

The Great Divide

Race, class, and opportunity in our schools

Education, Interrupted series

Academics and Learning

Equity and Access

Race and Diversity

Money and Facilities



In a winter of remote learning, most kids will be losing the magic of snow days

First it was prom. Then it was high school football games. Now the pandemic is erasing yet another cherished school tradition: the snow day.





Free meal or attend class? School schedules force some low-income families to choose

Many low-income families across Massachusetts have struggled to receive their promised free school breakfasts and lunches during the pandemic because of school schedules. It's another way the pandemic is widening existing racial and socioeconomic inequities in education.



Following parents' complaints of too much independent study, state mandates expanded instructional requirements

The proposal before the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education calls for students in fully remote programs to receive at least some live classes led by teachers every day; and it requires four hours of such classes per day, on average.



Nearly a quarter of Boston public high school students not logging into classes daily as course failure rates rise

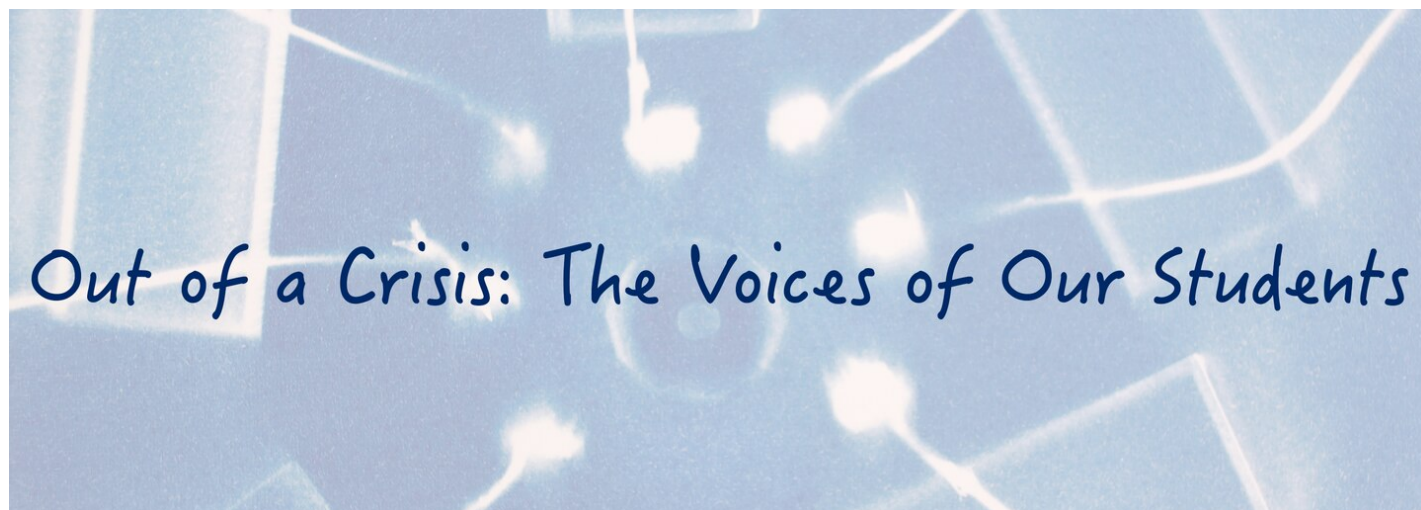
Among students in grades 6-12, failure rates for the first academic quarter, which concluded last month, jumped to 18 percent in English, from 12.4 percent the previous year. Increases in failure rates in other subjects were similar.



Racial gaps in access to in-person instruction worse than expected, according to a new poll

Two months into an unprecedented school year, the racial and socioeconomic gaps in terms of who can access in-person learning appear to be larger than expected.

Visit our archive of all stories from The Great Divide team



“Out of a Crisis: The Voices of Our Students” publishes student essays, poems, artwork, and videos featuring teenage perspectives on learning and living amid a pandemic.

‘Without human connection, school is a shadow’

I watch my classes as if they were a series on Netflix, each class an episode played just to fill the time. And when classes are over, what is different? Nothing. Nothing changes.

A high school senior asks: How can I learn when the world is crumbling?

Six feet can really feel like a world’s distance. This life is different. But life is always twisting. Pay attention to the wisdom. I learn another lesson, and hope for the world’s ascension.

Silence creeps through classrooms that are stuck — frozen in time

OPINION

JARED C. NICHOLSON

Reopening schools requires better state support

Acknowledge the local experts that we are listening to, or at least help us understand what’s driving any discrepancies among experts.



Map: A look at coronavirus in Mass. schools this year

The Globe is tracking coronavirus outbreaks and other incidents that have affected Massachusetts schools and students.

