

TIMELINE

Boston Educational Justice, 1980–2022

1985

- **Judge Garrity returns day-to-day control of the schools to the Boston School Committee:** He retains “standby jurisdiction,” reserving the right to issue future rulings over the student assignment process, faculty hiring, building maintenance, and vocational education.¹

1989

- **Boston Public Schools implement a new “controlled choice” school assignment system:** The plan divides the system into three K–8 zones and a city-wide high school zone, requires schools to reflect the racial makeup of their zone, and allows parents to choose schools to which they would prefer their children be assigned. Ultimately, however, the plan relies on a computer-based lottery system to assign students to schools of their choice if possible but to schools where seats are available if not.²

1992

- Following a national trend, the **Boston School Committee modifies its bilingual education plans to discourage teaching non-English-speaking students in their native language.** Due to the increasing diversity of Boston’s immigrant population, throughout the 1990s, the Boston Public Schools system struggles to find enough teachers to teach students in their native languages.

1995

- **A white family challenges Boston Latin School’s admission policy that reserves seats for students of color:** The father of a white student sues the Boston School Committee because his daughter was denied entry to Boston Latin School, the city’s most prestigious “exam school.” He claims her rights were violated because the

¹ “Boston School Desegregation Timeline,” compiled by Jim Vrabel from *When and Where in Boston: A Boston History Database* (unpublished) and shared with Facing History and Ourselves.

² “Boston School Desegregation Timeline,” compiled by Jim Vrabel.

admissions policy (mandated by Judge Garrity in 1974) reserves 35% of seats in the school for students of color.

1998

- **A federal appeals court rules that Boston Latin School's policy of reserving seats for students of color is unconstitutional:** The school committee stops considering race as a factor in exam school admissions. The percentage of Black and Latinx students at exam schools drops significantly over the next two decades.

1999

- **The Boston School Committee ends race-based assignment of students:** The change is prompted by a lawsuit that is filed by four white parents and a group called Boston's Children First, charging that the continued use of race in assigning students to schools is unconstitutional. Instead of returning to a neighborhood-based assignment process, however, the school committee continues to employ the computer-based lottery system (implemented in 1989) in an attempt to ensure that schools in all neighborhoods are of equal quality.³

2002

- **Massachusetts voters pass Issue 2, which bans bilingual education and requires that all classes must be taught in English,** regardless of students' first language or English skills.

2013

- **Boston Public Schools adopts its current system for assigning students to schools, including proximity of the school to students' homes:** According to the *Boston Globe*, the new system "did away with traditional school attendance boundaries drawn on a map [the zones created in 1989] and adopted what was billed as a revolutionary computer program developed by MIT researchers that provides students a range of choices within a certain proximity of their home. Under the system . . . students are guaranteed at least six school choices of varying quality and can also select any other school within an approximately 1-mile radius of their home. If there are not enough quality choices close to home, the algorithm will fill in the gap by adding choices that are farther away."⁴

³ "Boston School Desegregation Timeline," compiled by Jim Vrabel.

⁴ James Vaznis, "Report Faults City's Student Assign System: Minorities Tend to Face More Obstacles to Superior Schools," *Boston Globe*, July 17, 2018, accessed August 14, 2023.

2017

- **The Massachusetts legislature overturns Issue 2 by passing the Language Opportunity for Our Kids (LOOK) Act:** The law permits schools to experiment with bilingual education programs, in light of research showing their value.

2018

- **A Northeastern University report finds that Boston’s computerized school assignment system is increasing school segregation:** According to the *Boston Globe*, “The city’s historically white neighborhoods still have a disproportionate share of high-quality schools, while historically black neighborhoods . . . have fewer options, even though they have a higher density of students, the report found. Consequently, black students on average commute nearly 2 miles to attend a high-quality school—almost twice the distance traveled by white and Asian students.”⁵

2020

- **A study shows that while the vast majority of Boston’s public school students are people of color, most teachers in the system are white:** According to the Boston Indicators study, in 2017, 85.9% of BPS students were “non-white,” but only 41.8% of teachers were.⁶

2021

- **The Boston School Committee adopts a new admissions policy for exam schools, boosting admissions of students from low-income families.**

2022

- **Boston public school enrollment is nearly 49,000:** Of these, 14% of students are white, 32% Black, 43% Hispanic, 9% Asian, and 2% of other racial backgrounds.⁷

⁵ Vaznis, “Report Faults City’s Student Assign System.”

⁶ Mark Melnik, Gail Waterhouse, and Luc Schuster, [Changing Faces of Greater Boston: Overview and Regional Analysis](#) (Boston Indicators and the Boston Foundation, 2019), 20.

⁷ “Boston School Desegregation Timeline,” compiled by Jim Vrabel.

Sources:

In addition to footnoted entries, the following sources provided background 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.
- Libre, Eloise. "Learning English: The Changing Shape of Bilingual Education in Massachusetts Since 1965: An Honors Thesis for the Department of History." Undergraduate honors thesis, Tufts University, 2014.
- "Boston School Desegregation Timeline." Compiled by Jim Vrabel from *When and Where in Boston: A Boston History Database* (unpublished) and shared with Facing History and Ourselves.