

BOSTON BUSING/DESEGREGATION PROJECT

FOR TRUTH, LEARNING, AND CHANGE

KEY FINDINGS FROM DATA COLLECTION TO DATE



Union of Minority Neighborhoods

Prepared by the UMN Staff & the BBDP Steering Committee

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Introduction

The Union of Minority Neighborhoods through its program Black People for Better Public Schools (BP4BPS) began a Boston Busing/Desegregation Project that grew out of BP4BPS organizing. Our reasons are simple. Our work has taught us that scores of people had been harmed by the events of that time. It is our belief that in order for real civic engagement and participation to occur, for the rebuilding of community, getting people into good paying jobs and careers, for families to become whole, loving and supportive, for fear to be gone, the issue of busing must be confronted, talked about, placed in its proper context, and with proper support and encouragement, to help people and communities move forward.

The Process

In its attempts to organize African-American parents to be more engaged with the Boston Public School system, the Union of Minority Neighborhoods (UMN) encountered cynicism towards and distrust of the school system. They found, however, a lot of energy and no small amount of pain and anger around Boston school desegregation in general and “busing” in particular. In looking for a way to tap into and understand that energy, or what popular education theorist, Paulo Freire, would call a generative issue¹, UMN has begun investigating using a Truth process in Boston: a community-driven process of telling, sharing, and learning from stories across differences to co-create the history of busing and Boston school desegregation and invite more communities into current attempts to improve the school system.

Busing/desegregation in Boston was unarguably a watershed moment in the city’s history. The violence that met desegregation here was a shock to the nation as it clashed with Boston’s image and identity as a “liberal” and liberty-minded city. How could a “cradle of liberty” react to racial integration with such violence? Of course there was a long and complex history that many were not aware of. This included systemic racism, class struggle, Balkanized ethnic communities and many battles for quality education.

While T&R is a journey and specific outcomes cannot be nailed down, it is our intention to build, expand and strengthen a critical mass of people from diverse communities (race, ethnicity and class) in Boston who are committed to work on the following for Boston Public School education:

- Quality education
- Community engagement and action
- Race and class equity
- Cultural competency

¹ Generative issues = complex experiences which are charged with political significance and are likely to generate considerable discussion and analysis.

UMN's larger goals are:

- Come to a clearer understanding of the history of school desegregation in Boston, a collective story of its impact on the current state of public school education, and shared vision of where we go from here.
- Increase support of and trust in public school education.
- Engage a larger and more diverse body of communities in determining Boston's vision for public school education.

Six distinct groups that will benefit from this process are:

- Those who were negatively impacted in some way and have been unable to heal because of a lack of acknowledgment of what they experienced and the damage it caused
- Those who negatively impacted others in some way or benefitted from the racial tension, who want an opportunity to repair and heal from for the damage they caused
- Those who were negatively impacted or who negatively impacted others, who have moved past their experiences to connect across past differences, and wish to share their wisdom and stories with others to help the city move to a new place
- Those who are part of the attempt to create a new identity for Boston grounded in equity and opportunity for all, and want to work to reframe this memory that is often a barrier to imagining and working toward something new
- Those who are in search of a new vision and, though harmed by busing, still see it as a task of their current work/leadership to support the inclusion and engagement of all people, including their communities and any others who have been marginalized
- Those who want to learn about this period and come to a deeper understanding of its legacy and impact, as well as participate in imagining and shaping a better Boston for all

Over the year and a half—of organizing and of researching busing/desegregation—we have spoken to scores of individuals about the history of busing/desegregation in Boston and the possibility of revisiting it through a Truth Process. What follows are key findings so far from our organizing, interviews, affinity groups, reading and research.

I. Why is it important to do this project, and why now?

To Address Trauma and Injury

The first reason given for the importance of this project is to collectively address the suffering and trauma that many experienced during this period. Our initial interviews were intentionally with people who had for the most part recovered from the hurts of the desegregation era. That is, we focused on those who had gone on to get an education and to build meaningful and successful professional lives. They had chosen lives of service as a response to what they'd gone through. Still, even among these people, the wounds of the era were great and far from forgotten. Many were not so fortunate, however. There are many whose wounds were never acknowledged and the Truth Process is an opportunity to do just that.

It was really traumatic...I'm having trouble talking about it... -- African American teacher who started her career in 1974

This is important. It's had a great impact on me. I didn't talk about it until my late 20's---African American non-profit director bused first year of busing at 14.

...A mini prison. It was complete craziness, fights every day. Helicopters over our neighborhood.-- White South Boston professional who was a freshman at South Boston High the second year of busing

To Explore History to Better Understand and Address Current Conflicts and Problems

Another reason given was that it was critical to explore this history in order to truly address today's crisis in education. There was a sense from many that looking back at this critical time in Boston's history with an intention to move to change would break through some of the current barriers to equity in quality education:

There's a lot of healing that needs to go on...If people shift and begin healing, we may begin to create some cross-race diverse communities that want to work towards change. -- African American non-profit executive director

In the crisis, communications got stereotyped. Those stereotypes remain. People [in different communities] never had a chance to really listen to each other. ... A lot of emotion went underground. To look at it with distance provides a real opportunity for opening up people in the city to more collaboration -- White university professor

There isn't a shared understanding about what cross-cultural competence looks like or even if it should exist in education for teachers or for students, whether it would make a difference. I think if we could have a dialogue and commit to some agreements about what cultural competence is, it would influence every aspect of the educational process. .. If that was a by-product of this, it is long overdue—Organization development consultant

At first we were concerned that this was coming from the older generation, but young education students expressed the same belief:

...knowing our history is the only way to stop history from repeating itself. Growing up in Massachusetts we don't learn half as much about this issue as we should. I, for one, was shocked by the video [Eyes on the Prize] and feel like I have been lied to because I'm only hearing about it now. We blame the South for avoiding the discussion of slavery and civil rights but we are just as guilty in the North. -- Northeastern University student

...the "melting pot" idea of America has not been achieved. Many suburban schools are still predominately White; many city schools are predominately Black. City schools tend to lack resources and have lower performance levels. Understanding the work that has been done in the past to reach where we are today, which still is not ideal, is crucial to continuing work that needs to be done still. -- Northeastern University student

To Get Marginalized Voices and Taboo Topics into Today's Public Education Dialogue

So many we talked to focused on those who are excluded from visioning about public education. The Truth Process for them offered an opportunity to include the stories of those who went through this period and of their children and grandchildren who, because of race or class, were systematically excluded. Even within cultural communities people talked about how class status often determined access to education and to the chance to have a say in the values around education.

I chose not to roll up in bourgeois-land. They marginalized a lot of women who helped build community: women from the South with no 12th grade education. -- African American education activist

Understand, it was never about race. Understand that people in Roxbury, South Boston, Charlestown were pitted against each other...[yet] most working class people have better and more relationships across race than wealthy people -- South Boston professional

In the Boston community, it is taboo to talk race. People don't talk about it – [instead there's] covert racism and micro-aggression--Youth worker

They saw the Truth Process as a way to confront race and class divisions that are not discussed directly, and to come to new and deeper understandings across difference.

To Help Communities Learn Their Own Histories and Then to Forge a Collective Story of Busing/Desegregation in Boston

It was clear from our interviews that many did not have an understanding of the history and context of busing/desegregation. Many African Americans, for example, did not know of the Black struggle for quality education or how the decision came about, as was true for other people of color and white people. Many expressed anger at even the use of the term busing for the project because it misframed the issue and ignored the struggle for quality education for all and legal desegregation. We learned that a huge part of what people want the project to do is help various communities understand their own history and then dialogue to come to a shared understanding of busing/desegregation and its legacy.

To Challenge Leadership in Boston to Acknowledge the Traumas of Desegregation in Boston and to Address the Lingering Effects on Individuals, the greater Boston Public School System and the City

There was a deep sense that to move past the busing/desegregation era we need leadership that will tackle the In the film "Eyes on the Prize", Robert Kiley says at one point, "I think it's not unfair to say that the business community, the financial community and I would say the religious community took a walk in the early 1970's, leaving really only the politicians and the parents as the people who cared about the issue. And in a certain sense, the parents got pitted against one another, white neighborhoods against black neighborhoods in a way that no one had ever bargained for". One youth leader said in our interviews:

We need a major apology from the mayor as well as politicians – finally holding them accountable, being "real leaders" -- (get actual quote)

While this process cannot and does not pretend to guarantee “reconciliation” as a final product, the process seeks to set a challenge leadership to see, understand and confront the lingering effects of busing/desegregation in Boston.

