

Build BPS: A Mom's Counter Proposal

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School Repairs and Builds

Current Plan

After a building is closed for construction it not guaranteed the school for the departing students.

Recommendation

A closed building is guaranteed for that group of students and staff unless they prefer another building.

Bidding on Schools

Current Plan

Now all new buildings, and closed buildings are bid on by schools to determine who will get the buildings. The school that is chosen is one that submits the best proposal.

Recommendation

That this part of Build BPS would be removed completely. If more than one school wanted a new building, then the schools that have buildings in poor repair or have inadequate spaces for their student's learning needs, would get a higher priority. Also schools with high needs populations would have a higher, not lesser priority. Other priorities to be considered would be schools that were given less resources in the past, to address past inequities.

Swing Space

Current Plan

There is not a plan for swing spaces for current and future building construction and repairs.

Recommendation

BPS would secure swing spaces large enough to keep whole school communities intact where and when needed.

Specialized Programs

Current Plan

Schools with applications are not required to add specialized programs even if though it is in their pilot contracts. These schools would have a better chance winning a bid for new buildings if they offered to add specialized programming as part of their proposal.

Recommendation

Applications would be removed from all schools except the exam schools. The exam schools would change their exam to reflect what is taught in BPS and also measure what skills are needed to thrive in the exam schools.

Specialized programs would be added to all schools equitably and added grade by grade to not be too disruptive. This would cause minimal disruption at schools and provide more equal resources between schools.

Middle Schools

Current Plan

The BPS plan for removing middle schools creates new K6 schools & new 7-12 schools. Over time this might cause K-8 schools to lose enrollment which could push the district to change those schools to K-6 schools. This is a negative for families who love the K-8 model.

Recommendation

Make sure that there are an equal amount of K-8 and K-6 schools in the district as well as an equal amount of 9-12 and 7-12 schools (with a similar number of seats) in the district. This will allow many options for students and stabilize enrollment at schools. Some 7-12 high schools could also choose to offer equal enrollment for both 7th and 9th graders. If this was done at the exam schools, more seats would be available for students, and there would be more options for students as well.

High Schools

Current Plan

Build BPS talks about the need to consolidate schools because high schools are not fully filled.

Recommendation

One idea would be for High Schools to offer preschool classes (with a separate entrance). This could be a temporary solution for expanding K1 seats in the district and filling high schools. Long term BPS needs to have space for all the elementary students currently in the system. If there are quality options families will remain in the system. Swing space that is created for current school builds and repairs, could later have a use of providing more seats for elementary students when they reach middle school or high school age.

Neighborhood Options

Current Plan

The plan is for schools to be located near to where the highest populations of students currently live.

Recommendation

All neighborhoods should have access to schools for all age groups even if their school populations are low. All neighborhoods deserve to be welcoming for residents at all the times in their lives. Not providing schools to all neighborhoods will make some neighborhoods less welcoming to families. Families are a big part of what makes a neighborhood thrive and schools being available is part of why a family would choose to settle in a particular neighborhood.

School Assignment

Current Plan

The amount of school seats for each neighborhood would reflect the current school age populations. This is a movement towards neighborhood schools which will increase segregation.

Recommendation

School seats for all age groups would be equally distributed throughout Boston so that all home addresses would have an equitable amount of school seats available, reasonably nearby at similar rates. School assignment would be altered so that all schools have a mix of students from enough neighborhoods to not be segregated.

1. All students would have an equal number of seats to choose from. Also, all families would have the same percentage of high and low tier seats to choose from.
2. All students would have to choose and rank all schools in their choice list in order of preference when choosing a school.
3. The number of seats that each student would be competing for needs to be decided on also. The goal should be to choose an amount that would enable a student to be able to find a placement that would be a good fit, and to also increase diversity for the district.
4. Inclusion would be available in most schools in the district. ELL students would be in more schools including more dual language schools. Most ELL and SPED students would go through the lottery, increasing equity.

Community Engagement

Current Plan

Proposals are offered by BPS for specific buildings and then school communities need to fight hard to have these proposals updated to fit the actual needs and wishes of the school communities.

Recommendation

BPS would have conversations with school communities **first** to see what they prioritize for their school. It might be changes to make the building provide a better environment for students on I.E.P.s. It might be to grow to a K-6 or K-8 with a tall addition to the side of their building or adding a new story. It might be to pair with another school to become a K-6 or K-8 with two buildings. Or a school might want repairs and new paint more than a new building or they might want an updated playground. Basically, community engagement needs to be the starting point, and remain an important part moving forward. **These schools belong to the families of Boston and that needs to be remembered.**

Seats for the various grades

Current Plan

There would be less seats available in Middle School and in High School because so many students leave the district at those ages.

Recommendation

The seats in the upper grades would be the same as the lower grades. I recommend this approach as it is easier to find uses for extra space than to scramble to build buildings if you are unprepared.

School funding from enrollment

Current Plan

When Carol Johnson was superintendent, she increased seats for popular schools. This impacted less popular schools, and made their enrollments diminish over time.

Recommendation

BPS would think carefully about how many seats each school has so that all schools have a chance to thrive. If there are more seats available than can be filled, then that makes it possible for one school to have higher enrollment than another. If the seats available more closely matched the students applying, then there could be the possibility that all schools could be fully enrolled. The budgets need to be stabilized from year to year so either the funding needs to solidify, or the enrollment of students needs to. To accomplish these goals, when each building is considered for updating have a plan for how many seats will be available. There could be a check off list like the following:

1. How many seats for the whole school so that it can thrive in the district? Make sure that throughout the district there are not a lot more seats, than can be filled.
2. Of the seats which percentage will be ELL, General Ed, sub separate, and inclusive seats? Make sure that inclusive seats are the same percentage throughout the district.
3. Any families not getting placement could get seats through the wait list process. All schools that have additional room at their schools can have wait list seats available.

Inclusion

Current Plan

To not increase inclusion seats in the middle and high school grades.

Recommendation

Inclusion seats would be expanded in the high school and middle grades to have the same percentage of seats as in the elementary grades.

School Sizes

Current Plan

To build large schools with 4 classrooms per grade

Recommendation

That any large schools are in a location that would easily allow for students in other neighborhoods to attend so that it doesn't just become a school for a neighborhood with a large student population, increasing segregation. Schools with 3 classrooms per grade might be a better choice for most new schools to not negatively impact school assignment.

Also, in the district are many small schools. At some point it might be worth thinking about using some of those buildings for preschool seats. The small size of the buildings might work well for that age group.

An Intertwined Issue - Affordable Housing

Current Plan:

In Boston there is not an over-reaching goal to have an equal amount of affordable housing in all neighborhoods.

Recommendation

Have a commitment from the city to add more affordable housing to neighborhoods with the least and keep on doing this until the whole city has an equal amount of affordable housing units in all neighborhoods.

More ideas are also on my website under the heading of Build BPS:

<http://ljgraf.com/Bio.html>

I welcome feedback on Build BPS at lisa_jeanne_graf@msn.com
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