



**OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE REMOTE MA SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAM  
HEARING AND BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**

**May 25, 2022**

The Boston School Committee held a MA School Choice Program remote hearing and School Committee meeting on May 25, 2022 at 5 p.m. on Zoom. For more information about any of the items listed below, visit [www.bostonpublicschools.org/schoolcommittee](http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/schoolcommittee), email [feedback@bostonpublicschools.org](mailto:feedback@bostonpublicschools.org) or call the Boston School Committee Office at (617) 635-9014.

**ATTENDANCE**

School Committee Members Present: Chairperson Jeri Robinson; Vice Chairperson Michael D. O’Neill; Stephen Alkins; Brandon Cardet-Hernandez; Rafaela Polanco Garcia; Quoc Tran; and Student Representative Xyra Mercer.

School Committee Member Absent: Lorena Lopera.

**DOCUMENTS PRESENTED**

Agenda

Meeting Minutes: May 11, 2022

DESE Review Update (Superintendent’s Report)

Memo UP Academy

Equity Impact Statement: UP Academy

Grants for Approval Totaling \$955,926

Memo Massachusetts School Choice Plan

Massachusetts School Choice Plan

Memo Summer Learning Update

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Summer Learning Update Equity Impact Statement

Summer Learning Update Presentation

## CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Jeri Robinson called the meeting to order and led the pledge of allegiance. Ms. Sullivan called the roll. Mr. Cardet-Hernandez and Ms. Mercer were absent but arrived shortly after roll call. All other members were present.

Ms. Robinson said that tonight's meeting was being streamed live on Zoom. It will be rebroadcast on Boston City TV. It will also be posted at [bostonpublicschools.org/schoolcommittee](http://bostonpublicschools.org/schoolcommittee) and on YouTube. She announced that simultaneous interpretation services were available in Spanish, Haitian Creole, Cabo Verdean, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin and American Sign Language (ASL). The interpreters introduced themselves and gave instructions in their native language on how to access simultaneous interpretation by changing the Zoom channel. Translated meeting documents were posted at [www.bostonpublicschools.org/schoolcommittee](http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/schoolcommittee) prior to the start of the meeting.

Chair Robinson denounced the recent mass shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, TX, and called for a moment of silence.

## MA SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAM HEARING, SY 2022-2023

There were no speakers for the MA School Choice Program hearing, School Year 2022-2023.

***Approved*** - On roll call, the Committee unanimously approved a motion to adjourn the MA School Choice Program hearing for School Year 2022-2023.

## APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

***Approved*** - On roll call, the Committee unanimously approved the minutes of the May 11, 2022 School Committee meeting.

## SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

*\*As prepared for delivery.*

Thank you, Madame Chair, and thank you all for joining us tonight. I have a few updates that I want to share before we dive into this evening's presentations.

We are here tonight with heavy hearts. Yesterday's tragic events and loss of precious life illustrate the seriousness of the work ahead for all of us. Nothing is more important than the safety of our children and ensuring that they get to be children...free of worry and adult

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problems. Children only get one childhood. They should not have to be scared to walk to school, or be bullied, or be witness to gun violence and outright killing in our country. We have to do better. We must pass common sense gun laws and craft special programs to get guns off of our streets and out of the hands of those who would do harm. The safety and well-being of all of our students and staff are on all of our minds -- not just today, but every single day and night. I know tragic incidents like this make us all reflect on our own schools, students and staff. I want to take a moment to reassure families, staff and students.

This is scary but there are a number of things we have in place to keep our students safe.

- School access and controls are in place at all schools: all doors are locked and people cannot come in the building unless let in by staff.
- We added tap cards to schools so we know who is coming in our buildings
- We're making investments to upgrade our PA systems and many schools have radios to support communication if needed.
- For each classroom we just finished a review of all our internal doors to ensure they can lock
- Earlier this year we did a safety audit with each of our school leaders to understand what their safety needs are and each school has a safety plan. As a result of that audit we've been working this year and will continue through the summer to upgrade things like lighting and security cameras ○ Just last week we reviewed with our school leaders our safety protocols and when to call the police or emergency services.
- And we work closely with Boston police who patrol our school neighborhoods regularly

