



***Boston Public Schools  
Customer Experience @  
Harvard Kennedy School  
Spring 2018***

# **Boston Public Schools needs to improve parent customer service.**

At least 150 parents on an easy day who do not know where the bus is, and are calling in with questions. And this is with the app active.

# Methods

25

## Parent Interviews

Through street intercepts, school visits, and a snowball sampling, we have talked with parents across Boston.

20

## Stakeholder Interviews

Through shadowing BPS employees, Boston officials, and data analysis, we learned about customer service across the ecosystem.

4

## Best Practices Research

Private sector, peer district, educational consultant, and other public sector research has shown us best practices.

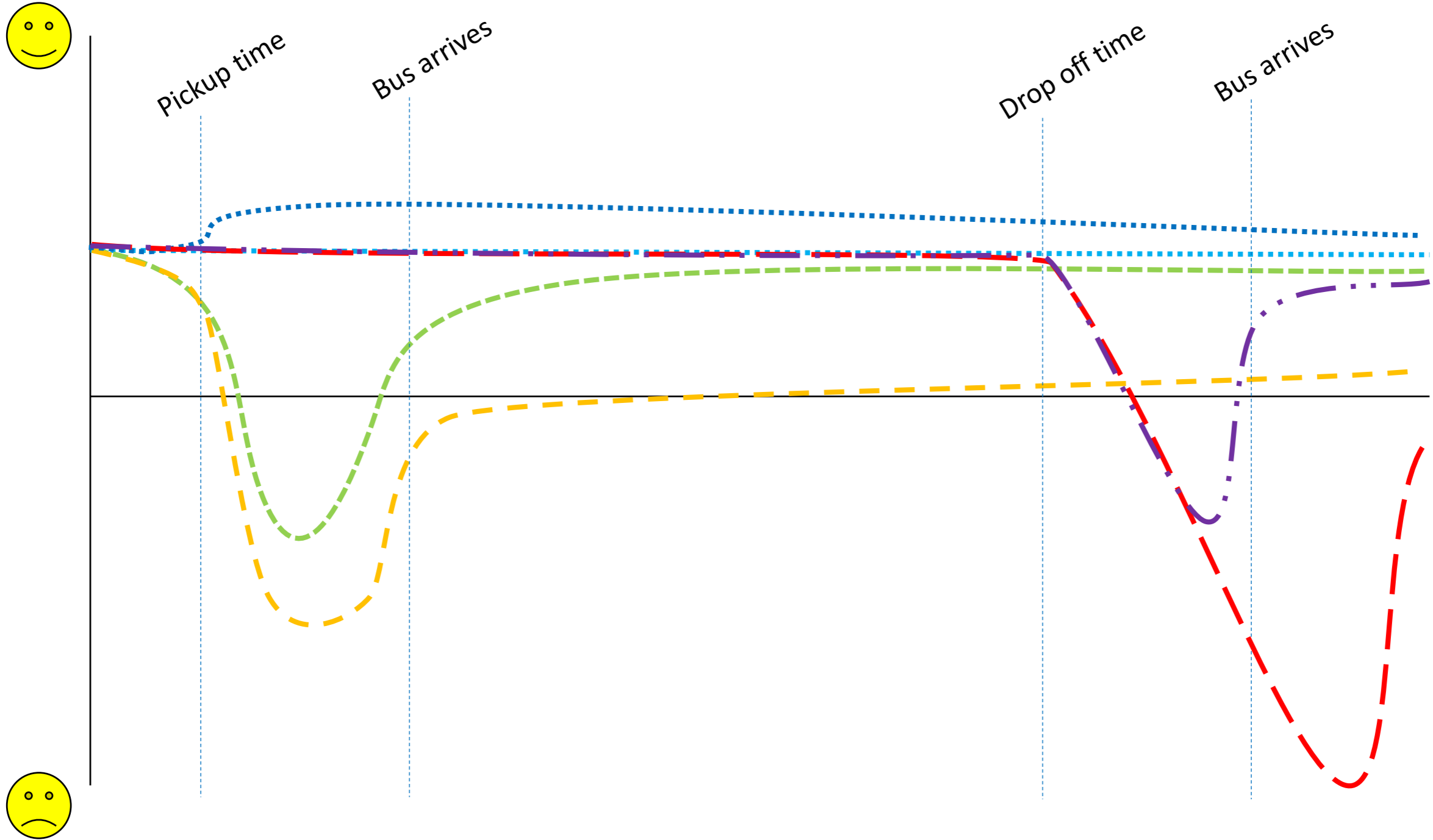
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## Empathy building exercise

