

# Our Next Chapter: 826 Boston's Vision and Strategy

2016-2021



**826**  
BOSTON

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# Dear friend,

As a writing center, we live by the motto of “revise, revise, revise.” The strategic plan that you hold in your hands proved to be no exception, and is the product of several months of intensive collaboration by the Strategic Planning Committee, comprising board members and senior staff members, and expertly guided by consultant Dan Salera. Through focus groups and discussions, this process was bolstered by feedback from our community—parents, volunteers, donors, students, and other key stakeholders—and was informed by data that has been collected across programs to gauge the impact of our work.

Early in the process, the Committee recognized that we had a unique opportunity to make a meaningful impact in the lives of many more students. Since we opened our doors nearly 10 years ago, 826 Boston has provided writing and tutoring support to more than 19,000 students through our engaging in-school and out-of-school writing and tutoring programs. In order to scale our work effectively and sustainably, we acknowledged the need to focus our attention and resources.

The Committee unanimously agreed that of all its successful programs, the 826 Boston Writers’ Room program demonstrated the most potential for growth—both in terms of its depth of service in individual schools, as well as its possibilities for expansion across the district.

Our plan is ambitious, as we want to impact as many students as we can through our high-quality programming. We are confident that we have the partnerships in place to build on the significant successes of the pilot Writers’ Room at the John D. O’Bryant School of Math and Science, where we are now moving into our fourth year. In the 2015-2016 academic year alone, we provided more than 20,000 hours of tutoring there.

We are grateful to our community near and far for supporting the growth of 826 Boston. We are especially grateful to an anonymous donor through 826 National for providing the funding that supported this planning process.

I am excited to share our plans for growth, and I look forward to collaborating with you as we work together to raise a community of lifelong writers, thinkers, and storytellers.

Warmly,



**Jessica Drench**  
Executive Director, 826 Boston





Photo by: Gretjen Helene

## 826 Boston Mission Statement

**826 Boston** is a youth nonprofit writing and publishing organization that empowers traditionally underserved students ages 6-18 to find their voices, tell their stories, and gain communication skills to succeed in school and in life.

Writing and communication skills rank among the most important 21st century skills for students to master, yet our country is facing a skills deficit in these areas. In the 2007 report *Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve the Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools*, Steve Graham and Dolores Perin state:

***“Writing well is not an option for young people—it is a necessity. Along with reading comprehension, writing is a predictor of academic success and a basic requirement for participation in civic life and the global economy.”*** Indeed, research

shows that students who lack proficiency in writing perform worse academically, fail to graduate from high school, and face greater risk of unemployment during their working lives. The National Commission on Writing

found that remediation of poor writing skills costs American businesses as much as \$3.1 billion annually.

***When students find their voices, share their stories, and gain newfound writing skills, they demonstrate growth in confidence, self-esteem, and resiliency.***

826 Boston’s core programs, offered free of charge, are guided by the belief that great leaps in learning can occur with one-on-one attention, and that writing skills are fundamental to future success. These programs include publication projects with partner schools, out-of-school time tutoring in writing, creative writing workshops, storytelling and bookmaking field trips, college essay support, and a summer theater collaborative with the American Repertory Theater.

# History of Growth

*Since opening its doors in 2007, 826 Boston has provided nearly 100,000 hours of writing and tutoring support to more than 19,000 underserved youth, has published dozens of volumes of student work, and has enlisted and trained 2,500 volunteers.*

The 826 model was developed in 2002 by best-selling author Dave Eggers and educator Nínive Calegari, who were looking for a way to support overburdened teachers and connect talented working adults with underserved students. 826 Boston is one of seven 826 chapters nationwide. While 826 Boston is an independent organization, it draws on the national network for professional development support, program evaluation, and connection to national resources. In 2013, the 826 network won the American Literacy Prize for its “innovative history of addressing community illiteracy...and its unique approach to helping at-risk K-12 students achieve reading and writing proficiency.”

Currently, 826 Boston serves 3,500 students from the under-resourced Boston neighborhoods of Roxbury, Dorchester, and Jamaica Plain, and schools where at least 65% of students are of high needs—English Language Learners, students whose families are registered for one or more state assistance programs, or who possess a learning disability. From providing after-school tutoring, to hosting a summer theater collaborative with the American Repertory Theater, 826 Boston delivers programming focused on providing one-on-one support to some of the city’s most vulnerable students.