II. What is important for this project to accomplish?

Working Goals

1. **Develop a shared history and context** of what led to the Boston desegregation/busing crisis.
2. **Support and learn from those affected** by the experience of Boston busing and desegregation.
3. **Foster an understanding** of how the desegregation/busing legacy shapes the challenges we face now.
4. **Learn together to address dynamics** of race, class, and power that get in the way of quality education and equal opportunity for all in Boston.
5. **Increase public understanding** of the importance of building a world-class public education system at the pre-college level in Boston that gives Boston Youth access to world class higher education, other opportunities and a meaningful life.
6. **Build a community of diverse and committed people** who work together to assure quality public education for all children and all schools in Boston, resulting in a better Boston that provides equal opportunity for all.

Core Values

- Truth-telling
- Lifting up the voices and tapping the wisdom of those who often get marginalized
- Going to the past to understand the present
- Belief in the possibility that people and communities can transform themselves through new learning
- Community as the native soil of human spirit
- Acknowledging and learning from the power and beauty of diverse cultures in order to shape our shared culture
- Supporting new generations to take leadership to create a better world

Framework: Truth, Learning and Change

We heard the message loud and clear that the Boston Busing/Desegregation Truth Project cannot be about “truth for truth’s sake”. Instead it must focus on three things: truth-telling, learning from that truth (or those truths), and making change based on our new shared knowledge. For that reason we see the project as having four distinct components that align to the Bridges Transitions model promoted by the Andrus Family Fund (see attachment). Each phase will include its own learning and recommendations:

Phase One: *Understanding our context -- who Boston was before the crisis -- and building a committed learning community to support this project.* Busing and school desegregation is a huge and unwieldy topic. In order to do justice to a Truth Process, we must spend a period of time putting the process in a historical context and making clear exactly what the Truth Process will cover. It also involves building a “container” called the Learning Network: a diverse group of people with diverse knowledge and skills who will learn together from the process and bring their collective skills and talent to holding the city through this process. These are people who already have a commitment to public school, to quality education for all, to working to address race, class and other divisions or inequities in education. They are also devoted to learning and service around these issues and being part of a vanguard to make this project successful. The framing of phase one is both conceptual and physical: we will build a process in which we continue to clarify and refine our focus and build a learning community. As one youth leader challenged us: “*Trauma should motivate a community, not disillusion them.*”

Phase Two: *Each cultural community understanding its own story.* Because some who were traumatized said they would first need to tell their stories in their own cultural group, we believe it is important to focus first on supporting each cultural community to better understand its own story, before bringing different cultural communities together to search for a deeper understanding of Boston’s collective story. We also intend to use this part of the process to propose...*[missing words]*. In addition to individuals sharing their personal stories/trauma, this phase will include learning about:

- The different histories that shaped people within each racial group
- How those different histories shaped the responses of subsets within each racial group to busing/desegregation as well as opportunities for these different subsets following busing
- The condition of these different subsets today; and developing solidarity within each racial group to stand for improving opportunity for all. In the transitions model, this first phase helps each racial group get to an important “ending”.

Phase Three: *Boston Reckons with the Busing/Desegregation Process.* This phase will bring different racial groups together for shared “hearings” and come to a shared history through the Commission. With this collective “ending” they will look at how Boston dealt with the ending of legal segregation of schools – and get to shared understanding of what was/is being left behind and shared commitment to go forward based on what was learned through the Truth Process. They will at the same time begin the collective learning process as they listen to and learn what other groups have learned about themselves, and as they reflect on what this new learning means to them, how it shapes their understanding about the busing crisis and its impacts – its legacy and possibilities -- for the people, communities, and city of Boston. In the transitions model, this phase helps different racial groups engage in knowledge exchange and dialogue to co-create and widen their *understanding of our shared story* about this period of Boston’s history. The work of the second phase also continues building the Learning Network for the last phase of this project.

