

January 26, 2011

Topics

- Implementation of and Student/Family Support for the Redesign and Reinvest Effort
- Weighted Student Funding Proposal for FY12

Formal Action Taken

The School Committee unanimously approved three grants totaling \$270,380 and two foreign field trips.

Highlights from the Meeting

The meeting took place at the Edward Winter Chambers at 26 Court Street, Boston, as another winter snowstorm began. About half-way through the meeting, the Superintendent announced that school would be closed the following day due a snow emergency, the third of the school year.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Johnson highlighted the district's focus on helping students obtain college scholarships, noting that many students have received scholarships this year. The Posse Foundation, for example, has awarded 25 scholarships for next year to students from 15 high schools across the city. She noted that it was nice to see that over half of BPS high schools were getting these opportunities, as opposed to just a few of the high schools. A group of guidance counselors, under the leadership of Catherine Chiu, are working to increase and help students pursue scholarship opportunities district wide. "Access and opportunity is directly tied to how much schools help students reach out," Dr. Johnson said. "This weekend, there will be programs to help families fill out the FAFSA forms, which is a very complicated process. There is a lot of work involved in getting our students ready academically and connecting them to these opportunities."

First Report—Redesign and Reinvest Implementation Framework

Dr. Johnson reminded the School Committee and audience members the broad purposes behind the decisions for the redesign and reinvest effort, especially the Mayor's and district's focus on closing the achievement gap and raising graduation rates for all students. The Superintendent acknowledged that accomplishing this requires that the district change the way it does business. This means making strategic decisions about applying different school options, creating more time for student learning, and use all available resources more strategically. "It won't be enough to serve just some of our students," Dr. Johnson said. "We must deliver on expectations to meet individual students' needs. Our competitors are quickly organizing to respond to this new reality. They are working to fill gaps that we've grown comfortable with for too long." Dr. Johnson went on to highlight the focus on education in President Obama's State of the Union Address. "The first step in winning the future is encouraging innovation. We are an innovation city...the Acceleration Agenda is not a random set of projects but a comprehensive roadmap. Tonight, we will discuss a new approach for funding our schools, one that is more equitable, transparent, and predictable, and focuses first on student needs. Dollars will follow the students, no matter where they attend."

Dr. Johnson went on to share her views on the weighted student funding proposal to be discussed. “I like to think about WSF this way. Today we send dollars to schools based on the number of students expected and the average teacher salaries. This system used to work well, but less so now. It’s time to re-look at how and why we distribute dollars in the system. The new system would allocate dollars for individual students based on individual needs. In the past we have moved students to the resources. This design moves resources to the students. It’s putting dollars where our students are.”

The superintendent described other features of implementing the Redesign and Reinvest effort that are underway.:

- After listening carefully to feedback from the SPED PAC and outside experts, John Verre, Assistant Superintendent for Special Education and Student Services has creating a plan that will keep students with special needs in the same schools for multiple years, rather than requiring frequent transitions.
- Plans are underway to cut central office bureaucracy.
- More than 2200 teachers have earned ESL licenses or gone through category training.
- Chief Academic Officer Irvin Scott has been boosting efforts around teaching and learning.
- A new teacher evaluation tool has been developed and the district is currently working on an agreement with BTU for its use (which, if BTU agrees, will enable Boston to receive \$30 million through Race to the Top funds).

Finally, Dr. Johnson noted that next month, student graduation progress tracker will help all 10th -12th graders know where they are relative to graduation. “We want all students to know where they are,” she stated, “And be able to take responsibility to develop a roadmap and way forward.”

“The changes you see in BPS are not random acts,” she stated. “They are part of a comprehensive plan to make sure that we achieve equity and excellence. I ask that you join us in this effort. Partner with us to make the changes and revisions in the plan to ensure that we make the excellence that we should.”

Deputy Superintendent Michael Goar provided additional details about implementation of the Redesign and Reinvest Framework. Several cross-functional teams are reviewing all programmatic expansions and services for students and families. They have been focused on trying to have accurate projections for enrollment for all of the schools next year.

