

## Topics

- Weighted Student Funding Proposal for FY12 (budget hearing)
- Report from the English Language Learning Task Force (school committee meeting)

## Formal Action Taken

All grants (including the \$3.5 million Race to the Top, of which Boston receives \$32 million over four years) and field trips were approved.

### **Part 1: Budget Hearing**

#### Opening Presentations

**Dr. Johnson** opened the hearing by noting that the budget is still evolving and what is being presented today is different from the original proposal of February 3 and that by March 23 there may be more modifications.

**John McDonough** and **Seth Racine** gave a presentation on the new budget, with an emphasis on Weighted Student Funding (WSF). “The budget process is not disconnected from the rest of the work in the district,” began Mr. McDonough, going on to reference the Acceleration Agenda. He noted that next year’s budget process will heavily emphasize transportation and assignment costs, while starting now, class size management is a large strategy. This involves bringing currently smaller high school classes closer to the contractual limit of thirty-one students per class.

Much of the presentation involved explanation of WSF. “It doesn’t save us money; it doesn’t cost us money . . . [It’s] equitable – that’s a dangerous word [people have different definitions of it] . . . Here’s our definition of equity: Students with similar needs, no matter where they live or go to school, receive the same resources,” explained Mr. McDonough. After explaining the basic mechanism of WSF, he described the \$6.1 million of soft landings, or cushions for schools adversely affected by the new distributions, noting that they have now unbalanced the budget and this will need to be made up through cuts outside of school budgets.

The chart on the ninth slide of the presentation lists the percent of the *difference* between a threshold reduction in budget, such as 15% that will be restored to schools in various categories. For example, turnaround schools that have reductions in budget over 15% will have 33% of the difference between their reduction and a 15% reduction made up to them. Mr. McDonough concluded by showing that about 80% of all BPS students attend schools that will have reductions of less than 7.4%, which would be the necessary budget cuts to all schools if weighted student funding were not in place.

About three-fourths into Mr. McDonough’s presentations, a group of high school students marched in, chanting “SOS, save our schools.” They stood in front of the stage and continued chanting as **Rev. Groover** tried to explain to them that they’re welcome to come, but must sign up to speak, and it’s only fair that people who came to hear the presentation be allowed to finish it. After five minutes or so, students went to sign up for public comment and Mr. McDonough finished the presentation.

## Written Questions Submitted

Q1: At the Hernández dual language school, why are the non-ELL students not given a weight as dual language learners, since they're learning in two languages and need additional instruction?

**Mr. McDonough:** We know that there is extra work that is not tied to any designation that we currently have. We don't have a separate weight for dual language learners yet, but it's an appropriate discussion to have.

Q2: How were weights examined through a pedagogical lens, in addition to a numerical one?

**Dr. Johnson:** This is a student-driven, not a teacher-driven process. The student needs drive the formula. There are weights for concentrated poverty in a school (more money for those schools that exceed the district's average of 80% in K-8, 67% in 9-12), ELL, off-track ninth graders. Schools are free to choose different methodologies to meet these needs, as long as they're meeting state requirements. We're funding the children's needs, not programs we want to each.

**Irvin Scott:** The standards don't change. The curriculum aligned to state standards, the teacher practices, assessment, PD etc. don't change [because of the formula].

Q3: What will you do when schools are overpopulated? Will the drop-out rate go up?

**Irvin Scott:** The drop-out rate is actually going down, and we will continue those efforts.

**John McDonough:** With more students in a school, there are more resources [under the WSF formula]. Right now we have underpopulated, not overpopulated schools.

## Public Comment

About fifteen speakers had signed up, though only fourteen came forward for their two minutes.

**Five** people were parents or students from **Boston Latin Academy**. They were optimistic that the new WSF formula would help out their school and wanted to express the drastic decline in physical plant and curriculum that BLA students have experienced over the last four or five years.

**Three** people were board members or parents from **Fenway High School**. They hadn't known about the soft landing and were happy to hear about it; they had originally come to voice their concern that their projected cuts were unsustainable and to explain the cost of a quality program. A parent urged the school committee to "proceed with caution," and noted that students who are excelling also have special needs.

