

Testimony on
“Supplemental Educational Services Under the No Child Left Behind Act:
How to Improve Quality and Access”
before the
Committee on Education and Labor Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and
Secondary Education
U.S. House of Representatives
by
Boston Public Schools

April 18, 2007
Washington, D.C.

Good Morning, Chairman Kildee and Ranking Member Castle, and Members of the Subcommittee my name is Monica Roberts, I am the Director of Federal and State Programs for the Boston Public Schools. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at this House hearing on Supplemental Educational Services and efforts to improve the quality and effectiveness of the program

Boston Public Schools (BPS) is the largest school district in Massachusetts and serves the largest number of low-income students in the Commonwealth with 71 percent of our students eligible for free or reduced price lunch. Of the 57,000 students served by the Boston Public Schools, 86 percent are African American, Hispanic, Asian, or American Indian. The district was one of nine organizations originally approved by the Massachusetts Department of Education to provide SES services in Boston. Today, the district continues to operate its SES program through the SES pilot project offered by the U.S. Department of Education. We are one of 24 SES providers approved to serve the Boston Area.

Boston has been recognized by a number of national organizations for its continuous improvement towards closing the achievement gap and moving towards proficiency for all students, including the Council of Urban Boards of Education (2004 Award Recipient) and the Broad Foundation (2006 Award Recipient). Despite our efforts and continued gains in student academic performance, 60 schools were identified this school year as failing to make Adequate Yearly Progress for three or more consecutive years, up from 43 schools in School Year 2005 – 2006, and 22 in School Year 2004 – 2005. The district was also identified by the Massachusetts Department of Education for *corrective action* as a result of 2006 adequate yearly progress determinations.

This year Boston Public Schools notified 22,532 eligible students across the 60 identified schools of the availability of SES programs and school choice options. The district reserved nearly \$5.9 million of its Title I grant for provision of SES. Given the per pupil allocation of \$2,390, the total number of students that the district estimated it could serve was 2,460. A total of 4,408 eligible students applied for SES services, and 70 percent of these selected the Boston Public Schools as their first-choice provider. Due to capacity limitation, Boston enrolled 67% of those requesting the district as the first choice provider, and the remaining 3% were enrolled in

their second choice program. The remaining 30% of students were enrolled in the programs of the other SES providers they selected.

The district is able to provide SES services for a quarter of the costs of other providers with the district program per pupil cost being \$610. The balance of the per pupil allocation that the district is eligible to collect, approximately \$1,800, remained in the available SES funding pool to allow for continued enrollment above the 2,460 that would be served if the district charged the maximum per pupil rate. As a result of this practice that Boston established in 2002, the district has been able to accommodate all 4,408 students applying for SES services this year. In short, nearly 2,000 more students are being served in the SES program because the Boston Public Schools has been able to provide SES services at the cost of \$610 per student, nearly four times less than the amount charged by private providers. Boston's experience is consistent with national data collected by the Council of the Great City Schools from 40 of their member school districts, which can be found in Appendix A.

The BPS SES Program model offers small group (6:1) differentiated academic intervention services and tutoring in Mathematics, Reading and Writing for a minimum of 80 hours of tutoring and up to 136 hours for students in schools identified for improvement. At 80 hours per child, the district offers between 33% and 100% more hours than other providers. The program is staffed by highly qualified teachers, a requirement that only school districts are required to meet. The district program schedule is specific to the needs of the families in the school and is offered before school, after school, on weekends, or a combination of these. The district works with each school to ensure that the program is linked to all other social support programs, and cultural and recreational activities available within the building to allow for holistic services and to accommodate working parents.

Boston Public Schools' SES program is connected to, but different from the regular school day and has been designed to build on the district's existing curriculum and assessment system to a) make a seamless link between the regular day and the SES program, and b) not over-burden teachers, students or parents with duplicative testing, record keeping and reporting. SES instructional staff use each student's Individual Student Success Plan (ISSP) developed by the regular school-day teacher to identify students' needs and provided targeted support.

Nineteen SES providers contracted with the district this school year, 8 are non-profits, 1 is faith-based, 1 is a local for-profit, and the remaining 9 are national for-profits. Seventeen of the 19 providers are offering services this school year. Two providers requested a waiver for service provision, because student enrollment in their programs would result in their operating at a financial loss. On average providers offer 40 hours of tutoring services, but range from a low of 29.8 hours to a high of 60 hours. There is wide variety in the hourly rate charged by providers ranging from \$39.82 to \$80 per hour.

