

TIMELINE

The Pursuit of Educational Justice in Boston, 1945–1973

1946

- ***Mendez v. Westminster.*** Federal courts rule that racial segregation of California schools is unconstitutional. The suit was filed by five Mexican families on behalf of their children and 5,000 others of Mexican ancestry in Orange County. They were supported by the NAACP, the Japanese American Citizens League, the League of United Latin American Citizens, the American Jewish Congress, and the American Civil Liberties Union.

1949

- **Freedom House is founded in Roxbury:** The organization plays a central role in African American community activism for several decades.

1950

- **Chinese Americans are accused of disloyalty during the Korean War:** When China joins the war in support of North Korea against South Korea and the United States, anti-communist Americans suspect Chinese Americans of disloyalty. Many Chinese Americans are isolated and have their businesses boycotted or vandalized.

1951

- **Ruth Batson runs for Boston School Committee:** She is the first Black person to do so in the twentieth century. She is not successful, but she becomes a leader in the movement for civil rights and educational justice in Boston.

1954

- ***Brown v. Board of Education.*** The US Supreme Court outlaws racial segregation in all of the country's schools in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.
- **Construction of the Central Artery Highway destroys part of Chinatown:** The elevated highway (which has since been reconstructed through tunnels under downtown Boston) forces the destruction of the eastern edge of the neighborhood.

1955

- *December* – **The Montgomery Bus Boycott begins in Alabama.**

1957

- *September* – **The “Little Rock Nine” integrate Central High School:** Nine Black students are blocked by police, National Guardsmen, and white mobs from entering Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. President Eisenhower sends the Army 101st Airborne division to enforce the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling and permit the students to enter the school.

1960

- *November* – **Ruby Bridges integrates her New Orleans elementary school:** Six-year-old Ruby Bridges begins school as the first Black student to attend her New Orleans elementary school. She is escorted into the building on her first day by four armed federal marshals who were sent to protect her from an angry mob protesting the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling.

1961

- **Roxbury mothers found a parents association:** Roxbury mothers Naomi Jones, Marianne Freeman, and Barbara Elam form the Concerned Higginson Parents Association (CHPA). They organize a parent volunteer program for schools in Roxbury’s Higginson school district in order to support teachers and document conditions in the schools.⁺⁺
- **Freedom Rides begin:** Black and white “Freedom Riders,” many of whom are teens and young adults, take bus trips throughout the South to protest segregation on buses. They often encounter threats and violence from segregationists.

1963

- **About 98,000 students attend Boston public schools:** 85% of students are white. 15% are from a variety of minority groups, but mostly African American.¹
- **Early program to assist Latinx newcomers to Massachusetts begins:** The state’s Migrant Education Program provides English classes and support for assimilation into life and society in Boston.⁺⁺

¹ Adapted from “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.

- *April* – **The Concerned Higginson Parents Association speaks out:** The parents association sends a letter to Boston mayor John Collins to document and protest the lack of educational equality for African American children in Roxbury.
- *June 11* – **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 11* – **Governor Wallace tries to stop the integration of the University of Alabama:** Governor George Wallace stands in the doorway to physically prevent two Black students from registering at the University of Alabama. President Kennedy sends the National Guard to end the standoff and permit the students to register.
- *June 12* – **Medgar Evers is murdered:** NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers is murdered by a white supremacist in Mississippi.
- *June 18* – **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 School workshops, students learn about African American history, citizenship, and nonviolent protest, and they are taught by leaders in Boston’s African American community, including Celtics legend Bill Russell.
- *Summer* – **Protests and demonstrations continue:** Black organizers continue to launch protests in the city against school segregation and educational inequality.
- *August 28* – **Hundreds of thousands join the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.**
- *September 3* – **Boston Public Schools’ open enrollment policy is announced:** It allows students to attend any school where seats are available and the curriculum is suitable, provided their parents can arrange for their transportation.²
- *September 10* – **10,000 Bostonians participate in the “March on Roxbury”:** The march ends at the Sherwin School, a dilapidated building that demonstrates the poor condition of schools that African American students attend.++
- *September 15* – **Four girls are murdered in Alabama church explosion:** White supremacist terrorists bomb the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham,

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

Alabama, a rallying place for civil rights activists in the city. Four young girls die in the explosion.

