



A Community Vision for Boston's Students and Families

Michelle *WU!* for Mayor



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Leading Together

01



As Mayor, I'll make transforming Boston Public Schools our community mission. This is personal for me. Great public schools changed my life. Throughout my childhood, my immigrant parents sacrificed so I could go to transformational schools where teachers nurtured in me more than I ever dreamed possible. **And as a BPS mom, I know the stakes and the urgency.** In the midst of my mom's struggles with mental illness, I raised my younger sister and navigated Boston Public Schools as her legal guardian through middle school and high school. Today I'm doing the same for my own kids—my 6 year-old is in Kindergarten at the Sumner School, and my 3 year-old will join his brother there next school year.

The pandemic has deepened the long-standing inequities and struggles of our school system. These challenges are compounded when policy decisions are not made collaboratively or communicated transparently; when educators lack the resources they need to do their jobs; and when the responsibility for protecting the health and well-being of our children is siloed in particular City agencies rather than embedded throughout all City decisions and operations. **We need more than a new policy approach to Boston Public Schools—we need bold, urgent leadership to lift up Boston's children as a true community mission.**

Whole Child, Whole Community

As we reopen and rebuild our school system after the pandemic, we must take a transformative approach recognizing schools as hubs of community. Every neighborhood in Boston deserves high quality schools as platforms for lifelong learning, health, and civic engagement. As Mayor, I'll take bold action so our schools can serve the needs of the whole child and the whole community, empowering lifelong learning and coordinated supports.

- **Providing wraparound services to children and families**, with direct access to physical and behavioral healthcare, including vision and dental; social and emotional supports; and nutrition, housing and legal assistance.
- **Budgeting for a foundation of resources and staffing at each school**, including social and emotional supports; rigorous academic offerings; robust staffing to meet the learning needs of all students; arts, music and sports programming; science and technology equipment; and a school library.
- **Connecting families** through dedicated, multilingual family and community engagement staff.
- **Opening up school buildings and programming to the community**, with expanded learning opportunities outside the traditional school day and beyond the curriculum.
- **Building collaborative leadership** to create a shared vision for each school through site-based leadership teams made up of parents, educators, students, and community partners.

Family Corps and Children’s Cabinet

To elevate the well-being of Boston’s children as a true community mission, we must marshal the full force of city government through a coordinated approach extending beyond the Boston Public Schools. By creating a Children’s Cabinet to align all City services that impact children, and a Family Corps to connect Boston families to every available resource, we will create a civic ecosystem that allows all children to thrive—inside and outside of school.

- **Creating a Children’s Cabinet within City Hall** to align and coordinate education, housing, nutrition, healthcare, recreation, legal, and other services for children and families across schools, City departments, and non-governmental service providers; with regular meetings chaired by the Mayor and co-chaired by the Superintendent of Schools to ensure progress and public accountability.
- **Matching each student and their family with a Family Corps guide** to help navigate their pathway from pre-K to graduation, advocate for the resources needed to meet students’ needs holistically, connect families with City services, and take an active role in establishing caring relationships so that every family has what they need for students to come to school ready to learn and grow.
- **Creating a Family Policy Advisor position** with dedicated support staff to manage ongoing coordination between the Children’s Cabinet, Family Corps, district leaders, and City representatives so that families’ diverse experiences navigating BPS directly shape City policy and budgetary decisions.
- **Publishing transparent, measurable goals** along all dimensions of children’s well-being—with a specific focus on the needs of English learners, students with disabilities, students living in poverty, and students experiencing homelessness—to centralize data collection and analysis, ensure all programs serving children and families are adequately resourced, and hold the City accountable for our progress.

Direct Voice for Students, Families, and Educators

Communities are the bedrock for our children’s development and growth. Our school governance structure must earn the trust of Boston communities through an honest reckoning with the role of structural racism in our city; and through transparency, genuine public engagement, and structural changes to deliver an equitable, nurturing, high-quality, anti-racist school system.

- **Immediately reforming the Boston School Committee nominations and selection process** to require representation of family members, educators, and community stakeholders, with full transparency at each stage of the nominations process.
- **Establishing Boston School Committee community engagement reforms** for accessibility, family engagement, and public accountability, including regular listening sessions in

community and requirements for language access through the entirety of all meetings.

- **Introducing legislation to restructure the Boston School Committee** with a majority of elected seats for democratic accountability and a minority of appointed seats to ensure representation of Boston's diversity and specific subject matter expertise, as well as extending full voting power to the Student Representative on the School Committee.
- **Creating a Teacher Advisory Board** to build clear channels of communication between schools and Central Office, BPS' administrative department, formally codifying educators' input into policy decisions on the district's central challenges, including curriculum development and equitable allocation of financial resources.
- **Empowering the Boston Student Advisory Committee** by entrusting students with the authority to set multi-year agendas, determine projects, and manage partnerships with community organizations; and improving district-wide communication to ensure all students can contribute to BSAC policymaking.
- **Soliciting ongoing, direct feedback from BPS students and families** to district leadership through a website, dedicated hotline, and regular multilingual public office hours, with feedback presented at School Committee meetings on a regular basis.

Human Capital Development and Career Pathways

- **Investing in the recruitment, retention, and ongoing support of educators of color;** including by hiring dedicating recruiting staff, supporting paraprofessionals and substitute teachers of color in advancing their careers, collaborating with higher education partners, and expanding existing teacher pipeline programs, so that our BPS workforce represents the full diversity of Boston communities.
- **Valuing educators as professionals** by expanding mentorship programs for newer educators, expanding preparation for Massachusetts' teacher certification exam, and offering ongoing learning opportunities for all school staff, linked to the key needs of students and families.
- **Building a human capital pipeline** to support and foster leadership development within schools and as a pathway to Central Office leadership, including by strengthening paid internal fellowship programs for school-based educators to develop and strengthen district-wide leadership skills, and creating pipelines that allow for teachers to take roles in Central Office and then have the option to return to the classroom.
- **Recognizing the human needs of educators**, including by providing adequate support staff to minimize burnout, expanding quality coaching, and increasing access to mental health services, particularly for educators of color taking on the burden of educating their colleagues and students about racism, in order to keep talented educators in the district.

**Facilities Upgrades: A
Green New Deal for BPS**

02

Schools are more than just buildings. Schools are networks of relationships—among students, teachers, staff, administrators, families, and community members—all of which are shaped by the built environment that surrounds them. Yet our approach to managing school buildings in Boston has jeopardized these relationships, resulting in deep-rooted mistrust, incoherent and inconsistent timelines for improvement, and facilities that continue to fail our children and our City.

BPS needs a wholesale shift in how we manage our school facilities to lift up our school communities, build healthy and nurturing physical environments, and align with our broader civic goals of equity, opportunity, engagement. In short, we need a Green New Deal for BPS. This isn't just a plan to invest in our school facilities—it's about leveraging the creativity and passion of all Boston residents to reimagine our schools as full-service community hubs that can adapt to meet the evolving needs of our students and our City.

Foundations for Every School Facility

[A recent survey](#) confirmed the persistence of troubling disparities across BPS facilities that perpetuate racial inequities. Schools disproportionately serving students of color, for example, are less likely to have libraries, science labs, and other critical facilities for learning. Every single BPS facility must be designed to create learning environments that are safe, comfortable, accessible, flexible, learner-centered, and developmentally- and age-appropriate.

- **Learning space.** In addition to traditional large group classroom instructions, all schools should be designed to support individualized, self-directed learning and small, informal group learning, with [clustered learning areas](#) around central cores of shared instructional support and resources, to provide the greatest flexibility for pedagogical goals. All BPS schools should adhere to [MSBA space guidelines](#) to provide well-rounded educational experiences for students of all ages, including art classrooms; dedicated space for band, chorus, and music practice; a gymnasium and locker rooms; science labs; informal meeting space; and a media center.
- **Technological capacity.** We urgently need [improved network reliability](#) in all our school buildings. During the pandemic, remote learning has increased the stakes of closing the digital divide—but even beyond 2021, we need the technological capacity to equip all students with the [digital skills](#) they'll need for lifelong learning.
- **Administrative space.** School facilities must recognize teachers and other school staff as professionals, with [decentralized space](#) and dedicated office and teaching materials for educators to work privately, collaborate with their colleagues, and speak with small groups of students or family members. Schools should also include public meeting spaces, fully equipped for simultaneous live-streaming and recording, for community members to organize, engage in civic life, and build community.

