

BPS Policy Discussion Piece

I suggest that the inclusion committee discuss the following principles that I think should undergird our work.

Fundamental Principles regarding children with disabilities and inclusive education:

- (1) Disability resides both within the child and the environment. The way in which schools respond to differences that arise out of disabilities has enormous influence on how well children do. Some practices exacerbate disability while others minimize the negative impact of disability.
- (2) Generally, but not always, segregation and removing children from their existing school exacerbates the negative impact of disability.
- (3) Many children with disabilities need special education services to help minimize the negative impact of disability.
- (4) There is considerable evidence that some children get placed in special education that may not have a disability but have not received effective instruction.

Current Practices in the Boston (inclusive of Charters and Pilots)

- (1) Boston has some schools that practice cutting edge, highly effective, inclusive education.
- (2) However, Boston segregates far too many children with disabilities.
- (3) Parents of children with disabilities do not have equitable choices in the existing school choice student assignment system.
- (4) Some Boston Schools have minimal capacity to serve students with disabilities while others have extensive capacity.
- (5) The current placement system through its elaborate coding system operates on the erroneous assumption that disability resides solely in the child and can be reduced to an invalid "code".
- (6) The current placement system promotes segregation.
- (7) The current placement system removes the responsibility from some schools for serving children with disabilities.
- (8) The current placement system consumes considerable resources.

Proposed Principles

- (1) Parents of children with disabilities should have free choice of schools within the assignment system.
- (2) All schools, public, charter, and pilot should have the capacity to serve children with common mild to moderate disabilities and, on a case-by-case basis, students with significant disabilities. Thus, every geographical area of the city needs to offer inclusive options for students with disabilities from early childhood through grade 8. There should also be multiple options for inclusion at the high schools which serve students city-wide.

- (3) The emphasis in capacity development should be on implementing effective inclusive practice.
- (4) The primary role of the central special education office should be to support the principals in developing their capacity to serve students with disabilities.
- (5) The central office should only get involved in placements in situations where schools cannot effectively serve an individual student.