

Dear BTU Member,

(WE ARE SENDING THIS MEMO TO ALL BTU MEMBERS IN ANY ONE OF THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES:

- 1. YOUR SCHOOL HAS SENT IN AN APPLICATION TO EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITY OF CONVERTING TO A PILOT SCHOOL.*
- 2. YOUR SCHOOL HAS SENT IN AN APPLICATION EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITY OF ADDING GRADES AND ESTABLISHING THOSE NEW GRADES AS A PILOT SCHOOL.*
- 3. YOUR SCHOOL HAS SENT IN AN APPLICATION EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITY OF ADDING GRADES AND REDESIGNING THE ENTIRE SCHOOL, NEW GRADES AND OLD, AS A PILOT SCHOOL.*

SIXTEEN BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS HAVE MADE APPLICATION IN ONE OF THE ABOVE CATEGORIES.)

As you probably know, some members of your school community have recently received a \$20,000 Pilot School planning grant from the Boston Foundation. While taking this money in no way obligates your staff to vote on whether your school should convert to Pilot status, it is likely, if not probable, that a vote to convert to Pilot status will be placed before you shortly for approval or rejection. The final proposal, if approved by a 2/3 rds staff vote at your school (and your School Site Council), is due to the Boston Public Schools by May 30. Submission requires an affirmative 2/3rds vote from BTU teachers and paras who work 50% or more of their work week at the building. The final proposal then goes to the BTU-BPS Steering Committee (6 BTU, 6 BPS, majority vote required, with both the superintendent and the BTU president exercising veto power) for discussion and vote.

In addition to the aforementioned conversions, six applications for new Pilot School start-ups have, too, been funded.

In accordance with contractual provisions, the BTU-BPS Steering Committee will review, discuss and vote on each pilot application. Both sides want to do what's best for our children and the school system. We will agree sometimes, we will disagree sometimes—but we will always be deliberate and thoughtful. The BTU will, as part of its considerations, review each individual pilot school application based on budgetary concerns, overall system wide needs, student demographics, and the effects of pilots on the ever-shrinking teacher vacancy pool. On the latter point, we know well that this year's teacher excess pools were extremely tight, as the growth of open postings positions has crowded out otherwise-available vacancies. Approving *more* pilot schools than are contractually required will exacerbate what is already a vacancy shortage. Lastly, in the midst of this year's budget deficit, the superintendent has already announced that she will be looking to save financial resources by re-designing space and perhaps closing some schools. Given the possibility of the department's closing facilities next school year (and our probable opposition to same), the BTU will be very hard pressed to approve the opening of new *start-up* pilot schools.

A vote to convert to pilot status, if approved, will grant your school a series of six autonomies, e.g., budgetary, curricula/assessment, scheduling/length of school day, and an exemption from the working conditions negotiated under the BTU contract. For the last 15 years, if a school wanted *any* of these autonomies, it had to convert to pilot status. That is no longer the case. Today a school can gain some, but not all, of the Pilot autonomies by seeking Discovery status. A chart detailing the similarities and differences among pilots, discoveries, and traditional schools is enclosed.

Fifteen traditional schools, including five that have accepted the \$20,000 grant from the Boston Foundation, have also applied to become Discovery Schools. An application for Discovery status does not require a vote of staff. What *is* required is consensus from four important groups within the school community: The ILT, School Site Council, the BTU Building Reps., and the Building administrator. A joint committee (2 BPS, 2 union, and 2 from the BPE) review each application for Discovery status and decide to grant such status based on the strength of the application.

Listening to many of you these last few months, we have heard growing concern that the issue of Pilot conversions threatens to linger indefinitely at many of your schools. Simply put, the Pilot decision-making process is beginning to wear on many of you. Some administrators have suggested a delay in the vote, we suspect, because they feel that the possibility of pilot conversion will increase with a changed (i.e., more 'promising') staff next year. This 'strategy' is suspect. Schools that accepted the \$20,000 grant have promised as a condition of the grant that they would bring forward a vote, one way or another, by May 30th. That was the original plan design—and that's how it remained until some administrators realized that obtaining a 2/3rds vote in their school was going to be an uphill climb. Suddenly, these same administrators want to delay the vote. This is a manipulation of the voting process and it has no place in our school system. Schools should take the vote—as they took the planning grant—and live with the results.

All of this said, we encourage you to research all options before taking your vote. We support both models of school reform. We also understand that many schools are already on the right path, a path that works for them, and they may very well choose to continue on that path without making *any* changes.

We look forward to working with you, and we're happy to visit and answer any questions you may have.

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