



# ***BUILDING THE SCHOOLS OUR STUDENTS DESERVE***

A Vision For Boston Public Schools



# OUR PROCESS

We engaged in a transparent and collaborative process to develop contract proposals that best serve our students, educators, and community. In the Fall of 2023, we conducted surveys with BTU educators and community members to identify priorities for our contract campaign.

Here's a recap of how we've included your voices in the process:



**BTU Member Survey:** We facilitated over one hundred 1:1 conversations at our June 2023 Membership Meeting to unearth “pressure points” in our work. These conversations shaped the questions we included in a survey distributed in October 2023. 3,786 educators indicated their priority issues across three primary categories: (1) fair and equitable compensation and work time; (2) BPS climate, culture, and workload; (3) resources and staffing.

**Community Survey:** We also surveyed 447 community members in September 2023. Our questions asked community members what their top priorities were for our schools.

**Participatory Community-Engaged Data Analysis Process:** We hosted twelve collective bargaining committee (CBC) meetings to review main themes from our findings. BTU members reviewed and sorted data from the survey, including open response questions, into categories. We then used these categories to inform our decision making process in developing contract language. We presented our results back to CBC members to verify our findings. We invited community allies to join us in reviewing all responses. We brought primary themes that emerged to our contract proposal development process. We then hosted two community forums to present our findings and gather feedback to community-check our findings.

To center the most marginalized voices, we:

- ★ Held a racial justice training in December with consultants from Beyond Conflict that our board, collective bargaining committee, contract negotiating team, and members were invited to attend.
- ★ Disaggregated data we collected by bargaining unit, race, and level of experience.
- ★ We hosted community-forums and working meetings with members to review our results and get feedback. This gave us another opportunity to review our findings and receive input on our top priorities.

We want to thank all those involved in our process and who took the time to share your concerns and feedback with us. We hope you see your voice reflected in our contract demands and we look forward to coming together as one voice to fight for these improvements to our schools.



While we strive to develop proposals centered around member and community priorities, we understand that we can continue to improve our process based on member and community feedback. Please send any feedback you have about the process to Ashley Houston at [ahouston@btu.org](mailto:ahouston@btu.org).

# INTRODUCTION

In her most recent State of the City address, Mayor Wu spoke about the limitless promise that exists within Boston Public Schools (BPS)— and also about the progress that needs to be made so that this promise can be fully realized for all students. In the long-term facilities plan, the district commits to supporting “a high-quality student experience in every BPS school across the city” that includes (1) rigorous and culturally affirming learning experiences (2) wellness and enrichment (3) supportive network of caring adults and (4) physical spaces that support learning.

We are in agreement about the promise and progress needed. However, our members are also all too familiar with broken promises and short-term investments and fads that come and go too quickly.

In preparation for contract negotiations, we spent nearly a year surveying our members and meeting with families and community members to discuss the challenges in our schools, and the steps needed to realize the vision we share with Boston leaders where every student has access to a high quality experience. What we found is that our educators are burning out and our students are not getting the resources they need to thrive. **We see our current contract negotiations with BPS as an opportunity to move towards sustainable solutions and closer to the goal of ensuring Boston has the most successful, equitable, and inclusive school system possible.**

This report pairs the results of the BTU member survey and BTU community survey with data from state and national findings. We lay out context for our contract campaign priorities and member- and community-driven solutions.

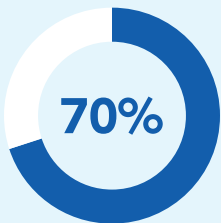
## BTU Member Identified Issues

- \* Salary
- \* Burnout
- \* Workload
- \* **Staffing**
- \* **Inclusion**

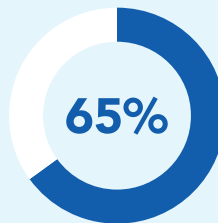
## Community Identified Issues

- \* Facilities
- \* Resources
- \* Safety
- \* **Staffing**
- \* **Inclusion**

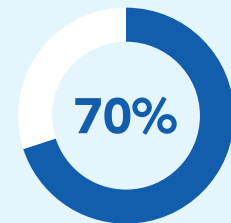
## OUR SURVEY FOUND:



70% of educators say they **do not have enough staff or resources** at their school.



