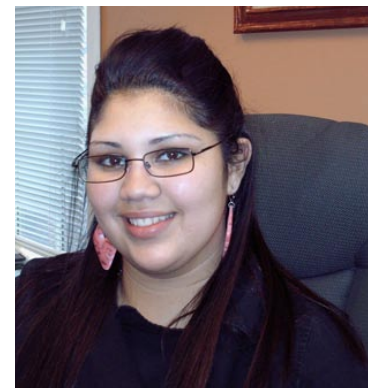
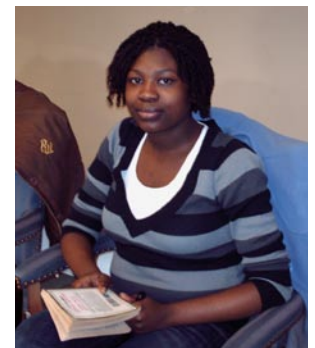
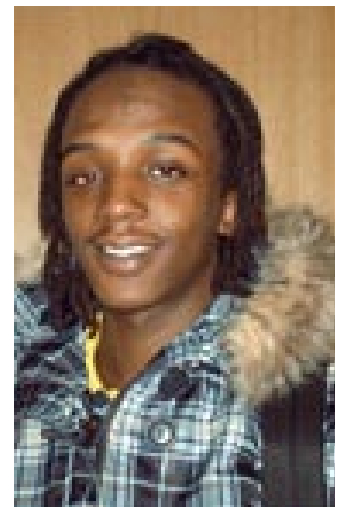


Voices of *Children* *Left Behind*

in Massachusetts Public Schools



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Voices of
Children Left Behind
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Introduction 1

Stories from Youth and Teachers, Organized by Issue

Many of the entries in this book describe experiences that illustrate more than one issue that have caused youth to be left behind in public schools. Therefore, while the entries are presented alphabetically by first name, this list of contents is organized according to the issue areas.

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Voices of Children Left Behind in Massachusetts Public Schools

Introduction

In 2001, the U.S. Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act. Its goals included improving reading and math skills, reducing racial disparities in achievement, and increasing accountability for student achievement. Instead of realizing major gains in these areas, however, the education system has suffered from unintended negative consequences, especially in those 27 states, including Massachusetts, that choose to include high stakes testing as a part of their school reform efforts. In Massachusetts this test is known as the MCAS, which was implemented in pilot form in 2000 and imposed as a graduation requirement in 2003.

Since 2001, there has been a significant rate of increase in the number of Massachusetts students living in urban areas who leave school before achieving high school graduation. In 2007, Boston Public Schools (BPS) reported a 25% increase in the dropout rate over the last seven years. A 2006 study by the Boston Youth Transitions Task Force states that “in any given year over the past five years, 1,400 to 1,600 students are dropping out of school in Boston. This compares with the approximately 3,000 students who graduate each year.” (1) The study also notes that this population of dropouts is 60% male; they are overwhelmingly youth of color; they come from Boston’s poorest neighborhoods; many have special needs; and many do not speak English as their primary language. The most recent dropout report issued by BPS documents that over 1900 students dropped out of Boston schools last year. Furthermore, the Boston experience is typical of urban public school systems throughout Massachusetts and the country. Clearly, the youth and their families who live in Boston and other urban areas are experiencing an educational crisis that is growing at an alarming rate, with consequences for the future of their children and the stability of their neighborhoods.

The Context for Urban Education

This booklet collects the experiences of 31 students who have dropped out of school or who have experienced significant struggles and of two teachers who deal every day with the challenges of working in urban schools. These stories were collected by Teen Empowerment staff members in an attempt to show the faces and lives of the real people behind the statistics about dropout rates and achievement gaps.

The students who have told their stories generally have not gone into detail about their home lives. But from working with many of these young people, Teen Empowerment staff know that most are burdened with great difficulties at home and in their neighborhoods. Their families are living at or below the poverty line. Some youth are in foster care. Some have witnessed drug

abuse or domestic violence at home. Many live in neighborhoods that have experienced violence. This is the context of the lives they bring to school.

The schools have a steady stream of children and youth arriving at their doors weighed down by these great challenges. Yet the schools are not charged with helping students deal with these challenges; more and more in the 21st century, they are charged only with raising the students' test scores.

Many students face a daunting challenge even in getting to school. In most Boston Public Schools, students are expected to be in the building before 7:30 AM. Many students have to travel over an hour by bus from home to school; many students' routes involve more than one bus; some are dependent on buses that run only once every 45 or 60 minutes. These students are waiting for the bus well before dawn, while most young people in suburban communities are still sleeping. Meanwhile, in an effort to curb tardiness, many schools have instituted strict lateness policies, so that students who arrive even a minute after the start time are not allowed into school.

Of those who arrive on time and are let into school, many find themselves in old buildings and overcrowded classrooms that are inadequate to provide for their needs. In suburban schools, typically every student gets a textbook; in Boston, teachers often have only one set of books per subject, so that students cannot take the books home. In some instances, there are not enough books for everyone in a class and teachers are forced to make photocopies of the textbooks.

Further, urban schools typically do not offer the mix of electives that are so important to students in the suburbs. Most urban schools do not offer classes in art, music, or theater. Time that may once have been allocated for these subjects is now devoted to test preparation for the MCAS. The students whose experiences you will read about here do not mention these gaps in their education; classes in the arts are so far beyond their expectations that they do not even know what they are missing.

Schools and Students in Opposition

The punitive aspects of No Child Left Behind and MCAS have placed students and teachers in opposition to each other, striving for different goals. Because of the sanctions imposed by these laws, teachers and administrators often see low-performing students not as young people in need of more help and attention, but as threats to the reputation and ultimately the independent existence of the school. Students see the schools as focused not on their well being but rather on raising the school's statistics so that it will not be labeled as "underperforming." There is significant anecdotal evidence, backed up by empirical studies (2), that pressure on school administrators to raise test scores has created a perverse incentive for them to "push out" low performing students.

In a process that has been labeled “gaming-the system,” a school removes students whose estimated test scores could bring down the school’s aggregate score. This action contributes to an appearance that the school is adequately meeting testing standards.

Schools remove students in a variety of ways, including the use of disciplinary action (suspensions, expulsions, law enforcement referrals) and academic action (making students repeat a grade or encouraging them to transfer to alternative schools or to enroll in GED programs). Students of color are often at greater risk of these actions. (2) In one telling study, David Figlio, a researcher at the University of Florida, analyzed a data set of administrative records from Florida school districts. He found that during the period when the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test was being administered, lower performing students were given longer suspensions for similar offenses than high performing students. (3) This process suggests that the schools used “selective discipline” in order to keep low-performing students out of school during test days.

In fact, there is a considerable body of evidence pointing to the conclusion that implementing high stakes tests increases dropout rates. One national study of enrollment trends, conducted by the Progress through the Education Pipeline Project at Boston College, reported that, in the years between 1990 and 2000, there was a “bump” in the number of students held back in ninth grade, and a decline in the percentage of students graduating. This trend coincided with the increased use of high stakes testing across the country. According to the report, this decline “is greatest in states that require students to pass exams in order to be promoted and/or to graduate from high school.” (4)

In line with nationwide statistics, overwhelmingly, the Massachusetts schools with the highest dropout rates are located in urban areas with large numbers of African-American and Latino students. In Boston, the reported dropout rate for the 2005-06 school year was 10.0%, compared with a statewide rate of 3.3%. Additionally, the four-year graduation rate was 80.9% statewide but only 57.9% in Boston. (5) Finally, the achievement gap has not decreased with the implementation of MCAS. For example, according to 2007 MCAS results, less than half of the city’s black and Hispanic 10th-graders reached the “proficient” level in math and English, compared to more than three-quarters of whites and Asians. (6)

Conclusion

Lowering the achievement gap requires a serious effort to address the fundamental issues that make education difficult for students. Yet in the current statistics-driven educational climate, the public discourse does not even mention these issues. Instead, educational experts are mired in discussion about test scores and how to raise them.

This report does not advocate any particular solution. Instead, it illustrates in students’ own words

how the current policies are failing to address the underlying problems these young people face as they try to make their way through the educational system. In all probability, these policies have had the unintended consequence of making things significantly worse, leading to increased urban dropout rates and a persistent widening of the achievement gap between urban and suburban students—the very problems that No Child Left and MCAS were ostensibly meant to address.

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Thanks also to the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute at Harvard University for assistance in gathering statistics.

Alexandra

Issue:	Lack of institutional support
Age:	17
Gender:	Female
School:	Greater Egleston Community High School
Education Status:	High school sophomore

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

I had a really rough year my freshmen year. I acknowledge the fact that sometimes it would be my fault for hardly attending, but I still would get my work done and the teachers would still say “why bother if you’re not going to get anywhere.” I felt like I had no support or encouragement. That used to make me think about dropping out. Yet reality hit me that my education was the key to success, no matter what teachers would say.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

The impact this had was huge. Most of the time, teachers paid attention to particular students only, such as sports players. They didn’t seem to understand that all students need the same amount of attention. I feel like that situation made me realize that teachers won’t always be there for me so I have to learn certain things on my own.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

Schools could have supported or treated me better by encouraging me to go to school, letting me know when I have a bad grade to boost it up. They could have answered my questions when I need help, and not be so focused on the sports teams.

Anonymous

Issues:	Suspension policy Lack of institutional support
Age:	23
Gender:	Female
School:	East Boston High School
Education Status:	Dropped out, enrolled in GED program

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

I've always been a loner, someone who spends a lot of time by herself. I get picked on for it a lot, and I would even get in fights because I felt I had to defend myself. When I fought, I would get sent to the office and suspended for three days. This happened over and over again; I was getting suspended three times in two months. No one ever asked me why I was getting in these fights, though I tried to explain the situation to the principal.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

Eventually, I just decided to drop out. I was getting suspended so much anyway that I just lost interest.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

Instead of just suspending me, I think the school should have had a guidance counselor or someone I could talk to about my reasons for getting in so many fights. Instead, I just figured I didn't belong at school, and I gave up.

Argenis

Issues:	Administration— <i>dropped from BPS rolls without consent</i> Pushed out
Age:	18
Gender:	Male
School:	Charlestown High School
Education Status:	Dropped from BPS rolls; tried a GED program, but has now returned to school

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

I used to miss a lot of school and had really bad attendance. I was dropped out of the Boston Public Schools list. After this, I realized that I wanted to have a nice and good future so I enrolled back in school. At first, I was making the same mistakes and had bad attendance. Then I started doing well. But after three weeks of going to school every day, I received a letter from BPS informing me that they had dropped me out of the Boston Public Schools.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

I was very upset that when I was really trying to do well, they dropped me out of BPS. There was no warning; they decided for me that I was no longer enrolled in school. When I really tried they did not care about my effort. Because of this I realized that I might get a better chance if I went to a GED program.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

The schools could have supported me better, even before I was dropped out of BPS. I wish that they could have worked with me and agreed on an attendance plan so that I wouldn't fall behind. I wish that they would have worked with me to keep me in school instead of just letting me go and dropping me out of the BPS list.

Bianca

Issue:	Lack of institutional support
Age:	17
Gender:	Female
Schools:	South Boston High Urban Science Academy
Education Status:	Dropped out; enrolled in GED program

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

I love learning. When I went to school, I would try my best, but I had a lot of trouble in math. The worst part was that I would get extremely anxious, so anxious that I would stay up all night studying. I couldn't eat or sleep and I would make myself sick. A couple of times, I ended up at the emergency room because I felt so bad. Despite all my stress, and despite all the hard work I did, I was still failing most of my classes. I tried special education classes, but they didn't seem to help.

My teachers were not sympathetic. When I was at Urban Science, where I went for ninth grade, I attended a parent teacher conference with me, my mom, and my math teacher. I was told that I just needed to pay more attention. Another time, the physics teacher at South Boston High told me I might as well drop out and live on the street because I was never going to make any money. He was angry that I was doodling on my paper, but that comment was really hurtful to someone who was struggling so much in school and had so few talents to feel confident about.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

Eventually, I got so discouraged that I stopped going to school. At first I started skipping, but my attendance gaps got bigger and bigger until I realized I wasn't really going to school at all.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

There are a lot of things the GED program does really well that the schools could learn from. We go on trips and have workshops and activities that make learning interesting and fun. I'm doing really well in all of my subjects, and have already passed three of my tests. I don't understand why I am getting such better scores here than I was at school. They always ask me why I dropped out of school.

Bryant

Issue:	Suspension policy
Age:	19
Gender:	Male
School:	Haverhill High School
Education Status:	Dropped out; enrolled in GED program

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

I was a student at Haverhill High School. There were rumors that I had been involved in a fight and the vice principal and the dean overheard some people talking about it. Without even questioning me, they suspended me on the spot. They didn't even give me time to gather my belongings, including my coat—just told me to get out, and that if I came back, I would be in danger of getting arrested. I had recently injured my leg, and it was the middle of the winter. I walked home on crutches.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

After that incident, I never returned to school. I felt extremely disrespected, and afraid that if I returned I would be locked up.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

The administration could have talked to me and gotten the real story about the fight. Instead, they listened to rumors told by a couple of kids, and then kicked me out of school. Their presumptions had a lasting impact on my education and my life, and I wish they had thought more carefully before they acted.

Chymia

Issues:	Expulsion policy / Pushed out
Age:	17
Gender:	Female
School:	Hyde Park High School Community Academy
Education Status:	Pushed out and dropped out; enrolled in GED program

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

When I was in 10th grade at Hyde Park High School, I got jumped by two girls in the hallway. The three of us went to court, and I was expelled. I am still not entirely clear on the reason for my expulsion, but recall being told I was a “menace to the school.” My friends at the time were a group of students who were always getting in trouble for cutting class and hanging out in the hallway. I went to class and had good grades, but the school assumed I was into the same trouble as my friends. The girls who jumped me got to stay in school, which I did not think was fair. It seemed like they’d been looking for an excuse to expel me, like they were looking for the “bad kids” so that they could push us out and clean up the school.

Boston Public Schools takes so long to re-enroll expelled students that the easiest thing for me to do was to enroll in Community Academy. Community Academy is for students who have been kicked out of school, so it’s full of the worst students in the district. Nobody there wanted to learn, and people would bring all kinds of weapons into school. I did want to learn, and I felt I did not belong. I lasted one full school year and a week into the next one before I dropped out.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

The circumstances at both these schools drove me to want a good education, more so than school itself ever had. I joined a GED class because I was serious about getting a real education, and felt that this path was the best route to get there.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

When I left Hyde Park High, I was in the 10th grade. I’d had good grades, and had already completed a good portion of the year. However, when I arrived at Community Academy, they insisted on making me start the 10th grade over again.

I don’t understand why you would take a decent student out of a school close to her house, and move her across town to a school full of difficult students. If the staff at Hyde Park had sat us down, they would have seen that my problems with the girls who jumped me were not ongoing; it was a one-time incident. Instead, they chose to stereotype me and then make decisions based on those stereotypes that will impact me for the rest of my life.

Craig

Issues:	Lateness policy Pushed out
Age:	19
Gender:	Male
School:	Hyde Park High School
Education Status:	Dropped out

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

At Hyde Park High, the late and tardy policy really had an effect on me and my education. Coming from Dorchester (Blue Hill), the public transportation wasn't and still isn't good enough to get students to school on time. I had to catch the 28 bus going to Mattapan and then catch the 33 or 24 to go to Hyde Park. The buses were never reliable. The school policy states if a student reaches the school at 7:25 am you're late even though school started at 7:24 am. About 60-70 kids would arrive at the school at 7:40 am. Buses usually only ran every 45 minutes to an hour. Through sun, rain, snow, tornado, hurricane, or even the end of the world, you had to reach the school at 7:24 or before. So, out of 180 days of schools, about 80% of the time I would be waiting for the 24 or 33 to go back home. They wouldn't let you into the school. They wouldn't even let you use the phone to contact your parents so that they could clarify why you were late. The students even went to MBTA officials, to see if they could agree on calling Hyde Park High to tell them the bus was late. They agreed, but still Hyde Park High didn't accept this excuse. Hot, cold, I would get up to go to school, but get rejected at the front door. Students would explain, "Look, at least we are making an effort to come to school. Can you cut us a break?" Our answer was the same, a slammed door in our faces. These acts by the school were the reason why a senior, like me at the time, dropped out. I regret dropping out but I had to look for another solution.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

This had a negative impact on my education because I never got over being turned around by a policy that was cold-hearted. It communicated to me that even if a student tried, it wasn't good enough. Because I was turned away, I missed important test dates such as the MCAS. I couldn't graduate because of 2-3 minutes. I couldn't believe that 2-3 minutes would really make my future something that I did not want.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

As a school and as a student there are rules to follow, but helping us and giving us a break could have helped, especially since the MBTA was able to stand up for us. Listening and understanding that we don't live down the street, but almost an hour away or more would have been enough. That's what they could have done instead of pushing us out — pull us in. Instead of zoning us out, listen. If we were making an effort, why couldn't they?

Damon



Issue:	Lack of institutional support
Age:	22
Gender:	Male
School:	Charlestown High School
Education Status:	Dropped out; graduated from GED program

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

I attended Charlestown High School. I truly believed that school had a lot of great expectations for me because I was involved in sports and I was very academically well skilled. My first three years there, though, I kept getting failing grades and got held back due to behavior. The criticism on my school work (where the focus should have been) was never as strong as the criticism on my behavior. I had never been in a fight or argument during my high school career. When I talk about the behavioral issues that I had in school, I am only talking about my non-engagement in the classes because I was extremely bored with the curriculum. As a result, I would talk a lot in class and not participate.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

I became quite depressed and discouraged because I did well in my school work, but kept getting held back. Eventually I became too old to be in high school and dropped out.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

Because we wore baggy clothes, talked in class, and looked a certain way, teachers and administrators judged us to be misbehaving problems in the school.

