

Future of BPS: Avoiding State Takeover with Partnership

First deadline fast approaching

In June 2022, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the City of Boston reached an agreement allowing the two entities to build a partnership with DESE oversight, and thus avoid state takeover of Boston Public Schools (BPS).

This agreement followed a [DESE review](#) of the BPS that identified persistent systemic failures within BPS. In June 2022, BPS and DESE released the BPS Systemic Improvement Plan, outlining 24 tasks that BPS committed to completing and 14 tasks for DESE to accomplish. DESE and BPS plan on meeting on a monthly basis for regular check-ins. All commitments must be completed by June 30, 2025.

DESE Findings

DESE's review determined that BPS needed "immediate improvement" and "failed to effectively serve" its students. They found that BPS could not provide basic necessities such as on-time transportation and renovated bathrooms in schools. DESE also identified systemic barriers to providing an equitable and quality education within the BPS, including a lack of operational plans and a need to overhaul the school assignment system.

Systemic Improvement Plan

The BPS-DESE agreement focuses on eight areas that the DESE review report called out as particularly concerning: student safety, special education, transportation, facilities, English learners (ELL), transformative schools, data, and accountability.

DESE will provide \$10.0M in support to BPS in the form of contracted services, in-kind resources, and targeted grants over a three-year period.

First Deadline: August 15

According to the Plan, there are a [total of 10 tasks](#) for the BPS to complete by August 15th, include building

a system to collect complaint data and creating an evaluation process to examine BPS's transportation system. DESE's responsibility by this deadline is to provide training to BPS central office staff on the Problem Resolution System Complaint Procedures Guide.

Acting BPS Superintendent Drew Echelson confidently reported to the Boston School Committee on August 10th that BPS has already completed three of the ten tasks and expects to meet the others by August 15th. The finished mandates are commissioning an audit to assess safety protocols, hiring a team to improve special education, and beginning an evaluation of the transportation system. Much of these initial tasks are implementing systems and processes, so the hard work will truly begin towards the fall after these structures have been set up and positions have been filled.

What to Watch

BPS's deadline for their next set of tasks is September 8, 2022. This includes BPS hiring a Coordinator of Problem Resolution and providing more data to the data auditor. DESE will have to assign a point person to inspect facilities' bathrooms. The list of all BPS and DESE tasks can be found [here](#).

Though not a receivership, DESE will still have a more significant role over BPS than it previously had. However, receivership is still a very real possibility if BPS fails to meet its benchmarks by their respective deadlines. The future of BPS remains up in the air with the threat of receivership, a relatively new mayor, yet another superintendent, and potential structural change within the School Committee.