



Boston City Council

Committee on Ways and Means

Dockets #0588-0596, 0606-0608, FY21 Budget

BPS Commitment 2: Accelerate Learning/BPS Revolving Funds

Working Session: Monday, May 11, 2020, 11:00 a.m.

Hearing: Tuesday, May 19, 2020, 10:00 a.m.

The following is a collection of questions that were asked by the Committee regarding the FY21 budget for Boston Public Schools at the Working Sessions on Monday, May 11, 2020 at 11:00 a.m. Recording here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SK7G4POavh8>

The Administration is requested to respond to all questions in one of three ways:

- 1) Verbally at the hearing on Tuesday, May 19th, at 10AM.
- 2) For factual questions, through written responses supplied prior to May 19th, including budget book page numbers or other references where appropriate.
- 3) By deferring to another specific scheduled departmental budget hearing.

Please annotate and return this information request before May 19th, indicating how each question will be answered.

BPS Commitment 2 Budget Questions

Councilor Michael Flaherty asked:

- Do we have sufficient funding for library tech specialists for students, specifically our younger students, who have proven so helpful in getting young students and their teachers oriented to how to use technology for learning during COVID-19?
- How do we expand Excellence for All and enhance STEM programming in all of our schools?
- Why do certain schools have Excellence for All and others do not? How do we get it in more schools, and what's the criteria now for who has it and who doesn't?
- How can we expand access to Advanced Work Class (AWC) seats across the City?
- How many AP classes are we offering across the system and can we increase that?
- Can BPS provide an assessment with respect to requests made by school principals that went unfulfilled this budget cycle? (*Asked 4/27*)
 - How are we making sure that resources are getting to the classroom to the core of teaching and learning?

Councilor Annissa Essaibi-George asked:



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- Can you provide an update on the Inclusive Preschool Grant, and the phasing-in of that over three years starting FY20?
 - Can you provide more information on that funding and program?
 - How does this grant affect our goals to increase access to pre-k seats?
- How can we expand access to universal-pre-k seats?
- How will the cancellation of MCAS impact scholarship opportunities that would normally be available to our students?
- I'm passionate about technical vocational education, specifically at Madison Park, and it seems like there have been some changes – some that give us more confidence, some that underscore concerns about stability. Can you speak to the state of affairs at Madison Park?
 - Re: leadership?
 - Re: organizing the curriculum and program, and its role in larger system?
 - The admissions policy; have changes been made?
- Can you provide an update on Madison Park's BuildBPS plans?
- How will BPS be engaging teachers and staff during the transition to a new curriculum under the MassCore framework?
 - What are the plans to move toward the MassCore standard?
 - What about for science education specifically?
- Can we increase funding for science education?
- If we implement an international baccalaureate program, how does that impact the BPS curriculum, teaching, and student success in the system as a whole?
- Can you discuss the existing strategic library plan and/or provide an overall plan for school libraries across the City?
 - How can we upgrade closet libraries, partner with BPL, and open full facilities where all we need is a librarian or a para-librarian to staff the space?
- Can you provide a timeline and concrete budget outline for BuildBPS?
- MyWay Café and bathroom refreshes are great, but what are our plans for new full-scale capital improvements, i.e. rebuilding or significantly renovating whole school buildings?
- How will we be funding the next round of BuildBPS, i.e. the next billion dollars?
- Can we do another facilities audit of BPS buildings, given that many haven't been audited for a long time?
- What is the status of the West Roxbury BPS complex? Let's keep that conversation moving, since it's a long process.
- How are we promoting school parent councils and school site councils?



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- Can we do a deeper-dive analysis to determine which schools don't have thorough parent engagement, and how we get to that point?
- Why not have the student representative who sits on the School Committee receive the same stipend that other School Committee members receive?

