



## NORTH END/WATERFRONT RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 130319  
Boston, MA 02113

May 18, 2011

Thomas M. Menino  
Mayor of Boston  
One City Hall Square, Suite 500  
Boston, MA 02201-2013

Re: North End Schools

Dear Mayor Menino:

This letter is written to notify you and other elected officials, the Boston Finance Commission, and the Boston Redevelopment Authority, of the North End community's concern and support for two iconic North End educational institutions, the Eliot School and the North Bennet Street School.

The Eliot School, due in large part to the extraordinary talents of principal Traci Walker Griffith, has grown in educational success, enrollment, and student demand. In recognition of this success, the Eliot School was featured on *The Today Show*. However, its continued growth is now limited by the capacity of the current building and the difficulties of expansion in our crowded neighborhood. To accommodate its present overpopulation of 320 students, the Eliot School has been forced to eliminate its library and music classes; to divide classrooms; to delay the installation of a fully funded computer lab; to borrow space at the nearby North Bennet Street School, and to require 120 middle school students to share one coed toilet.

The Eliot School is the only neighborhood school serving the North End, the West End, and Beacon Hill. While the ratio of children per occupied school seat is 1.6 citywide, it is 4.4 in these combined Downtown neighborhoods. There are currently more children on the Eliot's waitlist than the total number of its enrolled students. North End children living directly across the street from the Eliot are being denied admittance because of lack of space. Unless the School can expand, it will be forced to limit its second strand by next year and to end the second strand within two years. The current first graders will need to be relocated to other schools by 2012, including special needs students specifically assigned to the Eliot's targeted program.

The North Bennet Street School (NBSS) was founded in the North End in 1881, introducing Boston to both kindergarten and vocational training. A strong neighborhood presence for over a century, the School has become an institution of international distinction, attracting students from around the world. In partnership with the Eliot School, the NBSS provides instruction to the Eliot's sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students, in addition to lending the Eliot much needed space for its own classes. However, the NBSS has itself outgrown its space.

The NBSS's historic preservation program requires the use of heavy equipment and is currently being conducted in rented space in Arlington. At a recent NEWRA meeting, Miguel Gomez-Ibanez, the School's president, outlined three goals of the search for a new home for the NBSS: 1) to find a building of solid construction to support the heavy equipment, enabling all the School's programs to come together again under one roof; 2) to find a building with enough room for expansion of the School's community programs; 3) to find such a building in the North End, allowing the School to stay in its historic birthplace. He explained that the City Printing Plant and adjacent former Police Academy building, which have been declared surplus property, are ideally suited to the needs of the North Bennet Street School, due to their load-bearing capacity and location. NEWRA members voted to support the efforts of the NBSS to acquire these surplus buildings.

**Please be advised that there is strong support in our neighborhood for both the expansion of the Eliot School and the retention and expansion of the North Bennet Street School.**

These two schools have been woven into the social fabric of the North End for over a century. North Enders are both proud of and passionate about our community's history. We are also extremely pleased at the increasing number of young families choosing to raise their children in the North End, and we would like this trend to continue. While we are aware that the City needs to be continually striving to expand its tax base, and that offering the Printing Plant/Police Academy site for private development through unrestricted public bidding would provide some additional tax revenue, we speak to the present and future needs and aspirations of our unique neighborhood. We have already lost three significant educational facilities to private development. The Paul Revere/Saint Anthony's School, the Julie Billiard/Columbus High School and the Christopher Columbus Center are now on the tax rolls as condominium complexes. Please do not permit the North End to be deprived any further of its cultural institutions. We have done our fair share toward satisfying the fiscal needs of the City at large.

The crisis of the Eliot School's lack of capacity is upon us. The time for studying the situation has passed. Another year or two is a long time in the life and education of a child. Most of the North End buildings that might have suited the needs of both the Eliot and North Bennet Street Schools are now condominiums. However, the present NBSS buildings on Salem Street are located a short distance from the Eliot School and are already configured as classrooms. As mentioned above, the Eliot School is now borrowing classroom space in the NBSS. Due to their size, configuration, and location, the NBSS buildings offer a practical and timely solution to the pending crisis at the Eliot School. To this end, a swap has been proposed, whereby the NBSS would acquire the City Printing Plant and adjacent buildings, while the City would acquire the NBSS buildings on Salem Street for the purpose of expanding the Eliot School. If this proposal is accepted, the NBSS can accommodate some of the Eliot's older grades immediately, clearing space in the Eliot School building. The swap proposal has the advantage that it can be implemented quickly enough to help today's waitlisted children, while keeping the North Bennet Street School in the North End and allowing the expansion of its programs for the surrounding communities.

Sustainable neighborhoods are the best long-term investment for the City. Good schools attract long-term residents, increasing property values and creating a strong tax base. When the economy finally recovers, will the North End still be a neighborhood, or will it be a tourist destination occupied by transient renters? We believe that the choice of future use for the surplus City buildings in the North End will have a profound impact on our neighborhood. We ask the City to join with our community in finding a way to keep and expand our Schools, and thereby ensure a strong, sustainable North End neighborhood.

Therefore, we request a neighborhood meeting in the North End with our elected officials and representatives of both the Boston Finance Commission and the Boston Redevelopment Authority, to address the following questions. (1) What are the City's plans for the City Printing Plant and its adjacent buildings? (2) What is the City's proposal for addressing the expansion needs of the Eliot School? (3) How can the City help the North Bennet Street School to expand while remaining in the North End? Since there are only a little more than three months before the start of the 2011-12 school year, we ask that this meeting be scheduled within the next few weeks.

We, and the community at large, await your favorable reply.

Very truly yours,

Stephanie Hogue, President  
North End/Waterfront Residents' Association

cc: Representative Aaron Michlewitz  
Councilor Salvatore LaMattina  
Councilors-at-Large Felix G. Arroyo, John R. Connolly, Stephen J. Murphy, Ayanna Pressley  
Peter Meade, Director, Boston Redevelopment Authority  
Matthew A. Cahill, Executive Director, Boston Finance Commission  
Traci Walker Griffith, Principal, Eliot School  
Miguel Gomez-Ibanez, President, North Bennet Street School  
Ania Camargo, President, Beacon Hill Civic Association