



## **BARNSTABLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

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Dear BCHMCPS Parents/Guardians,

The recent School Committee vote for the nonrenewal of the Horace Mann charter application for BCHMCPS has generated questions among parents and guardians about the school's future status. I write in hopes of clarifying some misconceptions and sharing next steps. In order to address questions that we have received thus far, I have developed a Frequently Asked Questions guide below.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

1. *What changes will I notice next year at BCHMCPS?*

BCHMCPS remains a Horace Mann charter school for the 2018-19 school year. BCHMCPS will follow Department of Elementary and Secondary Education charter school regulations, as they would any year as a Horace Mann charter. Parents and guardians should expect that current BCHMCPS programming will remain in place for the 2018-19 school year.

2. *Why did the School Committee vote to nonrenew the five year charter application submitted by the BCHMCPS Board of Trustees?*

During the School Committee meeting on June 6, 2018, members discussed the current governance structure of BCHMCPS. As a Horace Mann charter school, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education has oversight and authority for BCHMCPS. At one time 17 Horace Mann charter schools existed in the state. Currently, 8 Horace Mann charter schools remain, including 6 in Boston, 1 in Salem, and one in Barnstable.

Members of the School Committee articulated their responsibility as local elected officials to provide oversight for the education of Barnstable Public School students. As stated by Vice Chair Stephanie Ellis, "The overall governance of a public charter school within a public school system is as clear as mud. It's not about what happens in the classroom, not at all, because great things are happening in the classroom. It's just the governance. And I applaud every teacher, every student and every parent and every staff member that has put your whole heart into this charter school because you guys have made a difference in the education of the children at Barnstable Public Schools and I'm so proud of that, so proud."

3. *After the 2018-19 school year, will BCHMCPS remain a school of choice?*

As Superintendent it is my intent to have BCHMCPS remain a school of choice for the Town of Barnstable, and I will make that recommendation to the School Committee. As such, there would be no need to redistrict BCHMCPS.

4. *How can BCHMCPS preserve its current programming without charter school status?*

As a Horace Mann charter school, BCHMCPS has autonomy in a number of areas, including curriculum. Autonomy may be continued through an *Innovation School* designation. Moreover, under innovation school regulations, existing students in the school prior to conversion to Innovation School status have the right to continue to attend. Innovation Schools are defined in An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap signed by Governor Patrick in 2010 (more information below), and are similar to Horace Mann charter schools in many ways, with the major exception of local school committee oversight instead of state oversight. Currently, there are 57 Innovation Schools in Massachusetts, each governed by their local school committee.

### **Innovation Schools**

As described by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/redesign/innovation/AutonomyFlexibility.html>), the following are the areas of autonomy and flexibility included in the Innovation School model, and examples of strategies that applicants establishing Innovation Schools can consider when designing their initial prospectuses and innovation plans.

1. **Curriculum and Assessment:** The freedom to structure curriculum and assessment practices to best meet students' learning needs. While acknowledging that Innovation schools are expected to administer any state required assessments, these schools have the flexibility to best determine which school-based curricula and assessment practices will prepare students for state and district assessments. This could include:
  - Freedom from local district curriculum requirements;
  - Freedom from required district professional development offerings.
2. **Staffing:** The freedom to manage staff members as needed in order to create a unified school community, subject to approval by two-thirds of the existing teachers in a conversion school or negotiation of waivers/modifications to the collective bargaining agreement in a new school. This could include:
  - Establishing staffing patterns and creating job descriptions which best meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of students; and
  - Hiring staff that best fit the needs of the school, regardless of their current status (member of the district or not, although every teacher hired becomes a member of the local teachers union).
3. **Budget:** A lump sum per pupil budget in which the school has complete discretion to spend funding in the manner that provides the best programs and services to students and their families. This could include:
  - A lump sum per pupil budget, the sum of which is equal to other schools within the grade span; and
  - District itemization of all central office costs, and freedom on the part of Innovation schools to choose to purchase identified discretionary district services or to not purchase them and include them in the school's lump sum per pupil budget.
4. **District Policies:** The freedom to create a school's programs and policies, while being mindful of state and federal requirements. This could include:
  - Increased governing responsibilities for the school's site council, including the following: principal selection and supervision, with final approval by the superintendent in all cases; budget approval; and setting of work conditions for faculty; and
  - Freedom from all district policies and the authority to set policies that the school community feels will best promote student success (including, among others, promotion, graduation, attendance, and discipline policies).

5. **School Calendar:** The freedom to set longer school days and calendar years for both students and faculty. For example, research supports a correlation between faculty planning time spent on teaching and learning and increased student achievement. Scheduling which allows for summer and school year faculty planning time could contribute to a more unified school community. This could include:
  - Increasing planning and professional development time for faculty;
  - Increasing learning time for students; and
  - Organizing the school schedule in ways that maximize learning time for students and planning time for faculty (e.g., longer days Monday through Thursday in order to have half-days for students on Fridays, enabling faculty a professional development block every Friday afternoon).
6. **Professional Development:** The freedom to structure the professional development activities according to the needs of the students, staff, and faculty of the school. This could include:
  - Modifying or transforming the structure and/or content of professional development activities to meet the specific needs of the school's student population, regardless of the district's professional development activities; and
  - Restructuring the daily schedule in order to fully integrate professional development into the daily collaboration of teachers within the school.

### **Next Steps**

In closing, I have met with the BCHMCPS staff to share the mechanism of the Innovation School designation as a way to continue autonomy with local school committee governance. As described in Massachusetts law, innovation schools require an eligible applicant to develop an application for Innovation School designation with an 11-member stakeholder committee. Prior to submitting the application to the School Committee for consideration, two-thirds of the teachers must approve the application for innovation. Therefore, it is important that BCHMCPS teachers consider whether an innovation school is a viable next step in the process.

If the BCHMCPS community would like to pursue Innovation School designation, I am committed to supporting the design and application process in order to preserve what I have heard from parents and teachers in terms of what makes BCHMCPS a special place to learn and grow. I anticipate the School Committee will welcome an application, given their comments that teaching and learning at BCHMCPS is effective and is benefiting students.

If there are other questions that parents/guardians have regarding the status of BCHMCPS, or the possibility of Innovation School designation, please do not hesitate to reach me at 508-862-4953.

Sincerely,

Meg Mayo-Brown, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

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