Councilor Liz Breadon asked:

- The Jackson Mann School is the only school in Allston-Brighton that has AWC and it is slated to close in 2021. What are the plans for the Jackson Mann? Still very concerned about losing this; how are we going to accommodate its students?
- How does an AWC Hybrid differ from an AWC?
- How can we expand Excellence for All to all schools across the district, so everyone gets enrichment in the curriculum?
- At Brighton High School, many students work 30-40 hours a week to support their families. Does the current school model work for them?
 - How can we change the model to support these students?
- Is it possible to offer vocational education programs in all our schools, rather than concentrating it all in Madison Park?
 - How can we expose students to coding, robotics, pre-healthcare-track jobs – i.e. prepare them for fulfilling careers in the workforce?
- How can we offer students more opportunities to become more fluent and literate in their native languages, in addition to English?
- Music and art should not just be seen as extra enrichment; how are we including them as part of the Excellence for All program?
- The COVID-19 crisis has exposed the depth of the digital divide at home; how can we now explore and enhance remote learning practices as something that we can robustly continue for working high school students, and for learning outside the school day?
- How is BPS committing to fund professional development to train teachers in remote learning practices?
- What is the number of Early Learning Centers? (*Asked 4/27*)
 - How many students are enrolled in our Early Learning Centers?
 - How are we evaluating outcomes in terms of readiness skills, not just academics?
- Where are we on the recovery of Madison Park and making it a great option for students interested in a technical career? (*Asked 4/27*)



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- Can you provide more information about the vocational pathway in comprehensive high schools? (*Asked 4/27*)
- Can you provide information on the extent and effectiveness of our music and arts programs at BPS? (*Asked 4/27*)

Councilor Kim Janey, President asked:

- What changes are being made at Madison Park, and will they disrupt the progress that has been made?
- Can there be a change on how Madison Park is funded, so that it's funded as a vocational-technical school and not like every other school?
- Can changes be made to the Madison Park admission policy?
- I want to see a guarantee of a seat in a BPS building for every four-year-old whose parents want one – fine to supplement with community-based seats for those who choose that option, but want the option of a seat in BPS itself for every four year old.
 - How close are we to that happening? What needs to be done?
 - Is this a shared goal of the administration?
- Can you provide a breakdown of the early education seats and K-1 seats?
 - Who are in these seats, by race and by zip code?
 - Where are these seats geographically?
 - What percentage of these seats are in BPS buildings, community-based, and family-based?
- Can you provide a breakdown on Excellence for All seats compared to Advanced Work seats?
 - Where are these seats geographically?
 - Who are in these seats – by race, language, and zip code?
 - What percentage of the seats are Excellence for All vs. Advance Work?
 - If they're the same, why do we have both Excellence for All and Advanced Work seats? Is this a multi-tier system?
 - Which District Seven schools have Excellence for All and Advanced Work Classes?
 - Are we seeing an increase or decrease in these seats? What are the budget implications?
- Can we invest more in arts programs across the City, like the one at Orchard Gardens?
- Can the Superintendent discuss how she is thinking about BuildBPS?
- How can we get more dual language programs like the Umana?



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- One of the things called for in the Opportunity & Achievement Gap policy, passed by the School Committee in 2016, was a decolonized curriculum. What is our plan to revamp the entire curriculum, especially history and social studies, and what should we be adding?
- How can we invest more in civic education and financial literacy?

Councilor Julia Mejia asked:

- There is a decrease in guidance and extracurricular activities funding. How does this align with the goals of supported, accelerated learning?
- What is BPS doing to protect the data from pre-k registration that it is filled out by parents using Google Forms?
- What has the response been for those registering for pre-k in languages other than English? Could this allow us to track language communities we need to do more outreach to?
- For the Office of Early Education, we're seeing a cut in funding for grades 1-5; what's the reason for this, and how will it affect kids in these early stages??
- Why is the Office of Secondary Schools seeing a decrease in funding for all but one middle school?
- Why is there a decrease in health and wellness funding, and in social and emotional learning funds?
- What is BPS doing to ensure all K-8 students, and not just those in transformation schools, are being served in the Excellence for All program?
- Is the registration for Thrive by Five available in other languages, and what budget is being allocated for that outreach?
- Are we able to include new types of career training at Madison Park, like video production and graphic design?
- How are we using vocational education programs to create a pipeline for our students into careers in the trades and into good city jobs?
- What will the increased funding in art and music education be used for? What's the criteria around this?
- How are we using our libraries to reach out to students that speak a language other than English?
- What resources are available for conducting research in non-English languages?
- What is the status of our libraries' plans to create family workshops, including Parent University and other literacy outreach programs?
 - How is the plan for these workshops impacted by the pandemic?