Denise Snyder, Senior Director of Enrollment and Welcome Services, shared more information about the effort to support students and families affected by closed or merged schools in their transitions. She described a collaborative effort to help “move families from where they are now to their new educational home in September, helping people understand what their next school choices are, the registration and assignment process, and providing support for how to make a successful transition.” They are trying to reach families early in the process, but acknowledge that they may inevitably miss someone. They are calling every family who did not submit an application. “It’s a huge undertaking, but we want to make sure to ask every family to learn about and choose their best option.”

Michelle Brooks, Assistant Superintendent for Family and Student Engagement added, “This is a tag team. Our office is gearing up for the transition once the assignment piece happens.” They are also providing support

for welcoming new students into schools. Information sessions are scheduled at various high schools that are likely to receive students affected by the closed high schools. Her office is also working with school site councils in merging schools to ensure that student voice is reflected in the merger plans.

School Committee Questions and Discussion

Marchelle Raynor asked what role community partners like ABCD might play. She encouraged BPS to utilize some of the existing vehicles that are already in place.

- District staff said that they met with ABCD two weeks ago to explore just how do to this.

John Barros expressed enthusiasm about the coordination and tag teaming efforts in the district. He asked if other departments such as special education were also benefitting from the cross-functional team approach that the district is now using “As a parent, I want someone thinking about placement, engagement, cultural competency, academics... I would be interested in learning from what happens with this team approach so that it can be applied to all areas.”

- Staff explained that when they hold meetings at each school, they make concerted efforts to include representatives from each service department serving different students. They have been working very closely with the Office of High School Support to make sure that these meetings are successful.
- Dr. Linda Cabral, Director of the Office of High School Support explained that they been meeting with students and teachers at every affected school and trying to answer their questions. In cases where schools are merging, they have held joint meetings.

Michael O’Neill noted a difference between schools that were merging (two schools blending together) versus those that are consolidating into one school, with one school as a distinct lead.

- Dr. Cabral said that yes, some schools are being merged and, in those cases, the two school models are being blended together, taking the best of each. In other cases, like Excel and Monument high schools, the two schools are being consolidated under the Excel HS model. She went on to point out that even in the other schools, “There are some things that have been done well. . . just not enough of them,” so they hope to still take advantage of the best practices.

Mary Tamer asked for clarification about the provision of social and emotional supports in cohorts.

- Dr. Johnson stated that the intention was to serve students as cohorts, although they recognize that families always have a choice. Nonetheless, they do see some value in facilitating this in cohorts.

Claudio Martinez asked whether the district had a plan to update families’ phone numbers.

- District staff responded that they were trying to make it easier for families to update that information through the schools rather than the central office.

Reverend Groover asked about high schools that have been reaching out to students of the closed high schools.

- Staff replied that Boston Community Leadership Academy and Charlestown HS have scheduled open houses. **Dr. Johnson** met with all of the pilot high schools to encourage them to reach out. In addition, 21 high schools will be part of the fair on February 2nd at Hyde Park where they will each have different booths for students and families to visit.

Michael O’Neill asked about the status of the Clap Innovation School plans.

- **Dr. Johnson** said the district received 15 Innovation School applications, including conversion schools and new schools. Staff are in the process of reviewing applications and have specific questions about cost, budget, timeline, etc. In some cases, they won’t have the capacity to move forward immediately. A three-person committee — the BTU President, the Superintendent, and the Chair of the School Committee — make the final decision. “The goal is to move forward for fall of 2012, except for the one that will replace the Clapp School, which is to be fall 2011.”

Rev. Groover expressed concern about supporting the students from closed high schools who will be high school seniors next year. He asked if there were any preferences or specific steps to support the students who are entering their senior year?

- **Dr. Cabral** stated that they are holding meetings with the “rising seniors,” and want to make sure that they don’t fall through the cracks. They are meeting with them as a group, so that they can dig deeper on their issues. They are also developing a classroom curriculum to be able to help teachers and students to talk about the change and get out their ideas and feelings.

Rev. Groover thanked Superintendent Johnson and staff. He noted that the last time the full School Committee met was December 15th. “It’s very reassuring that at the next meeting, critical steps and support services are being provided. You are on the case to support these students. That means a lot.”

