



## Answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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## 1. What is BuildBPS?

Launched in September 2015 by Boston Mayor Martin J. Walsh, the Boston School Committee and Boston Public Schools (BPS) Superintendent Tommy Chang, [BuildBPS](#) is a process to develop a ten-year Educational and Facilities Master Plan. The plan, released in March 2017, provides a strategic framework for aligning BPS construction and renovation projects with the district's educational priorities, supported by a **\$1 billion investment over the next 10 years**. It is designed to guide investments to ensure that the school district's facilities are equipped for innovative changes taking place in learning and instruction.

## 2. Why are the City and BPS engaging in a master planning process for school facilities?

A facilities master planning process was among the recommendations presented in 2014 by the Education Working Group of Mayor Martin J. Walsh's [Transition Committee](#). Mayor Walsh, in partnership with the Boston School Committee and the Boston Public Schools, has made this project become a major initiative of his administration.

BPS is comprised of [132 buildings](#), totaling more than 11 million square feet. Nearly two-thirds of the school buildings were constructed before World War II, and many of them can no longer support today's innovative educational approaches. The facility needs for modernization and repair exceed the resources available to address them, so the City and the school district must make difficult decisions every year about how to prioritize competing capital needs. The Facilities Master Plan will provide a long-range roadmap for construction and renovation projects, allowing the City and BPS to be more proactive in planning and financing projects that advance the school district's goals to improve student achievement.

## 3. Who is leading the project?

BuildBPS is led by the City of Boston, the Boston School Committee, and the Boston Public Schools. SMMA (Symmes Maini & McKee Associates) served as the lead planning and design firm, and Pinck & Co. serves as the project manager. BuildBPS is governed by a management team comprised of senior officials from the City of Boston and the Boston Public Schools. During the development of the report, the team oversaw [five advisory committees](#): Community Engagement, Demographics, Educational Planning, Facilities Assessment, and Finance. The advisory committees included representatives from the Mayor's Office and other City departments, BPS central offices, principals, teachers, parents, students, community members, and expert consultants in particular fields. The committees met regularly throughout 2016 to collect and analyze data in order to guide the master planning process.

## 4. What types of data does the BuildBPS team examine?

The focus of BuildBPS is to guide capital investment over the next ten years in an equitable way, based on the District's educational vision for the schools, as well as several sets of new and existing data. In particular, to bring data and vision together, the master planning process examines the following variables:

- **Educational:** the district's plans and priorities for teaching and learning in the years ahead, and the resulting facility and space needs for most effective instruction;
- **Facilities:** the existing condition and uses of BPS buildings, as well as their ability to house various educational programs;
- **Demographics:** current and projected school-aged populations in the City of Boston by neighborhood, program, and other factors;
- **Finances:** analysis of long-term costs for building maintenance and modernization, as well as the development of new schools, and funding strategies to finance them; and
- **Community Input:** perspectives from parents, students, staff, and other stakeholders about the present and future of teaching and learning and of Boston's educational facilities.

## **5. How did BuildBPS assess the current condition of all school buildings?**

Between January and June 2016, teams conducted individual site visits to all 128 schools. Comprised of engineers, architects, educational planners, and BPS staff, the teams examined both the physical condition of each facility and the appropriateness of its current educational use -- i.e., Is the building conducive to the educational programs offered within? The assessments do not include any review of academic outcomes or other performance data. The teams used a [comprehensive evaluation tool](#) to compile information about each school's classrooms, offices, cafeterias, auditoriums, gymnasiums, bathrooms, and other spaces, considering factors such as heating and ventilation, air quality, windows, roofs, lighting, security, traffic flow, and the availability of spaces for various educational programs and support services.

## **6. What did the BuildBPS team learn as a result of the facilities assessments?**

The assessments have confirmed that building structures and enclosures are generally sound, but the facilities needs are extensive due to the overall condition and age of the buildings. Many schools are overdue for systems upgrades (e.g., heating, plumbing, and ventilation). Smaller buildings in particular, especially at the K-8 levels, have uneven distribution of spaces such as cafeterias and auditoriums. Many schools cite a lack of appropriate spaces for critical educational needs, particularly student support services. Superintendent Chang has cited these gaps as examples of a lack of equity across the school district. BuildBPS is designed to help eliminate many of these disparities.

## **7. How does the project report on schools' proximity to other City and community resources?**

BuildBPS is in the process of compiling an inventory of nearby facilities that are available for school and community use, such as community centers, libraries, athletic fields and facilities, and Boys & Girls Clubs.

## **8. How does the plan account for spaces in schools that are shared with partner organizations?**

The guiding document for the aspirations of BuildBPS is the Superintendent's Educational Vision statement. This document offers guidance for educational programming and space use that the district will expect schools to take into account when considering how best to support and work closely with partner organizations.