The students at BPS are already living life under harsh realities and hard times. We struggle with poverty and violence in our communities. Everyone in the school knew this but they acted blind to these facts. The world already looked at us negatively and we walked into a school that did the same. The school downsized us and treated us like we were nothing. It is supposed to be a place where you felt welcomed, but instead you felt like a criminal, because they treated you that way.

As a result of their negativity, the students would more likely become negative as well.

Debbie



Issue:	Lack of institutional support
Age:	18
Gender:	Female
School:	Somerville High School
Education Status:	Dropped out; attending an adult diploma program

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

I dropped out of school at the beginning of my senior year a few months ago. I tried to sign up for two summer school classes so that I would be able to graduate on time, but was not given permission by my headmaster. I'm not really sure why I wasn't allowed to attend summer school for these classes, when I had never failed them before, but without them I couldn't pass the year.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

Leaving school has had a major impact on both my education and my career. Now, instead of waking up every day to go to school, most weekday mornings I do nothing. Being unable to finish high school like most students has made me feel like a failure. Even though I've enrolled in an alternative program, it's not the same and I wish I could have made it.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

Once I get my diploma, I'm going back to Somerville High so I can prove to them that I can achieve my goals without them! There was no support from the adults at the high school. The teachers at my school could have looked at me as an individual and taken my situation into consideration to help me graduate. I also wish that the headmaster would have communicated to me clearly as to why I could not take summer school in order to graduate. Instead, he gave me no alternatives and accepted the fact that I would drop out.

Dominicke



Issue:	Inferior education (BPS)
Age:	21
Gender:	Male
School:	Bedford High School Hyde Park High School
Education Status:	Graduate of Job Corps; received GED; enrolled in Bunker Hill Community College

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

From fourth grade through ninth grade, I attended Bedford Public Schools through the METCO program. Bedford was excellent--I always had great materials and books, the building was beautiful, the teachers were respectful, and the classes were orderly.

In ninth grade, I transferred to Hyde Park High. The quality of my education plummeted. I was learning the same material in ninth grade at Hyde Park that I had learned in seventh grade in Bedford. My classes were huge, with as many as 30 students in them. We didn't have enough books so that students weren't allowed to take them home to study. The building was old and run down. The classroom environment was chaotic, and disruptive behavior of some students took the teacher's attention away from helping students who wanted to learn. Then there were the teachers that were disrespectful to students. Once when I asked a teacher a question, she refused to answer and then told me that I would never amount to anything. When I asked my guidance counselor for help, she couldn't really do anything because she had a lot of other students to keep track of. In fact, she wasn't even able to remember who I was.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

When I was 16, I decided that the best thing I could do for my future was to drop out of school and join Job Corps. At Job Corps I got my GED and vocational training. I think I made the right choice because Job Corps turned out to be a better use of my time than staying in a school where so little learning was happening. When I went to Bedford, I knew I was being prepared for a successful future. When I went to Hyde Park, I knew I was wasting my time.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

Everyone talks about how urban youth have trouble achieving academically. But look at the difference in how we're being treated. One student gets a great building, new books, interesting curriculum, plenty of attention from their teachers. The other gets old books, worn out buildings, worn out teachers, and one overcrowded MCAS prep class after another. I think it's pretty obvious who is going to do better. The state legislature needs to make sure that the students of Boston get all the same opportunities as the students of Bedford.

Esther

Issue:	Major changes with no student input
Age:	16
Gender:	Female
School:	English High School Hyde Park High School
Education Status:	Dropped out; enrolled in GED program

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

Something that made me want to drop out of school was when English High turned into a pilot school. A lot of the changes English has gone through have had positive impacts on our education, including having more time to study and learn. There is better structure so that people can focus on their work, and there are also lots of student activities to choose from. However, there were no opportunities for students or parents to present our opinions on what changes were going to be made. As a result there are still a lot of things that don't work either. The school did once ask if any students were interested in coming to a meeting to discuss reform of English High, and a lot of us signed up. Later, we found out they never notified us about the meeting and made all the decisions without our input.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

Once the changes took place, the school day became longer and this impacted many people who work after school because they could no longer keep their work schedules and stay in school. By the time we found out about the changes, it was too late to transfer schools or to change the school schedule.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

The school could have treated us better by involving us in the decision making process, or at least warning us further in advance about the changes. People could have gotten prepared for the idea, transferred to schools that would better accommodate them, and perhaps given input that would make the school more productive for everyone.

Ever

Issues:	Expulsion policy Pushed out
Age:	22
Gender:	Male
School:	Chelsea High School
Education Status:	Dropped out; enrolled in GED program

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

I got kicked out of Chelsea High because I was falsely accused of doing graffiti on school property. I had gotten in trouble a number of times before that, and I got the feeling the principal really didn't like me. He asked me to bring my mother in so that he could have a conference with her. I explained to him that I don't live with my mother, and that it would not be possible for her to come in and meet with him. He responded that that was not his problem, and kicked me out.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

I didn't mind leaving school, because I was sick of going. I was sick of knowing I wasn't going to get anything done, and knowing they just expected me to fool around anyway. I didn't feel supported there.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

The principal needed to deal with me in a fair way. He shouldn't have blamed me for something he had no evidence for, just because of my behavior in the past. Also, the school should be finding ways to deal with difficult students besides pushing them out. We're often the ones who need the most help.

Gabriel

Issues:	MCAS Lack of institutional support
Age:	16
Gender:	Male
School:	Madison Park High School
Education Status:	Dropped out

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

I dropped out because I couldn't pass the MCAS. In my senior year I was going to night school so that I could pass, but I still could not after taking these classes. At this time I also had so much distraction going on in my personal life. There was just too much stress and pressure from school and home. I felt like it was too much and I signed myself out of school.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

The night school in addition to regular school hours took up all of my time. I could not find time to take care of my other responsibilities. The MCAS stressed me out so much that it hurt the other parts of my education; it made me hate school even more. I already did not like school because I felt like the teachers sucked and the time that school started was way too early for the students. We all lived far away from school.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

The school could have given me an MCAS prep class during the day instead of just putting me in night school. Or perhaps if there wasn't MCAS to give so much pressure, it would have helped. It would have helped to also have supportive teachers who believed in me as well. For me, just hearing a teacher say to me "you can make it" would have helped a lot.

