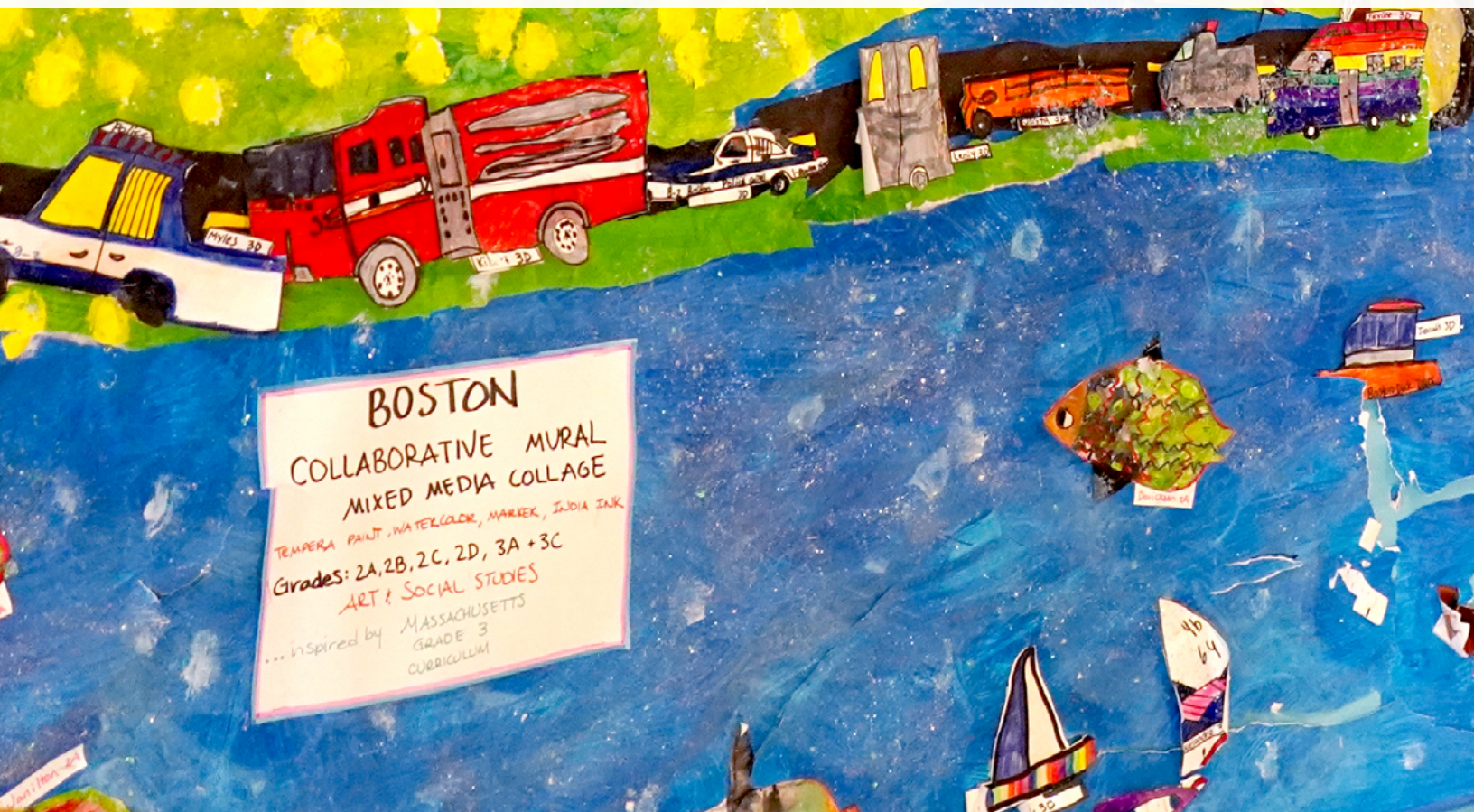# Re-imagining
BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A WIKIWISDOM REPORT

BOSTON
COLLABORATIVE MURAL
MIXED MEDIA COLLAGE
TEMPERA PAINT, WATERCOLOR, MARKER, INDIA INK
Grades: 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D, 3A + 3C
ART & SOCIAL STUDIES
...inspired by MASSACHUSETTS GRADE 3 CURRICULUM

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Introduction

Following a year of living through the COVID-19 pandemic and its upending of much of what school has looked like, leaders of Boston Public Schools and Boston Teachers Union reached out to their staff/members to gain insight into how the district might best re-imagine its schools moving forward.

In response, 201 members of the BPS education community joined a unique online conversation, the Boston Public Schools WikiWisdom Forum, between February 25, 2021 and March 25, 2021, and posted 113 ideas and 179 comments, engaging with the question:

Based on your experience with BPS, and especially this past year, we are looking for your ideas for re-imagining what school could be. If there were no bounds, what would the ideal learning experience be like for our students?

Fourteen of the most highly engaged members of this forum were then invited to join Phase 2 of our project as BPS Thought Leaders, with 10 accepting that invitation – Damian Aufiero, Jess Ellis, Nicole Ferrara, Theresa Garcia de Quevedo, Shirley Luke, Bonnie McBride, Renée Omolade, Sung-Joon Pai, Sara Schiloski, and Aaron Zaubi.

Building on the online conversation, the Thought Leaders honed the posted ideas and developed the 7 recommendations and 40 proposed solutions included in this report, which they will present to BPS and BTU leadership on May 3, 2021.