I want to also acknowledge that there have been several concerning incidents reported in the press at some of our schools. We have over 120 schools who are doing incredible things every day and there have been some schools that have had some troubling incidents. In each case staff has acted immediately taking the appropriate actions outlined in our protocols. We know that our staff are frequently required to make quick decisions under rapidly evolving circumstances. I am so grateful for our school leaders and staff on the ground who keep our students safe everyday. We will continue to support our schools to ensure that appropriate notification and safety protocols are followed so that we can provide a safe and nurturing environment for all of our staff and students. We know that learning is not possible if a young person is afraid of what will happen in school or if they experience violence in or on the way to school or on their way home from school. We are committed to providing our students with quality education opportunities in a safe learning environment free from any violence, harassment, bullying, discrimination, and hate crimes, where all student community members treat each other with respect and appreciate the rich diversity in our schools. And we sent a letter home to families and to staff with additional resources to help guide any conversations or questions students may have and will continue to work with our school based staff to support our students. Just this morning the Mayor and I announced several BPS and Citywide efforts to coordinate services for our students and families to address community wide concerns and to ensure a safe summer. This includes summer school, Boston After School and Beyond, Summer Jobs, a strengthened partnership with three City BCYF Centers, and the relaunching of Homefront a youth diversionary 4 program that works with the faith community and BPD to ensure families are getting the support needed to support their children who are in need of support.

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As I transition now to other news in the district, I want to start by highlighting a great example of our community building work between our schools, BPS safety services and the Boston Police. TechBoston, along with BPS Safety Services and the Boston Police Department, hosted a “Positive Vibe Basketball Game” where more than 150 students and 30 citywide Police Officers and BPS Safety Specialists took part in a friendly students vs. officers basketball game. The police officers and safety specialists took the “W” this time, but students had fun, enjoyed pizza and even received commemorative t-shirts and swag bags. There was even a poetry contest where student winners were awarded a \$100 gift card. It was a great event and it was great to see everyone enjoy themselves and the company of others within the larger community. This is exactly the type of community building activities that our young people need and we look forward to planning more events this summer and next year at other BPS schools.

Over the past few weeks there have been some exciting announcements from BPS and the City. On May 18, I joined the Mayor in announcing that beginning July 1, City Fresh Foods, a 5 Roxbury-based and Black-owned food service company, will be providing breakfast, lunch, after-school meals, fresh snacks and summer meals for all of Boston Public Schools. All meals will be freshly made in City Fresh’s Roxbury production facility with nutritious ingredients, including locally-sourced food. This partnership will help keep our students healthy and well so that they can continue to learn throughout the school day — as we know that our children cannot learn when they are hungry. The partnership is so special because not only will our students have nutritious meals, but they will also have access to a wide range of culturally relevant foods from a business that represents the heart and soul of Roxbury. I want to thank Mayor Wu, again, for her continued support and commitment to BPS and the investment in our students’ health. I look forward to this partnership with City Fresh Foods so that we can continue nurturing the future leaders of Boston.

I am also excited to share the Mayor’s announcement of the Green New Deal for BPS. On May 12, Mayor Wu announced a \$2 billion plan to overhaul BPS facilities, including new construction and renovation projects, as well as district-wide upgrades. I am excited about what this plan will mean for many of our students, staff and families. The way a school building looks and feels when a student walks in has such a big impact on the way they feel about learning. Every one of our students deserves to walk into a school building that is modern, up-to-date and well-equipped to enhance their learning environment, and just as importantly, make them feel great about the day ahead. The Green New Deal initiative will build upon the Quality Guarantee Framework that we’ve been advancing for the past several years and that was included as part of the BPS FY23 Budget. That Quality Guarantee is BPS’ promise to our students and families that one day, every school in every neighborhood will provide a standard of excellence and high quality. This baseline of services across all schools is nothing less than what parents expect and our students deserve. This investment will continue the work we’re doing towards guaranteeing that all of our students receive a quality education in school buildings, and classrooms that promote learning and help them succeed, thrive and achieve their dreams. We will be coming to the school committee in June to update you in more detail about the specific project and proposals but we wanted to lift up this exciting 2 billion dollar investment for our schools, students and staff.