■ Mass. reports 503 new coronavirus cases among public school students, 420 among school staff members

Massachusetts gets approval for school meal pandemic assistance through the end of school year



Massachusetts is the first state to receive federal approval to send out Pandemic EBT benefits through the end of the school year, helping families facing food insecurity, officials said Wednesday.

Boston Teachers Union votes no confidence in superintendent

The Boston Teachers Union overwhelmingly approved a vote of no confidence Sunday night in Superintendent Brenda Cassellius over her handling of reopening schools during the pandemic, marking the first time in decades that the city's largest labor group has resorted to such an action.



How often is COVID-19 spreading in Massachusetts schools?

In the pitched debate over how to get students back to school, nuance is often lost. Teachers' unions seem to suggest aging school buildings are danger zones unless proven otherwise. Politicians and some public health specialists promote schools as if they are safety zones from a pandemic.

■ Superintendents grapple with logistics, politics, and the second wave

When will Massachusetts teachers get the COVID-19 vaccine?

SCHOOL AMID THE PANDEMIC

Broadway star Laura Benanti celebrates high school seniors

When the coronavirus pandemic closed high schools, Broadway and TV star Laura Benanti knew it also meant most spring high school musicals would be scrapped.

Photos: Boston reopens 28 more schools for high-needs students

Boston Public Schools reopened 28 more schools on Monday to serve about 1,700 more high-needs students for in-person learning.

Advocates call on Boston Public Schools to expand in-person learning for high-needs students

Rally organizers say the district's current plan excludes many students whose education and developments are being hampered without the attention, care, and services they would receive at school.

With COVID-19 surging, Arizona teachers protest by calling in sick

About 100 teachers in Arizona's third-largest school district staged a sickout Friday, demanding that schools close after winter break and stay remote until the region's infection rate declines.

[Read all of our stories about school reopening and education amid a pandemic](#)

FEATURED STORIES |



A tale of two schools and the way they teach — or fail to teach — about racism





Boston Latin and the biggest test of their young lives



For low-income students, the suburbs are no sure path to college





'I didn't come to Boston because I thought it would be easy': Boston superintendent ends tumultuous year

FROM OUR PARTNERS

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EDUCATION, INTERRUPTED

This series explored how school closures in the spring of 2020 affected individual students.



Online, but off-kilter: A day in the life of a Boston sixth-grader

Malaki Solo is one of more than 50,000 students in Boston studying at home to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/education/k-12/education-project/>

Without enough to do, the 12-year-old spends much of his time bored inside his small Dorchester apartment.

Read our full Education, Interrupted series

With daycares closed, it's sometimes older siblings watching young children

It's a common scenario affecting countless teenagers across the city and state, as more parents juggle a full schedule with limited childcare support.



For high school seniors with disabilities, school closures can feel like walking off a cliff

For high school seniors, school closures have brought angst and logistical hurdles, including concerns about graduation and college delays.



ACADEMICS AND LEARNING



From individual sessions to taking a real-world approach, here's how teachers are adapting to the pandemic

Many Massachusetts teachers have begun to feel comfortable with teaching virtually, and now some are starting to experiment.

Mass. school districts' plans vary widely on key practices for pandemic-era education, review finds

The findings of a new survey from the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education underscore the wildly different approaches districts have taken to pandemic-era education in a state that has largely taken a hands-off approach to local education affairs.

Independent study for 6-year-olds? Some Massachusetts districts are skirting instructional requirements for kids

This school year, Massachusetts has reinstated its requirement that public schools provide at least five hours of "structured learning time" every school day. But interviews with a dozen parents, advocates, and experts reveal that districts vary widely on what constitutes remote education.

As schools reopen, students struggle with COVID trauma

At the outset of an unprecedentedly difficult year, schools are trying to help struggling students cope — a challenge exponentially complicated by the fact that many of them are learning remotely.

EQUITY AND ACCESS



Equity concerns spark discussion about school year

As policymakers think about ways to address learning disruptions students are experiencing during the COVID-19 pandemic, one potential tool that got attention during a Boston College webinar Thursday was the concept of restructuring the academic calendar.

Thousands of Boston public school students cut off from dental care

Oral health programs were halted in March when school buildings closed amid the pandemic. But that has left students without an opportunity to see a dentist or hygienist for the past seven months.

Educational inequality likely to widen this fall as white students return to school and students of color learn from home

Roughly two-thirds of Black and Hispanic students live in districts where schools are starting the year remotely. By contrast, most white students—about 70 percent—live in school districts with “hybrid” back-to-school plans that include some learning time inside school classrooms.

Hundreds of Boston students who need laptops have not received them, advocates say

Data published by advocacy group Lawyers for Civil Rights show in many cases students with disabilities and those at predominantly Black and Latino schools were less likely to receive laptops compared to their peers without disabilities or at whiter schools.

