

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Chairperson and Members  
Boston School Committee

FROM: Dr. Brenda Cassellius *BC*  
Superintendent

DATE: May 25, 2022

RE: School Choice, 2022-2023 School Year

The purpose of this memorandum is to request that a public hearing concerning Boston's participation in the School Choice program during school year 2022-2023 be scheduled for Wednesday, May 25, 2022. The public hearing should be conducted before the School Committee meeting.

As indicated in the attached document, the Educational Reform Act of 1993 amended the Massachusetts School Choice Law establishing a presumption that each school committee will admit non-residents under the Choice Program unless there is a vote to the contrary by June 1 each year. The law requires that a public hearing be held and that a resolution stating the reasons for withdrawing from the school choice obligation be stated as part of the resolution not to participate.

Our consideration of the issues involved in deciding whether the Boston Public Schools should participate in School Choice during the 2022-2023 school year is based upon (1) student assignment issues, (2) space limitations, (3) cost implications, and (4) decisions of school committees in neighboring communities.

### 1. Student Assignment Issues

At this time, an enrollment of 49,846 has been projected for the 2022-2023 school year. Currently, approximately 49,927 students are enrolled in the Boston Public Schools. The implications for non-resident student assignments to the Boston Public Schools are as follows:

- Historically, during the months of July, August and early September, a large number of students who are Boston residents continue to seek school assignments. We are required to provide an assignment for these residents.
- Enrollment of non-residents in the Boston Public Schools should not take precedent over residents who, as noted above, continue to make application for school assignments through early October.

### 2. Space Implications



The BPS is not able to set aside a number of seats for non-resident students at specific schools or in specific programs at the beginning or during the application/registration process. Students who are residents complete an application and provide proofs of residence in order to be assigned. Our obligation is to provide seats for residents of the city.

Certain schools and programs are popular and over-chosen by Boston residents. It is our view that non-Boston residents would probably seek seats in our most popular programs, making it impossible for a large number of Boston residents to obtain seats. We project these programs will be fully used by Boston residents.

### 3. Cost Implications

Unbudgeted costs would result from the need to provide resources to non-Boston residents. Specialized programs, i.e., special education (substantially separate) and programs for English Language Learners have either mandated class size or staffing requirements. Non-residents who apply for specialized services would have to be provided the same services as residents. Since many neighboring communities lack services and programs for students requiring specialized programs, our failure to withdraw from School Choice could result in an influx of students from other communities requesting seats in specialized programs, resulting in unbudgeted costs.

### 4. Decisions of Neighboring Communities

During the 2021-2022 school year, 150 school districts, including Boston, did not participate in the Choice Program. None of the communities surrounding the City of Boston participated. It is expected that they will continue to recommend non-participation during the 2022-2023 school year. The fact that these bordering communities will not participate in the state's School Choice Plan means that Boston students will not be transferring to nearby school systems, thereby opening seats in Boston schools for non-residents.

### 5. Recommendations

Based on the current enrollment in the Boston Public Schools, I recommend that the School Committee vote to withdraw from participation in the state Choice Plan for the 2022-2023 school year. I recommend that this vote be taken by the School Committee at the May 25, 2022 School Committee Meeting.

Attached you will find the Department of Education's Advisory Opinion on the School Choice program and a copy of the state law regarding school choice. Thank you for your attention to this issue.

Attachment