In 2013, building upon its successful In-School Writing and Publishing Program, 826 Boston partnered with the Northeastern University Writing Program to open its first Writers’ Room at the John D. O’Bryant School of Mathematics & Science. The Writers’ Room is a dedicated space within a BPS school that operates four days a week, is led by a full-time 826 Boston staff member, and is supported by a full-time service member and trained tutors from a university partner. The Writers’ Room provides whole-class writing support and publishing projects, creative after-school opportunities like a literary magazine or slam poetry club, college essay assistance, and drop-in writing support.

In addition to the expansion beyond its headquarters in Roxbury via its Writers’ Room and satellite after-school location, over the past five years 826 Boston has significantly increased its annual service from 14,580 hours in 2011 to over 25,000 hours in 2016. It has also grown from three full-time staff members and two service members to a team of nine staff and seven service members. 826 Boston has built its organizational capacity to support its team with management skills, finance capacity, and fundraising expertise. The organization’s budget growth has fueled its program expansion with an average yearly increase of 25%. 826 Boston has also increased its support and recognition within Boston Public Schools, and in the City of Boston, which will serve as a strong foundation for the next phase of growth.



# Key Strategic Goals

*826 Boston undertook a seven-month strategic planning process from August 2015 through February 2016, with the purpose of providing a strategic roadmap and operating plan to guide the organization over the next three to five years.*

A central theme that emerged through the strategic planning process was **Scaling for Impact**—growing sustainably while maximizing impact. **For 826 Boston this means replicating the innovative Writers' Room model, which allows 826 Boston to expand the depth and reach of its programs, serve students both during and after school hours, and maintain low overhead costs.**

Simultaneously, 826 Boston will evolve current center-based programs to meet the changing needs of students and families, and will strengthen organizational capacity for even greater impact in the future.

With a commitment to **Scaling for Impact**, 826 Boston will pursue the following strategic goals:

## Expand Writers' Room Program

- Open five new Writers' Rooms over the next five years in high-need Boston Public Schools.
- Increase service to an additional 3,500 students through its Writers' Room expansion.
- Explore a diverse set of partnerships, including K-8, vocational, and bilingual schools.

## Build Organizational Capacity

- Evolve and build organizational infrastructure so that 826 Boston has the necessary facilities, workspace, and technology to deliver its mission.
- Create a staffing structure that can support planned programmatic growth.
- Commit to diversity and increase racial, ethnic, gender, and age diversity among staff, board, volunteers, and leadership pipelines.

## Prove Our Impact

- Partner with Northeastern University on a multi-year academic evaluation that demonstrates the impact of Writers' Rooms on 826 Boston youth.
- Implement the National Writing Project writing assessment, customized for the 826 network.
- Scale up partnership with PEAR (Partnerships in Education and Resilience) to assess social-emotional gains in 826 Boston out-of-school programs and Writers' Rooms.

## Solidify Financial Stability

- 826 Boston will align growth plans with fundraising capacity, financial management, and organizational protocols to reduce risk associated with scaling.
- Grow its budget from \$1 million annually in FY2016 to \$2.5 million by FY2021.
- Launch a growth campaign with a focus on multi-year pledges and the creation of a diverse revenue portfolio.
- Develop capacity at the staff level to improve execution and oversight of financial management and operations.
- Significantly increase cash reserve in conjunction with annual budget growth over the next five years, with the goal of maintaining a minimum of six months of operating expenses.
- Continue to focus on developing and building a fundraising Board of Directors.

## Sustain Strong Relationships

- Launch a major gifts program to strengthen relationships with key individual and institutional funders.
- Foster existing relationships with BPS teachers, administrators, and district officials.
- Cultivate connections with education and arts thought-leaders to increase exposure for 826 Boston.



Photo by: Gretjen Helene

## Achieve Greater Brand Awareness

- Increase visibility in the media, education centers of influence, funding community, and the nonprofit sector.

## Implementation and Oversight

Working with the management team, 826 Boston's Board will monitor the organization's progress toward the goals outlined in the Strategic Plan.

Board responsibilities also include:

- Monitor a dashboard to evaluate progress against goals.
- Serve as counsel to the Executive Director on implementation.
- Advise in the event of required changes to the plan.



