

Remarks for Delivery: School Committee Meeting

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December 2, 2010

Remarks as delivered may differ from this text.

We have a great opportunity today to change our direction, to choose between educating some, to educating all. We are working to build a community of excellent schools. But in doing so, we must continuously challenge ourselves to change when what we do no longer works for all of our students. We must take bold and aggressive, yet thoughtful and deliberative steps, to ensure that our students attend schools that are the very best we can offer. The plan we will present to the School Committee tonight will allow us to be on course to reach and hopefully, in some cases, surpass our 2014 academic goals and targets.

Let me be clear, I do not and I know none of us wants to close schools. I **do** know how disruptive it is to families. I know students and parents have developed special attachments to their school communities and in many cases our schools have become like family and home. I know that for students with disabilities, change is particularly challenging and we must plan carefully when we move students from school to school. I know that many think that there must be another way to solve our academic and fiscal challenges. I assure you, there is no other way: Not when our mission is to put the needs of our **students** first, and the preferences of the **adults** in our system second. I also know that if we stay on the current path, we will not have the resources, either in people or in funds, to sustain the progress we have made to date or to achieve our ultimate goal of graduating all of our students.

Some will say they believe the school their child already attends is the very best - they may disagree with both our quantitative and qualitative criteria. Some will argue with why we chose some schools and not others, some will even suggest that we are not closing enough schools. We are on a journey to make every school in Boston better. Over the last three years, we have created more K – 8 pathways, expanded four-year old programs and in some cases we have exercised new authorities provided in the Education Reform legislation to begin the process of turning schools around. We have changed leaders, expanded pilots and extended learning opportunities; we have allowed leaders to carefully select staff teams, altered time and yes, also closed six schools just two years ago. We have added more advanced placement and 8th grade algebra classes, strengthened our literacy efforts, arts and music programs. More students are receiving ELL services thanks to many of you. We have Boston Teacher Residency and added Teach for America, International Baccalaureate, Montessori and we expect to learn from the best of our traditional schools, pilots, charters and EdVestors' Schools on the Move. Our efforts are paying off. MCAS and graduation rates are up, and dropout rates are the lowest they have been in two decades. We will exercise every tool possible to create the schools that will best educate all of our students. If we don't close schools, close achievement and access gaps, and make changes to our teacher's contract, we will be forced to strip our teachers of the very instructional materials, technology, and time needed to meet students' needs. We as a community must hold all schools accountable, and we as members of this extraordinary enterprise must accept responsibility for our results.

Boston is not the Boston of 1974; and yet as we have engaged in these discussions across this community about equity and excellence, we are always reminded of the past. We must remember and learn from the past, celebrate the progress we've made, and now move to a "new normal" that will ensure that our schools educate all students college and career ready. There is the constant pull and tug to maintain the status quo. But the status quo for some students has not meant proficiency, and not resulted in graduation college ready. Some want us to create neighborhoods that are racially, ethnically, and economically divided and isolated. And while it is important to strengthen our children's ties to their culture, their home language, and the richness of family traditions, we must resist the temptation that assumes that because we may come from different backgrounds, or we have different learning needs that we can't get along, learn together, and co-exist as fellow citizens. We live at a time where at the moment T.V. coverage, talk radio and divisive politics polarize us ideologically. Some in our community suggests that we can't put these two groups of students together, they won't get along. We must be careful not to foster upon our children, the next generation of leaders in this community, our own adult bias, bigotry or inability to value others who are different. Our children have the capacity to transcend these historic and sometimes artificial boundaries, if we as teachers create inclusive, diverse, and quality schools where they learn and excel together. Our students will not and cannot succeed in a global economy without being multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and capable of navigating confidently and competently, not just in their own backyards, but internationally. They will be expected to compete and work internationally and we must educate them well, despite

their family background and circumstances to be successful. We together must be keepers of this community's sacred trust which is to create a better future for all of Boston's children, whether they are Black, White, Latino, Asian, American Indian or Bi-racial or are students with disabilities or live with families with few financial resources. We simply cannot move to this new best place without educating all of Boston's children, without promoting and encouraging inclusive and diverse environments, without fighting against low expectations and underperformance, and without prioritizing where and how we will use our community's limited and precious resources to education students well.