65% of educators report that they **don't have the time to maintain a work-life balance**.



70% of educators say their **pay is not adequate** for the work they do.

# 5 SOLUTIONS ARE DRIVING OUR CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS

## 1 A CLEAR PLAN FOR INCLUSION WITH SPECIALIZED STAFF TO ADDRESS STUDENTS' NEEDS

*"If we are going to have students in inclusion spaces with significant needs, we need the people power/resources to support these students."*

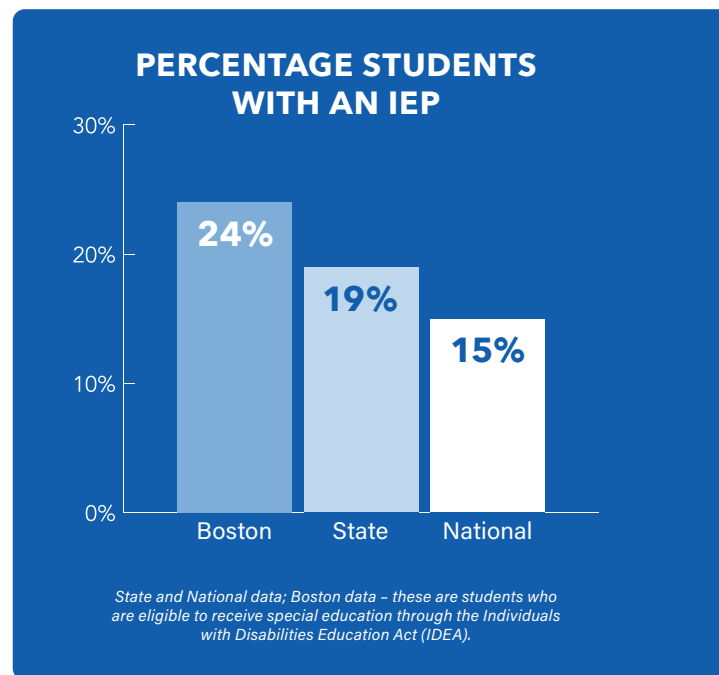
-Community Member

*"Fully staffed and trained teachers mean success for students."*

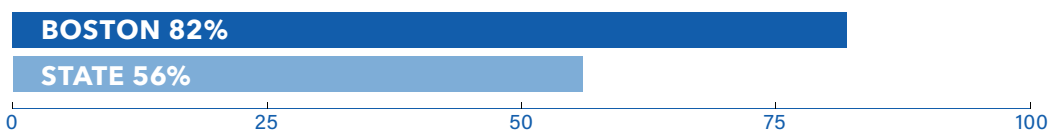
-BPS Parent

Boston students deserve fully supported and funded inclusive classrooms where they receive the services they need to learn and thrive. Many educators recognize the need for additional teachers, paraprofessionals, and specialized staff to better support students with diverse needs. There is a critical demand for more qualified educators in bilingual special education. The lack of specialized staff harms students' learning conditions and limits educators from addressing students' diverse needs.

Approximately 15 percent of U.S. public school students are eligible to receive special education through an individualized education program (IEP). In Boston, that number is much higher at 24 percent. Many Boston students with an IEP are English Language Learners and/or economically disadvantaged. BPS students with a disability are disproportionately Black or Hispanic. Boston also outranks state averages with the proportion of high needs students. We know that following the COVID-19 pandemic, many students and families are struggling. Nearly 82 percent of BPS students are deemed "high needs," which includes students who are economically disadvantaged, low-income, current or former English language learners, or have a disability.



### PERCENTAGE OF HIGH NEED STUDENTS



Data from DESE for the 2023-2024 school year.