- **Space for healthcare and supportive services.** We must ensure each school facility can comfortably welcome nurses, social workers, and other supportive services. A commitment to social and emotional learning requires dedicated space for anti-racist, trauma-informed restorative justice practices, such as [peacemaking rooms](#) that foster interpersonal conflict resolution, and smaller rooms for private conversations. Each school building must be equipped with a nurse’s office with a waiting area, private examination room equipped with telehealth capacity, and a private office for care providers, in line with the [educational design principles](#) that recognize schools as integral to children’s health and wellbeing.
- **Bathrooms and common space.** Too many schools [lack basic standards](#) of health and hygiene. Pre-pandemic, the bathrooms in nearly one-third of school buildings [lacked working sinks](#) with running water, soap dispensers, and paper towel dispensers. We must ensure all schools have clean, comfortable bathrooms fully equipped with basic supplies for hygiene and [freely available menstrual products](#), doors that lock, and safely-lit hallways. The BPS budget must significantly increase funding for custodial, maintenance, and other operations staff to ensure rigorous cleaning and maintenance standards can be sustained over the long term.
- **Outdoor space.** Outdoor learning programs have demonstrated [positive effects](#), ranging from increased self-esteem, communication and teamwork skills, community integration, youth leadership, attendance, and healthy behaviors. Every BPS facility should include outdoor space, including athletic facilities, playgrounds, and open green space for students’ and community members’ use, and a school garden to give every student the opportunity to connect with nature, grow food and other plants, and experience real-world applications of their science curriculum. When space is not immediately available on-site, BPS must work to ensure that school communities have full use of nearby public space for safe outdoor recreation.
- **Kitchen space.** The My Way Cafe program has made progress in increasing kitchen capacity across the district, but too many schools lack the facilities for nutrition staff to prepare fresh, nutritious, culturally-relevant meals. We must accelerate renovations and construction to ensure every school building has a full-service, fully-equipped kitchen—with increased funding for BPS Food and Nutrition Services to train and support staff taking on new scratch cooking responsibilities and maintain kitchen facilities over the long-term. In new school construction, we must plan for open community kitchens so that schools can open up their facilities to families and community members for cooking lessons.

Environmental Health and Justice

We need immediate investments in our buildings to secure the basic tenets of environmental justice for BPS students, while planning longer-term to ensure new buildings

and renovations are designed to maximize the built environment's impact on the [well-being of students](#), educators, and community members.

Poor air filtration poses particular health consequences during the pandemic, but air quality is not a new problem: children are [more sensitive to indoor air pollutants than adults](#), with a higher likelihood of suffering negative health outcomes like allergies and asthma. Particularly for students [near the airport](#) or [near major highways--who are disproportionately Black, Latinx, and AAPI](#)--inadequate air filtration perpetuates environmental injustice. And while Boston Water and Sewer Commission has one of the cleanest water systems in the country, fewer than one-third of BPS buildings have functioning drinking water fountains that meet safety standards.

- **Clean air.** Effective learning environments depend on [clean air](#) that is free of pollutants, yet only 38 BPS buildings have all-inclusive heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning (HVAC) systems, and 27 buildings have no mechanical ventilation at all--leaving them to rely on windows that only open a few inches as the primary source of airflow. This last school year has seen short-term investments in HEPA filters and emergency window repairs, but we must ensure that all BPS learning environments meet basic air quality standards, with urgent installations of HVAC systems in buildings that can support them, and installations of high-quality multi-year air filters--including [specialized filters for particulate matter](#) in schools near the airport or major highways.
- **Safe water.** BPS communities should not have to rely on bottled water or plastic water coolers to meet their [legal right](#) to safe drinking water. [Recent federal investments](#) will accelerate the installation of 1,400 new filtered water fountains, but the City must move quickly to provide the necessary matching funds to guarantee clean water for all BPS communities before the end of the three-year federal grant, prioritizing those schools serving a higher proportion of higher-needs students.
- **Comfortable temperature and humidity.** Thermal comfort affects task performance and attention spans--[particularly for younger children](#), who have higher core body temperatures and less developed thermoregulation capacity. Yet [research shows](#) that students tend to be highly dissatisfied with their schools' thermal environments. All BPS educators should have control over the temperature in their own classrooms to meet the individualized needs of their student communities. Investments in "right-sized," highly-efficient HVAC systems will help educators keep temperature and humidity levels in the comfort zone, without driving up energy costs.
- **Reduced noise.** The acoustics of school buildings impact students' learning and comfort, and students with Autism Spectrum Disorder or other developmental disabilities may face [particular difficulties](#) focusing on instruction in noisy, over-stimulating environments. BPS should conduct an audit of all learning spaces

to direct [targeted investments in soundproofing](#), such as installation of impact-absorbing materials to minimize reverberation, and felt or rubber studs under furniture to minimize noise during classroom reconfigurations. Longer-term design projects should locate sources of noise pollution—like playgrounds and music rooms—farther from classroom environments, carefully select HVAC systems to minimize noise, and avoid the use of building materials that increase reverberation.

- **Ease of navigation.** School buildings should be designed to build students' confidence, inclusive of students with physical or developmental disabilities, and minimize stress. Minor [investments in wayfinding](#) will enable everyone to safely, efficiently, and independently reach the services they need, from gender-neutral bathrooms to restorative justice spaces. Site configurations should maximize visual access to corridors and school grounds to ensure safety and security.

Schools as Comprehensive Community Centers

As BPS makes concrete investments to expand community schools across the district as part of its [strategic plan](#), we must consider what changes to the physical plant and built environment are needed to make that vision a reality. In many ways, BPS facilities already fulfill community functions, from serving as polling places on Election Day to offering classes in English as a Second Language for adult learners.

But if schools were set up to remain open during evenings, over the weekend, and throughout the summer, Boston residents could dream bigger about what kind of communities we want to build and what kind of [social contract](#) we want to live by. Schools could provide space for music and dance in the auditorium, pop-up farmers markets in the parking lot, rotating public art installations in the hallways, and championship games in the athletic fields—we just need the coordination to make it happen.

- **Facilitating community schools through collaborative joint-use agreements.** BPS should launch a joint-use stakeholder working group to develop a vision statement and [community use principles](#) to delineate the responsibilities and roles of schools and community members, including facility management processes, fee structures, and liability requirements. While public education will always remain the primary user of school buildings, creative and collaborative joint-use agreements can open up these public assets to other uses that further our civic goals. BPS must track up-to-date information on terms and lease agreements, spaces used, fees paid, and programs provided, with a website, map, descriptions of all sites and facilities open to public use, and a calendar and schedule of availability to enable community members to easily take advantage of public use opportunities.
- **Increasing the efficiency of the municipal footprint.** Opening schools to a full range of community functions [decreases Boston's climate footprint](#), requiring

fewer buildings and fewer parking lots, enabling preservation of open space, and concentrating more activities at fewer locations, enabling people of all ages to walk, cycle, or take public transit to pursue educational opportunities and participate in civic life. Joint development strategies could even expand the community school model to co-locate affordable housing, recreation centers, public libraries, and senior service centers alongside BPS facilities, increasing the fiscal efficiency of City investments.

- **Recognizing schools as a valued community asset.** The community school model grows the political coalition invested in ongoing maintenance and upkeep, building stronger political muscle behind larger public investment in our school system. Opening BPS facilities to the entire community also builds neighborhood-based assets to shelter community members in times of need, bolstering the City's resilience to flooding, extreme heat, and other climate-related shocks.

Transportation that Works for Students and Families

BPS' current transportation system frustrates families, threatens our environment, perpetuates neighborhood divisions, and wastes City resources. We need smart reforms to our yellow school bus program and new investments in low-carbon transportation systems that are designed with children's well-being at the forefront.

- **Raise standards for our transportation vendor.** Too many yellow buses are running under capacity, idling in our neighborhoods, worsening traffic, and emitting dangerous fumes in our environmental justice communities--while transportation costs eat up 10% of the BPS budget each year. We need to take advantage of our upcoming transportation bidding process to ensure we're prioritizing operational efficiency, protecting the health and well-being of our kids, and building a connected city.
- **Electrify school buses.** Our fleet includes 700 school buses that consume nearly 60% of all diesel fuel used by City government. BPS has made incremental progress swapping in propane-fueled buses for buses that run on diesel, reducing emissions of particulate matter that exacerbates respiratory illness--but propane buses still emit nearly [four times more greenhouse gas emissions](#) than electric buses. The federal infrastructure proposal includes funding for school districts to adopt new technology, like [extended-range, fast-charging](#) electric buses. Boston must meet the urgency of our climate emergency by committing to [full electrification](#) of our school bus fleet by 2030.
- **Create more options for active transport.** We must facilitate a transition towards more active, community-building transportation options. We need a district-wide [walking school bus program](#) so that groups of students can walk to school with the supervision of trusted adults. Walking to school increases students' daily

physical activity, strengthens their connection with their community and their neighborhoods, and [improves attendance and other academic outcomes](#). Boston should also expand the free Bluebikes program for BPS students and educators, prioritize school corridors for street safety redesign, and work with Boston's cyclist community to build pathways for children to adopt safe cycling habits.

- **Prioritize safe streets near schools.** Our schools should be the first places to benefit from street infrastructure improvements. We must increase coordination among BPS, the Transportation Department, and the Office of New Urban Mechanics to pilot school streets--roads with temporary restrictions on vehicle traffic--which have been found to [reduce driving and pollution](#) as families experience safer, healthier, more pleasant environments for active transportation. Other short-term, low-cost changes to the built environment--like public art, seating, or lawn games at bus stations or nearby parks-- will protect student safety, increase civic engagement, and build streetscapes that stitch our neighborhoods back together.
- **Expand public transit options for students.** Our [Boston Youth Transportation Project](#) successfully fought to provide free MBTA passes for all 7th to 12th graders, but we must expand this option to more students, including by training and paying adult community members to serve as trusted chaperones to help younger children navigate the T to and from school.

