

Education

OVERVIEW

Every student in every classroom in every school across Boston should have access to high-quality schools that will help them reach their full potential. This belief embodies the FY21 budget, with \$1.258 billion to support over 53,000 students at the Boston Public Schools (BPS) and \$232 million to support approximately 11,156 Boston students in charter schools. This \$97 million increase over the FY20 education budget represents 82% of all new City funding for next year, and the education budget remains over 40% of the city's budget as a whole. Boston has now grown its annual education spending by \$442 million since Mayor Walsh took office, with per-pupil spending increasing over 30%.

In the fall of 2019, city officials, parents, teachers, and advocates welcomed the passage of a landmark state education finance reform law, the Student Opportunity Act (SOA). The SOA addresses the underfunding of low-income, special education, and English learner students and will result in \$100 million more in state aid for BPS within seven years. However, recognizing that current BPS students cannot wait that long, Mayor Walsh announced a historic investment of \$100 million in direct classroom funding for BPS at his State of the City speech in January 2020. The investment will be phased in over three years and will be on top of standard cost increases, such as inflation and employee costs.

The City's \$100 million commitment to BPS will support Superintendent Cassellius's strategic vision. Informed by a four-month community tour in which the Superintendent visited all 125 BPS schools,

hosted numerous community meetings, and engaged with more than 2,100 district stakeholders, the strategic vision aims to deliver an excellent, equitable, culturally-relevant education for all students.

In FY21, the City is making \$36 million in evidence-based investments that are tied to the Superintendent's strategic vision, 100% of which will be directly in school budgets or in school services budgeted centrally. Of this new funding, over half will provide intensive, targeted support and resources to 33 "transformation" schools identified by the State as needing greater support. Investing in lower-performing schools will raise the quality of the district overall and provide a more consistent experience for students in Boston. While the FY21 investments focus on this subset of schools, Mayor Walsh's \$100 million, multi-year commitment will enable the district to plan ahead and develop a series of robust investments that will support students and educators at every school.

Collectively, the FY21 investments seek to improve the student experience and raise the bar on quality by strengthening students, teachers, academic content, and the relationships between these elements: \$9 million in investments will create a strong foundation for student success by offering students and their families more support and connecting them to resources and information; \$12 million in investments will increase teachers' skill through coaching and consistent feedback; and \$15 million in investments will bolster student learning with high-quality curricular materials, resources, and improved learning environments.

BPS OPERATING BUDGET

At a \$1.258 billion appropriation, the FY21 operating budget is the largest in BPS's history (Table 1). The FY21 allocation makes investments to strengthen social-emotional supports and family engagement, boost professional development for teachers, and broaden access to technology and “specials” (classes in art, music, science, and physical education). As in years past, the budget assists schools with declining enrollments.

BPS Budget Summary

	FY20 Approp	FY21 Adopted	\$ Change
Direct School Expenses	\$756M	\$809M	\$53M
School Services Budgeted Centrally	\$297M	\$317M	\$19M
Central Administration	\$64M	\$66M	\$2M
Non-BPS Student Services	\$61M	\$67M	\$6M
Total BPS Budget	\$1.178B	\$1.258B	\$80M

Table 1

Funding directly in schools will increase by \$53.4 million from the FY20 budget appropriation to \$809.1 million.

In addition to school budgets, schools receive significant support from services that are budgeted centrally. This includes items such as transportation, particular special education services, and facilities maintenance. This portion of the budget will increase 6.5% from the FY20 appropriation to \$316.8 million. With these support funds added to funds budgeted at the school level, \$1.126 billion dollars is expected to be spent on school services, fully 89% of the BPS budget.

BPS is also responsible for funding services for students in Boston attending school outside of BPS, including adult education students, students placed out-of-district for special education and vocational education, and pre-kindergarten students at community based organizations (CBOs). In addition, BPS provides transportation for

out-of-district special education students, and these costs comprise 24.5% of the FY21 BPS transportation budget. Total funds budgeted for non-BPS students will increase 9.4% from the FY20 appropriation to \$66.7 million, comprising over 5% of the overall FY20 BPS budget.

In FY21, the Central Administration budget will increase just 2.5% to \$66.0 million. The Superintendent’s strategic vision affirms the importance of organizational effectiveness and accountability, as well as the need for strong coordination and support from district leadership.