Phase Four: *Toward a New Beginning.* In this phase of the project, we are bringing different people together across all kinds of differences -- including, racial, cultural, economic, religious, gender, and generational -- to envision the future and priorities for impact they want for this city and its public

education system, in order to create greater inclusion, development, and opportunity for all. In the transitions model, this third phase helps people across differences engage in knowledge exchange and dialogue to co-create a new story and future for Boston. This also helps set the stage and build committed leadership and resources to support joint action as well as continued public learning and engagement to accomplish the vision and priorities that emerge from this process for building a better Boston for all.

Key Issues for Project to Address

In applying the above framework, the Truth Process must:

1. Consider and address the following injuries:
 - Trauma from the violence of busing/desegregation
 - Loss of learning for the generation that went through the busing crisis
 - Sense of Black inferiority and of White superiority among students
 - Marginalization of perceptions of poor Black (and White) parent activists
 - Loss of intact communities
2. Explore and help facilitate learning about the following issues:
 - History of the fight for quality education and the conflict over it
 - Institutionalized racism and the need for race literacy for effective dialogue about education
 - Understanding of class within and between communities, racial or cultural groups
 - Was desegregation successful? For whom? What are the needs today of those who did not benefit from it? How has that era impacted BPS today?
 - How have communities and the concept of community changed since this era? How does this affect possibilities for quality education?
 - Is there now a collective commitment to quality education for all?
 - Is there a relationship between the violence of that era and current violence in poor communities of color? (cf. South Africa)
 - What is the relationship between present political leadership and this era? (Traditional truth processes are created to facilitate a transition to a more democratic or just government. What does this imply for Boston's truth process?)

Requirements for an Effective Process

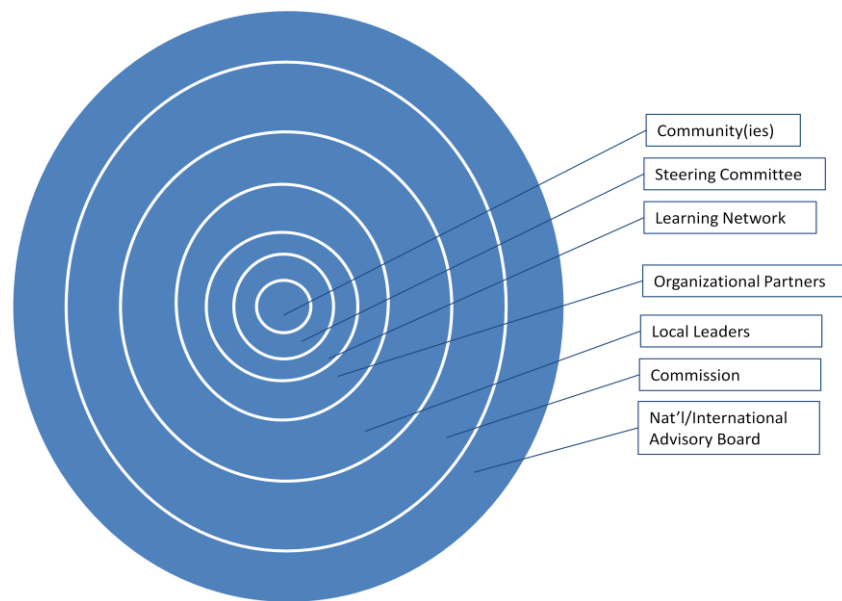
People in formal and informal interviews recommended the following:

- A slow, deliberate, strategic process: start small and build over the long-haul
- Exceptional listening and commitment to learning
- Must clearly define goals and focus and communicate it to public -- need focus and structure.
- Intergenerational participation at all levels
- Make sure all voices are heard—especially those most marginalized and those most hurt by busing
- An open, community driven process -- nothing top-down -- whose findings and recommendations are shared widely as well as with key leadership that can effect change
- Very clear and focused goals and structure
 - In sessions, however designed, clarify upfront what people will talk about.

