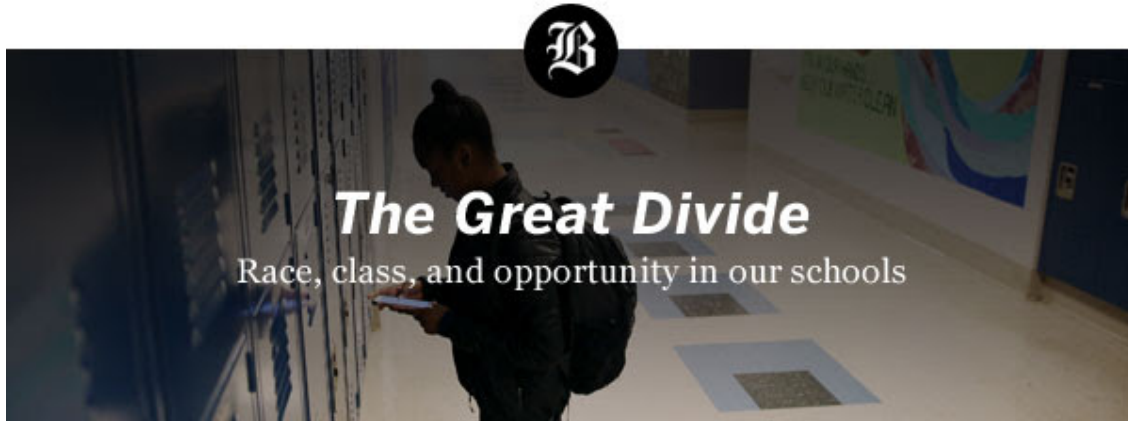


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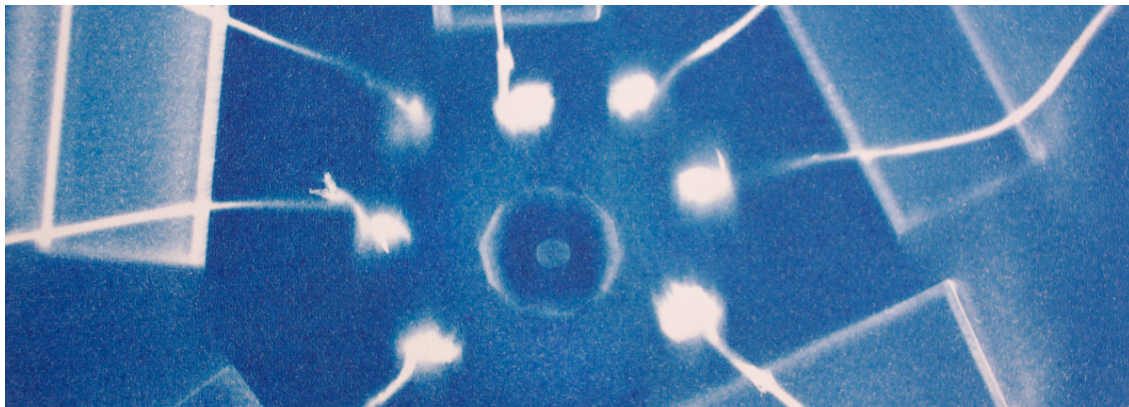
The Boston Globe

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Presented by



The Globe's [Great Divide](#) team investigates the deep inequalities in our public education system, examining both the challenges and possible solutions to creating equal opportunity for all students.



Out of a Crisis: The Voices of Our Students

One student can't focus on schoolwork with more than eight family members sharing a small apartment. Another discovers while risking her life caring for others during the pandemic that she needs to put herself first. A third writes: "I often worry about my future. I used to think that I'd be the first in our family to make it to college. Now I wonder if that will even happen."

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heartbreaking and hilarious, somber and hopeful, resilient and near the breaking point.

In newsletters for the rest of 2020 — and extending into 2021 — we will bring you student essays, poems, artwork, and videos featuring teenage perspectives on learning and living amid a pandemic.

The project will feature work from about 15 different students representing a dozen schools.

If you haven't already, [share this newsletter with a friend](#) to make sure they receive each week's featured pieces, too.

Tariq Charles, 18
Senior
John D. O'Bryant School of Mathematics and Science

Learning While The World Crumbles

 [Listen to Tariq read his poem.](#)

I sit down at my computer in a barren room,
angry that I have to stare at Zoom.

Then I'm humbled by the news, as they say the illness continues to ravage
communities everyday.

Nothing could make my mother less afraid to go to sleep.
In a bed that wasn't her own and away from her home,
My mother was given oxygen and a TV remote.

Inside, those hospital walls were cold and lonely; that's where she was.

Inside the walls of my own home felt dreary.
That's where I was.
The whole situation felt phony;

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So much going on, and I'm doing Algebra II.
How can I learn when the world is crumbling?

They say "Knowledge is power."
The phrase used to make my eyes roll.

But if I went to science class,
Maybe then I'd know,
A cure for the infection that has stopped the world.

It's sickening, to see a loved one inside of a section.
Cut off from the rest the world,
Like they are arrested.

I take that off my mind for a moment.

I'm sitting at a desk with a laptop,
Staring into an abyss of a blue screen.
My homework written down,
Then typed out.
The virus possesses the news it seems.
I scream silently.

Staring at an electronic pupil,
Trying not to fall asleep.

School isn't like it used to be — nothing really is.