Schools as Climate Hubs

We have no time to waste in transforming our BPS facilities into sustainable green buildings, meeting [our commitment to net-zero municipal buildings by 2024](#). BPS represents nearly [half of Boston's municipal emissions](#) and two-thirds of municipal gas consumption. Our facilities must maximize the potential for on-site energy generation and dramatically decrease fossil fuel use. Massachusetts is at the forefront of finding creative partnerships with utilities to fund window and HVAC upgrades in state-owned buildings; Boston should pursue similar arrangements to accelerate progress towards net-zero carbon. The generational task of retrofitting BPS buildings presents a massive opportunity to transform schools into climate hubs that train Boston residents for green jobs, empower community members to be climate champions, and help our City meet our climate goals.

- **Net-zero carbon emissions.** Boston must act now so that retrofitting projects--like clean spray foam insulations and triple-pane windows with high-performing glass-- can be completed over a summer vacation. With a newly high-performing facade, BPS facilities will be ready for deeper retrofits. Just across the river, a Cambridge school hosts a roof-mounted photovoltaic array that generates [60% of its energy on-site](#). We must install solar capacity, replace old HVAC systems with high-efficiency electric water heaters, and install geothermal heat pump systems to provide radiant heating and cooling. Installing energy meters in every floor also presents

an educational opportunity to experiment with energy reductions strategies—for example, measuring the impact of installing a lighting control system that keeps lights off when daylight is available.

- **Green jobs training centers.** The immense talent, creativity, and dedication of BPS educators holds enormous potential to train Boston students and adult residents for green jobs. Vocational training is already preparing BPS students for high-paying green jobs of the future, but we must offer [additional coordination](#) and support to bring all Chapter 74 programs up to state quality standards. [A city-wide urban conservation corps](#) will offer pathways to transition students from BPS into green employment, from growing and maintaining our urban forest, to retrofitting buildings, to installing resilient stormwater infrastructure—beginning with BPS facilities, themselves. We must also strengthen partnerships with Boston’s community colleges, green employers, and environmental advocacy community to build awareness of green jobs opportunities.
- **Zero waste.** BPS must recommit to its efforts to meet zero waste standards through source reduction, recycling, composting, and food recovery. Recent sustainability initiatives have made great progress in distributing recycling equipment across the district, but the upcoming implementation of the Good Food Purchasing Program presents [an opportunity to dramatically reduce our schools’ environmental footprint](#) by redirecting surplus or wasted food from the school breakfast and lunch programs to other uses—and an expanded school gardens program will allow a closed loop system where organic waste is [converted into compost](#) to help school gardens thrive.

Community Planning and Capital Investments

BuildBPS is the 10-year education and facilities master plan for BPS, calling for \$744 million in City investments in the construction and renovation of school buildings. But with huge sums set aside for necessary deferred maintenance and a small number of new buildings and major renovations, too many school communities are left wondering when their facility will be due for an upgrade. The lack of clear timelines and the announcements made without community input have [pitted neighborhoods and school communities against one another](#). We must empower communities to articulate a clear vision for the future of their schools, with bold, accelerated City investments to make that vision a reality.

- **Establishing a comprehensive cost estimate.** BuildBPS yielded an immensely valuable [dataset](#) that benchmarks the quality of buildings, sites, and learning environments and the adequacy of educational spaces across all 134 buildings owned or leased by BPS. But the analysis does not include a comprehensive cost estimate of what it would take for every BPS building to meet basic standards around health, safety, pedagogy, and accessibility. This baseline is a necessary

precursor to developing any comprehensive, community-driven, transparent capital plan.

- **Integrating BPS with City planning.** BPS should go through a similar Institutional Master Plan process required of hospitals, colleges, universities, and other large institutions in Boston, integrated into a comprehensive citywide master plan developed by a public planning department. In addition to school administrators, we must actively encourage the participation of students, family members, educators, advocates, and representatives from higher education institutions, community organizations, and local businesses.
- **Centralizing procurement.** Purchasing and procurement for BPS communities should be integrated with the City's Public Facilities Department and a centralized Procurement Office to achieve efficiencies and cost savings, accelerate the timeline of construction projects, ease the burden on school leaders and administrators, and facilitate an intentional, urgent strategy of [diversifying City contracting opportunities](#) to deliver racial justice and economic opportunity.
- **Recommitting to maintenance and upkeep.** The initial cost of a school facility may be less than [10-15% of life cycle costs](#) over a 30-year period—but deferred maintenance compromises the integrity of these initial investments, and also makes it more difficult to attract state funding. An updated master plan for BPS must include a transparent checklist for regular maintenance that needs to occur at yearly, 5-year, and 15-year increments across all BPS properties, with associated budgetary allocations. BPS must also revisit custodial contracts to ensure adequate support for the workers who keep buildings safe and clean for public use, with planned budgetary increases for full-service community schools with higher operational demands.
- **Maintaining public assets.** BPS facilities are community assets, and the City should never sacrifice them to private control. Buildings no longer used for public education can be redirected toward other public uses, like new affordable housing or community centers. Even if major redevelopments require major construction, maintaining the basic structure of a school building leads to cost savings that can be applied to other civic goals. New buildings should be designed for maximum flexibility, following design guidelines widely used in healthcare institutions and office settings, like flex space, movable walls, wide column spacing, and water hookups in every classroom.
- **Using project labor agreements for major facility upgrades.** A comprehensive facilities plan includes multiple complex projects that must be completed quickly and carefully sequenced to minimize disruptions to school communities. To make these large-scale projects possible, the City should use project labor agreements (PLAs), collective bargaining agreements that apply to a specific construction

**Academic
Excellence for All**

03



For too long, BPS has been a system where families are pitted against each other through a high-stakes school assignment lottery, budget negotiations, and selective admissions processes to access far too few well-resourced schools. Every student, regardless of their needs or socioeconomic background, must have a world-class education with every opportunity our city has to offer. That includes English learners--more than 50% of the BPS population speaks a language other than English at home--and students with disabilities, who make up one-fifth of our student population. We will take urgent action to celebrate diversity and difference while empowering every student with rigorous academic programming; multilingual, culturally competent educators; and whole-child support services.

Rigorous Academics for all Learners

All students deserve equal access to every academic opportunity that Boston has to offer. Too often, students' language needs, disabilities, or learning styles are seen as a barrier instead of an asset. We must ensure that our students are receiving individualized support and appropriate interventions alongside rigorous grade-level academic content.

- **Developing rigorous, age-appropriate curricula for all learners.** BPS must engage teachers in creating rigorous, grade level, and [anti-racist curricula](#) that provide multiple access points for English learners and students with disabilities. The curriculum should be engaging, encourage high-level thinking, and include challenging activities and tasks for all grade levels and contents. In partnership with the Boston Teachers Union, the District English Learner Advisory Committee, and the Special Education Parent Advisory Council, the district must expand professional development opportunities for educators to provide targeted support to higher needs students without sacrificing this rigorous academic programming.
- **Addressing absenteeism.** Chronic absenteeism always has a root cause that transcends academics. The community schools model and Family Corps guides will help to create and strengthen the necessary relationships with families and community providers to identify those root causes and work with families and students to address the barriers that lead to chronic absenteeism and get students back in school.
- **Streamlining graduation requirements.** BPS must adopt coherent graduation requirements that are closer in line to [MassCore state graduation requirements](#), and provide the necessary funding and support to schools to ensure every student is prepared to graduate. In adopting this BPSCore, BPS must also provide flexibility for older incoming students who are English learners or who come to the district from challenging backgrounds.
- **Offering summer intensive language and other enrichment programs.** BPS must expand options for English learners to strengthen their English language reading

and writing skills over the summer, including dual-language programs and project-based learning. Learning a new language can be a full-time job, and we must give English learners enriching opportunities beyond the classroom to practice their language skills in a safe, welcoming and fun environment. Expanding other summer enrichment learning programs will offer students of all language backgrounds the chance to get ready for the next academic year.

- **Expanding access to advanced coursework.** Programming for English learners, students with disabilities, and other children with specialized needs cannot come at the expense of access to Advanced Work Class, Advanced Placement classes, or other rigorous coursework. All students must have access to high-quality learning experiences that prepare them for whatever academic future they choose.
- **Committing to full inclusion.** Despite having comparable proportions of students with disabilities, [30% of BPS students with disabilities](#) are assigned to substantially separate classrooms, compared to the statewide average of 13%. By segregating students with disabilities rather than building inclusive classrooms, our district denies students with disabilities the opportunity to learn alongside their non-disabled peers. BPS must solidify a district inclusion policy that works for students, teachers, and families to empower students with disabilities to progress in inclusive, less-restrictive learning environments.
- **Focusing resources for students with disabilities.** We must redouble efforts to clear the district's [backlog of special education assessments](#), provide compensatory services to students most impacted by school closures over the last year, and center the needs of students with disabilities and the educators that allow them to thrive.

Fully Staff Our Classrooms to Allow All Students to Learn

Understaffed classrooms cause significant strain on educators and school staff while failing to meet the needs of students and families. We must invest in full staffing models across all schools, expanding the number of educators in each classroom to address each individual child's pace and learning style while maintaining a high-quality overall classroom experience.

