



english for **NEW
BOSTONIANS**

ESOL for Parents and Caregivers Curriculum

Navigating BPS: Unit 1 *School Overview*

Activities:

- #1: Exploring the BPS Guide for Families and Students**
- #2: Finding Your Way on the BPS website**
- #3: How Schools Are Structured (b)**
- #4: Who Works in a School (b)**
- #5: How Do Schools in Your Country Compare to Schools in the United States?**
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- #7: Using the BPS Calendar: Overview (b)**
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Developed by Susan Klaw

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About English for New Bostonians

English for New Bostonians (ENB) invests in the future of our region by fostering a high-quality ESOL system that prepares immigrants to pursue their educational, economic and civic aspirations. Through grant making, training teachers, and building public awareness, ENB expands the number of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) seats, improves program quality across agencies, customizes curricula to diverse subpopulations, and leverages private and public resources. Founded in 2001 by the Mayor's Office for Immigrant Advancement (MOIA), immigrant leaders, and local foundations, ENB now involves several city departments, approximately 20 public and private funders, and numerous community organizations.

About the ESOL for Parents and Caregivers Initiative

Through ESOL for Parents and Caregivers, ENB guides ESOL providers and immigrant-rich schools in building partnerships to facilitate parent engagement in schools, enabling parents/caregivers to improve their English and digital literacy skills, navigate school systems, and understand expectations and opportunities for school involvement and ways to optimize children's learning. At the same time, ESOL for Parents helps adults prepare to pursue their own educational and employment goals, *while supporting children's learning – aiming to eliminate multigenerational poverty.*

About Susan Klaw

Susan Klaw has directed, taught in, and developed original curriculum materials for Boston-based parent ESOL programs since 1991. She has delivered extensive training locally and nationally on various aspects of Family Literacy and been named a "Literacy Champion" by the Massachusetts Literacy Foundation, Parent Educator of the Year by the Children's Trust Fund, and Adult Educator of the Year by the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education.

About the ESOL for Parents and Caregivers Curriculum

The Curriculum (on ENB website and available free of charge) gives ESOL teachers background materials, lessons and activities designed to help immigrant parents learn English and become more effectively involved in their children's education. Selecting curriculum units and lessons relevant to their classes, ESOL teachers can orient immigrant parents to the U.S. school system and provide practical skills such as interpreting report cards, participating in teacher conferences, advocating for children, and supporting children's learning at home. While some information is Boston specific, much can be used in any locale. ENB can assist in adapting materials for school districts. Additionally, ENB offers a Companion Middle/High School Guide, as well as a Digital Learning Guide to support online instruction.

Using the ESOL for Parents and Caregivers Curriculum

All materials are intended to be downloaded and widely used. Please cite English for New Bostonians and credit English for New Bostonians on all reproductions. We welcome feedback and stories on how you and your students are using the ESOL for Parents and Caregivers Curriculum!

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Contact us at info@englishfornewbostonians.org
or visit us online at www.englishfornewbostonians.org

Note to Teachers about Unit 1- Navigating BPS

Many of the activities in this unit are specific to the Boston Public Schools. However, the concepts are easily adapted to other school systems. Exploring the BPS website can be turned into Exploring the Somerville Website for example. All of the calendar activities can be adapted using other districts' calendars. Activities #3, 4 and 5 can be used in any parent ESOL classes. They are not specific to Boston.

ACTIVITY #1: EXPLORING THE BPS GUIDE FOR FAMILIES AND STUDENTS

(Can be used/adapted for use with beginning level students)

Rationale:

Parents receive copies of the Guide to Boston Public Schools for Families and Students at the beginning of the school year. It contains a wealth of information, but is so text heavy that even when parents receive it in their first language, they seldom read it. Throughout the curriculum, small sections of the Guide are referenced and read as texts. Here, students explore the range of topics covered in the Guide so they can refer back to it for information in the future.

Student Objectives:

- Students will understand what a table of contents is and how it functions.
- Students will understand that you can use headings to locate information.
- Students will demonstrate that they can find different topics in the Guide.

Materials:

- Multiple copies of the current year's Guide to Boston Public Schools for Families and Students. Hard copies are available at most schools and at the BPS Welcome Centers. Parents receive copies of the Guide at the beginning of the school year and they are available in print in Cape Verdean Creole, Chinese, English, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, Somali, Spanish and Vietnamese. In this activity, the English version of the Guide is used. To download it, go to the BPS website and search for "guide for families."
- Handout: Can you find.....?