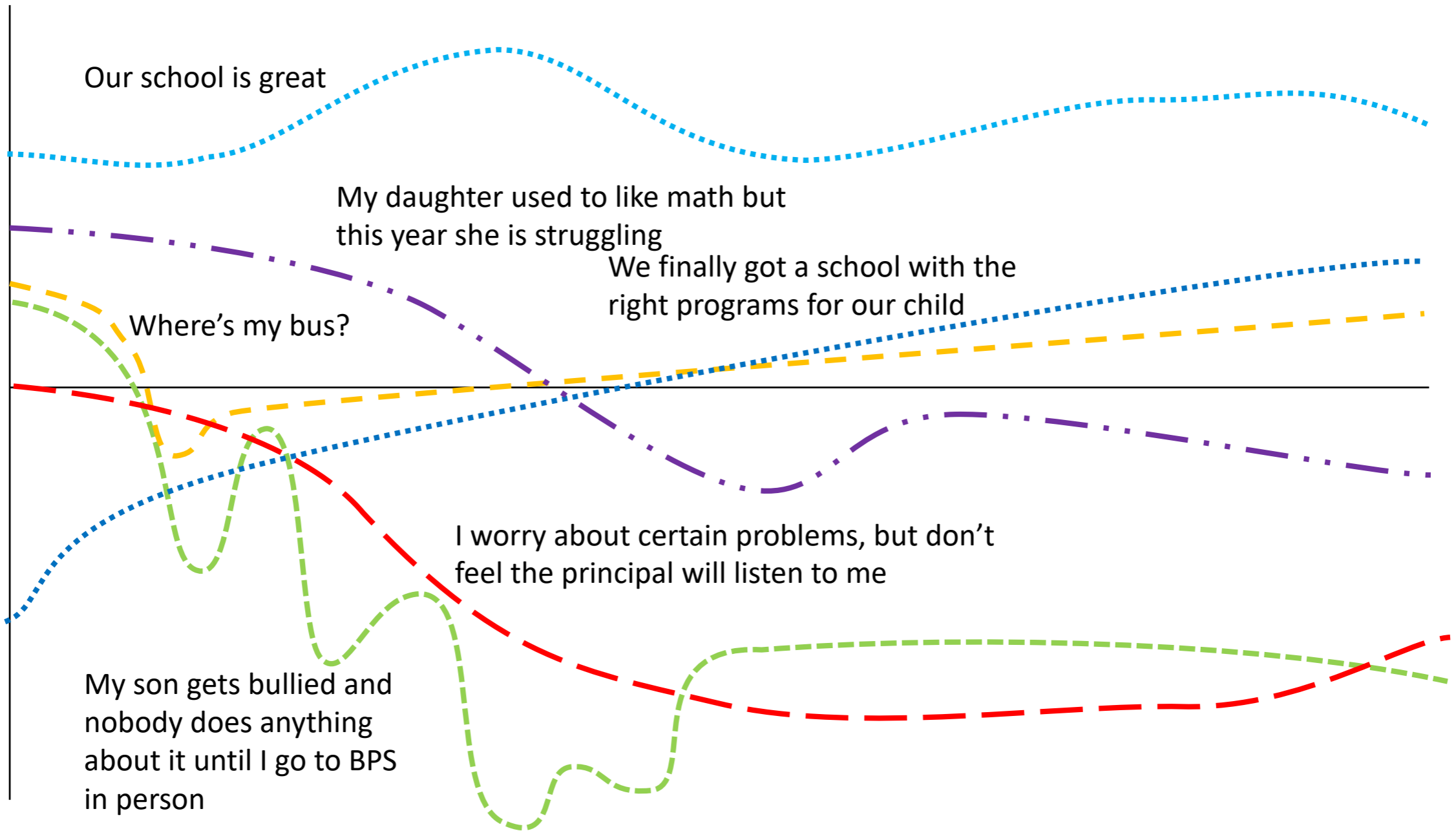
We tried to find the right phone numbers to call, and people to contact if we were BPS parents with various issues.

