



LAWYERS' COMMITTEE  
FOR CIVIL RIGHTS AND  
ECONOMIC JUSTICE  
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February 18, 2015

Michael O'Neill  
Chairperson, Boston School Committee  
26 Court Street  
Boston, MA 02108

Dear Chairperson O'Neill,

In the report to the School Committee on the FY2016 preliminary budget, the Superintendent stated that his budget recommendations would include "a limited number of school closures and program consolidations." Past school closures in Boston have had a major, disproportionate impact on Boston Public Schools' (BPS) students of color, leading to an ongoing investigation of BPS closings by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR). Since school closures have a profound effect on students and their families, closures should be carefully and transparently considered, driven by a Capital Facilities Master Plan, and not rushed as a part of the budget process. Only thorough, deliberate, and public planning will allow BPS and the city to equitably optimize school facilities over the long-term.

**School closures during the budget process will severely disrupt the plans students and families have made for the 2015-2016 school year.**

The last time the School Committee voted on school closures was in early December of 2010, well before the first round of student assignment. This year, the School Committee will not vote on closures until March 25, after the end of the second round of student assignment. Students and families displaced by school closures will almost certainly be denied access to higher performing schools that would have been available in the first two rounds of the student assignment process.

**School closure recommendations should be part of the long-term facilities planning process, not the annual, compressed budget planning process.**

In his State of the City address and his Education Transition Team Report, Mayor Walsh committed the city to a thoughtful, equitable 10-year school facilities plan. His Transition Team report states: "All facilities decisions regarding construction or closure of schools should be made with community input and through the lens of equity." In the fall of 2013, the School Department presented the *Capital Facilities Master Plan Update: FY2014-2018* that included facilities changes planned for the 2014-2015 school year. The School Department did not make a similar presentation to the Committee in the fall of 2015 with the facilities changes, particularly school closings, planned for the 2015-2016 school year.

**BPS is under an ongoing federal civil rights investigation for past closures.**

As the School Committee considers new recommendations for school closures, it should review the discrimination complaint arising from the last school closures in 2011 that is under investigation by OCR. The complaint included charges that the closures targeted schools that disproportionately served students of color, that the policies covering school closures were inconsistently applied, that displaced students were assigned to schools that were not higher performing, and that the programmatic needs of displaced students were not fully accommodated.

Before the School Committee considers or approves any school closings, it should ensure that:

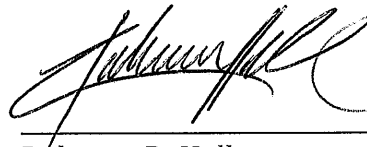
- It has completed a comprehensive, long-term school facilities plan
- It has clear policies and processes for timely and thorough engagement of families, students, and the community regarding possible closings;
- BPS has consistently applied the policies and followed processes for school closings;
- BPS has conducted and shared a comprehensive assessment to ensure that school closings, if warranted, do not negatively impact the elimination of the achievement and opportunity gaps (e.g., by depriving students of special curricular and/or enrichment programs not available at other schools, by moving students to lower performing schools or schools with insufficient capacity or inadequate facilities, etc.);
- School closings are equitable and do not disproportionately impact any racial/ethnic groups.

The Black Educators Alliance of Massachusetts and the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Economic Justice urge the School Committee not to approve any recommendations for school closures as part of the School Department budget for FY2015-2016. Contact: 617-988-0608.

Sincerely,



Johnny Molinnis  
President  
Black Educators' Alliance of Massachusetts



Rahsaan D. Hall,  
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Lawyers' Committee for Civil  
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Regina Robinson, Boston School Committee

John McDonough, Interim Superintendent, Boston Public Schools

The Honorable Martin J. Walsh, Mayor of Boston  
Turahn Dorsey, Chief of Education, City of Boston

Tito Jackson, Chair, Boston City Council Education Committee  
Matt O'Malley, Vice Chair, Boston City Council Education Committee

Margaret McKenna, Chair, Massachusetts Board of Elementary and  
Secondary Education

Ramzi Ajami, U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights