



V.

EDUCATION

Education

OVERVIEW

The FY26 Boston Public Schools (BPS) budget builds a foundation for the future. A robust \$1.58 billion in funding will support 50,000 students at BPS, and another \$292 million will support approximately 10,350 Boston students in charter schools.

An increase of \$53.4 million over the FY25 BPS Adopted operating budget supports the district's aim to provide a high-quality experience for every student regardless of school, program, or neighborhood. This \$53.4 million increase includes \$22 million in new investments and \$31.4 million in anticipated maintenance costs such as health insurance increases, collective bargaining agreements, out-of-district placements, and other annual expenses (note that in other chapters in this budget document the increase is characterized as \$45.5 million over the Appropriation budget, which reflects supplemental funding for settled union contracts). Boston's FY26 education budget, including the BPS operating budget and the city's charter school tuition assessment, represents roughly 39% of the City's budget as a whole.

Thanks to several years of strong fiscal stewardship and successful navigation of the end of Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding, this budget meets students' needs without losing focus on core priorities. Ninety-three percent is allocated to student services including school budgets and 7% is allocated to services budgeted centrally. These efforts are supported both by new funding and by \$21 million in cost savings from school closures and reconfigurations that will be reallocated into BPS classrooms and student and family support.

Table 1

FY25 BPS Priority Investments	Operating Budget
Inclusive Education	\$10M
Bilingual Education	\$4M
Program and School Expansions	\$5M
New Classrooms	\$6M
Other Positions in Schools	\$6M
Reserve for Future School Need	\$5M
Pool Rollout	\$5M
Curriculum Material	\$1M
Welcome Services and BPS Helpline	\$1M

FY26 Investments (see Table 1) target three priority areas and are aimed at improving academic outcomes and closing gaps: accelerating academic performance, ensuring access for all students, and consistency in high-quality learning opportunities. These priorities are data-driven and build on recent years of investment.

Accelerating academic performance means investing in high-quality academic experiences, equitable literacy, and providing high-quality instructional materials

Ensuring access for all students aims to provide inclusive education for multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and multilingual learners with disabilities; expand programs for multilingual learners including dual language, transitional bilingual education, students with limited or interrupted formal education, and newcomers; and focus on serving our diverse population with different socioeconomic statuses, race/ethnicities, geographies, and languages.

Consistency in high-quality learning refers to the implementation of the Long-Term Facilities Plan, access for every student to a high-quality student experience, rigorous and culturally affirming learning experiences, wellness and enrichment, a support network of caring adults, and physical spaces that support learning.

BPS OPERATING BUDGET

At a \$1.58 billion appropriation, the FY26 operating budget (Table 2) follows substantial budgetary increases over the past five years. The FY26 allocation makes investments towards achieving a fully-inclusive, high-performing district for the benefit of all students. Some of these investments started with ESSER and were identified as important components to student success and therefore moved to the general fund budget. The budget seeks to ensure the continuation of investments in priority areas that promote strong student outcomes, close opportunity gaps, and eliminate disparities in achievement that are shared by large urban districts across Massachusetts and the nation as a whole.

Table 2: BPS Operating Budget Summary

	FY25 Adopted	FY26 Adopted	\$ Change
Direct School Expenses	\$939M	\$961M	\$21M
School Services Budgeted Centrally	\$421M	\$441M	\$20M
Central Administration	\$107M	\$112M	\$5M
Non-BPS Student Services	\$58M	\$65M	\$7M
Total BPS Budget	\$1.52B	\$1.58B	\$3M

Looking at spending categories, funding directly in schools increases by \$21 million over the FY25 budget to \$961 million.

In addition to school budgets, schools receive significant support from services that are budgeted centrally. These services include transportation, particular special education services, and facilities maintenance. The centrally budgeted services portion of the budget increases 5% over the FY25 budget to \$441 million. With these support funds added to funds budgeted at the school level, \$1.4 billion is expected to be spent on school services, nearly 90% of the BPS budget.

BPS is also responsible for funding services for students living in Boston and attending school outside of BPS, including adult education students, students placed out-of-district for 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 approximately 20% of the FY26 BPS Adopted transportation budget. Total funds budgeted for non-BPS students will increase from the FY25 budget to \$65 million, comprising around 4% of the overall FY26 BPS Adopted budget.

