

December 2, 2013

Dear Superintendent McDonough:

Thank you, as well as Chief Operating Officer Rice, and Ms. Shaw, for meeting with QUEST. We came away with a fuller understanding of BPS's perspective on several issues, and respect for the hard work being done to roll out the home based plan. We know that you share QUEST's commitment to equitable access, and look forward to ongoing work to ensure that principles of equity steer implementation of the home-based plan.

We continue to have questions related to the issues we raised November 19.

1. Assignment Priorities for East Boston and Charlestown/North End: QUEST finds unconvincing the arguments for giving East Boston and Charlestown/North End families a neighborhood priority for their schools. A priority to neighborhood schools is a walk zone by another name. Specifically, in terms of the rationale BPS has offered for this walk zone like priority, QUEST has the following questions and concerns:

- Under what specific historic policy were East Boston families given priority for seats in East Boston? Why should this historic policy continue under a new plan in a very different time?
- Why are Charlestown/North End families being given a special exemption that will increase their access to neighborhood schools? No historic policy relates to these neighborhoods. To mitigate for one group, especially when their choices are disproportionately strong (all Tier One schools, plus the new North End school), is inequitable. If the issue is lack of capacity, then the Jackson Mann or another under-enrolled school could be added, as it has been for other neighborhoods.
- We find the argument that "these priorities balance each other, resulting in a more equitable system" confusing and unsupported by data. The data QUEST has presented about tier levels in these neighborhoods (all number one choices for North End/Charlestown, with far fewer quality choices in East Boston) is evidence that the policy would undercut equitable access. We are also still missing data about the number of East Boston v. North/End Charlestown families who chose non-neighborhood schools, and yet this data is critical to an analysis of equitable access.
- We have not heard a plausible explanation for why these "priorities" are different in any substantial way from the walk zone priority eliminated by the School Committee in its March 13 vote. That vote said that there would be no neighborhood or distance based assignment priority, and yet that is exactly what these proposals offer.

2. Independent Oversight of Equitable Access: The Quality Working Group is not serving this function. Though it conceivably could in the future, it's

important for an independent group to begin this work as soon as possible, especially in these early stages of implementation of the new assignment plan. Without such a committee, implementation will move forward without two critical recommendations of the EAC: to create an advisory panel to monitor and evaluate equitable access, and to analyze increases in quality seats in terms of equitable access.

3. Transparency: We've been encouraged by the increased transparency of the assignment system and look forward to continued access and sharing of information by the BPS. Regarding the Discover BPS site, we welcome the opportunity to share feedback about the site. QUEST is gathering a list of questions/comments (for example, about what a "Regional School" option is) and will forward as soon as possible. We also believe that BPS should use other groups (such as Technology Goes Home) to test out the accessibility/transparency of the site.

4. Facilities Plan: We were encouraged to hear your commitment to full community processes regarding any facilities changes, and to working with schools on changes, "helping schools create their futures." We look forward to working with you to ensure these commitments shape final decisions, especially those that would require existing schools to move against their wishes.

Again, we appreciated the time you spent with us and hope to stay in touch during the roll out of the new school choice plan, and beyond.

Sincerely,

Mary Battenfeld, Patricia Kinsella, Carol Ridge Martinez, Maura O'Toole, Megan Wolf
on behalf of QUEST