I am thrilled tonight to announce that after many months of negotiations. The Boston School Bus Drivers Union voted Tuesday night to approve a contract agreement that was reached with

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Transdev, Boston Public School's private transit contractor. Since I came to Boston, it has been a top priority of mine to get a fair contract for our workers and a contract that works for our students and families. This agreement is a victory for our students and families. This contract achieves several operational changes we need to increase our on time bus performance and driver attendance. These also include a significant increase in pay, making us more competitive and also several other contractual improvements for drivers and our operational changes to improve performance. It will improve school transportation operations for the more than 22,000 students across the City of Boston. Our school bus drivers are valued members of our community, and key to our strategy to provide all students with a high quality education. We're thankful to the Wu administration, Transdev, and the Driver's for their ongoing commitment to providing transportation that our families depend on.

I wanted to give you a quick update tonight on the progress of locating new school communities for our Mission Hill families to call home next school year. We are currently on track, and as of earlier today we have school choice information for 205 of 209 Mission Hill students. Our team is continuing to conduct outreach to each family to ensure that we have all students and their new placements accounted for. We will begin the process for assigning students next week, with a goal for families to receive their notifications starting on June 10.

Lastly, I wanted to share an update on the DESE report. Yesterday, DESE hosted their monthly Board meeting, which included an update on the follow up district review of Boston Public Schools. Tonight we have a brief presentation to share with you the overall timeline and overview of findings from the report. I will turn it over to Deputy Superintendent of Academics Dr. Drew Echelson to provide more detail.

*[Deputy Superintendent of Academics Drew Echelson presented a DESE Review Update.]*

Thank you, Dr. Echelson for the overview. We will continue to work in partnership with the state and the mayor as we determine the path forward. This concludes my superintendent report.

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Mr. Cardet-Hernandez questioned the School Committee's role in the DESE MOU negotiation process. The Superintendent said that operational matters are of the purview of the superintendent. She pledged to bring a final agreement to the School Committee for discussion

Dr. Alkins asked about the status of departmental strategic plans. The Superintendent said that Senior Advisor Nadine Ekstrom has drafted a special education strategic plan that is going to be shared with the Boston Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SpedPac). Interim Assistant Superintendent of the Office of English Language Learners Farah Assiraj is working with her team to finalize a strategic plan for ELLs.

Mr. O'Neill described the DESE report as sobering, calling on district leaders to reflect on the document and implement solutions.

Ms. Robinson clarified that the DESE report was shared with Committee members without delay as soon as it was released by the state.

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Mr. Cardet-Hernandez requested data on chronic absenteeism which the Superintendent agreed to provide.

Dr. Alkins asked about next steps and the role of the School Committee. The Superintendent said that she is in regular communication with the Chair and Vice Chair as she and her team negotiate a new agreement with DESE to stave off for receivership. She said she will bring a final draft of the agreement to the School Committee.

Ms. Robinson noted that she, Mr. O'Neill, Ms. Polanco Garcia and Ms. Mercer attended the DESE board meeting about BPS on May 24. She expressed concern about the accuracy of BPS data and said that the district must do better.

Ms. Polanco Garcia said that state receivership is not the answer. She said that the English Language Learners Task Force has been asking the district to provide more native language literacy opportunities. She suggested that the community should be able to review the MOU before it is signed. The Superintendent said that she will speak with Commissioner Riley to clarify the engagement process, as well as whether a vote by the Committee is needed, and will follow up with the Committee.

Mr. Cardet-Hernandez asked about the district's special education strategy. Deputy Superintendent of Academics Drew Echelson said that BPS must ensure strong Tier 1 instruction across all BPS schools. He spoke about the challenges and complexity of the district's special education coding system. He said that DESE is starting a new pilot program called the IEP Improvement Process to help districts customize the support for special education students.

***Approved*** - On roll call, the Committee unanimously approved the Superintendent's Report.

## REPORT

***UP Academy Boston and UP Academy Dorchester Schedule Amendment*** - Mike Bower, Chief Operating Officer of UP Education Network, requested an amendment to update the yearly schedule UP Academy Boston and UP Academy Dorchester from 185 days of school to 180 days of school, effective this school year. The proposal is in alignment with the rest of BPS and the other schools in our network. Mr. Bower explained that UP leaders have received ongoing feedback from families, students, and staff requesting to reduce the school year to 180 days, and this amendment is in response to that feedback.