- Engaging the complexity—nothing simplified or superficial
- Include art and a variety of modes of communication
- Exceptional communication about the project: must find ways to keep people connected into the process over the long haul—crucial to keep good communications.
- Multiple ways to participate: Use art, theater, ritual etc.
- Clarify important terms: busing, desegregation, racism (systemic racism), race, class etc
- Use community resources
 - Work at/with community libraries.
 - Connect with neighborhood groups—people in every neighborhood solving problems.
 - Look for partners and be non-proprietary

III. Project Guidance

The Boston Busing/Desegregation Project is community driven. This means that the project has developed and will continue to develop through dialogue with the Boston community and the diverse communities that compose it. The project starts with what we learn from the community and grows through concentric circles that provide various forms of input and expertise. It is necessary to grow each circle so that the project reaches and includes as many Bostonians as possible who are committed to its values and goals.



The Community - The Truth Project grew out of UMN’s attempts to organize Black parents around public school education. It was through that work that the need to revisit busing and desegregation arose. Step by step, the project has been designed to learn from written history, from individuals and from communities and to reach and include as many people and communities as possible who want the project to succeed.

The Steering Committee -The Steering Committee will partner with staff to define, design and monitor the project's process. Members are chosen for their commitment to the project, their compassion, their history of and commitment to truth-telling and for being risk-takers able to withstand the inevitable resistance we will encounter throughout the process.

The purpose of this committee is to explore possible models for revisiting school desegregation, choose the methods the project will use, and outline a mandate for its success. They will share the project's commitment to the following for Boston Public Schools:

- Quality education and excellence
- Community engagement and action
- Race and class equity
- Cultural competency

The members of this committee will:

- Help analyze busing -- its history, implementation, and impact -- systemically including understanding systemic racism and social analysis—and plan for the continuing analysis needed for the Truth process.
- Learn about and arrange for research about school desegregation, court-ordered busing.
- Study, understand, and support: change theory in general; two specific approaches to change -- the T&R approach, and the Transitions approach; and any other approaches the planning committee believes may be useful in supporting the project to achieve its goals.
- Learn about truth and reconciliation processes and connect with the larger international truth and reconciliation/transitional justice community.
- Provide information about working on issues of trauma and recovery and needs of this project around that.
- Share knowledge about systemic racism and classism.
- Work towards a process of getting increasing portions of the city's population involved in and knowledgeable about this effort.
- Develop a process of selecting a formal truth commission, if the Planning Committee chooses to use this model, and when the time comes identify/recruit new members.
- Acknowledge and address power differences and cultural differences and avoid getting stuck in the status quo -- remembering that this effort is first for those who need it, i.e. those who have been directly handicapped by busing.
- Accept and support Black leadership, and respect the fact that this project grows out of the African-American struggle for liberation even as it is committed to being open and willing to collaborate with other race/ethnic groups. It is important to be transparent that this is Black-led in ways that we are not usually willing to acknowledge that most processes are white-led.
- Reflect the diversity of the Boston community and its communities
- Be connected to diverse networks

Events will be held to help support and deepen the committee's learning.

There will be two primary deliverables of this group: 1) a mandate for the Commission and for the overall Project, and 2) a plan for a truth, learning, and change that would best serve Boston.

The Learning Network - Boston Busing/School Desegregation is a complex and much studied aspect of Boston's History. There were many people who were traumatized by violence and many suffered other losses, such as an interruption of their education due to the chaos, community disruption, race and class inequities. Many injuries however went beyond the individual and were systemic. In order to address the full complexity of the issue and to hold and support the city through this process, a huge container (learning and resource community) of people is needed to see this through. This group is made up of an ever widening circle of people who are already working on these and related issues. This group brings expertise as teachers, youth workers, systems consultants, etc. They will reflect together on what the project is learning to embed the learning in the larger community.