Recommendations and Proposed Solutions Overview

Recommendation 1

Make Facility Improvements, Building Updates, and Maintenance a Priority

1. Catch up on deferred maintenance and improve the safety of existing buildings.

2. Work to create more welcoming environments.

3. Update learning environments.

4. Focus on equitable access to facilities.

5. Schedule more frequent school-wide cleanings and repairs, so that teachers do not bear the burden.

6. Consider partnerships with local organizations that have unused space in large facilities in the neighborhood.

7. In planning for new buildings, let the community drive.

Recommendation 2

Increase School Support Staff, Especially Post-Covid

8. For inclusion to be done right, staff at least two teachers to a classroom — one specialized in general education and one in special education.

9. Interventionists at every school.

10. Add more paraeducators throughout the district — they are essential classroom support.

11. Ensure an adequate substitute teaching pool.

12. Look to develop partnerships with local organizations to expand the resources of the district.

13. Assign a guidance counselor to every student and adopt the National ASCA model.

14. Move toward a universally inclusive district, including staffing so that no schools need to be bucket schools.

Recommendations and Proposed Solutions Overview *(cont...)*

Recommendation 3

Explore Ways to Continue to Engage with Families and Students Remotely, and Leverage Technology in the Classroom

15. Discontinue the model of teachers offering synchronous teaching to both in-person and online students.

16. Explore alternate online options or ways for students to engage.

17. Continue to offer virtual meetings for parent-teacher conferences, IEP meetings, and community roundtables.

18. Provide funding for schools to continue subscriptions to online learning platforms such as Seesaw, Epic, Boom Cards, Nearpod, Peardeck, Lexia, ST Math, Zoom.

19. Continue to offer access to 1-to-1 student Chromebooks (or iPads if possible).

20. Build on what we have learned about Remote Wednesdays.

Recommendation 4

Expand Access to Resources Throughout the District

21. Provide a certified teacher-librarian in every school.

22. In addition to fully funding in-person arts learning, hire online district instructors to expand access to full-year music, art, and technology programs in every school.

23. Open access to BLS, BLA, and OB so that entrance is not based on a middle school exam.

24. Consider what other resources are needed for the district to provide equitable opportunities.

25. Revisit school schedules.

Recommendations and Proposed Solutions Overview *(cont...)*

Recommendation 5

Rethink Assessment and Grading Models, and Provide Curriculum Consistency

26. Reduce the amount of standardized testing, including MCAS, and rely more heavily on teacher assessments.

27. Look to MCIEA and "portfolio schools" for best practices, and leverage teachers in-district who are already experienced in providing their own assessments to offer PD or coaching to others in the district.

28. Shift, as a district, to standards-based grading.

29. Commit longer-term as a district to a curriculum, and recognize that, "Good teachers, given time to collaborate, can make anything work [curriculum-wise] for their kids given enough time to really know it" —Jess E.

Recommendation 6

Improve Diversity and Representation in BPS

30. Think outside the box when trying to recruit more teachers of color or dual language teachers.

31. Provide more pathways for paraeducators already in the district to obtain their teacher licensure.

32. Partner with organizations, like ACTT, to reach more teacher candidates in the community.

33. Train our students to be the next generation of teachers in the community.

34. Amplify the work of the Opportunity Gaps Office.

35. Invest in library materials, lesson materials, and school artwork/murals that reflect the backgrounds of the diverse student population.

Recommendations and Proposed Solutions Overview *(cont...)*

Recommendation 7

Solicit and Incorporate More Feedback from Stakeholders Throughout the Year

36. Cast a wide net when soliciting input, and include parent voice in more decision-making at BPS.

37. Increase communication between the Central Office and other stakeholders.

38. Require anyone who works in Central Office to spend, at minimum, a week per year in the schools, becoming part of the school community.

39. Bring back the system of regular evaluations of Central Office departments by principals and school leaders.

40. Build on feedback that is received.

Make Facility Improvements, Building Updates, and Maintenance a Priority

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Across the district, school buildings are failing students and teachers. Members of the online forum and participants in the Thought Leader conversation point to widespread unsafe or unsanitary conditions, such as peeling paint, falling plaster, asbestos in the walls, limited bathroom access for both staff and students, bathrooms without soap dispensers, unusable drinking fountains, windows that won't open or close or that don't have working shades, and classrooms without reliable temperature control.

FROM THE WIKI

"Repaired, renovated, and modernized facilities, with a long-term plan for regular maintenance and updates, would have the biggest impact on the learning conditions for students." —Jennifer R.

"Our buildings do not align with our values of the educational experience we want students to have" —Matt E.

Beyond safety issues, the state of facilities in BPS is negatively impacting student learning. It is hard to concentrate in a classroom requiring winter coats and mittens, or in a hot classroom with no air conditioning and no working windows to provide ventilation. It is hard for students to feel proud of their school when maintenance is deferred, buildings resemble old factories more than welcoming school environments, or when issues such as roof leaks damage an entire class' hard work on a project. Without equitable classroom technology or resources such as white boards, outdoor play areas or playground equipment, flexible seating, or facilities like science labs, libraries, art rooms, or gymnasiums, students suffer.

As some of the Thought Leaders note, *"This is primary and really should be a basic right for our students"* —Renée O., and *"We don't need kids worrying about their physical safety and comfort when they're trying to learn"* —Jess E.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

1. **Catch up on deferred maintenance and improve the safety of existing buildings. —"A first priority for any one-time COVID relief funds" —Aaron Z.**

   This could involve, for example, a commitment to reach all schools over a three-year time period, or could mean developing a rubric on which to evaluate all schools, while committing to improving the bottom xx number of schools each year, with an initial focus on:

   a. New paint, plaster, and drywall
   b. Asbestos mitigation
   c. New windows and window shades
   d. Updated and additional bathroom facilities
   e. Safe water fountains
   f. Updated HVAC systems with classroom temperature control

2. **Work to create more welcoming environments.**

   This could include:

   a. Painting and updating the exterior of buildings
   b. Adding student-designed murals that reflect the school community
   c. Improving and modernizing the appearance and functionality of building lay-outs