Activity Outline:

1. Explain objectives.
2. Handout copies of the Guide and ask: *Do you remember getting this at home in the beginning of the school year? What language did you get it in?* Explain that the purpose of the activity is to help them get more familiar with the contents of the Guide.
3. Point out the important information on the inside front cover (school calendar for current year) and the inside back cover (report card schedule.) The calendar will be used extensively in future activities in this unit; the report card schedule becomes a text in the unit on Report Cards. Give students a few minutes just to thumb through the Guide. Ask, *What do you think when you start to look at this?* Probably the answers will be some version of "There is a lot of information." Explain that the Guide is too long to read through everything, but that in this activity they will learn

how to find specific information.

4. Write table of contents on the board and ask whether anyone knows what a table of contents is. Then turn to the actual Table of Contents in the Guide by way of explanation. Show how one can use the headings, sub headings and page numbers to find information, actually walking students through a couple of examples.

5. Read aloud and have students repeat the subheadings of the first three sections: Family/School Partnership; Promotion and Assessment; and Special Programs. Explain very generally some of the vocabulary as you go through the subheadings.

6. Choose a page to look at as a group where information is grouped under various headings. The two pages on “Special Programs” work well for this. Write headings on the board and explain their function. Have students identify the headings on these two pages. Ask them to guess, without reading anything but the heading, what information will follow.

7. Give out the Handout: Can you find.....? Have students work on it individually, or if you think it will be hard for them, in pairs. You can use students who finish quickly to help check other students answers

Handout: Can you find.....?

DIRECTIONS: Use the Guide to the Boston Public Schools for Families and Students to answer the questions below.

- 1) What page in the Guide describes programs for English Language Learners? _____
- 2) What page in the Guide describes the Advanced Work Class? _____
- 3) On what page does the **Directory of Boston Public Schools** begin? _____ Use the Directory of Boston Public Schools to find the name of the principal of the Bradley Elementary School.

Write the name here: _____

- 4) Go to the page titled "**The Promotion Policy and School Attendance.**" Find information on excused absences. Write down one kind of excused absence:

- 5) What date does the February school vacation begin? _____
- 6) When will elementary students receive their first report card? _____
- 7) What page in the Guide describes "**The Home Connection: Simple Ways to Encourage Learning?**" _____

How many ways are listed? _____

Write down #4: _____

- 8) What page in the Guide describes homework recommendations for elementary students? _____ How much homework is recommended? _____

ACTIVITY #2: FINDING YOUR WAY ON THE BPS WEBSITE

(Can be used/adapted for use with beginning level students)

Note to teachers: *This activity is designed to be done on computers and for students who already know the basics of using the internet. Ideally each student will have his or her own computer. Because website design changes frequently, teachers should go on the BPS website before the activity to check out whether any items on the handout need to be changed.*

Rationale:

Learning to get information from websites is an important skill for students to have. BPS has a lot of information on its website, and most of that information can be translated into one of ten languages, so most students can access the information in their first language.

Student Objectives:

- On a computer, students will be able to find the Boston Public School (BPS) home page.
- Students will be able to change the language on the BPS website so that the text appears in their first language.
- Students will be able to find and open the school calendar on the BPS website.
- Students will be able to access different types of information from the BPS website.

Materials:

- Handout: [Exploring the BPS Website](#)

Activity Outline:

1. Explain objectives.
2. Write on the board the BPS website: www.bostonpublicschools.org and have students open the site on their computers. You can also show them how they can get to the same place by googling Boston Public Schools.
3. Explain the general concept of home pages. As students look at the BPS home page, explain that every time they go there, different information will appear, e.g. the most recent news. Explain that if there is a snow storm and the schools are closed, SCHOOLS CLOSED is what they will see when they open the home page.
4. Distribute the Handout: [Exploring the BPS Website](#). Have students work at their own pace to complete the tasks. Circulate to help. Note that the screen must be in full screen mode in order to see the headings referred to on the handout.