- **Fully staffing our full-inclusion classrooms.** BPS should invest in co-teaching, replicating successful models used at the Henderson Inclusion School. The current model of expecting a double- or triple- licensed teacher to meet the needs of 25+ students shortchanges our students who need the most significant support and jeopardizes students' learning and safety. BPS must guarantee fully-staffed, co-teaching inclusion classrooms throughout the district so that students ready to transition out of substantially separate classrooms do not have to face the disruption of moving to a new school in order to enter a more inclusive learning environment.

- **Increasing staffing to support English learners with disabilities.** More than 3,000 students are designated as English learners with disabilities. In order to commit to full inclusion and manage the complex academic and socioemotional needs of English learners on IEPs, we need more special education and English as a Second Language (ESL) educators and more paraprofessional support. BPS should also adopt an [interactive disability awareness curriculum](#) to teach school community members to see the whole person, fostering respect and inclusion for people of all abilities.
- **Offering robust, instructionally-focused professional development.** We need to invest in better instructional support for all teachers, administrators and staff, including ESL-specific coaches and special educators, and collaborate with instructional coaches and teachers to evaluate the purpose and effectiveness of professional development. BPS must expand training in [culturally and linguistically sustaining practices](#) that empower educators to address their biases and build closer relationships with students and families. Professional development improves educator retention, alleviating disparities that result in students with disabilities [significantly more likely](#) than their peers to be assigned to teachers with less than three years of experience.
- **Expanding bilingual programs.** Studies have shown myriad benefits to bilingualism, including expanded cognitive power and an edge in skills like empathy and attention. We must promote and expand our [successful two-way bilingual programs](#).

Reforms to Central Office for Deeper Family Engagement

No family should feel disconnected from their children’s schools due to language barriers, fears related to their immigration status, or a legacy of miscommunication and mistrust. We need structural changes at Central Office to ensure that schools can serve as community hubs that support children holistically by strengthening relationships with their families.

- **Building full-service community schools.** Many of our students face a variety of barriers outside of school that deny them the foundation of safety and security they need to learn. Providing holistic services to students and their families—including housing and food assistance, trauma supports, and physical and mental health care—holds particular promise for advancing the academic achievements of English learners, students with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness, and other learners with higher needs.
- **Eliminating racial inequities in special education.** Students of color, economically disadvantaged students, and English learners are [significantly more likely](#) than white students to be assigned to substantially separate strands—outside the general

education setting--and [classrooms with fewer support staff members](#). These stark racial inequities jeopardize the integrity of IEPs, with boys of color [disproportionately assigned](#) to the Emotional Impairment program strand. Central Office must invest in fully-resourced Student Support Teams at each school, and we must train and empower educators to recognize these discriminatory patterns and prevent the inappropriate assignment of students to special education services.

- **Intervening early.** We must provide all students with [high-quality screening](#) before entering kindergarten, so that children who would benefit from literacy, behavioral, or other interventions--and their families--receive the necessary support, instead of being inappropriately tracked into substantially separate programs. BPS must commit to a thorough equity analysis of its school assignment and placement process to ensure that children of color are not shut out from accessing higher quality learning opportunities.
- **Guaranteeing translation and interpretation services at every meeting.** To build true partnerships between BPS and our communities, we must make it possible for family members of all language backgrounds to participate in School Committee meetings, parent committees, and school-based meetings, and access all written BPS resources and reports in their primary language.
- **Engaging immigrant families.** We must review all internal BPS processes and programs to identify areas where internal practices are serving as barriers to immigrant family engagement or exacerbating trauma. Redesigning the Welcome Centers and the Newcomers Assessment Counseling Center with language accessibility, immigrant justice, and inclusion at the forefront will ensure that families' entry to BPS sets a clear tone and expectation that young people of all backgrounds can thrive in Boston. We should also leverage the City's Office for Immigration Advancement to identify the unmet needs of our immigrant students and connect our families with resources from the public, private and non-profit sectors.

**Health, Wellness
and Healing**

04

Academic excellence requires creating safe learning environments that address the whole child. Over the last year, the pandemic has highlighted how necessary our schools are in providing essential services to students, from regular and nutritious meals to mental health services. The results of the [Boston Youth Risk Behavior Surveys](#) of middle and high school students indicate that many young people in Boston are struggling to find the support they need as they navigate the challenges in their lives.

We must do more to support students' health, wellness, and healing, including helping them manage the intense transitions between remote and in-person learning and heal from the trauma of losing loved ones, experiencing community violence, and coping with the prolonged isolation of the pandemic.

Multilingual, Culturally Competent Mental Health Care

Decades of advocacy have moved us closer towards ensuring that every BPS facility has at least one full-time social worker—but we need more urgent investments to ensure that all students have the consistent, full-time support of social workers, psychologists, trauma specialists, and other clinicians, tailored to the unique needs of each school community.

- **Hiring more trauma-informed specialists** to support children involved in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems, children who experience family or community violence, children experiencing homelessness, and children who experience the trauma of poverty, food insecurity, or other financial hardship.
- **Creating a centralized directory** of all school-based mental health practitioners and support staff so that students and families can identify which schools have clinicians that speak their primary language. BPS should make it easier for students to access specialized support in other schools, if care in their own language is not available in their own school.
- **Deepening partnerships with Boston's higher education institutions** to build a sustainable pipeline of future mental health clinicians to ensure that across the district, our mental health workers represent the full linguistic, cultural, and racial diversity of Boston's families.
- **Supporting equitable partnerships.** Dedicated school leaders have successfully launched and maintained relationships with healthcare institutions and non-profit service organizations across Boston. The Home for Little Wanderers, for example, is the largest mental health provider for BPS students. But the district must provide more support facilitating these relationships so that every BPS student has access to support—not just those at the most well-connected schools. We must also ensure all schools have the private space and technology necessary for BPS students to access mental and behavioral health services through telehealth.

- **Supporting the transition to adulthood.** Research shows that emerging adults see the highest rates of behavioral disorders, with significant [racial and ethnic disparities](#) in access to mental health care services. BPS' mental health practitioners and support staff have enormous potential to normalize the practice of seeking out help, preparing older adolescents for a lifetime of self-directed health-promoting practices.

A Whole-Child Approach to Mental Health, Safety, and Autonomy

Providing access to mental health practitioners and trauma specialists is essential, but a comprehensive, compassionate commitment to children and adolescents' health and wellbeing requires a holistic, person-centered approach that considers each person's gender identity, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, family background, psychological development, culture, language, and physical and behavioral needs.

- **Delivering racial justice.** Mental health initiatives must recognize that students' health and well-being are intimately influenced by their experience of racism and white supremacy. We must ensure that all BPS students feel secure in learning environments that actively dismantle racial oppression, with policies that provide shelter from discrimination and police brutality.
- **Ending the criminalization of students.** Metal detectors have been found to [negatively impact](#) students' sense of safety at school, while school resource officers (SROs) [disproportionately criminalize Black and Latinx students](#), perpetuating the school-to-prison pipeline. We must immediately move to dismantle these punitive measures and reinvest in restorative justice practices employed by trusted, adult school community members. We must also codify a policy for [stronger surveillance oversight and accountability](#) that protects BPS students—including undocumented students—from having sensitive information shared with the BPD or the BRIC.
- **Reforming district-wide approach to student discipline.** There is [substantial evidence](#) that Black girls are being pushed out of educational opportunities through excessive disciplinary practices. Students of color, students with disabilities, and low-income students experience a [disproportionate share of disciplinary removals](#) overall, and students of color receive harsher punishments than white students for minor, non-violent incidents. To eliminate these inequities, we need to invest in social workers, counselors, and other supportive staff, [strengthen civil rights data collection](#) with respect to exclusionary discipline, and expand training in restorative justice principles for all school community members.
- **Embedding ethnic studies curricula across all grade levels.** Culturally responsive ethnic studies curricula strengthen students' relationship with learning, combatting the prevailing dominance of Euro-American perspectives that may lead students of color to disengage from their school communities. [Research indicates an](#)

[association](#) between ethnic studies and students' achievement, attitudes towards learning, sense of agency, and [engagement](#)--as well as more traditional positive [academic outcomes](#) like attendance and GPA. We must increase funding, staffing, and professional training for all schools to incorporate ethnic studies curricula across grade levels, including by creating new positions for instructional coaches and administrators to coordinate partnerships with community organizations led by people of color.

- **Incorporating LGBTQ history and culture into the curriculum**, following the [guidelines of the Massachusetts Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students](#), and expanding educators' access to professional development and coaching related to creating [safe, inclusive learning environments](#) for LGBTQ+ students. For many queer youth, the only safe, supportive adults they can turn to for guidance are teachers, counselors, and other school staff. We must ensure all schools are equipped with the knowledge and resources to protect LGBTQ+ students and educators from harassment, violence, and discrimination, and empower all young people to bring their full, authentic selves to school.
- **Valuing student voices**. Young people understand the needs and concerns of their peers better than anyone else. BPS must increase opportunities for students to take on meaningful leadership positions, from school-based clubs and organizations, to district-wide and City policymaking roles, and explicitly value the contributions of student voices in all decision-making--not only to more closely align pedagogy and supportive services with student needs, but also to build the kind of [democratic, participatory, inclusive school culture](#) found to improve students' self-reported wellbeing.
- **Expanding access to arts, music, and sports programming**. Research shows the [public health benefits](#) of music engagement, visual arts therapy, movement-based creative expression, and expressive writing, as well as the mental health benefits of time spent in [outdoor, natural environments](#). District- and school-level budgetary allocations must take into account the full scope of factors that influence students' health and wellbeing, resisting pressure to eliminate programming that addresses the whole child's mental and emotional needs.