## **9. How does BuildBPS address the issue of lead in drinking water?**

The immediate work to address lead levels in drinking water is being addressed outside the scope of BuildBPS. Longer-term issues will be considered as part of the educational and facilities master plan. For information about drinking water quality in Boston Public Schools, visit <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/water>.

## **10. How did the Education Planning Committee ensure that schools and classrooms will be designed to meet teaching and learning priorities in the years ahead?**

Improving teaching and learning within BPS is one of Superintendent Chang's core commitments. The Superintendent's Educational Vision defines the goals for schools and classrooms to meet these commitments. The Educational Vision provides the criteria for the redesign and renovation of schools and classrooms.

## **11. How will BuildBPS ensure that schools and classrooms are designed to support students with different learning needs, particularly students with disabilities and English Language Learners?**

This question is related to the one above. The definition of requirements for teaching and learning in the Superintendent's Educational Vision must define the needs of all students, including those with disabilities and English Language Learners. Creating equity is one of the Superintendent's core goals for the project, and this applies to classrooms as well as to schools.

### **12. How will the plan ensure that Boston classrooms are equipped with the latest technology needed to support innovative teaching and learning?**

The Facilities Master Plan is the vehicle for Boston to define how to direct financial resources to capital investment in the schools to create better buildings for teaching and learning. Equipping school buildings with the technology to become better teaching spaces is central to this idea, and BuildBPS includes proposals not only to renovate bricks and mortar, but also to expand the school system's technology capacity to teach in more innovative ways and to provide flexibility for the future.

### **13. Where will the \$1 billion investment in BuildBPS come from?**

To achieve a \$1 billion investment in BuildBPS over the next ten years, the City of Boston and BPS have devised new ways to increase funding amounts from existing sources. Mayor Walsh has committed approximately \$730 million in capital funds from the City by taking advantage of Boston's strong credit rating. For the remaining funds, the City and BPS will work in partnership with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) for school improvement and construction projects.

### **14. How will project ideas be proposed, evaluated, and approved?**

The first round of proposals for repair, renovation, expansion, and construction projects will emerge from the neighborhood workshops held in May and June 2017. In these workshops, parents, staff, and community members are using various data sources from the BuildBPS report – including facility conditions, enrollment and capacity figures, grade configurations, and more – to generate ideas for capital investments.

During the summer and early fall, the new School Building Office will collect all of the ideas generated by the community. The team will review the proposals and conduct further analysis to determine what their implementation would involve, both logistically and financially. In addition, the School Building Office will update the facilities and demographic data in the BuildBPS dashboard.

Following that phase, in a series of neighborhood prioritization meetings, community members will learn more about the School Building Office's analyses of the ideas generated in the workshops and provide input on the projects proposed for the first round of funding. In early 2018, based on the work conducted over the previous nine months, the City and BPS will include prioritized projects in Boston's capital budget proposal and continue to pursue projects with the MSBA.

Based on lessons learned in the first year of BuildBPS, the City and BPS will adapt the process to ensure successful community engagement, essentially repeating the cycle to prioritize projects for year two and beyond.

See a graphic depicting the process [here](#).

### **15. What is the 21st Century Schools Fund?**

As part of BuildBPS, Mayor Walsh established the \$13 million 21st Century Schools Fund to provide immediate, short-term capital investments in every building. Beginning in the fall of 2017, every school will receive an allocation and have the opportunity to choose from a menu of non-structural capital investments, such as furniture and technology improvements, to facilitate 21st century teaching and learning.

## **16. How will each school's allocation from the 21st Century Schools Fund be determined?**

The City and BPS are developing a formula for equitable distribution of the \$13 million fund that will take into account the condition of the building's learning environment (from the [facilities assessments](#)), the enrollment of the school, and the composition of the student body. We will share more details about the formula and the allocations as they become available.

## **17. What were the findings relative to demographics and enrollment?**

Enrollment has declined by 4.5 percent since 2010, due in part to enrollment loss in grades 5-8. BPS growth is not keeping pace with Boston's population growth, and charter schools continue to be a significant competitive factor. Specialized programs are scattered around the city, often increasing the need to transport students out of their home neighborhood. The demographers working on the project are continuing to devise enrollment projections, weighing a variety of factors that will influence population shifts.

## **18. How is the possibility of charter school growth factored into enrollment projections?**

The Facilities Master Plan will include enrollment projections that account for the full buildout of charter seats under the current cap, and the Demographics Advisory Committee is discussing what other scenarios the Master Plan could/should consider. Boston is currently subject to a cap in charter school enrollment, not to exceed 18% of net school spending. However, a statewide ballot initiative scheduled for November 2016 proposes to lift the cap in some communities, including Boston, resulting in an increase in the number of available charter school seats, if the measure is approved.