Handout: Exploring the BPS Website

- 1) Go to www.bostonpublicschools.org and open up the BPS website. You are now on the **home page**.
- 2) Look at the headings across the top of the page. Click on each one and see what happens. This is how you know how to get to specific topics on the website.
- 3) Usually there are one or two videos on the home page. Click on a video and watch it for fun.
- 3) In the lower right corner, there is a box which says **Translate**. Try that. Change the language into your first language and see what happens. Then try changing it into a language you don't know. See what that looks like.

- 4) Find the **school calendar** and open it up. If you lose your copy at home, you can always find it on the BPS website. Look at the calendar. Answer below:

When does the April vacation start?_____.

- 5) Go to **Schools** at the top of the page. Open up **School Directory List A-Z** Find your child's school.

Can you find the name of the principal?_____

- 6) Go to **Students and Families** at the top of the page. You will see an alphabetical list of many topics to read about. Before you choose a topic to read about, switch to your first language using the translate function. Then choose a topic to open up and learn more about.

- 7) Find the search function on the website. Search for **Welcome Centers**. Welcome Centers are where you go to register your child and get other kinds of enrollment help. Find the Welcome Center that is most convenient for you to go to. Answer the following questions about that Welcome Center.

What is the address?_____

What is the phone number?_____

What hours is it opened?_____

What languages are spoken there?_____

ACTIVITY #3: HOW SCHOOLS ARE STRUCTURED

(Can be used/adapted for use with beginning level students)

Rationale:

It is important for immigrant parents to understand the particular configurations in American schools (pre-school, elementary, middle, high school) because they differ widely from country to country. In Boston, this is particularly important because those points of transition, between elementary to middle school, for example, are currently the points at which parents can and must choose schools. They also need to know about American compulsory education laws, as many of their home countries do not have such laws.

Student Objectives:

- Students will understand that the law says that children in MA must be in school between the ages of 6 and 16.
- Students will learn how schools are structured by grade levels in the United States.
- Students will learn how to say and write ordinal numbers.

Materials:

- Handout: Schools in the United States
- Handout: How Are Schools Structured in Your Country?
- Handout: Practicing Ordinal Numbers
- Rubber ball

Activity Outline:

1. Write keywords compulsory education and dropout on board. Clarify meanings: compulsory education means that you must go to school; dropout means that you leave high school before you get your diploma. Explain that in the US, **every state** has laws saying that children must go to school. In MA, children must be in school between the ages of 6 and 16. Ask students whether they have compulsory education laws in their home countries.
2. Distribute Handout: Schools in the United States. Review these standard configurations of ages and grades. Point out that K in the chart is what BPS refers to as K2. Practice pronouncing Preschool, Elementary School, Middle School etc. Point out that BPS also has many K-8 schools, where the elementary and middle school grades are combined in one building. Poll students aloud to see how many have children in preschool, how many have children in elementary school, etc.
3. As you look at the configuration of ages/grades in high school, review the keywords compulsory education and dropout. Point out that the law in MA gives students the right to leave school at 16, before they get their diploma. Have students compare this structure to the system in their countries. They can fill out the blank chart on the Handout: How Are Schools Structured in Your Country? and then share with the class.

4. Tell students that we use ordinal numbers to talk about dates in the calendar and grades in school. Read through the grades aloud and have students repeat for pronunciation.
5. Ball toss: Have students form a circle and throw a ball from one to another. When a student catches a ball, they say, "My daughter/son is in ____ grade." The student then throws the ball to another classmate who similarly identifies what grade their child is in, etc.
6. Distribute Handout **Practicing Ordinal Numbers**. (This can also be assigned for homework). Tell students to refer to **Schools in the United States** handout as they complete the worksheet.

Follow-up:

- Some policy makers believe that MA compulsory schooling laws should be amended so that children must stay in school until age 18 instead of the current age 16. Have parents do a vote with your feet activity: put a sign saying AGREE in one corner of the classroom and one saying DISAGREE in another. Ask students whether they think the law in MA should be changed so that children would have to stay in school until the age of 18. Then have them go stand in the appropriate corner. Especially if there is a difference of opinion, ask for students from each corner to explain their thinking.
- Check the text book series you are using to see if there are any readings and exercises related to how schools are organized.
- If students ask more questions about the structure of higher education, there is a pertinent chart students can look at in Topic 3: Unit 10: Going to College, Activity #1, Handout D.

