

Suggestions for the Boston Public Schools Budget for 2020-2021

Lisa Jeanne Graf, written May 4, 2020

Redistributing funding to be more equitable, and end tracking.

Offer Comparable funding at each school:

- for a guaranteed foundation budget. This idea is well developed in the BEJA pledge ([link](#)).
- for additional funding for specific student needs through weighted student funding.
- For the Henderson model for inclusion - two teachers and a para professional
- for programs like the Boston Debate League and other strong partnerships
- for extracurriculars

Cost Savings would come from:

- Only offering a number of seats during school enrollment that match enrollment projections. Schools would be able to have enough seats to fully fund a school under the current system. If enrollment was higher than expected a wait list would be created and students could get seats in schools that have additional room.
- Filling seats through wait lists in close to real time. This would encourage more new BPS families to enter the district and keep other families from leaving the district
- Having two small elementary schools merge to be one K-8 or K-6 school. This could make it easier to have a foundation budget for all schools. There could be a two school leader model instead of one principal. Having a full time nurse at each building would be recommended.
- Sharing fund-raising between schools. One option way to achieve this goal would be for any fund raising over \$10,000 would go into a general fund that would be shared with all schools equally.

Funds could be reinvested in:

- Fully funded school budgets
- School Partnerships
- Before and After school programming

Offer Excellence for All, for all 4th-6th grade students and end the Advanced Work program:

- Merge the best aspects of the two programs, and make sure the program is accessible to all students and at all schools. Also the Excellence for All curriculum would include content that would align with the current exam school curriculum.

Cost Savings would come from:

- Eliminating the terra nova test for Advanced Work and related testing costs.
- Eliminating a test for the exam school, testing, and costs for test prep

Funds could be reinvested in:

- Offering access to Excellence for All in all 4-6 grade classrooms
- Providing all schools with a library and a librarian.

Supporting students without Homes:

- Currently BPS receives funds to support students without homes. A good part of this money does not go to housing costs.
- Reevaluate if there are times when funds could be better used directly for housing than for supports from not having housing.

Cost Savings would come from:

- Transportation costs of transporting students who live outside of Boston to their schools.

Funds could be reinvested in:

- Paying rent for a home for the student and their family near their school so transportation would not be needed (if this would be welcome change for the family).
- helping students who live in Boston gain a home, and not just access to a shelter.
- Continuing needed supports for students who are without a home.

Supporting Students with I.E.P.s, and 504s and students who are learning English as a second Language: (Note: some students require accommodations and curriculum for both needs.)

- End the practice of high school applications for all schools including pilot schools.
- All schools would have inclusive classrooms including high schools.
- more support would be available in exam schools for SPED populations. There are not inclusive classrooms in the Exam schools. This is an equity issue.

- Where possible cut down on school percentages throughout the district where more than 30% of students in a school have 504s or I.E.Ps. The enrollment process should offer an equal percentage of SPED seats for all schools.
- provide more specialized seats for SPED and ELL students in more neighborhoods so there is no longer a need to have overlays for SPED and/or ELL students. Each student would have various options available in their neighborhood.
- Offer alternatives to ABA for families who prefer other options for their autistic children. ABA teachers could be trained in, and offer programs like floortime, as well as counseling, and teach social skills (where social skills are taught like a second language- autistic and neurotypical social skills are very different and the differences need to be taught and understood by both groups).

Cost Savings would come from:

- Offering options to ABA for families who are not comfortable with this offering. Although parents are often encouraged by doctors and educators to use ABA autistics are very against this practice. ABA instructors could be retrained to take on other roles at BPS.
- Money saved on transportation from having more ELL and SPED options closer to home.
- Cutting down on door to door service is reasonable as long as it is voluntary, and appropriate for the student, and any benefits to cost savings go directly into the special education budget.

Funds could be reinvested by:

- ELL funds could partially be used to offer more dual language schools. Ideally all schools could offer this option for students to be fluent in two languages if they had the interest and ability.
- Where possible move students from sub-separate classrooms into seats in an inclusion classroom. Inclusion would become the default option for SPED students. Sub-Separate placement would be the last resort for classroom assignment.
- increasing student weights for autistic students as well as students with emotional impairments. These weights were lowered in a past budget and with additional funding the weights could be increased, allowing for better teacher student ratios.
- Teaching students in ways that build on strengths. One example would be using reading to improve vocabularies for autistic students who are hyperlexic and can read as early as age 2. Another example would be allowing students who have difficulty writing to type or use speech software to type (like Dragon software) so that the focus could be more on learning to write and not on how the writing is

created. Perhaps some of these approaches are being used in some classrooms already.

- Improve classrooms through Build BPS to be sensory friendly to autistics and other students with sensory sensitivities. Remove fluorescent lights or purchase light covers. Another lighting option would include a number of LED floor lamps. In addition some eyeglasses could be purchased that minimize the effects of fluorescent light. Also to not have air hand dryers (too loud) or automatic flush toilets (too startling).

Changes worth considering for the district moving forward:

- Update schools start times to allow for high school students to start school later, cut down on long bus rides due to rush hour, and only minimally affect family schedules. http://ljgraf.com/BPS/pragmatic_proposals.pdf If extended school days were ended there could be additional savings to the transportation budget.
- It would be good to add resources to support student safety plans when needed. There is currently an unfunded mandate to strengthen safety plans at schools when they are not working. If there were funds available from Safe and Welcoming Schools or SelWell for additional supports when needed, that would be helpful.
- Additional bus monitors
- To reach the goal of funding more school counselors BPS could hire less school police officers. Question: what are the salaries of Police officers, and counselors? Also Sel Wel staff could be reduced, or some of those staff could have positions at a school as school counselors instead. For students with behavioral challenges who have ABA services, counseling services could be offered instead.
- Live Streaming all BPS meetings (and not just school committee meetings) would make it easier for more families to be informed and to contribute. Also having a stenographer create closed captioning would increase access for those with disabilities and make translations into other languages easier.

City Budget suggestions

- There could be a cap on overtime for city employees. This might mean that more city employees would need to be hired, but that in itself would be a positive-allowing more Bostonians to have jobs that pay decently. Any savings could be put in the BPS budget.
- New Market Tax credits could partially fund Build BPS.
- Have one priority for city jobs to go to BPS parents to increase wealth for those families.
- Provide free wi-fi throughout the entire city.

COVID specific suggestions

While students are at home spending some money on some items that are not digital could be a positive emotionally for students. When things are tough having something special can make a big difference, and make one feel cared for. Some possible items could be:

- For students with sensory needs offering weighted blankets would be wonderful.
- Coordinating library or gifted books with students would be appreciated through the mail or bus drop offs for students already receiving food.
- lap harps are an easy way to create music as they come with paper sheets that you lay under the strings to show how to play songs. They sound lovely too.

<https://www.lap-harp.com/melodyharp.htm>