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- What are we doing to ensure that all students have access to fully functioning libraries? Can you speak to equity on this front?
- What opportunities are being leveraged with our local universities to increase access to the arts?
- Is the Excellence for All program available to students who are English Language Learners?
- What supports are in place, through Excellence for All, for chronically absent students?
- How is BPS engaging and involving parents in decision-making?
 - Can we create spaces for parents to be trained in professional development, or provided with participation stipends, to make things more equitable?
- What opportunities do we have to let students and parents lead the conversation in terms of what kind of support and resources they need to thrive at BPS? What is the infrastructure besides surveys – how can we go deeper with that engagement?
- What resources are available right now for parents to provide feedback about remote learning during COVID-19?
 - Have we received any feedback (in multiple languages) on what can be done differently to better educate our students, and how to support our special needs students?
- How are students and parents able to continue to provide ‘face-to-face’ feedback and comments on BuildBPS during this period of remote communication?
 - Can you be clearer about the degree of community participation and engagement in the processes around BuildBPS?
 - What is the status of the pause to enable more of that community engagement?
 - What difficulties and opportunities does COVID-19 create?
- Civics shouldn’t be an elective, should be mandatory. I had home economics – how are we providing life skills like financial literacy for our students?
- How can we make our history curriculum more culturally responsive?
- How are we going to allocate resources to ensure that parents are involved and well versed on the BPS budget process? (*Asked 4/27*)
- How are we providing resources to encourage more participation in the School Parent Council? (*Asked 4/27*)
- Can we provide translation services for School Site Council meetings? (*Asked 4/27*)



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Councilor Lydia Edwards asked:

- Will Charlestown be getting a much-needed Early Education Center?
- What is the plan to actually implement Universal Pre-K, and to use either BCYF or BPS buildings to do so?
- What is the plan to expand and grow dual-language programming that start much earlier than high school, not just in East Boston but also in Charlestown and elsewhere? The Umana is a great success.
- What is the partnership BPS is going to work on or demand with unions, especially those working on the Suffolk Down development, in terms of a pipeline from the high schools into good vocational opportunities? This is 20 years of work.
 - What recruitments efforts are being made?
 - Could they do pre-apprentice training in the high schools?

Councilor Matt O'Malley asked:

- Will there be an Interim Headmaster at Madison Park, given that it seems unlikely the nationwide search will be over by Labor Day?
- In the budget book, the external funds/partnership line has been zeroed out; assume this means it has just moved somewhere else? Can you explain?
- Can you explain why the budget for expanding extended learning time has decreased?
- What are your strategies to both lower the dropout rate – which will be particularly challenging this school year, given remote learning – and increase the four-year graduation rate?
- How does the reconfiguring of schools impact access to AWC and Excellence for All? And how do we bolster those programs?
- How can we ensure that all students have access to exam preparation this summer?
- Can you provide an update on the resubmitted RFI for the admissions exam for 6th grade students?
- Can you expand on new ways we will be supporting both our exam and non-exam high schools?
- Can you provide an update on the work that was done to decrease the number of school configurations? (*Asked 4/27*)
 - What is the timeline for the roll out of new school configurations?



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Councilor Ricardo Arroyo asked:

- What efforts is BPS making to increase quality seats for universal pre-k, and how do we measure that as a percentage of the demand?
 - Is there a portion of the budget in FY21 that address this?
- Why is there a 28 percent decrease in the Office for Elementary Schools?
- How do you determine which schools participate in Excellence for All?
- Why is the Elementary Education Grade Five budget decreased by 14 percent?
- How much of the budget is being directed towards non-state-mandated testing, including the cost of companion teacher guides, textbooks, and materials – i.e., the total portion of the budget being spent on tests not mandated by the state?
- Can we get an overall update on BuildBPS?
- Are we on schedule for grade reconfiguration? Has that been impacted by COVID?