It is not possible for us to allow all 19 providers that contract with the district onto every school site. However, external providers seeking to use Boston Public Schools facilities are invited by the district to negotiate directly with principals/headmasters regarding the usage of classroom space. Principals and headmasters are not required by the district to allow providers on campus and make decisions based on five factors: 1) availability of space, 2) past experiences

with the provider, 3) feedback and recommendations from other principals/headmasters, 4) providers' willingness to commit to serving students even if they do not obtain a "critical mass", and 5) the extent to which the provider can support the student population's academic weaknesses through tutoring (i.e. reading for ELL students). Of the seven external providers requesting permission from principals and headmasters to offer services on campus, six were granted access. All principals were required to meet with the providers at a district-hosted Principal-Provider fair. This was an opportunity for providers to broker relationships and make initial contact with schools in which they were interested.

In addition to SES provider fairs, the Boston Public Schools notified the parents of eligible students by mailing a letter to each home, utilizing Connect Ed to make standardized phone calls home, passing out flyers and notices to students in school, and through outreach with our community partnerships. The district also ran advertisements in the Boston Metro, the city's most widely circulated and read newspaper, and on the BPS Cablevision channel. All written communication was distributed in seven languages in addition to English. Boston's enrollment window lasted for an eleven week period, October to January. Boston's communication and enrollment efforts are consistent with national data collected by the Council of the Great City Schools, which can be found in Appendix A.

Providers with school-based programs in our district's school buildings are encouraged to work with parents and the school to ensure that students take advantage of other school-based opportunities offered at the school during the hours after SES tutoring has ended. This has allowed the district to better coordinate SES with other programs, and resulted in later pick up time options for parents. The Boston Public Schools enrolls approximately 12,000 students throughout the district in after-school programs, in addition to SES.

Having experienced SES as both a provider and a district managing the program, Boston has been working to identify areas of strength as well as areas for improvement. Particularly, the district is excited by the role that parents are asked to play in this initiative and the effort to empower them to make informed choices that can result in significant academic improvement. Schools hosting SES programs have found that parents with children in SES programs are more engaged and actively seek to understand their child's academic performance and strategies to support growth.

Schools see SES as having the potential to provide additional intervention services to students that are most at risk. A preliminary district analysis of the BPS program indicates that students attending the district program at least 75 percent of the time or receive 60 tutoring hours out perform students attending for fewer hours on local assessments and are more likely to pass the state assessment. Principals and headmasters have also noted that where SES providers are willing to align their curriculum with the district's school-day curriculum and use existing student performance data to develop instructional plans, students show some improvement.

Challenges are inevitable and the district is working collaboratively with providers and the state department of education to address them. The district has focused on developing and offering practical solutions to some of the problems that have inundated districts and providers.

Boston Public Schools offers the following proposals to strengthen Supplemental Educational Services.

1. Revise student eligibility requirement to be prioritized into two categories a) Priority 1: low income and low performing and b) Priority 2: low performing students from group(s) performing below proficient on state assessment. Currently a number of high performing and savvy families are accessing SES services, while some of our students that are most at risk academically are ineligible.
2. Permit all districts to become SES providers, regardless of their NCLB status. School districts approved to be SES providers are uniquely positioned to offer services with highly qualified instructional staff at a significantly lower per pupil cost, which allows for higher enrollment in the overall program. The quality of district programs will be reviewed and approved by the state department of education and only the highest quality district programs would be approved. Parents would reap the added benefit of increased options and access to services in a familiar and safe environment with instructional staff that are experienced with the regular day curriculum and practices.
3. All SES providers should be required to hire highly qualified instructional staff as research has shown that teacher quality has a direct impact on student performance. This requirement should be extended to staff working with English Language Learners and Special Needs students. This would increase access for these two populations, which frequently withdraw from non-district SES programs in Boston due to provider inability to adequately support the student.
4. Allow districts to use 10% of SES funds to cover overhead and program management cost, which are high and can limit district ability to support program expansion. In particular, districts are currently covering the cost of data management systems, enrollment materials, parental outreach (newspaper and radio advertisements, flyers, and provider fairs), financial management, legal services, and program management staff. In Boston, the overhead cost for this year is nearly a quarter of a million dollars and are scheduled to increase with our purchase of a data management system next school year.
5. Require states to comply with the current requirement to evaluate providers and administer a common growth model assessment for all providers. In the case that the state is unable to implement a common assessment, give the local education agencies authority to mandate and administer the common assessment. States should set performance requirements for all providers based on the assessment and remove providers failing to meet targets for two or more consecutive years.
6. Require states to put limitations on incentives offered by providers to students for enrollment and recruitment of other students, not to exceed a \$5 value per child. This continues to be a significant concern for most districts. In Boston, one provider offered students \$2,000 to enroll in their program and recruit 7 to 9 additional students. Providers violating this requirement should be removed by the state from the list of approved providers.
7. Require all SES providers to serve all students enrolled in their program regardless of the number of students enrolled in their program district-wide, and to begin services within two weeks of receiving their enrollment data. The trend in Massachusetts has been for providers to market their services to parents, and then either seek waivers in order to not