In FY26, the Central Administration budget will increase by 5% to \$112 million, to ensure organizational effectiveness, accountability, and strong coordination and support from district leadership.

FY26 investments target the following key initiatives: inclusive practices, bilingual education, expansions and reconfigurations, new classrooms, school pool maintenance and staffing, curriculum workbooks, and BPS helpline and welcome services language capacity.

A \$10 million investment in Inclusive Practices will expand the inclusive programming for students with disabilities in grades 1, 2, 8, and 10 for the academic year 2025-2026. The goal is to enhance student outcomes and ensure that all students are educated in the least restrictive environment, along with strengthening the capacity of teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff.

In FY26, a \$4 million investment in bilingual education will expand the multilingual education programs to seven elementary schools and two secondary schools. This is the largest single-year expansion of multilingual education in BPS history. BPS is adding four bilingual programs at the Blackstone, Philbrick-Sumner, McKay and Quincy Elementary schools for speakers of Spanish, English, and Mandarin. The District is also planning a new Cape Verdean Creole Bilingual Program at the reimagined Frederick. There will be three newcomer programs at TechBoston Academy, Ohrenberger Elementary School and English High School, and two Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) programs at Sarah Greenwood and the Ohrenberger Elementary schools.

A \$5 million investment in program and school expansion will broaden opportunities for students to advance their college and career goals. This will also support the creation of new career-connected programs in clean energy, aviation, robotics, computer science, and cyber security.

In addition to the investments mentioned above, \$31 million in new FY26 funding will cover increased costs for Out of District Tuitions and Transportation, Health Insurance cost increases, collective bargaining agreements, and Special Education related services.

Early Childhood Education

The City continues to offer quality pre-kindergarten seats as part of the Boston Pre-K initiative. In the 2025-2026 school year, about 5,013 three- and four-year-olds are expected to be enrolled in a quality pre-kindergarten program. This includes 3,380 BPS K0 and K1 seats and 1,533 CBO K0 and K1 seats. The City's Quality Pre-K Fund enabled and accelerated this expansion over several years. An ongoing partnership between BPS and the City's Office of Early Childhood will support Mayor Wu's vision of universal, affordable, high-quality early education for all infants, toddlers, and children under five. Changes since Mayor Wu took office include updating the funding model from seats to classrooms, opening participation to three-year-olds, and integrating family child care providers into the UPK system.

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 has shown that BPS pre-kindergarten attendees outperform their peers in third and fifth grade MCAS, in both ELA and Math.

Special Education

The FY26 BPS budget makes robust investments in special education through the Office of Specialized Services and Direct School Staffing based on classroom compositions and formulas to determine special staffing needs. The special education budget totals over \$421 million in FY26, an increase of \$3.9 million, or 1%, from the FY25 budget. The special education budget accounts for nearly a quarter of the total BPS budget and supports the over 11,500 students with disabilities, or about 23% of the BPS student population.

The significant increase in special education teachers in the FY26 budget aligns with the continued inclusion rollout across the district and into new grade levels, as well as commitments made in the district's systemic improvement plan agreement with the Commonwealth.

In addition to mainstream or substantially separate placements in the district, BPS is responsible for the educational services of special education students in out-of-district placements. Over time, BPS has seen an increase in the number of high-need students and Department of Children & Families (DCF)-involved students placed in group homes who require private placement. BPS expects to be fully or partly responsible for paying for services for 450 students, at a total projected cost of \$49 million in FY26. Some of the costs for these services will be reimbursed by the State's Circuit Breaker Program designed to relieve districts of extraordinary special education costs. Tuition rates for placements 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 FY26 budget continues to fund a proportionate share team responsible for conducting IEP meetings and evaluations.

English Learners

The Bilingual/Sheltered English Immersion budget totals \$123.1 million in FY26, a decrease of \$4.7 million, or -3.7%, from the FY25 budget. Approximately a third (33%) of BPS students have an ELL designation; as a group, they hail from approximately 148 different countries and speak 96 languages. This year's Bilingual/Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) budget decrease is due to a combination of re-coding positions and changing how educators are classified in BPS systems, as well as updates in the number of minutes required, changes in the definition for SEI classrooms, and consolidation of classrooms.