3. **Update learning environments.**

   In order to better foster classroom learning, prioritize:

   a. Flexible classroom seating that can be rearranged to support activities such as small group learning, project-based instruction, both individual and collaborative work, or standing or sitting positions
   b. White boards to replace outdated or non-functioning chalkboards
   c. Working technology for students, more reliable building wi-fi service, and classroom technology such as smart boards or Airtime screens mounted to the wall
   d. Classroom sinks, especially in the younger grade levels, to aid in project clean-up and handwashing without whole classrooms having to travel to floor-level bathrooms

4. **Focus on equitable access to facilities.**

   Increase efforts to provide all schools with:

   a. Outdoor play areas
   b. Outdoor classroom space
   c. School libraries
   d. Science labs
   e. Art rooms
   f. Gymnasiums

5. **Schedule more frequent school-wide cleanings and repairs, so that teachers do not bear the burden.**

   Take the responsibility of scrubbing down classrooms and repairing things like shelving, coat hooks, or other classroom essentials off of teachers' plates.

6. **Consider partnerships with local organizations that have unused space in large facilities in the neighborhood.**

   These facilities could provide students with temporary access to more reliable internet service, to air conditioned spaces, or with more room for social distancing.

7. **In planning for new buildings, let the community drive.**

   It is time for a refreshed look at BuildBPS, especially post-COVID, with a more community-driven planning process, rather than a consultant-driven process. State of the art facilities, and moving students out of buildings that formerly housed factories or prisons is an essential goal.

WHY WE THINK THIS WILL WORK

If students, teachers, staff, and the community feel safe, comfortable, and welcomed in their school environment, they can focus more of their attention on instruction and learning, to the benefit of all. Enrollment and the desire to send children to local schools is tied to schools that reflect the values of the community.

Increase School Support Staff, Especially Post-COVID

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Inadequate levels of staffing in the classroom, or at the school level, does a disservice to students and contributes to burnout among teachers. The policy of requiring classroom teachers to be double or triple certified, while in itself may be beneficial, does not support students when tied to practices that oftentimes result in just one adult in an inclusion classroom, with an expectation of teaching a full class including a number of students on IEPs. Students do not receive the support or expertise that they need to succeed, and teachers are left trying to fill the shoes of multiple positions.

FROM THE WIKI

"BPS should take this opportunity to REALLY make inclusion a better model for both SWD and Gen Ed Students. A two teacher model would go such a long way in helping close the gaps created by the pandemic and the gaps that existed before the pandemic." — Amanda B.

With a return to school post-COVID, learning gaps between students — among those who have thrived online or had home support, and those who have not — are likely to be larger. We will see students "behind" with regard to grade level standards, all which calls for more individualized attention and instruction than ever before.

On top of academic support, there will also be an increased need for social and emotional support and guidance as students return fully to the social environment of schools and the associated transitions that that entails.

As one Thought Leader points out, *"one of the things in terms of thinking about next year is hiring more staff, even if they're just temporary and see it for like a year or two sort of lens, because I think so many kids are going to come back, quote, unquote, behind in reading...behind in math. And they're going to need small group instruction and more support than ever just to catch up." —Nicole F*, and others add, *"This is essential. We are going to have students who have been promoted but still need significant instruction in reading and math skills that are not included in their new grade's curriculum." —Theresa G*, and *"we cannot be anti-racist and continue to not provide students with the adequate resources." —Renée O.*

"We need school counselors in every school and at every grade level. I support and encourage the increase in social workers to support the mental health needs of our students. But let us not forget the academic needs of our students that have always existed but that are going to be significantly increased because of COVID."
—Jessica W.

"COVID has taught us a lot. At my school, one that was clear before but has become overwhelmingly evident now, is that our paras are not just homework checkers and copy-makers, they are our second teacher in the classroom. My team could not have had the success that we have had over the past without the unbelievable support we have had from these second teachers — they have built relationships with parents, ran lessons in breakout Zoom rooms, conferenced with students on writing and math strategies, developed SEL lessons and so much more." *—Rhyland G.*

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

8. For inclusion to be done right, staff at least two teachers to a classroom — one specialized in general education and one in special education.

A floating paraeducator is helpful in this model as well—

"Even floating one paraprofessional per grade at schools to push-in throughout the day would be incredible. Imagine if, when a special education student was having difficulty during class, we could call a paraprofessional instead of our discipline team. —Aaron Z.

9. Interventionists at every school.

Add reading specialists and math interventionists at every grade level and in every school, especially to help students who have fallen behind during the pandemic.

10. Add more paraeducators throughout the district — they are essential classroom support.

Use paraeducators to help facilitate small group instruction and as support to address the varying levels of students post-COVID.

11. Ensure an adequate substitute teaching pool.

Avoid pulling paraeducators away from inclusion classrooms, or teachers from their PD or lunch periods in order to fill the role of substitute teachers.

12. Look to develop partnerships with local organizations to expand the resources of the district.

Consider organizations that can provide already trained support to hit the ground running — places like universities with student teachers, CityYear, AmeriCorps, etc. And look to appoint someone at the school level to activate these communities and develop the relationships.

13. Assign a guidance counselor to every student and adopt the National ASCA model.

Work to improve the ratio of counselors to students, with a minimum goal of having a guidance counselor per grade level at every school.

14. Move toward a universally inclusive district, including staffing so that no schools need to be bucket schools.

Provide the appropriate support so that students can learn in whatever school is closest to them, rather than having to move around to schools based on their needs.