*“There was a moment at the beginning of the year when we had three educators in my 18 person classroom and I could see what a huge impact it had on all of my kids. For a moment there, everyone was able to learn what they needed to learn. **My students deserve to have all the teachers they need to support them.**”*

– Kayode Holden-Canzoneri



Taking into consideration these realities, we know that properly serving all students in an inclusive setting requires a team-teaching model and enough specialized staff to meet all students’ needs. **Through our contract, we are seeking to end BPS’s practice of denying students with disabilities the support of an additional educator.**

No educator should be required to provide instruction using more than one license simultaneously. Yet in BPS, teachers are being pushed to get dual or triple-certified so that they can use multiple licenses at the same time — meaning that a general education teacher may be asked to provide core instruction and special education instruction simultaneously. According to the [Council of the Great City Schools](#):

*“No districts we are familiar with use dually certified general/special educators to meet the needs of all of their students, even with paraeducator support. These districts rely on general educators to provide core instruction and special educators who provide specially designed instruction using an in-class or pull-out model.”*

Students’ required specialized instruction must be provided by an additional educator. Rather than requiring staff to use multiple licenses at a time, our students deserve the proper staffing models to get inclusion done right in every Boston school.

*“I’m fighting for equality and facilities that can provide vocational opportunities for all students in substantially separate classrooms so they can learn the skills they need. **There needs to be an even playing field** so all students can gain the life skills they need to be productive members of society.”*

– Allison Doherty



## OUR CONTRACT VISION:

- ★ Assurances that when students w/ special needs and Multilingual Learners (MLLs) require additional support, those supports are provided by an additional teacher.
- ★ Overall class size reduction.
- ★ ESL teachers shall be assigned to schools by a formula that takes into consideration students language instruction needs.

## 2

## INCREASE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR OUR STUDENTS AND REDUCE CASELOAD FOR MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT STAFF

Our students deserve safe, supportive learning environments to meet their learning needs and to build trusting relationships with educators and other children. To meet the social-emotional and academic needs for all students to thrive, we need to ensure students have access to social workers, counselors, psychologists, restorative justice practitioners, and other mental and behavioral health staff.

Nearly one in five children and adolescents experience mental health problems. The number of youth dealing with serious mental health issues—including anxiety, depression, and self-harm—is on the rise among Boston students. Poor mental health can have negative impacts and affect students' school experience. In recent years we have seen historic levels of investment in student mental health services, both at the local level and at the federal level. However, some investments were made temporarily during the COVID-19 pandemic and as such, are due to run out.

**Our students deserve a long-term investment that will sustain enough counselors, psychologists and social workers to ensure nationally-recommended student to provider ratios.** Mandated ratios on caseload caps are linked to improved outcomes for students, including higher college enrollment. We understand that capping caseloads is necessary to meet students' long-term needs.

*"Social workers are constantly called for crisis work and it interrupts the sessions we have with our students. One thing I'm excited to work on in this contract is **having a caseload cap for social workers**. It will help make this **an equitable learning environment for our students**, help them get the dedicated and individual time they deserve."*

– Randi Davis



### OUR CONTRACT VISION:

- ★ Overall caseload reductions for mental and behavioral health providers.
- ★ Invest in restorative justice practices that work for our schools and students.
- ★ Guarantee mental health supports at nationally recommended ratios.
- ★ A private space for behavioral health staff to meet with students.

### 3

## HIRE AND RETAIN EDUCATORS THAT REPRESENT OUR STUDENTS AND TEACH CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY RELEVANT CURRICULUM

*"More Diversity in regards to teachers of color. I think the **students need to see more of who represent[s] them.**"*  
–BPS Parent

**Boston students deserve schools that are adequately resourced and fully staffed with a racially and linguistically diverse group of educators.** Community members and educators in our surveys highlighted a lack of diversity among educators. Research consistently shows that students who have a teacher that looks like them and who engage with culturally-relevant curricula are more likely to succeed. Boston is one of the **most diverse** school districts in the country. Yet, **students remain** far more **ethnically and racially diverse** than their teachers.

*"One thing I love about my job is that we have a librarian and a library para at the Curley but **it's hard for us to meet the needs of our students when we don't have books that are in the students' languages.** Our students deserve a librarian and a library para in every school and deserve to read books that reflect their own experiences."*

– CasSandra Samuel



Many of the root causes to the lack of educator diversity require policy solutions, such as establishing multiple routes to educator certification and passing the Educator Diversity Act (S. 311). Other solutions require investments in attracting and retaining educators, such as scholarships for future educators during their training; investment in paraprofessional-to-teacher pipeline programs; and paid teacher-apprenticeship programs. Long-term solutions require creating working conditions that attract and retain quality educators, including **competitive salaries** and adequate support.