This community will do much of what the Steering Committee will do including:

- Help analyze busing -- its history, implementation, and impact -- systemically including understanding systemic racism and social analysis—and plan for the continuing analysis needed for the Truth process.
- Learn about and arrange for research about school desegregation, court-ordered busing.
- Study, understand, and support: change theory in general; two specific approaches to change -- the T&R approach, and the Transitions approach; and any other approaches the planning committee believes may be useful in supporting the project to achieve its goals.
- Learn about truth and reconciliation processes and connect with the larger international truth and reconciliation/transitional justice community.
- Provide information about working on issues of trauma and recovery and needs of this project around that.
- Share knowledge about systemic racism and classism.
- Work towards a process of getting increasing portions of the city's population involved in and knowledgeable about this effort.
- Develop a process of selecting a formal truth commission, if the Planning Committee chooses to use this model, and when the time comes identify/recruit new members.
- Acknowledge and address power differences and cultural differences and avoid getting stuck in the status quo -- remembering that this effort is first for those who need it, i.e. those who have been directly handicapped by busing.

Events will be held to help support and deepen the groups learning.

Organizational Partners - These are organizations that partner to work on various aspects of the project. The first organizational partner in the Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project at Northeastern University that produced a timeline of Boston's Busing/Desegregation era—focusing especially on 1974 to 1978—and the has expertise in restorative justice processes like Truth Projects. Other partners will work on fitting parts of the project.

Local Leaders - Local Leaders will participate will come together to contribute to and learn from the project. They will bring their resources to the project's implementation.

The Commission - The Truth Commission will facilitate the mandate laid out by the Steering Committee.

The International Advisory Committee - This committee will be made up of experts and leaders in education, truth processes, trauma, systems thinking, political activism etc. They will provide guidance, inspiration and observation of our process.

IV. What should the first phase of implementation focus on and accomplish?

(Phase One: May 2011 – June 2012)

To date, we've agreed that the following objectives are important for phase one:

- ***Continue to build the capacity of people who will constitute the initial Learning Network for this project:*** people who believe it is important to do and will participate in different ways to help make it happen.
- ***Continue to publicize the project and do community outreach to build awareness of it, buy-in/support for it, and participation in it, thus expanding the Learning Network for this project in ever wider circles.*** Also use this outreach to deepen the project's learning about what's important to the Boston community about this project, what they'd like to see it accomplish, and who it needs to involve and learn from to support its success.
- ***Define the context to build shared understanding of the history that led up to the busing/desegregation crisis in Boston from 1974-78.*** Share this history widely and invite the Boston community to help co-create this history by sharing their own knowledge of who Boston was before the crisis took place. Use this process of sharing and co-creating the history of Boston before the crisis to publicize the project and recruit people to participate in the next phase of it.
- ***Design phase two of the project,*** which will support people within the same cultural community to come together to share their experiences of the busing/desegregation crisis and engage in dialogue about the impact of the crisis on them, their communities, Boston schools, and the city.
- ***Create and convene a commission that reflects a cross-section of the Boston community*** -- across cultures, economic backgrounds, generations, faith communities, neighborhoods, and sectors.

Appendix: Tentative 1st Year Project

Boston Busing/Desegregation Project

Draft Timeline: May 2011 - May 2012

Below is a draft timeline for the first year of the BBD project:

I. May 9, 2011

Learning Network Gathering

Report back and preparation for Film

Identify where film will be shown

Identify organizational partners to host the film: content partners, media partners, resource partners

Identify people to facilitate discussions

II. May

CRRJ hosts academics affinity group at NEU

III. MAY 18-20

BBDP Team to Greensboro, NC

IV. June

Screening of film

Public launch for Learning Network, interested partners, and leaders

V. June

Preparation for outreach

Training or distribution of curriculum

VI. June-September

Film shown throughout Boston and people invited into process

Invite people to learning network

Spell out and publicize yearlong process

Use screenings to discuss and market the project

VII. July 30

Meeting with Eduardo Gonzalez and Jill Williams

VIII. September

Learning Network Gathering: Truth Processes in the US Program at CRRJ

IX. October

African descent Program

X. December

Latino Program

XI. January, 2012

White Program

XII. March

Asian descent Program

VII. April or May

City Wide Conference

Share about the Project: who we are, where we're going

**Draft Timeline
Boston Busing/Desegregation Project**

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