



BOSTON CITY COUNCIL
WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE

March 4, 2026

Supt. Mary Skipper
Boston School Committee Chair Jeri Robinson
Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building
2300 Washington St.
Boston, MA 02119

To Superintendent Skipper and School Committee Chair Robinson:

As Chair of the Boston City Council's Committee on Ways & Means, I write to you to share thoughts that my colleagues and I have on the proposed FY27 budget and to highlight some of our priorities that we will be focusing on when the BPS budget is presented to the City Council in April. We would first like to thank you for engaging with the Council, including attending a Council hearing on the FY27 budget as early as November 2025, providing a budget training for Council staff, and for producing a BPS budget book to the Council prior to the School Committee's FY27 budget vote on March 25. We look forward to your continued partnership as we head into what will be tough economic times for the City and for Boston Public Schools.

My colleagues and I fully understand that the proposed FY27 BPS budget is a reflection of changing circumstances that make it increasingly difficult to meet all of our goals for our students. The district is facing declining enrollment (including the unanticipated loss of approximately 3,000 students in the last year alone); increasing healthcare costs (an increase of roughly \$34 million from FY26 to FY27); and rising costs of transportation (\$11 million), special education services (\$12 million), and staff salaries set by collective bargaining agreements (\$29 million). These increased costs coupled with increases in hiring led to a projected \$53 million budget shortfall for FY26 that has resulted in a hiring freeze and the elimination of positions next school year. Moreover, problems created by rising costs are compounded by the restrictions on the City's ability to raise revenue by, among other things, Prop 2½ and the restrictive application of the Massachusetts Home Rule amendment.

The proposed FY27 budget demonstrates that the City is still committed to investing in our BPS students, indeed, our per student spending is projected in FY27 to exceed \$36,000. Costs, however, appear to be rising faster than our sources of revenue, meaning that in many departments, we have to cut personnel even though we are spending more overall.

On February 28, 2025, prior Ways and Means Committee Chair Brian Worrell sent a letter to BPS outlining the Council's FY26 budget priorities. It appears that BPS will continue to support many of these priorities. In two presentations of the proposed FY27 budget to the School

Committee by BPS Chief Financial Officer David Bloom, the Committee was told that BPS would continue to invest in “priority areas such as inclusive education, bilingual programming, instructional resources (e.g. HQIM), student supports, and college and career readiness programming (e.g. early college, dual enrollment, CTE).” The Council hopes that these priorities are adequately funded. The proof will be in the pudding.

The Council is encouraged that BPS has made concrete investments that will support both the success of the inclusion model and dual language programming. These include: 1) each school receiving an additional \$9,500 per student with disabilities who is primarily served in an inclusion setting; 2) installing paraprofessionals in all Dual Language classes in grades 1 and 2; and 3) more investments made in our Transformation Schools.

One of the other areas of focus has been on Central Office spending. While roughly \$875 million of the BPS budget will be in the Central Office, most of this will pay for things that benefit students directly like teachers’ benefits, transportation, and in-school supports like social workers, occupational therapists, psychiatrists, and food. It is also instructive to know that 93 percent of the entire BPS budget can be classified as being spent in service to students and schools, and that BPS is proposing \$34 million in reductions to Central Offices budgets to be better used to prioritize student-facing positions.

While the priorities of the City Council are similar to last year, it is worth highlighting several areas on which we hope the Superintendent and the School Committee will focus in the coming weeks to ensure our students’ needs are being met. These include:

1. Equitable Implementation of the Inclusion Model. With the decline in enrollment, many schools are losing staff, including teachers and paraprofessionals that are needed to make the inclusion model work. It certainly appears that BPS has sought to limit cuts in the classroom by focusing on decreasing Central Office non-student facing staff, but more should be done before the School Committee votes on the budget to ensure schools have adequate staffing to allow all kids to benefit from inclusion.

