QUEST Recommendations Regarding School Assignment Plans

Over the last year, Boston has undertaken the task of examining and more fully understanding our school assignment system. We have learned much about how school assignment works and about the many factors that influence the educational opportunities of all our children. Thanks to Mayor Menino, Boston Public Schools and the External Advisory Committee for leading this difficult and time consuming task.

Twenty-three years ago, when the current 3-zone school assignment plan was put in place, Boston was a different city than it is today, and our systems must change as we do. In our attempt to create vibrant and high quality schools in all our neighborhoods, we cannot ignore Boston's unique history and challenges: historic and lingering racial and economic segregation, and a school system that is even more segregated than our city demographics. We must confront these divisions of race, class and neighborhood as we create a new dialogue that focuses on increasing opportunity for all children, regardless of their personal circumstance or location. It is only through deliberate understanding and intention that we can be the city we envision ourselves to be - vibrant, diverse and unified.

As members of QUEST (Quality Education for Every Student), a recently formed grassroots organization of BPS parents, we are aligned with many concerned parents and groups in wanting to create a Boston that offers opportunity to all our children through high quality schools. We evaluate and make recommendations about the proposed assignment plans through this framework. Our work has led us to endorse the following position.

Closer to Home vs. Equal Access to Quality Schools

One of the primary challenges facing the school assignment process is families' desire to send their children to schools close to home *and* to be assured that their children have access to excellent schools. Given our city's demographics, there are factors that make it difficult to accomplish both of these interests at the same time. These include capacity issues as not all neighborhoods have schools and not all schools have enough seats to accommodate all children in the neighborhood. The highly variable quality of schools across the city is also a factor. QUEST believes that access to quality must take precedence over proximity because the convenience of a school close to home is not equal to all children's right to access a high quality education.

Some have posited that quality can be improved by enabling children to attend schools closer to home, since families will then be more deeply invested in that school. There is no evidence to support this hypothesis. In fact, in many of Boston's lowest performing schools, more than 75% of students are walk zoners, e.g. the King, Winthrop, Higginson/Lewis, Ellis schools (see *School by School Walk Zone Percentages*, attached). Furthermore, many families are highly invested in their current schools, regardless of how close to home they are.

All plans BPS currently proposes bring students closer to home, decreasing the average distance traveled and increasing the likelihood of attending schools with one's neighbors. In addition, if quality improves at more schools in the city, there will be natural movement towards limiting travel. However, the question remains: How can Boston assure all children a fair and equal chance to attend a high quality school?

Which Assignment Model?

The currently proposed models offer two basic alternatives: a zone based plan and a plan based on a family's address. QUEST believes that the modified 11-zone plan would do more harm than the current plan and the Home Based alternatives for a number of reasons. It divides the city, separating neighborhood from neighborhood and splits some neighborhoods in two. Second, while complete access to quality is ensured in some zones, others have only very limited access (Zone 2 and Zone 5 with 100% and 10% Tier 1 schools, respectively). These extremes would likely worsen over time, with families with greater resources choosing higher quality zones or abandoning lower zones with lower quality, leading to greater housing segregation in our neighborhoods (see *Letter by Harvard Associate Professor of Education Meira Levinson*, attached). In addition, zones become confusing when families are allowed to cross boundaries via walk zone preference. Finally, zone lines on a map are inflexible and hard to adjust as school quality changes over time.

QUEST believes that the Home Based models are a more creative approach that have the potential to meet both the goals of equity and closer to home. The intentional design of their choice menu ensures that all students have at least a chance of attending a high quality school. The model also makes schools' quality measurements (tier levels) easily apparent to all families and holds the system visibly accountable for school improvement. The Home Based models allow for flexibility over time, adjusting to the changing quality of particular schools as well as changes in the system of assessing school quality. As schools improve, the model also provides practical incentives, via less need for bus transportation, as schools improve.

For these reasons, QUEST suggests that Boston adopt a Home Based assignment plan with the following adjustments.

Adjustments Needed for the Home Based Plans:

Equitable Baskets

The great strength of the Home Based plans is that there is an attempt to offer all students access to high quality schools. Some families will have far greater access to quality than others under the current configuration of baskets, however. This is for two reasons. First, the tier configuration allows families two (or three) schools from tier 1, four (or six) from tier 1 *or* 2, and six (or nine) from tier 1,2 *or* 3, instead of a basket with a fixed number of schools in each tier. This configuration results in some families having

many more tier 1 or tier 2 schools and some families having far fewer.

The second inequity in the configuration is that schools are added as part of one's walk zone, with geographically advantaged families having additional tier 1 and 2 schools added. At the same time, for those in so called "quality deserts," the plan adds tier 3 and tier 4 schools. This important difference affects a student's chances of getting into a high quality school (see *Comparison For Home Based Plans*, attached).

The seat capacity in each school and tier is also of concern. Two families might have an equal number of tier 1 or tier 2 schools in their basket, but the number of *actual* seats and the competition for them might be quite different. This is especially true in certain neighborhoods, where many lower quality schools will be in many people's baskets.

Several adjustments will mitigate these inequities. One suggestion is that a student's basket include a fixed number of schools (for example, three schools in tier I, three in tier 2, etc.) or the baskets could account for population density and number of seats available. Another adjustment that some EAC members have suggested is a preference given to those in the lowest socioeconomic brackets with the least access to quality schools.