**Two** people, a parent and **principal Margarita Muñoz**, explained that the true cost of educating students in two languages at the **Hernández** was not taken into account in the current budget. Principal Muniz wanted the adjustments made this year rather than left for a discussion for the future.

**Carolyn Kane**, the **chair of the SPED PAC** congratulated the district on the new WSF formula and thanked them for answering the group's questions and working with them throughout. Responding to a previous statement by Fenway parent, she noted that special education students are "not the lowest rung on the ladder."

A BPS teacher scheduled to speak gave his two minutes to a student representative of the group that had entered during John McDonough's presentation. **Pedro Martinez** of Fenway High School called the budget

hearing a “show... decisions have [already] been made,” and noted the 32 million dollar police station recently constructed in the city.

A **member of the public** asked about what would happen to the vacant school buildings, specifically wanting to know if they would be turned into condominiums, other forms of housing, or facilities like a museum.

A **member of an activist coalition** linked the budget process to “violent disruptions around the world” and asked people to support measures in state and national government to increase taxes on the wealthy in order to solve the budget problem.

**Peggy Weisenberg** was concerned about the “mechanistic formula.” She wanted to know whether each school will be funded adequately and what checks and balances exist to guarantee it. She brought a list of questions, including: How much time did other districts take when implementing WSF? How does the Boston formula define risk when assigning weights for at-risk students? What weights were given to poverty in other districts? Will there be any weight for concentrations of low-performing students, since that affects learning needs at schools overall? How do schools with fundraising foundations fit in? How is the formula accounting for and projecting administratively assigned students? She handed a full list of questions to the school committee as time had run out.

### **School Committee Discussion**

Members of the committee posed questions and comments to Mr. McDonough and Mr. Racine. Most of the questions were requests for more details of the calculations involved.

- **Mr. O’Neill** thanked the district for all its work and asked to know more about how this evolved in other cities.
- **Mr. Barros** offered his support for WSF and was happy to hear about the soft landings. He wanted to know more details about how they were calculated. He also wanted to know if the external support for extended day programs was counted in the 6.1 million of adjustments that need to be made.
- **Ms. Tamer** wanted more details on class size and staffing. She was concerned about sustainability and wanted to know what next year might look like.
- **Ms. Maitre** asked whether specialty schools that are currently non-vocational could be recognized as vocational because she was concerned their current soft landings were not enough. She also asked whether the buildings are owned by the city, and if so, what say would the district have in their use. She wanted to know whether the figures quoted entailed just teacher salaries or other resources the schools could use. Finally, she asked about the quality of the school food now that the food service deficit has been reduced.
- **Mr. O’Neil** seconded Ms. Maitre’s question on buildings, asking for a description of the process that would decide the use for vacant buildings.
- **Ms. Tamer** wanted to know if schools like Boston Latin Academy, which has students sitting in many study periods, are suffering from scheduling problems or budget problems.
- **Dr. Johnson** provided some historical context for the committee and audience. When she arrived at BPS, the annual budget was \$835 million, and it has gone down every year since, while costs have been going up steadily. She noted the importance of advocacy at the state and federal level and of the upcoming contract negotiations for more flexible schedules. She reassured the audience that schools are already working on taking in more students with special needs in order to have fiscal sustainability

under WSF. She informed Ms. Maitre that to be designated as a vocational institution, there would have to be a state-approved vocational program with a certified vocational teacher. She explained that all buildings belong to the city. Finally, she reiterated that resources are going down while costs are rising, and that the district is trying to distribute its limited resources more equitably.

- **Rev. Groover** assured the audience that the committee knew of no plans for the commercial use of schools buildings left vacant. He also thanked Dr. Johnson and her staff for all their work.

The public hearing was adjourned.

## ***Part 2: School Committee Meeting***

Many of the audience remained from the budget hearing. After the call to order and pledge, there were some discussions about which minutes had been approved when, and all meeting minutes were approved, including ones from public meetings that were not committee meetings. When the committee was asked if there were any objections to approving the minutes, Peggy Weisenberg stood up and requested that yea and nay votes be placed on public record and that a list of public commentators be available as well.