WHY WE THINK THIS WILL WORK

Additional staff and support in the classroom will allow for more opportunities for small group and tailored instruction post-COVID. These opportunities, in combination with interventionist and guidance counselor resources will help students to transition back to school both academically and socially/ emotionally, and reach grade level standards. Additional trained staffing will be better able to provide students with the support that they need, and create more equitable and successful inclusion models. Not requiring classroom teachers to wear so many hats can help to better attract and retain quality educators and prevent burnout.

Explore Ways to Continue to Engage with Families and Students Remotely, and Leverage Technology in the Classroom

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Educators largely agree that a hybrid model with teachers teaching in-person and online simultaneously is unsustainable and does not serve either group of students well.

A debate arises, however, in regard to what remote options for learning should look like moving forward, or if they should look like anything at all, and this is a topic that could use more time for discussion, community engagement, and creative thinking.

FROM THE WIKI

"Throughout this school year and the end of last, we have learned so much about how to better leverage technology in the classrooms and at home! We are able to reach more families/guardians to get feedback, make connections, and provide more opportunities to have an active role in teacher/parent/guardian/school communication and involvement. It would be a great benefit to continue and increase funding to keep these tools viable. As one example (of many), I have had a much higher turnout for my virtual open houses than my in person open houses. Because I am able to offer a Zoom option for meetings, community days, and conferences I have had contact with more parents/guardians than ever before." —Debra H.

There are some students and teachers for whom remote learning has worked well. Students who, in-person, have experienced social stresses at school, found classrooms too loud or otherwise stressful to concentrate, who work better when setting their own pace, or who may experience situations that often interrupt their in-person attendance at school, but who have instead been thriving online. And teachers for whom the flexibility of working remotely and not commuting has lent more time to focus on their class and building their community. As one Thought Leader says best, *"I truly believe a remote component of learning needs to stay for students that benefit from being home."—Sara S.*

There are concerns, however, that schools might not best be serving students if those students aren't learning how to deal with or interact with others in-person. There are concerns about accountability and making sure that students are doing the work themselves. There are concerns about equity, and which families would even have the option to take advantage of a remote learning option moving forward or to provide support for their students at home. As one Thought Leader points out, however, while most students should return fully in-person, for those that have been more successful online, it may be the

case that: *"Until we learn to create an environment where kids can feel successful socially and emotionally, then they need a place to be successful"* —Nicole F.

Despite this debate about remote student learning, where there is not concern is in engaging with parents and families remotely, which has only served to increase participation during the pandemic. Losing the option to meet with parents remotely would be synonymous with lower, and less equitable opportunity for engagement.

New online learning platforms, which may be too expensive for schools to fund on their own, have also emerged as a beneficial tool for a lot of teachers in the district, and as a resource for developing student skills for the 21st century. Teachers have spent *"a lot of time in to learn and maximize some of these resources"* —Theresa G., and they see how the resources should be used as a tool for increasing communication with families and giving students more avenues for learning, even after the pandemic is over.

FROM THE WIKI

"While remote instruction has been challenging for many, approximately 10% of my students are thriving online, in comparison to their academic and social performance during in-person instruction. These students have noticed their improvements and are joyous online. Would BPS please consider creating a remote BPS school for students in the district who thrive in the online environment? I think there would be great interest in having one K-12 (or possibly 6-12) remote school. It would backstepping and unnecessary to remove the option of remote learning for those that learn best in that setting. I also think that a fully remote school doesn't mean students never see each other in person, there are many models to explore. Some of our most vulnerable and unique learners need this as an option to thrive." —Liz L.

"In regards to making a remote school, could we not through a remote school platform make Boston Latin School accessible to every age appropriate student in BPS? Now that every child has a laptop, they can access the exact same instruction that enrolled BLS students are getting online. The lessons the BLS teachers teach can be open to all BPS students online through the computer. In this case any student with the heart and desire in Boston could follow the BLS classes and be enrolled in BLS coursework." —Justin B.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

15. Discontinue the model of teachers offering synchronous teaching to both in-person and online students.

But continue to have the systems built out and in place for a remote community, such as online platforms and camera technology, in case the need arises for a return to fully remote learning, or for use in the current model for snow days.

16. Explore alternate online options or ways for students to engage.

Ideas include:

a. Posting assignments or recorded classroom lessons online for students to access when they are ill or otherwise unable to make it to the classroom —rethink attendance policies in these cases

b. Offering an online option through a student's home school or through another school in the district; one where an interested teacher per grade level offers remote instruction

c. An online academy in the district that students could choose to enroll in, or an option in partnership with Open Opportunity Massachusetts

d. Differing options based on grade level — it is more difficult for younger learners to engage online, while older learners, if they are keeping up with the class, may benefit from continued access to remote learning

e. Reach out and engage parents to explore what options might work best for families

17. Continue to offer virtual meetings for parent-teacher conferences, IEP meetings, and community roundtables.

Allow for more parents and more of the community to engage with schools through Zoom or GoogleMeet meetings and virtual home visits.

18. Provide funding for schools to continue subscriptions to online learning platforms such as Seesaw, Epic, Boom Cards, Nearpod, Peardeck, Lexia, ST Math, Zoom.

Provide greater student access to grade level learning tools that are not available without the budget to do so.

a. Further strengthen school-family connections with a "Caregiver University" to introduce, demonstrate, and otherwise allow families to become and stay familiar with these technology platforms (as well as those like Google Classroom) that teachers are using in the classroom

19. Continue to offer access to 1-to-1 student Chromebooks (or iPads if possible).

Librarians need training in revising, explaining, and upholding a Materials Selection Policy in order to ensure effectiveness. This can take many forms, but should include a strongly worded policy in favor of evidence-based facts. Most importantly, it should be backed at an institutional level, such as by a Library Board, and by local political and community leaders.