*“One thing I love about my job as an ethnic studies teacher...is talking with young people about the issues that affect their daily lives in Boston and within the world at large. I’m proud to be fighting for more diversity among educators so that our young people feel truly affirmed, seen, heard, and valued in our schools...[and] so that we in the classroom better represent the lived experiences and identities of our young people.”*

– JD Davis



In addition to retention of diverse educators, the curricular materials students engage with also make an impact. Ethnic Studies curriculum — which focuses on the histories of marginalized communities, promoting critical awareness of social issues and civic engagement — has been **increasingly adopted** by schools across the country. Early **research** on the benefits of Ethnic Studies programs among low-income and students of color include: improved grades and attendance following enrollment and a higher **probability of graduation**. We understand that there are multiple approaches to strengthening recruitment and retention of diverse and bilingual educators and to support our students.

## **OUR CONTRACT VISION:**

- ★ The district will resume granting permanent status to highly skilled educators in their first or second year of teaching to retain educators from historically marginalized backgrounds.
- ★ BPS will hire at least 5 additional positions to support educators in getting their licensure.
- ★ Allow bilingual educators to opt in to being identified as interpreters in school and be paid a differential for providing this service.
- ★ BPS will fund and maintain an Ethnic Studies department with six full-time teacher-coaches and two full-time coordinator/coach positions to ensure curriculum is vetted by experts in the field, revised based on community feedback, and to ensure teachers are trained in the Boston Ethnic Studies curriculum.
- ★ Improve working conditions to help recruit and retain skilled educators that represent our students.

# 4

## SAFE, WELCOMING, AND WELL-RESOURCED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR OUR STUDENTS

*“Many of the **BPS buildings** are in deteriorating condition and do not have basic amenities that all students deserve like adequate bathrooms, eating space/cafeteria, a library, a gym, designated offices for support staff.”*

– Community Member

Educators reported widespread deterioration of school buildings and insufficient resources for educators and students. Boston students deserve sustained investments in long overdue new constructions and renovations as well as guaranteed funding for the arts, athletics, libraries, STEM, and world languages in every school. The [BPS long-term facilities plan](#) details a history of disinvestment and highlights that many schools were built more than 100 years ago. A recent [Boston Globe article](#) found that districts in Massachusetts with mostly white students received more aid per student for school projects compared to districts made up mostly of students of color.

We know that having adequate resources goes beyond the physical environment to include staff and learning tools necessary for students to thrive. Research consistently shows that having school library programs and a school librarian improves student grades and outcomes. However, many Boston schools do not have sufficient funds for basic resources and programs, like a library or art classes, because of the current school funding formula. About one-fifth of schools attempt to fill this gap with private fundraising that disproportionately benefits schools with more resources.

All schools deserve to have their resource needs met. We are advocating for a guarantee that the arts, athletics, libraries, STEM, and world language programs are funded in every BPS school. We have also been a champion for Community Hub Schools that offer integrated support for our students and their family by providing before and after-school care and prioritizing family engagement.

**Upwards of half of all BPS schools are located in buildings that were built before World War II and more than 30 are 100 years old or older.**

*"[I'm] proud to be fighting for a contract that ensures our students get what they deserve. As a school librarian I'm particularly excited about ensuring that all schools have libraries. **We know from data how important libraries are to student literacy and to students becoming better readers and writers. These are pivotal skills that students need forever.**"*

– Emmanuel Oppong-Yeboah



We believe we need to prioritize construction of new buildings rather than closing schools, which **further harms communities** that have been historically discriminated against. Every Boston student deserves access to modern school buildings with functioning bathrooms, air conditioning, wrap-around services, fully-staffed libraries, high-quality arts, athletics, STEM, and world language programs.

## **OUR CONTRACT VISION:**

- ★ BPS shall provide a budget for every school to have visual arts, music, performing arts, sports, STEM, languages, and technology.
- ★ The city will commit to putting an agreed upon amount of money towards building renovations and construction each year over the next ten years.
- ★ BPS must have community forums, town halls, and presentations to a school community before any school closures, mergers, reconfigurations, or relocations.
- ★ BPS will continue to support the Boston Community Hub Schools coalition and working group.

