

Pilot Schools Q & A

Updated 2/29/08

The purpose of this document is to provide factual information about the structure, operation, and governance of pilot schools, as well as to inform members about the differences in working conditions and contractual rights in pilot schools vs. other Boston public schools. The document is offered as part of the investigatory process a staff should entertain as it seeks detailed information about whether or not to become a pilot school.

The purpose of this document is not to advocate for or against a school's conversion to pilot school status. The BTU represents members who enjoy working in pilot schools. And we recognize that many pilot schools, like many other traditional BPS schools, have excellent records of achievement. Still it is important that all aspects of pilot school status be examined thoroughly before a school votes to change from traditional to pilot status.

While this document makes no effort to judge the quality of pilot schools, we encourage members who want to learn more about the programs being offered in pilot schools to review the Pilot School Network web page (www.ccebos.org). We also encourage staff, as part of their learning process, to thoroughly review this document and to talk with people who work in pilot schools. Both activities, as well as having a conversation with BTU staff, will help all to understand how pilots operate.

In the event that a faculty does seek to convert to a pilot school, it takes a two-thirds vote of all BTU members (teachers and paras) to obtain pilot school status. That vote should not be taken until all members have had an opportunity to thoroughly study their school's pilot school proposal and to conduct the research mentioned in the above paragraph. The vote must be conducted in accordance with the BTU contract as follows:

After staff has completed its study and investigation, a secret ballot vote shall be conducted by the BTU building representative(s) after five days' notice to the staff. There are no provisions to reverse the vote once a school has become a pilot school; however, pilot school status is subject to renewal every five years by the Joint BTU/BPS Steering Committee.

If you need additional information, please call your BTU Field Representative.

1) What is a Pilot School ?

A pilot school is a Boston Public School. Those who teach in pilot schools are employees of the Boston School Department and members of the BTU; the children who attend these schools are Boston Public School children. Pilot schools do, however, operate differently than regular public schools. These schools have greater flexibility in the areas of governance, school budget, staffing, curriculum, and scheduling.

Teachers in Pilot schools have greater independence in areas of professional development and teaching strategies. Teachers and Paras in pilots do not receive many of the rights and protections of the BTU contract.

2) How are Pilot Schools governed?

All Pilot Schools have a governing board that is established as part of their original proposal. Governing Boards vary in size and composition. Governing board members may include the principal, teachers, students, parents, business partners, higher education partners, and community activists. As a result of our recent negotiations with the school department, all governing boards must have at least four teacher-members.

Pilot schools have greater flexibility and decision-making powers over budget approval, programs and policies.

Pilot School Governing Boards have the authority to make all of the final decisions regarding educational and operational policies for their school.

The school has flexibility to be freed from district policies and set its own policies that the school community feels will best help students to be successful. This includes policies such as promotion, graduation, discipline and attendance.

3) How is the Governing Board of a Pilot School established?

The Planning Committee that writes the original proposal for a pilot school establishes the composition of the governing board. This Governing board functions as the Pilot School 's Board of Directors. Of course, pilot schools must abide by all applicable federal and state laws that pertain to public schools. And pilot schools must follow the limited language in the BTU contract (pp. 26-31) which includes the most recently- negotiated language in the settlement agreement that pertains to pilot schools.

4) Do Pilot Schools have School Site Councils?

Under State law all pilot schools are supposed to have School Site Councils. These School Site Councils are based on the model described in the Education Reform Act and are advisory in nature only.

5) Who determines the working conditions, class size, schedule, length of the school day and school year, and the amount of required professional development time for teachers in Pilot schools?

All of these decisions are made by the Governing Board.

The proposed work schedule for an upcoming school year at a particular school will be given to staff by the school's Governing Board (GB) by 1/15 of a given school year. The staff may override the schedule by a 2/3 rd's vote. An override sends the work schedule back to the pilot's GB for possible adjustment and tweaking. The GB is encouraged to adjust the proposed schedule and submit again to staff, which can again vote to override. And so on. By 2/15 of a given year, there must be an approved schedule in place - one that has not been overridden - or the current year's schedule remains in place. After the start of the school year, if the GB wishes to change a school's schedule, the change MUST be approved by a 2/3 rd's vote of the affected BTU Bargaining Unit staff.