No Walk Zone Advantages

As geographically based plans, the Home Based models achieve the goal of placing students in schools closer to their homes. Adding a walk zone priority to the geographic privilege of living near high quality schools, however, subjects students to "double jeopardy" if they live in areas with few quality schools.

Although a presentation to the EAC on January 14th by Dr. Tayfun Sönmez of Boston College indicated that an average of 47% of students in the city were walk zoners, this only took into account first round data, and didn't differentiate by demand. In fact, examining a school-by-school breakdown shows that many schools have walk zone percentages in the 60 to 90% range (see *School by School Walk Zone Percentages*, attached). Changing the processing order to increase the number of students in the walk zone could push many schools significantly further into the 80 to 90% range.

In an effort to provide more seats to walk zone students, BPS has recommended going to a new algorithm of assigning 25% of seats first to walk- zoners, 50% to walkers or non-walkers, and 25% to walkers. But as Peng Shi and Parag Patak noted in their paper *Simulating Alternative School Choice Options in Boston*, "The new processing order gives more advantage to walkers than non-walkers." This is clear when looking at a school with an even number of walkers and non-walkers applying. The net result would be approximately twice as many walk zoners as non-walk zoners assigned (see *Proposed "Compromise Method,"* attached). If the intent is to provide equal access to quality schools, then keeping a walk zone privilege negates this access for those who lack quality seats (or any seats) in their neighborhood, those being administratively assigned, and those applying after the first round.

As a result, QUEST feels that if either Home Based options is adopted, any walk zone priority must be eliminated.

A Robust Quality Metric

The EAC has recognized that the measure of quality currently being used, three quarters MCAS data, one quarter MCAS growth data, is limited and doesn't take into account the many factors that determine school quality. The BPS must develop a multi-faceted quality index to assess schools. In addition to test and growth data, this index should include, but not be limited to: facilities information; the availability of academic and enrichment programs; student, teacher and principal retention rates and evaluation information; student/teacher/family feedback via school climate surveys; safety information; and funds raised through grants and fundraising via parent councils and/or other support groups at schools. This information should be made available to all families for the purposes of school selection and ranking. (See *Quality Task Force Recommendations of 2004* and findings of others, e.g. *"An Examination of the Oklahoma State Department of Education's A-F Report Card"* for suggestions for a quality metric.)

QUEST proposes that by January 2015 this new and robust standard quality metric replace the current measurement.

Middle School Pathways

The Middle School Pathways aspect of the proposed plans has received little attention and research. Though designed to create predictability for families through eighth grade, the proposed plan locks students into schools. Families could no longer choose schools based on particular values, programming, enrichment or quality. Provisions need to be made to allow families access to non-pathway schools. Until more research has been done to fully understand the consequences of such a plan, it should not be implemented.

Special Education and English Language Learner Overlays

Though attempting to limit travel time for Special Education and ELL students, the two overlays must be carefully monitored to ensure equity of access to high quality programs.

Regarding the addition of bilingual programs, Special Education strands and inclusion schools, careful consideration must be given to the location of these programs, ensuring that they are placed in areas with the most need and the least access to current quality programs. Special attention should be given to ensure that socio-economically disadvantaged populations within these subgroups are equally served. In addition, ELL programs must be flexible as demographics change.

Finally, regarding the establishment of new two-way bilingual programs, we strongly advocate reinstating the state recertification program for two-way bilingual teachers, which was eliminated as a result of the Unz Initiative of 2002.

Implementation, Accountability and Mitigation

As with any new initiative, implementation and follow up are crucial to its success. Implementation must be done with a careful eye towards supporting families during the transition and special attention must be given to families with the least access to technology. In addition, because many questions remain about how families choose schools, further research should be done and that research should be incorporated into the assignment system over time.

There needs to be an annual evaluation of the assignment plan that includes thorough and public data collection, clear measures of access and equity, and quality improvements. In addition to an annual report, an independent body must monitor the success of any plan.

In the review process, special attention must be paid to the effects and trends of the assignment plans on students by geography, socio-economic status, race and ethnicity. The effects on ELL and Special Education populations must be evaluated as well, including by race and socio-economic status within these subgroups. Due to the overwhelming evidence that integration by socio-economic status in schools has great transformative power, there should be a continued exploration of interventions to encourage socioeconomic integration. (See *Why Growing Concentrated Poverty Dooms School Reform*, attached).

Long Range Capital Plan and Budget Transparency

A great success of this assignment process has been its transparency and sharing of data. This trend should continue, particularly as it applies to the capital plan and budget.

The assignment process has highlighted the many challenges Boston faces regarding seat capacity in certain neighborhoods: an abundance of seats in some neighborhoods and a dearth in others. A long range, transparent capital plan needs to be developed in conjunction with the data uncovered by the assignment process (demographic data, seat capacity, Special Education needs, English Language Learners needs). These long-range plans need to be developed, and shared, with the broader community.

