

# Downtown Schools for Boston

March 11, 2013

Boston School Committee  
26 Court Street, 4th Floor  
Boston, MA 02108

Re: Recommendations of the External Advisory Committee

Members of the Boston School Committee,

We are writing to strongly support the recommendations of the External Advisory Committee on Improving School Choice.

Downtown Schools for Boston is a group of four hundred Boston parents, grandparents and other supporters, working to:

- Add and expand public elementary schools in downtown neighborhoods.
- Make it possible for more children to attend Boston Public Schools, and help more families stay in downtown Boston.
- Support efforts to improve the quality of downtown public schools.

Our focus is on the downtown neighborhoods that currently have no public elementary schools: Back Bay, Beacon Hill, Fenway / Kenmore, the West End, and central Boston (Downtown Crossing, Downtown North, Government Center, and the Financial District). We strongly support the Boston Public Schools, and expect our efforts will help continue the steady improvements we have seen in the Boston Public Schools.

The External Advisory Committee brought together a broad range of voices and viewpoints. Members strongly expressed their views, yet listened carefully to the views of other members and citizens. The committee worked diligently over many months to bring those voices to a consensus on the best possible plan for Boston. We sincerely thank each of the members of the External Advisory Committee as well as its co-chairs, Dean Hardin Coleman and Helen Dájer, for their steady and careful work to ensure a constructive, respectful process and a very positive result.

The creative zone-less plan improves both equity of access to quality schools and distances traveled to schools. The proposed plan acknowledges the current realities of the Boston Public School system, and responds to the needs of its families. At the same time, the plan is flexible and will adapt as our schools expand and improve, to maintain equitable access and to further reduce transportation time and costs. It will also improve predictability for families and promote parent involvement.

As challenging as this process has been, far greater challenges remain for the Boston Public Schools. The External Advisory Committee has set an example over the past twelve months on how we might understand each other, work together and address these great challenges. We strongly encourage you to ensure that the City-wide conversation about our public schools continues, expands to include more citizens and stakeholders, and remains constructive and vibrant.

We are also very encouraged and grateful that during this process the Boston Public Schools have publicly voiced their support for public elementary schools for the downtown neighborhoods. Schools for downtown Boston will support the goals of the assignment process, as well as the broader efforts to improve the quality of the Boston Public Schools; and will add to the quality choices for other families and neighborhoods in Boston. We hope to work collaboratively with the Boston Public Schools to bring public schools to families in the downtown neighborhoods.

We look forward to supporting the Boston Public Schools as you implement a new assignment plan, and as you strive to provide quality public schools to all of the children and neighborhoods of Boston. The recommendations of the External Advisory provide a solid foundation for the work ahead, and we encourage you to adopt those recommendations.

Very sincerely,

Downtown Schools for Boston

cc: The Honorable Thomas M. Menino, Mayor of Boston  
Dr. Carol R. Johnson, Superintendent, Boston Public Schools  
Councilor Michael P. Ross  
Members of the External Advisory Committee  
Martha Pierce, Education Advisor to the Mayor