*Equity  
Considerations  
Transportation  
Age of child  
School  
Language  
Privilege  
Networks*

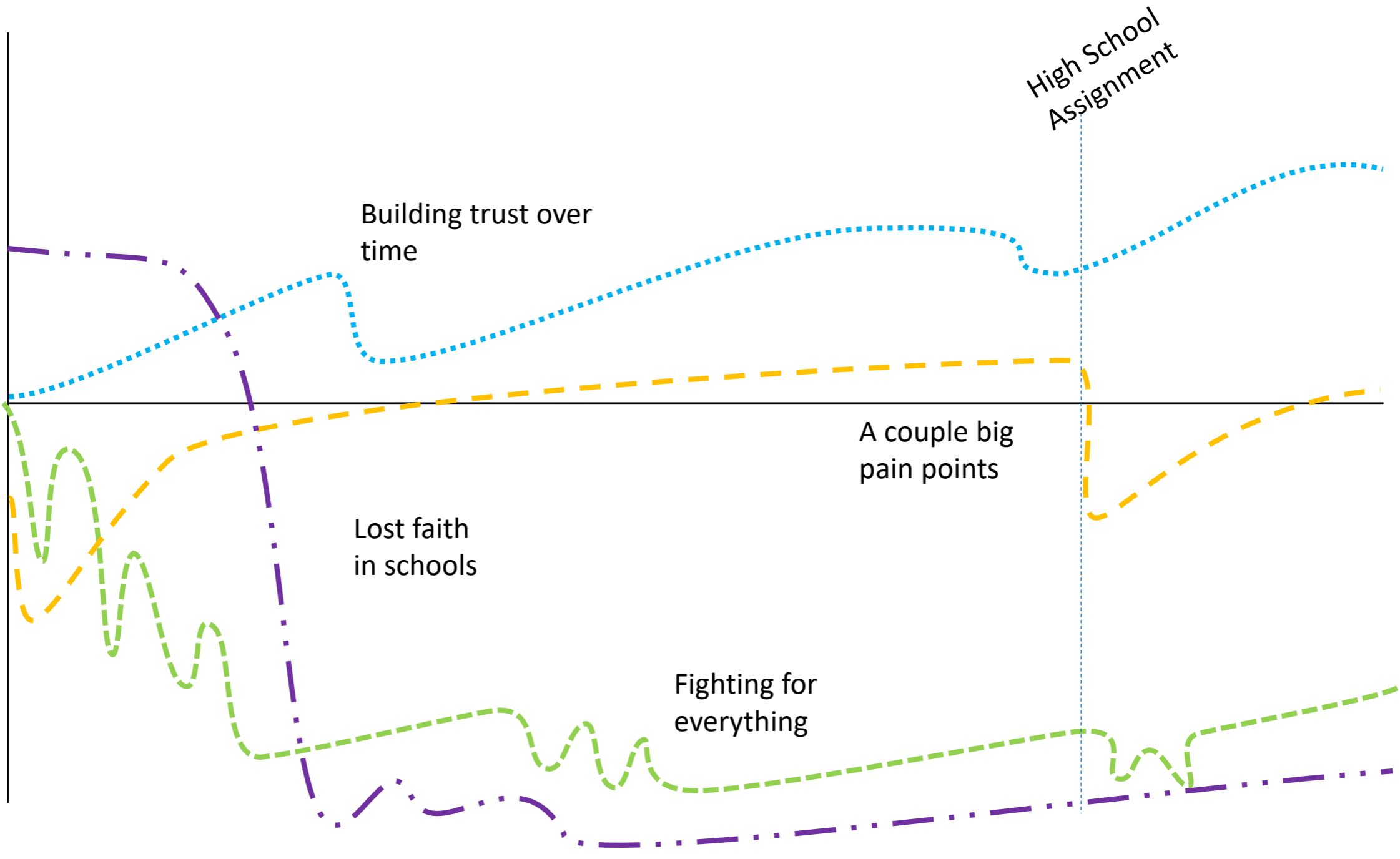