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.
Now, another Zoom class that I didn't want to mention.

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Simone Watts, 16
Junior

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Boston Arts Academy



Watts created a mixed-media, partly abstract self portrait of mental health transitions he has been through over quarantine and the connectedness with past versions of himself in those transitions — a process he said he wouldn't have been forced to confront if he had been distracted with "normal life."

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**Alondra Bobadilla, 18
Senior
Fenway High School**

from now to maybe

 [Listen to Alondra read her poem.](#)

a forlorn silence creeps through school hallways,
the classrooms encapsulated in time,
remnants of the students scattered,
books and bags never collected
lockers cracked open, unattended.

the last moments replay,
students avoiding each other's touch along with gaze,
nostalgia pouring into the hearts,
cups full to the brim,
promises of return are grim.

no one wants to speak the knowledge shared by the collective.
no one is coming back come September.
the voices of children's laughter will not be heard,
nor the scribble of pencil tip,
nor the hush of a librarian,
and now as the future has become the present,
this bitter reality we swallow like syrup,
has shadowed over our joy.

young men and women who have dedicated their struggles to their studies,
young men and women who would be the first in their family,
young men and women who once contemplated suicide but have triumphed
over their hardships,
young men and women who have maintained a perfect track record,
young men and women who dropped out, came back, maybe left again but have
gotten this far,
all these stories are piecing together like a mosaic,

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saying it all has a purpose,
hurts the soul as the idea of walking on
a virtual stage sours the mood,
and plans to go abroad are still air,
for though it may have meaning,
the fog between today and tomorrow is thick
and plans are temptations leading only to hopelessness.

tell me when the class is back in session
and the boards are riddled with equations,
and the halls packed with youthful delight.
call me when the bell is ringing
and the world has returned to our created meaning,
of production and sustainability the song i have
written on my skin and now we wonder if
any of the years were worth it when the systems
that once functioned to a slim are now
silently collapsing to the ground.

Djessy Kungu, 17
2020 Graduate
Excel High School

Isolation

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The latest from The Great Divide team

As public health experts advise keeping schools open, superintendents grapple with logistics, politics, and the second wave

In the 10th month of the pandemic, officials responsible for educating Massachusetts' 911,432 public school students are grappling with two competing and wildly conflicting narratives: The hopeful one presented by Governor Charlie Baker and by a growing global consensus of scientists that COVID-19 has not spread widely in schools, especially at the elementary level, and the alarming one of a surging second wave that seems bound to test the limits of that understanding.



Superintendents are facing pressure from frayed parents on both sides of the

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argument, and many are choosing to take what they see as the safer path, limiting children's time in school — often for reasons that have as much to do with logistics and politics as they do with science.

-Stephanie Ebbert and Naomi Martin, Globe Staff

[Read more.](#)

State instructs Boston, Worcester, and Springfield to open classrooms for special education students

A top Massachusetts education commissioner is pressuring Boston, Worcester, and Springfield — with the threat of an audit — to open its classrooms to students with disabilities as soon as possible, state officials announced Friday.

In letters sent to the state's three largest school systems this week, Jeffrey Riley, commissioner of elementary and secondary education, ordered local officials to submit detailed plans within 10 days to bring students with disabilities back to school..

-James Vaznis, Globe Staff

[Read more.](#)

UPCOMING VIRTUAL EVENT

Virtual Learning: What's Working, And What's Not?

In the months since many schools moved online, we've learned a lot about remote education, and strategies for keeping kids and families connected to school. In this discussion, the Boston Globe will interview students, educators and other experts about what we've learned so far about learning during a pandemic — and what we can do better in 2021.

[RSVP here.](#)



Other education news from the Globe

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We are tracking outbreaks, cases, and other coronavirus-related incidents affecting Massachusetts schools. [See our tracker here.](#)

- During the week that ended Dec. 2, there were 276 new coronavirus cases among students and 251 among school staff members reported to the state, [according to education officials.](#)
- About 100 Boston parents and children [rallied at City Hall last week](#) to push for the reopening of the city's schools. Boston Mayor Martin J. Walsh said he supports those parents, but [the city isn't ready to reopen schools](#) as coronavirus cases continue to rise.
- Both Cambridge and Framingham public schools have [returned to remote learning](#) for students this week. Nantucket schools [went remote last week.](#)
- Newton [plans to reopen its high schools](#) for in-person learning in January.

What we're reading

Chalkbeat: [Brave new world: Students from immigrant families in Philadelphia give inside view on adjustment to remote learning.](#)

The Associated Press: [Schools confront 'off the rails' numbers of failing grades](#)

The New York Times: [Why School Districts Are Bringing Back Younger Children First](#)

The Hechinger Report: [Coronavirus means school food is free across the U.S. What if it stayed that way?](#)

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More about The Great Divide

The Great Divide builds on the findings of the Globe's [Valedictorians Project](#), a Pulitzer Prize finalist that published in January 2019. The project revealed that even the best students in Boston public schools often struggle after high

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school. The Great Divide team is examining public education in the region, with humanity and empathy, and with a goal of provoking public discussion and exploring what might be done to fix core issues of inequality, social mobility, and economic opportunity. Please send ideas and suggestions to: thegreatdivide@globe.com.

Tell us what you want to see in our enhanced education coverage.

The Valedictorians Project
 Boston's top students from 2005
 to 2007 set out to change the
 world. But then life happened.



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