

QUEST Parents Support Geographic Factor for Exam School Diversity

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Quality Education for Every Student (QUEST), a grassroots organization of Boston Public School parents, announces its support of the Exam School Admissions Working Group recommendation for inviting students to three citywide “exam schools” in the upcoming year.

Schools and universities around the country have recognized that basing admissions on tests is neither safe nor equitable during the COVID-19 pandemic. We believe the working group’s recommendation offers a solution to the challenges of the pandemic

The plan also addresses long-standing inequities in the “exam school” admission process, creating necessary measures to ensure Boston’s children have equitable access to these schools. Regarding recent complaints that the plan discriminates on the basis of zip code, BPS parent Odette Williamson says, “It’s highly ironic to hear parents complain now about discrimination by zip code. Children’s educational and life opportunities have always been shaped by their zip codes. They have determined access to high performing schools, affordable housing, decent healthcare, community resources and even life expectancy. This plan is a small step towards leveling the playing field.”

While we are pleased with the intent and projected outcome of this proposed temporary change, we cannot escape the reality that a small number of selective admissions high schools still offer the promise of more opportunity and resources in comparison to our open-enrollment schools.

BPS must end policies that maintain racial segregation and ensure all students attend well-resourced, welcoming schools. “The topic of ‘exam schools’ came up at one of Dr. Cassellius’ early listening sessions, and a friend next to me whispered, ‘Those aren’t for kids like my son, those aren’t for Black boys,’” recalled Travis Marshall. “As a parent of a white 4th and 1st grader in a zip code that now sends an inordinate number of kids to ‘exam schools,’ I hope we continue to interrogate the way policy upholds racial inequity in BPS.”

We believe that the current proposal serves only as a *starting point*. The Working Group should continue in its charge of an admissions process that leads to schools which better reflect the socioeconomic, racial and geographic diversity of all students in Boston.

Admissions criteria for schools have changed over history, and we look forward to continued work that recognizes the longstanding, structural barriers that have created and maintained enrollments that do not reflect Boston’s school-age population. Boston’s public schools must hold opportunities for all students, in the 2021-2022 school year and beyond.