

Ideas to Help BPS's Budget (January 25, 2016)
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Suggested Changes to the BPS Budget

1. **School facilities** are not always well utilized. For the buildings that are not filled enough see if they can house things like the company that provides food for BPS students, and other related school services like central office staff. I think filling these buildings with related staff would be more popular than closing schools (and wiser until there is a finished facilities plan). Buildings for related staff might need to be closed or find new uses with this approach but this would be less disruptive for students and families as they could keep their schools.

Another option would be to offer free rent to groups that provide services to students like therapists. The school would have the convenience of therapists on-site and save money on student services costs as well. Services could be bartered for free rent or given at a discount.

2. **Transportation.** Offer families a financial incentive to take their kids to school to cut down on transportation costs. Offer those families a free t-pass for themselves and their children (if needed). Allow families to apply for schools outside their home area that are level 3 or 4 schools if they agree to provide transportation for their kids. Some families might work near a school so this could be a convenience and not a burden. For parents who have door to door service but would prefer to drive their child to school perhaps there could be a benefit for families like cash for gas each month.

Another thought is that some of the most expensive transportation costs are for homeless students that live outside of Boston but get bussed in for school. The city of Boston could partner with BPS to help those families get housing in the city.

3. Have the funding get spent in steps starting with the most **critical priorities**: The first priority would be the student funding for each individual student. This might bring in staff or consultants like a physiologist, ELL teacher or specialists. The second priority would be for each school to have a school nurse, principal, librarian, social worker, art teacher, and music teacher, etc. Some schools would also need science teachers, second language teachers, etc.. to fulfill the mission statement for the school. In some cases a full time position could be shared between two schools. The third priority would be the maintenance of buildings and the staff needed for that. The fourth priority would be for advanced work or differentiated learning. The fifth priority would be for central staff. Initiatives like testing, ELT, and expanding Kindergarten seats would come last. The important thing would be for all schools to offer the basics solidly and equitably. And then for extras to also be shared equally.
4. To **save money** areas that could have a reduction in spending could be extended learning time, testing that isn't mandated, expanding kindergarten seats, and central staff.

Also partnerships could be revisited. See which ones are providing a good value for their cost. In the case of partners who pay property tax perhaps their rates to BPS should be lowered if they are presently not paying their full amount of property tax. The other possibility is that they could pay more tax and have some of it earmarked for the BPS. Or more services could be provided. School Principals could negotiate for the services that would be the most useful for their schools.

5. Try to bring back into BPS students that are currently in **out of district placements** that are paid for by BPS. Offer the full needed services at a school that is a good fit for the student. If this works for families it could also save money.
6. Don't change the teacher to student ratio for autistic students and students with emotional impairments. These groups tend to need more support, not less. I would also offer **alternatives to ABA**. Many adult autistics that had ABA were traumatized by it. I hear parents often singing its' praises but I don't know of one autistic who recommends it. That is enough to give me pause. I would focus more on providing speech therapy, occupational therapy, digital devices like ipads, and social skills training. There are alternatives to ABA including DIR/Floortime or SCERTS. Also providing a sensory comfortable learning environment can go a long way. Eliminating noisy hand dryers in bathrooms would be one example. Also about 5-10 percent of autistics are hyperlexic (read early- often from age 2.5 to age 3) and that skill should be utilized more as a way to learn and teach. Over the years I have met three ABA specialists that have good instincts, that I trust but I think offering parents other options is best, especially if they are uncomfortable with ABA themselves.

An additional thought is that it would be great if there was an outreach to autistic adults that BPS would welcome them as part of its' diverse workforce. A group like aane.org would be a great place to start. Also to let parents know about this outreach as well. A number or parents with kids on the autism spectrum, are on the autism spectrum themselves and might be interested in employment in the schools. I think having staff who understand autism from the inside out would be a great benefit to BPS.

Policies to help reduce financial difficulties for families whose children go to BPS.

These suggestions are given since poverty often impacts educational outcomes. Instead of just dealing with the results of poverty I think it would be a better idea to also try to lower the percentage of families in Boston who are in poverty. Families who are homeless could have a priority for these suggestions.

1. Have each fine arts institution partner with BPS to offer free passes for families once a year who go to BPS. This could be paid for by the city arts budget. The plus of this is that students who don't like crowds can go on quiet days and really enjoy the arts. Free days at Museums are not ideal for all families since they tend to be very crowded.
2. Have the majority of low income housing turned from rental property to owned property. This would provide more stability to neighborhoods and properties would be better maintained because homes would be owned by residents. Groups like the Allston Brighton CDC or the Fenway CDC would be great choices for developing mixed income properties. Artists could be commissioned to add public art to these developments. This would help both new home owners and artists. Also property taxes reduction for landlords who offer fair rents would be welcome. Also have real estate developers no longer able to give money to the city (linkage fees) instead of having middle or low income units created in their buildings. The only option would be to provide those units or they can't build. This would mean that all neighborhoods would have mix of incomes. The current system makes it hard for mixed income developments to be created in rich neighborhoods and has too many low income developments in neighborhoods that need more middle income families in their communities.
3. City jobs would have a priority to families with children in Boston Public Schools. This would help families and also have more employees meet a residency requirement.
4. Have a minimum wage in place for the city of Boston. \$15.00 an hour would be ideal but

any increase would help many families.

5. Whenever possible help families increase their income, and improve their housing, and health. All city departments should have goals for directly helping the families in the Boston Public schools.
6. Have MBTA passes for students kept low. In addition offer lower cost t-passes for their families as well to help them have affordable access to better employment opportunities.

Changes to the City Budget and City Policy

1. If there is money left over from the snow removal fund at the end of winter have that money earmarked for BPS.
2. Offer barter between colleges and high schools to address the fact that they don't pay their full property taxes. Essentially doing a barter for some services. Some examples would be high school students taking classes to earn credits towards a BFA. This is already in place in a number of colleges but more partnerships/barter could take place. The other alternative would be for colleges to pay more in taxes and have some of it earmarked for BPS.
3. Have all city departments have one of their goals to directly help BPS families. Have funds for health and human services target students and families in the Boston Public schools for instance. Another example might be for the Mayor's Commission For Persons with Disabilities to address the needs of students with disabilities in Boston. Perhaps they could help students with career and college readiness. Also I personally would love for there to be a change in the volume of hand dryers in public bathrooms in Boston. Noisy ones impact children and adult with sensory sensitivities. They are painful to hear.
4. Overlap the goals for different departments. In working with the health and wellness department have a goal be for more residents use the MBTA. Also to increase safe bike lanes for bicyclists. These changes would be a plus for lowering pollution which would then help the health of Boston residents. Also to make sure that new companies coming into the city like GE don't add new pollution. Don't offer tax breaks for companies that will hurt the environment.
7. Recently libraries in Boston have been removing books from their shelves to make room for computers. It would be great if at times like those the books could be offered to the libraries in BPS.
8. Increase money in the BPS budget. Get the extra revenue from groups that are underpaying like colleges, and businesses. Also some money could come from the city's free cash flow. Another source of money could be selling city property.

I'll keep brainstorming and would love to have suggestions too: lisa_jeanne_graf@msn.com