The FY21 BPS budget includes \$9 million in targeted investments to create a strong foundation for student success and outreach to connect families to resources. This includes an investment of \$5.6 million to hire social workers to provide a coordinated, multi-tiered system of supports to meet the social-emotional needs of students and their families. These social workers will be deployed to the 33 transformation schools, as well as other schools demonstrating the greatest need.

Also included in this category of investments is \$2.5 million for family liaisons who reflect the cultures and speak the languages represented at the transformation schools and other schools where more than 50% of students speak a language other than English. In addition to helping families navigate registration and other school functions, liaisons will refer families to community resources for housing, food, and counseling, resources that are more critical than ever amid the COVID-19 crisis.

The FY21 operating budget devotes \$12 million to increasing teachers’ skills through coaching and professional development. Because even the best teachers require training and support to be at their most effective, \$4.6 million will be provided to assign instructional facilitators to the transformation schools. These

facilitators will impart strategies for getting the most out of curriculum materials, oversee lesson planning, and provide consistent feedback. Additional support for instruction is timely as teachers are developing new skills to deliver lessons to students learning remotely. Other investments in this category will promote professional learning, including team-based strategies for eliminating opportunity gaps and raising instructional rigor.

Among the themes frequently expressed during the Superintendent's community tour was a desire for access to 21st century technological tools for all students and a full range of programming including arts, science, and physical education (PE). These fall under the third category of investments, which consists of \$15 million to raise the bar on student learning with high-quality learning materials, resources, and improved learning environments. The recent disruption related to COVID-19 has underscored the extent to which technology has become an essential learning tool and must be prioritized. In FY21, \$4 million will fund the purchase of technology, such as laptops, to support teaching and learning.

Beyond the core curriculum, course offerings in areas like art, music, science, and PE give students the opportunity to explore their passions and fuel their curiosity. In FY21, \$2.8 million will add one "special" per week at select schools, freeing up classroom teachers to participate in more coaching and planning time, guided by instructional facilitators. The FY21 budget will also ensure that school facilities support learning by investing in building condition and cleanliness through the hiring of 25 new custodians.

As a result of collective bargaining with the Boston Teachers Union, the FY21 budget provides 2% salary increases for BPS teachers, making them among the highest paid in the country. The budget also includes \$5 million to put a

paraprofessional in every kindergarten classroom, as well as continued hiring of nurses to ensure at least one nurse in every school.

Early Childhood Education

Under Mayor Walsh's leadership, the City has continually expanded the number of quality pre-kindergarten seats, as part of the Universal Pre-K (UPK) initiative. In April 2019, Mayor Walsh announced the creation of a first-of-its-kind \$15 million investment in the Quality Pre-K Fund, to support the creation of a citywide mixed-delivery system with school-based programs and community-based organizations (CBOs).

Because of this extraordinary investment, as well as ongoing operating support in BPS's Department of Early Childhood, in the 2020-2021 school year, up to 937 more four-year-olds will be enrolled in a quality pre-kindergarten program than when the UPK initiative began in FY14, nearly two-thirds of the way toward the City's goal of 1,500. The Quality Pre-K Fund will enable the City to close the existing gap in quality seats, guaranteeing every four-year-old in Boston a high-quality pre-kindergarten experience.

BPS early education programs have been recognized as among the most effective in the nation at closing achievement gaps. They are content-rich in science, literacy, arts and math. Data shows that BPS pre-kindergarten attendees outperform their peers in third and fifth grade MCAS, in both ELA and Math. Two-thirds of BPS early childhood classrooms have earned accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), affirming that these programs offer high-quality, state-of-the-art education to help get children off to successful starts.

Special Education

The FY21 BPS budget makes significant investments in special education that will result in over 90 new school-budgeted special education teachers and paraprofessionals. The special education budget totals \$289.8 million in FY21, an increase of \$19.3 million or 7.1% from the FY20 appropriation. The special education budget accounts for approximately 23% of the total BPS budget and supports the over 11,000 students with disabilities, or 20% of the BPS student population.

The FY21 budget includes \$4.7 million in new funding to support students with autism through the Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) program. 1 in 37.5 BPS students has autism as a primary disability, a higher rate than the national average, and the rate continues to grow. To meet increased need, BPS will add 20 new ABA specialists and 2 new ABA program directors, as well as ABA-licensed contractors to provide additional services. The FY21 budget also includes a significant increase in special education teachers as the district continues its inclusion rollout.