Handout: Schools in the United States

Adapted from the Fairfax County Family Literacy Curriculum

PRESCHOOL

<u>Age</u>	<u>Grade</u>	
3		
4	PreK	Prekindergarten

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

<u>Age</u>	<u>Grade</u>	
5	K	Kindergarten
6	1 st grade	First Grade
7	2 nd grade	Second Grade
8	3 rd grade	Third Grade
9	4 th grade	Fourth Grade
10	5 th grade	Fifth Grade

MIDDLE SCHOOL

<u>Age</u>	<u>Grade</u>	
11	6 th grade	Sixth Grade
12	7 th grade	Seventh Grade
13	8 th grade	Eighth Grade

HIGH SCHOOL

<u>Age</u>	<u>Grade</u>		<u>Year</u>
14	9 th grade	Ninth Grade	Freshman
15	10 th grade	Tenth Grade	Sophomore
16	11 th grade	Eleventh Grade	Junior
17	12 th grade	Twelfth Grade	Senior

COMMUNITY COLLEGE (two years)

COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY (four years)

Handout: How Are Schools Structured in Your Country?

What country are you from? _____

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Age	Grade

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Age	Grade

HIGH SCHOOL

Age	Grade

In your country, is there a law which says children must go to school? Circle YES or NO. If YES, until what age or grade must children be in school? _____ If NO, do you think there should be compulsory education laws? _____

Handout: Practicing Ordinal Numbers

Directions: Fill out the chart below with either the word or the abbreviation.

second	
	1st
fourth	
	3rd
eighth	
	10th
twelfth	
	5th
seventh	
	6th
tenth	
	9th
eleventh	

Directions: Fill in the blanks in the following sentences. Use words, not abbreviations.

1. My son/daughter is in _____ grade.
2. Where I live now is my _____ apartment in Boston.
3. English is the _____ language I have learned.

4. I went through _____ grade in school in my country.
5. Elementary school is kindergarten through _____ grade.
6. Middle school is _____ grade through _____ grade.
7. I want my children to finish _____ grade and go to college.

ACTIVITY #4: WHO WORKS IN A SCHOOL?

(Can be used/adapted for use with beginning level students)

Rationale:

It is helpful to know both the roles and names of staff in schools ones children attend. It makes it easier for parents to resolve problems and support their children's learning.

Student Objectives:

- Students will be able to explain five key jobs in an elementary school.
- Students will know the name of their child's teacher, the principal, the nurse and the parent coordinator at their child's school.

Materials:

- Handout: Who Works in the School?
- Handout: My Child's School

Activity Outline:

1. Explain objectives.
2. Explain the term school personnel. Ask students to name the titles of anyone they know who works in a school.
3. Distribute the Handout: Who Works in a School? Read through the list. Pause after each person and ask the same three questions:
 - Do you know what this person does in the school?
 - Do you know the name of this person at your child's school?
 - Have you ever met with this person?
4. Distribute the Handout: My Child's School. In class, see how many names students can fill in. Note that their children's schools might not have people in all these positions. For instance, in smaller Boston elementary schools, there are no assistant principals. Homework is to fill in any blanks by asking their children to help them. If there are still blanks, they should go to or call their child's school and ask the school secretary. They can explain that they are doing their homework for their English class. Because questions are so difficult to form in English, have parents draft the questions they will ask and help correct them.

Follow Up: Invite any of the people who work in a school to visit your class and introduce themselves.

Handout: Who Works in a School?

- **Principal/Headmaster:** the Head of the School – the person in charge
- **Assistant Principal:** helps the Principal and deals with discipline problems (students who do not follow rules).
- **Guidance Counselor:** helps students choose classes for graduation, apply to colleges
- **Parent Coordinator:** helps parents with any school problems.
- **School Secretary:** works in school front office, answers phones, helps Principal.
- **Teachers:** teach the children in all the subjects like Math, English, Art, Science
- **Librarian:** manages all the books in the Library. They help students find books and check them out as well as researching (looking up) information
- **Nurse:** helps students when they feel sick, gives them their medicine
- **Custodian:** Cleans the school and fixes things that do not work.
- **Cafeteria Manager:** is in charge of the cafeteria.
- **Lunch monitors:** supervise students during lunch.