2. Supports for English Language Learners and Dual Language instruction. The proposed FY27 budget appears to send mixed signals on this. Funding and staffing levels for Dual Language programs at the Muñiz, Hernandez K-6, Hurley, and Umana are relatively stable, and the City is funding new dual-language programs at the Blackstone, Sarah Roberts, Mather, and Fredrick. At the same time, there are approximately 77 bilingual staff being cut in the FY27 budget. We must make sure we are doing everything we can to ensure English Language Learners have the resources they need to thrive in BPS, including access to general education in the native language of ELLs who require it.

3. Reading Supports. If kids fall behind in reading, they will have trouble accessing many other aspects of their education. BPS must increase investments in reading specialists, evidence-based early literacy instruction and reading intervention programs for students in kindergarten to grade 3, high-dosage tutoring, and overall professional development for classroom teachers around the subject of reading. The Budget Book does not detail how many reading specialists are working in BPS now or in FY27. It appears that while close to 70 FTEs were budgeted in FY26 for reading in general education, only 47 FTEs were filled. The FY27 budget shows a loss of 2.8 FTEs in FY27 for this line item. BPS should make efforts to ensure every school has access to reading specialists. Moreover, while high-dosage tutoring is listed on Page 52 of the Budget Book under “Expanded Learning Opportunities,” it is unclear what amount is being allocated to this service.

4. Services for Students with Disabilities. The FY27 School Committee tables show that BPS is budgeting roughly \$475 million (up from \$456 million in FY26) for special education, and with external funding will be just over \$553 million on students with disabilities. Problematically, we still are losing around 160 FTEs for special education. In last year’s letter, the Council requested more support for students with disabilities as well as ensuring the availability of accessible buses for field trips and school events.

5. Early Childhood Education. Both the Mayor and the City Council have strongly advocated for Universal Pre-K and for every child in Boston to have access to early education. Slight reductions in Universal Pre-K and the Department of Early Childhood budgets do not reflect the desire we have to see those items level-funded or increased slightly. It appears, however, (see Page 34 of the Budget Book) that the budget for Early Childhood Education is decreasing from \$29.7 million in FY26 to \$28.5 million in FY27.

6. Homelessness. BPS estimates that roughly 5,000 of its students experience homelessness each school year. It is encouraging to see that BPS has increased its funding for Homeless Student Services by 22 percent in FY27. BPS should make further investments that will help its students remain in their housing, such as by supporting the Access to Counsel Program, which is currently funded out of the City’s operating budget.

7. Athletics. This remains a top priority for the Council. BPS must serve its kids by providing a wide array of sports in all upper schools as well as opportunities in 7th and 8th grade for students to play sports. In addition, BPS must provide reliable transportation to and from sporting events, which has been an ongoing problem. According to the Budget Book, on Page 71, the athletics budget is increasing by about \$500,000, but it is not certain how that money is being allocated and what impact the increased investment will have on transportation.

8. The Arts. BPS must ensure that students across the District have equal access to music, art, dance, etc. The District, however, appears to be cutting 3.3 FTEs in Music instruction. These positions should be restored or accounted for through outside partnerships or PILOT community benefits.

9. Mental and Behavioral Health Supports. BPS must do everything feasible to improve students' mental health as they grow. Providing whole child and whole family holistic support is necessary in order to meet the needs of students and their families. In addition, restorative justice practices have been shown to reduce exclusionary discipline, create stronger student-teacher relationships, improve student climate, increase student engagement, and improve conflict resolution skills. Funding for the Division of Student Support should be reflective of that, but the Budget Book at Page 73 shows that this department is losing \$1.2 million and 9 FTEs for support staff.

In addition, the FY27 proposed budget of \$2.3 million for Behavioral Health Services is \$40,000 less than in FY26. This includes a reduction of around 10 ABA Specialists (although the amount being spent on this line item is increasing by over \$3 million). The Council strongly recommends investments in mental and behavioral health to ensure the appropriate number of psychologists and behavioral health services at every school for all of our students.