In addition to mainstream or substantially separate placements in the district, BPS is responsible for the educational services of approximately 463 special education students in out-of-district placements. BPS has seen an increase in the number of high-need students and DCF-involved students placed in group homes who require private placement. BPS is fully or partly responsible for paying for services for most of these students, at a total projected cost of \$41.5 million in FY21. Some of the costs for these services will be reimbursed by Circuit Breaker. Tuition rates are established by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Rate Setting Commission.

BPS is also responsible for providing education services to students with IEPs in private placements. To better support these students, the FY21 budget continues to fund

a proportionate share team responsible for conducting IEP meetings and evaluations.

Bilingual Education

The Bilingual/Sheltered English Immersion budget totals \$99.9 million in FY21, an increase of \$3.7 million or 3.8% from the FY20 appropriation. Approximately one-third of BPS students have an ELL designation, and students in the district come from 139 different countries. In addition to baseline ELL funding, the FY21 budget includes \$1.8 million in supplemental support for students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE).

BPS Enrollment

Student enrollment is the foundation of the BPS budget. The preliminary stage of the budget process involves enrollment projections for each program, grade, and school, which are based on historic trends and current data. The projected enrollment at each school for the upcoming school year determines the allocation of resources at the school level through the weighted student funding formula. The FY21 budget development process continued the work done for FY19 to use data more rigorously and collaborate between school leaders and BPS Finance to develop accurate enrollment projections.

In FY21, the BPS projected budgeted enrollment is approximately 54,844. At the school level, BPS has seen some shifts in enrollment. BPS gives parents a voice in where their child attends schools, which causes shifts from year to year. The BPS School Committee has also supported school communities that have requested to expand grades in recent years, which has led to shifts in enrollment.

Weighted Student Funding

Weighted Student Funding (WSF) ensures resource equity for all students no matter

the school they attend. The weighted student funding model creates a baseline per-student funding amount and then adjusts the amount depending on individual student need. For example, students whose family income is at or below the poverty level will receive additional funding in the formula. Other need-based weights include students with disabilities, English Language Learners (ELL), and vocational education students. A school's budget is calculated by adding the individual funding amounts for every student projected to attend that school in the fall. Additionally, each school also receives a foundation budget to support essential staff.

For FY21, the tenth year using the WSF formula, BPS continues to refine this need-based method of funding. Student-based allocation models are the standard for transparent and equitable school budgeting. Such models allow dollars to follow students, and those dollars are weighted based on student need. BPS's highest-need students receive more resources through the weighted student funding structure.

When enrollment declines at a school, the central office works closely with the school to appropriately adjust staffing. Particular care is made through this process to make classrooms full so that they are affordable to schools. There are safeguards in place to assist schools with declines in enrollment, such as sustainability allocations and soft landings, as well as other reserves that are used throughout the budgeting process.

The district increased WSF funding to \$559.3 million in FY21. WSF is only one component of schools' funding; total school funding will rise by \$53.4 million in FY21.

In FY21, BPS school budgets include a series of substantial new supports on top of WSF. The Foundation for Quality, which replaces sustainability funds, expands the definition of baseline services for schools, ensuring that all schools have a baseline amount of

funding above compliance. Schools in transition will receive additional targeted funding, including supports for K-6 transitions, new inclusion programs, strands undergoing redesign, and capacity maintenance for existing programs.

The Opportunity Index

FY21 is the third year that BPS will be using the Opportunity Index (OI) as part of WSF. The OI is an innovative tool that quantifies differences in experiences, opportunities, and need between students, allowing BPS to allocate resources more equitably. The OI is a composite index that incorporates a range of data representing factors that are outside of the schools' control, yet are predictive of students' academic outcomes. By rolling multiple measures into a single, more accessible metric ranging from 0.01 to 0.99, BPS is better equipped to direct resources and supports to the schools and students who need them most.

Since FY19, BPS has used OI for the allocation of two central sources of funding: School Support Funds, which support schools' academic priorities, and the Partnership Fund, which enables schools to partner with community nonprofit organizations. Funding is allocated based on student enrollment and level of need. In FY21, \$5 million in discretionary School Support Funds will be awarded to schools with an OI score greater than or equal to 0.35. Additionally, \$6 million from the Partnership Fund will be awarded to schools with an OI score greater than or equal to 0.56.