Second Report—Weighted Student Funding Proposal

Chief Financial Officer John McDonough described a process that grew out of the district’s new way of working — the cross-functional teams. He explained that this model is an important part of the district’s ability to successfully meet the goals of the Acceleration Agenda. “Tonight we will be providing information on a new way to distribute resources to students,” he said. “We ask for your support. This is a change that we believe will better position BPS to succeed on those goals laid out in the Acceleration Agenda. Weighted Student Funding (WSF). . . is about making sure that there is a tight alignment between student need and resources that are allocated.”

Currently, dollars are allocated to schools largely based on a staffing model, which allocates one teacher per class of 22 students (at the elementary school level). There are many instances, however, where teachers are allocated with fewer than 22 students in a class, which is part of what creates empty seats. “When you look at empty seats, you’re looking not only at the issue of how many facilities we have but how we manage class size.”

There is a separate funding model for pilot schools, which receive an average per pupil amount, differentiated by grade level (elementary, middle school, and high school). This model does not recognize the particular needs of the students in each of those schools.

“Both of these models have strong and clear rationale to support them,” Mr. McDonough stated. “But over time, we have layered adjustment upon adjustment upon adjustment, in order to meet the specific set of fiscal challenges that we have faced, and it just isn’t going to work any more.”

Given the \$63M budget gap and the district’s need to accelerate improvement for the neediest students, the WSF proposal was devised. It “allocates available resources based on student need, dollars following students.”

Mr. McDonough referred to the core principles of WSF on the Powerpoint presentation (see slide 12):

- Equity. In this context, equity means a student who has a similar need is guaranteed a level of resources the same level of need in any other school.
- Transparency. How we allocate resources to schools will be more easily understood. You will be able to calculate any school’s budget.
- Differentiation based on need.
- Predictability. The process is more predictable.
- School empowerment and flexibility. Resources will allow schools to construct a budget that meets collective bargaining and legal requirements without imposing a specific program model.
- Alignment with district strategy.

“WSF does not save money or gain us money,” Mr. McDonough continued. “It is budget neutral in terms of counting the amount of dollars available for schools. It is, however, extraordinarily powerful to ensure that resources are allocated with intent, focused where needed, and delivered on the basis of serving students.”

He further explained that other districts around the country have implemented WSF, and BPS has been able to learn from their efforts. No district does it the same way. He also acknowledged that this was not a new idea for BPS. A past task force and School Committee presentations have been made, but at the time, the district “didn’t have the appropriate environment to move forward as we do now.”

The development of this model was informed by the work of many people. A group of 60 included principals/headmasters, district leaders, city personnel, and others. There are several benefits for BPS to adopt the WSF model (see slide 14):

- dollars follow students
- one allocation method for both pilot and traditional schools
- incentives for principals to increase enrollment
- school creativity and entrepreneurship in thinking beyond a staffing allocation methodology

The basic formula for the WSF model (see slide 15) is:

Base amount/school foundation + [school’s projected enrollment X weights X per pupil base funding factor] = total school budget

Specific weights have not been finalized yet, but all students will receive a base/foundation amount (this is called the “base weight”). Those students with special needs will receive additional support (this is called “need weights”). Need weights will be applied for:

- Programs (e.g., English language learners, special education, vocational)
- Student characteristics (e.g., poverty)
- Academic performance (e.g., low, high)

The model allows the district to adjust the weights to reflect student needs and district priorities. The WSF model will be phased in over the next two years (FY12 and FY13).

Dr. Johnson noted that there were some special sites, such as the Carter School, where the WSF model might not work. They were looking at this more closely. She explained, “This represents a major shift in thinking about how you support student learning based on individual needs of the students served and tries to anticipate a cost to the school of educating students to the high standards that we want for all of the students.”

Mr. McDonough acknowledged that this type of change requires a significant amount of communication and support. They are working to have a dialogue with all principals to share how this works and create an opportunity for feedback before they are presented with a series of factors that they don’t understand.

Mr. McDonough also acknowledged that, “Some schools will receive less. Some will receive more. But the rationale for why. . . is based on the characteristics of who is in their school and what needs do they have that need to be addressed.”

School Committee Discussion and Questions

John Barros thanked Mr. McDonough and expressed excitement for the WSF model. He asked how they would account for the services that are provided by Court Street and how they could follow the resources tied to those services.

