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## **Boston City Council Committee on Ways and Means**

*Dockets #0588-0596 FY21 Budget*

*BPS Commitment #1*

*Working Session: Monday, April 27, 2020, 11:00 a.m.*

*BPS Commitment #1 (I) Hearing: Tuesday, May 5, 2020, 10:00 a.m.*

*BPS Commitment #1 (II) Hearing: Tuesday, May 5, 2020, 1:00 p.m.*

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The following is a collection of questions that were asked by the Committee regarding the FY21 budgets for Boston Public Schools at the Working Sessions on Tuesday, April 28, 2020 at 11:00 a.m. Recording here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hINEnGA1Gc8>

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

- 1) Verbally at the hearings on Tuesday, May 5<sup>th</sup>, at 10AM or 1PM
- 2) For factual questions, through written responses supplied prior to May 5<sup>th</sup>, including budget book page numbers or other references where appropriate.
- 3) By deferring to a specific scheduled departmental budget hearing

Please annotate and return this information request before May 5<sup>th</sup>, indicating how each question will be answered.

### **BPS Commitment #1 (I) Budget Questions**

BPS Commitment #1 (I) (Overall Alignment and Wraparound Supports) includes the following sub-topics:

- OAG Policy Alignment, Implementation, Progress
- Workforce Diversity
- Curriculum Bias Review
- Code of Conduct Implementation, Disproportionality
- Social/Emotional Learning & Wellness
- Nurses
- Trauma/Crisis Response
- Behavioral & Mental Health Supports
- HERN

**Councilor Ed Flynn, asked:**

- When we are hiring nurses and mental health counselors are we factoring in the demographics of the school?
  - Are we ensuring that some of these new hires can speak another language?

- Do we have social workers and nurses that can also communicate in Cantonese?
- What are we doing for students who live in public housing to ensure they are academically successful?
  - What is BPS doing to make sure these students are taking advantage of programs that are available to them?
  - How is BPS addressing food access for these students?
- How are we partnering with our local hospitals and universities to provide resources for BPS students?
  - The Josiah Quincy School has a great dental care program for students. Are we able to expand these services or provide other healthcare opportunities for students?
- Can you provide an update on how many nurses we have at BPS?
  - When will we have at least one nurse in every school?
- How many mental health counselors do we have at BPS?

**Councilor Michael Flaherty, asked:**

- BPS recently entered into a partnership with Warby Parker to provide eye exams for students. Can you provide more details about this partnership?
  - What schools have access to this program?
  - How many students have been helped so far?
  - What are the results of this program?
  - Are we making sure that first and second graders are taking advantage of this program?
- Students lose a lot of time commuting to and from school. Is there any information or statistics on how long commute times affect a student's achievement gap and academic performance?
  - **Transportation hearing.**

**Councilor Kim Janey, President, asked:**

- What is the overall budget for efforts targeted directly at eliminating the opportunity and achievement gap?
  - Can you provide information on how BPS is implementing the plan to close the achievement gap that was adopted by the School Committee in 2016?
  - Is the Office of Opportunity and Achievement Gaps properly staffed? Will we be seeing a change in FY21?
  - Are there any initiatives that the Office was hoping to undertake but will now be impacted by COVID-19?
- Can you provide an update on BPS's Code of Conduct?
  - Do we need more investment in forming this policy?
- Can you provide information on BPS's response to students with trauma?
  - Is there a possibility to implement a system that would alert schools when there are children who have experienced recent gun violence in their immediate neighborhoods?

- Can we provide more investment in BPS's trauma response?
- Are there any plans to enhance summer learning opportunities to address the increase in the opportunity gap from distance learning measures?
- If students do not return to school in the fall, how is BPS preparing to enhance remote learning and provide services for vulnerable students?

