

A “Fenway Mom’s Proposal”

Presented to External Advisory Committee on School Choice, Oct 10, 2012

I created three proposals but on fine tuning them, I came to the conclusion that one of the options wasn’t viable and that two of them could be combined. So I will be discussing just one proposal that I will call a “Fenway Mom’s Proposal.”

This proposal offers reasonably equitable access to quality schools in Boston. Also Included are suggestions for improving academics to address quality. This plan offers a family a choice of at least 4 quality schools, one dual immersion school, and one inclusive school. My goal was for each family to have good options to choose from and to bring quality as near as possible for all families.

For this proposal:

Each family would have a priority zone and would have at least 3 priority schools. These would be the schools closest to their home and/or walk zone schools (schools a mile from the family’s home). 50% of these schools would go to families in the priority zone. This number could be increased if families from outside of the priority zone did not take the seats.

Also each family would have free travel schools.

These free travel schools would include schools that are more than 1 mile from a family’s home address and include:

- one dual immersion school
- one inclusion school
- at least 1 additional quality school that is closest to the family’s house.
- schools that are 1 mile or less if the neighborhood isn’t safe
- one or more schools might also be included to provide enough seats for the students who do not go to the “priority schools”.
- a number of poor quality schools, which would not be more than one third of the family’s choices
- The current city wide schools

First a family would be assigned three priority schools. Next quality schools would be added until 2/3s of the family’s options would be quality schools. These quality schools would be the closest quality schools to the family’s home. If the family’s choices did not include an inclusion school, the closest inclusion school would be added. If the family’s choices did not add a dual immersion school, a dual

immersion school would be added. If there are a number of language options available then the family could choose which language they would prefer. They would get the closest school in the language of their choice.

With this approach families in neighborhoods with poor schools would get “quality schools” added to their options until the percentage was at least 66%. Schools could also be added to ensure that there would be enough seats available for everyone. Since this plan does not give 100% of the spots to the priority zone, a certain percentage of students would be assigned from their free travel zone.

For fairness all families would have 1 third of their choices be the closest schools of poor quality. A school might be added to the family’s choices that is poor quality to keep this percentage in place. In the future the 2 thirds quality 1 third poor quality formula could be shifted. Ideally all schools will offer quality shortly and this part of the proposal can be removed. The city wide schools would not be part of this formula as all students would have access to those schools.

In addition all families could apply to any school in the city if they were willing to take care of transportation costs. This would fall under “outside of the priority zone” spots. As this option will also be available to all families, it would not affect the formula for quality and poor schools either.

Next I will discuss the priorities for this lottery.

Priorities would be given in the following order:

1. Sibling preference (including schools outside of the free travel zone and priority zone if the parent was willing to provide transportation)
2. Priority Zone
3. The closest quality school or closest specialty school (like a dual immersion school or an inclusive school).
4. The second closest quality school or closest specialty school.
5. A school where the family was willing to provide transportation.

If a school needs to be filled (not enough kids have applied to it) then 50% would be assigned randomly to families from their free travel zones.

Continued on back

Next I will discuss a few additional items.

Grandfathering would continue to grade 5, then could continue with parents providing transportation, or kids arriving to school by a t-pass that the Boston Public Schools would provide.

Transfers between schools could be done by parents choosing to do a school swap with another parent.

In addition to these ideas for assigning students I have **recommendations for improving quality**.

My main recommendations are the following:

First create more dual immersion schools. This amount should be enough so that most students learning English could learn in this setting. The languages these schools would offer would reflect the needs of different communities.

Second create more inclusive schools. This amount should be enough so that all Special Education students that can thrive in an inclusive environment would have one available.

Third offer differentiated learning for both addressing student strengths and weaknesses. Most schools are going in this direction currently. Right now it seems to be done primarily to address student's weaknesses and address them. I think this needs to be broadened so that kids can have deeper instruction in areas of strengths or are able to take

a class with the next grade level. This would be a great motivator and be fair to more students. This could be done at all schools so all students would have the option to do advanced work.

My hope is that with these proposals more Special Needs Parents and English Language Learner parents will be able to go through the lottery and not need to be assigned by the Boston Public Schools. It would be more equitable if more parents could make choices in the schools that their children go to.

Additional quality improvements should also be added. Other plans have made excellent recommendations in areas that are not my expertise. But 4 more suggestions I would add to the mix would be:

1. Offer better student teacher ratios
2. Improve the libraries with more books- classics, books that are interesting, beautiful and fun.
3. Offer specialty schools that build off a schools current strength's and partnerships. One example would be creating an Arts Elementary school at the Tobin School or a Music School at the Quincy School in the style of the Conservatory Lab Charter School in Boston.
4. New schools could be created in underserved neighborhoods. To keep costs down the schools could be small. Or they could be in neighborhoods with less expensive real estate but close enough to be a walk zone school for that neighborhood.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to hear suggestions for improving this proposal and to answer questions.

Lisa Jeanne Graf
lisa_jeanne_graf@msn.com
617-536-0131