6) Do most teachers in Pilot Schools work a longer school day and a longer school year and are those who do compensated?

Yes, most work a longer day and have more professional development and parent/teacher conferences. Many pilot schools have their staff work a week or more in the summer.

This school year some pilot schools require as few as 24 hours of extra time and other schools require as many as 282. The most extreme example: In 2002-2003 and 2003-2004, the Egleston Square Pilot required over 350 uncompensated hours of its staff. Our new agreement does not equalize these hours—nor do we think it should—but it does set a universal cap on uncompensated hours that can be required of any staff member. Uncompensated hours are limited to 105 in 2006-2007; to 100, in 2007-2008; and to 95 in 2008-2009.

The compensation for time above and beyond the hours detailed above will be at the contractual hourly rate (\$39.24 as of 9/1/08) and will be retirement-worthy. (An explanation of how to calculate the number of additional hours, as mentioned above, follows below *.) Looking at 2006-2007, as an example, let's examine how the issue of compensation is resolved.

Assume, for the sake of argument, that a staff's total hours above and beyond the work day/work year total 218. Hours 0 to 105 would not be compensated. Hours 105 to 155 would be paid by the school department. Hours 155 to 218 would be paid by the school itself. In this case, the staff would get paid for hours 105 to 218, or 113 hours x \$36.08 per hour for a total of \$4077. The amount would be finalized before the start of the school year, verified, and spread out over 22 or 26 paychecks. If a school's governing board planned a schedule that required this amount of hours, staff would have to be paid, the first 50 hours out of school department funds, the remaining out of the school's funds. If the governing board decided that it could not afford to pay hours 155 to 218, its Governing Board would have to decrease the amount of hours required.

The above section on pay for extended hours applies to paraprofessionals as well.

(* Additional Hours: Here's an explanation of how to calculate additional hours:

The school day is defined as 6:30 for elementary teachers and 6:40 for secondary teachers. This is the duration of time between the required sign-in time and the allowed sign-out time. (If you are given a 30-minute break in the middle of the day for lunch, or time-off for whatever, that time counts towards the school day. This issue is mentioned because it came up specifically the other day at a pilot school.)

The length of the school year is 180 school days as defined above. There are 3 additional non-student days: the Tuesday and the Wednesday after Labor Day, and the day after the Winter/December break. These three non-student days, however, are 6-hour days, not 6:30 - or 6:40 -days. In addition to the '180' plus the '3', there are 18 hours of professional development time and 4 hours of parental contact time (PTA meetings and the like). There are no other days or hours required, whether during the school year, in the summer, or whenever. All time required above and beyond what is defined in this paragraph is considered additional time and would contribute to the limits, which, if exceeded, require compensation. If you have any questions on this calculation, please call the BTU office.)

7) What rights do I have under the contract if I teach in a Pilot School?

You have the right to receive your base salary and benefits, including group insurance, Health and Welfare benefits, sick leave, personal days, etc . You also maintain and accrue your seniority in the

school system for citywide assignment purposes and protection against layoff. You do not have a seniority attachment right to the school you work in.

8) What contractual rights do I lose if I teach in a Pilot School?

Except for salary and benefits and seniority rights, you have no other guarantees under the terms of the contract. As stated above, class size, teacher programs, length of work day/year, professional development time, etc. , are all determined by the Governing Board.

9) As a Pilot School teacher, do I have a right to file a grievance?