20. Build on what we have learned about Remote Wednesdays.

Larger periods of uninterrupted time for teachers to collaborate with colleagues, extra time to meet with small groups or with struggling students, and time for more project-based learning are beneficial and may be able to fit into a schedule moving forward where not all five days of the week look the same.

WHY WE THINK THIS WILL WORK

Remote options for parent meetings allow more of the community to engage with schools. Teachers *"saw so much more engagement during this year with some families" (Nicole F.)* given the online format of meetings. Parents who otherwise could not leave work to get to the school, or for other reasons do not feel comfortable engaging in-person, can participate and support their child's education through virtual meeting options and other online learning platforms. We have learned a lot about technology and which platforms and methods are most engaging or beneficial for students. Continuing to leverage what has worked (and eliminating what hasn't), while providing equitable access to technology, can only have an additive effect in schools.

Expand Access to Resources Throughout the District

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is not equitable access to resources across BPS. Many schools in the district lack certified librarians or library spaces, do not offer music, art, dance, or technology programs, do not offer the same level of classes or opportunities as those in exam-entrance schools such as BLS or schools with advanced work programs, do not offer outdoor spaces for children to play and learn, or do not have the materials or resources that they need in additional languages for their programs.

As one Thought Leader notes, *"Remote learning has exacerbated the vast inequities that exist between our schools. In my position as a teacher-librarian, I have seen how essential having a well-stocked library staffed by a teacher-librarian has been for my school. I've been able to support my colleagues by providing them access to eResources in place of print, helping them find replacements for things not available as an eResource, continuing to support a strong culture of reading and literacy throughout my school, and teaching digital literacy and information literacy skills to our students."* —Bonnie M.

With particular regard to the limited access to exam-entrance schools in the district, there is a disservice done to students overall. As one Thought Leader mentions, "*It pulls a select group of students…pulls them away from our other schools. And it just tips the balance…it's terrible*" —Aaron Z. Another adds, *"I hope this gets talked about more…I still struggle to see how a school system can work towards "eliminating access and achievement gaps" and maintain this level of stratification"* —Damian A.

FROM THE WIKI

"An ideal learning experience would follow the Classroom Without Walls structure, but it would make quality education accessible to all students and not only in a remote setting. Programs like METCO are great, and students should not have to travel 2hrs outside of their community for quality education, access to classroom/ school materials and equitable opportunities to make them competitive students." —Jasmyne H.

"BPS students deserve access to comprehensive music education regardless of the school they attend…If we seek to be an anti-racist district, we must no longer accept second best for our students. We must offer music programs that are comparable to those of better-funded districts." —Cara C.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

21. Provide a certified teacher-librarian in every school.

Foster library skills in every school, preparing students for the research and critical analysis competences needed to be successful in postsecondary education.

22. In addition to fully funding in-person arts learning, hire online district instructors to expand access to full-year music, art, and technology programs in every school.

Extend more class options to students that don't have them in their home school, either through these district instructors, or via classroom teachers who volunteer to extend access to their classes online.

23. Open access to BLS, BLA, and OB so that entrance is not based on a middle school exam.

Base enrollment in advanced classes more on student and family choice and good standing in school, and recognize that students may benefit from advancement in a particular class without needing to be identified as being on a comprehensive advanced track or program. As mentioned in the strategies above, online access to, for example, BLS may be one strategy for broadening access to the opportunities available at the school.

24. Consider what other resources are needed for the district to provide equitable opportunities.

Funding for dual language materials or after school programs are one place to start.

25. Revisit school schedules.

Follow through on prior plans to adjust start and end times for all schools based on the age level that they serve — the science backs it up.

WHY WE THINK THIS WILL WORK

Placing a certified librarian in each school will expand access to eBooks and other digital resources, allow more students to gain information/information literacy skills, as well as allow that school to join the Metro Boston Library Network, becoming a BPL branch, and gaining access to all of the library network's resources for the students at that school. Numerous research studies have shown that a credentialed teacher-librarian, plus collaboration through co-teaching, all elevate student learning.

District instructors that are able to reach students from multiple schools can increase access to full-year art, music, technology, or other elective programs, and fill the gap until every school has funding for their own program. Expanded access to advanced academic programs, such as BLS, can better help to meet all students where their needs and strengths lie.

Rethink Assessment and Grading Models, and Provide Curriculum Consistency

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Educators in BPS are being asked to assess students through standardized testing multiple times throughout the year and with multiple different tests. Each test takes time away from real instruction and classroom learning and often delivers information that is not very actionable for teachers. Many of the standardized tests provide data that teachers have already collected on their students through rubrics, project assessments, classroom observations, or curriculum unit assessments in a way that is more diagnostic and better shows student progress than those tests. As one Thought Leader points out, *"Instead of telling us what to give as assessments, tell us what data you need. What data do you need from me? Do you need me to track reading data, writing data? Do you need me to track certain skills? Fine. Let me track it the way I know best…I'm the one seeing my students every day"* —Aaron Z.

Report cards, especially at the elementary school level are complicated and harder for parents to know what they mean for their child's progress. Standards-based grading, as opposed grading based on letters or percents, more clearly highlights student mastery of subjects, but requires a district-wide shift and support for the model.

Curriculum changes occur so frequently throughout BPS that instead of teachers having the time to develop mastery in teaching a curriculum, or time to collaborate with colleagues on best practices for implementing that curriculum, that time and energy is spent trying to learn a new curriculum each and every year, to the detriment of students. As one Thought Leader comments, *"We need to stop spending money on curriculums that we don't even, that we change every year. We need to spend more money on staffing and more money on facilities"* —Shirley L. Another notes, *"My best teaching was when I had the same curriculum for four years in a row"* —Jess E, and the general sentiment is that *"Time + Consistency = Awesome"*— Aaron Z., with regard to curriculum.