## **19. In order to stem declining enrollment, what is the school district doing to attract and retain a greater portion of the school-aged population in Boston?**

Ultimately, all investments in school and district improvement are designed to strengthen the quality of our educational programs across the city in order to attract and retain families in the public school system. Superintendent Chang has identified several key tenets for maintaining robust enrollment, including:

- Ensuring quality schools close to home
- Reducing transitions, improving feeder patterns, and simplifying grade configurations
- Creating program models that promote equity for all students
- Increasing capacity for early childhood education
- Providing flexibility for future growth

## **20. How can parents, staff, and others get involved in the master planning process?**

Extensive participation from a broad range of BPS stakeholders – including parents, students, staff, partners, and residents – is essential to the success of the project. The project includes ongoing opportunities for members of the community to offer their opinions on the most effective educational uses of BPS facilities, and to provide feedback on findings and recommendations. Initial steps have included a citywide survey in nine languages, several community forums and open houses, office hours, information sessions, and neighborhood workshops, all designed to share findings and to hear questions, ideas, and concerns from the public.

To stay informed about the latest developments in BuildBPS:

- Visit the [BuildBPS pages](#) of the district website.
- Sign up to receive periodic [e-news](#).
- Contribute to the conversation on Twitter using [#BuildBPS](#).
- Review documents in the public [Google Drive](#).

**21. What is the feedback loop with School Site Councils to address any questions or concerns that arise?**

The draft assessment for each school has been provided to the School Site Councils for review and comment. This will give school leaders and Site Council members a better understanding of the assessment process, and provide a feedback loop on the assessment data, as well as opportunities to raise concerns and questions about the master plan.

**22. What steps are the City and BPS taking to develop a more sustainable budget model for the school district?**

Despite declining enrollment, the BPS budget has increased by 23.4% (\$192 million) since 2010. The City and BPS have launched a Long-Term Financial Planning process, which is exploring both potential cost-saving measures and additional revenue streams. The team’s work includes identifying particular “pressure points” on the annual BPS budget – i.e., the costs that are rising at particularly fast rates – in order to propose strategies for containing those cost increases. An Advisory Committee includes stakeholders from across the community and will release its first report this fall.

**23. Which escalating costs are contributing most to increasing gaps in the BPS operating budget?**

There are four areas in particular where BPS both spends more than other districts and has experienced the greatest cost increases:

- Student transportation: BPS spends about 10% of its budget on transportation, and costs in recent years have increased, largely as a result of a new transportation contract, and the increasing need for specialized services for high-need students.
- Staff salaries: BPS offers competitive salaries for staff members. The National Center for Teacher Quality ranks BPS #1 out of the largest 113 districts for lifetime earnings for teachers, who comprise the majority of the BPS workforce. The cost of salaries and benefits has increased by \$107 million since 2010, accounting for more than half of the \$192 million increase cited above.
- Increasing student need: BPS spends a quarter of its budget on special education, which is driven by a large and increasing percentage of students who require special services.
- “Footprint”: BPS operates a large number of schools, programs and classrooms, relative to other similarly-sized districts, partially due to the high number of small school buildings.

**24. Does the BuildBPS report include recommendations for closing certain schools?**

No. The plan reports on the viability of each school building, based on its age, condition, maintenance and repair needs, appropriateness for educational use, and other factors. In the future, some buildings identified as the least viable from a physical and educational perspective may be recommended to be taken off-line. That recommendation would apply only to the building itself, and not necessarily to the school operating within the building, which could be relocated to a more suitable facility.

**25. I’ve heard BPS is planning to close 30-50 schools. Is that true?**

No. If the district identifies a need to close or repurpose some schools in the future it would be part of a comprehensive plan aligned with academic priorities, and would certainly be a much smaller number.

**26. Is it true that there is a list of schools already being considered for closure that has not been shared with the public?**

No. There is no list of schools. Dr. Chang has begun to work with all school leaders to explore options for aligning the district’s portfolio of schools with our educational priorities. That work is informed by the findings and recommendations from the Educational and Facilities Master Plan. Any future proposals to

restructure, reconfigure, consolidate, or repurpose school buildings will be brought to the community for input and discussion.

**27. I've heard the district plans to move away from current grade configurations, possibly to a K-6 and 7-12 model. Is that true?**

Dr. Chang has stated concern that the district currently has schools with 20 different grade configurations, which creates both educational and operational challenges, as well as uncertainty for families. Ultimately, we want to create a system with more coherence and as few transitions as possible for students and families. However, we also know that one size does not fit all. We will continue to study the issue, explore options, and gather input from parents, students, and educators about what makes the most sense for each school and for BPS as a whole. Dr. Chang has stated an interest in pursuing a structure that minimizes transitions, including the potential for all schools to be aligned to a K-8/9-12 and K-6/7-12 model. For a detailed discussion of grade configurations, see page 72 of the [BuildBPS report](#).