**Councilor Annissa Essaibi-George, asked:**

- Can you provide an update on being able to right-size our nursing staff to a minimum of a fulltime nurse in every school building?
  - Where are we in the process of making sure each school has at least one teacher?
  - How many schools are left remaining without a nurse?
  - Some schools may require more than one nurse. How are we making sure that schools have appropriate staffing of nurses?
- How does nurse staffing levels relate to the school based mental health and emotional health support services?
  - How can we begin investing to make sure we have a fulltime emotional support counselor or social worker in every school?
  - How many social workers do we have at our schools?
  - What schools do not have social workers?
- The DESI report states: "A district administrator said that funds should pay for the nurse and social worker would come out of the district budget and that the district had asked every department and school to identify potential reductions of 5 percent to help pay for them."
  - Is it true that we ask schools and departments to have a reduction of 5 percent?
  - How does that impact making sure that our schools have essential services?
- To come back to a question I've asked before, what are the things we've identified as a city as part of a baseline budget that we want to have in each of our schools?
- Can you provide an update on the Family-Led Stability Pilot program?
  - That started with a few schools; how are we seeing that play out, and how do we expect to support something similar across more of our schools given the expanded partnership with the BHA?
- Do we have 100 percent identification of family liaisons at all of our schools that work specifically with families experiencing homelessness?
  - What is the substance of their work? (e.g., Housing referrals, food access, and other referrals to services.)
- Can you provide more information on HERN funds?
  - How are we using this money?
  - Is it now allocated as part of the weighted student formula?
  - Have we seen any success due to this new funding?
- Are we beginning to explore ways to address the traumatic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic for our students once they return?

- Can you provide an update on the Becoming A Man program?
  - Will we be expanding this program?
- Can you provide an update on Working on Women program?
  - Will we be expanding this program?
- Can you provide an update on the comprehensive behavioral health model initiative?
- Can you provide an update on the work being done to address the opportunity achievement gap and culturally and linguistically sustaining practices?
- The Opportunity Achievement Gap Taskforce was working to analyze and understand the over assignment of Black and Latino boys to Special Education classrooms. Has BPS been looking into this practice?
  - What is being done to increase the percentage of Black and Latino students entering exam schools?
- What is being done to increase race and gender diversity among administrative and teaching staff at BPS?

**Councilor Ricardo Arroyo, asked:**

- Why is there a 35 percent decrease in support services in the Office of Student Supports?
- Why is the achievement gap portion of the BPS budget under the Chief of Equity Strategy decreased by 48 percent?
  - With these cuts how do you plan on meeting OAG goals and strategies?
- Why is there a decrease in the amount spent for social and emotional learning?
- What schools other than the transformation schools will be getting designated social workers?

**Councilor Matt O'Malley, asked:**

- Can we examine out-of-district placement including the transportation costs?
  - How do we ensure that out-of-district placement is a last resort option?
- Can you provide an update on social and emotional assistance support?
  - Can you provide more information on the increase of school social workers and their placement?
  - What about social workers in our high schools?
- Can you provide an update on the Exam School Initiative?
  - Will there be an opportunity to allow for the Exam School Initiative to be done remotely?
- Can you provide an overall update on what BPS is doing to address the opportunity and achievement gap?

**Councilor Julia Mejia, asked:**

- One of the identified goals for OAG policy was that there would be a solidified strategy platform to address issues of racism and equity that aligns with the work of BPS and City Hall by June 2018.
  - Can you provide an update on this issue and why it is past due?

- Is there any funding in the current recommended budget to increase the role of BPS family voices in addressing the issues of racism and equity?
- Six of the thirteen goals listed by OAG are past due including addressing staff diversity and implementing a process to collect both connective and qualitative data to better understand why educators of color stay in certain schools or leave.
  - Can you provide an update on these goals and explain why so many are past due?
  - Does the recommended budget include any investment to support these goals?
- How many attendance supervisors are there in BPS?
- In regards to social and emotional learning we are seeing a decrease in funding by 123 percent, but there is an increase in funding by 33 percent for social and emotional intervention. Can you explain the difference and goals between these two programs?
- There is an eight percent decrease in summer review program funding.
  - How is this affecting staffing levels?
  - Why is there a decrease in funding?
- How do we ensure that our school nurses are culturally competent and reflect the communities that they serve?
- How are departments across BPS currently handling student's mental health and trauma associated with COVID-19?
- Can you provide information on the design of the curriculum, specifically in regard to how it reflects and speaks to the diversity of our students?
- What financial resources are being poured into feeder schools in certain neighborhoods that don't send as many students to the exam schools, to help make sure they're getting the support they need if they're falling short?
- What is BPS going to do to make sure all high schools are well-resourced, not just the coveted exam schools?
- How is BPS going to identify gaps in education during this time of distant learning?
  - How is BPS planning to adjust for lost learning time?
- Are there resources available to help parents understand what equity is and what it is supposed to look like?
- Can you provide an update on teacher recruitment and retention, especially for teachers of color?
- How is BPS thinking about pulling from different buckets of money to fill the particular increased opportunity gaps created by COVID-19, whether on the academic or social/emotional side?
- Is there a plan to increase learning time by giving up vacation, or maybe exploring Councilor Flaherty's idea of a 13<sup>th</sup> year for some students, and how are we planning for addressing those needs for more time financially?