EXTERNAL FUNDS

External funds are provided directly to BPS through formula grants (entitlements), competitive grants, reimbursement accounts, and other grants, primarily from state and federal sources. These external funds are critical to the success of the district, but have decreased to 10.6% of total funding in FY21 from 17% in FY12

(Figure 1). Decreased external funding was identified as a challenge to BPS’s long-term financial stability in the Long-Term Financial Plan. In recent years, the BPS budget has relied on the increased City appropriation to help absorb these decreases.

One of the largest sources of federal revenue for BPS is the Title I entitlement grant. BPS will receive \$38.9 million in Title I revenue in FY21. The grant’s purpose is to improve the academic achievement of disadvantaged students by ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to obtain a high-quality education. The grant provides direct funds to schools with higher levels of poverty.

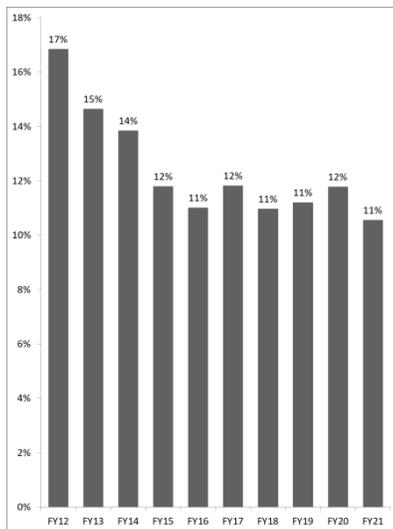


Figure 1
External Funds as % of Total Funds
FY12-19 Actuals, FY20 Appropriation, FY21 Adopted

BPS receives two external revenue sources to fund the district’s comprehensive special education program. Through Circuit Breaker reimbursements, the Commonwealth shares the cost of educating students with disabilities once the cost to educate those students exceeds a threshold amount. BPS has budgeted approximately \$17.7 million in Circuit Breaker revenue in FY21. Additionally, funds

provided through the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) grant enable the district to provide special education services in the least restrictive environment possible for children with disabilities ages three through twenty-one, and to provide early intervention services for children from birth through age two. BPS will receive \$17.5 million in IDEA funds in FY21.

School Improvement Grants

BPS will receive \$512,000 in School Improvement Grants from the Commonwealth in FY21 to support the Dever and Ellis. This funding is provided to the lowest performing schools in BPS, also known as turnaround schools, to extend the instructional day, increase professional development, and provide other supports.

As School Improvement Grants end for each school as they exit turnaround, the district has shifted these activities to the operating budget to continue the work of turning around low-performing schools. The FY21 budget includes \$2.03 million in funding to transition the Channing, Grew, English, Brighton, Excel, and Madison Park schools, where previous School Improvement Grants have ended or funding is tapering.

PERFORMANCE

BPS is committed to using data to improve school performance and provide the best education to students.

In 2018, BPS developed the Performance Meter, which was a critical step in establishing a performance management culture within the district. In FY21, BPS is replacing the Performance Meter with six anchor goals articulated in the Superintendent’s strategic vision: eliminate opportunity and achievement gaps, accelerate learning, amplify all voices, expand opportunity, cultivate trust, and activate partnerships. Each goal is paired

with a series of aligned metrics to measure progress.

Graduation Rates

BPS has been evaluating its progress towards academic goals using measurable outcomes for several years. The district has seen positive gains in several performance metrics, including decreases in dropout rates.

The overall four-year graduation rate has increased by 19% over the past decade, from 61.4% in 2009 to 73.2% in 2019. In addition, the five-year graduation rate continues to climb.

In 2020, ten Boston high schools achieved graduation rates of 80% or above: the John D. O'Bryant School of Mathematics and Science, Boston Latin Academy, the Edward M. Kennedy Academy for Health Careers, Boston Latin School, New Mission High School, Fenway High School, Dearborn STEM Academy, TechBoston Academy, Boston Green Academy, and Boston Arts Academy.

Dropout Rate

The overall dropout rate for grades 9-12 in 2019 was 4.2%, a 22% decrease from the 2018 dropout rate of 5.4%. BPS has cut the dropout rate by 38% over the past ten years, with a decrease of 565 students dropping out annually over that period.