In addition, it's clear that school quality, and the maintenance thereof, is affected significantly by budget constraints, both in allocation of resources and through the current budgeting process. The year-by-year changes cause great instability for schools, their families and potential applicants. Once schools achieve a certain level of success, they are often penalized by the subsequent removal of resources, and their ability to sustain success is jeopardized. This cycle needs to be stopped through better long-range planning and transition strategies for when funds expire.

Conclusion:

As community members who have closely followed the work of the EAC, QUEST appreciates the many rich and meaningful conversations that have been part of the process. The turn towards issues of equity and an on-going commitment to improving school quality have mirrored deep concerns in the community, and for this we are grateful. We appreciate that many hard decisions that will be made over the coming weeks as various needs and practicalities are weighed. We hope that as the EAC works to finalize an assignment plan, its decisions will ensure the greatest number of children have equitable access to a high quality education, one of their most precious rights and greatest needs.

School by School Walk Zone Percentages

School Name	City	Grades	Circle of Promise	Walkzone %	Tier
O'Donnell Elementary	East Boston	K1-5		91	3
McKay K-8	East Boston	K2-8		91	3
Otis Elementary	East Boston	K1-5		89	1
Kennedy PJ Elementary	East Boston	K0-5		85	2
Kilmer Lower Baker St (K0-3)	West Roxbury	K0-3		82	1
King K-8	Dorchester	K0-8	Circle of Promise	80	4
Trotter Elementary	Dorchester	K2-5	Circle of Promise	79	4
Winthrop Elementary	Dorchester	K1-5	Circle of Promise	79	4
East Boston EEC	East Boston	K0-1		79	
Higginson/Lewis K-8	Roxbury	K0-8	Circle of Promise	78	4
Warren/Prescott	Charlestown	K2-8		78	1
Ellis Elementary	Roxbury	K1-5	Circle of Promise	77	4
Kilmer Upper Russett Rd (4-8)	West Roxbury	4-8		77	1
Mason Elementary	Roxbury	K0-5	Circle of Promise	74	1
Hale Elementary	Roxbury	K1-5	Circle of Promise	73	1
Adams Elementary	East Boston	K0-5		72	3
Orchard Gardens K-8	Roxbury	K1-8	Circle of Promise	70	2
Hurley K-8	Boston	K0-8	Circle of Promise	69	1
Holland Elementary	Dorchester	K1-5	Circle of Promise	69	4
Haynes EEC	Roxbury	K0-1	Circle of Promise	69	
Holmes Elementary	Dorchester	K1-5	Circle of Promise	68	4
Marshall Elementary	Dorchester	K1-5	Circle of Promise	68	4
Tobin K-8	Roxbury	K0-8	Circle of Promise	67	3
Henderson Elementary	Dorchester	K0-5		66	1
Mather Elementary	Dorchester	K1-5	Circle of Promise	65	2
Greenwood, Sarah K-8	Dorchester	K0-8	Circle of Promise	63	2
Roosevelt K-8 (K1-2)	Hyde Park	K1-2		63	
Lee Elementary	Dorchester	2-5		61	3
Mission Hill K-8	Roxbury	K2-8	Circle of Promise	60	2
Everett Elementary	Dorchester	K1-5	Circle of Promise	59	3
Gardner Pilot Academy	Allston	K1-5		59	3
Lee Academy	Dorchester	K0-1		59	
Murphy K-8	Dorchester	K1-8		58	1
Mendell Elementary	Roxbury	K0-5	Circle of Promise	57	4
Mildred Avenue 3-8	Mattapan	2-8		56	4
Conley Elementary	Roslindale	K1-5		56	1
Clap Innovation School	Dorchester	K1-5		56	2
Harvard/Kent Elementary	Charlestown	K0-5		55	1
Roosevelt K-8 (3-8)	Hyde Park	3-8		55	1
Sumner Elementary	Roslindale	K1-5		54	1
Quincy Elementary	Boston	K0-5		54	1
Russell Elementary	Dorchester	K0-5	Circle of Promise	54	3

School Name	City	Grades	Circle of Promise	Walkzone %	Tier
Taylor Elementary	Mattapan	K0-5		53	2
Bates Elementary	Roslindale	K1-5		52	2
Curley K-8	Jamaica Plain	K1 - 8	Circle of Promise	52	2
Bradley Elementary	East Boston	K0-5		52	1
Eliot K-8	Boston	K1-8		52	1
Winship Elementary	Brighton	K0-5		51	3
Haley Elementary	Roslindale	K1-5		50	3
Philbrick Elementary	Roslindale	K2-5		50	1
Baldwin ELC	Brighton	K0-1		49	
Grew Elementary	Hyde Park	K2-5		49	4
Lyndon K-8	West Roxbury	K1-8		49	1
Beethoven Elementary	West Roxbury	K1-3		49	2
Mozart Elementary	Roslindale	K1-5		48	2
Kennedy JF Elementary	Jamaica Plain	K2-5	Circle of Promise	47	2
Perry K-8	South Boston	K1-8		47	3
Lyon K-8	Brighton	K2-8		46	1
Blackstone Elementary	Boston	K0-5	Circle of Promise	46	4
Hennigan Elementary	Jamaica Plain	K2-5	Circle of Promise	46	4
Ellison/Parks EE Sch	Mattapan	K1-3		45	
Chittick Elementary	Mattapan	K1-5		44	4
West Zone ELC	Jamaica Plain	K0-1	Circle of Promise	44	
Channing Elementary	Hyde Park	K1-5		44	4
Perkins Elementary	South Boston	K2-5		43	4
Kenny Elementary	Dorchester	K0-5		43	2
BTU School K-8	Jamaica Plain	K1-3, 6-7		42	2
Ohrenberger School	West Roxbury	1-7		42	
Young Achievers K-8	Mattapan	K1-8		42	4
Condon Elementary	South Boston	K1-5		41	3
Guild Elementary	East Boston	K2-5		41	2
Greenwood E. Leadership	Hyde Park	K2-5	Circle of Promise	39	4
Jackson/Mann K-8	Allston	K0-8		39	2
Mattahunt Elementary	Mattapan	K0-5		36	4
Manning Elementary	Jamaica Plain	K0-5		34	1
Edison K-8	Brighton	K1-8		33	2
Dever Elementary	Dorchester	K1-5	Circle of Promise	32	3
Tynan Elementary	South Boston	K0-5		29	4
Hernandez K-8	Roxbury	K1-8	Circle of Promise	0	