Nutritious, Culturally Relevant Food

On average, students receive [nearly half their daily calories](#) from school breakfast and lunch programs, and [research shows](#) that nutrition is foundational to students' academic performance. We must do more to improve the quality of our school meals and [guarantee food justice](#) for all BPS families.

- **Implementing the [Good Food Purchasing program](#)**, with full transparency and accountability to the public through a Community Advisory Council to shape

external food contracts. By explicitly valuing nutritional quality, racial equity, environmental sustainability, local economies, labor standards, and animal welfare in food contracts, we can deliver quality for BPS families while accelerating broader food system change.

- **Leveraging the capacity of locally-owned catering companies** to increase the cultural diversity of school meals while also keeping City dollars circulating in Boston, building wealth in underinvested communities. Expanding partnerships with locally-owned food businesses will also create opportunities for students interested in pursuing good food jobs pathways.
- **Celebrating food cultures** as a valued reflection of the diversity of Boston students and families. No student should ever face [bullying or shame](#) for bringing meals to school that are reflective of their heritage or other cultures. School-based anti-racist training should use food diversity as a launching-off point to celebrate, not stigmatize, diversity and difference.
- **Protecting families from food insecurity.** During the pandemic, [new flexibility in federal nutrition programs](#) allowed BPS to distribute bulk meals for students to take home to their families--addressing the nutrition needs of parents, guardians and siblings, as well as students. We must draw on City and philanthropic resources to continue these family food security programs over the long-term, leveraging successful local initiatives like [Boston Public Market's elementary backpack program](#), which delivers seasonal produce from New England farmers for students to take home over the weekend.

**Closing the Early
Education and Child
Care Gap**

05



High-quality early education and care prepares children for a lifetime of opportunities, eases the burden on working families, and properly values the providers who help set the foundation for our children’s lives. But despite years of promises, a massive early education and care gap has persisted in Boston—and the pandemic has only underscored this reality.

We need bold, urgent leadership to solve our childcare crisis. Massachusetts is the [second most expensive state](#) in the country for early education, with an [average annual cost](#) of \$15,095 for a 4-year-old and \$20,913 for an infant—nearly one-third of Boston’s median household income. Early education and care providers in Massachusetts—a workforce that is predominantly women, people of color, and immigrants—[earn an average of just \\$24,980 a year](#), roughly one-third the salary of an elementary school teacher. Low wages lead to high staff turnover, which disrupts the consistency and stability that provide the foundation for children to learn, prevents many childcare providers from building a fulfilling career in this field, and discourages aspiring providers from entering the field at all.

In 2017, more than 14,000 of Boston’s children ages 0-5 years old lacked access to an available early education and care seat—a number that includes 74% of all infants and toddlers. The gap is particularly acute in certain neighborhoods, led by Dorchester, East Boston, West Roxbury, and Charlestown. Even before the pandemic, [Boston had been losing licensed early education and care seats](#), and particularly those in family-based programs.

Early education and care is a public good, and it requires public investment. Boston must leverage City resources and our existing network of family-based and center-based providers to implement universal pre-K for all 3- and 4-year olds and affordable, high-quality care for all infants and toddlers; and invest in providers as professionals, creating a talent pipeline to meet the demands of the next generation. By elevating the well-being of children and families to the top priority of City Hall, we can make Boston a city for everyone.

One-Stop Shop for Enrollment and Access

We need an early education system that works for every Boston family—not only the most privileged. The City should streamline access and enrollment for families, resources for providers, and provide regularly updated data for accountability.

- **Creating an Office of Early Education and Care.** A fully staffed, resourced, multilingual Office of Early Education and Care will share provider resources, coordinate with non-profit organizations, house relevant data, and serve as a guide for families of all backgrounds as they navigate early education and care across Boston.
- **Streamlining enrollment and outreach.** Navigating the early education landscape is a difficult task, especially for new parents. Last year, nearly 20% of seats in community-based programs went unfilled. The Office of EEC will create a user-friendly, multilingual website and phone line for families to enroll their children in

early education seats within BPS and at BPS-aligned center-based and family-based programs. The gaps between the pre-K lottery, the regular school assignment lottery, and community centers' application process create unnecessary confusion and stress for families and [perpetuates racial inequities](#). Aligning enrollment timelines will ensure all families know what options are available to them and enable a coordinated citywide outreach strategy.

- **Sharing real-time data for full accessibility.** Navigating the vast and complicated landscape of early education options, availability, costs, and subsidies is a heavy burden for working parents with limited time. The City should integrate data across the city, state and federal level to create a one-stop shop for parents seeking information, vouchers or other financial assistance, and proactively reach out to all new parents in Boston to offer assistance.
- **Offering open-source resources for providers.** The Office of EEC will work in partnership with local non-profit organizations to serve as a resource hub for current and prospective providers, including sharing business planning tools; sample policies, procedures and handbooks; pedagogical resources; networking opportunities for informal collaboration; and membership and discounts to online educational tools. The [Shared Services](#) platform offers some of these resources to providers; Boston should build a platform tailored to our local community context and ensure full language accessibility. Providing welcome kits to newly-licensed family-based programs would help providers navigate their financial and business management options.
- **Organizing neighborhood communities of learning.** The Office of EEC will organize neighborhood-based networks of early education providers—in BPS, center-based programs, and family-based programs. Neighborhood organization will help providers access up-to-date information, adapt to changing circumstances, and share best practices and professional development opportunities, and build community.
- **Leveraging cultural institutions across the City.** The Office of EEC will help connect early education providers to the City's museums, libraries, and other cultural institutions to increase young children's exposure to history, art, music, and other hands-on learning experiences.

High-Quality, Universal Affordability and Access

Through City coordination and public investment, we will deliver universal pre-K for 3-5-year olds and affordable, high-quality care options for every infant and toddler in the city. We will dramatically expand Boston's system of early education seats inside Boston Public Schools, and in partnership with center-based and family-based programs to offer flexibility to parents.

- **Connecting BPS with existing family-based programs in the community.** Our current pre-K options for 4-year-olds have shown that center-based programs and BPS can work together to deliver an educational experience tailored to the unique developmental needs of young children. Expanding these partnerships to include family-based programs will drive more resources to dedicated, experienced family-based providers, strengthening Boston’s commitment to ensuring that early educators receive benefits and salaries commensurate with their BPS peers, while bringing families with infants and toddlers into the BPS community—and [existing programs](#) run by Boston’s major employers have demonstrated that this model can work.
- **Investing in the creation of new early education programs.** To create enough seats to meet the needs of all of Boston’s young children, the City should make targeted investments in center-based and family-based programs aligned with BPS. Offering rent-free space in municipal buildings and public facilities to non-profit providers, and providing assistance with rent, mortgage payments, or start-up costs to family-based providers will create new early education seats—while offering cost savings that can be passed down to families with children under 3 through a sliding scale fee structure.
- **Recognizing early education providers as professionals.** The research is clear that early education provides a wealth of cognitive, social and academic benefits to children. Early educators must be valued for the work they do. City investment in BPS-aligned early education programs will ensure that all educators in our community receive good salaries, strong benefits, workplace protections, and ongoing opportunities for professional development—mitigating staff turnover, providing the stability and consistency that is the foundation for children’s learning, and attracting passionate young people and other aspiring educators into the profession.
- **Prioritizing partnerships in early education deserts.** Parts of East Boston and Hyde Park and other neighborhoods with a high proportion of Boston’s young children are considered to be [early education deserts](#). The expansion of new early education centers in partnership with BPS should begin in these neighborhoods with the greatest need.
- **Extending good food standards to early education centers.** With the adoption of the Good Food Purchasing Program in 2019, [BPS has committed](#) to sourcing food that meets rigorous, community-determined standards around nutritional quality, racial equity, environmental sustainability, a valued workforce, local economics, and animal welfare. Extending these standards to early education programs will ensure that Boston’s young children have early exposure to nourishing food and healthy habits.

Sustainable Early Education and Care Career Pathways

By investing in early educators at both family-based and center-based programs, and by supporting entrepreneurs looking to launch new programs, we can lift up Boston's working families while also strengthening small business opportunities for an early education workforce that is predominantly made up of [women, people of color, and immigrants](#).

