

**HANDOUT**

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# Event Cards | Boston Educational Justice Timeline

**Teacher Instructions:** The following pages include descriptions of individual events for students to analyze as part of the activities for Supporting Question 2. Print and cut them apart before class.

*June 11, 1963*

**The Boston NAACP presents demands to the Boston School Committee (BSC):**

Led by Ruth Batson, the NAACP presents a list of 14 demands to the Boston School Committee. The first demand is that the committee recognize that de facto segregation exists in Boston schools, creating educational inequality that the committee must take action to end. The BSC refuses to acknowledge that segregation exists in the schools or to take any action to address unequal education between white and Black children in the city.

*June 18, 1963*

**Thousands participate in Boston's first "Stay Out for Freedom":** Organized by hundreds of parents and civil rights activists, nearly 3,000 African American high school students stay out of public schools and attend six Freedom Schools instead. At Freedom Schools, students learn about African American history, citizenship, and nonviolent protest, and they are taught by leaders in Boston's African American community, including Celtics basketball legend Bill Russell.

*April–August 1965*

**The NAACP uses report findings to push for a new state law to fix schools.**

**April – The Kiernan Report documents harmful effects of “racially imbalanced” schools in Massachusetts:**

State Commissioner of Education Owen Kiernan issues a report concluding that the state’s schools are “racially imbalanced” (an indirect way of saying “segregated”) and that this is “educationally harmful and should be eliminated.” After the report is released, Boston’s mayor, John Collins, acknowledges segregation in the city’s schools and calls for its end. Boston School Committee chairperson Louise Day Hicks publicly disagrees with the mayor.

**June – NAACP pressures the Massachusetts legislature to take action in response to the Kiernan Report:**

Ruth Batson explains: “At the height of bitter frustration, and in desperation, black parents, community organizations and concerned citizens realized that they had no other recourse but to challenge the Massachusetts Legislature with the responsibility of legislating quality education for all. This was the one method that had not been tried.”<sup>1</sup>

**August 18 – Massachusetts enacts the Racial Imbalance Act (RIA):** The African American community’s pressure on the state legislature pays off. The new law requires local school boards to ensure that no schools have a student body that is more than 50% non-white. The state can withhold funding from districts that do not comply. The Boston School Committee resists the law and attempts to have it repealed.

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Batson, *The Black Educational Movement in Boston: A Sequence of Historical Events* (Northeastern University, School of Education, 2001).

1965

**African American parents found Operation Exodus:** Led by Ellen Jackson, the community-funded program provides privately owned buses to take African American children from Roxbury to public schools in other Boston neighborhoods that have enough space and better resources.

According to historian Jeanne Theoharis, the program was part of an effort to challenge the idea that Black parents did not care about their children's education. She writes: "Parents believed that if they began busing Black students to these open seats, they would shame the school district into complying with the state law [Racial Imbalance Act] and taking over the operation and funding of the buses."<sup>2</sup> But the school system refused, and Operation Exodus ended in the early 1970s due to lack of funding. As many as 3,000 students participated in the program in each year of its existence.

1965

**African American parents found the Roxbury Community School:** It is the first of four alternative Black independent schools, offering alternatives to Boston's public schools. Each of the four schools serves grades K through 6 and enrolls between 75 and 200 students. The principals and a majority of the faculty at each school are Black, and the schools give parents a significant voice in their operation. Historian Tatiana Cruz writes: "Community members donated materials to create hands-on learning activities centered on 'real world' problems, while other lessons focused on questions of identity and instilled pride in students' African and African American heritage. Schools adorned African flags and posters of black freedom fighters, and some schools like St. Joseph's even centered student evaluations on their proficiency in the seven principles of Kwanzaa."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jeanne Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 52–53.

<sup>3</sup> Tatiana Maria Fernández Cruz, "Boston's Struggle in Black and Brown: Racial Politics, Community Development, and Grassroots Organizing, 1960–1985" (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2017), 147.

1966

**Ruth Batson helps begin the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity**

**(METCO):** METCO is a program (still operating today) that arranges for students of color from Boston to attend schools in participating suburban school districts and provides transportation for the students to get there.

1966

**The Boston School Committee manipulates racial classifications to avoid**

**“racially imbalanced” schools:** The Boston School Committee reclassifies 650 Chinese American students from “non-white” to “white” in an effort to prevent two schools from being in violation of the Racial Imbalance Act. A 12th-grade Chinese American student tells the *Boston Globe*: “The School Committee can’t make us white just by saying so.” Another Chinese American student tells the newspaper, “How can the School Committee suddenly decide I’m white? It’s not only ridiculous, it’s unfair to us.” A Chinatown businessman adds, “So the School Committee wants our children to be white to help them solve the racial imbalance mess. But will our kids be considered white in other circumstances?”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ken Botwright, “He’s Not White And Proud of It,” *Boston Globe*, October 20, 1966, 1.

