**Time for the State to Take Over Boston Public Schools**

By [Jim Stergios](https://www.realclearpolicy.com/authors/jim_stergios/) & [Charles Chieppo](https://www.realclearpolicy.com/authors/charles_chieppo/)
February 23, 2022

*The Boston Globe* recently reported that the Boston Public Schools (BPS) may have [overstated its graduation rates](https://www.bostonglobe.com/2022/01/31/metro/bps-may-have-overstated-graduation-rate-five-last-seven-years/?p1=BGSearch_Overlay_Results) in five of the last seven years. Following on the heels of a December report that the system underestimated the number of English language learners BPS wasn’t adequately serving appear to have been the final straws that led to the resignation, announced this week, of school Superintendent Brenda Cassellius.

The spate of revelations recently led to calls for a city audit of the system. But a new audit is unlikely to tell us anything we don’t know from previous ones.

It’s time for state leaders to intervene. Together, the state and the city should select a new receiver-superintendent with an eye toward the person best equipped to work with the state to develop a plan to radically overhaul the entire school district.

A 2020 [state review of BPS](https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/03/13/metro/mass-officials-release-scathing-review-boston-school-system/?p1=Article_Inline_Text_Link) understandably gained little traction, as it was released on a Friday afternoon in March amid the initial wave of COVID-19 lockdowns. But it merits close attention in the wake of recent developments.

The report is devastating. The size of the achievement gap between Black and White students widened and the performance of Latinos trails even further behind. More than 30 percent of the system’s students attend schools ranked in the bottom 10 percent statewide, and the state found no clear, consistent strategy for improving those schools. All this despite the fact that the district spends [approximately $22,000](https://www.bmrb.org/fy22-school-budget-1-3b/) per student annually, according to data from the Boston Municipal Research Bureau.

The review stopped short of recommending a state takeover of BPS, but it also relied on the district’s self-reported data. After learning that the system may have overstated its graduation rates, we have good reason to wonder if accurate data may have led to a different recommendation.

The recent findings make it clear that things haven’t gotten any better in the two years since the review was published. In addition, learning loss from the pandemic is impacting an entire generation of students, especially those most at-risk.

Two years ago, BPS botched the calculation of student grade point averages, resulting in some students improperly being offered invitations to the city’s sought-after exam schools, while others who had earned invitations were denied.

Last year a Federal District Court Judge took the exceedingly rare step of withdrawing an earlier opinion upholding the district’s exam school admission plan, because he believed he had been “misled” by the omission of racist text messages from two school committee members who later resigned when the messages were made public. The texts came on the heels of the resignation of the committee’s chairperson after he muttered derogatory comments about Asian names into a live microphone.

Sadly, all this is nothing new for longtime observers of the BPS. In 2004-05, the state Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) published a highly critical 200-page report on BPS that identified many of the same systemic failures outlined in the 2020 report. Since then, three governors and four Boston mayors have found it politically expedient to ignore the stubborn, disturbing facts about BPS.

Given the failures of both appointed and elected school boards, perhaps the time has come for the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to appoint members of the Boston School Committee.

For decades, we have waited in vain for the Boston Public Schools to improve. The problems are well documented. As the system prepares to select its seventh leader since the late Thomas Payzant retired in 2006, it’s time for the Commonwealth to step in.

*Jim Stergios is executive director and Charles Chieppo is senior fellow at Pioneer Institute, a Boston-based think tank.*