

May 2012

BPS Access To Excellence Plan Moves Forward

City Council approved bond issue to allow capital plan to proceed after cautious review

The Access to Excellence Plan of the Boston Public Schools (BPS) to expand classroom seats in high performing and high demand schools received City Council approval for a \$18.5M bond issue at its meeting on May 23. This vote will enable the facility modifications required to implement this plan to proceed now, but it will take a few years to be completed. The overall plan involves 12 high performing schools that, in aggregate, will expand to serve an additional 1,544 students by 2020. A bond issue requires a second vote which will have the same results.

The City Council's final 12-1 vote on the bond issue masked the dissatisfaction by some members of the plan's treatment of certain schools and the extent of information provided by the BPS. The Council's Ways and Means Committee delayed further action on the plan until more detailed information was made available and a second hearing was held.

Access Facilities Plan

The [Access to Excellence plan](#) involves 12 high performing schools, 10 of which will increase seating capacity and seven of which will require capital infrastructure improvements. Of note is that 11 of the high performing schools are Pilot, Horace Mann In-District Charter and Innovation schools with flexibility over staff selection, scheduling and extended time with only one traditional school. The most controversial aspect of the plan was the decision to move Fenway High School to the Mission Hill K-8 building and to locate that school to the Agassiz facility in Jamaica Plain. Moving Fenway High

will allow the Arts Academy to expand at the Fenway building that it now shares with Fenway High. In the end, both the Arts Academy and Fenway High believe this change can work and finally settle the future direction of both schools. Relocating a successful K-12 school in Mission Hill to the Agassiz facility was criticized, but in the end, the Councilors felt the integrated plan provided a greater good, met a wide range of needs and resolved a few important long-standing facility issues.

Access Capital Budget

The [capital plan](#) was estimated to cost approximately \$18.5M. Almost 54% of the total cost or \$9.9M is expected to meet the high school needs of the Mission Hill facility which involves the addition of a cafetorium, new labs and basic building upgrades. Locating the new Margarita Muniz Academy in the Agassiz school was the second highest capital cost at \$3.5M.

Call for BPS Master Facilities Plan

The lack of a comprehensive multi-year school facilities plan meant that the Access plan could not be evaluated in the context of an overall building master plan. Such a plan would also be helpful in the current effort to develop a new student assignment plan. The BPS has indicated that it will move forward in developing such a plan. A recent example of this type of study is the [Quality Schools](#) report for the Washington, D.C. School System issue in January 2012. However, more detailed demographic, building condition and financial information should be expected in a report for the BPS.