Gregory



Issues:	Suspension policy Truancy policy Lack of institutional support
Age:	15
Gender:	Male
School:	John D. O'Bryant High School
Education Status:	Freshman

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

Some things that make me think about dropping out of school are some of the teachers' attitudes towards their students, as well as the unfair rules that the school sets up. For example, when I didn't feel like going to school, I just skipped. When I got caught skipping they just suspended me for five days. To be honest, I didn't see the point. It was like they were doing me a favor by not making me come to school. I don't know much, but I guess it would have been better to make me stay after school and attend those classes that I missed.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

The impact that those circumstances had on my education was that I ended up missing more days and falling even further behind on my work. I had so much work to make up and I barely knew the material. My class was so far ahead. I felt as if I was being left on an island as my friends went away somewhere on a boat. That made me definitely not want to come back to school.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

This all could have been prevented if the school actually encouraged me to be in class rather than not be in school. My school could be friendlier and could help students out when they are in need. They also need a better way of dealing with misbehaving students instead of discouraging them.

Jane

Issue:	MCAS
School:	Community Academy of Science and Health (Hyde Park Education Complex)
Education Status:	Boston Public School teacher for 4 years

Something that happens in education that inhibits students' ability to learn or stay in school

The MCAS exam as a graduation requirement does not adequately promote student success. It is a biased and unfair test because it targets students who attend disadvantaged public schools. Students who attend private schools are not subject to taking the MCAS as a graduation requirement. In addition to already having greater resources, these students do not have to face the extra stresses and challenge of passing a test in order to receive a high school diploma. Furthermore, the instruction they receive in the classroom is not comprised of “MCAS prep” or “MCAS review” as it is in the public schools. Not only do private school students experience a well-integrated, interdisciplinary classroom environment; they also are able to complete their academic careers as better-rounded individuals who have not had to spend practically the last term of their schooling taking a test.

How this impacts students and my ability to be a successful educator

This policy impacts my ability to be a successful educator on a daily basis because the lessons have become less hands-on and experiential as the date of MCAS draws near. As an ESL teacher and former Special Education teacher, I feel that this is an unnecessary, insurmountable challenge for my students in particular. For example, research proves that it takes at least 7 years to acquire another language proficiently, but my students are given a year to learn a completely different language and asked to pass one test that will determine their future.

Furthermore, because the MCAS is overly emphasized in the curriculum, passing the test gives students a false sense of completion. Students who pass MCAS feel that they have completed their high school career and they do the bare minimum amount of work in order to get a diploma. The MCAS exam undermines the school, as well as the teacher’s true assessment of the student’s academic ability and level.

How the school could better support teachers and students

The exam may have some merits; however, it undeniably is perpetuating the status quo. The test needs to be eliminated as a graduation requirement. But, if the MCAS is so important that it be a graduation requirement, then out of fairness, ALL schools in Massachusetts—private, parochial, independent, charter, pilot, Montessori, or public—should have to take it.

Jonathan

Issues:	Pushed out Lack of institutional support Suspension policy
Age:	18
Gender:	Male
School:	Chelsea High School
Education Status:	Dropped out; enrolled in GED program

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

When I was at Chelsea High, I was a couple of years older than most of the people in my grade. This was due to my staying back, moving a lot, and spending time in DYS. There are also policies that make it hard to advance, like one that says if you miss three days of school in one quarter, you automatically fail for the quarter. I often got the sense that, because they knew I was older and had stayed back a few times, the administration didn't want to invest much in helping me graduate and even wanted me to leave the school. In the second and third quarter of tenth grade, they started suspending me for silly things, like coming to school without my name badge. Even though I was working hard in my classes, it seemed like the only attention I got was suspensions for these kinds of silly mistakes.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

I went to school every day feeling like crap, just waiting to see how they were going to suspend me today. I didn't see the point of doing my work if my improvements weren't going to get recognized. My classes were overcrowded, and I didn't get the help I needed to succeed in school. I ended up dropping out because my education didn't seem worthwhile to myself or my school.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

The school could have provided me with more individualized attention, especially in algebra. In general, I think the school needed to give me more positive reinforcement.

Joshua S.



Issue:	Lack of institutional support
Age:	14
Gender:	Male
School:	Woodrow Wilson Middle School
Education Status:	8th grade student

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

I want to tell you about some of the hurtful experiences I went through during elementary school. I went to the Taylor Elementary School. I had ADHD, and my medicine wasn't working for me. I needed a lot of support. But in giving me that support, teachers seemed to judge me. They assumed I was going to act up in class. I would overhear them talking about me. My teachers saw me as someone different. I also wasn't getting the help I needed to do better on my work. The teachers focused on the kids who had better skills than I did, kids who could read and write. Every time I asked for help, the teacher would say, okay, I'll help you in a few minutes. I'd wait and wait, and then the class would be over and I would still not have gotten the help I needed.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

I just got the message that no one thought I was going to make it.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

When I got to the Woodrow Wilson Middle School, everything changed. My teachers were nicer than they had been at my other school. I felt like they were people who understood my passion and what I'd been through. They could talk to me and give me advice about how to avoid acting up and getting into trouble with the wrong people. I needed to work on how to manage my anger with adults and students, and I've gotten really good advice on how to do that. I'm also in a better class now, and having supportive teachers has made a bigger difference than I would ever have thought. Respectful teachers aren't only able to help you with your work. They're also able to help you respect yourself, even in times of struggle. Our schools need teachers who know how to handle students of all levels of ability, and can teach us to respect ourselves and each other.

Joshua T.

Issues:	Lateness policy Bathroom pass policy
Age:	16
Gender:	Male
School:	Monument High School / South Boston Education Complex
Education Status:	High school sophomore

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

There are two policies that I have a problem with. First, there is new policy that if you come in tardy three times to a class it counts as an absence. The second policy is that you cannot go to the bathroom when you need to. You must go in between periods. This can be difficult especially now that we have double blocks in English Language Arts and Math.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

The tardy policy impacted me because I have come in late to classes because I cannot get to school on time and therefore I am marked absent. As a result, I have received bad grades in my classes, even though I do my work. The bathroom policy has affected me as well. When I need to use the bathroom I can't go and therefore I cannot focus.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

The schools should have left the bathroom policy as it was – just get the pass and go. That would really help me focus a little more. They can try to change the tardy policy so that it is not so harsh and understand that students have a difficult time getting to school on time because they do live far from school.