Handout: My Child's School

Directions: Next to each title, write in the name of that person in your child's school.

My Child's Teacher(s)

Principal _____

Assistant Principal _____

Secretary _____

Guidance Counselor _____

Nurse _____

Cafeteria Manager _____

ACTIVITY #5: HOW DO SCHOOLS IN YOUR COUNTRY COMPARE TO SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED STATES?

Note to teachers: The following activity is adapted from the [Fairfax County Family Literacy Curriculum](#), if you need related but simpler activities for beginning students, go directly to the link above, open the Government module and look at Lesson #1.

Rationale:

Students will understand American schools better if given the chance to compare schools in the U.S. with schools in their home countries. They will understand their classmates better when encouraged to share their experiences with being in a new and different culture.

Student Objectives:

- Students will reflect on how schools in their country are different from schools in the United States.
- Students will write Compare and Contrast sentences.

Materials:

Activity Outline:

1. Explain objectives.

2. Warm-up: Tell students the following true vignettes:

When Rosa came here from Mexico, her son started kindergarten in Boston. Rosa was very surprised that her son had homework everyday. In Mexico, there's no homework in kindergarten.

Rosa took English classes at night. The first week she was so surprised! Many of the other students called the teacher by his first name. In Mexico, you always called your teacher "Profesor."

Ask students *What are some things about schools in the US that surprised Rosa?* Ask whether anything about schools in the US surprised them.

3. Write the following keywords on the board:

transportation
discipline

school hours
homework

lunch
teachers
vacations

school building
parents
clothes

4. Ask students, *How are schools in your country different from schools in the United States?* Elicit examples from students, drawing on keywords (e.g. “In my country, students eat lunch at home. Here they eat lunch at school.”)

5. Have students write a few sentences comparing schools in their country and schools in the U.S. Use the following examples and prompts:

In my country, Columbia, students wear a uniform to school. Here they wear regular clothes.

In my country, _____, students _____.
Here, students _____.

Have students share what they have written with the class

Follow-up:

- An additional topic for discussion with students is *What did you do to succeed in school?* Have students compare this with what their children do to succeed in school. · If the Best-Plus is used for assessment in the class, point out to students that comparing and contrasting as they did in Steps 4 and 5 above, is the same thing they are often asked on Best Plus questions, using the terms similarities and differences. Give some additional examples similar to those from the test.

ACTIVITY #6: WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT BOSTON SCHOOLS?

Rationale:

True/False activities are a good tool to gauge student prior knowledge or to review content taught, and to promote student ability to explain opinions in English.

Student Objectives:

- Students will show what basic knowledge they currently have about BPS.
- Students will practice explaining their opinions.

Materials:

- Handout: What Do You Know About Boston Schools?

Activity Outline:

1. Explain objectives.
2. Distribute the Handout What Do You Know About Boston Schools? Assure students that this is not a test. You don't expect them to know all the answers. You want to will help them learn more about BPS.
3. Read the statements aloud and clarify any vocabulary students do not understand. Have students work individually, in pairs, or in small groups to complete the questions.
4. When students have finished, read each statement and ask for a show of hands to see how many people marked a statement T or F. Especially if there is disagreement, ask students to explain their reasoning. Use the answer key below to give and explain briefly the correct answer. Say that the class will learn more about that topic in future activities.

Answer Key: 1F, 2T, 3T, 4F, 5T, 6F, 7F, 8F, 9T, 10F

Follow-up:

- With more advanced students or as a review of content, you can use the same True/False questions as a listening exercise. Students just mark F or T.

Handout: What do you know about Boston Schools?

Note: BPS is short for Boston Public Schools.

Directions: Mark each of the following statements with a **T** for True or an **F** for False.

1. If you move to Chelsea or Milton, you can continue to send your children to a Boston public school.
2. The law says children in Massachusetts can not leave school until the age of 16.
3. The law says children in Massachusetts are required to start school no later than the age of 6.
4. When your child is old enough to start school, BPS will tell you what school your child will attend.
5. In Massachusetts, when you register your children for school, you do not need to show any documents about your immigration status.
6. In BPS, it is fine to take your children to your home country for a month at Christmas as long as you tell the teacher.
7. In BPS, children do not get homework in Kindergarten.
8. In Massachusetts, children start high school when they are 13.
9. Students in BPS have a school vacation at Christmas, a one week school vacation in February and a one week school vacation in April.
10. In Massachusetts, only children in high school take the MCAS.

