



OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE REMOTE BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

August 31, 2022

The Boston School Committee held a remote meeting on August 31, 2022 at 5 p.m. on Zoom. For more information about any of the items listed below, visit www.bostonpublicschools.org/schoolcommittee, email feedback@bostonpublicschools.org or call the Boston School Committee Office at (617) 635-9014.

ATTENDANCE

School Committee Members Present: Chairperson Jeri Robinson; Stephen Alkins; Lorena Lopera; and Quoc Tran.

School Committee Member Absent: Vice Chairperson Michael D. O'Neill; Brandon Cardet-Hernandez; and Rafaela Polanco Garcia.

DOCUMENTS PRESENTED

Agenda

Grants for Approval

Memo: School Year 2022-23 Reopening Update

Presentation: School Year 2022-23 Reopening Update

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; Ms. Polanco Garcia and Mr. O'Neill were absent. 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 and on YouTube. She announced that simultaneous interpretation services were available in Spanish, Haitian Creole, Cabo Verdean, Vietnamese,

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Cantonese, Mandarin and American Sign Language (ASL) and gave instructions on how to access simultaneous interpretation by changing the Zoom channel. Translated meeting documents were posted at www.bostonpublicschools.org/schoolcommittee prior to the start of the meeting.

Ms. Robinson announced that due to illness and travel, the Committee would not have a quorum for the entire duration of the meeting. In order to conduct the necessary business of the School Committee, she proposed that the Committee re-order the agenda, moving the votes to the beginning of the agenda. If and when members need to depart, the Committee would vote to adjourn the meeting, as there would no longer be a quorum. Given the urgency of the work being done by the District to prepare for the reopening of school and the need to share this important information with stakeholders and community members, the remaining members will remain to hear the Acting Superintendent's report and the Back-to-School Update. Those signed up for public comment have the option of testifying this evening or waiting until the next regularly scheduled meeting on September 14, 2022.

ACTION ITEMS

Dr. Alkins asked about the benefits of membership in the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC). Ms. Robinson and Ms. Lopera spoke about the benefits of the MASC membership, including professional development training, workshops, advocacy, support, and monthly bulletins. Ms. Robinson thanked MASC President Glenn Koocher for providing the Committee with expert guidance.

Approved - On roll call, the Committee unanimously approved the payment of membership dues to the Massachusetts Association of School Committees in the amount of \$8,280 for School Year 2022-2023.

Approved - On roll call, the Committee unanimously approved grants for approval totaling \$372,042.

Approved - On roll call, the Committee unanimously approved a motion to adjourn the meeting.

ACTING SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

**As prepared for delivery.*

Thank you, Madame Chair. I am happy to join you this evening. On August 15, we submitted the first set of deliverables as part of the Systemic Improvement Plan (SIP). This included the first draft of a strategic plan for multilingual learners, a revised policy and procedure manual for special education, a streamlined Quality School Plan template for school improvement planning, a plan for renovating bathroom facilities in 16 schools, and engagements with the Council of Great City Schools for external reviews in special education, transportation and student safety. All deliverables we submitted can be found on the BPS website at www.bostonpublicschools.org/strategicprogress. The district team continues to engage with

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senior-level DESE staff to review their feedback and make adjustments as we continue to collaborate on this critical systems work. The Council of Great City Schools completed their first on-site visit to interview various stakeholders in special education. They will continue to document review and additional virtual interviews in the next few weeks, as they finalize their report and recommendations. We look forward to bringing their recommendations forward to the School Committee in November. We have additional deliverables due September 8, including hiring for key positions to oversee the Problem Resolution System and revising student withdrawal procedures. I am happy to report that we are on track to deliver on these commitments, and we will again post all deliverables on the BPS website, once submitted to DESE.

During our last meeting, I spoke about the investment we have made in our athletics work. The season has started. Mass General Brigham Sports Medicine provided Boston Public Schools with free pre-season physicals on August 13. Taylor Twellman, a former player from the New England Revolution and color commentator with ESPN Sports, came to meet with the students.

I am happy to report that I have continued to update Incoming Superintendent Skipper on the upcoming projects and plans for the new school year. She has been participating in meetings with key stakeholders. She made key leadership announcements which you will see in the slides.

