January 7, 2025

Dear students, families, staff, faculty, and administrators of the Paul A. Dever Elementary School,

I am writing to communicate directly with you about the proposal to permanently close the Dever Elementary School at the end of the 2025-26 school year. Due to the school being in state receivership, the decision to propose school closure requires approval from me in my role as Acting Commissioner. I have granted permission to Boston Public Schools (BPS) to propose closing the Dever, with the closure to take effect at the end of school year 2025-26, as part of a broader set of school consolidation proposals that will be presented to the Boston School Committee in January 2025.

I acknowledge that it may be difficult to understand this decision in light of the major school transformation efforts that have been underway since the school entered receivership in 2014. Both DESE and BPS recognize that the Dever school community devotes tremendous effort every day to providing a rigorous and welcoming educational environment to all of its students and families.

My decision to support the proposed closure of the Dever at the end of school year 2025-26 reflects the urgent importance of enabling BPS to move forward with its long-term facilities plan. Since 2022, BPS has been implementing its [Systemic Improvement Plan](https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/unsure/systemic-improvement-plan) to address major concerns identified in a 2022 district review conducted by DESE. In the [2022 district review report](https://www.doe.mass.edu/accountability/district-review/nolevel/2022-0035.pdf), the district’s lack of a comprehensive facilities master plan was cited as a key failure of district operations. For the past two years, the City of Boston and BPS have worked to create the city’s first-ever [Long-Term Facilities Plan](https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/file/2024/01/Long-Term%20Facilities%20Plan%20-%20Final%20Draft.pdf), which is grounded in a vision of a [High-Quality Student Experience](https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/academics/inclusive-education) for all BPS students. The new Long-Term Facilities Plan has been informed by extensive community engagement and collaboration with DESE.

Under this plan, the district has adopted a transparent data framework for assessing the capacities of existing school buildings to support high-quality experiences for all students. The district’s long-term investments in facilities are now guided by school building ratings maintained in a publicly accessible [dashboard](https://www.boston.gov/departments/schools/decision-making-rubric-dashboard), as well as other indicators of building viability such as utilization rates, family preference data and percentages of students in the school’s walk zone. The district’s analysis of these data has yielded a set of recommendations for consolidating seats that includes the proposed closure of the Dever at the end of school year 2025-26.

In my consideration of BPS’ proposal to include the Dever in its consolidation plans, I required the district to demonstrate that the decision for the Dever would be based upon a systemwide analysis of space utilization, in which the Dever would be evaluated using the same criteria as all other BPS schools. The data-driven decision-making process described above meets this requirement. The district also demonstrated a plan that ensures students currently enrolled at the Dever will have high quality options and support in enrolling in a new school. At the district’s upcoming community meetings for Dever stakeholders, BPS officials will provide more details and be available to answer your questions on the data and decision-making process that led to the recommendation to close the Dever.

I am aware that the public discussion of closing the Dever will be difficult for members of your school community in the coming days. DESE is working closely with BPS leadership to ensure that Dever stakeholders will have multiple opportunities to voice their needs, questions and concerns throughout the public deliberations. DESE staff will attend the community meetings for Dever stakeholders.

If you have any questions or concerns that you would like to direct to DESE, please contact Lauren Woo, Acting Chief of Staff, at lauren.woo@mass.gov.

Sincerely,

Russell D. Johnston

Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education