# Parent Experience



# Parent Experience



# Parent Experience



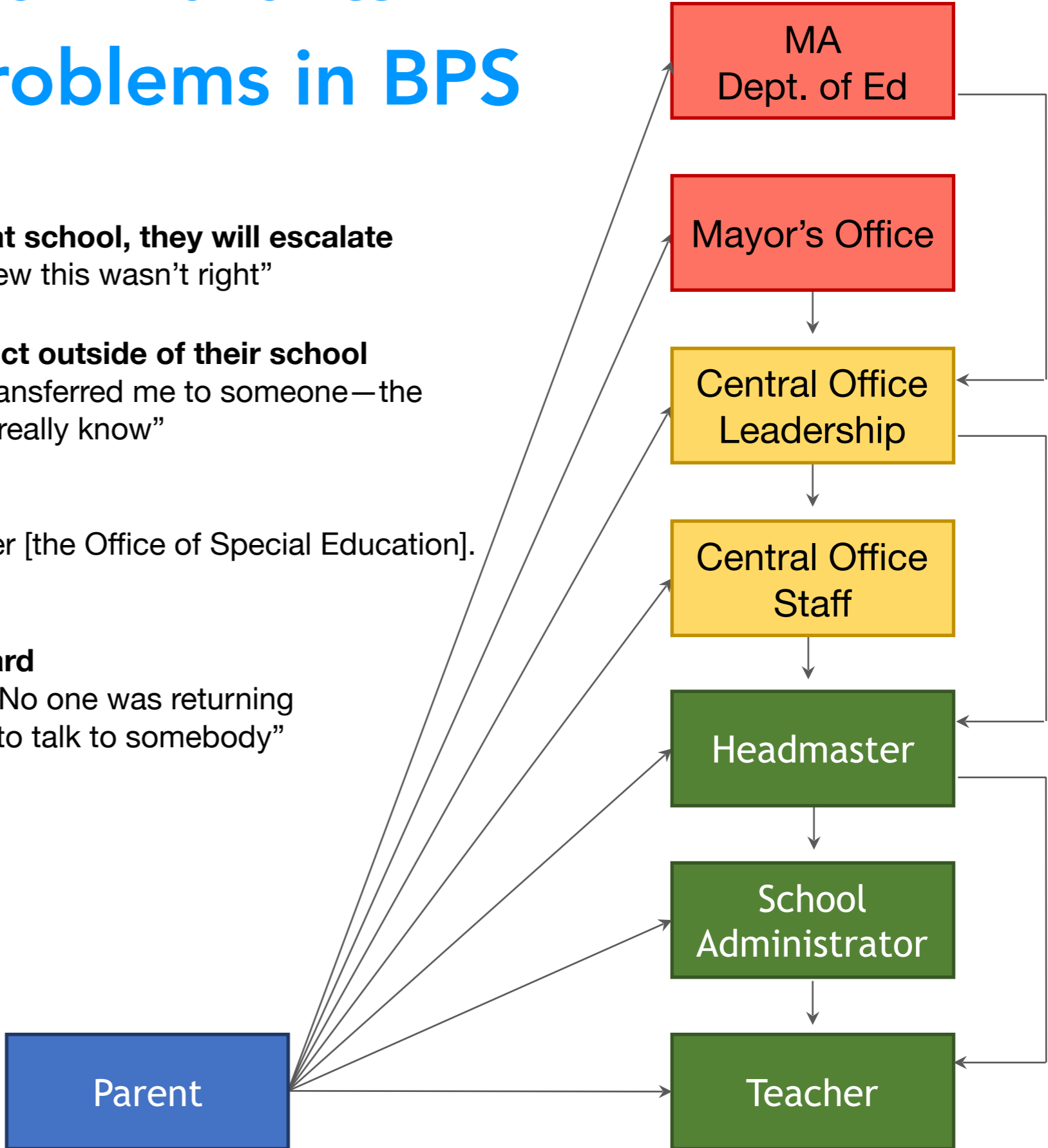
# User Journey: How Parents Seek to Solve Problems in BPS