- **Mr. McDonough** explained that services that are currently budgeted centrally will remain budgeted separately (e.g., therapeutic services, occupational therapy, custodians). The district still needs to look at this. Part of a solution would be to apply similar thinking to other services. “Where are we able to continue to leverage efficiencies while improving support services, we will do so. “

John Barros asked about the kind of guidance that schools will get on how to allocate the new money associated with the weights.

- **Mr. McDonough** cautioned that it is problematic to think about the individual incremental weight as the only amount for that student. Guidance to schools on resource allocation will be incredibly important. The district has asked department heads to begin to develop this support. It will come both in the form of formal written guidance and ongoing support. On the back end, there is a review process when schools submit their budgets to ensure that the expected levels of service are provided. Money is attached to the needs of the student, so having students in two study periods, for example, is not acceptable. Dr. Johnson said, “We want to see a schedule that serves students not the adults.”

Michael O'Neill thanked John McDonough and staff for taking on this huge project. He endorsed the approach and said that he was glad that the change will involve the principals and headmasters. He expressed concern about the phase-in approach, especially as potential weights for gifted and talented students were concerned, given that there is a finite amount of money.

- **Dr. Johnson** acknowledged that due to district capacity, they would simply not be able to address all of the issues they would like to this year. They would like more time to get community input.

Mary Tamer asked how, if at all, the transition affects the amount that Boston allocates for students who choose to attend a charter school.

- **Mr. McDonough** explained that, on the whole, it does not, but that as the model plays out, the issue should be thought through more deeply to see if the new allocation model creates a significant shift in the proportions going to charter schools.

Mary Tamer asked what happens if a child leaves BPS to attend a charter and then returns to a BPS school later in the year. Does the charter retain the money?

- **Mr. McDonough** said that the money is pro-rated by the amount of days the student spends in the charter school.

Claudio Martinez said, "This is music to my ears!" and was especially appreciative of the principles upon which the WSF model is based. He asked if there were any big differentials calculating teacher salaries based on the grade level (elementary teachers versus high school teachers) or type of school.

- **Mr. McDonough** explained that traditional schools all purchase staff based on the average cost of teachers, and that the grade level served does not matter. Pilot schools purchase staff based on actual teacher salaries.

Esteniolla Maitre, the student representative on the Boston School Committee, shared her excitement about the WSF model. She said that it would be reassuring for students to know that money will follow them, especially for those who are affected by the school closures or mergers. She asked what impact of the WSF model would have on empty seats.

- **Mr. McDonough** explained that it would have a positive effect. There is a financial incentive to make sure that schools maximize the number of students that they serve, because it's the students that drive the resources.

Rev. Groover stated that he had been waiting for this moment for the past few years. "It's the right direction, the right thing to do." He is interested to learn more about the experiences of other cities in implementing this model. What have their successes been and how can WSF be tied to academic improvement, districtwide?

Before the meeting adjourned, **Chief Academic Officer Irvin Scott** shared an update on staffing. Several new principals have been appointed: **Norm Townsend** at the Ellis, **Nancy Dickerson** as interim principal at the Fifield as the school prepares to close, **Antonio Barbosa** as interim principal at the Blackstone, and **Leah Blake**, a teacher leader from the Hennigan, as principal at the Harbor School. Dr. Cabral is working with the South

Boston and West Roxbury high school complexes to develop processes for choosing who will eventually lead those schools.

Quick Links

News articles, press releases, and district materials presented during the December 15th meeting:

In the News

- 02.03.11 Boston Globe, School budget proposal would cut 250 positions
[http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2011/02/03/school_budget_proposal_would_cut_250_positions/?p1=Local Links](http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2011/02/03/school_budget_proposal_would_cut_250_positions/?p1=Local+Links)
- 01.30.11 Boston Globe Column, The transition coach,
http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2011/01/30/the_transition_coach/
- 01.30.11 Article, Horace Mann charter schools reopen education debate.
<http://www.metrowestdailynews.com/news/education/x1486248381/Horace-Mann-charter-schools-reopen-education-debate>

From BPS

- FY12 Budget Development: <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/budget>
- BPS' press release on support for student scholarships:
<http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/node/4274>
- BPS Newsletters <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/newsletters>
- BPS webpage on redesign: <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/redesign>