

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS: WEIGHTING WHAT MATTERS

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The Boston Public Schools FY 2014 budget allocates \$424 million of its \$1.1 billion via a student based allocation (SBA) formula, amounting to 40 percent of its annual budget.¹ This figure ranks BPS among the leading urban districts on %SBA, a metric developed by the Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University to compare the depth of SBA implementation across school districts. In recent years, Boston's detailed SBA formula has undergone several revisions both to further refine student categories and to deploy additional portions of the district's resources. The BPS formula, summarized in Table 1, now relies on a total of 31 student categories, including categories for students with severe disabilities and other high needs.

Weighting by Age and Need

Fundamentally, the BPS formula weights students according to two key components: age and need. Unlike most SBA districts, Boston Public Schools does not allocate a singular base amount of funding to all students. Instead, the district assigns a weight for every grade, and prioritizes funds for the youngest students. All weights, including the grade level weights, are indexed to a base figure of \$3,832.² Schools teaching the youngest students—preschool through second grade—receive the highest per-pupil amounts. For example, schools receive 1.8 times the base for every qualifying pre-school student, 1.6 times base for each kindergartner, and 1.4 for students in grades one and two. Middle-schoolers in grades 6-8 also receive a weight of 1.4, while the lowest weight, 1.3, is reserved for high school students and middle elementary-schoolers in grades 3-5. Beyond grade level allocations, the district distributes resources for additional student needs including students with disabilities, English-language learners, high-schoolers deemed at risk of dropping out, low-income students, vocational students, and students with interrupted formal education (SIFE)—a category especially developed for immigrant students whose gaps in formal education left them far behind academically compared to their age peers.

Special Attention to Special Education Allows More SBA Distribution

BPS is one of the few districts in the nation that uses a student-based allocation formula to distribute resources for high-severity disabilities. BPS has chosen to take a close look at both needs and services within special respectively. An additional 11 categories have been created to address high-severity needs and are weighted in a range between 1.6 and 6.0 for the highest-need students. Though creating these categories was not an easy

¹ Edunomics Lab calculation based on: Boston Public Schools, "FY14 Weighted Student Funding Budget," accessed May 30, 2014, http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/files/7._fy14_wsf_budgets_by_school_20130202.pdf.

² Boston Public Schools, "Weighted Student Funding Budget Analysis by School," accessed May 30, 2014, <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/budget>.

process, it resulted in an additional \$83 million deployed to districts through SBA. Rather than compromising service delivery, the new flexibility in special education funds gave principals greater ability to meet their students' needs.

Weights Reflect Evolving Student Needs

As the district's student demographics have evolved, so too has its SBA formula. The district now identifies high-schoolers at high risk of dropping out as evidenced by attendance problems, poor academic performance, and insufficient credit accumulation.³ Schools are awarded a weight of 0.2 for high-risk 9th-graders and 0.05 for 10th-graders. BPS has also made changes to accommodate evolving student needs among English-language learners (ELLs). To accommodate a recent influx of older, often preliterate students whose formal educations in their home countries had been interrupted, the district created a new, separate weight for them (SIFE). It also tailored the existing ELL weight to both the grade and language acquisition level of each student.

Periodic Updates to the SBA Formula Reflect Ongoing Strategy and Changing Conditions

The BPS formula provides an instructive example of how an SBA formula can be updated annually. BPS adjusts its weights annually as part of its strategy and budgeting process, and the 31 current student categories reflect that iterative effort. Some updates have allowed the district to expand its formula to encompass more funds, including those for higher-severity special education students. Other updates enabled the district to respond to changing conditions, including newly-identified student needs, and ensured the formula better addressed the changing needs of BPS students.

³ Boston Public Schools, "Individual Student Profiles," accessed May 30, 2014, <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/files/AccelerationAgenda.pdf>.

Table 1: BPS' FY14 allocation formula outlines district spending in terms of student type.

Category	Weight	Amount	Total District Allocation
Qualifying Pre-K (K0, K1)	1.80	\$6,898	\$21,711,868
Grade K2 (Kindergarten)	1.60	\$6,131	\$29,347,652
Grades 1-2	1.40	\$5,365	\$48,815,684
Grades 3-5	1.30	\$4,982	\$58,389,536
Grades 6-8	1.40	\$5,365	\$62,130,028
Grades 9-12	1.30	\$4,982	\$85,322,843
Total District-Wide Allocation			\$305,717,611
Students with Disabilities			
Low severity	1.00	\$3,832	\$10,406,860
Moderate severity	1.40	\$5,365	\$10,483,494
High Severity			
Autism	4.30	\$16,478	\$13,362,240
Developmental Delay	6.00	\$22,992	\$482,792
Early Childhood Ages 3-4	3.20	\$12,262	\$7,111,610
Early Childhood Ages 5-6	3.00	\$11,496	\$5,437,163
Emotional Impairment	4.30	\$16,478	\$11,945,282
Full Inclusion - High Complexity	4.30	\$16,478	\$4,563,922
Intellectual Impairment	1.60	\$6,131	\$7,320,054
Multiple Disabilities	4.30	\$16,478	\$2,158,389
Physical Impairment	4.30	\$16,478	\$939,146
Sensory Impairment - Vision	3.00	\$11,496	\$264,386
Specific Learning Disability	1.60	\$6,131	\$8,883,382
Total District-Wide Allocation			\$83,358,720
English Language Learners			
K0-K5 ELD Levels 1-3	0.09	\$345	\$2,415,687
6-8 ELD Levels 1-3	0.33	\$1,265	\$1,698,165
9-12 ELD Levels 1-3	0.43	\$1,648	\$3,247,469
All Grades ELD Levels 4-5	0.02	\$77	\$605,023
Total District-Wide Allocation			\$7,966,344
Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE)			
Grades 4-5 SIFE	0.50	\$1,916	\$613,999
Grades 6-8 SIFE	0.84	\$3,219	\$348,463
Grades 9-12 SIFE	0.94	\$3,602	\$348,463
Total District-Wide Allocation			\$1,310,925
High Risk Students			
9th Grade	0.20	\$766	\$1,819,285
10th Grade	0.05	\$192	\$414,780
Total District-Wide Allocation			\$2,234,065
Poverty			
Free and Reduced Lunch	0.10	\$383	\$16,220,093
Poverty Concentration (≥ 60%)	0.10	\$383	\$3,797,028
Total District-Wide Allocation			\$20,017,121
Vocation Students	1.00	\$3,832	\$3,613,280
Grand Total District-Wide SBA Allocation			\$424,218,066

ELL weights recently expanded to differentiate ELL student needs

New weights added to address needs of unique student type