**If a parent can't solve their problem at school, they will escalate**  
"I didn't know what else to do. I just knew this wasn't right"

**But parents don't know who to contact outside of their school**  
"I called the mayor's hotline and they transferred me to someone—the superintendent's office, I think—I don't really know"

**Escalation is not always linear**  
"I actually talked to the headmaster after [the Office of Special Education]. It's impossible to get any time with her"

**Showing up is the best way to be heard**  
"No one was responding to my emails. No one was returning my calls. Finally I just went down there to talk to somebody"



# Insights



1. **Central office is not the first stop.** Parents go to teachers or principals first.
2. Parents are **emotionally invested in both** process and outcome.
3. Identifying who to contact is extremely confusing.
4. **Information is not shared** across departments.
5. Customer service representatives are **too busy firefighting** to think about proactive solutions.



# Insights

- 1. Central office is not the first stop.** Parents go to teachers or principals first.
- Parents are **emotionally invested** *“I went to the school and said ‘I will sit here until I can talk to the headmaster. I’ll sit for 4 hours if I have to.’”*
- Identifying who to contact is extremely difficult
- Information is not shared** across departments.
- Customer service representatives are **too busy firefighting** to think about proactive solutions.

# Insights

1. **Central office is not the first stop.** Parents go to teachers or principals first.
2. Parents are **emotionally invested in both** process and outcome.
3. Identifying who to contact is extreme *“I was tired. I’m in school too. I can’t do this all the time.”*
4. **Information is not shared** across departments.
5. Customer service representatives are **too busy firefighting** to think about proactive solutions.

# Insights

1. **Central office is not the first stop.** Parents go to teachers or principals first.
2. Parents are **emotionally invested in both** process and outcome.
3. Identifying who to contact is extremely confusing.
4. **Information is not shared** across *“I’ve tweeted, emailed, Facebook messaged, called, and left my phone number so many times. I even have gone into the Bowling building at BPS multiple times.”*
5. Customer service representatives proactive solutions.

# Insights

1. **Central office is not the first stop.** Parents go to teachers or principals first.
2. Parents are **emotionally invested in both** process and outcome.
3. Identifying who to contact is extremely confusing.
4. **Information is not shared** across departments.
5. Customer service representatives provide proactive solutions. 

*“I’ve talked to six different people at the welcome center, and they each have given me a different answer, let alone across another department. Twitter updates me with more factual information than the BPS representatives do.”*

# Insights

1. **Central office is not the first stop.** Parents go to teachers or principals first.
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*“Customer service wants to solve the problem right there.”*

