

A Framework for Addressing Quality

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The current Mission Statement of the Boston Public Schools is the following:

"As the birthplace of public education in this nation, the Boston Public Schools is committed to transforming the lives of all children through exemplary teaching in a world-class system of innovative, welcoming schools. We partner with the community, families, and students to develop in every learner the knowledge, skill, and character to excel in college, career, and life."

Currently the mission statement for Boston Public Schools sounds good. But since some schools offer more and better options than others it doesn't ring true that all students have similar resources to develop "the knowledge, skill, and character to excel in college, career, and life."

It seems like the Boston Public Schools are moving towards a more student centered model with a student weighted funding formula and more use of differentiated learning for addressing student difficulties in learning.

I am thinking that some new language could be added to the mission statement like the following:

"Our approach to teaching is student centered. A plan for learning will be created that is specific to your child. Programs that are available are inclusive special needs services, dual language instruction, English as a second language instruction, and differentiated learning to address learning differences as well as to challenge accelerated learners. We will work with where the student is now and challenge them to their highest levels."

I think parents would be more willing to take a chance of lower performing schools if the following changes happened:

1. More Dual Immersion schools were created to teach most of the students that are learning English as a second language.
2. More Inclusive schools were created to teach all of the special needs students that would thrive in an inclusive environment.
3. Each school would offer some form of differentiated learning for accelerated learners.

4. Each school would offer differentiated learning for learning differences as well.
5. Teachers would be trained to be able to offer differentiated learning.
6. Extracurricular offerings would be similar from school to school. More offerings would be added at the schools that have less than the current average.
7. Arts offerings should be comparable as well. More offerings would be added at the schools that have less than the current average.
8. Gym offerings would be comparable as well. If the facilities don't have a pool or fancy offerings the gym teachers would be creative with options like dance, judo, yoga, weight lifting and gymnastics, etc..
9. The New School assignment should make it easier for families to get their child into a school that will be a good fit. If there are overlays this should make the process easier, not more difficult. Also a child with a 504 plan should not have to wonder if they need an IEP to get into a school that is a good fit for them, or if they would have better luck with the general lottery.

As the new assignment process is working on creating equitable access to quality schools I think there needs to be some mechanism that puts into the choice process the family's beliefs about what quality means to them. For one family a partnership with Boston Ballet might be huge, or the school climate in another school might make it the ideal fit for their child.

Since each family has a different definition of what quality is I think that there should be a percentage of spots available citywide to families interested in undersubscribed schools that are willing to take care of transportation costs. This would not take spots away from communities that want those spots. They would only be available if there was the capacity for it and the interest. But it is one way to increase choice, let parents define quality more, and also be a cost savings.

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10. Meetings between parents and the BPS would take place addressing how to have schools meet the needs of the various communities that will go to them. Each school should reflect the communities' needs and aspirations for their children. Suggestions on how to improve the schools would be discussed. Then changes would happen with these suggestions as a real starting point. This is another example of parents being able to define what quality means to them.

11. One suggestion I was given was having BPS use the LEAN program like Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center did. It is an interesting way to save money and increase efficiency. Saving time and money would help achieve the rest of these goals.

Although a number of these ideas have been suggested before it seemed like there needed to be a framework that quality improvements could be organized under. I think "Student Centered Learning" is a framework that could encompass various quality improvement ideas and that could address the goals and aspirations of most families in Boston.

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

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