Data from BPS School Descriptive Data, School Year 2011-2012

HARVARD
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

May 16, 2012

Dear Councilor Connolly,

I'm sorry it's taken me so long to get back to you with data about the links among within-district school assignment policies, housing prices, and neighborhood composition. I wanted to brush up on the most recent research literature since this isn't my normal area of expertise, and also talk to some of my colleagues at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. I've now done so.

As I said at the meeting last month, the research literature shows incontrovertibly that there is a rise in housing prices—and likely other changes in neighborhood composition including increasing racial segregation—when parents are assured of being zoned to a higher-performing school (or set of schools) within a school district. (Machin, 2011; Stiefel, Schwartz, Rubenstein, & Zabel, 2005) are two extensive and rigorous reviews of the literature that confirm this finding.

In general, it appears that houses zoned to a school that performs one standard deviation better than another school in the same district command a 2-5% higher price (as much as 10% or even 25% higher in some circumstances). This table shows the summary of a number of recent studies that have used rigorous methods to test the responsiveness of housing prices to within-district variations in school quality:

Table 2
Estimates from ten selected studies.

Study	Method	Impact on prices	Data
Brasington and Haurin (2006)	i)	7.6% for 1sd	Ohio, US
Cheshire and Sheppard (2004)	ii)	4–10% for 1 sd	Reading, UK
Rosenthal (2003)	iii)	5% elasticity	England
Black (1999)	iv)	2.5% for 1 sd	Boston, US
Davidoff and Leigh (2008)	iv)	3.5% for 1 sd	Australia
Fack and Grenet (2010)	iv)	2% for 1 sd	Paris, France
Kane et al. (2006)	iv)	10% for 1 sd	Mecklenberg, US
Clapp et al. (2008)	v)	1.3–1.4% for 1 sd	Connecticut, US
Bayer et al. (2007)	vi)	1.8% for 1 sd	SF Bay, US
Gibbons and Machin (2003, 2006)	vi)	3.8%–7% for 1 sd	London, UK

Source: (Machin, 2011) http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2011.05.005

These studies use a variety of methods, but the most common and perhaps interesting of these is the one marked (iv) above. It compares the prices of houses in the same neighborhood, of similar quality, very close to one another, but on opposite sides of a school assignment boundary within the same school district. In doing so, the researchers are able to see what effect perceived school quality (usually as measured by test scores) has on housing prices, since in all other relevant respects the houses are the same. Some of the studies have also been able to compare the effect of changing school assignment boundaries on housing price and neighborhood composition.

Kane et al. (2006), for example, were able to take advantage of Charlotte-Mecklenberg's changing school assignment boundaries due to the end of race-conscious desegregation policies to see how changes in school assignment affected the value of homes that were reassigned. They were also able to look at how changes in school composition thanks to new assignment policies influenced the prices even of those houses whose school assignments had not changed. Because Charlotte-Mecklenberg's schools went from more diverse—including intentionally mixing families from multiple neighborhoods—to less diverse, and because their schools have been generally well-regarded by a diverse array of families, especially for an urban district, Kane et al.'s findings are perhaps the most relevant to Boston's current debate over new school assignment policies. Kane et al. found that houses assigned to schools with significantly (one standard deviation) higher test scores commanded a 10% premium over similar houses just on the other side of the assignment zone. When houses were reassigned to new schools, their prices slowly shifted in line with the quality of the new school. Kane et al. also found that even for houses that remained in the same assignment zone, if the composition of the school itself changed thanks to new assignment policies affecting other neighborhoods, housing prices changed accordingly. Hence, as a school got more white or black, and as its test scores rose or fell, house prices in neighborhoods that remained assigned to that school adjusted up or down in response to these shifts.