The August Leadership Institute (ALI) was held at Boston University from August 16 to August 18. I had the honor of greeting attendees from across all of our schools on day 1, along with BTU President Jessica Tang, Incoming Superintendent Skipper, School Committee Chairperson Jeri Robinson and School Committee Vice-Chair Michael O'Neill. The three days focused on the implementation of Equitable Literacy and the development of Quality School Plans for SY22-23.

The Management and Operations Institute was held virtually from August 22 to August 24 and engaged school staff, leadership, and Central Office administrators. A wide variety of departments presented on several different topics that will help inform our work as a district in the coming year, including key topics related to the Systemic Improvement Plan -- the special education policy and procedure manual, the BPS Helpline, and the revised student withdrawal procedures, and our COVID-19 Protocols to name a few.

The central office held our Annual Open House on August 25, where school leaders and staff visited different departments for a meet and greet, as you can see in the pictures from the presentation.

Yesterday we held our Countdown to Kindergarten event at the Boston Children's Museum, where we welcomed kindergartners and families and passed out backpacks and goodies. We are so grateful to Boston Children's Hospital, the Boston Children's Museum, Cradles to Crayons and the Mayor's Office of Early Childhood. It was an event that brought me some joy.

School starts next week on Thursday, September 8, for grades 1-12 and Monday, September 12, for our K0-K2 grades. We will have a more detailed update to share with you later tonight, but

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as I mentioned at our last meeting, this team has been working hard to address the key areas that will help us be ready to have a smooth transition to the school year.

As you know, last week, we held our press conference with the Mayor about the Orange Line shutdown. I want to thank Director of Transportation Del Stanislaus and her team, who have been working nonstop to address the transportation issues and innovation, working alongside the Mayor, her team, and all the other partners involved. Our main concern is ensuring that our students and staff have a means of transportation to get them to school safely. In partnership with the school bus drivers' union, we have agreed to permit the district to retain additional 7D student transport vans, primarily for routes outside of the City of Boston. These student transport vans will free up existing yellow school bus drivers to increase the number of buses available within city limits. Although the Orange Line shutdown will undoubtedly raise challenges for BPS transportation, we are hopeful that these student transport vans will lessen the additional strain on our yellow school bus system. We continue to update our families weekly as information becomes available. MBTA and BPS staff will also plan to provide additional staff support to help guide students along the Orange Line shuttle route. Keep an eye out for MBTA Transit Ambassadors who wear bright red polo shirts, sweaters, or jackets with T logos and can be found at stations throughout the system.

We understand that this will be a stressful time for our students. Our BPS school community is here to serve our students as they arrive at school, ensuring access to care, education, and healthy breakfast and lunch "after the bell," regardless of travel delays. Students should plan for delays and, where possible, build additional time to get to and from school. Students arriving late due to transportation issues will not be penalized. Students who usually take the Orange Line may use the free shuttle bus service from the MBTA along the Orange Line route. For more information on shuttle buses and transit hubs, visit the City's [Orange Line Shutdown guide](#). Students may also choose to take free Commuter Rail service by simply showing their CharlieCard or CharlieTicket – even if the passes have no value added. All Commuter Rail stops within Boston are ADA accessible. If this is your first time riding the Commuter rail, we encourage you to read the [City's transportation resource page](#). The City of Boston distributes free CharlieCards at all Boston Public Libraries. If your trip takes you on the Orange Line, you may consider alternate routes using the bus network or other rail lines. [The MBTA Trip Planner](#) can help you find other transit options that may work for you. We encourage students and families to practice traveling new routes before the first day of school. BPS has secured 5,000 free MBTA 7-Day Passes for families, delivered to schools across the district. Families are encouraged to follow up with their respective schools to arrange pick-up times. Students are already equipped with summer passes, and parents or guardians can accompany them using these free MBTA 7-Day Passes. If your child needs wayfinding help, please encourage them to call the BPS Transportation Helpline at 617-635-9520. If your child becomes lost, they should call 9-1-1. The Boston Police Department's school unit coordinates with Boston Public Schools to locate missing children and return them to their parents, guardians, or school as quickly as possible. We also shared an announcement to staff to help serve as ambassadors for peak times and will send a message to them in the coming days.

