

January 2012

Mayor Menino's State of the City Address

Speech for the neighborhoods has a strong education component for a reason

Mayor Menino's 2012 State of the City Address delivered on January 17 at Faneuil Hall was a speech focusing on neighborhood issues which included two education initiatives. The inclusion of education issues in the Mayor's remarks is a reflection that he is accountable for the Boston Public Schools (BPS) by right of appointing the seven members of the School Committee.

Madison Park & Student Assignment

The Mayor announced plans to transform Madison Park Technical Vocational High School in Roxbury into a "top notch" center for career readiness and workforce development. Three phases of the plan are:

- To designate Madison Park as an Innovation School to be able to change the schedule and curriculum to facilitate work-based experiences.
- To create the Madison Park Partnership involving businesses and institutions that would provide advice, jobs and financial resources to help transform the school
- To initiate a night shift to establish the school as a center for job training for unemployed and underemployed residents

This plan moves in the right direction and does begin to address issues identified in a recent operational analysis of the school. The plan will have its challenges since creating an Innovation School does require

negotiations with the BTU. It also presumes partnerships for jobs and financial support from local businesses and institutions.

Second, the Mayor committed to the adoption of a "radically different" student assignment plan by January 2013. He wants this plan to put a priority on children attending schools closer to their homes. He directed Superintendent Johnson to create a citywide group of "dedicated individuals" to help design the plan and engage the community on the transition. The challenge here is for a new plan to succeed there must be confidence by the parents that the educational quality of their neighborhood schools has improved. That may require the new plan to be phased-in over a period of a few years. Focusing on neighborhood schools also means less options for parents and students for schools in other areas.

Boston Teachers' Contract

Not raised by the Mayor was a push for contract reform in current negotiations with the Boston Teachers Union. However, for student assignment to succeed, BPS schools will need to show improvement in student achievement and that will require fundamental reform in the contract now in its 21st month of talks. The BPS and BTU are still far apart on the money issues of salary plan and extended time.