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December 14, 2017

Statement on Boston Public Schools' Proposed Bell Times: Changes Will Disproportionately Harm Families of Color

BOSTON – Boston Public Schools (BPS) has announced dramatic changes to its buildings' start and end times. We applaud – and the research strongly supports – starting high schools later in the morning in order to improve student outcomes. However, despite the district's claims to the contrary, there is no research to support moving our youngest students to a 7:15 start time, in part because almost no other U.S. school district does this, and common sense tells us why.

Moreover, the burden of these changes will fall disproportionately on families of color. At last night's School Committee meeting, Superintendent Tommy Chang highlighted BPS' recent Equity Analysis of the change, contending that the change is spread equally across racial groups. However, this ignores the fact that parents of color are disproportionately in lower-wage jobs, and are less likely to have the flexibility needed to build their schedules around a school day that ends at 1:15 or 1:55, let alone pay for any resulting need in afterschool care.

BPS' proposed change would move more than two-thirds of all Black and Latino elementary students – and almost 80% of Asian elementary students - into disfavored start times before 8am and after 9am. While it may be true that large percentages of White students will also be affected, surface-level "equity" that does not take into account the reality of families' lives is simply no justification for a harmful policy change.

The questions that parents are rightfully raising should have been asked, and meaningfully addressed, by the district administration, the School Committee, and the Mayor all prior to approving these changes. It is shameful that BPS turned an opportunity to do right by our high school students into a justification for unrelated cuts that harm our youngest children. What makes this decision even more concerning to us is what appears to be a lack of understanding of "Equity" as a principle by those charged with ensuring it. Equal distribution of changes does not mean that a decision is based on equity principles. They are two different measurements. The decision made by the administration and School Committee is not racially equitable, and is likely to bring significant harm to children and families of color across the City of Boston. Equity demands that this decision be reconsidered.

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