- **Construction of the Massachusetts Turnpike decimates Chinatown:** The highway is built through the southern and eastern ends of Chinatown, requiring the destruction of more than 60 buildings and one-third of the neighborhood's housing units. Hundreds of Chinese American families are displaced.

1964

- *February 26* – **More than 20,000 students participate in the second “School Stay Out for Freedom”:** 35 Freedom Schools offer workshops for students that day.
- *July* – **President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964:** The law forbids employment discrimination due to race, color, sex, religion, or national origin.

1965

- *February* – **Malcolm X is assassinated.**
- *March* – **Nonviolent civil rights marchers are met with violence by the Alabama Highway Patrol in Selma.**
- *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” 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.⁺⁺
- *April 22–23* – **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. visits Boston:** During his short stay, a proposed meeting with the Boston School Committee is canceled after he is informed by Louise Day Hicks that if local civil rights leaders accompany him, they will not be allowed to speak. Dr. King is, however, welcomed by a joint session of the Massachusetts legislature at the State House, where he decries school segregation. The next day, he leads a mile-long “March on Boston” from Carter Playground to Boston Common, where he tells a crowd of more than 20,000 people, “The vision of the New Boston must extend into the heart of Roxbury.”³
- *April 28* – **Rev. Vernon Carter begins his protest against school segregation outside the Boston School Department headquarters:** A minister at All Saints

³ “Boston School Desegregation Timeline,” compiled by Jim Vrabel.

Lutheran Church, Carter vows to continue his vigil day and night for 114 days, until the state legislature and governor take action.⁴

- **June – The 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.”⁵
- **August 6 – President Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to outlaw racially discriminatory voting requirements.**
- **August 18 – Massachusetts enacts the Racial Imbalance Act (RIA):** The 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.
- **October – President Johnson signs the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965:** The act ends quotas established in 1924 that restricted immigration levels by race and nationality. This leads to increased immigration from Latin America, Asia, and Africa. While laws passed in the 1870s and 1880s that banned immigration from China had been repealed in 1943, the 1965 law enables a significant increase in immigration to the United States from Asia.
- **African American parents found Operation Exodus:** Led by Ellen Jackson, the community-funded program provides transportation for children from Roxbury to Boston’s public schools in other neighborhoods that have open seats and better resources. Before it is ended due to lack of funding in the early 1970s, Operation Exodus serves thousands of students.⁺⁺ According to historian Jeanne Theoharis, the program is part of an effort to challenge the idea that Black parents do 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.”⁶ But the school system refuses, and Operation Exodus ends in the early 1970s due to lack of funding. As many as 3,000 students participate in the program in each year of its existence.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ruth Batson, *The Black Educational Movement in Boston: A Sequence of Historical Events* (Northeastern University, School of Education, 2001).

⁶ Jeanne Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 52–53.

- **African American parents found the Roxbury Community School:** It is the first of four alternative Black independent 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 significant voice in their operation. Historian Tatiana Cruz writes: “With parental involvement at the center of this community school model, the black independent school curriculum and pedagogy reflected the commitment to self-determination as well as racial pride. 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.”⁷⁺⁺
- **The Boston School Committee continues to resist desegregation:** Continuing to resist pressure to desegregate the city’s public schools or otherwise provide an equal education to all of Boston’s children, the Boston School Committee proposes to address the overcrowding of Roxbury schools by having students attend school in multiple shifts during the day.

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?”⁸
- **The state penalizes Boston schools for violating the RIA:** The state declares that the Boston School Committee is in violation of the Racial Imbalance Act and withholds funds from Boston Public Schools.⁺⁺

⁷ 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.

⁸ Ken Botwright, “He’s Not White And Proud of It,” *Boston Globe*, October 20, 1966, 1.

- **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.