**28. What is the McKinsey report, and what did it say about BPS enrollment capacity?**

Mayor Walsh commissioned operational audits of several City departments, including from McKinsey & Company on the Boston Public Schools, in order to identify potential opportunities for improving efficiency. Included in the [BPS audit](#) was a broad estimate of the school district's enrollment capacity, which McKinsey calculated as about 93,000 physical seats. The report also cited "a significant number of underutilized buildings and classrooms, spreading funds thin across the system and lessening the impact of resources on a per pupil basis."

It's important to note that there are various ways to calculate capacity. The methodology used in the McKinsey report generated an estimation of "physical capacity": the number of students each school building can accommodate based on the size of classrooms and approximate class size maxima. This methodology, however, did not account for all the particular grades and programs (for example, English Language Learners) in each school, both of which have specific class limits that dictate the number of students each classroom can accommodate. Therefore, the report does not reflect significant variations in the usable capacity of each classroom based on those factors. For these reasons, the estimate of 93,000 seats will not be used in any way for planning purposes. The BuildBPS process included more precise methods of estimating capacity. (See below.)

**29. What does the BuildBPS analysis indicate about the school district's enrollment capacity?**

Through BuildBPS, City and BPS officials discovered that, while BPS has space for more students on the whole, there is significant variation across the system by school typology and neighborhood. We estimate that in the aggregate, the buildings as they are configured today represent a district-wide capacity of about 69,100, which is in excess to the current enrollment of 56,520 students. However, as the district moves closer to meeting the Educational Vision described in the report and space perceived as "excess" is put to effective educational use, the district's capacity will trend towards 21st Century Educational Capacity of 55,500 students. A detailed discussion of BPS capacity begins on page 29 of the [BuildBPS report](#).

**30. Which BPS projects are currently receiving funding from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA)?**

The largest MSBA-approved project currently under construction is the \$70 million Dearborn STEM Academy in Roxbury, which is scheduled to open in 2018.

Mayor Walsh recently announced [\\$25.1 million investments to replace windows and doors in seven schools](#), including \$16.4 million in MSBA funds: Young Achievers Science and Math K-8 School (Mattapan); Community Academy of Science and Health (Dorchester); TechBoston Academy

(Dorchester); Ellis Elementary School (Roxbury); McKay K-8 School (East Boston); Curley K-8 School (Jamaica Plain) and Sumner Elementary School (Roslindale).

In May 2016, the MSBA invited five additional Boston schools into the Accelerated Repair Program: Boston Latin School (Fenway), Channing Elementary School (Hyde Park), Condon Elementary School (South Boston), Dever Elementary School (Dorchester), and McCormack Middle School (Dorchester). The program provides funding for the repair or replacement of roofs, windows and boilers in schools that are otherwise structurally, functionally and educationally sound.

In the spring of 2017, the City submitted requests for Accelerated Repair Projects in 12 additional schools: Chittick Elementary (Mattapan), East Boston High School, Curley K-8 (Jamaica Plain), Kilmer K-8 (West Roxbury), UP Academy Dorchester, O'Donnell Elementary (East Boston), Perry K-8 (South Boston), Russell Elementary (Dorchester), Sumner Elementary (Roslindale), Timilty Middle (Roxbury), and Tobin K-8 (Roxbury).

### **31. What about the construction projects proposed for Quincy Upper School and Boston Arts Academy?**

In advance of BuildBPS, the City of Boston had been, and continues to be collaborating with the MSBA for several years on the Josiah Quincy Upper School ("JQUS") and Boston Arts Academy ("BAA"). The City is currently working closely within the MSBA process to find the most fiscally responsible and educationally appropriate solution for both schools.

The BAA is completing the MSBA's Feasibility Study Phase with their Owner's Project Manager ("OPM") and Designer. During the Feasibility Study, BPS, the City of Boston, and its consultant team collaborate with the MSBA to document their educational program, generate an initial space summary, document existing conditions, establish design parameters, develop and evaluate alternative construction solutions that meet the requirements of the Boston Arts Academy's educational program.

The JQUS Project is currently in the Schematic Design Phase of the MSBA process. BPS, the City of Boston, and its consultant team are currently exploring options for the location of a new JQUS.

#### **For more information about BuildBPS...**

- Visit the [BuildBPS pages](#) of the district website.
- Participate in [community engagement events](#).
- Sign up to receive periodic [e-news](#).
- Contribute to the conversation on Twitter using [#BuildBPS](#).
- Review documents in the public [Google Drive](#).