

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chairperson and Members
Boston School Committee

FROM: John P. McDonough
Interim Superintendent

DATE: March 19, 2015

SUBJECT: Update to Superintendent's Recommendations on School Closures

In our initial budget recommendation to the School Committee we included provisions to either close or significantly change four schools and one program. Since that time we have listened to students, families, staff, community members and School Committee members. They have expressed concerns and questions regarding the specifics of each proposal. They have both questioned the proposals themselves and have sought support and clarity about how we are supporting students that would be dislocated should the proposals be approved.

This has occurred at meetings we have sponsored with students, school staff and families of the impacted schools and programs, at School Committee sponsored budget hearings and at School Committee meetings.

The intent behind these proposals has been to take a first step in addressing key drivers that contribute to a structural imbalance in our system that, if left unaddressed, will lead to a recurring cycle of reductions throughout the district to maintain what we have. If that is our strategy, we place every school at risk and we place every student at risk. The intent has been to recognize that so long as we spread our resources too thin, we, as a school district, will not be in a position to invest in strengthening our schools and supporting our students and staff in ways that they deserve and we believe is right. We will not be in a position to meet our goal of eliminating opportunity and achievement gaps, and providing a world-class education to every student, in every school, every single day. We will not have the resources to do so.

Through this process we have moved closer to a shared understanding of what our future directions needs to be. We must have a process of engagement that represents "the new normal"

on a city-wide basis. This is not about a single school at a single point in time. It is about strategically moving from a place of vulnerability and risk to a position of strength. It will both involve and impact all schools. It will require difficult conversations. It will result in the closure of some schools. But it will be about problem-solving together in a framework that makes sense.

Tonight I am presenting modifications to the recommendations that have been previously submitted. I will address each one singly, but present them as comprehensive proposal.

Community Academy:

During this past week the School Committee and I received a recommendation from Community Academy students, families and community members that was offered as a substitute to the three options that had been previously developed by a cross-functional, district-school team. This new proposal was discussed at the meeting that occurred with Community Academy earlier this week.

Based on review of this proposal, I have concluded that it achieves the goals that had been established at the outset of meetings that started during the last school year. It provides a service model that maintains the intensity and quality of support for the students that Community Academy serves. It is both sustainable in its proposed form for 2015-2016 and is flexible enough to be adjusted based on reaching specific enrollment goals. It achieves a significantly lower per pupil cost than the current model. It builds on the strength of Community Academy and addresses its current risks. It fits nicely within the construct and guiding principles of weighted student funding: it is student-based, equitable, and transparent.

Based on this review and the advice of my team, I am recommending that the School Committee adopt the alternative model formulated by the students, families and community members of Community Academy. This will result in a per pupil allocation of \$16,894 and a total budget of \$1,351,572. Community Academy will continue to operate at its current location at Fuller Street in Jamaica Plain.

Middle School Academy:

I recommend that we expand our partnership with College Bound Middle School to serve middle school students currently served by the Middle School Academy program. College Bound MS is an existing model that we currently use to provide an effective, alternative educational setting for middle school students. By doing so, we will be positioned to strengthen our support for overage 8th graders. Additionally, College Bound is positioning itself to enhance the district's ability to service students on the full spectrum of special education disabilities, as well as students with ELD levels 1-3.

By expanding our partnership with College Bound MS, we will be able to maintain a sustainable model moving forward. The middle school program would reduce in costs from \$1.4 million projected for next year to \$542,500. By partnering with College Bound, we are able to leverage external resources to support our students. CBMS serves the same population as Middle School Academy in terms of both a combination of choice and COC seats. It currently serves 20 students (with a capacity of up to 45) in grade 7-8. The costs of the program for this school year

will increase from \$300,000 to \$330,000 to include an ESL teacher and other wraparound supports in order to position itself to serve a more diverse student population.

We will work with the provider to ensure smooth transitions to and from their home schools, as well as ensure alignment with curriculum and social-emotional supports.

West Roxbury Academy:

I recommend that West Roxbury Academy remain open for the 2015-16 school year. With the work that is beginning around the Facilities Master Plan and High School Redesign, I recommend that West Roxbury Academy, as well as all high schools, becomes part of a city-wide discussion that looks at enrollment trends, facilities, grade structure, academic performance and the appropriate number of schools needed for the students we anticipate serving in the future. It is important to note that both West Roxbury Academy and Urban Science Academy be on notice regarding the larger planning underway with respect to high school redesign and that while we recommend that WRA remain open for next year, we may, as a city, determine another path for the school in the near future.

Rogers Middle School:

I maintain my initial recommendation to close the Rogers Middle School. The school has experienced major declines in enrollment over the last three years, with over a 40% decline from 2012 to 2014. The school is projected for another 38% decline from this year to next. The enrollment has dropped from 583 in 2012 to 348 in 2014, and is projected to serve only 249 students next fall. The school is also not highly chosen, ranking 10 out of 11 in terms of families' top 3 choices for the 2014-15 school choice season. Unfortunately, the school is not viable from a programmatic or financial sustainability perspective. We should be investing our limited resources in those schools that students and families choose, rather than sustaining under-enrolled and struggling schools.

We have worked with Rogers families to offer continuity for the student population by providing every rising 7th and 8th grader with a guarantee to attend the Irving Middle School. The anticipated influx of students to the Irving, will enable us to reinvest resources in strengthening the school. Rogers students will also have the highest priority, after sibling preference, at all of the schools on their home-based choice list.

We have established two open houses at the Irving for Rogers families:

Tuesday, March 24, 2015 from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm

Tuesday, March 31, 2015 from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm

We will also be maintaining the extend day learning program at the Irving for all 6-8 students, including the 5th graders from EGLA (see below), through our partnership with Citizens Schools. We are confident that given the transformation efforts underway at the Irving, and the reinvestment of resources into the school, that Rogers students will have access to a high-quality learning opportunity at the Irving Middle School.

Elihu Greenwood Leadership Academy (EGLA):

I maintain my initial recommendation to close EGLA. EGLA is currently in its 5th year of turnaround status, and would be entering its 6th year next year. While we have seen some academic improvement in Math over the last two years, the school has not yet reached its CPI target. It has also experienced a decline in ELA over the last year. While we have seen improvements in the school culture and climate this year, we believe the students of EGLA deserve a stable, high-quality learning environment. At the two families meetings with EGLA, we had staff available to provide one-on-one support to families to help them learn about their new school options through www.discoverbps.org. Based on feedback from families, we are also proposing to create a 5th grade at the Irving for EGLA rising 5th graders. This will help to minimize their transition from 5th grade to middle school, preventing them from potentially having to attend another elementary school for grade 5 and then a middle school in grade 6. We have called each individual family to share this new information.

We are concerned by the paucity of high quality school options currently in the Hyde Park community. While Hyde Park is home to the Roosevelt K-8 School, a highly-chosen Level 2 school, the other schools in the neighborhood are Level 3 or Level 4. We believe that we need to come together as a city to develop a transformation plan for the Hyde Park neighborhood, building a process to engage families, students, staff and the community to design high-quality school offerings in Hyde Park.

Closing a school is the most difficult and disruptive action a district can take. However, delaying or not dealing with the fundamental issues that place all of our schools, and all of our students, at risk is, ultimately, more damaging. We must keep our focus on the long view, and the 57,000 students we serve each and every day.

Thank you and I look forward to discussing this updated proposal with you at tonight's budget hearing.