1967

- **Planning begins for new Quincy School in Chinatown without community input:** As the Tufts-New England Medical Center rapidly expands in Chinatown (displacing many families in the process), the hospital and various city agencies begin to draw up plans to replace the Josiah Quincy Elementary School with a new school building and community center. The Quincy School building was one of the oldest in the country still in use, and about half of the school's 650 students were Chinese American. The rest of the students came from nearby Black, Latinx, and white neighborhoods.
- *September* – Using federal funding, **Boston Public Schools begin offering English as a Second Language (ESL) classes:** Ten English-speaking ESL teachers work in nine schools, pulling out students from their regular classes for 45 minutes each day.⁹

1968

- *January* – **The Bilingual Education Act is signed by President Johnson:** The law offers money to school districts to create innovative educational programs for students who speak little or no English.
- *April 4* – **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated in Memphis.**
- *May* – **Riots break out between African American and Latinx students at King Middle School in Boston:** Community members blame the violence on overcrowded classes and poorly trained staff in schools with majority Black or Latinx students. Activist Alex Rodriguez says: "If our children fear to go to school, they are being denied their right to have an education." King teacher Armando Martinez, who is Puerto Rican and Cuban, argues: "If the school system cannot guarantee the safety of our children, then let them give us a school of our own somewhere, where we can attend to their needs."¹⁰
- *August 15* - **Quincy School planners meet with Chinatown, Castle Hill, Bay Village, and South End residents:** Planners from the Tufts-New England Medical Center and the city share their plans for the new Josiah Quincy School. The residents

⁹ Cruz, "Boston's Struggle in Black and Brown," 130.

¹⁰ "Boston's Spanish-Speaking People Blame Dropouts on Beatings," *Boston Globe*, May 16, 1969.

challenge the planners, asking: “Why had [they] taken so long to come to the community? By what right did they plan for, rather than with, the community?”¹¹

- **September – The Quincy School Community Council is formed:** 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. 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.¹²
- **Fall – 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

- **April – A major study published on Latinx children in Boston Public Schools finds that existing programs are not adequately supporting their needs:** The study finds that “an overwhelming majority of Latino school-aged children and their parents lacked formal education and could not comfortably read or speak in English.” This same study finds that over 75% of ESL students are below grade-level.⁺⁺¹³
- **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.⁺⁺¹⁴
- **September – 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

¹¹ 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.

¹² Quincy School Community Council, “Program Requirements and Design Specifications,” 112.

¹³ Cruz, “Boston’s Struggle in Black and Brown,” 131.

¹⁴ Cruz, “Boston’s Struggle in Black and Brown,” 148.

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.”¹⁵⁺⁺

- **September – Two Latina mothers, with support from several community volunteers, establish the Acción School:** It offers a school-readiness program for 30 Latino children.⁺⁺
- **September – The Quincy School Community Council issues its final report with plans and specifications for the new school and community center:** Created by a committee of Chinese American, Black, Latinx, and white Bostonians, the plan envisions an educational program and building centered on the needs and cultures of a diverse community.
- **The William Monroe Trotter School opens in Roxbury:** After the initial BSC proposal to name the school after an opponent of the Black education movement, Roxbury residents mobilized to demand that it be named after Trotter, a turn-of-the-century Black activist in Boston. The school is the first in Boston to be named after an African American.⁺⁺

1970

- ***The Way We Go to School: The Exclusion of Children in Boston* is published:** The report, authored by a coalition of urban activists, finds that between one-third and one-half of Latinx children in Boston do not attend school. It also finds that Boston public schools “are failing to educate the numbers of Spanish-speaking children who are in school.”¹⁶⁺⁺

1971

- **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:** Latino parents vote to name the school after Hernández, a Puerto Rican poet, composer, and musician.⁺⁺¹⁷

¹⁵ Cruz, “Boston’s Struggle in Black and Brown,” 149.

¹⁶ [The Way We Go to School: The Exclusion of Children in Boston](#), report by the Task Force on Children Out of School (US Department of Health, Education & Welfare, Office of Education, 1970), 20.

¹⁷ Cruz, “Boston’s Struggle in Black and Brown,” 157.

- **The state penalizes Boston schools for violating the RIA for the second time:** The state withholds funds from Boston Public Schools after finding that the school system continues to violate the Racial Imbalance Act.⁺⁺
- **High school members of Boston's Black Student Federation lead a school walkout:** The students reiterate their call for Black faculty and staff, Black studies courses, and an end to harassment of Black students by white students and school staff.^{##}

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*.

1973

- **The state penalizes Boston schools for violating the RIA for the third time:** The school system gives up \$65 million in state and federal funds rather than desegregate its schools.^{##}

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.