Our Office of Community Engagement will facilitate two virtual meetings to introduce the incoming Superintendent Skipper and share with families how we are prepared to welcome their children back to school. These are promoted via robocalls, texts, emails, and the weekly parent

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newsletter. The first one is tomorrow at 6 pm and the second one is Saturday, September 10 at 10 am. There will be updates on facilities upgrades done over the summer, updated COVID-19 protocols, transportation information, and more. The new BPS Helpline actively supports families through the back-to-school process. The team has logged nearly 2,200 calls, both inbound and outbound. Over the last week, the team presented to schools about the new helpline and has started sharing promotional swag with families and community partners with the phone number and email address. The Family Engagement team is hosting two "Get Engaged Sessions for BPS Families." The first one had 461 participants!

I also wanted to communicate that I am planning to provide an update to the Boston School Committee and our community on Mission Hill at the September 14 SC meeting. I look forward to giving you a report on how the start of school went and updates on our progress managing through other areas of interests as they arise. Thank you.

Dr. Alkins asked how community groups are being included in the DESE SIP process. Dr. Echelson said BPS and the Council of Great City Schools are holding meetings with external stakeholders and advocacy groups to gather feedback to help inform their recommendations in several key areas of work.

Dr. Echelson confirmed for Ms. Robinson that BPS will have a multilingual staff deployed at MBTA stations. Transportation Director Delavern Stanislaus said that 429 families have opted into yellow bus service during the Orange Line shutdown. BPS is adding shuttle routes for schools most impacted by the shutdown, such as Charlestown High School.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

- Vernee Wilkinson, not Boston resident, SchoolFacts Boston staff, read a resolution about student and parent feedback.
- Robert Jenkins, Mattapan resident and community advocate, testified regarding Orange Line shutdown
- Sharon Hinton, Hyde Park resident and advocate, testified regarding school reopening
- Lauren Peter, Roslindale resident and Sumner Elementary School parent, shared concerns about the proposed merger between the Sumner and Philbrick schools.
- Shery Keleher, Charlestown resident and BPS parent, testified regarding school reopening

The following people testified regarding COVID health and safety measures:

- Nancy Lessin, Jamaica Plain resident, member of BPS Families for COVID Safety (FamCOSa)
- Julia Raifmann Brookline resident and Boston University School of Public Health professor
- Elise Pechter, Jamaica Plain resident and FamCOSa member
- Cheryl Buckman, South Boston resident and FamCOSa member
- Suleika Soto, South End resident and FamCOSa member

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REPORT

School Year 2022-2023 Back-to-School Presentation - Dr. Echelson and his senior leadership team presented an overview of the district's progress and plans for a strong start to School Year 2022-2023 for Boston Public Schools (BPS) students, families and staff. Dr. Echelson said that while staffing and transportation challenges remain, BPS is well prepared for a strong start to the new school year.

Staffing: Bus drivers and monitors, food service workers and some paraprofessionals remain the top positions needed to be filled. BPS is working to incentivize bus driver and bus monitor positions and making contingency plans to ensure students assigned monitors receive the necessary services. Hiring secondary science teachers and ESL teachers has also been challenging. While several schools are currently carrying the vast majority of teacher vacancies, the district is working closely with these schools to hire the staff needed for the first day of school.

Transportation: BPS continues to leverage the Collective Bargaining Agreement with the Drivers Union, which provides new opportunities to better serve our students. Staff are working around the clock with partners at the City and MBTA to collaborate and minimize disruption during the state's unprecedented Orange Line closure, and BPS continues to improve operational efficiencies that will help get students to school safely and on time. The BPS Transportation team continues to work on routing and bus assignments, customer service staffing, and bus yard preparations.

Food and Nutrition Services: BPS is committed to supporting students' growth and academic success by providing nourishing meals and a positive dining experience. Students in schools experiencing hiring challenges this year will receive healthy, vended meals through a new contract with City Fresh Foods, a Roxbury-based, Black-owned business that prepares freshly-made meals using locally sourced ingredients.

Facilities: To ensure a successful school year, school facilities must be safe and welcoming. This summer, schools have undergone deep cleaning and disinfection as well as numerous interior and exterior improvements. BPS also completed several school renovation projects, expansions and other upgrades that include indoor and outdoor spaces such as bathrooms, entryways, parking lots, and playgrounds.

