Stronger Schools, Stronger Boston: A Plan to Foster Equity, Coherence, and Innovation

Boston’s strategic implementation plan, Stronger Schools, Stronger Boston: A Plan to Foster Equity, Coherence, and Innovation is a roadmap for providing high-quality public education for all BPS students and is grounded in the values of equity, coherence, and innovation.

Focus areas of the plan include: implementing an inclusive, rigorous, and culturally linguistically sustaining instructional program; attracting, developing, and retaining highly effective educators; engaging students, families and community; delivering high-quality support and customer service; and building a sustainable financial system.

Education

Boston is the birthplace of public education and aspires to equip all students at every level of education with the tools they need to improve the city. Currently, disparities in educational attainment by race and economic status persist. Bostonians of all ages agree that quality public education is essential to Boston’s future and a powerful engine for economic equity.

We are committed to addressing existing disparities by developing a sustainable urban education system that supports many school types and educational paths. Our schools have made a promise to our students to provide education that empowers them to become the next generation of workers, leaders, advocates, and innovators. The following initiatives will enable Bostonians to access quality education opportunities for lifelong learning and connect them to jobs where they can make powerful contributions.
Educational attainment is a key determinant of economic outcomes. 15 percent of Boston residents over age 25 lack a high school diploma and almost one third of this population lives in poverty. There is a significant and persistent gap between the performance of black and Hispanic BPS students and their white peers. White fourth-graders scored 27 points (13 percent) higher on the National Assessment of Educational Progress reading scale than their black and Hispanic peers. Education rates vary significantly by race. While 63 percent of white residents over age 25 have a bachelor’s degree or above, only 19 percent of black residents and 17 percent of Hispanic residents have the same.
Our city is rich with learning resources both inside and outside the classroom. We are connecting these resources and creating a system of pathways for learners of all ages to achieve lifelong success.

**Boston's Citywide Learning Ecosystem**

**OUR VISION FOR EDUCATION + LEARNING**

Boston's communities collaborate to guarantee residents world-class Pre-K through Grade-16 education and lifelong learning opportunities that develop the knowledge, skill, and experience needed to be fully engaged in shaping Boston's culture, providing civic leadership, and strengthening the local economy.

**INCREASING EDUCATIONAL EQUITY**

- Modernizing Boston Public Schools and improving quality by increasing equity, coherence, and innovation
- Creating partnerships among all Boston Schools to promote quality, equity, mutual accountability, and sustainability among all school options
- Creating seamlessness across Boston's education pipeline from birth to career

**HOUSEHOLD STABILITY**

- Meeting families' basic needs to accelerate school success

"Ensure that early care and elementary school facilities support twenty-first-century learning experiences grounded in play. Playgrounds and other creative play spaces for kids are important when thinking holistically about designing these learning environments."

Comment via email in response to Draft Plan

Imagine Boston 2030

Spotlight

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BPS Educational Vision

We will build a learning system that is student-centered and easy-to-navigate, placing equity, innovation, and learning—both inside and outside the classroom—at its center.

Core Values

Equity
We will eliminate systemic bias and provide authentic learning opportunities for all students. We will develop our future leaders into determined, independent learners who are able to pursue their aspirations.

Coherence
We will reduce inconsistencies and inequities in the way our schools and district are organized in order to create a seamless system of care—whether in our classrooms or in our grade configurations across schools. We will make our operations and learning environments student-centered.

Innovation
We will enable our students and employees to become leaders, advocates, entrepreneurs, and innovators for Boston and the world. We will open the doors to the innovation economy for all our learners, youth and adult.

Characteristics of a BPS-Trained Student

Career Ready
Fundamental to our work are the skills, knowledge, and capacity necessary for college and career. We must be clear about what capabilities future workers will need and design our system to develop these in our students.

Equity Oriented
Where do we learn about injustice? Where are the opportunity gaps? The actions of the adults, peers, and systems in our lives are experienced daily and studied more closely than any textbook. BPS can shape significant elements of our kids’ early experiences to be more equitable.

Community Contributors
We do not just want our students to climb the ladder but to reach back to pull others up. Our students are critical in shaping what our communities look like over time. As students climb the educational ladder, BPS will equip them to support their peers and contribute to their communities.