# 5

## A LIVEABLE WAGE FOR ALL EDUCATORS AND PAY EQUITY FOR OUR LOWEST PAID MEMBERS

*“My students deserve a safe and welcoming school where they’re served by educators who not only look like them but also live in their communities. I’m fighting for paraprofessionals because **we deserve an equitable salary so we can stay in our student’s communities.**”*

– Vanessa La Rocque



### Higher pay for educators can improve teaching quality, reduce educator turnover, and improve student performance and engagement in their education.

We cannot retain educators and attract new educators without investing in those who work in public education.

*“Paying paraprofessionals a **livable wage** so they don’t need to work additional jobs”*

– Community Member

Teachers are paid much less than workers with similar levels of education and skills. Economists call this the **“wage penalty”**. In the late 1990s, public school teachers earned 6% less in annual income compared to workers in similar professions. By 2021, the wage penalty among teachers grew to around 21%. In Massachusetts, teachers take a 20% pay decrease by working in public schools compared to occupations that require the same level of education and skill.

As housing costs rise, our educators and our students are struggling. Many educators cannot afford to live in the communities they serve. Data from the [Council for Economic and Social Research](#) found that Boston’s housing costs are 127% higher than the national average. The Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom in Boston is \$2,635 per month or \$31,620 a year, making Boston the **third most expensive rental market** in the country. MIT’s [Living Wage Calculator](#) helps assess the average salary one would need to support themselves and/or their family members by working full time. A living wage in Boston for a single adult with one child requires an annual income of \$122,000. This is well above the average salary for Boston educators, particularly our lowest paid members.



**\$31,620**

The Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Boston



**\$33,827**

starting para annual salary

Classroom paraprofessionals' starting annual salary for the 2023-2024 school year was \$30,514, less than a third of a living wage for Boston. Moreover, the Fair Market Rent cost of a two-bedroom apartment in Boston is 97% of the starting annual salary for paraprofessionals. Raising the baseline pay for our paraprofessionals is a priority. Many para educators are much more representative of our students and are a key asset to our schools.

**Para educators are much more ethnically and racially representative of our students and key assets in our schools.**

BPS currently operates under a two-tier system where about a third of all schools operate with "autonomies" that offer administrators flexibility around staffing, job security, school hours, curriculum, and in some cases, compensation. At some of these autonomous schools teachers may work 200 extra hours a year without additional compensation.

At most autonomous schools, staff do not have the same job protections as at traditional (non-autonomous) schools, which can lead to veteran educators being removed for speaking up on behalf of their students or colleagues. These gaps in pay equity and job security lead to lower staff morale and higher staff turnover at autonomous schools. This is not fair to either staff or students at these autonomous schools, which is why we envision a contract that would end this two-tiered system. In addition to the contractual solutions below, **we are advocating for the passage of the Thrive Act, which would end the existing state takeover system that further exacerbates the inequities listed above.**

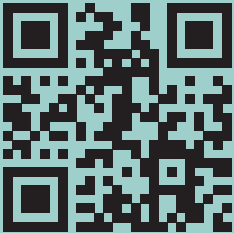
## **OUR CONTRACT VISION:**

- ★ A general wage increase that allows employees to keep pace with the increasing costs of living in our area.
- ★ Provide compensation to teachers in extended-day schools with pay proportionate to additional work.
- ★ In addition to the general wage increase, add an increase in hourly pay each year for paraprofessionals.
- ★ Educators in Autonomous schools will be compensated fairly for all additional time.
- ★ Ensure a level playing field for educators across schools so all educators can have the same expectations for their working conditions.

# CALL TO ACTION

The limitless promise of Boston Public Schools can only be realized through collaboration and collective action.

The voices of our families, educators, students and communities have revealed the path that can lead us towards a brighter future for our district and city. It is time we listen to those voices and ensure that our schools: offer equitable and comprehensive education to multilingual learners and students with the highest needs, provide access to mental health support which meets nationally recommended student to provider ratios, are staffed by educators who reflect the lived experiences of Boston's students, modernize school facilities and fully fund extracurriculars, and provide a fair and livable wage for all educators so they can live in the communities they serve.



Through our contract, we can address these needs and make those possibilities a reality. But we need your help. We ask you to join us.

Go to [btu.org/engage](https://btu.org/engage) to sign on to our contract demands and join the fight for a BPS that our students deserve.

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