Levar

Issue:	MCAS
Age:	21
Gender:	Male
School:	Charlestown High School
Education Status:	Dropped out; enrolled in GED program

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

I failed the MCAS three times. I felt like there was no hope. I felt heartbroken. I felt that even though I tried my best in school there was no winning for me because I couldn't pass the MCAS. Therefore I could not continue with my future.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

I felt stupid for not passing the MCAS and I did not feel that I was receiving the proper preparation. Teachers would focus attention and help students that they favored. As a result I dropped out of school.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

Teachers should have given more support and prepared us better for the MCAS. Oftentimes the preparation that we did have was not of quality. The material that they gave us for preparation did not match the material that was on the MCAS. As a result I always felt like I studied for nothing.

Marsha

Issue:	Inferior education — <i>specifically, inadequate materials and inadequate support for teachers</i>
School:	John D. O’Bryant High School
Education Status:	Teacher

Something that happened in my education that inhibits students’ ability to learn or stay in school

While students may not fail, they are unable to reach their highest potential at John D. O’Bryant for a number of reasons:

- 1) Inadequate support for science and technology. In the words of the NEASC Commission, “You are not a school of math and science.” Equipment is old and dilapidated and frequently jerry-rigged.
- 2) Materials are not provided.

How this impacts students and my ability to be a successful educator

The O’Bryant student body does not receive the same level of support given the city’s other exam schools. The constant scramble for materials and supplies is disheartening and adversely affects morale of students and staff.

Teachers (some) are not given decent teaching schedules or places to teach. A veteran science teacher returned to O’Bryant in September 2007 to find his room reassigned, and now he has to teach Biology I and II out of a cart he rolls to different rooms. He was given a desk to call his own in a dark, dank, windowless storeroom.

How the school could better support teachers and students

First and foremost, staff should be treated fairly. Secondly, the school’s administration has a moral obligation to vigorously advocate for its student body, which I believe receives a second rate education because of its ethnicity.

Melvin

Issue:	Lack of institutional support
Age:	21
Gender:	Male
School:	Hyde Park High School
Education Status:	Dropped out; enrolled in GED program

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

There is not a lot of support and encouragement from teachers in the schools. They are quick to give up on us. When I first thought of leaving school I was in middle school. My guidance counselor told me that I was not going to pass and I shouldn't even bother going to summer school. I was young and my only thought was, "Wow, the whole summer, no school." Later reality set in and I ended up playing catch up and forced myself to go to summer school every year afterwards.

In high school, the school's lack of caring was horrific. They were very quick to kick me and other students out of class. This didn't solve any problems because students would just wander through hallways, run around, and disturb other classes.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

They tried to treat us like adults, but that does not work when there is no caring or guidance. This is why I dropped out, there was no one who cared or looked out for me, I was dispensable.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

We need teachers who care. Teachers need to be more into their jobs, not just teach, but develop a bond with their students. Even if students are being hardheaded, teachers should pull them aside and have a conversation with the student, don't just kick them out. Students would adjust their behavior if they see that teachers are really trying.

There should be more support to help struggling students. If they see students slipping they need to assign students to an adult to look out for them. They should tutor us and make classes smaller and so it could be controlled more.

Mia

Issue:	Inferior education— <i>specifically, large classes, poor classroom environment</i>
Age:	16
Gender:	Female
School:	Greater Egleston Community High School
Education Status:	High school sophomore

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

At the age of 15, I was attending Social Justice Academy as a freshman. I knew it was going to be a new experience, but the experience I had was unbelievable in a negative way. Before I chose to go to Social Justice Academy, my mother did a background check on the school. I especially liked the name, because as a child I always wanted to become a judge or a lawyer.

I began school with an open mind. But the school was not what I thought it was. I had difficulties in each class. The main reason for this was because these classes were too big; students weren't getting along with each other, and did not respect other's wishes of getting a good education. Also the teachers just weren't living up to their part. What I mean by this is, if one student was being disrespectful they both would take up the whole class period arguing. I was going to school to hear teachers and students argue.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

This is when I became stressed out. On my first report card, I received D's and C's, which had never happened before. Each term, I tried harder but I wasn't making any progress. So I had the thoughts that many teenagers have and those were of dropping out of school. It felt like I was going to school just to be present and I felt like I could not put up with all the lies the school told both my mother and me. While having the thoughts of dropping out, I started coming to school late and not doing any work at all. Then I slowly just stopped going at all. It got worse when I realized that I was not the only student who wanted to drop out. I let my mother know that if I stayed at that school another year, I would be guaranteed to drop out.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

The support from the staff at the school was not what I expected it to be. It seemed like they had problems of their own so they just didn't care about students' school problems.

Michael



Issues:	Inferior education— <i>specifically, inadequate resources</i> MCAS Lack of institutional support
Age:	14
Gender:	Male
School:	John D. O’Bryant High School
Education Status:	High school freshman

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

Lack of teacher’s help is one problem for my low grades. I have a history teacher that is not willing to take her time to stay after school to help those kids in need. So we are failing and teachers don’t want to help, then comes along MCAS prep. Everyone is worried about MCAS and we have to study for it instead of looking at the important stuff like passing your classes. So there is really no time to do my work and excel in school.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

With that said it has really impacted my grades in school. I went from being salutatorian in middle school to coming into high school with grades that are either C’s or lower. I think those grades are horrible and are only partly my fault. I want to be salutatorian again or do even better and even become valedictorian like I hoped for in the first place.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

My school could have treated me better by giving me much better resources. My school is an exam school in BPS called the O’Bryant but yet we have torn up textbooks with no cover at all, literature books that are missing pages, so pages are photocopied to paste into the book.... Some classes have no window. Does that sound like a positive environment for BPS students?

Make BPS schools a place where students want to be.