ACTIVITY #7: USING THE BPS CALENDAR: OVERVIEW

(Can be used/adapted for use with beginning level students)

Rationale:

When students look at any calendar, they can learn/review date related vocabulary and if necessary, learn how to read a calendar. When they look at a school calendar, they can additionally learn a lot about how the school year is structured.

Student Objectives:

- Students will be able to identify basic dates from the calendar: when BPS schools start and end, and when vacations and holidays are.
- Students will be exposed to the BPS website.

Materials:

- A Boston Public School Calendar (download the most current from [the BPS website](#);
- Handout: Cut and Match Calendar Clarifying Questions

Activity Outline:

1. Explain objectives.
2. Hand out a copy of the Boston Public School Calendar for the current school year.
(*note: if you zerox copies of the calendar, you may lose the shading which represents school holidays and half days. You may want to print out the desired number of copies from the BPS website.*)
3. Review overall layout of the calendar. Show how you go back and forth between key on top left and calendar itself. Focus on the graphics which show which days school is closed. Ask questions to help students be able to use both parts of the calendar, e.g. *What happens on November 11?*
4. Explain that all schools in Massachusetts are required by law to have 180 days of school. Have students count the days on the calendar to see that from the first day of school until the last day, it equals 180 days.
5. Write **snow day** on the board and see if students know what snow days are. Pose this problem: *If school is closed on Feb. 8th and 9th because of snow, when will the school year end?* Answer: The ending date of school will be moved ahead two days because the schools must have 180 days of school. Have students who are not first-time parents explain to newcomer parents how you know when schools are cancelled because of snow or other weather emergencies. Answer: Turn on TV news and the names of all school systems that are closed will scroll across the bottom of the screen. Make sure parents understand to look for “Boston Public Schools” and not the name of individual schools. Parents will also receive an automated call from their child’s school saying school is cancelled, or they can check the [BPS website](#).

6. Divide students into pairs. Make copies of Handout: Cut and Match Calendar Clarifying Questions. Give each pair a copy, with questions and answers cut into individual boxes and scrambled. The first pair to correctly match all questions and answers wins.
7. Encourage students to save the calendar so they can refer to it. Mention the “Put it on the fridge” technique. Show them how a copy of the calendar for the current school year is in the inside cover of the *Guide to the Boston Public Schools for Families and Students* which they should have all received a copy of at the beginning of the school year. Walk them through the steps of finding the Calendar whenever they want at the BPS website.
8. Tell students that you will revisit the calendar every month to review and plan for upcoming holidays and vacations.

Handout: Cut and Match Calendar Clarifying Questions¹

What does the first small triangle on the calendar mean?	It means school begins for students in grades 1-12.
When do kindergarten students begin school?	They begin on _____. Write date
What does it mean when the date is grey on the calendar?	It means no school.
Why is September the first month on this calendar?	It is a Boston Public School (BPS) calendar.
How many months do children go to school in Boston?	They go to school for 10 months.
What does a half circle mean on this calendar?	All Boston Public School (BPS) offices and Family Resource Centers closed.
What does the term “recess” mean?	It means no school for more than a day. Some say vacation.
What does “early release” mean?	Children get out of school earlier than their normal time.
How many days of school are there in a year?	There are 180 days of school.

How many days is winter recess?	Winter recess, including weekend days, is _____. write number of days
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¹Developed by Elizabeth Butler, ESOL Teacher for BPS Adult Learning Center.

ACTIVITY #8: USING THE BPS SCHOOL CALENDAR: DATES

(Can be used/adapted for use with beginning level students)

Rationale:

Many students, especially those at beginning levels, will need additional practice in reading the calendar. Most students need practice pronouncing dates and asking questions.

Student Objectives:

- Students will be able to say and pronounce the dates of the month.
- Students will be able to ask and answer When questions about the calendar.

