

A Vision for Boston: Questions for the 2009 Mayoral Candidates

DAY 12: STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

How would you change the school assignment and student transportation options for the city with the objective of satisfying parental demands and achieving savings?



Michael F. Flaherty Jr.

I've always supported the idea of children going to a school near their home and making schools a real part of the neighborhood. But I'm also a strong advocate for equal educational opportunities and presently, a return to a neighborhood school system won't achieve such equality. We need to work towards a school system where everyone's neighborhood school becomes their number one choice school. However, that won't happen overnight as we have too many neighborhoods with high concentrations of underperforming schools. A transformed school system that provides educational equality requires bold leadership, collaboration among all parties and the incorporation of best practices working in other urban school districts across the country.

At the same time, we must determine how we can reign in transportation costs that are bankrupting BPS and taking precious dollars away from the classroom. Even if we overlook the fact that we spend \$78 million because we haven't figured out a better way to provide quality public education in all of our neighborhoods, we cannot overlook the fact that this spending crisis perfectly illustrates the city's mismanagement with taxpayers' money. A sweeping review of routes, age of fleet, bell schedules, and fuel efficiencies must be conducted.

Thomas M. Menino

We've met with thousands of parents to discuss assignment and transportation issues. Parents are clear: they want choice, and they want quality. Applying these principles, we have improved our system. Parents now get their first choice for schools over 50% of the time and one of their top three choices over 80% of the time. Additionally, BPS trimmed over 30 bus routes this year.

It's important to consider that roughly 50% of school transportation costs are allocated for transportation of special needs students. To improve school assignment, save money, and invest more in the classroom, we will:

- *Improve Bus Routing*

BPS has worked with individuals from MIT to identify the best strategies to route school buses in the most efficient way possible.

- *Preserve School Choice*

We understand that children don't all thrive in the same academic environment. That is why we have a range of options, such as two-way bilingual schools and schools focused on careers in health or public service.

- *Increase School Quality*

We have created 24 pilot schools and 25 new K-8 programs and are expanding our advanced placement classes district-wide. With passage of our in-district charter legislation, we will be able to accelerate the transformation of our under-performing schools.