

January 2008

Will New Pilot Schools Be Approved?

February 2006 agreement authorized seven new pilot schools

A joint meeting held on January 4 and sponsored by Mayor Menino, Superintendent Johnson and Boston Teachers Union President Stutman for schools interested in learning more about the pilot school model was encouraging and hopefully signaled a willingness by all parties to move forward.

Pilot schools are not bound by School Committee or Boston Teachers Union (BTU) work rules and enjoy greater flexibility with regard to budget, staffing, scheduling, curriculum and governance. These schools provide an important alternative within the Boston Public Schools (BPS) for parents and students. To date a total of 18 pilot schools have been approved, serving an estimated 6,122 students or approximately 11% of the BPS' total enrollment. A 2007 report by the Center for Collaborative Education showed that students in eight pilot high schools outperformed students from other non-exam BPS high schools on every standard performance measure.

Nevertheless, the pilot school movement has been stalled since 2004 when the BTU in the BPS/BTU Steering Committee refused to approve the vote of 83% of the Gardner school teachers to convert to a pilot school. Subsequently, the BTU modified its internal rules to require that the President of the BTU meet with school members before a vote on pilot school status is taken. The BTU members of the Kennedy and Edison schools did not achieve the required 2/3 vote to adopt

the pilot school model after such meetings and because of anxiety about the lack of building seniority and work rule protection.

Concern about the future of pilot schools led to an agreement negotiated between the Boston School Committee and the BTU in February 2006 to create a minimum of seven pilot schools by September 2009. Teacher compensation for hours worked above the normal school year was also addressed. This agreement was included in the new BTU contract but since 2006 only the Gardner school has been approved as a pilot school starting in the 2006-2007 school year after a second vote by its BTU members.

In December, Superintendent Johnson moved the process forward by issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for schools interested in pursuing the pilot school model. The Boston Foundation will provide planning grants for schools that want to explore this option.

Schools that pursue the planning process are expected to complete their work and vote on the pilot school model by May 15 with the expectation that the BPS/BTU Steering Committee will act on legitimate proposals by the end of the school year or summer. That way the schools will know at the start of the next school year that they will convert to pilot schools for the 2009-2010 school year. One proposal expected will be a BTU-sponsored, teacher-run school. Stay tuned.