Finally, these changes in response to school assignment zones seem to risk causing longer-term changes in neighborhood quality and composition. "Even if houses and neighborhoods are very similar on either side of a school border when the boundary is originally drawn, the similarity may not last long as properties are bought and sold, as neighbors change, and as houses depreciate and are improved" (Kane, Riegg, & Staiger, 2006, p. 194). This shift is due not only to straight economic forces, where families able to pay a premium for houses in the better zone also pay for more home and neighborhood improvements. It is also due to sorting decisions made by families around race and ethnicity. A study from last year following up on the changes in Charlotte-Mecklenburg found that "for those who moved, the legal decision made white families with children in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools over 50 percent more likely than they were during desegregation to move to a neighborhood with a greater proportion of white residents than their own neighborhood" (Liebowitz & Page, 2011, p. 2). It is telling that the title of this paper is, "Is School Policy Housing Policy?"

I am happy to send you copies of the original articles if you would like to review them for yourself. Some are open access, but others I could access only through Harvard's libraries. There are also a number of other articles that I did not quote here, but I can provide you if you're interested.

Yours,

Meira Levinson
Associate Professor of Education
Boston Public Schools Parent (Hernandez)

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Comparison For Home Based Plans

Lawrence St 02121

Home based A school	grades	tier		2012-13* enrollment: K1	K2
King	K1 - 8	4	Dorchester	62	41
Haynes EEC	K0 - 1	n/a	Roxbury	65	68
Holland	K1 - 5	4	Dorchester	45	124
Winthrop	K1 - 5	4	Dorchester	42	63
Trotter	K1 - 5	4	Dorchester	48	85
Mather	K1 - 5	2	Dorchester	67	83
Everett	K1 - 5	3	Dorchester	14	42
Higginson	K1 - 8	4	Roxbury	34	49
Ellis	K1 - 5	4	Roxbury	50	65
Russell	K1 - 5	3	Dorchester	42	56
Mason	K0 - 5	1	Roxbury	29	37
S Greenwood	K - 8	2	Dorchester	47	48
Clap	K1 - 5	2	Roxbury	24	22
Hale	K1 - 5	1	Roxbury	22	27
Home Base B adds:					
Orchard Gardens	K1 - 8	2	Roxbury	55	85
Lee Elem/Acad	K0 - 6	3		82	49
Henderson	K0 - 5	1	Dorchester	34	46

Metropolitan Avenue 02131

Home based A school	grades	tier		2012-13* enrollment: K1	K2
Bates	K1 - 5	2	Roslindale	24	44
Conley	K1 - 5	1	Roslindale	19	26
Sumner	K1 - 5	1	Roslindale	39	110
Mozart	K1 - 5	2	Roslindale	22	21
Philbrick	K0 - 5	1	Roslindale	10	22
E Greenwood	K2 - 5	4	Hyde Park	0	62
Haley	K1 - 5	3	Roslindale	31	63
Home Base B adds:					
BTU	K1 - 8	2	JP	22	27
Lyndon	K1 - 8	1	W. Roxbury	44	65
Beethoven /Ohrenberger	K1 - 8	2	W. Roxbury	44	83

bold indicates walk zone school

city-wide schools not included

*DOE school profile data

Proposed "Compromise Method" (25% walk zone, 50% open seats, 25% walk zone)

This chart demonstrates the advantage walk zone students have if this algorithm is adopted. For example, with an even number of walkers and non-walkers applying, the net result would be approximately twice as many walkers as non-walkers admitted. With a 3:1 ratio of walkers to non-walkers, almost six times as many walkers would be admitted.

		Ratio of applicants*	**Approximate Proportion that gets in**
With even walk zone and non-walk zone applicants	1 2 3 4 5 11 13 15 16 17 18 19 20 W N W N W N W N W N W N W N W N W N W N W N W 6 7 8 9 10 12 14	1W: 1N	13 W: 7 N **(*not same as proportion of applicants)**
With high proportion of walk zone applicants	1 2 3 4 5 7 9 10 11 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 W W W N W W W N W W W N W W W N W W W N W W W 6 8 12	3W : 1N	17W : 3 N (***not same as proportion of applicants)**
With high proportion of non-walk zone applicants	1 2 3 4 5 16 17 18 19 20 N N N W N N N W N N N W N N N W N N N W N N N W N N NWNNNWNNNWNNNW 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15	1W : 3N	10W: 10N (***not same as proportion of applicants**)

* W = walk zone student, N = non-walk zone student

QUALITY WORK GROUP REPORT

Introduction

In September of 2004, the Student Assignment Task Force (SATF) presented its recommendations to the Boston School Committee. Among those recommendations was the call for a Task Force on Quality Education. The SATF's final report recommended that this task force "be comprised of citizens and school personnel who would determine indicators of quality for the entire school system. The Task Force on Quality Education would be responsible for establishing, with the support of consultants and experts, a list of comprehensive citywide indicators of quality education."

In October 2004, The School Committee accepted the SATF's recommendation and appointed the Quality Work Group (QWG) to establish a comprehensive list of indicators of quality education that could be used to assess the level of quality of each Boston Public School. A diverse group of citizens from throughout the city served on the Quality Work Group. There were representatives from "Walk to Schools" and "Work 4 Quality", two community based organizations that were formed in response to the most recent debates about student assignment. The Boston Parents Organizing Network (BPON) was also represented. Two former members of the original SATF, a BPS parent and a representative from higher education were also members. Last, four BPS employees served on the Work Group.