RACE AND DIVERSITY |



Coalition of students urge school leaders around Boston to address anti-Asian racism

WORLD ASIAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

In an open letter to school leaders in Boston, Quincy and Malden, a coalition of Asian-American students and their supporters is urging educators to take action now to ensure their safety as a new school year begins.

How teachers are bringing lessons from the racial justice uprisings into the classroom

Galvanized by a summer of civil unrest, teachers across the Commonwealth are planning to integrate the tenets of antiracism into their curriculum during a school year already defined by change amid the coronavirus pandemic.

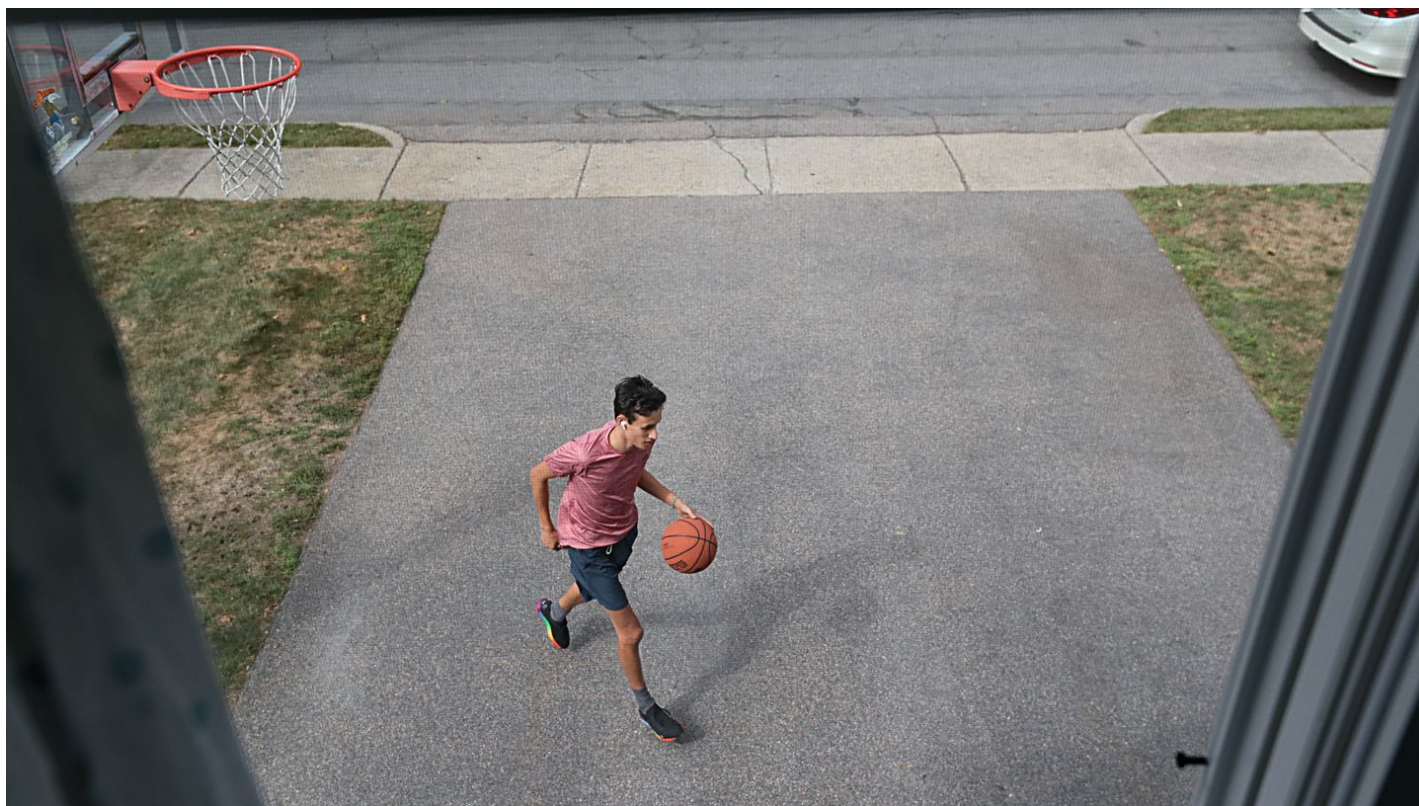
Black girls in Mass. nearly 4 times more likely to face school discipline than white girls, report finds

The state's disparity is slightly higher than that of Alabama, the report by the nonprofit Applesed Network found.

In embrace of W.E.B. Du Bois, Great Barrington names middle school after the civil rights icon

At the end of a two-and-a-half-hour Zoom meeting — in which dozens testified, mostly in favor of the proposed change — the Berkshire Hills Regional School District committee voted unanimously Thursday evening to rename the local middle school in honor of Great Barrington's best-known native son.

