

Brookline schools to eliminate Office of Educational Equity amid budget cuts

By **James Vaznis** Globe Staff, Updated March 20, 2025, 2:16 p.m.



The Brookline School Committee in a divided vote plans to eliminate the Office of Educational Equity as part of an effort to close a projected \$8 million budget shortfall next year. LANE TURNER/GLOBE STAFF

Social justice advocates in Brookline are pushing to save the Office of Educational Equity after the School Committee voted to eliminate it as part of an effort to address an [\\$8 million budget shortfall next year](#).

The controversial 5-4 vote last week came as President Trump has been attempting to abolish [diversity, equity and inclusion programs from the nation's schools](#) — a point

not lost on social justice advocates and some School Committee members who voted against the motion.

“We made clear before the vote and since [then] that this absolutely aligns Brookline with the Trump administration’s attempt to eliminate offices like the Office of Educational Equity in Brookline,” said Raul Fernandez, executive director of Brookline for Racial Justice & Equity and a Brookline parent. “One would think that in a moment like this that communities like Brookline would lean into equity.”

But School Committee members who voted in favor of cutting the office stressed their decision was based on budgetary considerations, especially as they try to avoid cuts that would directly impact students and educators in their classrooms.

They also noted the district’s work in diversity, equity, and inclusion will continue, although some adjustments will need to be made.

“We remain committed through our faculty and staff to continue to support policies and practices within our school communities so every student can experience a safe and welcoming environment,” Jesse Hefter, a committee member, said in an interview.

Superintendent Linus Guillory Jr. reaffirmed his commitment to equity in a statement, saying it remains a core value of the district.

“Given the magnitude of our projected budget gap for next year, a number of Central Offices positions were suggested to the committee to consider for mitigating the gap,” he said.

Students of color represent more than half of the 7,023 pupils enrolled in Brookline schools, according to state data, while wide gaps in achievement persist among students of different backgrounds on the state’s annual MCAS exams.

The Office of Educational Equity is a small operation, consisting of an executive director and an assistant director, and works in conjunction with equity teams at individual

schools. The office, which operates on an approximately \$350,000 budget, also coordinates the professional development for educators and participates in educator recruitment events.

The School Committee is about halfway through in getting next year's budget down to approximately \$142 million, which would align with [initial revenue projections](#).

Many questions abound over how Brookline has wound up with the projected shortfall. Guillory in his initial budget request last month attributed it to “contractual obligations, newly requested positions and structural deficit/gap elements.”

But a former special education official has [accused the district of financial mismanagement](#). The Brookline Select Board and School Committee decided last month to [pursue an audit](#) of the school district's “budget and management processes.”

Many districts around the state are currently [grappling with difficult budget decisions](#), which are largely due to [inflation](#) and rising costs, and are targeting central office positions to avoid classroom cuts.

Many districts ramped up equity work as achievement gaps among students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds widened during the pandemic and in the aftermath of the 2020 Minneapolis police killing of George Floyd. Concerns regarding racial discrimination in schools also increased during that time.

But Trump is pushing to abolish diversity, equity, and inclusion programs in all aspects of government — dubbing such efforts as [“illegal” and “immoral”](#) in a Jan. 20 presidential order. [Some Asian-American and white parents have waged legal challenges to](#) initiatives prioritizing Black and Latino students, while social conservatives have been trying to restrict the rights of transgender students in public schools.

In Massachusetts, Trump's quest [has led to a standoff](#) with Governor Maura Healey and Attorney General Andrea Campbell, both of whom directed educators last month to stay the course on diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.

The national debate flared up during the Brookline School Committee meeting on March 13 in the moments leading up to the board's divided vote.

Mariah Nobrega, a School Committee member, said during the meeting she was greatly concerned about eliminating the Office of Educational Equity amid the federal dismantling of such programs and more broadly the US Department of Education.

"I think that our students and our staff deserve better," she said. "They deserve to feel safe. They deserve to feel protected. And while the federal government is not providing those levels of protections, and in fact, is making people feel vulnerable and scared, we need to be reinforcing those protections locally."

Social justice advocates are trying to persuade the School Committee to restore the Office of Educational Equity by using external funds. Advocates are seeking donations from various organizations and also are urging the district to eventually use a portion of its state grant for Metco, a voluntary integration program that allows students of color from Boston to attend Brookline schools. Metco also works on other school diversity initiatives.

Fernandez said advocates recognize the School Committee is facing tough budget decisions, but the Office of Educational Equity plays a critical role in keeping students safe.

"We know we should be doing this work," he said. "We have issues related to bias in our schools."

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