serve students if they do not reach their critical mass for profitability, or to delay provision of services until they reach this critical mass, if at all.

Thank you. I will be pleased to answer any questions that you have.

Appendix A

Preliminary NCLB Survey Results from the Council of the Great City Schools on Supplemental Educational Services

Figure 1. Percent of Eligible Students Receiving SES in Cities Where Districts Can Provide Services and Where They Can't Provide Services

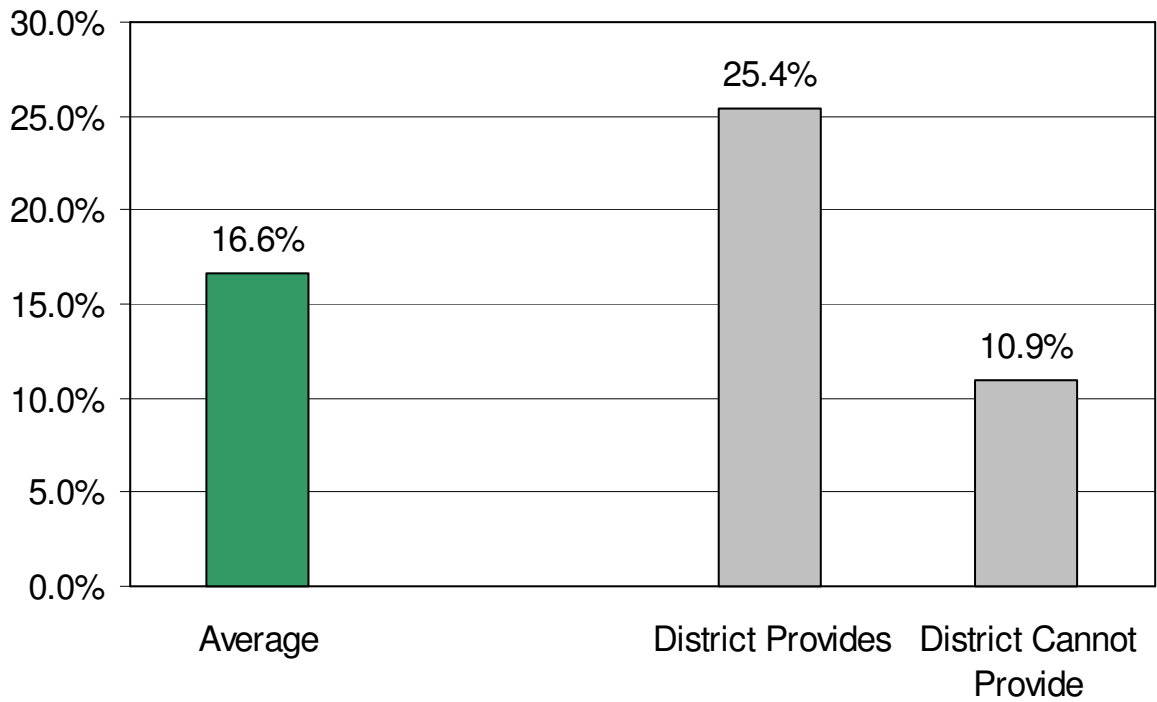


Figure 2. Percent of Students Receiving Supplemental Services by Type of Provider

