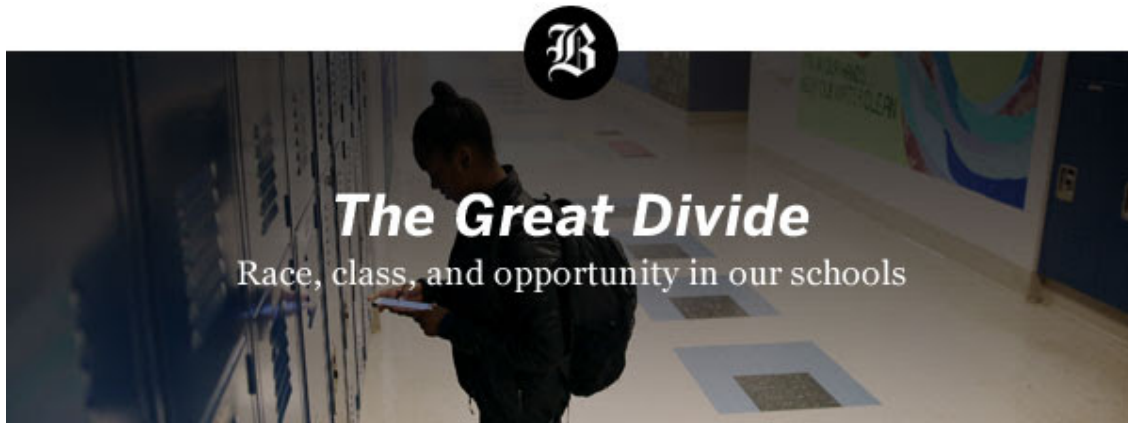


The Boston Globe

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The Great Divide

Race, class, and opportunity in our schools

By Felicia Gans, Globe Staff

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. Anyone interested can [sign up for this free newsletter here](#).

The latest from The Great Divide team

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

In Chelsea, where 88 percent of students are Hispanic and 6 percent are white, students are not going back into their schools this month. And while parents here know better than most the pandemic's deadly toll and ongoing threat — no place in Massachusetts was harder hit than this one — they also fear the lasting consequences for their children's education.

That danger is real across the state, where roughly two-thirds of Black and Hispanic students live in districts where schools are starting the year remotely, according to a preliminary analysis of state data by The Education Trust, a nonprofit group that advocates for educational equity. 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, the

The disparity is not surprising, given the pandemic's tighter grip on many cities and its disproportionate impact on people of color, as well as the heightened complexity of reopening school buildings safely in large urban systems with aging infrastructure. Nonetheless, the demographic split between students learning in and out of school ratchets the stakes for remote learning even higher, turning its quality into a matter of educational equity.

-Jenna Russell, Globe Staff

[Read more.](#)



Laura Gamba, 14, waited with brother Nicolas, 10, while her mother, Luz Gamba, received notes from teacher Sherry Spaulding. (Erin Clark/Globe Staff)

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

As public officials make the difficult decision of whether to reopen schools for in-person learning this month, the neighboring states of Massachusetts and Rhode Island share two important characteristics: They have some of the lowest per capita COVID-19 positivity rates in the country. And both state's governors have consistently proclaimed that as many students as possible should return for in-person instruction this fall.

Yet the results could not be more different.

-Bianca Vázquez Toness and Dan McGowan, Globe Staff

[Read more.](#)

Teachers at high risk for coronavirus still don't know whether they'll be allowed to work remotely

While most districts have given teachers an answer, scores of educators across the state are still in limbo, waiting to hear whether their own, or loved ones', preexisting health conditions qualify them to work remotely, adding mightily to the confusion of the most tumultuous back-to-school season in modern history.

Without state guidance for how districts should handle this issue, teachers in different communities face a variety of responses — on a variety of timelines, according to Beth Kontos, president of the American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts. Several have yet to finalize teachers' assignments, including Boston, Lowell, and others, Kontos said.

-Naomi Martin, Globe Staff

[Read more.](#)

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

For centuries, dead white men have dominated high school English classes. Syllabuses and summer readings lists are chock-full of Shakespeares, Hemingways, Faulkners, and Fitzgeralds.

But this year, Joana Chacon, an English teacher at Newton South High School, is trying something new: Like many in her department, Chacon is teaching texts only by authors of color. Freshmen will read “The House on Mango Street” by Sandra Cisneros and civil rights poetry by Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Maya Angelou. Juniors will dive into Sherman Alexie’s bildungsroman, “The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian,” Gene Luen Yang’s graphic novel “American Born Chinese,” and one of Toni Morrison’s

-Deanna Pan, Globe Staff

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School reopening news

We have published all the reopening decisions for Massachusetts' school districts. [Find your district in our tracker here.](#)

- Across the state, [air quality and ventilation issues are taking center stage](#) as officials work to get children back inside school buildings. In Boston alone, a city-commissioned report two years ago found air quality and ventilation to be poor or deficient in more than half of the city's schools.
- The first day of school in Boston: Boston officials were [prepared for a bumpy start](#) today as all students logged in remotely for the first day. Today, the Globe's Great Divide team followed a range of students, educators, and support staff. [Read their stories here.](#)
 - Families: [We want to hear from you.](#) How did your first day of remote learning go? Did you have any issues?
- Across Massachusetts, [most school districts started](#) school over the past two weeks. In Rhode Island, [school started last week.](#)
 - Worried about sending your child back to school? [Here are six key points to consider.](#)
- Last week, Boston Superintendent Brenda Cassellius warned that the school district was still [waiting for 20,000 Chromebooks](#) to distribute to students. Meanwhile, the advocacy group Lawyers for Civil Rights [estimated that hundreds of Boston students](#) who have been requesting laptops since the spring have still not received them.
 - If you need to buy a Chromebook or other technology for the school year, [here are some tips.](#)
- Two maintenance workers at the Readville bus yard have [tested positive for the coronavirus.](#)
- High school parties in some cities and towns are [forcing school districts to change plans](#) and start the year remotely out of concern about budding outbreaks. Meanwhile, some schools have [delayed in-person classes](#) after a [student](#) or [staff member](#) tested positive.
 - "And the children shall lead us. Yikes!" | [By Yvonne Abraham](#)

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virtual events

On **Wednesday, Sept. 23 at 7:30 p.m.**, GBH and The Boston Globe are partnering for the second event in a series of virtual forums examining race and inequality in Massachusetts. Produced in partnership with the NAACP Boston Branch and GBH WORLD, "The State of Race" will continue with a discussion on how racial inequities in Massachusetts school systems disproportionately impact communities of color.

[RSVP here.](#)

Missed our past event, "**All in this Together? How to Minimize Harm in Reopening Schools**"? [You can watch it here.](#)

What we're reading

["Cajon Valley in California is doing something that many lower-income districts have postponed: offering in-person instruction."](#) (The New York Times)

["Denver students push the district to include Black, Latino, Indigenous history in curriculum"](#) (Chalkbeat)

["A Massachusetts teenager tested positive for COVID-19. His parents sent him to school anyway"](#) (The Washington Post)

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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 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

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[Tell us](#) what you want to see in our enhanced education coverage.

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



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