Materials:

- A Boston Public School Calendar (download the most current from the [BPS website](#))
- Rubber Ball

Activity Outline:

1. Explain objectives.
2. Remind students that we use ordinal numbers to express dates, just like we use ordinal numbers to talk about the grades their children are in. Give students a list of ordinal numbers to keep as a reference. This is easy to find on the internet or in the back of one of the textbooks in your program library.
3. Read aloud together the days of whatever month you are in (May 1st, May 2nd, etc). Practice the difficult pronunciation of adding the -th to a number.
4. Play the ball toss game for further practice: Have students stand in a circle and throw the ball one to another. First student to catch the ball begins by saying the first day of the current month. The next student to catch the ball says the second day of the month, etc.
5. Ask students a series of “When” questions, writing one model on the board, e.g. *When is the only holiday in May?* Then have students work in pairs, asking and answering “When” questions. You may want to have them write three questions first.

ACTIVITY #9: USING THE BPS SCHOOL CALENDAR: SCHOOL VACATIONS **(Can be used/adapted for use with beginning level students)**

Rationale:

Students need to know ahead of time when school vacations occur and how long they are. It is important they understand that BPS has a very strict attendance policy regarding extending school vacations and trips to the home country. Here parents are also encouraged to plan enrichment activities they can do with their children during school vacations.

Student Objectives:

- Students will examine the consequences of children missing school because of a trip to their home countries.
- Students will be able to say the name of each school vacation and when it starts and ends.

Materials:

- A Boston Public School Calendar (download the most current from the BPS website: www.bostonpublicschools.org)
- Handout: The Flores Family Goes to El Salvador at Christmas: A True Story
- Handout: What Are You Going to Do Over Vacation?

Activity Outline:

1. Explain objectives.
2. Distribute additional copies of current BPS calendar if necessary. Write on the board the following key terms commonly used to describe school vacations
Recess
Winter Vacation/Winter Break/Christmas Vacation
February Vacation/February Break
April Vacation/Spring Vacation /Spring Break
Summer Vacation
Point out that although the calendar uses the term “recess” to describe the school vacation, that term is seldom used when talking about school vacations.
3. Have students identify when each of these vacations starts and ends. It may be confusing when children return from winter recess (sometimes referred to as Christmas vacation,) so clarify that. Explain that all schools in Massachusetts have the same February and April vacations, but that when the school year starts and ends, and how long the winter recess lasts differs from city to city. Remind students that in Massachusetts, schools must be open for a minimum of 180 days.

- . Ask students: “When you were in elementary school, were the school vacations the same as in Boston”? Elicit comparisons from the group. For Latino and Vietnamese and Chinese students, note that the week before Easter (Samana Santa) is **not** a vacation week (as it is through all of Latin America) and American schools do **not** close for a week at the time of the Chinese and Vietnamese New Year.
5. Distribute and read the Handout: The Flores Family Goes to El Salvador at Christmas: A True Story (Note to Teacher: This activity could also be used in Topic 1: Navigating BPS, Unit 4: Policies). With beginning level students, orally summarize the story very simply.
6. A good way to discuss this case study is to do a Vote With Your Feet activity. Write three possibilities, each on a separate piece of paper, and tape the paper up in three different corners of the room.
- Milagro should go to El Salvador with her children
 - Milagro should leave her sons with their father and go to El Salvador herself
 - Milagro should cancel the whole trip and get some of the money refunded to go in the summer
- Have students go stand next to the statement they agree with. Ask volunteers to explain their positions. Invite students to move if their opinions change
7. If there is a school vacation approaching, use the Handout: What Are You Going to Do Over Vacation? Have students work on it with their classmates. Save copies of their work and check back after the vacation to see what they actually did.

Note to teachers: *The Guide for Families and Students, referenced above, lays out the attendance policy for BPS and differentiates between excused and unexcused absences. It does not explicitly say that children after four or five consecutive unexcused absences will be discharged from the school, but that is what sometimes happens. The Guide does make clear that reasons for unexcused absences include extending any school vacation or taking a family vacation when school is in sessions. To help parents understand why the schools are strict about this, explain that when children miss school, they miss school events, fall behind, and typically don't do as well on their tests. They also get the message from their parents that school is not important. Parents need to be encouraged to plan trips to their home country in the summer, not during the school year.*

Follow-up:

- Review the school calendar on a monthly basis as a good way to help students look ahead and plan for vacations. If they work, who will take care of their children? If they don't work, what special activities can they do with their children that will be fun, promote learning, and keep their children away from screens? Students could collect resources to share with each other. For example, are there vacation week camps being offered in their community? What special events will the local library be holding? What about going to a museum or riding the T to a new place in Boston? Teachers could

encourage students to get together over vacation for socializing with their families. With permission, share a class phone list.