**Councilor Liz Breadon asked:**

- How are we ensuring that there are no gaps in the remote learning infrastructure, especially for students without access to reliable internet or technology?

- Is there a way that we can use this opportunity to make remote learning components part of the menu more permanently, not just during a crisis like COVID, but for instance for our older students who may need to work while trying to finish high school?

**Councilor Kenzie Bok, Chair, asked:**

- Your strategic plan points toward the need to align all BPS operations with closing the achievement and opportunity gaps – to that end, is it your ambition to have per-student funding more closely correlated with the Opportunity Index in the future, given what we know about how poverty and other related factors determine student outcomes?
- Your materials mention a qualitative review of why teachers and administrators of color leave the BPS system. Can you provide more information on the findings from that review?
- Given the learning loss that is taking place this year due to COVID-19, won't we need more intensive investments in academic and social support for our students than ever before, especially if we don't want the opportunity gap to simply widen?
  - Are our efforts to plan for summer and learning loss replacement being closely coordinated with our efforts to close the opportunity & achievement gaps?
  - How can we use new creative efforts on that front to help the students who were already not on track to advance, even before COVID-19?

**BPS Commitment #1 (II) Budget Questions**

BPS Commitment #1 (II) (Specialized Academic Supports) includes the following subtopics:

- Inclusion
- SPED/SPED Transitions
- ELL & Bilingual Education Plan

**Councilor Ed Flynn, asked:**

- What interaction is BPS having with student families about their children's learning during this time?
  - How is BPS addressing language access challenges and working with non-English speaking families to become more involved in BPS and BPS programs?

**Councilor Kim Janey, President, asked:**

- Can you provide an update on the expansion dual language learning and ELL services?
  - How many students are dual language learners and in ELL?

**Councilor Ricardo Arroyo, asked:**

- Why is the bilingual education Spanish program being reduced by 77 percent?
- Why are the budgets for the structured English immersion program for Cape Verdean, Chinese, and ESL decreased?
- What is the reason for the decreased budget for Advanced Work Classes?
- Are there any plans on implementing dual lingual programs at any schools in District Five?
- Why are there no “Arab” or “Middle Eastern”, Pacific Islander, or Native American ethnicities included on the list of the new ethnicity/nationality question as part of Objective 4.4 of the OAG Implementation Update?

**Councilor Matt O’Malley, asked:**

- Can you provide specific plans to expand the inclusion school model across the district?

**Councilor Julia Mejia, asked:**

- What is the purpose of having a general education teacher and a special education teacher in a classroom with special education students?
  - Are general education teachers not certified for special education?
  - What percentage of teachers have a special education certification?
- A lot of ELL students are at an even greater disadvantage in their learning right now as compared to if they were in school. How does this budget plan to fund efforts to address this issue?
- Why is there a decrease in funding for SEI and bilingual education?
- How large are the inclusion classrooms?
  - How has this increased or decreased over time?
- How are we keeping track of special education students and the resources that are supposed to follow that child?
  - How are we preparing to do this with distance learning practices?
- Can we look into having parents who are former educators from other countries become paraprofessionals at BPS, to bring more linguistically and culturally competent assistance into our schools?

**Councilor Kenzie Bok, Chair, asked:**

- Given that it has now been three years since the passage of the LOOK Act, what is the plan for standing up a more robust bilingual education program across the entire district, aside from small initiatives in specific schools?
- Can you provide more information on the inventory conducted by OEL of models, curriculum, and materials used by existing dual language schools? What can we learn from these for a district-wide strategy?
- In some instances, students are in an inclusion classroom with a paraprofessional with them for regular subjects, yet for certain special subjects like Science the class will only have one teacher because that person has a Special Education certification.