# Parent Personas

**The Connected** is unafraid to reach out to various BPS resources & staff

**The Majority** interacts primarily with their school for concerns

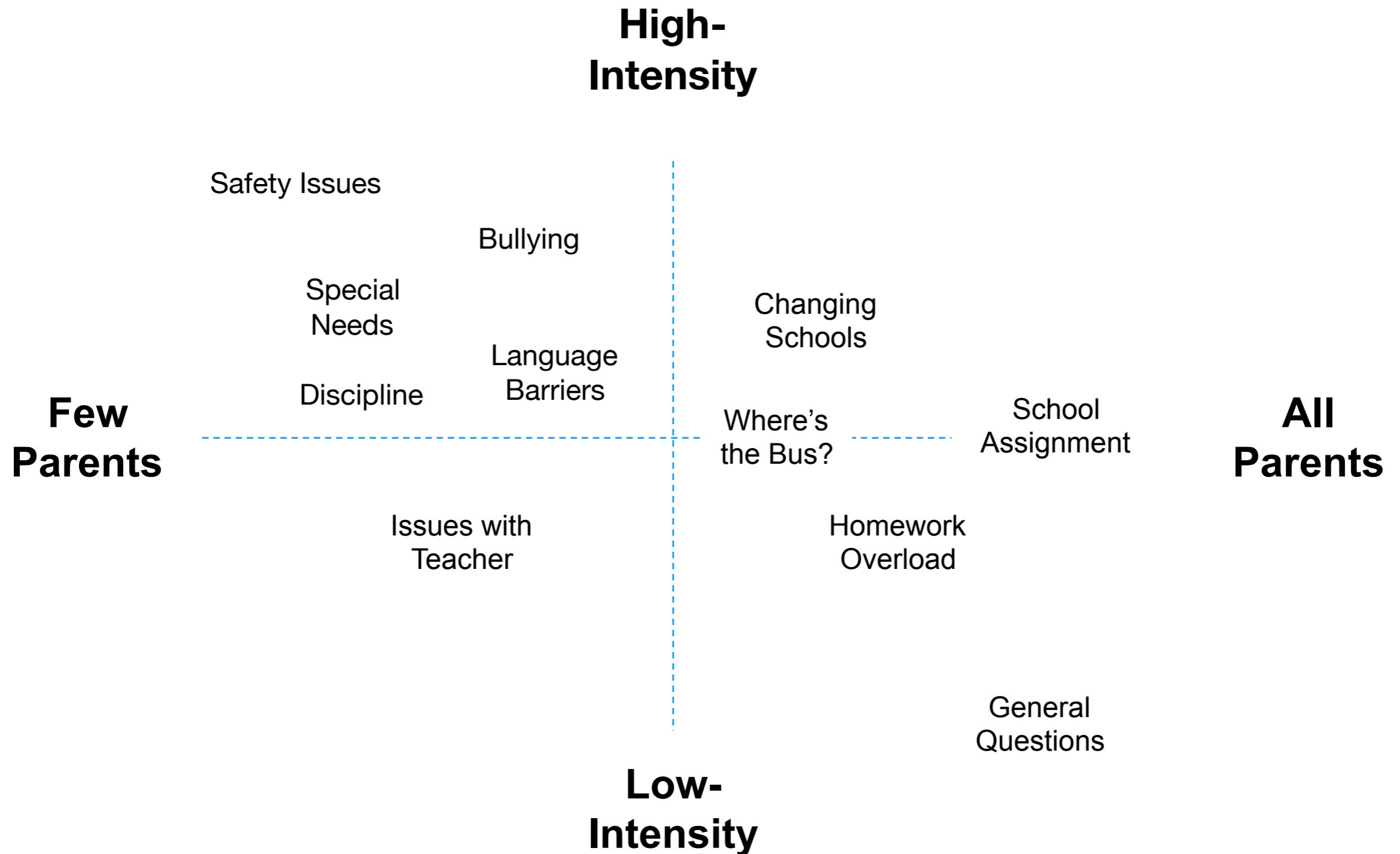
**The Less Involved** may approach his/her child's school with a concern

# BPS Staff Personas

**Customer Service** will do whatever he/she can do to solve the issue

**The Fixer** wants to solve the issue at hand as quickly as possible

# Differentiating Challenges by Intensity and Scale



# Where should our research focus?





# Thanks

Ayna Agarwal

Chris Kuang

John LaRue

Ben McGuire

Molly Thomas

# Appendix

# Jane "The Connected" Milliman



**Mother of three (4th grade, 2nd, K)  
Joseph P. Manning School  
Runs a Parent Group  
Graduate of BPS**

## **Does:**

- Escalate to BPS
- Calls superintendent
- Tweets, posts on FB, emails
- Organizes parents group

## **Thinks:**

- Wants to better know where they are in the system when they have reached out to BPS
- BPS should better engage with her problems
- Wants to feel respected

## **Says:**

- She needs to be heard by BPS
- Needs a response from BPS
- BPS to take parents' point of view into account

# Overview of Methods

## Literature Review

- Analyzing best practices in customer service from private sector firms
- Studying success stories in customer service excellence from other large districts
- Understanding recent BPS news and events