- Reuse the Handout: What Are You Going To Do Over Vacation? before each vacation.

Handout: The Flores Family Goes to El Salvador at Christmas: A True Story

Milagro's mother in El Salvador had a heart attack and had surgery just before Christmas. She had not been able to go home to El Salvador since she came to the United States 11 years ago. But now, people with TPS (Temporary Protective Status) were allowed to travel to their home countries for medical emergencies. She decided she would go visit her mother and take her two sons, who were in 1st and 4th grades. Her sons were American citizens, so they could travel easily. Her husband would stay in Boston with their two year old daughter.

Her plan was to leave right before Christmas vacation started and stay for three weeks. She realized the kids would miss almost seven days of school, but thought it was more important that they got to meet their grandmother. She bought the tickets which cost her \$800 per person. She had to borrow money from a relative to help pay for the tickets.

Before they left, she went to her children's school to talk to her children's teachers. She wanted to bring some school work for them to do while they were in El Salvador. When the teachers heard that the children would miss seven days of school, they both told her the same thing, "You need to go talk to the principal."

When she went to talk to the principal, the principal told her these would be unexcused absences. She said that Boston Public School attendance policy was that both family vacations and trips to the homeland were unexcused absences. She explained that if the children were out of school that many days they would be discharged from their school. When they got back to Boston, Milagro would have to re-enroll them in school and they might have to go to a new school. The principal couldn't promise that there would still be a place in their school for the two boys because the school had a waiting list.

WHAT SHOULD MILAGRO DO?

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Handout: What Are You Going To Do Over Vacation?

What can you do over the vacation that will help your children's learning? List at least three things. For example: *I will do puzzles with my son.*

1.

2.

3.

Talk to your classmates. Add other ideas from your classmates.

1.

2.

3.

ACTIVITY #10: USING THE CALENDAR: HOLIDAYS

Rationale:

Major national, religious and cultural holidays all appear on the BPS calendar. While a discussion of holidays is not directly related to the topic of school structure, benefits arise from cross cultural comparisons of holidays and how they are celebrated in different families. Also, immigrant parents are always interested in learning more about the American holidays their children are studying in school. The calendar provides a good springboard for rich discussions about holidays, families, and religious and cultural traditions.

Student Objectives:

- Students will learn about different holidays and how their classmates celebrate them.
- Students will learn to write a comparison essay
- Students will build reading fluency by doing a dramatic reading of a play

Materials:

- A Boston Public School calendar
- A great resource: Plays for the Holidays, published by Pro Lingua.

Activity Outline:

1. Explain Objectives.
2. Have students identify the national holidays that appear on the school calendar, e.g. Veteran's Day or Memorial Day. Write the names of those holidays on the board and briefly describe why they are holidays. Distinguish between religious and non religious holidays. Have students look at the list of "Major Religious and Cultural Holidays", circle the ones that they celebrate, and share that list with a partner.
3. Invite questions about different holidays which other students can answer, e.g. *What is Ramadan? What do you do on Eid al-Adha? What is Three Kings Day? Why don't they celebrate Mother's Day here in the schools?*
4. Have students write a brief essay comparing how they celebrated a common holiday in their home country with how they celebrate it now in the United States.
5. Produce a dramatic reading of a play about an upcoming holiday from the book Plays for the Holidays, published by Pro-Lingua. The plays also include vocabulary, background reading, and pronunciation exercises. Once assigned parts have been practiced in class, students can practice their parts at home to build fluency. Over many years of teaching parent ESOL classes, students have loved doing these plays. Sometimes one class will perform the play for another. Sometimes they will perform the play for their children.

Follow-Up:

- Scavenger Hunt: If your class is in an elementary school, have students look in the halls and/or classrooms if they aren't in use to see what they can find on the walls which relates to a given holiday, e.g. Thanksgiving or Martin Luther King Day. Give them a clipboard and tell them to make a list of all the different displays or books or student work which relate to the holiday. Give them a time to be back in the classroom. The person with the longest list is the winner.
- Stories to Tell Your Children: Encourage parents to tell their children stories about how they celebrated these holidays when they were children.