

---

**TO:** School Committee  
**FROM:** Superintendent Mary Skipper  
**RE:** Back-to-School Preparation Update School Year 2023-2024  
**DATE:** Wednesday, August 30, 2023

---

As the excitement builds for the first day of the new school year 2023-2024, the Boston Public Schools (BPS) team is working hard to prepare for the return of students, teachers, and staff. My *Superintendent Report* will provide a comprehensive update to the members on our preparations.

This memo will chart the significant progress we have made since the start of school year 2022-2023, which I will also speak to in my report. We are in a position to start the school year strong. I think it is important to provide an update of where we were at this time last year and where we are today with:

- Staffing
- Transportation
- Food Services
- Operations & Facilities
- Academics
- Family and Community Engagement

## **Making Progress - Where We Were Last Year and Where We Are Today**

### *Staffing - Teacher and Para Hiring*

We are in a strong position with our hires as we start the school year. At the beginning of **last school year (2022)**, there were **1,069 teachers** hired with 64 applications submitted leaving a **5% percent vacancy rate**. **Currently**, we have hired **1,419** teachers and we have a **2.7% vacancy rate**.

### *Transportation*

Thanks to the terms of our new contract with our transportation vendor Transdev and

the tireless recruitment efforts of the BPS Transportation Department, we are in a solid position to start the school year. Our new five-year bus vendor contract includes significant financial incentives for improved performance and liquidated damages for non-performance that are tied to student-oriented outcomes that were not included in previous contracts.

We are fully staffed with **743 active drivers and 25 trainees** preparing to hit the road soon. We also have **675 bus monitors**, with an additional **49 hires pending** clearance by the BPS Office of Human Capital. Under our new contract, we have expanded bus monitor training and coaching to better support students with disabilities.

Transportation assignment mailers have gone out via mail and email to all students, translated into families' home languages. The Transportation Customer Service team is also fully staffed with a multilingual team of nearly 30 customer service staff, prepared to support students and families with any transportation questions, concerns, or challenges. If families have any questions about their student's transportation assignment, they can reach out to the BPS Transportation Hotline at 617-635-9520 or through the [Transportation Support Portal](#).

Over the past school year, we have markedly reduced the amount of trips missing arrival data (i.e. "missing GPS data"). **Last August (2022)** we were missing data for **19.1%** of scheduled AM bus trips and **21.6%** of PM trips. By **June of 2023**, that number dropped to only **3.6%** and **4.9%** respectively.

I am excited about the deployment of approximately 20 electric school buses with 18 electric more scheduled to be delivered and on the road during SY23-24. **This is the first time BPS has started a school year with electric buses as part of the fleet.** BPS has also submitted an application for the Environmental Protection Agency's 2023 Clean School Bus Grant Program for up to 50 additional electric school buses.

### *Operations and Facilities*

We know that students perform best when their needs are met and we are committed to meeting those needs by providing healthy meals and comfortable, welcoming facilities on day one.

As of 8/25, **86 schools are ready to start cooking on the first day of school.** At the start **last school year, only 67 schools were ready** to start cooking. BPS Food and Nutrition Services have 444 filled cafeteria positions and have 48 hires in process equalling a **staff of 492.** This time **last year**, that total was **473.**

BPS Facilities continues to work toward making our schools clean and comfortable for students and staff. They have outfitted **78 schools** with more than **3,800** air conditioning units (total of 108 schools now with thermal comfort). **Last year only 20 schools** had a total of **916 AC units**.

This summer BPS Facilities began full-scale renovation work in 15 schools on their school bathrooms. Over the course of the next four months, 346 fixtures will be updated. Painting projects have been completed at more than 40 schools since 2022. Since the start of the summer, 13 school parking lots received upgrades including resurfacing, line painting and catch basin replacement among other improvements. Work also includes cleaning and sanitation, painting, bathroom upgrades and other enhancements.

### *Academics*

More than 550 BPS educators attended (School Leaders, School-based teams) and 100 Central office staff attended this year's August Leadership Institute at Madison Park Vocational Technical High School August 15th through 17th. Sessions focused on regional work time in support of Quality School Plan (QSP) development as well as the rollout of our new inclusion model across the district.

This fall, every school in the district will launch an Inclusion Planning Team, which will be built out and supported by regional coaches to ensure access of strong Tier 1 instruction and map services as we implement inclusion. The first year of planning during SY23-24 will focus on roll out for grades K0, K1, K2, 7 and 9, to be implemented in SY24-25.

### *Family and Community Engagement*

Earlier this week, I hosted the #Back2BPS virtual community meeting where my team presented valuable information to help families prepare for the first day of school. We had over 800 families join the call!

The BPS Helpline continues to build capacity so that it is ready to assist families with their questions in multiple languages. Multilingual Specialists are available at 617-635-8873 or via email [helpline@bostonpublicschools.org](mailto:helpline@bostonpublicschools.org).

As of 8/28, 103 out of 116 school-based Family Liaisons are ready to provide language access, host events and support beyond academics, and will work closely with the nine regional teams across the district. Eleven positions are currently posted. The four BPS Welcome Centers are open and continue to register students. Summer Registration

(July/August) We have 2,124 new students for a total enrollment of 50,552 (as of 8/28). Final School Year 2023-2024 enrollment will be available October 1st and as is typical, our final enrollment number in October is often lower than our total registrants at the beginning of the year.

### *The Year Ahead:*

As we head into this school year, we are more prepared than ever. There is still a lot of work to be done, but we've been very intentional about laying a strong foundation. We know that in addition to the day to day operations there is larger strategic work we must also focus on. In addition to the ongoing family engagement and academic work, I wanted to share a few key operational areas we're focused on for this upcoming year:

Our **BPS Capital Planning Team** is building a rubric that will inform decision making on facility projects. This will be presented to the Boston School Committee as a draft in September. The current version of the rubric will be shared with the public on September 16 at an Open House so that they may provide feedback we will incorporate into the draft presented at the School Committee. The goal of the rubric is to define for the Committee and the public how we plan to make decisions on future school facility projects. Additionally, we will complete two more months of localized community engagement before bringing the rubric back to the School Committee for a vote. Later this year, we will also share the Long Term Facilities Plan to create a comprehensive predictability for the needed facilities work, allowing families, students, and staff to understand the future of their school community.

Our **Systemic Improvement Team** will continue to work across the organization to build and implement lasting systems in the key areas of the SIP, ensuring we meet deadlines and monitor progress once implementation is complete.

Once the rush of the hiring season is over, our **Human Capital Team** will do an assessment of their current systems. The district has added more staff in the past few years and has finalized multiple collective bargaining contracts. All of this has an impact on the OHC team and their capacity. It's a priority this year to understand what is working and what other supports may be needed so we can serve the over 11,000 employees of the Boston Public Schools.

Our **Budget and Finance Team** will finalize the reimagine school funding project and bring forward a new proposal for how we fund our schools. We will also assess our procurement processes and streamline where possible and finally, we will review spending across the full central office as we plan the FY25 Budget to transition away from ESSER.