Miguel

Issues:	Inferior education— <i>specifically, large classes</i> Lack of institutional support
Age:	20
Gender:	Male
School:	English High School
Education Status:	Dropped out; enrolled in GED program

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

I dropped out of English High School in the ninth grade. The school was over populated, and the classes were crowded. It was extremely difficult to learn, especially when over half the class didn't want to. I kept trying to ask for help, but it seemed like my teachers were always too busy controlling the class. When they did give personalized attention, it went more toward the students who were getting good grades. My grades began to fall. My teachers took this as a sign that I wasn't serious about my work, and they seemed to categorize me as a class clown.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

Because they saw me as a goofball, I started to act like one. They didn't take me seriously when I asked for help, so I stopped asking for help and began to give up on myself. I felt dumb, and forgot the good skills that I did possess.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

Instead of making assumptions about my abilities, the school could have worked with me to identify what my learning issues were. If they'd really have made the effort to understand me, they would have seen that I wanted to do well and perhaps they could have provided me with some kind of extra academic support. In general, I just wish they took all of their students more seriously—even the ones who aren't making honor roll.

Nastasha



Issues:	Lack of institutional support MCAS
Age:	19
Gender:	Female
School:	Madison Park High School
Education Status:	Dropped out; enrolled in GED program

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

I started elementary school late and was held back in the sixth grade because of my attendance. When I got held back, I felt like my life was put on hold and I didn't know what to do. I thought of not coming back or just dropping out completely, but I didn't give up. When I got to high school, I was so excited because I built my life's goals around finishing high school. I attended Madison Park High and thought it was such a great school because I got a feel of the whole vocational experience. That was until I started to understand what the curriculum was based on and that it was teaching to a test we all know as the MCAS.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

Boston Public Schools left a negative impact on me because in a way I felt like I was being used because I wasn't getting the proper education. I felt stuck because as soon as I would start to get my life together it seemed like the school system would just stop me in my tracks. I was too old to be in the ninth grade. The administrators didn't care about my feelings so I asked the guidance counselor what I could do. She helped me apply to Day and Evening Academy but I got denied because they said I wasn't enrolled in a Boston Public School. After that I gave up and signed myself out. Now I attend Everest Institute and I'm studying to become a dental assistant. It's still a constant struggle because I never finished school. I now have to go back and take a night class to get my GED so that I can graduate from my school.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

The school could've helped me in so many ways, like giving me options. Because the school is so big and the administration isn't as large, they don't have the time to deal with each and every student. For that reason, I felt like the individual attention and support I needed was really hard to obtain from my teachers. I wish I didn't have to get in trouble to be acknowledged.

Orleuse



Issue:	MCAS—especially its impact on ELL students
Age:	18
Gender:	Female
School:	Community Academy of Science and Health
Education Status:	High school senior

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

One thing that made me think about dropping out of school is the MCAS. It's been four times that I have taken the MCAS. I passed the math test, but I can not pass the English one. Even though I read, studied and practiced the MCAS, I still can not pass it. I believe that a big reason why I can not pass is because English is not my first language. My family and I moved to this country from Haiti in 2005. My first language is Haitian-Creole.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

The impact that not passing the MCAS has on my education is that I can not focus on my school work. Every time I am doing my homework or listening to teachers speak, my head goes somewhere else. I always think about the MCAS. If I don't pass I will not be able to move on with my education, especially since I have already been accepted to Salem State. It hurts me so bad to see that I spent three years in a school, only to not graduate because of a test. What is worse is that I am now being required to take an after-school language requirement for French, a language I already know fluently. Taking this class has forced me to leave my job. At my job I was improving my English by writing, and speaking more. The after-school French class will make it harder for me to pass the MCAS.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

The School could have supported me by making us graduate with the grades that we have. If a student has an A or B they should be able to graduate, but they don't do that. They make sure you pass the MCAS to graduate. The support of teachers can help us too, by letting people know about our work in the classroom. Also, the schools should be better at supporting students who are still learning English and letting them know what options they have for the MCAS.

Randy

Issues:	MCAS (<i>limiting further education</i>) Lack of institutional support
Age:	20
Gender:	Male
School:	Madison Park High School
Education Status:	Graduated in 2007 with a vocational diploma

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

One thing that made me think about dropping out was the MCAS, because I felt that there was no reason to do it. The way I see it, if I have good grades all year, and I was passing all my classes, why should a test determine if I graduate or not when I worked so hard all year. But I took the test, because it was required. I thought that I had passed it, especially since my high school gave me a diploma.

But, I just found out that I missed passing the MCAS by 4 points. I found this information out on the 22nd of January 2008, when I went up to Roxbury Community College to apply for admission. I went there, showed the lady my transcript, and she said that she needed to see my final year grades for my senior year of high school. So I left and went to Madison Park High School to see the guidance counselor. He pulled up my MCAS scores and that was when I found out that I failed the MCAS. They didn't even send me any papers in the mail to let me know if I had passed or failed. I had even been given what I thought was a diploma from my high school.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

When I found out, I was crushed because I really wanted to go to college to further my education and play college basketball. But now I have to wait because I have to take the MCAS over in March.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

The school could have supported me and treated me better by letting me know that I didn't pass the MCAS last November. They could have given me better information and not allowed me to walk out of the school with what I believed was my diploma. No one ever spoke with me about my MCAS status and what my choices were.

Sable



Issues:	Lack of institutional support Inferior education
Age:	18
Gender:	Female
School:	University High School
Education Status:	High school senior

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

I went to Charlestown High School after spending two years at MATCH [charter school]. I felt that it would be an easy ride, a little less strict than MATCH. But it was not easier because it was out of control and unorganized. I could not focus in any of my classes, so I felt as if it was a waste of time. I was also having trouble at home. This made it even harder to stay focused and motivated in school.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

I stopped going to school and I got a job at a Dunkin Donuts and started working full-time. This held me back for two extra years. But I did eventually realize that I had made a mistake, and I returned to school at University High.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

I could have had a counselor who talked to me or helped me to figure out what was going on. At that time I needed to talk to someone who could have showed me that Dunkin Donuts is not a dream job and school was the best way. But there was no one who even seemed to care that I dropped out.