FROM THE WIKI

"If we are truly committed to providing equitable instruction we need to shift to a standards-based report card. Standards-aligned is always the first adjective used to describe the instruction we hope to see for our students or a first question when considering curriculum. The fact that the elementary school report card looks the way it does sends mixed messaging on what we value to both educators, students, families, and caregivers." —Matt E.

"Scrap the MCAS — it perpetuates inequity and says nothing of the individual's academic ability. Teaching and prepping for it steals both teachers and students time for actual worthwhile study and learning." —Jonathan B.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

26. **Reduce the amount of standardized testing, including MCAS, and rely more heavily on teacher assessments.**

    Trust teachers to use observations, benchmarks, rubrics, portfolios, project-based assessments, competency-based models, curriculum unit assessments, and tools such as Fountas and Pinnell to provide the district with the data that it needs on students.

    a. While MCAS remains a part of the district's assessments, recognize that these results are less reliable as indicators of school performance and should not be tied school performance metrics

27. **Look to MCIEA and "portfolio schools" for best practices, and leverage teachers in-district who are already experienced in providing their own assessments to offer PD or coaching to others in the district.**

    a. Better train teacher evaluators so that they can act as coaches, offering productive, useful feedback, such as how better to collect data on students
    b. Re-imagine the Academics Department to work in better partnership with what is happening in classrooms
    c. Build district-wide assessments into the curriculum as "performance tasks" rather than exams (San Francisco Public Schools provides a good example)
    d. Offer teachers with a menu of assessments per grade level with which to choose from and engage in PD

28. **Shift, as a district, to standards-based grading.**

    Aim to measure learning and advancement based on mastery, rather than completion.

    a. Allow for more project-based and experiential learning hand-in-hand with this grading model — in particular learning models that bring students outside of the classroom and into the community
    b. Offer additional options and a less punitive system for credit recovery

29. **Commit longer-term as a district to a curriculum, and recognize that, "Good teachers, given time to collaborate, can make anything work [curriculum-wise] for their kids given enough time to really know it" —Jess E.**

    Redirect funds spent on purchasing new curriculum to PD for teachers to master the curriculum that they have or to other high-need areas for the district.

WHY WE THINK THIS WILL WORK

Fewer standardized tests throughout the year will allow teachers to focus on instruction and true assessment of their students, and will allow students more time for learning. A robust system of teacher-led PD and teacher coaches can support the development of assessment best-practices.

Standards-based grading will open up opportunities for project-based learning, better assess curriculum mastery, and allow families to better understand how their child is doing in school. A consistent curriculum year-to-year sets teachers up for success in providing instruction to their students, and allows for more time to plan and prepare.

Improve Diversity and Representation in BPS

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

BPS staffing does not represent the diverse student population in the district. BPS is in need of more teachers of color, more teachers of Asian descent, more male teachers of all races and from all backgrounds, more teachers who speak a second language. When students do not see themselves reflected in the staff, it is hard to feel understood.

As one Thought Leader points out, *"I definitely want to speak on diversity because that is a huge equality piece that the district has yet to resolve. Back during the seventies, there was an order given by a judge that told the district that they had to have a certain percentage of, of teachers of color, Black and Brown teachers. And the district has never met that percentage"* —Shirley L.

While the Thought Leaders recognize that BPS did hire a recruitment specialist with a particular focus on people of color, the pipeline for these teacher candidates remains small, and the district may not be casting a wide enough net.

Students need more preparation to become the next generation of teachers in the community. As a Thought Leader asks, *"how are we building up our students today to be the teachers tomorrow? And if we're not graduating our students at grade level or at reading level, or et cetera…in 10, 15 years, we're not going to have teachers because we didn't raise up teachers in our district."* —Renée O.

FROM THE WIKI

"It is incredibly important to increase and retain the diversity of BPS staff as new hiring commences. If we are truly to combat white supremacy within our schools, then we need to ensure that our school staffs reflect the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of our students. We need to recruit and retain more educators of color and bilingual educators. One strategy is to offer more pathways for paraprofessionals to pursue teaching licensure or increased compensation and benefits. There are many paraprofessionals in our district with years of experience working with our students. Many speak additional languages and are from the same communities as our students. Our paraprofessional staff are an important resource in Boston, and we need to acknowledge their contributions to our communities." —Theresa G.

"All Early Childhood classrooms and curricula to be updated and embedded with culturally and linguistically responsive read alouds that represent the diversity of our community. All schools that use guided reading practices need to have book room upgrades to include leveled libraries…that celebrate stories, customs, traditions and language of people from culturally diverse backgrounds. The Early Childhood Department needs to work smarter to embed culturally responsive practices in activities, choice boards, materials and building in family connections and participation. —Stacia L.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

30. Think outside the box when trying to recruit more teachers of color or dual language teachers.

Conduct job fairs in the local community. Reach out to multiple networks, rather than just broadly soliciting resumés, to hire those with a diverse background.

   a. Attract more qualified teachers of color to the district by providing more flexibility on job offers. As one Thought Leader suggests, *"Would BPS pay more if a teacher has a set of experiences that would make them a more effective teacher? Provide better avenues for advancement? Offer early job offers? When I first entered there was a "letter of commitment" system where teachers of color were offered a guarantee of employment as early as January"* —Sunny P.

31. Provide more pathways for paraeducators already in the district to obtain their teacher licensure.

Expand access through funding or in the form of increased paraeducator salaries and benefits.

32. Partner with organizations, like ACTT, to reach more teacher candidates in the community.

   a. Recruit more people of color into the substitute teacher pool, offer specific training and support to substitutes district-wide, and promote pathways to entering programs such as ACTT — this solution *"not only addresses a sub shortage but increases a pipeline for hiring more teachers of color."* —Sunny P.

