

**HANDOUT**

# Sources of Power in the Pursuit of Educational Justice in Boston

## Community Organizations

In every community, individuals join together to form organizations and committees to advocate for the things they would like to change, or to protect, in their community. These organizations might work toward their goals by raising awareness about issues in their communities, proposing solutions to problems, pressuring politicians and officeholders who have the power to make changes, and more. In Boston in the 1960s and 1970s, a variety of organizations and committees were created by parents and other neighborhood residents to advocate for better schools for their children. Some were also created by parents and residents to organize resistance to school desegregation.

## The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

The NAACP is a civil rights organization founded in 1909 to advance and protect the rights of Black Americans. The NAACP, led by Thurgood Marshall, represented 13 Black families in the Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*, which declared segregation in schools unconstitutional. The Boston branch of the NAACP began in 1912. In the 1960s and 1970s, it led the campaign to desegregate Boston's public schools, under the leadership of Ruth Batson and Thomas Atkins. The NAACP continues to advocate for the rights of Black Americans today.

## The Boston School Committee (BSC) and the Boston Public School System (BPS)

The Boston School Committee was a five-person committee that oversaw and made important decisions about the public schools in Boston. In the 1960s and 1970s, the members of the school committee were elected by the residents of Boston (today they are appointed by the mayor). Until 1977, all of the members of the school committee were white, and for decades they had mostly come from Boston's poor and working-class Irish neighborhoods.

The Boston School Committee appointed a superintendent to run the Boston Public School System, which in the 1970s included about 100 schools. Each school was operated by principals, teachers, and administrative staff.

## Boston City Government

The city of Boston, in the 1960s and now, is governed by a mayor and a 13-member city council. The city council can pass city laws and ordinances, and the mayor has veto power.

The city government makes major decisions that relate to day-to-day life in the city and oversees public safety agencies such as the police and fire departments. In the 1960s and 1970s, the mayor and city council did not have control over Boston Public Schools; that was the Boston School Committee's role. (Today, the mayor has indirect control because school committee members are appointed by the mayor rather than elected.)

### **Massachusetts State Government**

Massachusetts is governed by a governor, state legislature, and court system. Any laws enacted by cities and towns within the state must follow the laws and court decisions of the state government.

### **United States Federal Government**

The United States federal government includes the executive branch led by the president, the legislative branch consisting of the two houses of Congress, and the judicial branch led by the Supreme Court and the federal court system. Any laws enacted by states or city/local governments must follow the laws and court decisions of the federal government. Legal disputes that involve the laws of the federal government or the rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution are usually brought to federal courts rather than the courts of an individual state.