aligning bell times and combine bus services for some co-located schools; and
  - (~\$1M) Develop a more transparent structure on transportation by asking schools to budget and pay for certain “a la carte” services.

# The Middle School Transportation Program Designed to Address Challenges

- In spring 2013, the Boston School Committee voted to accept the recommended Middle School Transportation Program for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. BPS received authority for a phased in implementation including only 8<sup>th</sup> graders in year 1.
- The Program:
  - Expands the District's MBTA pass program to offer free, 7-day bus, subway and commuter rail passes to 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students who qualify for transportation.
  - Allows transportation-eligible students in Boston Public Schools, as well as charter, private and parochial schools to participate.
  - Does not impact students with disabilities who receive door-to-door yellow bus service as part of an IEP.
  - Allows for families to opt out of the program through a waiver process.

# Broad Collaboration Drives Year 1 Implementation

- Inter-agency Coordination & Communication
  - Daily communication of adjustments &/or issues for real time action
  - Weekly Friday Ops meetings between BPS, BPD, MBTA Transit, and the MBTA to review the week and plan for the next
  - Quarterly Check Ins looking at overall program
  - BPS Safety Ambassadors & StopWatch
- Inter-agency Student Support
  - Positive adult presence and support at stations
  - Riding trains and buses with students
  - School-based programs that educate & promote positive ridership
  - Student mediation programs
- MBTA and BPS Service adjustments
  - Additional yellow bus shuttles
  - Additional MBTA train at JFK
  - Added MBTA buses or route extensions

# The MST Advisory Committee Tracks Data Points Over Several Domains to Monitor Program Performance

- The Advisory Committee developed – and is refining – a data template to capture data and trends related to:
  - Program participation;
  - Student Attendance, Absence and Tardiness
  - Student Safety
  - Program Costs and Savings
- The MST Advisory Committee also collected feedback on program performance and satisfaction from students, parents and school leaders. Sample sizes are small, but the Committee believes the feedback highlights an important set of themes.

# Program Participation –

Nearly All BPS 8<sup>th</sup> Graders, 50% of 7<sup>th</sup> Graders Participate in the Program

## Program Participation by Grade

	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	SY 14-15%
Corner Bus	83.23 (2204)	50.97 (1555)	6.49 (205)	44.75 (3964)
MBTA	16.77 (444)	49.03 (1496)	93.51 (2954)	55.25 (4894)
<b>Total</b>	100.00 (2648)	100.00 (3051)	100.00 (3195)	100.00 (8858)

## Waivers By Grade

Grade	# of Waivers	% of All Waivers
6 <sup>th</sup> Grade	94	23.3%
7 <sup>th</sup> Grade	93	23.1%
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	207	51.5%
<b>Total</b>	402	100.0%

BPS approved 925 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade opt ins. The District received thousands of opt-in requests from families who were not eligible for the program.



# Student Attendance + Absence –

Attendance, Avg. Absence for MBTA Riders Roughly Same as Students Riding Other Modes of Transportation

## 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Participants (n = 2,954)

Student Type	Attendance Rate	Avg. Days Absent
All Students	94.3%	4.3 days
MBTA Riders	94.7%	4.1 days
Walkers	94.0%	4.5 days
Yellow Bus Riders	92.3%	4.9 days

## 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Participants (n = 1,496)

Student Type	Attendance Rate	Avg. Days Absent
All Students	94.8%	3.9 days
MBTA Riders	96.4%	2.7 days
Walkers	94.8%	3.9 days
Yellow Bus Riders	94.9%	3.8 days

Note: Data from Sept. 2014 – Jan. 7, 2015

# Student Tardiness –

Avg. Days Tardy through Jan '15 Seem High for 8<sup>th</sup> grade MBTA Riders; below average for 7<sup>th</sup> graders

Student Type	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade – Avg. Days Tardy	7 <sup>th</sup> Grade – Avg. Days Tardy
All Students	6.6 days	4.4 days
MBTA Riders	7.0 days	3.7 days
Walkers	6.4 days	5.5 days
Yellow Bus Riders	4.8 days	4.0 days

Note: Data from Sept. 2014 – Jan. 7, 2015

# Program Costs + Savings –

## At the Half Year Point, Savings to Date in Line with Projections

### Year 1 Program Savings

- Program Savings to Date = Approx. \$2.0 million
  - **Number of Bus Routes Reduced:** 44 routes since last year (from 1,520 to 1,476); Removed 72 buses (from 651 to 579)
  - **Change in Number of Yellow Bus Riders:** Down 3,113 students (Grades 6-8) since last year
  - **Change in Route Efficiency:** Down 0.3 since last year (2.6 to 2.3/ 3.0 ideal)

### Projected Full Implementation Savings

- Per the budget proposal submitted to the Boston School Committee on March 9, 2015, BPS projects SY 15-16 savings associated with full program implementation and additional reforms at \$9.5 million.

# Student Safety –

## Few Safety Incidents Reported to BPS Since Program Launch; Arrest Data Cause Some Concern

- Since the MST Program launched:
  - BPS has not received any reports of incidents involving middle school students as victims.
  - BPS has received 27 reports of incidents involving middle school students as aggressors.
  - There have been 580 yellow bus incidents requiring police attention.
- Since initiating the MST Program, transit police logged 89 juvenile arrests. The rate of arrest is of concern to the MST Advisory Committee.
- BPD has combed arrest records and performed narrative searches, but have not identified program related arrests.