According to state guidelines, students in grades 6-12 are counted as dropouts if they leave school during the year for any reason other than transfer, graduation, death, or expulsion with an option to return.

Accountability Results

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) implemented a new accountability system in the fall of 2018, which determines schools' need for assistance or intervention based on a set of accountability indicators

including student growth, graduation rate, and chronic absenteeism.

In 2019, DESE singled out the Hale and Winship as schools of recognition. Fourteen schools were classified as meeting or exceeding targets, and thirty-five were classified as making substantial progress toward targets. 67% of schools improved relative to 2018 performance. BPS met English language arts, math, and science targets for all students in grades 3-8, and many schools showed strong progress against targets.

In March 2020, as the result of a district review by DESE, BPS and DESE entered into a partnership to improve the district's lowest performing schools, continue to address systemic barriers to equity across the school system, and support its most vulnerable students to achieve their highest educational potential.

As part of that partnership, BPS has committed to four priority initiatives: make improvements in BPS schools included among the lowest performing 10% of schools in the state; address instructional rigor, equitable access to advanced coursework, and chronic absenteeism at the high school level; improve educational services for students with disabilities; and improve on-time arrival of school buses. BPS has also committed to a long-term initiative to develop a plan for improving services to English learners and improve interpretation and translation services for limited English proficient parents and guardians.

The City will continue to work with state and community partners to make more improvements in our schools across the board.

BUILDBPS

In FY18, Mayor Walsh announced BuildBPS, a \$1 billion investment to modernize Boston's public school infrastructure. Through a dedication of City capital funds

and a strong working relationship with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), the plan more than doubles the capital spending on BPS facilities from FY18 to FY27.

This ten-year investment will be the largest school building plan in forty years. The plan will result in new school buildings and major transformations, reconfigurations to align schools with K-6/7-12 and K-8/9-12 pathways, and increased investments district-wide for all school buildings and communities. The planning process is focused on creating high-quality, twenty-first-century learning environments for students, which contributes to closing opportunity gaps for more students.

Since FY18, BPS has completed construction on the new building for the Dearborn STEM Academy and the Eliot School at 585 Commercial Street. Boston Arts Academy is currently in construction. The Josiah Quincy Upper School and the Carter School are currently in the process for MSBA funding. BPS is also planning K-6 and 7-12 conversions at various schools to minimize school transitions for students.

All schools will receive security improvements and technology infrastructure. The City is also investing in bathroom renovations, drinking water upgrades, entryway improvements, schoolyard repairs, and accreditation repairs at various schools, as well as the third phase of the multi-year My Way Café kitchen upgrade initiative. Additionally, the City is leveraging the MSBA Accelerated Repair Program to fund roof, window, and boiler repairs.

Mayor Walsh's FY21-25 capital plan implements early action BuildBPS initiatives and supports planning for large-scale projects coming out of the BuildBPS engagement process. The City is projected to spend \$169 million on BuildBPS capital projects from FY18 through FY20. The FY21-25 capital plan projects \$438 million in City

spending over the next five years, and the City has committed an additional \$123 million for the remainder of the ten-year plan. When combined with projected MSBA matching funds, Boston is committing \$1 billion to BPS capital projects over ten years.

CHARTER SCHOOL TUITION

Commonwealth charter schools, which are granted charters by the State Board of Education, are publicly-funded schools administered independently from local school committee and district bargaining rules and regulations. Commonwealth charter schools are primarily financed by the home districts of their students through a per-pupil-based charge.

Commonwealth charter schools are projected to educate approximately 11,156 Boston students in FY21. Boston is assessed by the Commonwealth to fund charter schools on a per-pupil basis, and Boston's charter school tuition assessment is projected to increase by \$17 million over FY20 to a total of \$232 million due to increasing enrollment and higher per-pupil tuition rates.

As of FY20, Boston's charter school assessment had tripled since the enactment of the 2010 Achievement Gap legislation. This put increasing pressure on the City to fund schools as overall state support decreased. However, thanks to the Student Opportunity Act (SOA), Boston and other municipalities across the Commonwealth will see an increase in state education aid. The SOA makes an unprecedented \$1.5 billion investment in Massachusetts public schools, and provides an implementation timeline for fully funding charter school reimbursement costs.

See the *Revenue Estimates and Analysis* section of Volume I for more details on the SOA.