

**December 15, 2010**

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## Topics

Redesign and Reinvest Proposal

## Formal Action Taken

The School Committee unanimously approved the district's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan that will be submitted to the state by the end of December.

The Committee also unanimously approved the Superintendent's Redesign and Reinvest Proposal.

## Highlights from the Meeting

The meeting took place at English High School in Jamaica Plain.

## Superintendent's Report

Dr. Johnson attempted to give her report, mainly a summary of the rationale for the closings that she had previously presented, but was met with frequent interruptions, shouts, and protests. Rev. Groover sternly asked audience members to "allow the superintendent respect so that she could finish her report." Mention of Mayor Menino's name drew loud boos.

Dr. Johnson touched upon the student assignment plan, noting that BPS plans to engage the community in the process and that a new plan would be discussed in the spring "but would take several years to implement."

## Public Comment on Bullying Prevention

Three **Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC)** members said that, while they were pleased that the district is proposing anti-bullying policy, they were concerned that it focuses more on adults than on students. Students need a voice in this plan. BSAC didn't receive a copy of the plan until the last school committee meeting. They want to see more specificity, including an outline of the kind of resources schools have to provide to support the effort.

One student spoke about the bullying plan, but used it as a platform to speak against school closure, saying, "Do you really think that by merging schools and putting more kids into classrooms that will stop school bullying? (big applause)...like in prison, you put more prisoners

## Overview of the District's Plan

### Mergers

- Lee Academy/Lee Elementary (East Zone, Dorchester)
- Alighieri and Umana (North Zone, East Boston)
- Urban Science Academy/PATH (Citywide, West Roxbury)
- Brook Farm Academy/Media Communications Technology High School (Citywide, West Roxbury)
- Excel High School/Monument High School (Citywide, South Boston)

### Expansions

- Holland Elementary (East Zone, Dorchester)
- Trotter Elementary (West Zone, Dorchester)
- King K-8 (West Zone, Dorchester)
- CASH (Citywide, Hyde Park)
- TechBoston Academy (Citywide, Dorchester)
- Dorchester Academy (Citywide, Dorchester)

### Closures

- East Zone ELC (East Zone, Dorchester)
- Fifield Elementary (East Zone, Dorchester)
- Middle School Academy (East Zone, Dorchester)
- Emerson Elementary (North Zone, Roxbury)
- Farragut Elementary (North Zone, Mission Hill)
- Agassiz Elementary (West Zone, JP)
- The Engineering School (Citywide, Hyde Park)
- Social Justice Academy (Citywide, Hyde Park)

### Innovation schools/conversions

- Gavin MS—converts to UP Academy Charter
- Odyssey—to convert to Boston Green Academy
- Clap Elementary—to convert to an innovation school (not yet determined)

together, that's not going to stop violence."

### **Public Comment on the Redesign and Reinvest Proposal**

More than **70 speakers** signed up to speak. They each had two minutes to share their comments.

#### *Against the Proposal*

**Lack of data and information.** Some expressed concerns about the lack of information and opportunities to engage the community in the process.

**Concerns about equal access and opportunity.** Several voiced concerns about the impact that the school closures will have on Black and Latino families. Some felt that the impact would be disproportionately worse for these communities. One charged that the "proposed proposal would disrupt equal access" and demanded that the district present an equity analysis.

**Concerns about "corporatization" of education.** Several members of a group called the "Coalition for Equality Education" and others, such as Steve Kirschbaum from the bus driver's union, expressed concern that the plan represented an effort to privatize public education, claiming this was "class warfare" and highlighting the "disturbing national current to sell out kids' educational futures on the mantra of corporate profit." One speaker charged that Mayor Menino was only serving the "real bosses" of the city, which are the "corporate elite," which is why he went to the Chamber of Commerce rather than to the people when making his recent speech about the subject.

**City Councilman Charles Yancey** urged school committee members to vote no. He said it was good to see so many parents coming out and noted that this is not the first time we have faced closures. "We are going in the wrong direction with the Boston Public Schools. We must stop balancing the books of city government on the backs of the Boston public schools children."

**City Councilman Felix Arroyo** asked school committee members to delay a vote until a more comprehensive community engagement process could be undertaken.

**Agassiz ES parents and teachers** implored the school committee to reconsider the plan to close the school, and especially to consider the impact on the students with special needs (especially the LAB cluster and autism program). Members of the Arnold Arboretum, which has a science partnership with the Agassiz, also asked that the school committee vote no.

**Farragut ES parents** described the school as a "hidden gem" that should be kept open.

**East Zone Early Learning Center parent** spoke against the proposal.

**Alighieri ES parent** requested as many resources for the Umana as possible, noting that currently over 900 East Boston students take bus through the tunnel.

**Emerson teachers and parents** praised the school's bilingual program, questioning Dr. Johnson's understanding of the value of this program. Some suggested that the district should explore the notion of merging the Emerson with the Dearborn Middle School to create a K-12 school (much like the Quincy School), thus keeping students in the community.