Stephanie

Issues:	Administration— <i>credits lost</i> Lack of institutional support
Age:	19
Gender:	Female
School:	English High School
Education Status:	Dropped out; enrolled in GED program

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

When I was 17, I became pregnant. I was at English High School, and I left to attend a school for pregnant girls. When I returned to English High, they said they never received my credits and that I would not be able to move on to the next grade, 12th grade. I followed up with my guidance counselor, but she wasn't able to make any progress on getting proof of my work.

The following year, I returned to school. I was now in eleventh grade. Later that year, I became pregnant again. This time, I did not register for the school for pregnant girls because I didn't want to risk my credits not transferring again. However, my current school schedule did not allow me to attend the doctor's appointments I needed to go to. I ended up dropping out.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

Because my credits wouldn't transfer, I was 19 and in the 11th grade, so I decided to leave school. Nobody that I spoke to about this decision tried to stop me or present me with alternatives; my guidance counselors and teachers just signed the papers necessary to let me drop out.

I dropped out because I didn't think the credits would transfer from the school for pregnant girls, because it didn't transfer the first time. Also, I knew I'd be able to get a GED more easily than a diploma, because the GED class would give me the flexibility to take care of my pregnancy.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

English High could have worked harder to get the credits from the other school I had attended. They also could have tried to find a way to help me stay in school, instead of just signing the papers for me to leave. Most of the students in my GED class are females who dropped out of high school because they got pregnant. Maybe the schools should have some way of accommodating these students so that we don't have to choose between getting an education and taking care of ourselves.

Steven



Issues:	Administration— <i>reassigned as a freshman without explanation</i> Lack of institutional support
Age:	18
Gender:	Male
School:	Charlestown High School
Education Status:	Dropped out; enrolled in GED program

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

I was enrolled as an eleventh grader at Charlestown High School and that year we had a new unit leader. The new unit leader needed to update grade assignments for all students who had attended summer school. I was one of those students. She wanted to reassign me as a freshman. I tried to talk to her and ask her why this was happening. She kept on saying that she did not know why. I tried for a week to understand, but could not get any clear answers. I got frustrated and discouraged; I did not want to start again as a freshman. I decided to leave school. No one from the school ever followed up on me to find out what happened to me.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

I never got the proper attention that a student should get. No one takes the time to help you out, for example, give you one on one time. Instead it seems that they would rather fail you or send you to summer school or just keep you back. Instead of wanting to help you the teachers would rather not deal with you.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

The school could have focused on those who need more help. I needed teachers who really wanted to help me, give me one on one time. I needed teachers who took the time to ask me if I understood something. Instead, teachers just threw worksheets at you.

Tanya

Issue:	Lack of institutional support
Age:	17
Gender:	Female
School:	Greater Egleston Community High School
Education Status:	High school sophomore

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

Something that happened in my old school that led me to fail was the fact that teachers really didn't care about me and my education. They didn't teach or help me. When I needed help and didn't understand the material they were giving me, they didn't bother to help me understand it. They just gave us worksheets and did their own things. If we needed help they sometimes helped us but most of the time they would tell us to ask the other students to help us. When in reality most of us didn't know what we were doing.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

This situation had a big impact on me because this demonstrated that not a lot of people really care about you. I tried to understand them. They probably didn't feel well or had something going on in their lives. That is probably why they ignored us. Another way this impacted me and my education is that my grades weren't great. But I consider them good, considering that most of the teachers didn't teach us what we needed to know to pass their classes with honors.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

In my opinion, the school could have supported us by trying to listen to us and hear us saying that we wanted a real teacher to teach us. But they didn't listen to us, instead they told us it's too late to get a new teacher, and that we needed to focus on our work and not to get involved or worry about other situations. I just couldn't understand why they said that, because it does involve me, it involves my education, and if they mess with my education, they are messing with me.

Tiffany



Issue:	Lack of institutional support <i>(especially regarding safety)</i>
Age:	21
Gender:	Female
School:	Charlestown High School
Education Status:	High school graduate

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

There was an incident with these two kids that didn't get along because they were from different neighborhoods. It started inside the school, then when school was out it started again. They started shooting outside the school, one kid and a security guard got shot. That made me want to leave school because I didn't know if they were going to come back the next day and retaliate. To me it was like where is the safety? If I don't feel safe then I don't want to be there.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

I felt like my life was on the line and I had to make a decision on how to deal with it. I was put in a situation that I shouldn't have been in. I didn't want to switch schools. I was there for so long that if I did a transfer it would have taken too long to finish school. I had no real support or advice from the school on what to do and I was extremely upset. Even some teachers were so scared and distracted by it that they couldn't teach how they usually did.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

I think they should have made it a bigger issue than they did. They should have investigated the situation and made sure that it wouldn't be able to happen again. Also show the kids that they were more concerned! When it happens in the suburbs, they give them counseling and a day off. They didn't do that for us, nor did they lock the school down. So we just came to school the next day. They had no student support; they did nothing about it. Then a similar situation happened later in the year—someone got stabbed. Things like that are going to keep happening until we take better care of our schools and make the students our main priority.

Wilmary



Issue:	Inferior education
Age:	17
Gender:	Female
School:	Charlestown High School
Education Status:	High school senior

Something that happened in my education that inhibited my ability to learn or stay in school

I attend Charlestown High School as a senior. This is my first year at the school. The problem that I have with the school is that it is all broken down. The classrooms look horrible. The classes contain tables and chairs that are worn down and broken. The tables are chipped and broken and cannot stand straight and sturdy. Also, the teachers' materials are not entirely available. There are not enough textbooks, so we have to use photocopied pages. Not only that, but overcrowded classes make it hard to read the old out-of-date chalkboard in the front of the class.

The impact this had/has on me and my education

The impact this has had on my education is that I feel like the government does not care about our schools and instead provides us with a building that is not a healthy learning environment. The uncomfortable rooms and furniture and general rundown nature of the school make me feel worthless. It makes me wonder if they feel like we are not worth investing resources in.

How the school could have supported or treated me better

We need better buildings, more resources, and enough materials for our classrooms.



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