- **Creating a talent pipeline through vocational and higher education programs.** Boston is fortunate to have [public universities](#) and community colleges with deep expertise in early education and care. The Office of EEC will facilitate partnerships between these programs and providers to provide ongoing opportunities for professional development. The City should also explore the creation of an early education track at Madison Park Technical Vocational High School for students to pursue careers in early education, modeled after [successful programs](#) at other vocational high schools in the region that train providers and support local families.
- **Cutting red tape for family-based programs.** Family-based early education programs are generally more affordable than larger center-based programs, their hours tend to be more accessible for families with non-traditional work schedules, and their smaller setting is preferred by some families. We must make it easier for these programs to succeed, including by providing online, multilingual training programs, advocating for state-level regulatory changes to streamline the certification and reimbursement process, and implementing immediate changes in Boston—for example, early education providers should no longer have to seek [rezoning approval](#) from the Zoning Board of Appeals to start family-based programs.
- **Supporting programs in Boston Housing Authority.** We must ensure that all BHA property managers understand that BHA residents can be licensed family-based early education providers, and work to make common space available for aspiring providers to more easily meet state licensing requirements.
- **Expanding the Childcare Entrepreneurship Fund.** This program provides [grants and technical assistance](#) to support existing family-based providers as entrepreneurs and business owners. We must expand this program to include assistance for launching new childcare programs, reach all of Boston's providers, increase the size of each grant, incorporate digital skills training, and ensure that early education providers are supported over the long-term.
- **Working with landlords and developers to make housing family care-friendly.** Minor architectural considerations—such as making the restroom visible from the kitchen, and having two points of entry—can align residential units with state licensing requirements for family-based providers. The City should build these considerations

into the development approvals process and work with developers and landlords to make it easier for aspiring family-based providers to earn their license.

Accessible, Inclusive Care for ALL Boston Families

Early education and care should meet the actual needs of Boston's families, including parents who don't have a 9AM-5PM schedule, families experiencing homelessness, and people living with disabilities.

- **Providing options for parents who work nontraditional hours.** Local initiatives like the [Independent Women's Project](#) help fill gaps for parents who work in industries with non-traditional hours, like hospitality, food service and construction. We must partner with employers, unions and other provider initiatives in these fast-growing sectors to ensure all working parents have access to quality, affordable, and dependable early education options, and provide incentives for providers to open during nonstandard hours, including for parents who work overnight shifts.
- **Amplifying the work of early education and care collectives.** Collectives such as the [Greater Boston Childcare Collective](#) are organized directly by parents and are typically located in home settings. These programs fill gaps in care, and hold enormous potential to meet the needs of particularly vulnerable parents, including those experiencing homelessness.
- **Ensuring inclusivity in policies and programs.** Given the diversity of Boston families, all early education and care programs should center the needs of children with disabilities and English language learners—who are often not adequately served later in their educational careers. Greater Boston is home to many graduate programs for early education providers, including [experiential learning programs](#) centered on teaching English language learners. The City should take an active role in building partnerships between these training programs and both family-based and center-based programs to ensure all providers have the knowledge, training, and support they need to offer high-quality education to young children with disabilities and those who speak a language other than English at home.
- **Increasing education about the resources available to families experiencing homelessness.** The City should provide educational programming for early education providers about vouchers in order to reduce any stigma and the likelihood that a childcare provider would turn a family away for using a voucher. The City should provide easily accessible and digestible information about the voucher system and early education options for families experiencing homelessness to ensure that all families, providers, and shelters know the services available to them—including Head Start, which provides comprehensive services to children experiencing homelessness at no cost to the family.

- **Providing fare-free transit for families experiencing homelessness.** Transportation is a major hurdle preventing families experiencing homelessness from accessing early education and other services. The City should work with shelters to provide free MBTA passes to parents, modeled after the [program for 7th-12th grade BPS students](#), to make it easier for families navigating complicated travel between shelters, workplaces, and early education programs.

City Authority for Family-Friendly Workplaces

Workplace-based early education offers parents the flexibility and peace of mind to have their jobs co-located with their children’s care. For employers, easing barriers for employees to balance family responsibilities helps recruit and retain a productive workforce.

- **Strengthening Inclusion of Day Care Facilities (IDF) regulations.** Boston’s zoning code [requires developers of large commercial projects in certain districts](#) to dedicate a portion of office space to a child care facility or build such facilities off-site—but the outdated regulations no longer reflect the realities of Boston’s economy. To extend the benefits of this program to all of Boston’s working families, we must lower the minimum square footage threshold that triggers IDF and broaden its scope across the entire city, especially to districts that have become commercial hubs in the years since the IDF ordinance was created. The City should also create an EEC Trust where developers can direct IDF payments in lieu of directly providing space for early education and care, similar to the linkage program. The EEC Trust can be used to lower the cost of care for families in BPS-aligned programs and expand the Childcare Entrepreneurship Fund.
- **Enforcing existing IDF obligations.** To maximize public benefits, the City must work with the BPDA to enforce existing IDF obligations. Over the long term, stronger IDF regulations should be monitored for compliance alongside the linkage program and other developer commitments by an independent enforcement office of the City’s public planning department, which will ensure that early education and care is considered as part of the civic infrastructure needed to make new developments work.
- **Extending on-site care options to contracted workers.** On-site early education provides flexibility to parents who might work inconsistent or long hours. However, this benefit is typically only available to the company’s direct employees, excluding contractors. Boston should use the PILOT community benefits process to ensure non-profit anchor institutions that offer on-site early education also extend these benefits to their contracted and subcontracted workers, such as cleaning staff and food service workers, and explore similar incentives for private-sector employers.
- **Showing City leadership as an employer.** Some parents who work for the City have access to the BCYF City Hall Childcare Program, demonstrating the convenience of

on-site workplace-based care. City employees are also entitled to up to [six weeks of paid parental leave](#)—one of the strongest paid leave programs in the country. The Human Resources Department should conduct an audit to ensure all employees are able to use the parental benefits to which they're entitled and implement new policies based on [best practices around flexible scheduling](#) to support workers with family responsibilities. The City should regularly convene and recognize private employers to encourage the adoption of similar policies in the private sector.

Coalitions for Early Education and Care as a Public Good

Urgent leadership requires leveraging our power to amplify community voices to lobby for bold, systemic change at the City, state and federal level.

- **Supporting workplace organizing.** Local labor unions like SEIU 509 and BTU and national coalitions like the National Domestic Workers Alliance are doing tremendous work advocating on behalf of early education workers, who are disproportionately women of color. Strong federal labor protections will ensure that these workers have the right to self-determination and a seat at the policymaking table.
- **Advocating for the proposed state legislation to cap early education costs.** [A new bill](#) filed in the Massachusetts legislature would mandate that no family spend more than 7% of household income on early education and care. Care would be free for the lowest-income families and provided on a sliding-fee basis for middle-income earners. The legislation is supported by [a coalition](#) of advocates and business groups.
- **Deepening partnerships with the private sector.** Working with the private sector to create additional funding sources could help increase both the supply of early education programs and the wages of providers without raising costs to families. Private sector leaders from Greater Boston have [recently signaled](#) that they plan to contribute to early education and care solutions in Boston. Social impact bond financing demonstrates that investments in early education show a [consistent rate of return](#). By leveraging social impact bond financing and other private sources of funding, the City can increase its investments in both affordability and supply.
- **Increasing funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant.** The proposed federal stimulus bill in Congress includes [\\$15 billion for CCDBG funding](#), which Massachusetts could use to expand subsidies offered to families or boost providers' wages. This infusion of cash will help stabilize the sector from the most immediate disruption caused by the pandemic – but it won't fix the underlying economics. We must continue to advocate for long-term, sustainable solutions.
- **Recognizing universal early education as a public good.** COVID-19 has demonstrated how early education is the linchpin on which every other element of society rests.

With [bipartisan support](#) for increased public investment to make child care truly affordable, now is the time for bold action. The upcoming federal infrastructure bill must recognize early education as essential civic infrastructure, just like K-12.

**High Schools: Building
a Foundation for Life**

06



High school is an essential stepping stone for young people preparing for an enriching career and fulfilling life. We must ensure that all BPS high schools see young people for who they are, give them a voice in their own education, and guarantee safety and security for all communities of learners. High schools must provide space for students to engage in rich and courageous conversations, develop critical thinking skills, pursue their passions, and develop academic skills that prepare students for a lifetime of learning.

But Boston's ability to offer these types of learning environments to all students is particularly limited at the high school level. We need a new approach to district organization and an expanded investment in the particular needs of adolescents to give every high schooler an educational experience fitting of a world-class city.

District Organization and Equity

Boston Public Schools' 33 high schools employ a wide variety of entrance requirements and admissions processes—and these are not limited to the City's three exam schools. A simplified high school enrollment process, more opportunities for mid-year enrollment, and an equitable distribution of program offerings across the district will support families in finding the high school that meets the unique educational profile of every child.