This change will:

- Ease the scheduling burden on families with students in other BPS schools by more closely aligning UP's calendar with the rest of Boston Public Schools.
- Create a more sustainable school year for students, families, and staff - particularly in this challenging COVID year.
- Mitigate transportation challenges for families that arise from having a significantly earlier start date than other BPS schools.

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- Save BPS money by removing the additional week of bus costs that is currently required from having a 185-day school year.

The Committee is scheduled to vote on the request later in the meeting.

## GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

- Ankaa Hollister Carlson, Jamaica Plain resident and Boston Latin Academy student, advocated for quality, age-appropriate sexual health education,
- Sugey Scannell, Roslindale resident and Hurley K-8 School parent, testified in support of the English Language Learners Task Force making a presentation to the School Committee this spring.
- Maria Mejia, Roxbury resident and Blackstone Elementary School parent, testified in support of native language instruction and school safety.
- Kelsey Brendel, Back Bay resident and BPS parent, testified regarding concerns about special education.
- Ymaris Matias, South End resident and Orchard Gardens K-8 School parent, testified in support of the English Language Learners Task Force making a presentation to the School Committee this spring.
- Michael Heichman, Dorchester resident and Boston Education Justice Alliance member, testified against state receivership and other education-related issues.
- Roxi Harvey, Dorchester resident and chair, Boston Special Education Advisory Council, testified regarding concerns about special education.
- Tania Del Rio, East Boston resident and Alighieri Montessori School parent, testified in favor of including housing justice in the Boston Teachers Union contract.
- Ann Hernandez, Roslindale resident and O’Bryant School of Math and Science staff, advocated for mental health support for students.
- Ruby Reyes, Dorchester resident and Boston Education Justice Alliance Executive Director, testified regarding the DESE report.
- Griselda Polanco, Roslindale resident and BPS parent, testified in support of the English Language Learners Task Force making a presentation to the School Committee this spring.
- Sharon Daura, Roslindale resident and Manning Elementary School parent, testified regarding bullying concerns.
- Danielle Tierney, Dorchester resident and Henderson Inclusion School parent, testified regarding special education concerns.
- Edith Bazile, Hyde Park resident and Boston Advocates for Educational Excellence member, testified regarding special education concerns.

## ACTION ITEMS

***Approved*** - On roll call, the Committee unanimously approved grants totaling \$955,926.

Acting Chief of Family and Community Advancement Denise Snyder presented the Superintendent's recommendation to withdraw Boston Public Schools from the MA School

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Choice Program for School Year 2022-2023 based on a number of factors, including: student assignment issues; space limitations; cost implications; and the decisions of school committees in neighboring communities. The Superintendent suggested that the district may want to consider participating in the program sometime in the future as a pro-enrollment strategy. Mr. Cardet-Hernandez agreed that the district should give the program consideration in future.

**Approved** - On roll call, the Committee unanimously approved Superintendent's recommendation to withdraw BPS from the MA School Choice Program for SY 2022-23.

**Approved** - On roll call, the Committee unanimously approved UP Academy Boston and UP Academy Dorchester's charter amendment updating the yearly schedule from 185 days of school to 180 days of school, effective School Year 2021-2022.

## REPORTS

**Summer Learning Update** - Acting Chief of Family and Community Advancement Denise Snyder and Executive Director of Expanded Learning Opportunities and Partnerships Alba Cruz Davis presented a report on the district's summer learning opportunities. BPS is launching a comprehensive summer program to ensure opportunities are available to all students that promote social and emotional growth, foster continued learning over the summer, close opportunity gaps, and provide enrichment experiences. This is particularly vital for students from historically marginalized populations, including students of color, and those who are English learners (ELs) and/or have disabilities.