### **Superintendent's Report**

Much of **Dr. Johnson's report** focused on commendations and upcoming events of interests, including Rev. Groover's leadership award, the progress of the Acceleration Academies, the upcoming districtwide science fair, participation in a conference with Arne Duncan on labor/district cooperation, and grants to the Burke and UP academy. She was glad to announce that Melissa Orozco, an Orchard Garden student injured in a hit-and-run accident, was back to school. She assured the audience that she will follow up on the negative reports about the food services, while praising them for serving over sixty thousand meals a day. She introduced **Thelma DaSilva**, a new member of the district's communications department.

Dr. Johnson asked **Dr. Linda Cabral, Assistant Superintendent for High Schools**, to make announcements on new headmaster appointments. Rudy Weeks will be headmaster of the merged BFA and Media high schools at West Roxbury complex, Stephanie Sibley will lead Excel High School, and Nicole Gittens will head Urban Science Academy, also at West Roxbury. Dr. Cabral noted that all three have a mathematics background, which will assist them in using data to lead their schools. She also noted that Tanya Freeman-Wisdom will continue leading Community Academy of Science and Health, which will be relocated from the Hyde Park complex to the former Cleveland Middle School building.

### **Action Items – Grants and Foreign Filed Trip Requests**

All grants and field trips were approved. One of the grants was for 3.5 million of the Race to the Top funding. Before approval, **Mr. O'Neil** asked for more information about the grant, noting its importance. **Dr. Johnson** asked Chief Academic Officer Irvin Scott to describe the grant. **Dr. Scott** explained that it's \$32 million distributed over four years, with the request from the state that only 10-15% be spent this year in order to plan for future years. The grant will cover 32 separate projects in five broad categories:

- 1) Increasing teacher and principal effectiveness, including improvement of evaluations.
- 2) Aligning curriculum and instruction to the new common core standards and other key curriculum and instruction core work.
- 3) Supporting the turnaround efforts, mainly through innovation schools.

- 4) Promoting college and career readiness, which may mean changing graduation requirements in response to new standards for state universities developed through MassCore.
- 5) Using data to improve instruction, which requires quick access to data.

**Mr. O’Neil** urged the district to provide presentations in the future and to include measures of success. **Ms. Tamer** asked for information on the MassCore work prior to such presentations.

### **Reports on English Language Learning**

The bulk of the meeting was used to present the final report and recommendations of the ELL Task Force, co-chaired by Claudio Martinez and Claire Shaw, followed by a presentation directly from the ELL office and by Gastón Institute researchers evaluating the district’s progress. A student dance group, Ritmo en Acción, composed of many ELL students from across BPS, presented a dance. Next, a first-year student at the Newcomer’s Academy described how he went from knowing no English to being at the third ELD level after coming from Haiti this year. After commending the student presenters, the committee went through the reports.

#### ***Report of the ELL Task Force***

After acknowledging the taskforce participants, **Claudio Martinez** and **Clare Shaw** stressed that their recommendations are meant to improve the whole school system by including language learning for everyone. It’s meant to be a win-win solution not just for ELL students. Next they described the negative image of ELLs based on ideology rather than on data which left ELL students in limbo after passage of Question 2. They pointed out that America’s competitors educate their students to speak two or three languages and spoke at length about charter schools’ lack of services for ELL students, leaving this task to the district. To that end, they wanted to know when their recommendations would be implemented, how much it would cost, and who would oversee it.

The recommendations focused on BPS as a multicultural, multilingual district, improved assessment and assignment, program quality and quantity, family/community engagement, integration of special education services, data use, and accountability. In addition to details in the presentation, **Mr. Martinez** and **Ms. Shaw** noted the need for more parent advocates, professional development beyond current category training, help with enrollment and assignment, and data support for the ELL office.

Mr. Martinez and Ms. Shaw’s said, the “most important thing that we learned” was that “[complicated] issues can be addressed successfully with a diverse team of stakeholders. ... Don’t shy away from criticism of our current systems,” but invite your critics to the table and make them “real participants.” They again thanked the public and the district. They noted that “you can’t do this work without the support of a competent administrator,” and thanked **Dr. Eileen de los Reyes** as well as **Harry Smith**, their facilitator.