Full of Agency
We want students to see themselves in potential futures and to believe in their ability to effect change. School can help them recognize their role and potential as an individual.

The successful BPS graduate is one who, six years after graduating high school, is gainfully employed and a productive, contributing citizen who believes in his or her ability to effect change.

BPS Skills
As we look toward the future, we believe that our academics and enrichment have to equip BPS students with three types of skills:

Learning and Innovation Skills
Creativity, Critical Thinking, Communication, and Collaboration

Information, Media, and Technology Skills
Information Literacy and Media Literacy

Life and Career Skills
Adaptability, Initiative, Social and Cross-Cultural Skills, Productivity, and Leadership
Imagine Boston 2030

Education

We will:

Build a connected education system that supports learners from early care through career
We will expand Pre-K until every 4-year-old in Boston has a seat and strengthen K-12 education as a pathway to college and career. Our schools will prepare students to attend college and encourage learning that prepares students to meet industry requirements.

Provide twenty-first-century learning experiences and facilities
We will modernize infrastructure through the BuildBPS Ten Year Educational and Facilities Master Plan and develop innovative modes of instruction through High School Redesign.

Encourage partnerships among district, charter, religious, and independent schools
These partnerships will promote best practices and innovation as well as maximize resources for teaching and learning.

Take steps toward making college affordable and accessible for all Bostonians
We will continue to add more free community college options for eligible BPS graduates. We will make it easier to earn early college credits and transfer community college credits between institutions and to four-year colleges. We will provide nonfinancial support for matriculation through programs like Success Boston that help students navigate the college experience.

Foster learning beyond school walls
We will support after-school programs, expand opportunities to earn credit in community settings, increase access to summer learning opportunities, and otherwise unlock learning outside of classroom walls, including giving caregivers tools to support children’s learning. Boston will support playgrounds and streetscape infrastructure that create playful environments where kids enjoy learning and build twenty-first-century skills such as grit, determination, teamwork, and problem-solving.

Create pathways to career ladders in Boston’s strongest and most well-paid sectors
We will focus on pathways to jobs in sectors such as education, financial services, technology, and healthcare by strengthening partnerships between employers, schools, and job-training programs that can guarantee jobs for participants. We will explore hybrid school models that train students for careers through more rapid academic programs that result in postsecondary credentials and jobs.

Strengthen Boston Public Schools to fulfill its promise to students that they will have a quality job in Boston no more than six years after graduation
We will implement an inclusive, holistic, and culturally responsive instructional program; cultivate highly effective instructors who embrace a diversity of cultures and perspectives; engage students, family, and the wider community in learning; support students and families through a coordinated, school-based support network; and build a financially sustainable and equitable education system.

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“Imagine Boston 2030

Introduction

Context

The Opportunity of Growth

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“We have the intellectual and cultural capital in our cities to make our public schools the best in the nation. In 2030, my vision is that Boston should serve as a model for public schools just as it did in 1635 when it opened the nation’s first public school.”

South Boston resident via web survey

BPS students →

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Boston is committed to ensuring a high-quality Pre-K seat for every 4-year-old in the city.

Building on its legacy as a leader in education, Boston has established early childhood education as a citywide priority. Boston is a national leader in Pre-K education in large part due to program-quality improvements made in Boston Public Schools and across community provider settings through the local “K1DS” initiative and through the federal Pre-K Expansion Grant effort. Studies have shown that investments in high-quality Pre-K translate directly into closing early racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps, as well as long-term academic success and greater likelihood of gainful employment.

The Mayor’s Universal Pre-Kindergarten Advisory Committee defines Pre-K quality by several standards, which include teacher qualifications and certifications, curricular accreditation and standardization, ongoing professional development and frequent child outcome assessments used to inform classroom practices. Boston now meets the total demand for Pre-K seats citywide and in every neighborhood and is on track to have enough seats for the next 10 years. Nevertheless, only 75 percent of Boston’s 6,000 4-year-olds have a quality seat, and the total number of 4-year-olds is expected to grow to more than 6,700 by 2025. Quality seats are not evenly distributed. Neighborhoods like South Boston, Brighton, Charlestown, Allston, and Jamaica Plain currently have enough high-quality seats to serve children and families, while Dorchester, Hyde Park, West Roxbury, Roxbury, East Boston, and Roslindale are in need of additional high-quality seats.