The Quality Work Group acknowledges the determined efforts of the Superintendent and School Committee to focus on quality during the past decade. The establishment of the Quality Work Group demonstrates the Boston Public School's continued commitment to enhance and increase the scope of this work by involving citizens and parents more directly in the reform efforts. The costs associated with some of our recommendations also need to be acknowledged. These costs will need to be considered as part of the budget process over the next few years. It should be clear that while we focused on indicators and reporting systems that were primarily targeted for parents and the community, our work also led us to indicators that would improve "internal" systems, e.g., teacher performance evaluations. The nature of some of the recommendations is confidential and contractual and would only be available to appropriate school department staff through Human Resources.

Building Upon the SATF Community Forums

The Quality Work Group began its task by reviewing the comments, concerns and suggestions collected at the community forums that were sponsored by the Student Assignment Task Force. During the first round of forums, participants were placed into small groups and each participant was asked to respond to the question, "What is most important to you when making choices for your children's schools?" A total of 730 citizens participated in these discussions. Responses revealed that a vast majority of them shared an overwhelming concern about school quality. More specifically, it was clear that the most important factor in determining where to send their children to school was the quality of education offered at that school.

A summary of these citizens' comments demonstrated that they defined quality in nine main ways. First, the parents[1] defined a quality education in terms of the curriculum and how it was delivered to children. Thus, parents want a quality **teaching staff and effective school leadership**. Second, they want proven and varied **curriculum and academic programs** available to their children. Third, parents believe that the environment in which their children are educated impacts the quality of the education they receive. Thus, they want to know more about the **school climate**. The forums revealed that when talking about school climate, parents focused on the **diversity** of the school and the extent to which **parents were involved** and welcome at the school. Fourth, parents are concerned about the schools' **resources**. They were particularly concerned about the school's **physical plant**. Finally, participants believe that a quality school is one that delivers various **support programs** to students.

The community forums also revealed that the residents of Boston were in disagreement about how much the proximity to a school or being able to choose a school contributed to the quality of that school. Therefore, the Quality Work Group did not include these two factors in this report. Rather, we focused on measurable indicators of quality.

The Process of Arriving at Quality Indicators

The Quality Work Group took this information and expanded upon it. Using our own expertise, along with the latest research available in each of these areas[2], the Quality Work Group discussed each indicator in depth. We used the following criteria to determine which indicators we would include in the report. Was the indicator measurable? Would it be a burden to collect, either on the part of the individual school or the BPS system as a whole? Was it useful to parents when making decisions about where to send their children to school? Was it research based? Finally, was it factual, meaning was the indicator based upon current and up to date information about the BPS and its schools? Overall, the Quality Work Group met once a week from October to January for a total of thirty-one hours. This process led us to eight categories of indicators that can be used by parents to assess the quality of each Boston Public School. The categories are listed below:

Teacher Quality
School Leadership
Curriculum: Rigor and Breadth
Student Support
School Climate
Family and Community Involvement
Supplies
Physical Plant

We want to note that although we have broken school leadership out as a separate category of indicators, we want to emphasize the crucial role the school leader plays in ensuring the success of each indicator presented here. The plan we are putting forward will fail if principals and headmasters are not explicitly made aware of these indicators as well as their own level of responsibility in making sure quality is maintained and that parents are kept informed.

[1] "Parents" in this section refers only to those who attended the community forums.
[2] See attached bibliography

We also want to highlight the importance of diversity as an indicator of quality in the Boston Public Schools. Citizens who attended the Student Assignment Task Force community forums emphasized diversity as an important part of the school climate. Rather than create a separate category of indicators for diversity, we have included indicators of diversity within the other categories.

This report reflects the opinions of all Work Group members save one. It is our understanding that this member will present his minority report to the School Committee separately.

The remainder of this report consists of a series of charts for each category. Each chart contains the following:

- Specific indicators to be examined within that category
- What to measure in order to be able to assess that indicator
- The minimal benchmark for each indicator
- The data sources that will be used to collect information on each indicator
- How information about the indicator will be reported to parents and other interested parties.

In addition, the charts also contain the following information:

- a notation if a particular indicator includes a recommendation to the Boston School Committee
- a symbol indicating that a particular indicator is already being reported

The Six Essentials that guide reform in the Boston Public Schools

The QWG recognizes that many of these indicators are aligned with the Six Essentials that guide the BPS Whole-School Improvement Plan (WSIP) for school reform in Boston[3]. In summary, these essentials are:

- Effective Instruction
- Student Work & Data
- Professional Development
- Shared Leadership
- Resources
- Families and Community

These Six Essentials have been in existence since 1996 when the BPS implemented an extensive reform effort aimed at improving many aspects of schooling. Since then, the Boston Public Schools has made steady, well documented progress toward improving the quality of all schools. The Quality Work Group acknowledges these efforts. However, one thing we learned from the Student Assignment Task Force process was that the public is not fully aware of the extent of the progress that has been made in the Boston Public Schools. The SATF process has

[3] See appendix for the complete Six Essentials

made the BPS more aware of what citizens want from the schools. The Quality Work Group has come up with clear quality indicators for the public schools, as well as viable ways that these indicators can be measured and reported to parents. However, given the lack of public awareness about current improvement efforts in the schools, a secondary goal of the Quality Work Group is to make suggestions about how the BPS can inform the public about the quality work that already exists. In essence, the Quality Work Group has extended these reform efforts by developing a mechanism for expanding and reporting the BPS reform efforts to parents.

