

For Immediate Release
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Superintendent to Propose Major Changes for 2018/2019 School Year

(Salem, MA) -- Salem Public Schools Superintendent Margarita Ruiz, announced that she will present a plan to School Committee that promotes equity and access for all students, recommending the dissolution of the Nathaniel Bowditch School and the relocation of the Horace Mann Laboratory School to the Willson Street building.

Speaking to a school-wide convocation, Superintendent Ruiz recommended dissolving the Bowditch school and welcoming students across the district to better integrate schools and raise student achievement levels. Ruiz also noted that the Bowditch School was once a model for dual language instruction, a gem of the school district. Unfortunately, over the years the school has become segregated. She further noted that research makes it very clear that segregation has a negative effect on student achievement.

In 2013, in hopes of better serving the district's K-8 students in Sheltered Immersion programs, the prior administration transferred all of the children in these programs to the Bowditch. The plan then was to provide additional resources to the English Language Learners (ELL) who needed the highest levels of support. Unfortunately, due to leadership turnover, changes in the school model, and the district's implementation of student assignments, the district's execution of this plan fell short of the original vision.

The 2017 MCAS results confirmed that the district is not serving the Bowditch students to the standard of excellence we strive to provide according to Superintendent Ruiz.

"The School Committee firmly believes that every student in Salem deserve an equal chance at success. At present, despite best efforts, we are not serving the kids at NBS as well as we are those in other schools in the district," said Mayor Kimberly Driscoll. "In addition, students at the Horace Mann Lab School have a building that is substandard in comparison to other school buildings in the district. Everyone is working with the goal of improving educational opportunities and outcomes for all students in Salem, and I believe that is at the heart of the Superintendent's recommendation."

Currently, the Bowditch School serves 358 students in Kindergarten through 8th grade who would be welcomed at new schools for the 2018/2019 school year. The Collins Middle School would welcome rising students in grades 5, 6, and 7.

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For students in grades K-4, the district would take advantage of under-enrolled grades at other schools to open the doors to Bowditch students. The Superintendent noted that new classrooms and teachers would be added at the Witchcraft Heights, Horace Mann, Bates elementary schools and at the Collins Middle School. Class sizes at all schools would remain within the STU contractual limit.

“Through our recent strategic planning process, we made a promise to ourselves, our community and most importantly our students, to provide equity and access to all,” said Superintendent Ruiz. “We have an obligation to eliminate any and all barriers to educational achievement and promote policies and practices that are fair and just and make learning opportunities fully accessible to all.”

The district intends to reuse the building to relocate the Horace Mann Laboratory School, currently located on the campus of Salem State University. Built in 2001 to house 640 students, the Willson Street building is part of the Salem High School campus. The 99,500 square foot building includes a cafeteria, gymnasium, science labs, library, bandroom, 31 classrooms and parking for 79 cars.

By relocating the Horace Mann School to the Willson Street building, the district will be able to provide a cohesive, single building site program, that will improve the physical working environment for teachers, and provide safer transition areas for walkers, bus riders and parent drop-off and pick up.