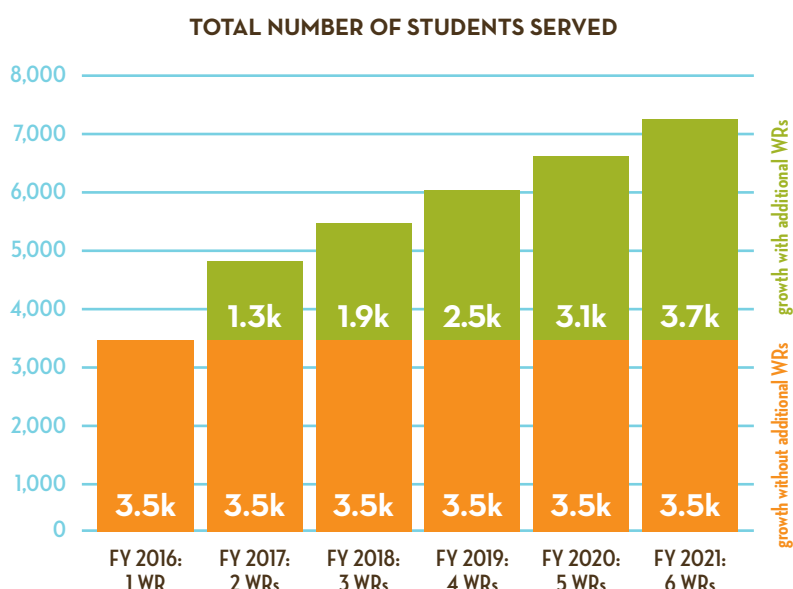
# Program Highlight: The Writers' Room

*The 826 Boston Writers' Room is an innovative, fully-staffed writing center that is located in a dedicated space within a Boston public school, directed by an 826 Boston staff member, and supported by a service and university partnership.*

## The Writers' Room:

- Provides whole-class tutoring support for writing projects and classroom assignments during the school day.
- Supports project-based learning opportunities.
- Runs creative after-school programming that transforms the culture of writing within a school.

The Writers' Room is made possible through a four-way partnership among a local university, a Boston public school, a funder or consortium of funders, and 826 Boston.



## Program Delivery Growth

826 Boston will expand its Writers' Room (WR) model to **more than double** its overall service capacity from 3,500 students in 2016 to 7,200 by 2021.

**“The Writers' Room helps us to ‘level the playing field’ for our students in order to provide them the writing tools necessary to compete successfully at the collegiate level.”**

**—Crystal Coy Gonfa, ELA Director,  
The John D. O'Bryant  
School of Mathematics and Science**



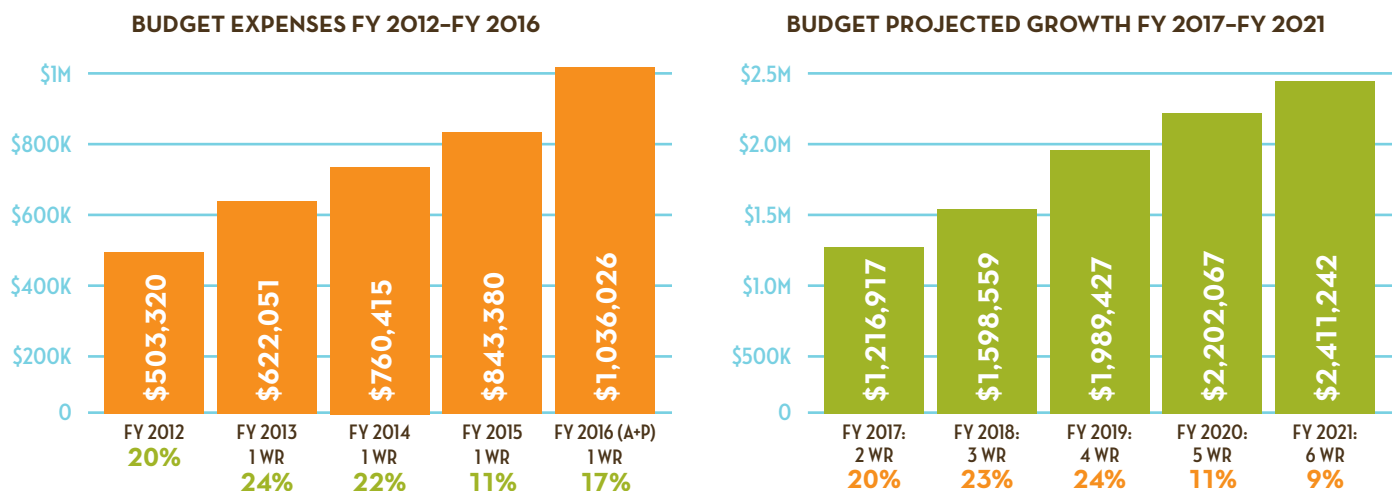
Photo by: Gretjen Helene

**“826 Boston has pushed me to consider how every moment in my classroom is a writing moment . . . I have become a stronger teacher, stronger for daring to consider how student writing can be published and shared with families and beyond through story collections and public readings.”**