33. Train our students to be the next generation of teachers in the community.

   a. Look to create opportunities for students in higher grade levels to intern in elementary school classrooms

      b.   Partner with local colleges to offer a five-year post-high school option to obtaining both a Bachelor's and Master's degree and returning to BPS as teachers

      c.   Redouble efforts to ensure that BPS students are graduating at grade level in reading and math and are prepared to move on to the requirements necessary for teacher licensure

34. Amplify the work of the Opportunity Gaps Office.

Take action to ensure that the existing BPS teacher workforce continues to improve in meeting student needs with regard to diversity. Consider engaging the expertise of Dr. Rose and Dr. Frederick (formerly of the Opportunity Gaps Office) in a consultant capacity.

35. Invest in library materials, lesson materials, and school artwork/murals that reflect the backgrounds of the diverse student population.

Teach students the stories of figures and events that reflect the racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of the entire school community.

WHY WE THINK THIS WILL WORK

When students see themselves represented in the teachers and staff, and feel better understood at school, everyone wins. When tragedy strikes, for instance the recent attack on Asian Americans in Atlanta, having staff representative of the community can make a difference in supporting students. As mentioned on the forum, many paraeducators already in the district have backgrounds similar to those in the community and are invested in the schools. Supporting them in leveraging their experience and gaining teacher licensure is a natural path to a more representative and diverse teacher population.

Flexibility in job offers to teachers can help to make BPS an attractive option to more highly qualified candidates of color. A more diverse selection of books and lessons can also serve to inspire students and allow them to better connect with characters in books or figures from history.

Solicit and Incorporate More Feedback from Stakeholders Throughout the Year

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is frustrating to devote time and energy to providing input, and to feel as if that feedback is going unheard or unheeded. Several Thought Leaders were initially hesitant to even participate in the WikiWisdom Forum, given past experiences where they felt that nothing had changed or resulted from their efforts.

There is a sense that there is a divide between the Central Office and teachers. But, as one Thought Leader from Central Office points out, *"I think that the change cannot happen if we don't do it collaboratively with the teachers on the ground, working with the Central Office." —Renée O.*

Others worry about a one-time opportunity to provide feedback being a "flash in the pan" or a talking point just to show that the district has reached out to its stakeholders. As one Thought Leader mentions at the end of the Thought Leader discussion, *"This makes me sad that this was just a one-off 2-hour conversation" —Jess E.*

Families are an essential source of information and insight into the needs of their children and the solutions that will work best for them, but it is hard to reach a representative sample of the community. The voices heard are often limited to those who can afford childcare or afford to leave work early in order to engage. Especially after the past year, one Thought Leader points out, *"I think we do forget that our parents are experts on their kids and they really worked with their kids this year" —Nicole F.*

FROM THE WIKI

"Equity Roundtables are truly a hidden gem and resource at the Joseph Tynan Elementary School. Initially, I was extremely frustrated with the ask of holding Equity Roundtables during the closure of BPS in March 2020. At the Tynan we were trying to adjust to our new normal of remote learning while balancing life in the pandemic. In many ways I felt the ask was too much. However, I was compliant and sent out a communication to the entire Tynan Community — families, partners, and staff, for our first Equity Roundtable meeting. The outcome was so much more than I had ever imagined. We had a robust and diverse group of participants who all came to the discussion with rich ideas and a shared focus on our shared priority — Tynan Students. The participants were voices that previously were not heard at the Tynan, however they were ready and willing to work given the right opportunity. The Equity Roundtable was the opportunity that allowed more voices to be amplified…the Equity Roundtable allowed me as a school leader to recognize this wonderful resource that has a laser focus on students and increased my awareness of the power of community voice." —Leslie G.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

36. Cast a wide net when soliciting input, and include parent voice in more decision-making at BPS.

   a. When engaging parents/families ensure that there are equitable and inclusive opportunities to provide feedback — remote ways to join meetings or sessions, or practices of collecting feedback at diversely attended events, such as Parent University

   b. Find out what the community sees as minimum baseline qualifications for their school/ students early in the process, such as before new schools are built

   c. Utilize participatory planning and participatory budgeting processes to create more even playing fields

37. Increase communication between the Central Office and other stakeholders.

   a. Improve follow-up after soliciting feedback, so that stakeholders know that their voices were heard, and know what action is being taken

   b. Ask stakeholders how the district is doing in meeting calls for change

   c. Enhance transparency, for instance, providing stakeholders with the budget that the district is working with, so that they can provide smart recommendations within those bounds

38. Require anyone who works in Central Office to spend, at minimum, a week per year in the schools, becoming part of the school community.

39. Bring back the system of regular evaluations of Central Office departments by principals and school leaders.

Return to this system that existed in BPS in the early 2000's where scores were made public and *"departments were expected to have a customer service orientation to schools (and thus students) and were expected to improve their scores"* —Sunny P.

40. Build on feedback that is received.

Provide more than one-time opportunities for feedback, instead collecting input throughout the year, perhaps on a quarterly basis.

WHY WE THINK THIS WILL WORK

Parents know their child best and know what will work for their family. And as one Thought Leader says, "the more opportunities we can communicate with them in advance about options, the more equitable, I think, the experiences" —Bonnie M. Clear lines of communication can help to make everyone feel that they have a stake in the process. Thought Leaders are ready and willing to volunteer their time to create real change. When those who work in Central Office engage with the work going on on the ground in schools, they can better connect with staff and understand their needs, and staff can better form relationships and trust with leadership in the district, benefiting the whole community.

Conclusion

The message is clear — members of the Boston Public Schools community have numerous ideas for how BPS can and should re-imagine its schools to better serve students, staff, and the community as a whole. The goal should not be a post-pandemic return to what was normal, but rather an objective to Build. Back. Better.