Quality Work Group Indicator Charts

(See the indicator charts)

Quality Work Group Recommendations

In discussing each indicator, the Quality Work Group realized that certain recommendations had to be made to the BPS as a whole in order for parents to be fully served by this process. Overall, the Quality Work Group makes twelve recommendations, six general recommendations that can be applied to the BPS as a whole, and six that are connected to specific quality indicators. These are noted on the Indicator Charts next to the indicator to which they relate. Each recommendation is also explained below.

General Recommendations

Recommendation #1 – We recommend that the Report on Teaching and Learning (RTL) be expanded to include more information of interest to parents. Our recommendations about what should be added to the RTL are included on the Indicator Charts.

Recommendation #2 – We recommend that the BPS create two surveys, one for parents and one for students, in order to collect data regarding the School Climate, Family Engagement and Student Support indicators. These surveys should be administered annually to all parents and students in each school.

Recommendation #3 – We recommend that the Superintendent give a yearly "State of the Schools" address as one method of informing the public about the progress that is being made in the Boston Public Schools.

Recommendation #4 – There appears to be much confusion about Special Education Compliance questions for BPS parents. Both the Student Assignment Task Force and the Quality Work Group were made aware of such issues. Given this, we recommend a specific person or office be put in place, separate from the school and Unified Student Services, whom parents may contact when they have complaints about special education compliance issues.

Recommendation #5 – The role of the Instructional Leadership Teams (ILT's) and the School Site Councils has become blurred since the institution of the ILT's. We recommend that the School Site Councils be revitalized and that the BPS make deliberate efforts to clarify for school staff and parents the distinction between these two school governance bodies. Further, we recommend that the BPS reinstitute the practice of having an external person responsible for monitoring Parent and School Site Councils.

Recommendation #6 – In order for schools to improve and to be able to offer broader curriculum offerings, there needs to be more instructional time. Therefore, we recommend that the school day be extended. We note as we make this recommendation that Boston has one of the shortest school days in the state and possibly in the nation.

Indicator Specific Recommendations

Recommendation #7 - We recommend that the current "mid-term warning" system be expanded to a "mid-term progress" system. This will result in all families being notified about their children's progress.

Recommendation #8 – Plans are already underway to make "MyBPS", the BPS' web-based data reporting system, available to parents. When this happens, the Quality Work Group recommends that parents be allowed to access information such as:

- The attendance rate for the school
- The frequency of counseling sessions at the school
- The percentage of Individual Student Support Plans (ISSP's)
- The percentage of Individual Education Plans (IEP's) completed on time

Recommendation #9 – We recommend that deliberate efforts be made to recruit teachers who are culturally competent, teachers of color, and teachers who have pedagogical expertise in specific subject areas.

Recommendation #10 – We recommend that newly hired teachers be supported in at least one of the following ways for the first year of teaching:

- reduced teaching and administrative load
- opportunity to observe other teachers' classes
- targeted professional development

Recommendation #11 – We recommend that the BPS create and make available "Family and Community Engagement Binders". These binders would be housed in the Family Resource Centers by zone, triad or cluster. The binders will allow parents to access a large amount of data about a particular school from one convenient location and they will contain the following information:

- The home-school compact
- The school's family engagement plans
- School policies
- The building's inspection reports
- The Massachusetts OSHA audit for information about the school's physical plant
- The executive summary of the WSIP
- A list of on-line documents available about the school
- A summary of survey results

Recommendation #12 – We recommend that every school have a minimum of one Advanced Work Class in the school. If there are not enough students to fill a whole Advanced Work Class

in that school, we recommend that a mechanism be created to serve talented and gifted students within their own school, rather than moving them to another school.

Conclusion

First and foremost, the members of the Quality Work Group want to emphasize that the work we have done here is a continuation and expansion of the ongoing reform efforts that the Boston Public School System initiated almost ten years ago. As the QWG proceeded with its task, we realized that the Boston Public School already had in place many measurements of school quality. If we view those measures as tools that can be used to support teaching and learning, this report, then, could be viewed as a toolbox. By our recommendations, we have created more tools as well as a framework for them. We have also made suggestions of ways the Boston Public Schools can expand the visibility of and accessibility to measurements of quality. It is our hope and intent that this report provides more and better information that is useful for parents and others who want to identify and quantify the ever-improving quality that exists in each Boston Public School.

Finally, upon approval by the Superintendent and the Boston School Committee, these recommendations as well as an assessment of every school in the district will need to be implemented given the framework outlined in this report. To this end, we recommend that the Boston Public Schools convene a work group to determine how this work will move forward. For example, the Boston Public Schools might consider instituting a team of various professionals, parents, and community members to provide an in-depth review of the schools based on this report's indicators and framework.

The Washington Post Print

Why growing concentrated poverty dooms school reform

By Valerie Strauss , Updated: February 5, 2013

Until very recently, policymakers ignored the effect that concentrated poverty has on student achievement. Here's a look at why more attention must be paid to the problem, written by Greg Kaufmann, who reports on poverty for the Nation, and Elaine Weiss, the national coordinator for the Broader Bolder Approach to Education. This appeared on The Nation's website.