"Experience Summer" is a menu of free (except as noted) opportunities that include:

- Summer Staff programs offered by non-BPS entities (often fee-based)
- BPS 5th Quarter learning and enrichment programming held in schools or at partner sites
- Early Focus BPS programming to support early learners
- High School Credit Recovery BPS-school specific programs by invitation
- English Learner programs primarily integrated in 5th Quarter; others by invitation
- Extended School Year (ESY) by invitation for students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) that include ESY
- Exam School Initiative (ESI) by invitation to support students from under-represented groups in exam schools
- Summer jobs through the City of Boston and partners offering opportunities to earn and learn for youth ages 14-24

Goals for summer 2022 include increasing the number of seats in 5th Quarter programs, the number of programs with extended day schedules, available transportation options, and access to fresh food. BPS' investment in summer learning for 2022 is \$24.1 million. Families can register online at [bostonpublicschools.org/summer](https://bostonpublicschools.org/summer).

Dr. Alkins asked about mental health services offered during the summer. Ms. Snyder said that family liaisons offer points of contact to families during the summer. Ms. Cruz Davis said that training for summer programs will include social emotional wellness.

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Mr. Cardet-Hernandez asked about participation. Ms. Cruz Davis said that half of the summer programming seats are currently full as of today. BPS also provides extended school year summer programming to 4200 special education students through the Office of Special Education.

Ms. Polanco Garcia suggested offering summer programming to students in their native language.

Ms. Robinson emphasized the importance of outreach and communication with families about summer learning opportunities.

***Superintendent Search Process Update*** - Dr. Cassellius stepped out of the meeting and returned immediately following the update. Dr. Pam Eddinger, co-chair of the Superintendent Search Committee and President of Bunker Hill Community College, presented an update on the search process.

On May 18, the Committee met in person in executive session to review current applications. There were 34 candidates. The Committee selected a subset of the candidate pool to interview virtually in executive session on June 1 and June 2. The characteristics of the subset are responsive to our executive profile for the superintendency. The pool is diverse and balanced in gender and race/ethnicity. The pool includes those with superintendent experience, executive leaders, and candidates with local knowledge and national perspectives.

Dr. Eddinger noted that Orange County FL and Dallas TX, both larger districts searching for superintendent, have respective candidate pools of 15 and 12 respectively. The trend is fewer applications at large districts nationally.

After this first round interview via remote, the Committee will further narrow the pool for a second round of interviews in person, in executive session, on June 7 and June 8. The Committee will identify finalists from this round of interviews to recommend to the School Committee. The charge of the Search Committee will be fulfilled once the finalists are recommended. In mid-June, the School Committee will hold public interviews with the finalists. In late June, the School Committee will vote on the final selection.

In partnership with the Mayor's Office, Search Committee members have attended additional small group listening sessions in five other BPS home languages (*Haitian Creole - date TBD*), Cantonese, Caboverdean Creole, Vietnamese, and Mandarin). The Search Committee continues to encourage groups who want to share feedback to host their own listening session, and send a summarizing memo to the Search Committee official email, or inviting Search Committee members to attend and listen. The Committee continues to accept video testimony and text submissions via the search webpage ([bostonpublicschools.org/supt-search](https://bostonpublicschools.org/supt-search) or via email at [superintendentsearch@bostonpublicschools.org](mailto:superintendentsearch@bostonpublicschools.org).)

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Dr. Alkins suggested sharing the forthcoming DESE MOU with the community.

Mr. Cardet-Hernandez emphasized the importance of reference checks in the search process. He suggested that the Committee have a conversation about an interim superintendent at the next School Committee meeting, even if one is needed only for a short period of time.

**PUBLIC COMMENT ON REPORTS**

Charlie Kim, North End resident and vice chair, Boston Special Education Parent Advisory Council, testified regarding the ARP IDEA Early Childhood grant and summer learning.

**NEW BUSINESS**

Dr. Alkins requested that the Committee receive follow up from the Superintendent's team on the concerns raised during public comment. Ms. Robinson asked the Superintendent for follow up at the next Committee meeting. The Superintendent said that she will check with legal counsel about what information can be shared publicly

**ADJOURN**

**Approved** - At approximately 9:37 p.m. the Committee unanimously approved a motion, by roll call, to adjourn the meeting.

Attest:



Elizabeth Sullivan  
Executive Secretary