- **Creating a unified application process.** Similar to the Common Application students use for higher education, BPS should create a coherent system for students and families to learn about each high school's programs and submit any required school-based essays, portfolios, letters of recommendation, or other materials when indicating their high school preferences. We must also invest in guidance counselors and educators at the middle school level to ensure all students and their families have the information they need to select the high school that works for them.
- **Expanding options for mid-year enrollment.** Students who enter the district after the initial enrollment process or who transfer mid-year tend to have particular challenges, like language barriers or housing instability, and are often funneled into comprehensive, "traditional" enrollment schools. Requiring all schools to reserve seats for mid-year enrollment has been [demonstrated](#) to improve enrollment equity in other urban districts, and BPS must take this step to enable higher-demand schools to serve all students, rather than a select few.
- **Equitably distributing program offerings.** Disparities in available programming for certain student populations create hotbeds of inequality, with highest-needs students funneled into a select few schools, which tend to have lower enrollment and thereby fewer resources. For example, students with limited formal schooling or literacy skills in their primary language are directed towards SLIFE (Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education) programs—bilingual settings that strengthen students' foundational literacy before moving on to a mainstream bilingual or Sheltered English Immersion class—that are only available in some

schools. Similarly, more than 40% of the district’s students with disabilities attend schools classified among the lowest performing schools in Massachusetts, reflecting an inequitable distribution of special education programming across the district. BPS must embed these specialized programs across the district and take a holistic, district-wide approach to integrating student needs—for intensive programming, advanced coursework, and enrichment programs—with school offerings.

High Quality at Every High School

Talented, dedicated, and compassionate educators work in every single school in BPS, but comprehensive high schools continue to lack the resources, facilities, and coordination needed to provide all high school students with the rigorous course offerings, wraparound supports, and specialized programming to succeed in the higher education and career pathway of their choice. Our investments in high schools must affirm the reality that every high school community has something special to offer Boston students and families.

- **District-wide quality.** Boston’s three exam schools have a long, rich history of academic excellence, and additional selective admissions high schools in the district offer specialty programs and curricula, but structural barriers in the admissions system have closed the door for too many students of color and economically disadvantaged students seeking the highest level of academic rigor and programming. Students at every high school must have access to well-resourced academics, facilities, health and wellness supports, and extracurricular activities to guarantee a range of diverse, high-quality choices for students and families that encompass the entire district. Reforming Boston’s exam schools admissions process should take place through a comprehensive community planning process that results in reforms to the offerings and quality across all Boston high schools. In this and all other policy reforms, we must build an open, inclusive and deliberative process to build trust with our school communities, centering those families that are most impacted by policy decisions.
- **Streamlining graduation requirements.** BPS must adopt coherent graduation requirements that are closer in line to [MassCore state graduation requirements](#), and provide the necessary funding and support to schools to ensure every student is prepared to graduate. In adopting this BPSCore, BPS must also provide flexibility for older incoming students who are English learners or who come to the district from challenging backgrounds.
- **Advanced coursework.** All high school students deserve the opportunity to pursue Advanced Placement or other college preparatory courses, no matter which school they attend. But currently, not every high school offers AP courses—the ones that do offer them see persistent racial inequities in participation and performance, and [progress](#) made in recent years in increasing underrepresented students’ access to

AP courses [has stalled](#). Central Office must collaborate with high school educators and the Boston High School Heads Association to identify strengths and weaknesses of each high school's course offerings and ensure each school has the budget, staffing, training and other resources to expand advanced coursework options, increase student participation, and ensure all students have the skills, knowledge and confidence to succeed in advanced coursework.

- **Dual enrollment.** BPS should deepen its partnerships with [Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology](#), [Roxbury Community College](#), [Wentworth Institute of Technology](#), [Bunker Hill Community College](#), and other local higher education institutions to enable more BPS juniors and seniors to take college classes and earn college credit at no cost, beginning the transition to life after high school. BPS must redouble efforts to ensure more students meet the [state requirements](#) for participation and equip guidance counselors with the resources they need to ensure students' success in dual enrollment and early college programs.
- **Later start times.** Remote learning has [resurfaced](#) the debate over high school start times as adolescents, their families and their teachers have experienced the [wide-ranging benefits](#) of an extra hour of morning sleep. [Scientists recommend](#) that high school classes start no earlier than 8:30AM, but fewer than 25% of BPS high schools follow this guidance. Adopting later start times for all high schools will give students the opportunity to be more awake, more excited to learn, and more engaged with their school communities. BPS must build on earlier [community engagement efforts](#) to identify and implement strategies to align high school start times with public health guidance and educational best practices while respecting families' need to plan carefully around work and childcare schedules.

Support for the Transition to Adulthood

High schools offer more than just academics—they must provide Boston's young people with comprehensive supports, enriching extracurricular and job opportunities, and practical skills that prepare students for life after graduation. Nationwide, [only 16% of students](#) move on a straight path from high school to college to a career that requires a college degree. To help each student build a career on a timeline that fits the contours of their own life, we must build an educational system that breaks down the false barriers between secondary education, higher education, and work and support students in whichever pathway they choose.

- **Preparing students and families for higher education.** Access to financial aid should never serve as a barrier to post-secondary training and education. Though student debt is a structural issue, schools can play an enormous role in preparing students and families for the financial decisions involved in selecting a higher education pathway, [alleviating the racial disparities](#) that perpetuate Boston's racial wealth

gap. We must hire more advisors to work with students and families to help them navigate the higher education admissions process, and expand the reach of local organizations like [Gear Up](#) and [Breakthrough Greater Boston](#).

- **Teaching life skills.** High schools must expand programs to address critical life skills, from financial literacy and professional networking, cooking and basic nutrition, to vehicle and home maintenance. Creative partnerships with community organizations like [Invest in Girls](#) and experienced vocational educators will allow BPS to offer well-rounded, practical education to all students so they are fully prepared for life after high school.
- **Connecting students with paid internships and jobs.** High school students should never be forced to choose between supporting their families and pursuing hands-on learning opportunities. We must create more internship and employment opportunities for students by hiring more career and employer engagement specialists to create and maintain robust partnerships with Boston's business community and anchor institutions; collaborate with school-based counselors to recruit, place, and support students, including in fields tailored to the unique skills of English learners and [students with disabilities](#); and evaluate internship experiences to maximize students' freedom to explore and experiment with possible career pathways before graduation. Collaboration with the City's economic development programming will also extend summer and year-round jobs programs and entrepreneurship opportunities to BPS students and graduates.

**Expanded Enrichment
Activities**

07

Universal access to robust arts education, athletic programming, and other enrichment opportunities is a critical component of a holistic approach to child development. [Research confirms](#) the cognitive development benefits of studying dance, music, theater, and visual arts, from stronger reading skills to higher math proficiency and test scores. And sports bring immense value to our young people, who learn how to develop a strong work ethic, cultivate enduring healthy habits, and become leaders, communicators, and teammates—roles that will serve them for their entire lives. But when school budgets are overly reliant on enrollment, school leaders are forced to make difficult decisions to cut extracurricular activities in order to maintain foundational academic programming. As students return to in-person learning over the next year, extracurriculars will be more essential than ever to support schools in becoming the nurturing, community-centered hubs we know they can be.

More Resources for Extracurricular Programs

We must provide robust access to athletics, dance, music, theater, visual arts, and other extracurricular activities, so that students can begin to heal as well as learn. To create meaningful improvements to BPS' extracurricular programming, we need dedicated resources and a recommitment to recognizing the value of extracurricular activities in students' lives.

- **Providing foundational arts funding.** When school leaders are forced to trim budgets, arts education is frequently at the forefront. Foundational funding that is not dependent on year-to-year fluctuations in enrollment will allow educators to build up their curricula and their materials, preventing teachers from spending their free time hunting for one-off external grants.
- **Maintaining arts through graduation.** In 2018, 96% of K-8 students but only 63% of high school students received arts programming. Beyond the one-year graduation requirement, all high school students deserve the opportunity to take elective courses across arts disciplines.
- **Increasing the BPS athletics budget.** Funding for athletics makes up only 0.3% of the upcoming school year's BPS budget, and in 2019, Boston spent only \$89 per student on athletics, [compared to the state average](#) of \$186 per student. BPS has traditionally relied heavily on external partnerships to provide opportunities to student athletes. These collaborations, including the new facilities provided by ESPN's [Rise Up Project](#), have provided essential upgrades and services to schools within BPS. But BPS should not have to depend on temporary or conditional private partnerships that can be easily discontinued. Our students deserve in-budget funding that reflects the full value of athletic programming.
- **Expanding the number of sports offered.** BPS currently offers 7 sports in middle schools and 15 in high schools—and most of these are limited in reach and reliant

on external partners for funding. Golf, for example, is only offered at one high school, and wrestling is only offered at two. With greater investment comes the potential for greater variety in the sports offered to students. Adding additional sports, particularly at the middle school level, will afford more students the ability to benefit from athletics and cultivate active lifestyles.

Stronger Infrastructure for Partnerships

Partnerships among community-based groups, sports teams and leagues, nonprofits, companies, and schools are a crucial piece of the extracurricular landscape. Boston boasts an impressive landscape of organizations that can offer our young people new possibilities—but we must dedicate resources to sustain these partnerships over the long term.

- **Building clear pathways to form new clubs, teams and partnerships.** One of the biggest barriers to improving athletics for young people in Boston is a lack of clarity surrounding the processes for establishing teams and partnerships with BPS. Currently, individuals who want to build teams within BPS and external organizations seeking to partner with BPS must navigate complex and opaque processes, with little to no assistance from the Central Office. We should create a new Youth Partnerships Liaison position within BPS Central Office to assist school-based personnel in facilitating new clubs, teams and partnerships, and serve as a clearinghouse of information related to facilities, teams, partnerships, and district-wide extracurricular policies.
- **Deepening engagement with Boston’s artist community.** Our city is home to world-class art museums, spoken word poetry performances, outdoor music festivals, and colorful and collaborative murals across all our neighborhoods. BPS Central Office must dedicate staff and resources to support school leaders in creating and maintaining external partnerships with arts organizations, equitably shared across the district, over the long-term.
- **Utilizing community centers.** Our community centers are vibrant, accessible, and built with the explicit purpose of bringing people together. Many also possess excellent fields, courts, and pools that could be used for sports practices and competitions; classrooms and meeting spaces that can be used for academic support; and studio space for arts programming. BPS should take an active role in guaranteeing students’ access to these facilities and communicating their availability to students and families.