This doubling of certifications doesn't seem consistent with a robust inclusion model. What is BPS doing to address these inconsistencies in its inclusion supports and the doubling of certifications?

- Are we making any efforts to move towards a more consistent model of inclusion classroom staffing across the board?

**Councilor Annissa Essaibi-George, asked:**

- How do we define "inclusion" as a school district?
  - What does it mean to be an inclusion classroom?
  - What is the analysis around inclusion across the district?
- How are we supporting students with dyslexia?
  - How can we improve our current practices?
- What is the current number of students that have an IEP and 504s?
  - How are we evaluating and reevaluating those students?
  - How are we incorporating students in that process?
  - Can you provide an update on the reevaluation hearings and meetings during this distance learning period?
- How many students are currently in the STRIVE program?
  - What support services are in place?
  - How do we enhance the opportunity for those students to participate fully in their academic experience?
- How is the LOOK Act implemented or part of the strategic plan going forward to expand multilingual programs?
- How are we supporting SLIFE students?
  - How many students in the district are considered SLIFE?
  - Can you speak specifically to the additional investment of \$1.8 million to support those students?
- How can we look at the more popular special education programs that our students are accessing outside the district and create those programs in our own district?

**Councilor Liz Breadon asked:**

- Are we providing ESL classes for BPS parents?
  - What other opportunities are we providing through BPS for adult education?
- Does BPS have a robust plan to manage the transition period for the families at the Horace Mann School for the Deaf, and for the Jackson-Mann, so that we don't disperse those school communities and make sure they have all the support they need?

**Councilor Kim Janey, President, asked:**

- What is the state of staffing levels for those who work closely with vulnerable students including those experiencing homelessness, substance abuse issues, and those in special education?



- For inclusion and special education, are we closer to having two or three teachers in one classroom, and not just one teacher that is dual or triple certified?

**Other BPS Related Questions: These will be discussed in upcoming hearings.**

**Councilor Julia Mejia, asked:**

- How is it decided who BPS chooses as food vendors? *(Defer 5/26?)*
  - Would it be possible for BPS to break up contracts into smaller contractors to provide opportunities for small businesses?
  - How can BPS support minority and women owned businesses?
  - How is BPS investing in food access?
- How are we going to allocate resources to ensure that parents are involved and well versed on the BPS budget process? *(Defer 5/19?)*
  - How are we providing resources to encourage more participation in the School Parent Council?
  - Can we provide translation services for School Site Council meetings?

**Councilor Ed Flynn asked:**

- How is BPS collaborating with the Boston Teachers Union (BTU) to ensure students are successful in this new situation? *(Defer 5/26?)*
- Are any new investments being made to the JROTC program? *(Defer 5/19?)*
- Are there any increases or decreases in funding for sports programs? *(Defer 5/26?)*
  - Are there any new investments being made in physical fitness?

**Councilor Liz Breadon asked:**

- What is the number of Early Learning Centers? *(Defer 5/19?)*
  - 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? *(Defer 5/19?)*
- Can you provide more information about the vocational pathway in comprehensive high schools? *(Defer 5/19?)*
- Can you provide information on the extent and effectiveness of our music and arts programs at BPS? *(Defer 5/19?)*

**Councilor Matt O'Malley asked:**

- Can you provide an update on the work that was done to decrease the number of school configurations? *(Defer 5/19?)*
  - What is the timeline for the roll out of new school configurations?

- In terms of COVID-19, how are we preparing are schools for when students return in the fall? (e.g. class size, staggered start times, modular classrooms) (*Defer 5/26?*)

**Councilor Kim Janey, President, asked:**

- Is BPS examining different social distance measures in our schools and classroom once students return? (*Defer 5/26?*)

**Councilor Michael Flaherty, asked:**

- Can BPS talk about their work to date with getting the BPS partnership programs up and running in this situation? (*Defer 5/26?*)
  - What is BPS's financial commitment to supporting community based nonprofits in their work with BPS students in this crisis?
- Can BPS provide an assessment with respect to requests made by school principals that went unfulfilled this budget cycle? (*Defer 5/19?*)
  - How are we making sure that resources are getting to the classroom to the core of teaching and learning?