

April 15, 2003

Dear Superintendent Payzant,

On March 25<sup>th</sup> the Boston City Council held a public hearing to discuss the implementation of Question 2 and to address the questions and concerns of teachers, students, and parents in the Boston Public School System. While the presence of your office and their subsequent efforts to respond to questions are greatly appreciated, I would like to continue the dialogue begun that day and support your efforts in developing a timely and transparent process for the implementation of Question 2.

As you know many school assignment deadlines are approaching for our students and, if the Boston Public School System plans on moving forward with the implementation of the Unz Initiative, it is of the utmost importance to synchronize regular BPS deadlines with the deadlines that may accompany Question 2. One of the most pressing concerns for current Bilingual Education students and their parents is the waiver process. Below I will outline the aspects of the waiver process that need immediate attention and a response from your office.

### **Access to Waivers**

Parents and teachers alike are still at a loss as to when and how waivers will be made available. On Monday morning our office received what looked to be like a letter from your office (in English) dated April 2, 2003 accompanied by waiver forms in English and in Spanish to be distributed to parents of Bilingual Education students in BPS. When teachers and advocates contacted the Bilingual Education department to confirm the authenticity of these documents they were informed that they could not distribute the information and that it was not official. Nonetheless, the letter sets forth two deadlines for submitting the waivers, the first of which is April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2003. Without broad distribution of the waivers and accompanying information in multiple languages this deadline would be meaningless.

### **Access to Information and Support**

The letter I have seen outlining the waiver process is only in English and the sample waivers are only in English and Spanish. As you well know the Bilingual Education program services multiple languages including Haitian Kreyol, Chinese, Cape Verdean and Vietnamese. It is essential that parents of all linguistic backgrounds have access to information on waivers, assessment, programs, teacher qualification and student assignment. Those assigned to support parents in the waiver and student assignment process should speak the languages of the families in their neighborhoods and be fully informed about the pedagogical decisions that need to be made for the child. A further barrier to open participation in this process is the limitation of application times to weekdays from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. set forth by your letter. As many parents work during the daytime these hours are not sufficient. Therefore, it is necessary to provide application times during evening and weekends.

## **Location, Staffing and Description of Programs**

At this stage there is still a great deal of uncertainty about the specifics of the programs available to English Language Learners and what criteria will be used to determine the appropriate program for each child. Also it is still unclear what training teachers will complete in order to properly administer the BPS Programs for English Language Learners.

The questions I have raised in this letter pertain only to the waiver process, one of many aspects of the transition into English Immersion. The implementation of Question Two in its entirety continues to be of great concern to the residents of Boston. I expect you will work towards a transparent process by making information available promptly to all the children and parents affected by these changes, in all the languages that the Bilingual Education Program currently services, and in writing. As we are only days away from the first deadline set forth in your letter for filing a waiver, I trust you will respond to the concerns expressed in this letter as soon as possible.

I would like to reiterate that our commitment to English-learning children must guide all of our actions as we work together to help facilitate this difficult transition.

Sincerely,

Councillor Felix D. Arroyo

CC: Mayor Thomas M. Menino;  
Nydia Mendez, Director of Bilingual Education Programs, BPS;  
Elizabeth Reilinger, Chair of the Boston School Committee;  
Councillor Chuck Turner, Chairman of the City Council's Education Committee