



333 Washington Street, Suite 854, Boston, MA 02108  
T(617-227-1900 F(617)227-2815 www.bmr.org

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## **School Committee Should Approve School Closing/Merger Plan But It Is Not Enough**

As difficult as the decision is by Superintendent Johnson and the School Committee to close nine schools and merge five schools, the plan now before the Committee should be approved, but it is not enough. The School Committee needs to approve the Superintendent's school closing and merger plan now because parents will begin selecting schools for their children for the next school year in early January.

With 5,600 empty seats costing the system \$25.2 million, this plan will reduce 1,354 seats at an estimated savings of \$10.6 million. The seats being reduced represent only 24.2% of the total estimated empty seats in the BPS.

The Superintendent and School Committee will need to revisit decreasing excess seating capacity and closing more schools next year or certainly the year after.

Reducing 1,354 seats still leaves 4,246 empty seats costing the BPS approximately \$19.1 million. Those are dollars that should be allocated to teacher development and student achievement initiatives.

It should be noted that the total budget for those schools that will be closed or merged is \$48.7 million of which \$10.6 million is the estimated savings from the steps recommended. The remaining balance of \$38.1 million will follow the students to reinvest in schools they attend.

The estimated savings of \$10.6 million represents 25% of the mid-point of the total savings range of \$36-\$49 million in the Superintendent's budget plan. From \$26 to \$39 million in savings in the Superintendent's budget plan is estimated to be achieved through redesign of academic services for students with differentiated needs (Special Education, English Language Learners and Advanced Work Classes) and increasing actual class size within contract maximums. Also savings from transportation and central office services are planned.

When the School Committee receives the Superintendent's recommended fiscal 2012 budget on February 2, 2011, the members will need to pay particular attention to these savings estimates to be satisfied that the actual savings can be realized. The inability to achieve the savings projected in any part of the plan will force further cuts at the school level.