

Memorandum

To: B-SPACE Members

From: Alan Morse, Co-Chair B-SPACE

Re: Comparing Classroom Capacity Options

Date: February 22, 2013

(Please note that there are two other exhibits in the emailed package related to this memorandum, one on the distribution of METCO and Materials fee students throughout our system, and one which displays the pros and cons of each of the options below in chart form)

Given current enrollments and anticipated Kindergarten enrollments from FY'14 through FY'17, the Public Schools of Brookline (PSB) needs 18 more K-8 classrooms (serving 22 students each) than are currently available in its elementary schools.

This memo presents various approaches to this space challenge with their associated advantages, disadvantages, and impact in terms of space creation. Those options looked at include:

- Eliminating or phasing out METCO
- Eliminating or phasing out Materials Fee Program
- Increasing allowable Class Size to 30
- Modular Classrooms
- Suspending Neighborhood Assignment for Elementary School
- Creating a new school, sited at Old Lincoln, for some combination of students that would draw proportionately from the elementary schools and free up sufficient classroom space at each

The longer-term objectives of expanded capacity are: 1) to accommodate current and anticipated enrollments; 2) to allow for the return of pre-Ks to the K-8 buildings; and 3) to allow for the restoration of some of the space already "captured" in those schools where we have dividing and/or re-purposing existing spaces.

As is clear from the detail below, the only option that yields the 18 classrooms needed is the new school at Old Lincoln. Even in combination, the other options fall short of what is required, and many of them would yield either a substantial diminution in educational quality in Brookline, community uproar, teacher and staff disaffection, or all three. A new school at Old Lincoln still does not create sufficient space to bring pre-Ks back into the elementary schools, and it may not allow for restoration of existing buildings, but it accomplishes the most important charge while adding to, rather than compromising, educational quality in the PSB.

1. Phase out METCO program

The METCO program enrolls 300 students of color from Boston in the Brookline Public Schools K-12. We receive \$4,200/student enrolled from the DESE, or approximately \$1.26million against student costs of approximately \$5million (i.e. \$17,000/student).

Pros:

- Reducing METCO enrollments eases class size. A phase out would entail not taking new students into Kindergarten next year (and thereafter), approximately 16-20 children each year, scattered across the district. Individual classes would lose 0-2 students, potentially lowering the student/ teacher ratio in the classroom (depending on other enrollments).
- Phase out gradually reduces operating revenues, avoiding the sudden loss of significant sums (see below 1A: Elimination).
- Would eventually (after several years) potentially allow consolidation of a few classrooms. Because no elementary school has more than 0-2 METCO students per classroom, phasing out METCO students one year at a time would not reduce class sizes sufficiently to allow merging classrooms (consolidation).

Cons:

- This option does not yield more elementary classrooms, which is our primary objective.
- The PSB would lose per capita METCO funds, possibly forcing staff reductions affecting all students.
- METCO is a highly valued program to which Brookline has been historically and consistently committed.
- METCO enhances the racial and socioeconomic diversity of our student body, enriching the experience of all Brookline students: without METCO students, the numbers of African American and Latino students falls to less than half the percentage of those populations nationally
- PSB is proud of its record showing that METCO students fare better academically than their Boston Public Schools (BPS) counterparts
- METCO benefits all students by adding to the excellence of our teachers who are held to a high standard of teaching effectively through differentiation among students with diverse backgrounds.

1A) Eliminate the entire K-8 METCO program now

Brookline would declare its participation in METCO over, not take any more students for next year's Kindergarten, and expel the remaining 217 students in grades 1-8. BHS would phase out 20 students per year for 4 years.

Pros:

If done in tandem with increasing class size, possible consolidation of a few classrooms district-wide.

Cons:

- Operating budget disaster: Would take \$1.5 million from the budget (6 teaching positions) while not reducing the need for classroom teachers through consolidations
- Runs counter to every core value of the PSB
- Would dramatically disrupt every grade and some 200 families

- See above “cons” under phasing out

2. Phase out the Materials Fee Program

The Materials Fee program allows children of Town and School employees who do not reside in Brookline to attend the PSB for a fee (Towns are prohibited by law from charging tuition for out-of-district students, but may seek reimbursement for materials and supply costs per student). The fee is set by the School Committee, currently approximately \$2,500/child. School placement is determined by the Superintendent and is based on available space, with siblings attending the same school. In FY2013, there are 23 Kindergarteners from this program, placed at 5 schools (168 students K-12).

Pros:

- Not accepting staff children helps with class size at some schools (see discussion of METCO).
- The fee is out of step with the cost of these students, so it is a substantial unfunded staff benefit for those with children
- With growing numbers of younger staff who live outside of Brookline, the number of students enrolled is expected to rise

Cons:

- Does not solve problem. Phasing out 25-30 children across the district one year at a time does not yield more classrooms (unless combined with increasing class sizes)
- The program gives us a meaningful advantage in hiring and retaining teachers and staff, contributing to teaching excellence (lower turnover means a more experienced teaching staff, which is better for our students, and lower costs of supervision and professional development for inexperienced teachers).

