

Considerations For Proposed School Committee Reorganization

Testimony of the Boston Municipal Research Bureau

Before the

Boston City Council Committee on Government Operations

December 6, 2021

Regarding: Docket #0899, *Petition for a Special Law re: An Act Relative to Reorganization of the Boston School Committee.*

Vice Chair Flaherty and Members of the Committee,

My name is Pam Kocher. I am the President of the Boston Municipal Research Bureau and I am also a city resident.

Thank you for this opportunity to join the conversation regarding Docket #0899.

At this time, the Boston Municipal Research Bureau is not testifying for or against this proposal. However, I would like to share some thoughts and questions about this proposal.

Engagement

Thank you for announcing the committee's intention to hold additional opportunities for comment on the proposal in the new legislative session beginning January 2022. Perhaps at least one of those hearings could be an evening hearing – to expand participation and community engagement opportunities for city residents unable to participate during primary working hours.

A process of electing rather than appointing school committee members is not a guarantee for more city residents from diverse backgrounds to have their voices heard. Elections can, and have, led to results that reward the loudest voices and those with the most resources behind them. If this proposal becomes law, then during the run up to a school committee election, ideally we would see community forums where each and every candidate has an equal opportunity to present their candidacy, regardless of whether they can afford some of the more expensive approaches to promote their candidacy and get elected.

Implementation Considerations

If approved by the State Legislature and Governor, this proposal needs to work well to successfully achieve the intentions behind it.

Regarding the **first phase** of the proposed restructuring – the eight-member hybrid elected/appointed school committee – what is the mechanism for breaking a tie vote among this even-numbered committee?

Regarding the **second phase** of the proposed process – the two-year hybrid elected/appointed school committee consisting of seven mayoral appointees, three at-large members elected city-wide and one voting student member – what is the potential to reduce the challenges inherent in a such an unbalanced hybrid model to negatively impact governance and progress, including the challenge of mayor-appointed members voting in a block focused on meeting a mayor’s priorities?

The proponents might consider sending the proposal to the City’s Corporate Counsel for legal review before submitting it to the State as a Home Rule Petition, thereby avoiding unnecessary delay due to drafting issues.

Increased City Council involvement in Boston Public Schools decisions

With the passage of Ballot Question 1 on November 2nd, City Council gained opportunity and authority to become more involved in Boston Public Schools matters.

What would City Council involvement look like, and what would that mean for a School Committee made up of **newly elected** Boston residents, as presented in the third phase of the School Committee transition process? To what extent might City Council engagement in BPS affairs impact a School Committee’s execution of its mission?

If approved, the shift to an elected school committee would be one of two substantial changes to city governance and operations within a relatively short time period:

- The change in city budgeting approved by the voters on November 2nd, and
- Implementation of the first phase of a Boston School Committee reorganization...although timing of a change in the composition of the School Committee would be dependent on the timing of review and approval by the State Legislature and Governor.
- Still, significant changes in both the city and school budgeting processes within close proximity of each other could well pose some challenges to effective implementation of one or both transitions.

Whichever school committee model or variation Boston has, clearly the focus needs to be on preparing our Boston Public School students for their futures, including college and/or career.