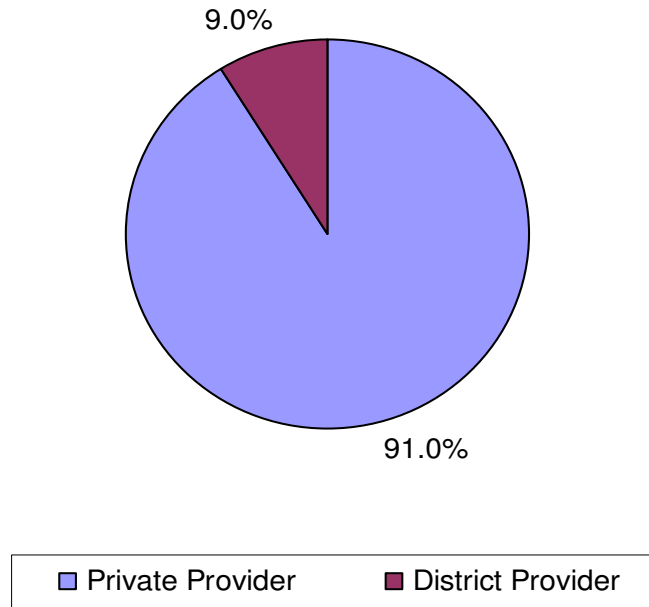


Figure 3. Percent of Districts Using Various Methods to Communicate with Parents about Supplemental Services

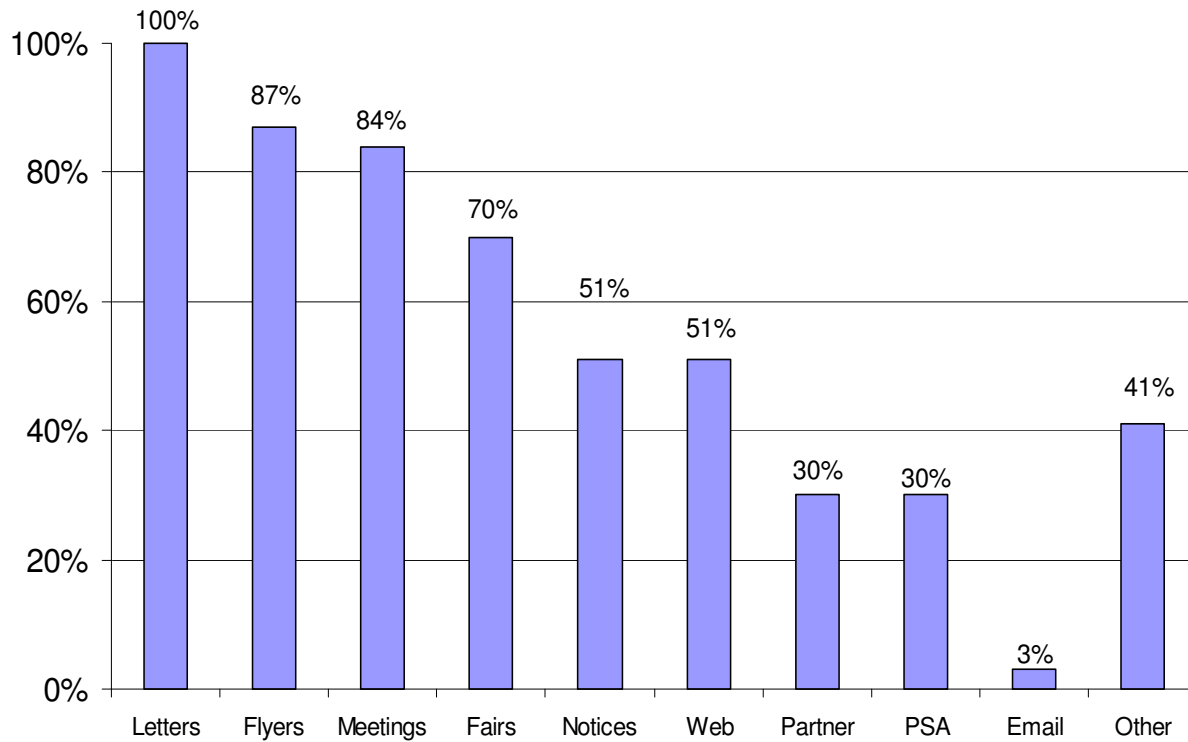


Figure 4. Percent of Cities Using SES Windows of Varying Lengths

