



The Boston Busing Desegregation Project: for Truth, Learning and Change

---Press Statement---

The Boston Busing/Desegregation Project stands with the Community Coalition for Excellence, Equity, and Engagement in the Student Assignment Process

Recently, a community coalition of advocates and parents has come together to call for a student assignment process which truly addresses issues of excellence and equity in Boston Public Schools through a process of full engagement with all relevant stakeholders. The members of this coalition want to see equal access to a quality education for students across the city, and holds that any new school assignment process should be designed to bring us closer to this goal. This coalition holds that parents in the city of Boston first and foremost desire the opportunity to choose a quality education for their children, an option that many parents today do not feel that they have. Only a slow, open and transparent process will bring the city closer to this goal.

The Boston/Busing Desegregation Project of the Union for Minority neighborhoods stands with this coalition in calling for an open process which heeds the lesson of the past in any changes to the school assignment process. Over the past year, we have heard many different interpretations of why and how kids are assigned to schools today and what the connection between then and now is in terms of school assignment. We also heard a good deal of anxiety about change and the implications for equity, access, excellence, and residential patterns in the city. Since the city has begun this process, we have reflected on what we we've been hearing and come up with three lessons from the history of the Boston busing/desegregation crisis that we hope can help guide the new process:

First, any conversation around school assignment should be historically rooted. Though the city has changed considerably over the past 40 years, the pain from this time period still runs deep throughout the city. The children and even grandchildren of people impacted by this crisis have grown up with this pain and have a relationship with the schools based on it. At the same time, there are community members who see this period as a necessary struggle that provided equity and equal access to opportunities to learn for their children. Parents fought hard in federal court to attain these opportunities. The city needs to take seriously the complexities of the busing/desegregation era rather than avoid it or shrug it off. This means recognizing not only the trauma of violence, but also of interrupted educational trajectories, loss of community, feelings of betrayal and misunderstanding, and marginalization. It also means learning from what's worked. For many residents of Boston, their feelings about schools and school assignment have been deeply influenced by these experiences.



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Second, school assignment is intricately connected to questions of the equitable distribution of resources and quality schools across the city. No parent wants to hear that their child has to go to a school considered inferior in the name of fairness, and individual families will do whatever is necessary to send their kids to the best schools they can. No one can blame them for this. This means we need a citywide structure to make sure that all families, especially the most vulnerable among us, can access the resources necessary to get a good education for their children. Because students concentrated in low-income schools tend to perform poorly and because achievement gaps between both white children and children of color and poor and wealthy kids persist, we cannot ignore the realities of racial and economic segregation in our city. Any honest conversation about neighborhood-based schooling in Boston will need to take a hard look at residential segregation, the concentration of poverty in Boston, and how to distribute resources more equitably to address it. Yes, neighborhoods have changed, but real inequities still exist among us – and need to be acknowledged and addressed.

Third, discussions around school assignment must involve stakeholders in a real and meaningful way. This means privileging the voices and participation of those who will be most impacted: the families who do not have the resources to send their children anywhere but the Boston Public Schools. These are the families who will have to pick up the pieces if the proposed change in school assignment goes awry. It is not enough to simply include a few of them on a committee or in a conversation – they should be central to the dialogue and decision making process. This may mean slowing down the process – these are often, after all, the very families who faced the trauma of the busing/desegregation crisis almost 40 years ago.

It's been almost forty years since Boston had its first transparent school assignment process. Then and now, what parents wanted most was to get a first-rate education for their kids. We now have an opportunity and responsibility to finally make it happen for all.

Press Contact

Donna Bivens
BBPD Project Director
617-830-5085
DonnaBivens@umnunity.org



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