BPS Enrollment

Student enrollment is the foundation of the BPS budget. The projected enrollment at each school for the upcoming school year helps determine the allocation of resources at the school level. The FY26 budget development process required close collaboration between school leaders and BPS Finance to develop accurate enrollment projections.

BPS projected enrollment for FY26 is approximately 50,343. The district has seen steady enrollment decline over the last 7 years, driven by broader demographic trends, with fewer students living in Boston and entering the district as birth rates decline and the cost of living continues to rise.

Reimagine School Funding

FY26 will be a transition year away from Weighted Student Funding (WSF) as BPS builds a new framework called Reimagine School Funding. The weighted student funding model created a baseline per-student funding amount and then adjusted the amount depending on individual student need. For example, students whose family income was at or below the poverty level would receive additional funding in the formula. Other needs-based weights included students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and vocational education students. A school's budget was calculated by adding the individual funding amounts for every student projected to attend that school in the fall. Additionally, each school also received a foundation budget to support essential staff.

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

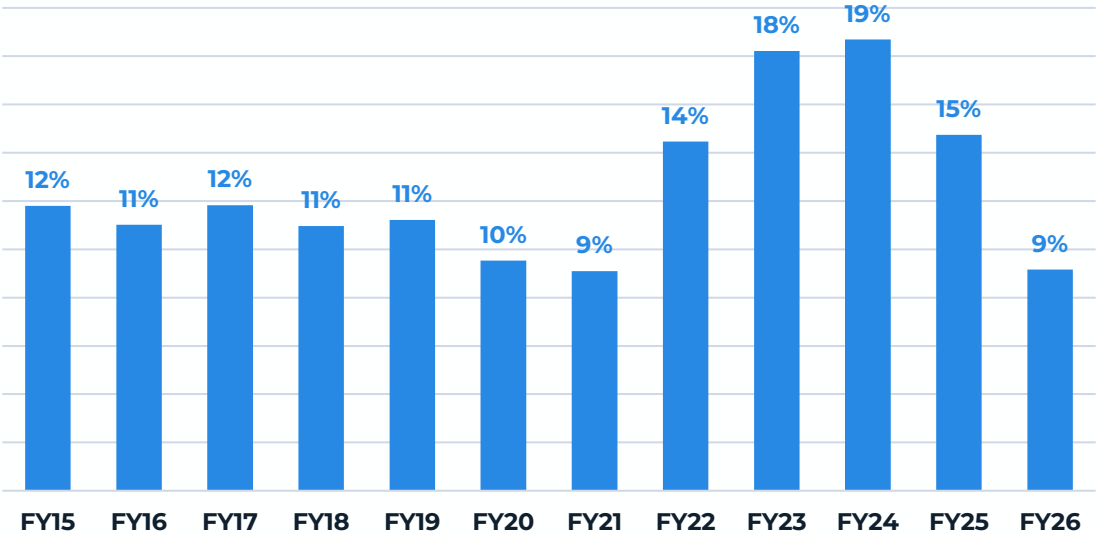
In FY26, budgeting at the school level began with existing operating allocations from FY25. The number and mix of classrooms in schools was then adjusted based on enrollment and student

need. From there schools were given investment funding for inclusive education and other changes to English as a Second Language (ESL) and Special Education services. Lastly, the team reviewed and updated the distribution of social-emotional support positions.

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, and at \$159.4M represent 9% of total funding in FY26, down from 12% in FY15 (Figure 1). Decreased external funding was identified as a challenge to BPS’s long-term financial stability in the district’s 2016 Long-Term Financial Plan, with the BPS budget relying on increased City appropriations to help absorb costs.

Figure 1: External Funds as % of Total Funds FY15-24 Actuals, FY25 Appropriation, FY26 Adopted



One of the largest sources of federal revenue for BPS is the Title I entitlement grant. BPS expects to leverage \$44 million in Title I revenue in FY26. 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.

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 \$30.9 million in Circuit Breaker revenue in

FY26. 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 expects to have almost \$19 million in IDEA funds available in FY26.

