

Bourne Public Schools

Listening Session Report – September 2025

Executive Summary

During September 2025, Bourne Public Schools held six listening sessions with caregivers, community members, and staff to gather input on school configuration, enrollment, and facilities planning. Sessions were scheduled at different times of day and in both in-person and virtual formats to maximize accessibility. Each was facilitated by at least one School Committee member and supported by the Superintendent and Central Office team.

Across all sessions, participants consistently expressed strong enthusiasm for expanding pre-K, deep concern about space constraints at Bournedale Elementary, and recognition that facilities planning is necessary. The most divisive issue was whether to move 8th grade to Bourne High School. While some families and staff supported the move for enrichment opportunities and space relief, others raised social-emotional and retention concerns. Even among supporters, there was consensus that 8th graders would need a separate identity within the high school.

Views on neighborhood schools versus grade-banding were mixed, with parents weighing the benefits of stability versus new peer groups, and staff emphasizing equity concerns. Other recurring themes included the need to market and upgrade Bourne High School, the importance of strengthening community engagement, and staff concerns about the logistics of reassignments under any new configuration.

Individual Session Summaries

Session 1: Caregivers & Community

Date/Time: Wednesday, September 17, 6:30 PM

Location: BIS Media Center

Participants: 15 caregivers and community members

School Committee: Donel Beals, Kathleen Quintal, Kari MacCrae

Central Office: Dr. Zhou (Superintendent), Christine Borning (Assistant Superintendent)

Participants voiced concern about moving 7th and 8th graders to the high school. There was strong enthusiasm for expanding pre-K opportunities, including the idea of infant care integrated

at the high school. Families noted that pre-K expansion could help retain students who might otherwise attend Falmouth. Recognition that Bournedale is at capacity was paired with appreciation for proactive planning. Opinions on neighborhood schools were mixed, with some favoring continuity and others supporting the introduction of new peer groups.

Session 2: Caregivers & Community

Date/Time: Friday, September 19, 10:45 AM

Location: Central Office

Participants: 7 caregivers and community members

School Committee: Donel Beals, Kendelly Gagne

Central Office: Dr. Zhou (Superintendent), Kristin Donahue (Director of Special Education & Student Services)

Families were divided about 8th grade at the high school. Supporters cited enrichment opportunities and existing integration with athletics, while opponents raised strong concerns about social-emotional readiness, with one parent indicating she would seek alternatives outside the district. Ideas included creating a 5–8 configuration at BMS or moving all preschool to BHS.

Additional topics included community engagement (suggestions for retirees to have free access to events), the need for upgrades to the high school, and stronger marketing of BHS programs.

Session 3: Caregivers & Community

Date/Time: Tuesday, September 23, 7:30 PM

Format: Zoom

Participants: 14 caregivers and community members

School Committee: Kerri Scofield, Rachel Agrillo

Central Office: Dr. Zhou (Superintendent), Christine Borning (Assistant Superintendent), Christopher Oliver (IT & Communications Director)

Discussion began with an overview of enrollment trends and space challenges. Participants revisited the idea of moving 8th grade to the high school. Some recalled negative experiences from prior attempts, raising concerns about retention. Others felt today's lower enrollment and facility improvements could make the move more feasible, especially with a separate wing, lunch schedule, and enrichment opportunities.

Questions were raised about the ILC model, the impact of universal pre-K on space, and transportation challenges, particularly with bridge construction. Portable classrooms were

suggested but deemed impractical. The group also reviewed grade-configuration options, long-term stability goals, and facility retrofitting needs.

Session 4: BPS Staff

Date/Time: Monday, September 29, 3:30–4:30 PM

Location: BES Art Room

Participants: 15 staff members (various schools and roles)

School Committee: Kerri Scofield

Central Office: Dr. Zhou (Superintendent), Christine Borning (Assistant Superintendent)

Staff raised broad questions about whether regionalization or the status quo were viable options. Concerns included student movement to UCT, keeping 8th graders separate if moved to the high school, and scheduling challenges at the 9th grade level. Teachers stressed the importance of recess for younger grades and voiced differing views on neighborhood versus grade-banded schools.

Bridge construction was noted as a major factor for planning. Teachers also emphasized the importance of marketing BHS and suggested structured transition opportunities for 8th graders.

Session 5: BPS Staff

Date/Time: Tuesday, September 30, 2:30–3:30 PM

Location: BMS Media Center

Participants: 16 staff members (various schools and roles)

School Committee: Donel Beals, Kerri Scofield

Central Office: Dr. Zhou (Superintendent), Christine Borning (Assistant Superintendent)

This group showed broad support for Option 1, moving each grade up by one level, viewing it as least costly and least disruptive. Staff expressed concern that returning to neighborhood schools could undo progress under the grade-banded model and create inequities. Others noted benefits of students starting fresh with new peers in middle school.

Several participants supported moving 8th grade to the high school, while stressing the need for a clear integration plan. Teachers raised logistical concerns about specialists' placement and classroom assignments, as well as transportation if younger grades were moved across the bridge. Additional suggestions included adding daycare to attract staff and upgrading BHS facilities.

Session 6: BPS Staff

Date/Time: Tuesday, September 30, 6:00–7:00 PM

Format: Zoom

Participants: 15 staff members (various schools and roles)

School Committee: Maria Heaney

Central Office: Dr. Zhou (Superintendent), Christine Borning (Assistant Superintendent)

Participants expressed strong support for neighborhood schools, citing shorter travel times given bridge construction and benefits for older elementary students. Teachers noted that while students may be nervous about change, staff could provide consistency across schools.

Ideas included creating an alternative learning school, centralizing pre-K to share resources, and considering 8th grade at BHS, with mixed opinions. Staffing and placement logistics were major concerns. Central Office leaders explained that teacher placements would be managed systematically, with input from staff and transparent processes.

Common Themes Across All Sessions

- **Pre-K Expansion:** Strong and consistent support from families and staff, seen as both a retention strategy and recruitment tool.
- **8th Grade at the High School:** The most divisive issue, with both strong support and strong opposition. Even supporters emphasized the need for a distinct identity and space for 8th graders.
- **Neighborhood vs. Grade-Banded Schools:** Families were mixed, while staff emphasized equity and concerns about undoing recent progress under grade banding.
- **Facilities & Marketing:** Widespread recognition of capacity issues at Bournedale and the need to upgrade and market Bourne High School to remain competitive.
- **Community Engagement:** Calls for stronger community involvement and showcasing BPS strengths, particularly in comparison to UCT.
- **Staffing Logistics:** Repeated concerns about reassignments, fairness, and transparency in processes if reconfiguration occurs.