New lessons have been learned in this past year of the pandemic, and persistent ones have become all the more acute. As the district sets out on this task, it has a group of staff ready and willing to engage, and a community at large ripe to be part of the decision-making process.

Thought Leaders

Damian Aufiero teaches History and Civics at the Edward M. Kennedy Academy for Health Careers. He is a lifelong learner with 10 years of experience in the classroom. He has worked with talented teams of educators in a variety of roles, from history departments to developing materials with the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the Senate, and presently as a member of the Massachusetts 2020-2021 Secondary Teacher & Principal Advisory Cabinet.

Jess Ellis has been in the district since 2003, teaching inclusion and SEI in the early grades in many schools and in different parts of the city. She is passionate about supporting educators to be successful and to make the work more sustainable. We lose great educators because the demands placed on teachers only continue to grow. Jess wants to be part of the solution for making the profession a desirable one and for keeping our excellent educators here for their whole career.

Nicole Ferrara is currently a District Social Worker (formerly PAC) in Boston Public Schools. She began working for BPS in 2006. Nicole had always planned to work in a public school setting and committed herself to the goal of working for BPS after her first internship at the Counseling and Intervention Center in 1999. Prior to working in BPS, Nicole worked for in agencies as a home based family therapist for children and adolescents who were returning home after being placed in residential placements. When not working Nicole enjoys spending time with her husband and three children mostly at sports events, the beach, and travel.
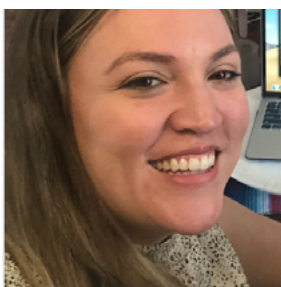
Theresa Garcia de Quevedo is an ESL and Wilson Reading Teacher at Mildred Avenue K-8. She is also a Language Assessment Team-Facilitator for the Mildred and organizes many school-based literacy events such as free book fairs and reading incentive programs. She has been teaching in BPS for 7 years and prior to that, taught English in Spain and South Korea.
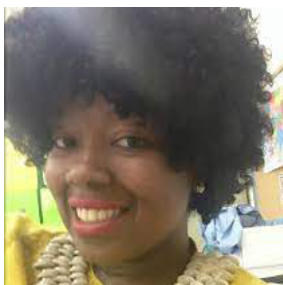
Shirley Jones Luke is an educator and literacy advocate. Ms. Luke teaches English Language Arts. She has been in the district for over fifteen years. Shirley enjoys art, poetry, and writing.

Bonnie McBride earned her MSLIS from Simmons College in 2015 and became Teacher-Librarian at Fenway High School that same year, where she has worked to create a strong culture of reading. A 2018 Massachusetts School Library Association President's Award winner and 2019 Boston Foundation EdTalks presenter, she is passionate about school libraries bringing equitable access to information for all students and promoting the joy of reading through culturally responsive books.

Renee Omolade is a lifelong resident of Boston, MA! As an alumna of BPS she finds it exciting to have the ability to reinvest her talent back into the school system. Renee is currently the District Hub School Coordinator for Boston Public Schools working to bring the national community school model to the city of Boston. Through public policy, her ultimate goal is to impact how we structure systems to be anti-racist and to mitigate the perpetuation of societal norms that negatively impact communities of color.

Sung-Joon Pai is an administrator at Charlestown High School. Since 2010, Sunny has taken on multiple roles at CHS, such as Director of the Diploma Plus Programs, Chief of Staff, team leader for the Leadership Team, Guidance Team, and Math Team. Over 22 years in BPS, Sunny has also worked at Fenway High School, as a founding faculty member at Boston Arts Academy (BAA), and as the founding principal of the Media Communications Technology High School. Sunny was recognized in 2016 by the Boston Globe as a Bostonian of the Year for his leadership with the DP program, and he is a winner of the Lawrence W. O'Toole Award. He lives with his spouse and two sons in Jamaica Plain.

Sara Schiloski is a 5th grade ELA teacher at the Murphy School. It is her 7th year teaching 5th grade. Sara started at the Murphy while she was doing her student teaching through Northeastern University. She also attended James Madison University in Virginia. Sara is a part of the Murphy School Instructional Leadership Team and School Site Council. She also has three daughters and a puppy named Charlie.

Aaron Zaubi has been teaching high school in Boston Public Schools since 2015. In those years, he has had the unique opportunity to co-create Boston's first project-based Electronics & Engineering course with the countless contributions of students from year to year. It is because of experiences like this that Aaron cannot imagine teaching anywhere else. He loves Boston and the students that call Boston home, and is grateful and humbled every year to feel like an adopted part of his students' lives here in the city. Having a child of his own, Aaron hopes to see him go through the Boston Public Schools, not the system as it is today, but the system that he believes it can become if we elevate and value the voices and ideas in our own communities.

About WikiWisdom

How do leaders or decision makers easily capture the valuable insights, ideas, observations and wisdom from the hands-on experience of frontline peer groups that reside at the bottom of the power pyramid?

How do they learn from the frontline about issues that are plaguing the system? How can you make it comfortable for them to come forward and share what they know in a way that could be used to inform policy making and priority setting?

WIKIWISDOM IS THE ANSWER.

A WikiWisdom Forum harnesses the power of technology, peer collaboration and networks to unearth frontline wisdom and connect it to the people with the power to make changes.

WikiWisdom uses the internet to offer people a chance to do more than gripe about their situation. It gives them the opportunity to use their knowledge to tell the powers that be how to do things better.

It's a rare gift to people at both ends of the power structure.

WIKIWISDOM

F O R U M

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