By Greg Kaufmann and Elaine Weiss

Researchers know a lot about how various factors associated with income level affect a child's learning: parents' educational attainment; how parents read to, play with, and respond to their children; the quality of early care and early education; access to consistent physical and mental health services and healthy food. Poor children's limited access to these fundamentals accounts for a good chunk of the achievement gap, which is why conceiving of it instead as an opportunity gap makes a lot more sense.

But we rarely discuss the impact of *concentrated* poverty—and of racial and socioeconomic segregation—on student achievement. James Coleman's widely cited 1966 report "Equality of Educational Opportunity" has drawn substantial attention to the influence of family socioeconomic status on a child's academic achievement. However, as Richard Kahlenberg, senior fellow at the Century Foundation, notes

Until very recently, the second finding, about the importance of reducing concentrations of school poverty, has been consciously ignored by policymakers, despite publication of study after study that confirmed Coleman's findings.

It's time that we stop ignoring it. The past few decades have seen increasing income polarization, with the top 1 percent reaping the vast majority of societal gains, the middle class shrinking, and those at the bottom losing ground. As a result, concentrated poverty is more potent and relevant an issue than ever. Add to that the fact that 2012 marked the 25th anniversary of William Julius Wilson's groundbreaking book,"The Truly Disadvantaged," and we have every reason to reexamine the life realities, impacts, and policy implications of segregation and entrenched, concentrated U.S. poverty.

Wilson's research explains how a combination of northward migration among African-American families, disproportionate loss of jobs in the industries in which they worked, and the mass exodus of middle-class black families from city centers to suburbs, created an underclass comprised of the truly disadvantaged: concentrated ghettos of poor, unemployed, under-educated families with dim school and life prospects, largely headed by single black women. Although Wilson's work spurred multiple policy fields and thousands of studies on concentrated poverty, the reality for those experiencing it remains tragically unchanged. The

number and proportion of families living in concentrated poverty dropped briefly during the boom years of the 1990s, but it has since increased again and even spread further:

[T]he problem of poverty concentration is growing, and the type of district grappling with the issue is no longer confined to those in urban areas. According to the U.S. Department of Education's *Condition of Education*, 47 percent of elementary students now attend majority low-income schools, and the proportion of high-poverty schools has grown from 34 percent in 1999 to 47 percent in 2008. A 2010 Brookings Institution report, "The Suburbanization of Poverty," found that in the nation's largest metropolitan areas, more poor people live in large suburbs than in their primary cities. (Kahlenberg p.3)

This trend frustrates efforts to improve educational achievement among low-income and minority students. Concentrated poverty plays a key role in explaining why poor white students perform better on tests, on average, than African-American students with similar family incomes. Not only are white children much less likely than their black peers to live in poverty (12.5 percent versus 37 percent), among those who are poor, only 12 percent of white children live in concentrated poverty, while nearly half of poor African-American children do. Black students are thus much more likely to attend schools in which most of their classmates are also poor. It isn't hard to imagine the impact of this divide: black students disproportionately lack peers whose parents went to college and who take for granted that they will go; their schools and the pathways to them are more likely to be dangerous; their PTAs are comprised of parents with little political power to get the school system to meet their demands; and too many parents are overwhelmed by factors that render help with homework a major challenge–multiple or late-night jobs, cramped and unhealthy housing, lack of heat, and insufficient food.

Breaking up concentrated poverty and reducing segregation at the neighborhood and school levels offers tremendous potential. As Kahlenberg points out, "on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, low-income fourth grade students given the chance to attend more-affluent schools in math are two years ahead of low-income students stuck in high-poverty schools."

Harvard University professor Heather Schwartz also finds that socioeconomic integration trumps extra resources in boosting achievement. In her rigorous study of Montgomery County, Maryland schools, low-income students whose subsidized housing assignments enabled them to attend very low-poverty schools closed more of the achievement gap with their high-income peers than did low-income students in higher poverty schools who received an additional $2,000—monies which were devoted to extended learning time, smaller classes, and specialized professional development.

Effective policies exist to de-concentrate poverty and desegregate schools. Montgomery County showcases one of the smartest: laws that require developers to set aside a proportion of new housing units for subsidized housing, so that rather than creating ghettos of all-poor families (and resource-poor schools to go with them), lower-income families are able to reside in higher-income areas, and their children attend higher-income schools. Counties and cities across the country are exploring and adopting less restrictive zoning laws, since minimum-acreage lot requirements inherently lead to income segregation and force the concentration of poverty in less-restricted regions. The Century Foundation's recent book, "The Future of School Integration," advocates school "choice" focused on integrating students through voluntary inter-district transfer, and magnet schools that draw students of different ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds without busing, by making the case

to today's parents that a 21st century education requires no less.

As the United States increasingly regresses toward a Gilded Age of haves and have-nots—in terms of income, education, and opportunity—taking on concentrated poverty is critical. Indeed, Richard Rothstein and Mark Santow assert in their recent paper that, until we do so, education reform efforts are all but doomed. Continuing to consign so many children and families to communities devoid of pathways out of poverty is tantamount to throwing away our greatest resource for the 21st century: human potential.