# Some Students and Parents Report that Program Is Working, But Express Concerns

- MST Committee members representing community groups launched a survey of students, parents, community members and teachers (total n = 90) – 2/3 of respondents do not participate in the MST Program.
  - Of 13 students surveyed and participating in the program, just over half strongly agree or agree that the program is working;
  - Of 7 parents with middle school students participating in the program over half strongly agree or agree that the program is working, remaining respondents strongly disagree.
  - Survey respondents raised concerns about safety, interaction with unfamiliar adults, overcrowding on public transit, tardiness and bullying.

# Focus Group Students Provide Similar Feedback

- A focus group was conducted with one middle school class to elicit feedback on the MST Program. Positive feedback included the following:
  - Many students glad not to have to take the yellow bus anymore;
  - Enjoy the “freedom” of riding the T
- Students also note several challenges:
  - Discomfort with unfamiliar and disorderly adults;
  - At the T station in question, some feel that police are herding them on and off trains (yelling, etc.); and
  - Female students report being harassed by older males

# School Leaders Report Mostly Successful Program Implementation

- The MST Advisory Committee solicited program feedback from participating school leaders. Of the 32 schools partially (8<sup>th</sup> grade mandatory/7<sup>th</sup> grade opt in) or fully (all middle school grades) participating, 15 school leaders responded to the solicitation, noting that:
  - The program is working in general and most would recommend moving forward with full 7<sup>th</sup> grade implementation;
  - MBTA rider attendance and tardiness do not seem to be greatly impacted;
  - The program is offering students/families more flexibility and independence;
  - They've had fewer transportation-related disciplinary issues; and
  - Management of dismissal is easier in several schools.

# School Leaders Also Highlight Needed Program Improvements

- Responding school leaders also noted ongoing program challenges that need to be addressed:
  - The difficulty that students making connections (e.g., train to bus or shuttle) face getting to school on time;
  - Variability in student arrival – some arriving too early, some tardiness issues;
  - Policy consistency to keep siblings together;
  - Interaction with/complaints from local businesses in some neighborhoods; and
  - Some complaints from female students of harassment on the MBTA.



# There Is Not Consensus Among Committee Members On Full 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Implementation

While members agree that many aspects of the program work, ongoing concerns about student safety, data, public transparency and communication with families prevent unanimous agreement on moving forward with full 7<sup>th</sup> grade implementation.

Student Safety	Data Reporting	Public Transparency	Communication with Families
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Female students report feeling unsafe;</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Committee does not have a full year of data to compare to previous years;</li><li>Do not have feedback from representative sample of students and families</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The public has not had opportunity to review and respond to emerging data</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Observation that families have not been clearly informed about transportation options and waiver opportunities</li></ul>

# MST Advisory Committee Recommendations

- The MST Advisory Committee acknowledges that School Committee has already voted to fully implement the program and place 7<sup>th</sup> graders on the MBTA. Should School Committee proceed, the Advisory Committee recommends that several issues be addressed and program improvements made in advance of full implementation.
- Following we present recommendations related to:
  - Inter-agency coordination and training;
  - Student/Public Safety;
  - Communication with families and students;
  - Data Collection and Reporting; and
  - Program Oversight.

# The Success of the MST Transportation Program Depends on Inter-agency Coordination

- **Recommendation #1:** *Secure formal agreement across BPS, MBTA, Transit Police and BPD to support and sustain coordinated deployment.*
  - Sign-off supporting the current level efforts and staffing flexibility is needed from the BPS Supt., MBTA GM and Transit and BPD Chiefs.
- **Recommendation #2:** *Institute inter-agency training for staff deployed from the platform to the classroom.*
  - Training should be focus on emerging best practices in student relations and interaction, logistical planning and deployment and community outreach; should also include training on the BPS Code of Conduct.

# Need to Build a Stronger Safety Culture in BPS and with Program and Community Partners

- **Recommendation #3:** Establish a definition of safety and transportation safety standards to guide MST implementation and future initiatives.
- **Recommendation #4:** Build a culture within BPS and with program and community partners that encourages deployed adults to “own” student safety throughout the community.
  - Through training and messaging, ensure that all BPS staff take responsibility for student safety in and out of school.
  - BPS and program partners take the lead in creating extended partnerships with city community centers, nonprofits, local businesses and other agencies to monitor neighborhoods and provide student support to ensure safety.

# Improved Communication with Families Critical to Helping Them Exercise Program Options, Receive Ongoing Support

- **Recommendation #5:** Provide families with information on program and program options well in advance of expanding implementation
  - This will allow families to make informed decisions about waivers, if desired.
  - Program information should also be shared and underscored during the annual assignment process.
- **Recommendation #6:** Establishment of a program resource contact – phone and online – for program complaints, feedback and participant help.
  - Students reporting that they do not know whom to call or where to go if information or help needed.
- **Recommendation #7:** Provide families and students opportunities to acclimate to the MBTA per the Orchard Gardens example.

# Transparent Data and Increased Feedback from Students and Parents Needed for Continued Program Improvement

- **Recommendation #8:** Continue to refine the data template used to monitor program performance.
  - Committee is still concerned about data that is not captured routinely including month-to-month comparisons, MBTA rider segmentation, etc.
  - Want to find creative ways to capture nuanced safety and incident data.
- **Recommendation #9:** Routinely collect larger samples of student and parent feedback.
  - Launch an annual survey; might also incorporate new questions into the School Climate Survey to learn more about program experience and satisfaction.
- **Recommendation #10:** Make data public, update BPS communities on program performance and engage communities in addressing program challenges.

# Program Success Depends on Continuing Community Oversight

- **Recommendation #11:** Continue sanctioning a MST Advisory Group to monitor program performance and implementation.