You can file a grievance if your paycheck is in error or if you are not receiving the benefits in the contract (e.g. , sick leave pay or Health and Welfare benefits). In all other respects, you have no right to file a grievance or go to arbitration. All pilot schools do, however, have an internal “appeals process.” Teachers may use this appeals process to have their concerns addressed by the principal and Governing Board. Issues not resolved at the school level may go to mediation under Article X-C of the BTU Collective Bargaining Agreement. If mediation fails, unresolved issues can be appealed to the co-chairs of the BTU/BPS Steering Committee (The Superintendent and the President of the BTU). However, unless the co-chairs agree on a resolution, the matter goes unresolved.*

(* There is one exception to this: a problem relating to pay as defined in question 6 can go to arbitration.)

10) Is there a document that spells out my working conditions?

Yes. Each Pilot School, as part of its original pilot school proposal develops a Memorandum of Agreement that outlines the rights and responsibilities required of the staff. This includes the length of the school day, the length of the school year, any extra time required during summer or school vacations and duties or obligations that differ from the BTU contract.

This information is provided to individuals who apply to teach in pilot schools at the time of their application. It also must be provided to staff by 2/1 each school year for the upcoming school year. Through the years, it has been difficult to enforce this provision in some schools.

11) How are staffing decisions made at Pilot Schools?

Governing Boards of pilot schools have complete discretion in hiring and removing staff, including permanent staff, from their schools, i.e., There is no seniority attachment right to a school. In other words, a person's assignment to a pilot school, permanent or provisional, is year-to-year only.

12) What level of job security do I have at a Pilot School?

Within a pilot school you have no job security. The pilot school Governing Board can remove you from a pilot school without giving a specific reason at the end of a school year. You cannot grieve this decision. If you are a permanent teacher, however, you do retain your rights to a position elsewhere in the system through the normal transfer/excessing procedures.

13) Can a teacher be required to stay at a Pilot School?

Teachers work at pilots on a voluntary basis and can voluntarily excess themselves by February 1 of a given school year. A permanent teacher would then have a right to attend the "Excess pool" and choose a new assignment. Teachers who are not permanent would have no contractual right to a new assignment and would have to apply for a teaching position at a new school.

14) How are Pilot Schools funded?

Pilot schools receive the same funding as regular schools PLUS funding from two additional sources.

Pilot schools do not have to purchase a variety of services provided by the central office, such as substitute teachers, textbook, SPED contracted services, and academic coaches. By not purchasing these services pilot schools 'save' , typically, \$300 to \$400 per year per student. They are allowed to retain these funds and purchase these services privately if they wish. and;

Pilot schools are allowed to retain the cost difference in salary and benefits between the actual cost of an employee and system wide average. For example, if a pilot school hires a teacher whose total salary and benefit package costs \$55,000 in a position budgeted at \$70,000 on a system-wide average, the pilot school gets to keep the difference of \$15,000 and use it as it wishes.

15) Is there a financial incentive for Pilot Schools to employ staff on the lower end of the salary scale?

Yes, there is a financial incentive to both hire and retain staff on the lower end of the salary scale.

16) How much autonomy do Pilot Schools have from School Department Rules and Regulations?

Pilot Schools have a great deal of autonomy from School Department rules and regulations. This is considered by many people the greatest benefit of teaching in a pilot school. These schools do not have to implement instructional and professional development programs mandated for regular schools. They are free to design their own models. Further, pilot school can utilize personnel more flexibly and structure their own staffs; for example, they can allow administrators to teach classes or hire extra classroom personnel to reduce class size instead of hiring guidance counselors or assistant principals.

They also have greater flexibility in determining how they spend their funds, including funding they may receive from grants or other outside sources.

17) Are there any other BPS models that offer some of these advantages?

The BTU and the school department have just agreed to create Discovery schools, which will operate as a hybrid model between pilot schools and traditional schools. Discovery schools will be able to enjoy some of the autonomies - such as budgetary, academic and assessment—that heretofore have only been available to pilot schools. An RFP will be announced in 3/08. Discovery schools will not be designed to be as flexible or as independent as pilot schools. On the other hand, those working in Discovery schools will retain all of the rights they'd be entitled to, as in a traditional school.