Student Assignment/Outreach and Engagement: As of August 24, a total of 50,980 students were enrolled in BPS schools. This number will fluctuate as students continue to register or withdraw. The formal enrollment total will be available on October 1st. Staff continue to call families on waitlists for schools with open seats. Family and community outreach efforts are outgoing and include promoting student registration. The new BPS Helpline is up and running and Early Childhood's annual Countdown to Kindergarten program is fully underway with 30 neighborhood events and the citywide Celebration on Tuesday, August 30. BPS is also hosting two Back-to-School virtual community meetings to provide families with an opportunity to meet the new Superintendent and learn more about how BPS is readying schools for students.

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The meetings are scheduled for Thursday, September 1 at 6 p.m. and Saturday, September 10 at 10 a.m.

COVID-19 Planning and Preparation: A cross-functional team of BPS and Boston Public Health Commission representatives meets three days a week to ensure that BPS is on track with COVID-19 planning for the start of school. Planning includes student and staff testing, weekly distribution of take home tests, symptomatic testing, vaccine clinics and education, and the masking policy. BPS continues to focus on ensuring schools have proper air quality and ventilation and operating air purifiers and air quality sensors.

Academics: Nine school regions and school superintendents are ready to welcome students back to the classroom and provide support to educators with an Equitable Literacy Instructional Focus. Support is in place for students with disabilities and multilingual learners. BPS has established a temporary satellite Newcomer Assessment and Counseling Center site in East Boston and is currently updating the Special Education Policy and Procedural Manual. The new collective bargaining agreement with the Boston Teachers Union allows the district to move forward aggressively and thoughtfully with its inclusion work. The first cohort of 20-25 schools will create inclusion plans for their schools and Cross Functional Inclusion Teams will address systemic barriers by becoming more inclusive at their individual schools.

Dr. Alkins asked about the reasons behind staffing vacancies. Interim Chief Human Capital Officer Rae Cathings cited the nationwide trend with difficulty hiring teachers, pandemic recovery, and natural churn as the major reasons for the vacancies. She said that BPS is working creatively with faith-based partners and retirees to recruit new staff. BPS is considering offering sign-on and retention bonuses for bus monitors. Dr. Echelson said that BPS is seeking permission from the City to waive residency requirements for hard-to-fill positions such as bus monitors and food service workers.

Dr. Echelson confirmed for Ms. Robinson that BPS is well prepared to implement MassCore graduation requirements.

Dr. Alkins asked how schools that received renovations were selected. Facilities Director Brian Forde explained that the BPS racial equity planning tool and Opportunity Index were cross-referenced with the BPS building dashboard to ensure equity in prioritization.

Dr. Alkins asked about the district's collaboration with the Boston Public Health Commission regarding COVID planning. Senior Advisor Megan Costello described the district's layered approach to health and safety protocols. The [BPS health and safety webpage](#) includes Frequently Asked Questions on COVID-19 as well as guidance on Monkeypox.

Dr. Alkins asked about the district's efforts to hire literacy coaches. Assistant Superintendent Office of Academics and Professional Learning Dr. Christine Landry said that despite hiring challenges, each region will be staffed with an equitable literacy coach and interventionist.

Ms. Robinson requested an update on safety services vacancies. Chief of Safety Services Neva Coakley Grice said that the department is focused on hiring and onboarding new safety staff.

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Ms. Robinson asked how individual schools are tracking their own data. Deputy Superintendent of Operations Sam DePina said that a cross-functional team of more than 40 departments led by the Division of Schools is working to support school leaders. He explained how the new regional structure will better support schools.

Dr. Alkins asked about strategies to fill vacancies for multilingual educators and educators for special education.

Dr. Echelson said that the district is focusing on individually impacted schools by deploying resources aggressively. He expressed confidence that BPS will be able to meet targets set by DESE and the Department of Justice, adding that the district is well prepared for on-time bus performance and increasing access to higher quality instruction.

CLOSING

With the School Committee having already voted to adjourn the meeting earlier in the evening, Chair Robinson closed the session at approximately 7:37 p.m.

Attest:



Elizabeth Sullivan
Executive Secretary