10. Professional Development for Teachers. In addition to ensuring that all educators have access to high-quality instructional materials, the Office of Teaching and Learning must have the proper funding to support Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 interventions. This is also important because the inclusion model relies on teachers having a license plus an endorsement. Without additional licenses, teachers must have the tools to support our students. The budget shows that in FY26, BPS budgeted for 87.4 FTEs in this department, but filled only 66.4 FTEs. In FY27, BPS is cutting roughly \$1 million for the office and it is losing 5 FTEs with no additional vacancies.

11. Alternative Education. To ensure that students who are not succeeding in a traditional environment are on track to graduate, we must invest in the support they need to graduate in an alternative setting. The FY27 proposed budget has steep cuts from Secondary Alternative Schools and At-Risk Alternative Programs. Much of this may come from closing Community Academy, but BPS must support these programs, especially in a time when many students appear to be in need of these services.

12. Partnerships. An important part of the student experience in BPS relies on supports from outside programs, including Catie's Closet, St. Stephen's Mentor Project, Boston Music Project, 826 Boston, Youth Guidance, and many more. The proposed FY27 budget appears to include a 20 percent increase in the allocation of funds, and the Council asks that this increase be maintained in the final budget. The Council still has questions, however, regarding

how those partnership funds are distributed and requests that the School Committee and Superintendent take steps to ensure that the distribution is equitable across all BPS schools.

13. Guidance Counselors and College Readiness. As the parent of a recent graduate of Boston Arts Academy who had to navigate the college admissions process, I know first-hand that the City must ensure our 11th and 12th graders are prepared for success in college. The BPS FY27 Budget Book reports a cut of one High School Support Teacher or Sub FTE, but otherwise this category's funding is similar to FY26. A recent article raised concerns about a large number of BPS 12th graders being behind schedule to meet Mass Core standards for graduation. We hope that the loss of an FTE from High School Support will not hamper BPS's ability to track students' progress on Mass Core requirements.

14. Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT). According to the FY26 Tax Recapitulation Report, submitted to the Division of Local Services, Boston received \$93,589,046.14 in cash contributions from PILOT institutions in FY25. In an increasingly challenging fiscal environment, BPS should take the fullest possible advantage of any opportunity afforded by PILOT benefits, especially at Boston's colleges and universities.

15. Before and After School Programming. Our students must be provided with equal opportunities for growth in programming before and after school. In the Budget Book, the funding for the Offices of Expanded Learning Opportunities and Opportunity Gap is increasing, and some schools have their own funding for these programs, but it is still unclear specifically what investments are going into this critical area.

16. Hub School Model. The Council requests that adequate funding for the Hub School model continue into FY27. It appears from BPS's budget tables that the investments in Hub Schools is rising only slightly from \$2.33 million to \$2.4 million. BPS should make a long-term commitment to the Hub School Model.

17. Busing Costs. The Council requests a plan for reducing the costs of busing before approving another large increase in funding for busing. The proposed budget shows an increase of 5 percent for a total of \$197.6 million in FY27. Due to the other pressures on the BPS budget, we must get serious about reducing these costs. The School Committee should press BPS on the cost-saving benefits of aligning school day schedules across the District.

This is not an exhaustive list. An additional item to highlight would be the Mass Core graduation requirements. Recent reporting suggests nearly a third of 12th graders are not on track to meet these requirements by June 2026. BPS must do everything it can to ensure these students have received an education that will prepare them for success after they leave high school.

In addition, the myriad budget documents produced by BPS are not always clear. This may have to do with old coding or multiple or vague descriptions of positions and departments. BPS should outline how it plans to improve the clarity of its budget filings and presentations.

Overall, we urge the School Committee and the Superintendent to take another long look at the FY27 budget to make sure our students' needs will be met. To do that, BPS should work to preserve student-facing positions such as general education teachers, paraprofessionals, special education instructors, dual language teachers, and bilingual teachers throughout the District.

Thank you for taking the time to review our letter and I look forward to continuing to work together to ensure our kids have access to the world-class education they deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ben Weber", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Benjamin J. Weber
Boston City Councilor, District 6
Chair of the Committee on Ways and Means