*—Ian Doreian, Teacher, The John D. O'Bryant School of Mathematics and Science*

## Budget Growth

826 Boston must grow its annual budget from \$1 million in FY 2016 to \$2.5 million in FY 2021. It has a positive trend of incremental budget growth over the previous five years, and will continue on this trajectory in the years to come with the addition of a growth campaign.



## By the Numbers

826 Boston Writers' Room at the John D. O'Bryant School of Mathematics and Science in the 2015–2016 school year:

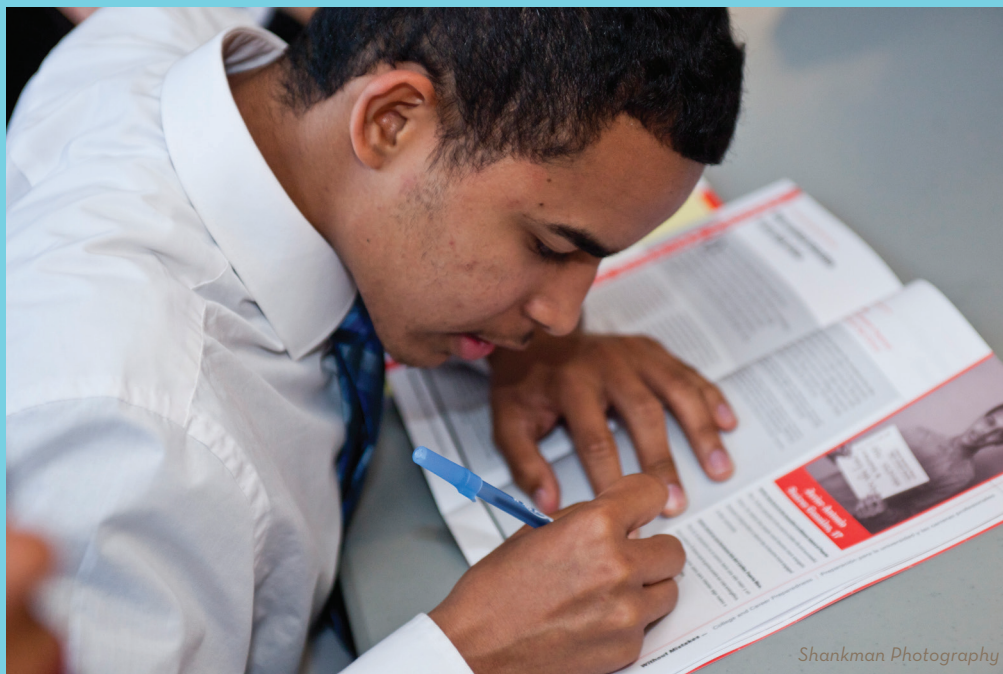


## Writers' Room Impact

Writers' Room survey responses from 2014–2015 report the following outcomes:

- 85%** of students report that working with 826 Boston helped them improve their writing
- 83%** of students say that working with 826 Boston helped them improve their confidence in writing
- 80%** of students say that their ideas improved as a result of working with 826 Boston

In fall 2016, 826 Boston will launch an evaluation in partnership with Northeastern University to measure the impact of the 826 Boston Writers' Room on school culture and changes in student behavior and attitudes.



## Onward

**826 Boston** is poised to build on its strong foundation of growth over the past nine years. Through the strategic planning process, **826 Boston's** leadership team has recognized the organization's potential for scaling its impact to reach twice the number of students in high-need schools across the district over the next five years.

By leveraging relationships with community and university partners, funders, and the Boston Public Schools, **826 Boston** is positioned to provide targeted support to improve students' writing skills and continue to spotlight the stories and voices of some of our city's most talented, yet underserved and at-risk youth.

Cover photo by: Daniel Johnson

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