Affirming Youth Identity in BPS Extracurriculars

Youth of all identities need to be able to bring their authentic, full selves to every environment they enter. They should feel encouraged in their development by educators,

mentors, coaches and professionals that guide them. In an age where some gender non-conforming student-athletes' expression of their identities is [under attack](#), extracurricular opportunities in Boston must serve as a validating experience for kids of all genders.

- **Validating student identities in BPS athletics.** BPS has existing [policies](#) that create identity-based, equitable protections for students, but we must work to improve outreach to students, strengthen student autonomy to report any incidents that may occur in violation of these policies, and dedicate staff resources to evaluating these policies' impact. And we must give athletic coaches access to robust professional development related to affirming student identity and creating safe, positive, and fun athletic environments for young people.
- **Continuing to emphasize social emotional learning.** A focus on students' social and emotional well-being is particularly important as students navigate the long-term effects of COVID-19 and school closures on their physical and mental health. Programs like [Becoming a Man](#), for example, guide young men to learn and practice social cognitive skills, strengthening relationships with themselves and with their broader communities. We must continue to teach resilience, emotional regulation, and persistence, among other key competencies, through sports, arts, and other extracurricular programming.

**Economic Empowerment
through Vocational
Education**

08

Imagine a school where Boston’s young people are challenged by rigorous academic classes while also learning hands-on skills in culinary arts, construction trades, hospitality management, radio broadcasting, or graphic design. Imagine a curriculum that puts students in direct contact with trade unions, entrepreneurs, health care institutions, and public servants, building relationships with mentors who can offer career guidance and connections to all that Boston has to offer. Imagine a community hub that offers specialized career training programs to Boston residents of all ages, preparing high school students and adult learners alike for the jobs of the future.

For thousands of our young people, Madison Park Technical Vocational High School—the only comprehensive vocational school in the City of Boston—has made that vision a reality, opening doors to a high-paying, fulfilling career. But decades of neglect have prevented Madison Park from providing well-rounded vocational education to all students who want it. Revitalized vocational education must be a central piece of our recovery strategy to close opportunity gaps and empower our residents to shape Boston’s future.

Equitable Opportunity and Investment

Madison Park must receive the support it needs to support its diverse high school student body as well as adult learners in the community. Our investments in the school must reflect the fact that Madison Park not only opens doors for its students, but also builds the economic vitality of our entire City.

- **Conducting an audit to ensure equitable distribution of state funding** among all Chapter 74 programs across BPS, minimizing the administrative and overhead costs on vocational programs by prioritizing coherence, coordination, and a formal mechanism for similar vocational programs to share resources and best practices.
- **Prioritizing stability in leadership**, with a [school leader](#) committed to the Boston community and dedicated expertise in vocational training, and an experienced vocational educator serving on the Boston School Committee.
- **Implementing a Boston School Committee-approved admissions policy** that provides BPS students the opportunity to select, rather than be administratively assigned to, Madison Park, following state regulations for admissions to Chapter 74 programs.
- **Enacting a multilingual marketing and advertising campaign** with an annual budget, leveraging the talent and innovation of Madison Park’s Commerce Academy students, to communicate the full value of vocational education to Boston families.
- **Creating opportunities for middle school students** to explore vocational education by shadowing current students across all vocational programming, and providing professional development opportunities and site visits for all middle school guidance counselors to connect the school with future students

- **Fully funding the capital upgrades that Madison Park needs** in order to teach and train students in an environment that is safe, inviting, and comfortable, including improving [interactive and wireless technology](#), and creating dedicated space for teacher planning, small group academic learning, and other critical functions; and guaranteeing full access to its current school building in order to continue enrollment growth.
- **Accelerating the creation of the new Madison Park Technical Institute for adult learners**, in collaboration with the Career Champions Network and experienced adult educators like the Jewish Vocational Services, and with dedicated City staff to assist school leaders in securing state and federal funding to support Boston residents seeking to develop [new skills](#) and advance their careers.

Integration of Academic and Vocational Programming

Academic skills provide the foundation for all students' success, regardless of the career path they choose. We must support Madison Park educators to be able to fully blend academic and vocational programming, recognizing that all work requires communication, teamwork, and critical thinking skills.

- **Building on the recommendations in the 2018 NEASC accreditation report** to ensure Madison Park's continued progress towards a strong instructional core and high graduation rate.
- **Focusing resources on students with IEPs and English learners**, including hiring additional dedicated special education and ESL educators to provide individualized support to students in vocational classes.
- **Providing wraparound supports to students and families** to improve attendance rates from day 1 of freshman year, thereby expanding paid co-op opportunities to more juniors and seniors.
- **Expanding opportunities for after-school, weekend and summer tutoring and test preparation** to close assessment gaps that have been exacerbated by the pandemic.
- **Increasing student participation in the RoxMAPP Dual Enrollment/Early College Program**, which allows Madison Park students to earn college credits at no cost and get a head-start on college and career exploration, while engaging in work-based learning opportunities.

Jobs of the Future

The future of work in Boston must be green and low-carbon--and it will depend on Madison Park students. To implement a Green New Deal for Boston, our city needs plumbers to assemble and repair new, energy-efficient water, heating, and drainage

systems; solar energy technicians to install photovoltaic technology; arborists to care for carbon-sequestering trees—[jobs with high growth](#) potential that often pay well over Boston’s median household income. We’ll also need early educators, home health aides, and other caregivers, who make up an essential, low-carbon care sector we urgently need to meet the demographic needs of our changing city. Madison Park’s unique structure and deeply involved alumni and business networks mean that the school not only fills a critical role in preparing young people to thrive in dynamic professions—it can also take an active role in building and sustaining new career pathways to create a sustainable future for Boston.

- **Working with Program Advisory Boards** to ensure all vocational programs are equipped to prepare students for green jobs and aligned with the action items identified in [Boston’s 2019 Climate Action Plan](#), including building and maintaining energy-efficient buildings, [solar canopies](#), resilient stormwater infrastructure, public transit systems, and urban farms and forests.
- **Strengthening existing and building new partnerships** with Boston’s building trades, the U.S. Green Building Council, a new citywide Urban Conservation Corps, community colleges, state and City agencies, and environmental non-profits to provide hands-on internships and career opportunities for students in green vocational training programs.
- **Conducting a caregiving needs assessment** for the Greater Boston area in collaboration with BTU, SEIU Locals 509 and 1199, and labor justice advocates and ensure that existing caregiving vocational programs at Madison Park are fully resourced and aligned with regional needs.
- **Launching a new early education vocational program**, aligned with existing Chapter 74 early education curricula throughout Massachusetts and with Boston’s higher education institutions that offer advanced degrees in early education, and expanding paid opportunities for adult paraprofessionals in BPS to advance their early education careers and build the career pathway to deliver on our promise of universal pre-K for all Boston families.
- **Continuing the work of the Career Champions Network** to lay the groundwork for new vocational programs in biotechnology, robotics, solar energy technology, and other dynamic employment sectors.

Community Integration

Madison Park is a high school, but it is also a community hub—and the legacy of the Humphrey Occupational Resource Center provides a model of how a revitalized vocational education center can serve as Boston’s hub of economic development. We need the vision, dedication, and financial resources to leverage the immense talent of the Madison Park community to serve Roxbury and all of Boston.

- **Launching a revamped early learning center at Madison Park** to support neighborhood residents in accessing affordable care, offer Madison Park’s early education students an on-the-job training opportunity, and support BPS paraprofessionals looking to advance in their careers with tuition reimbursement for college courses.
- **Expanding the student-run automotive repair program** to provide affordable repair services to Boston residents and support the City vehicle fleet while providing hands-on experience to students in the Automotive Technology and Automotive Collision Repair & Refinishing programs.
- **Strengthening partnerships with non-profit healthcare institutions**, particularly those that serve seniors and other vulnerable populations, to offer home visits as part of the Health Assisting and Dental Assisting programs.
- **Developing a student-run IT help desk and repair shop** within the Information Support Service & Networking program to provide technology support to residents and build a more connected city through [digital equity](#).
- **Reopening a Madison Park full-service restaurant** to [complement the school’s food truck program](#) and increase workplace learning opportunities to culinary arts students, while drawing Roxbury residents and other neighbors into the school to build community.
- **Creating new internship and apprenticeship programs with Black-owned and other minority-owned businesses** in Roxbury and across Boston to provide students with models of diverse entrepreneurship.
- **Increasing collaboration with City economic development officials** to ensure youth and adult learners at Madison Park and their families have full access to literacy programs, tuition-free community college, tax assistance, savings and credit-building programs, and other job-seeking assistance.