2A) Eliminate the entire K-8 Materials Fee program now

Expel 136 students in K-8. The 32 high school materials fee students would graduate over the next four years.

Pros:

- If done in tandem with elimination of METCO, possible consolidation of a few classrooms district-wide.

Cons:

- The largest number of Materials Fee students in one K-8 classroom is 5, so short term this move would not allow any consolidations.
- Would disrupt every grade and approximately 130 families
- Undermines staff morale, potentially compromising teacher hiring, retention, and efficacy and/or complicating collective bargaining

3. Increase Class Size Cap to 30

Class size caps would be raised to 30 for 4-8th grades and 25 for K-3. Although there is no contractual “cap,” the School Committee has consistently called for low student/teacher ratios and class sizes of not more than 25 in the upper elementary grades. Because smaller class size has more impact on student learning in the early grades, the

target cap in K-3 is 20 students. The Superintendent already has flexibility to go above these targets, and has done so in the lower grades because of enrollment pressures.

Pros:

- Given current enrollments and class sizes, increasing class size to 25 in K-3 and to 30 in older elementary grades would allow for consolidations of between 8 and 10 classrooms in grades 4-8 spread among our larger schools. (Because current class sizes K-3 go to 23, raising to 25 would not produce more consolidations than already anticipated).
- Consolidations would help limit the operating budget increase for new classroom teachers

Cons:

- Does not yield sufficient numbers of classrooms
- Damages educational quality. Smaller class size and lower student/teacher ratios are linked with improved student achievement, especially in the lower grades. Increasing class size is shown to have the opposite effect.
- Class size is limited by the physical size of our classrooms. It is not clear how many larger classes could be accommodated in our current elementary school rooms.
- Opportunities for consolidation are not equally spread across the elementary schools, so larger class sizes would be more likely at some schools than others, compromising educational equity across the district.
- Larger classes disrupt the community. Both teachers and parents strongly oppose larger classes as a solution to the crisis.

4. Modular Classrooms

Modular classrooms, “temporary” pre-fab structures purchased or leased and appended to school buildings, allow new classrooms to be added at a school at a lower cost than building permanent space. If feasible given land and location constraints, they are a quick way of adding space at a given school. The PSB expects to add 4 modular classrooms at the Lawrence School in FY 2014.

Pros:

- If feasible, quickest way to add classroom space to a given building
- Avoids “off-site” location of K classrooms
- Modest disruption to school from installation. No need to move students.
- Not permanent, so can be removed if enrollments fall dramatically

Cons:

- Very limited possibilities in Brookline. Feasibility studies have suggested most Brookline elementary schools do not have the space/land on which to place modulares.
- Considered ungainly and frequently used far longer than desired, modulares are unpopular with neighborhoods
- They solve immediate space problems without adding anything to the quality of the facility.

- Though less expensive than renovation, they are expensive (approx. \$500K per classroom to purchase and install)

5. Discretionary Student Assignment

Also referred to as “buffering the whole town,” or “eliminating neighborhood school boundaries,” this option calls on the School Committee to suspend its school assignment boundaries and allow the Superintendent to assign any student in Brookline to any elementary school, based on available space.

Pros:

- Because enrollments are not evenly distributed in Town, allowing the Superintendent to place students in any elementary school in the district would greatly ease the current space problem by matching enrollments with available space.

Cons:

- Ends neighborhood schools. The neighborhood K-8 school is the cornerstone of the Brookline elementary school model and experience.
- The School Committee is unlikely to approve such a change
- The PSB would have to pay for the transportation of any student in K-6 who lives farther than 2 miles from their assigned school.

6. New School @ Old Lincoln

With classroom space for up to 500 students (22 classrooms), Old Lincoln represents the single most comprehensive solution to the space crisis. In order to maximize the impact on the 8 elementary schools, a new school would have to draw sufficiently from each to allow projected enrollments to be accommodated within their built capacities.

Pros:

- Represents an exciting opportunity for the Brookline Public Schools to expand its array of educational options for students
- Can absorb all of the students necessary to yield the required additional classroom spaces in the elementary buildings
- Might help alleviate future space crunch at BHS (depending on grade span and concept)
- May reduce the need for expanded buffer zones by creating a common optional alternative that has the same effect of lowering space pressures in the K-8 buildings
- Provides flexibility in the event our student growth pressures taper off.

Cons:

- Very expensive, with approximately \$3-4 million needed for renovation of Old Lincoln and approximately \$6-8 million per year in operating costs
- Takes Old Lincoln out of commission as swing space when the PSB renovates other elementary schools, making those projects more difficult and costly
- Difficult to reach community consensus on the educational mission/design of a new school
- Does not solve pre-K space problems (would not free up enough space in elementary buildings)