#### ***Report from the BPS Office of ELL***

In presenting the basic data on ELL enrollment, **Dr. de los Reyes** noted that any classroom with even a single ELL student is an SEI classroom and that it’s not easy to actually count the numbers of students receiving ESL services because pull-out and push-in delivery methods have to be accounted for school by school. She then summarized the increases in district capacity to deliver ESL services, now including 900 category-trained teachers rather than the 776 currently listed on the slides. She also suggested that the district may have finally

turned the corner on ELL drop-out rates after passage of Question 2. But “the fragility of the change” still concerned her, and she asked all the parties to this change to keep working and being vigilant for progress. “There are many moving parts, and if any one group stops, it won’t happen.”

She commended the ELL task force for their relentless focus and incisive questions, noting that it was sometimes easier to meet with the Department of Justice than with the task force because it was demanding and held her accountable. She was surprised how much operational tasks figured into her office’s work because of staffing and budget issues and thanked them for helping. Finally, she connected the work of the ELL office to the BPS vision that every graduate “participates actively in a democratic society as a responsible, courageous leader who challenges injustice.” Describing the process that a language learner goes through, she wanted people to “believe that ELLs bring knowledge [to our schools]. Our students are brilliant.”

### ***Gaston Institute***

**Drs. Miren Uriarte and Rosann Tung** outlined their plans to evaluate BPS progress in educating ELL students. The current study follows on their 2003-2006 research on the impacts of Question 2 and will provide a baseline against which to measure future outcomes. What distinguishes it from prior studies is that it will compare different types of ESL services/programs and also identify schools that have statistically significant outcomes for ELL students beyond average or expected performance levels. The researchers’ goal is to identify practices that can be implemented district-wide, and they’ll focus on schools that generate good outcomes for large ELL populations. “There are lots of opinions on what works, but not much evidence,” noted Dr. Tung. Dr. Uriarte and Dr. Tung collected and ranked evidence-based practices and will collect data on their presence in schools with good ELL outcomes. The full details, including variables used for each stage of the research, are available in the presentation included here. The final report will be available in September 2011.

### **Questions and Comments from Committee Members**

- **Ms. Raynor** was concerned about the large number of ELL students in second grade and wondered what happens in earlier grades to help them.
  - o **Dr. de los Reyes** pointed out that while students are identified as ELLs in kindergarten 0 and 1, the services don’t start until K2. **Dr. Johnson** suggested that early childhood educators need to be involved.
- **Mr. O’Neill** wanted to know how the change in ELL drop-out rates correlated to the overall change in BPS drop-out rates.
- **Ms. Tamer** was “in awe” of the work of all the presenters. She wanted to know what were the projections for ELL enrollment and how the district was preparing, and how this would factor in the task force recommendation to expand or replicate more ELL options such as dual-language.
  - o **Dr. de los Reyes** described the projections as a stable 3,000 students a year coming in with language needs, and noted that calamities like earthquakes will periodically bring in more students.
- **Mr. Barros** thought that **Dr. de los Reyes’** report was “the most complete presentation [he ever heard] from BPS,” and wanted to hear more. He was concerned that the approach was still siloed and requested assurance that all relevant departments were working together. Moreover, he still wasn’t clear on how this pertained to all of BPS, not just ELLs. He wanted to be able to apply the lessons learned from work on ELLs to the academic success of all schools.

- **Rev. Groover** was excited about the recommendations and wanted the Office of ELLs to play a more active role in family resource centers. He commended the Gaston Institute on their partnership with the district, “I don’t remember when this [kind of partnership] happened.”

## Public Comment

Six speakers presented comments. Five spoke on behalf of formal and informal groups; one was an elected official.

