

November 2008

School “Pathways to Excellence” Plan Approved

Thoughtful plan misses the mark in needed savings to be achieved

The School Committee approved the last phase of Superintendent Carol Johnson’s Pathways to Excellence plan at its meeting on November 19. The purpose of the plan is to create savings in the school operations of facilities and transportation to fund more high quality educational options for parents and students in an effort to improve academic achievement.

This plan is thoughtful, but in the current economic climate, it is not bold enough considering the full extent of budget cuts that may be required in FY10. The actual savings projected to be achieved by the plan is \$25.4M over five years but only \$2.7M in FY10 with a one-time \$4.1M capital investment. The savings over five years are \$2.4M less than an earlier version of the plan as a result of modifications made following public meetings the Superintendent held throughout the city.

Approved Pathways Plan		
In Millions		
Category	1 st Year	5 Year
Reprogramming	(\$1.2)	(\$9.4)
Moving/Upgrades	\$0.3	\$0.3
Transportation	(\$1.7)	(\$16.4)
Total	(\$2.7)	(\$25.4)
One-Time Capital	\$4.1	

In the face of a national economic downturn, the financial crisis in Massachusetts has intensified, making cuts in state aid next year inevitable. State leaders are talking about reducing next year’s state budget in the

ballpark of 8%. That would mean a local aid cut for Boston of about \$40M. The School Department represents 46% of the City’s total departmental budget and is too big to not be directly impacted by budget cuts. Salary and step increases alone will increase school spending by \$30M next year, not including health insurance or energy increases. The Superintendent and School Committee will need to prepare for far greater cuts in the FY10 budget than achieved with this plan.

Savings Components

School Reprogramming— To use space more efficiently while increasing access to innovative academic programs, the plan will:

- Create six new K-8 schools through consolidation.
- Relocate four schools for expansion.
- Add seats to over-chosen schools and programs in high demand while decreasing overall seat vacancy.
- Vacate six buildings for future use.

Transportation Savings— In an effort to control transportation costs, the plan will:

- Reduce out-of-zone transportation costs by providing more zone options for SPED students.
- Certify that all SPED students receiving door-to-door transportation are in need of this service.
- Remove citywide status of three schools.
- Examine students receiving walk zone priority and transportation services.