School Improvement Grants: In FY26, BPS will apply for funding from the commonwealth through targeted assistance grant funding. Targeted assistance grant funding is provided to the lowest performing schools in BPS, also known as turnaround or transformation schools, to increase professional development, add staff, and provide other supports. In FY26, a number of BPS schools may be eligible for this funding. As school improvement grants end for each school exiting turnaround status, the district shifts these activities to the operating budget to continue the work of turning around low-performing schools. The FY25 budget included \$665K in funding to transition Madison Park Vocational High, Grew Elementary, Excel High School, English High School, and Brighton High, where previous school improvement grants had ended or funding was tapering.

Federal Relief Funding

BPS received \$390 million via the federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund. During the period of FY22 to FY24, the increase in the percentage of external funds as a share of total BPS funds (Figure 1) reflects COVID-19 relief funding. ESSER spending totaled around \$65 million in FY22 and at least \$130 million in FY23. Including FY24, total anticipated spending is \$370 million. Though not officially budgeted, BPS expected to carry roughly \$19.5 million in ESSER funding forward into FY25.

ESSER allocations directly to schools amounted to \$50M in both FY23 and FY24, with schools having some discretion on how to spend those dollars in ways that would be most transformational. The district also had numerous central ESSER initiatives aligned with its strategic academic priorities. With ESSER expiring in FY25, the district made investments in FY24 and FY25 to sustain critical programming and positions, moving them into the operating budget. In FY26 the district has identified Central Office efficiencies to preserve additional programming that was initially funded with ESSER dollars.

PERFORMANCE

BPS is committed to using data to improve school performance and provide the best education to students. In FY21, the district created a new performance management system based on six anchor goals: eliminate opportunity and achievement gaps, accelerate learning, amplify all voices, expand opportunity, cultivate trust, and activate partnerships. Each goal was paired with a series of aligned metrics to measure progress. Entering FY26, BPS has been evaluating its progress towards academic goals using measurable outcomes for several years.

Graduation Rates

The overall four-year graduation rate for the BPS class of 2024 was 79.7%, a slight decrease compared to the 2023 rate. The graduation rate increased 13 percentage points over a decade, from 66.7% in 2014.

In 2023 nineteen Boston high schools achieved graduation rates of 80% or above: New Mission High School, O'Bryant School of Math & Science, Boston Latin School, Boston Latin Academy, Quincy Upper School, Edward M. Kennedy Academy for Health Careers: A Horace Mann Charter Public School, Boston Community Leadership Academy, Snowden International High School, Boston Green Academy Horace Mann Charter School, TechBoston Academy, Henderson K-12 Inclusion School upper, East Boston High School, Fenway High School, Boston Arts Academy, Lyon High School, English High School, Margarita Muniz Academy, Dearborn 6-12 STEM Academy, and Burke High School.

Dropout Rate

The overall dropout rate for grades 9-12 in school year 2023-2024 was 2.9%. BPS cut the dropout rate by 45.3% relative to a decade earlier, with a decrease of 214 students dropping out annually across the decade.

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, determining schools' need for assistance or intervention based on a set of accountability indicators including student growth, graduation rate, and chronic absenteeism.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, DESE did not issue school or district accountability determinations in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years; for 2021-2022 DESE pursued an "accountability lite" model featuring published data but no determinations. For the 2023-2024 school year accountability classifications resumed, with BPS being assessed as "Not requiring assistance or intervention" based on substantial progress toward targets. Meanwhile in 2024, four BPS schools were named Schools of Recognition: Alighieri Dante Montessori School, Fenway High School, Guild Elementary School, and Bradley Elementary School

In 2024, eight BPS schools were rated as meeting or exceeding targets including four recognition schools: Alighieri Dante Montessori School, Fenway High School, Guild Elementary School, Bradley Elementary School, Boston Latin School, Otis Elementary School, Perry Elementary School, and Warren-Prescott K-8 School.

In addition to this, 29 schools have been identified as making substantial progress towards target: Bates Elementary School, Boston Latin Academy, East Boston High School, Edison K-8

School, Eliot K-8 Innovation School, Ellison-Parks Early Education School, Hale Elementary School, Haley Pilot School, Hernandez K-8 School, Holmes Elementary School, Hurley K-8 School, Kennedy John F Elementary School, Kennedy Patrick J Elementary School, Lee Academy, Lyndon K-8 School, Lyon K-8 School, Manning Elementary School, Mather Elementary School, Mattahunt Elementary School, McKay K-8 School, New Mission High School, O'Bryant School of Math and Science, Perkins Elementary School, Quincy Elementary School, Roosevelt K-8 School, Sumner Elementary School, Tynan Elementary School, Winship Elementary School, and Winthrop Elementary School.