- 1) **Samantha Calero of Sociedad Latina** thanked the ELL task force, especially for taking into account cultural proficiency. She forwarded a set of recommendations from the organization:
  - a. Continue the ELL task force.
  - b. Invite Sociedad Latina to participate
  - c. Prioritize cultural proficiency and use the organization’s help to develop an cultural proficiency audit tool for schools to use each year.
- 2) **John Mudd** spoke on behalf of Boston United for Students, thanking the researchers and the task force. He also had recommendations to include:
  - a. Revive the Master PAC to promote parent and student involvement.
  - b. Create parent advisory groups for Level 4 turnarounds.
  - c. Replace the antiquated teacher corps diversity policy with a more ambition one that reflects the current demographics of the district.
  - d. Investigate the needs of English-speaking children of non-English-speakers.
  - e. Evaluate the range of programs and consider two-way-bilingual and other programs that used to be very popular with parents.
  - f. Address the fact that Latino students lose self esteem the longer they’re enrolled in school.
- 3) **Representative Jeffrey Sanchez (D-Boston, Jamaica Plain)** applauded the work on behalf of ELLs but noted that “we’ve been here before” and spoke of the need to “empower Eileen de los Reyes,” citing it as a past failure. He argued that it was the Department of Justice that finally forced the district to act, but that it was clear that BPS has now made ELL achievement a priority. He felt that neither the state nor the charter schools were making ELLs a priority, so “let’s make sure we stick with it.” He noted that the part of the education reform law that required charter applicants to state how they would recruit and retain ELL students has been disregarded.
- 4) **Dan Chu**, a student representative of **BSAC and Boston United for Students (BUS)** delivered the youth’s priorities for the district in upcoming contract negotiations:
  - a. Effective teacher evaluations
  - b. Extended learning time
  - c. Flexibility in teacher hiring
  - d. More music and art
- 5) The Spanish language interpreter for the evening spoke on behalf of **Reina Perez**, parent of an Engineering School student. Ms. Perez wanted to lend her support to the BUS coalitions requests for better teacher evaluations, flexibility in hiring, inclusion of parents and students in evaluation, longer school days with arts and music, and professional development for teachers. She related her daughter’s experience in losing a highly effective special education teacher who was let go during a merger due to seniority status.

- 6) **Jean Charles Bertrand**, chairman of the **Boston Haitian-American Parents group** raised concerns about Haitian students in BPS. He asked why all high school aged Haitians entering the Newcomers Academy are automatically placed into ninth grade regardless of age and prior academic experience. He wondered why there were no parent liaisons at the school who spoke Haitian Creole out of the four liaisons there, even though Haitians constituted the second largest ELL group in Boston. It was particularly problematic that there were few Haitian Creole speakers available during the special education referral process. "Haitians need to be included as part of the solution," he said. He also expressed concern about the lack of support for students who entered BPS with serious physical and emotional problems stemming from the earthquake.

After public comment, the school committee voted to go into executive session in order to discuss a litigation strategy. The public left the premises.

### Quick Links

News articles, press releases, and materials presented during the meeting:

#### *In the News*

- 03.24.11 Boston Globe, School panel ok's \$829million budget  
[http://www.boston.com/news/education/k\\_12/articles/2011/03/24/school\\_panel\\_oks\\_8295m\\_budget/](http://www.boston.com/news/education/k_12/articles/2011/03/24/school_panel_oks_8295m_budget/)
- 03.24.11 Boston Herald, 200 jobs, 9 schools lost in \$830 million budget  
[http://news.bostonherald.com/news/regional/view/2011\\_0324200\\_jobs\\_nine\\_schools\\_lost\\_in\\_830m\\_budget/](http://news.bostonherald.com/news/regional/view/2011_0324200_jobs_nine_schools_lost_in_830m_budget/)
- 03.21.11 Boston Globe, Pinching has cut 1050 city jobs  
[http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2011/03/21/pinching\\_has\\_cut\\_1050\\_city\\_jobs/](http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2011/03/21/pinching_has_cut_1050_city_jobs/)

#### *From BPS*

- FY12 Budget Development: <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/budget>
- Schedule of BPS Budget Hearings: <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/node/4319>
- Press Release on 3/23 Unanimous Approval of Budget, <http://bostonpublicschools.org/node/4344>