MONEY AND FACILITIES



How Rhode Island brought most students back for in-person learning — and Massachusetts did not

In Massachusetts, only about a dozen districts, most of them made up entirely of elementary schools, plan to return all students to classrooms full time this fall. Meanwhile, in Rhode Island, the vast majority of the state's 66 districts and charter schools plan to offer full-time in-person learning by October.

State school funding formula too generous to wealthy districts, report says

The state's formula for funding public schools has changed over time in ways that pump extra money into wealthier districts while shortchanging low-income areas, according to a report released Monday by the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education and the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce.

BPS students see bathroom improvements after Globe story

Students and staff at three schools mentioned in a previous Globe story said they have seen improvements, including more regular cleaning, reduced odors, and new janitors.

Baker budget doesn't keep state's commitment to poor students, critics say

Although more students would be classified as low-income under Governor Charlie Baker's budget, districts would get less extra money for each one of those students than they expected to receive.

FINALIST FOR A PULITZER PRIZE

The Valedictorians Project

The city's top students from 2005 to 2007 set out to change the world. But then life happened. Explore their stories here.



Sign up for The Great Divide newsletter

Stay abreast of the most pressing issues plaguing our public education system and their possible solutions. Sign up for our free newsletter with updates on our investigative findings, links to stories, and other relevant information.

- **Dec. 14: There's nothing like being a teenager during this pandemic**
- **Dec. 10: School through a screen and the loss of human connection**
- **Dec. 7: Out of a Crisis: The Voices of Our Students**

STUDENT CORNER

Make sure your voice is heard

Students, we want to hear from you. Please subscribe to a student-only text line to share your story ideas and tips with our team, and receive occasional news alerts from our team. To join, text the word HELLO to 1-833-335-2777.

EVENT HUB

Upcoming and past events

The Great Divide has been hosting an ongoing series of virtual events, with an emphasis on student voices, during the pandemic. Watch some of our past events:

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- **The State of Race: Education**
- **All in this together? How to minimize harm in reopening schools**
- **GlobeDocs presents: 'My voice matters': Brighton Debate en Español team**
- **The Digital Divide: Education, Race and Virtual Learning**
- **Great Divide Town Hall: What will it take for you to feel safe when schools reopen?**

About The Great Divide

The Great Divide is a two-year reporting effort dedicated to investigating race, class, and inequality in Boston-area schools. It is jointly funded by the Globe and the Barr Foundation, a Boston-based foundation that has prioritized student success in high school and beyond. The Globe maintains editorial control and independence over the project.

THE GREAT DIVIDE TEAM

SARAH CARR

Sarah Carr is editor of the Globe's Great Divide team. She has covered education for 20 years, winning several national awards. Carr is the author of "Hope Against Hope," about New Orleans schools after Hurricane Katrina. You can reach her at sarah.carr@globe.com, or follow her on Twitter [@sarah_e_carr](https://twitter.com/sarah_e_carr).



Parents, students respond to Boston's proposed 'hybrid' school plan: 'I don't want to risk my life,' one says

A brand new COVID-era college in Vermont?

For high school seniors with disabilities, school closures can feel like walking off a cliff

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Snow-related school closings: Which schools are closed or teaching remotely because of the storm?

COVID-19 cancels Globe Santa events but can't extinguish the giving spirit

In a winter of remote learning, most kids will be losing the magic of snow days

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Racial gaps in access to in-person instruction worse than expected, according to a new poll

Biden won Lawrence, but Republicans found new pockets of support. What gives?

Major incidents of voter intimidation and disruption largely fail to materialize

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Free meal or attend class? School schedules force some low-income families to choose

How often is COVID-19 spreading in Massachusetts schools?

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'If this was real school, I'd be paying attention, but here I'm so distracted': Scenes from around the city as an uncertain year begins

Educational inequality likely to widen this fall as white students return to school and students of color learn from home

School districts aim to aid at-risk students with remote learning increasingly likely this fall

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Boston Teachers Union votes no confidence in superintendent

Nearly a quarter of Boston public high school students not logging into classes daily as course failure rates rise

Boston to reopen 28 schools for 1,700 more students

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To Boston parents, treatment of most vulnerable students underscores district's poor planning, communication

Boston eyes return to in-person instruction at four schools

Boston's exam schools may drop entrance test for one year**THE GREAT DIVIDE**

‘My voice matters’: Brighton Debate en Español team gives students a platform to grow

Throughout the winter, scores of Boston students devoted much of their weekends to fervently argue about a single topic: whether the United States should limit its arms sales. Teens in the Boston Debate League verbally jabbed back and forth, poking holes in their opponents’ arguments.





IDEAS | LINDA K. WERTHEIMER

Teaching about racism is urgent — but tricky

Many K-12 educators now want to go deeper on the subject of race. Are they equipped to do it well?

■ **Tips for teaching about racism**

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