**Boston Teachers Union President Richard Stutman** said it was a disgrace to meet in a hall where people have to stand in order to meet their democratic right to be heard. He stated BPS is making an irrevocable mistake to vote to close schools. "You are closing schools that work and without having gone through a deliberate process that is required. . . sending students to schools that are not any better. If the object is to improve education, you have failed miserably." He charged that the closure plan would "drive people toward charter schools, although I am not sure that will bother you." He further said that instead of closing schools, we should be

focused on the progress that schools are making. “When schools make progress, you ought to encourage more progress. . . not say you don’t care about their progress by closing the school.”

In Favor of the Proposal

**Mike Tooke from the Boston Leaders for Education and the Dorchester Family Initiative** said it is never a good thing to close schools. “I don’t know how you make decisions between schools, but what I do know is that we have a deficit. If you take the \$12 million to save closing these schools, that’s about \$200 for every child. If you take the rest of the money you will save for other changes in classrooms. . . that’s another \$200 (\$400 per child), which is money that can be spent on teaching and learning. I don’t envy you this process. You’re cutting babies in half. These are tough decision between buildings and programs that you want to develop for the whole city.”

### Discussion and Questions

**Claudio Martinez** offered an amendment to postpone the decision on the Alighieri ES until they could see exactly what the impact from charter school expansion in East Boston was truly going to be. This, he said, was a recommendation from the English Language Learner Task Force.

**The amendment failed 4-3** with Groover, O’Neill, Tamer, and Raynor voting “no” and Harris, Martinez, and Barros voting “yes.”

**John Barros** moved to amend the proposal by removing the closure of the Emerson ES to explore the idea of creating a K-12 school at the Dearborn, a suggestion offered by members of the community.

**The amendment failed 5-2** with Groover, Raynor, Tamer, Harris, and O’Neill voting “no” and Barros and Martinez voting “yes.”

**Michael O’Neill** gave his rationale for supporting the superintendent’s proposal. Although some BPS students would be affected by this decision in the short term, he felt it would improve education for all 56,000 students in the long term.

**John Barros** said that although he disagreed with portions of the proposal, namely the closure of the Emerson ES, he did support the proposal overall. He said, “We need to hear the echoes of parents not in the room. . . We are in a position where we cannot compete. I cannot recommend that all schools receive cuts because we cannot strategically manage our system. We have to right-size the district. The only way that we can stay #1 is by making sure that we manage our resources strategically.”

**Mary Tamer** said that this is about doing what’s right for all 56,000 students in the Boston Public Schools. She said that it would take all of us to collaborate and work together to make the transition successful and she hoped that the community would pull together to ensure that this happens.

**Claudio Martinez** echoed the words of John Barros and went on to say that he “had not seen in the last 25 years in the city of Boston a superintendent that addressed the most marginalized students in the city more than Dr. Johnson has.” He thanked the superintendent and Rev. Groover for keeping the focus on these students and Rev. Groover specifically for bringing about a more democratic process on the school committee. He stated several times that maybe people didn’t realize how the school committee used to be.

**Alfreda Harris** thanked Dr. Johnson for her vision and courage.

**Marchelle Raynor** shared her experience of having to close her own granddaughter’s school and noted that “there is life after closure.”

**Rev. Groover** assured the community that the school committee has listened to all of the comments shared over the last 10 weeks and thanked the superintendent for providing them with prompt answers to their questions, including the equity analysis that he requested. He realized that the public had not seen that data and those responses. He said he would make sure that it would be posted on the district's website and made available to the public.

Rev. Groover noted that the school committee would sometimes make decisions that the community disagreed with. Either way, three years ago, the mandate was to find a superintendent who was capable of accelerating the improvement that the Boston Public Schools had achieved under its previous leadership. He was pleased that they did find that in Carol Johnson. He said, I know that "Everyone wants change, but no one wants that change to be on their own doorstep. . . We are focused on making sure that there are quality schools in every single neighborhood. Change is not easy. This is just the beginning." He asked the community to "Help us. Partner with us to make education great for every child in this city."

## Quick Links

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

### *In the News*

- 12.16.2010. Boston School Committee OKs Cost Cutting Plan. *The Boston Globe*.  
[http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2010/12/16/boston\\_school\\_committee\\_oks\\_cost\\_cutting\\_plan/](http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2010/12/16/boston_school_committee_oks_cost_cutting_plan/)
- 12.16.2010. Menino Calls School Closures Difficult but Necessary. *The Boston Globe*. *Your Town*.  
[http://www.boston.com/yourtown/news/south\\_boston/2010/12/menino\\_calls\\_school\\_closures\\_d.html?p1=Local\\_Links](http://www.boston.com/yourtown/news/south_boston/2010/12/menino_calls_school_closures_d.html?p1=Local_Links)

### *From BPS*

- BPS' press release: <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/node/4159>
- BPS webpage on redesign: <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/redesign>