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, to continue to address systemic barriers to equity across the school system, and to support its most vulnerable students to achieve their highest educational potential.

As part of that partnership, BPS 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.

To assist in a holistic understanding of the progress that BPS made toward these goals, DESE undertook a follow-up district review of BPS in March 2022. The review found that progress had been made in multiple areas but that persistent challenges remained. The resulting systemic improvement plan succeeds the 2020 agreement with DESE and focuses on many of the same areas, as well as student safety, facilities, and data integrity. The City is working to meet the new commitments by the deadlines stipulated in the plan and is receiving significant support from the commonwealth, including an expected \$10 million in funding over three years. The formal engagement is scheduled to end in June 2025.

BPS CAPITAL

The city is committed to modernizing Boston's public-schools infrastructure. With city bond funds and a strong working relationship with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), the capital plan includes 47 projects and programs with a total budget over \$1.2 billion.

Implementing a long-term facilities improvements plan for Boston Public Schools 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 ongoing planning process is focused on creating high-quality, twenty-first-century learning environments for students, and in so doing closing opportunity gaps for more students.

In September 2024, Boston Public Schools completed improvements to 3 school yards across the City at the Henderson Inclusion Lower School, Winthrop School and Warren Prescott School. In addition, the City will facilitate the implementation of BPS's Long-Term Facilities Plan for improvements to the Lincoln Building, Hennigan, Frederick, Lyon Upper building, Excel building, and Cleveland building. The Horace Mann School will also be relocated to the former Edwards School in Charlestown, following a \$46 million building renovation.

Construction on the new \$111 million Carter School in partnership with the MSBA is on schedule. The new building welcomed students in September 2025. Renovation of the former Irving School building was also completed for a September 2025 school opening. The renovated building supports the merger of the Philbrick-Sumner schools.

Two additional schools have been accepted into the MSBA Core program, a new Shaw-Taylor School and the new Ruth Batson Academy. BPS has also submitted an application for the Madison Park Technical Vocational High School. In addition, BPS will pursue building improvements to facilitate grade reconfigurations at various schools.

The City will also continue district-wide investments in window replacements, bathroom upgrades, fire systems, radiator covers, entryway improvements, plumbing and fixture upgrades to expand drinking water availability, school yards, security improvements, and technology infrastructure, as well as leveraging the MSBA accelerated repair program to fund roof, window, and boiler repairs.

The FY26-30 capital plan sustains and supports planning for large-scale projects coming out of the BPS capital engagement process. The FY26-30 capital plan projects \$910 million in BPS-related spending over the next five years.

CHARTER SCHOOL TUITION

Commonwealth charter schools, which are granted charters by the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, are publicly-funded schools administered independently from local school districts and district bargaining rules and regulations. Commonwealth charter schools are primarily financed by each student's sending district through per-pupil-based tuition.

Commonwealth charter schools are projected to educate approximately 10,268 Boston students in FY26. Boston is assessed by the Commonwealth to fund charter schools on a per-pupil basis, and the City's FY26 charter school tuition assessment is projected to increase by \$8.8 million to a total of \$291.9 million primarily due to Foundation Budget increases, and low income and special education enrollment increases.

Entering FY26, Boston faces continued financial strain due to the escalating charter school assessment, which has nearly tripled since the 2010 Achievement Gap legislation. While the Student Opportunity Act (SOA), passed in 2019, initially promised increased state education aid and full charter school reimbursement, Boston remains a minimum aid community. The

Commonwealth successfully funded the SOA from FY22 to FY25. However, projections for FY26 indicate that despite these efforts, state education aid is expected to remain insufficient. Specifically, charter tuition costs are anticipated to substantially outpace the combined allocation of charter reimbursement and Chapter 70 aid, resulting in a negative balance. See the Revenue Estimates and Analysis section of Volume I for more details on state education aid and charter school tuition reimbursement.

More information on the FY26 Boston Public Schools budget may be found at:

<https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/about-bps/budget/fy2026-budget-development>.