The following actions will help expand quality Pre-K seats, and achieve Boston’s goal of ensuring a high-quality Pre-K seat for every four-year-old.

**Preserve Established Progress**

Boston will work to protect the high-quality seats that are currently funded through the Preschool Expansion Grant program.

**Expand Quality Programs**

We will expand the number of BPS seats as space allows and expand the number of seats in community-based organizations that meet the city’s quality thresholds, especially in communities where there is a shortage or potential shortage.

**Improve Existing Programs**

We will invest in improving quality in community-based organizations that are close to meeting quality thresholds. Among the most important investments will be investments in early educators. We intend to assist teachers to earn advanced credentials and reduce gaps in teacher compensation.

**Build an Oversight System**

Boston’s Universal Pre-K work will be guided by a partnership between City Hall and Boston Public Schools and will draw on expert input from field experts and community providers. This partnership will oversee Pre-K investment, program delivery and monitoring of system quality and student results.

**Achieve Full Access**

Identify a revenue source that will allow high quality Pre-K for every-four-year-old in the city. Boston has put forward proposals to the State House that will allow for a dependable revenue source.
BuildBPS is a strategic framework to bring Boston's school buildings into the twenty-first century.

Boston is committed to providing a strong, equitable educational system in all our neighborhoods. Boston's demographics are changing. Black and Latino children make up a large and growing portion of Boston’s youth. Historically these children have not been well connected to the full range of assets Boston has to offer. Boston’s education system has a mandate to connect all students to the full assets of the city and society.

At present, 59 percent of BPS’s students are clustered in four neighborhoods—East Boston, Mattapan, Roxbury, and Dorchester. The projected growth rate is also highest in these neighborhoods for the foreseeable future. Black and Latino children make up a large proportion of BPS students in these neighborhoods. Boston will make investments in these areas, as elsewhere, to ensure equity and sufficient capacity across our system.

At the same time, our facilities are old, built for a time when teaching and learning were different. 65 percent of our schools were built before World War II and fewer than half of those have been fully renovated. Many schools lack key resources—a dedicated art room, a dedicated music room, or a library/media center can each only be found in half of public elementary schools. More than half of all middle and high schools also lack a library/media center.

The places where we educate students have changed very little over the last 125 years, but the world has changed dramatically. The ways that school space is arranged and classrooms are set up suggest the kind of instruction we can expect to see in them.

Existing classrooms traditionally follow an “egg carton” design where learning tends to be sedentary, passive, and controlled.

The next generation of learning should be active, collaborative, playful, creative, and self-directed. Correspondingly, our next generation of learning spaces will be flexible, sensory, contextual, safe, and networked. Our school facilities will foster collaboration and small group learning. They will integrate the use of new technologies and content across disciplines.

A new $73.5 million building at the 6-12th grade Dearborn STEM Academy is scheduled to open in 2018 in Dudley Square. The new space has been designed for twenty-first-century student learning. It will feature flexible spaces for collaboration between students and adults and a high capacity for the use of technology, including a makerspace and learning commons.

Principles for Investment

We will make creating high-quality 21st-century learning spaces for every student a centerpiece of our investments: investing an unprecedented $1 billion in Boston’s school buildings over the next 10 years.

What our students and staff need

We will create school environments that promote student and staff safety and well-being.

Our growth

We will develop adequate school capacity in projected high-growth neighborhoods.

What our education programs need

We will invest in new school furniture and technology to promote twenty-first-century learning and teaching methodologies. We will make improvements to facilities so that they support the needs of our educational programming.

Climate responsiveness

We will improve the energy efficiency of BPS facilities.

The state of our facilities

We will use real-time facility assessment data to prompt and validate our investment choices via the BuildBPS Data Dashboard.

Collaboration

We will look for opportunities to develop shared spaces for learning, used by two or more schools, through partnerships, existing BPS facilities, or new construction.