*August–September 1968*

**Community members demand a voice in the redesign of a Chinatown school.**

*August 15, 1968* – **Quincy School planners meet with Chinatown, Castle Hill, Bay Village, and South End residents:** The planners from the Tufts-New England Medical Center and the city share their detailed plans to replace the Josiah Quincy School building in Chinatown, one of the oldest and most dilapidated school buildings in the city. The residents are outraged that the plans for the new building have already been made without consulting anyone in the community. They challenge the planners, asking: “By what right did they plan for, rather than with, the community?”<sup>5</sup>

*September 1968* – **The Quincy School Community Council is formed in response to residents’ demands to have a voice in planning for the new school:** The new council includes Chinese American, Black, Latinx, and white representatives from the communities served by the school, the city of Boston, and the Tufts-New England Medical Center. The council takes over planning for the new Quincy School. While the committee agrees to make decisions by majority vote, they are able to arrive at nearly all decisions by consensus.<sup>6</sup> They issue a new plan the next year that envisions an educational program and building centered on the needs and cultures of a diverse community.

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<sup>5</sup> Quincy School Community Council and Quincy School Project Staff Planning Office, Tufts-New England Medical Center, “Program Requirements and Design Specifications for the Quincy School Complex” (1969), 111.

<sup>6</sup> Quincy School Community Council, “Program Requirements and Design Specifications,” 112.

*Fall 1968* – **African American students in Boston protest for culturally responsive education:** A protest by African American students at English High School over their school’s lack of Black faculty and staff, lack of Black history courses, absence of a Black student union, and the school’s shirt-and-tie dress code sparks larger protests by African American students throughout the city. Little more than a week after the initial protest at English, more than 6,000 African American students boycott Boston’s 16 high schools. The boycott lasts four days; the schools agree to adjust their dress codes but do not give in to the other demands.

*1969*

**Latina mothers create independent educational opportunities for Latinx children.**

*Summer* – **Latina mothers create Latin American Summer:** It is a summer educational program for 400 Latinx children. One in eight children who attend have never been to school before.<sup>7</sup>

*September* – **Two Latina mothers, with support from several community volunteers, establish the Acción School:** It offers a school-readiness program for 30 Latinx children.

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<sup>7</sup> Cruz, “Boston’s Struggle in Black and Brown,” 148.

*September 1969* – **Latinx activists kick-start more bilingual classes in BPS:** Under pressure from Latinx activists, the Boston School Committee approves an expanded number of bilingual classes. According to historian Tatiana Cruz, “Latino parents and members of the Spanish Federation (a mostly Puerto Rican group that organized around education) took community control of the implementation of these bilingual programs. They found unused locations for the clusters, furnished classrooms, advertised the programs in the community, recruited students, and screened and hired teachers.”<sup>8</sup>

1971

**Bilingual education gains momentum in Boston.**

**Massachusetts enacts the Transitional Bilingual Education Act:** The law requires schools to create special bilingual education programs if they have at least 20 students of a single minority language group who are not proficient in English.

**Boston Public Schools’ first bilingual school, the Rafael Hernández School, opens:** Latinx parents vote to name the school after Hernández, a Puerto Rican poet, composer, and musician.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Cruz, “Boston’s Struggle in Black and Brown,” 149.

<sup>9</sup> Cruz, “Boston’s Struggle in Black and Brown,” 157.



1972

**The Boston NAACP sues the Boston School Committee in federal court:** After having exhausted efforts at the city and state level to desegregate Boston schools and achieve educational justice, the NAACP sues the Boston School Committee in federal court. The case is known as *Morgan v. Hennigan*.

**Sources:**

In addition to footnoted entries, the following sources provided significant information for this timeline:

- Cruz, Tatiana Maria Fernández. "Boston's Struggle in Black and Brown: Racial Politics, Community Development, and Grassroots Organizing, 1960–1985." PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2017.
- Delmont, Matthew, and Jeanne Theoharis. "Introduction: Rethinking the Boston 'Busing Crisis.'" *Journal of Urban History* 43, issue 2 (March 2017): 191–203.
- Liu, Michael. *Forever Struggle: Activism, Identity, and Survival in Boston's Chinatown, 1880–2018*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2020.