Councilor Ed Flynn asked:

- Has there been a study done that examines what has happened over the last ten years at Madison Park, and how the changes in leadership have impacted that?
 - Would be great to get analysis and recommendations from professional educators, and really glean some lessons learned.
- Would it be possible to increase the amount of paraprofessionals at BPS?
- What kind of training, pay, and support do our substitute teachers receive?
- What is the Superintendent's vision for BuildBPS?
 - What changes may we see on this front in relation to COVID-19 and the recession?
- Can you provide more information on the relationship between BPS, BCYF, and BHA, and how we can ensure programs are targeted towards BHA residents who attend our schools?
- If there is a BCYF facility, like a pool, connected to a BPS school, are our students benefitting from those facilities? Can we take an inventory of what of these facilities are and aren't being put to full use for our students, and which might be in need of assistance?
- Can you provide more information on the public safety and public health aspects of our schools, in terms of non-students entering our schools?
- What public health measures we are taking when non-BPS students or staff enter our schools, especially in light of COVID-19?
- Can we conduct a full inventory of school playgrounds?



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- What limitations, such as damage or neglect, are preventing children in some schools from having access to a safe playground?
- What is the state of our school playgrounds?
- Can you provide more information on the JROTC program and support for it district-wide?
 - Are any new investments being made to the JROTC program? (*Asked 4/27*)

Councilor Kenzie Bok, Chair asked:

- What is the progress on getting community-based pre-k seats up to the same quality standard as pre-k seats in BPS facilities, now that we've been through a couple rounds of the RFP?
- How can BPS go upstream to proactively find sites and operators to ensure that we have community-based pre-k seats where families don't have easy access to public education?
- What is the Superintendent's plan for BuildBPS and a long-term capital plan? All the major updates on BuildBPS to the Council came prior to the Superintendent's tenure; I'd like to understand how she's thinking about that, and thinking beyond the signature projects that are already baked in.
- There are two school buildings hosting McKinley programs in the Fenway, one in Audubon Circle and one on Peterborough St. A creative idea that has bubbled up in the community is whether there's a way to add housing on the large parking lots around these buildings and use that to cross-subsidize big renovation projects, ones that could accommodate both the McKinley programs and bringing an elementary school back to the Fenway neighborhood. What's the best opportunity to have that conversation, with the burgeoning number of young families in the Fenway, and is the BuildBPS team thinking so far about creative efforts akin to the 'Housing on Public Assets' work by the City?
- Can you update us on the overall BPS library plan? Where are the places where partnerships with BPL are working well, and where do we have the opportunity to turn a locked book room into a real school library?
- How can we approve school admission and assignment for families, and in particular how can we make it less frustrating for families?
 - How do we make it less frustrating for families in District 8 whose nearest school options, when they first go to enter the lottery, may be more than a mile or a mile and a half away?
- What are our overall commitments and goals for science, music, and art?



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- What are our long-term goals for consistent access to great programming?
- How do we get to a best-in-class vocational education program? We're not there, but we have such access to an educational and economic hub.
- Are we running a deficit in the Transportation revolving fund?
- We are doubling the maximum annual authorization from \$1 million to \$2 million for the Technology fund. Why is there such a large increase?
 - The technology fund took in & spent about \$1 million in FY19, but in FY20 took in & spent about \$100,000. Why is there such a big difference?
- Why is there a decrease in the Facilities revolving fund? Is the projected decline COVID-related?
- What plans are in the works to develop more high school history electives, besides the twelfth-grade Civics capstone course, especially given the shift to the MassCore standards?
- What is the current state of civic education at BPS?
 - I know there is a wide array of programs; how consistently across the board is real substantive civic education accessible to students?

New BPS Questions for 5/26 Hearings

Councilor Lydia Edwards asked:

- Is there a mechanism in place, or that the superintendent is proposing, to address the inequities with individual school fundraising?
 - Can she elaborate on her plan on this front?
 - Will schools finally be required to disclose the amount of money they raise?
 - Will this money get sent to the Central Office, or kept in its own account?

Councilor Ed Flynn asked:

- How much physical education and exercise are students with special needs receiving?
- Can you provide more information on the food and nutritional programs that are available to students and families?
- What additional support could we provide for the people who work in the cafeterias?

New BPS Questions Related to Past Hearings



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Councilor Liz Breadon asked:

- How much revenue does the Horace Mann School bring in from out-of-district students?

Councilor Ed Flynn asked:

- What kind of communication is there between school nurses and a student's family when that family doesn't speak English, or a student has special needs?
- How do we determine what schools might require more than one nurse, given workload?