We must examine admissions practices that invite some students in, and discourage other from attending some of our schools, and the high standards and expectation we have for a few, must become the excellence we want for all.

Our vision is clear. This is not about a budget shortfall for a single year. These changes are designed to create permanent solutions that position us for educating all of our students better, sustaining our progress to date, and being able to make investments that will pay huge dividends in the future. We are a labor intensive business. Most of our resources are spent on people, buildings and busses. We must prioritize the people investments, our teachers, school leaders and staff that work directly and daily to educate our students. In order to give our teachers the materials, technology and tools they need and our students the time, diverse and rich course offerings and extra curricula, we must revisit our transportation and real estate costs, our academic delivery model, central services and our collective bargaining agreements.

We have already cut nearly 800 positions in just the last two years, and many groups have accepted wage freezes and wage cuts. We were able to save 215 jobs through the stimulus resources, almost all of them teachers. We have also found one-time savings, like putting off maintenance or not buying new school buses. But these costs don't go away, they do return. The changes we are proposing tonight are permanent. The changes will allow us to create permanent savings and create a more stable system.

Just today, my colleague, Richard Stutman, who is here tonight and who is the leader of our Boston Teachers Union and a parent in our district, sent an email to all of our teachers. He said that the real problem is that for too many years our teachers have been forced to buy their own supplies, while we at the District level have decimated spending on things like computers and textbooks. But this is not us versus them. This is not management versus teachers, or schools versus central office. Richard was right on one point: We have cut deeply into instructional supplies – 70 percent in the last ten years. This is not acceptable and not what we want in the future. In the past, school districts around this nation, not just in Boston, have approached budget reductions by cutting arts and music programs, physical education and athletic opportunities, social workers and counselors, after-school tutoring and field trips and yes supplies, materials and technologies, the very opportunities that our families want most and our students need to stay engaged. We can't be successful if we have lots of buildings, but we can't give students a reason to come to school and our parents a reason to choose us.

These are very tough decisions and hard choices but without them how will we have great schools.

The plan we are presenting tonight creates permanent changes to our system. These are not one-time fixes. We are building schools that work for students now and forever. This is what our Acceleration Agenda calls for, and this is what we are delivering tonight.

Post-presentation remarks

When we started tonight I said that many of you see your current school as your home, and we are closing it. First of all, we are going to support you as you find a new school. We will give you priority as you enroll, and we are going to help you with field trips and meetings with new principals, and with support for your child as he or she begins his experience in a new place. Change is difficult, and sometimes very painful. We will be there for you. We do want to work with you and your School Committee through this transition.

*****I also want to remark on class sizes. Part of our solution for filling empty seats is doing a better job scheduling our classes. This will primarily affect our upper grades – mainly high school – where we have learned that even though our current class size cap is 31 students, our average class size is closer to 22. Even adding four or five students would mean that we are nowhere near the cap – which is already among the lowest in the country – but we are doing a better job more putting teachers in front of our best teachers. We are not talking about raising our low class size caps. We are talking about managing our existing class sizes better, and the focus is in our high schools and middle schools, where we have lots of flexibility. *****

And finally, I want to ask for your help as we go through this process. I know that many of you are upset and I understand that. We are here tonight to listen to you and also to answer your questions. In the lobby we have a list of phone numbers and resources that can help you through this process if the School Committee approves it. And I know there are many people here tonight who have listened to what we have said and are asking – can we actually succeed with this? We will succeed, but only if we continue to get help from the community partners who are already involved in our schools. We need you to continue to invest both with your time and your resources, because it has a tremendous, immediate, positive impact for our students. This plan allows us to scale up arts, athletics, tutoring, mentoring and family support – and share those resources with more students much more quickly.

With this plan, I feel that we are doing our part. The School Committee will consider it thoughtfully, we are going to answer your questions and listen to you – and we are going to support students through the process. Together, we are building a much better system and it takes **all of these strategies working together, and working with you**, to succeed. Thank you.