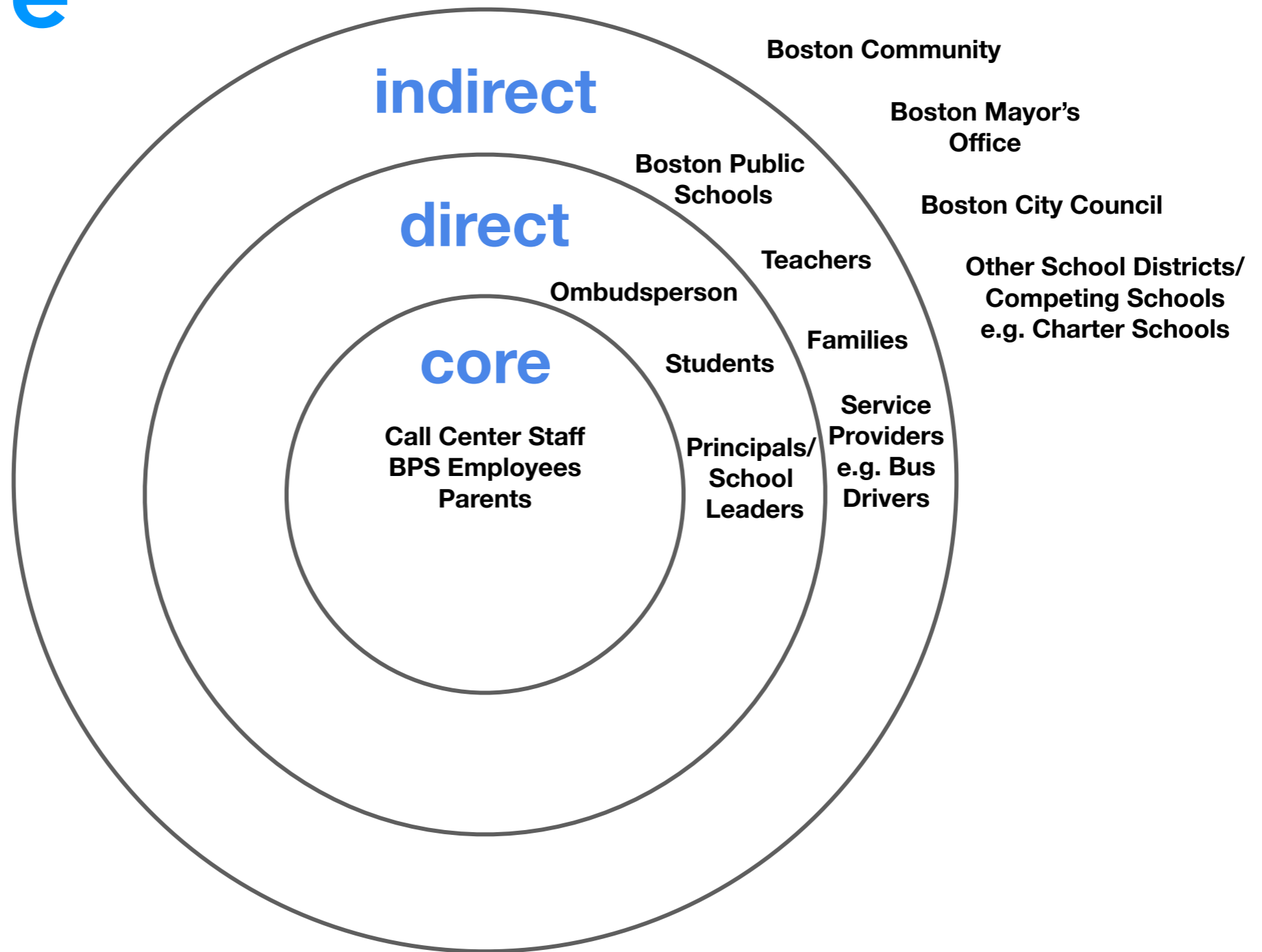
## Client Context

- Interviewing District stakeholders across Welcome Services, Transportation, Central Office, and school staff
- Job shadowing frontline customer service representatives
- Working with City of Boston teams to understand 311 and intergovernmental relationships

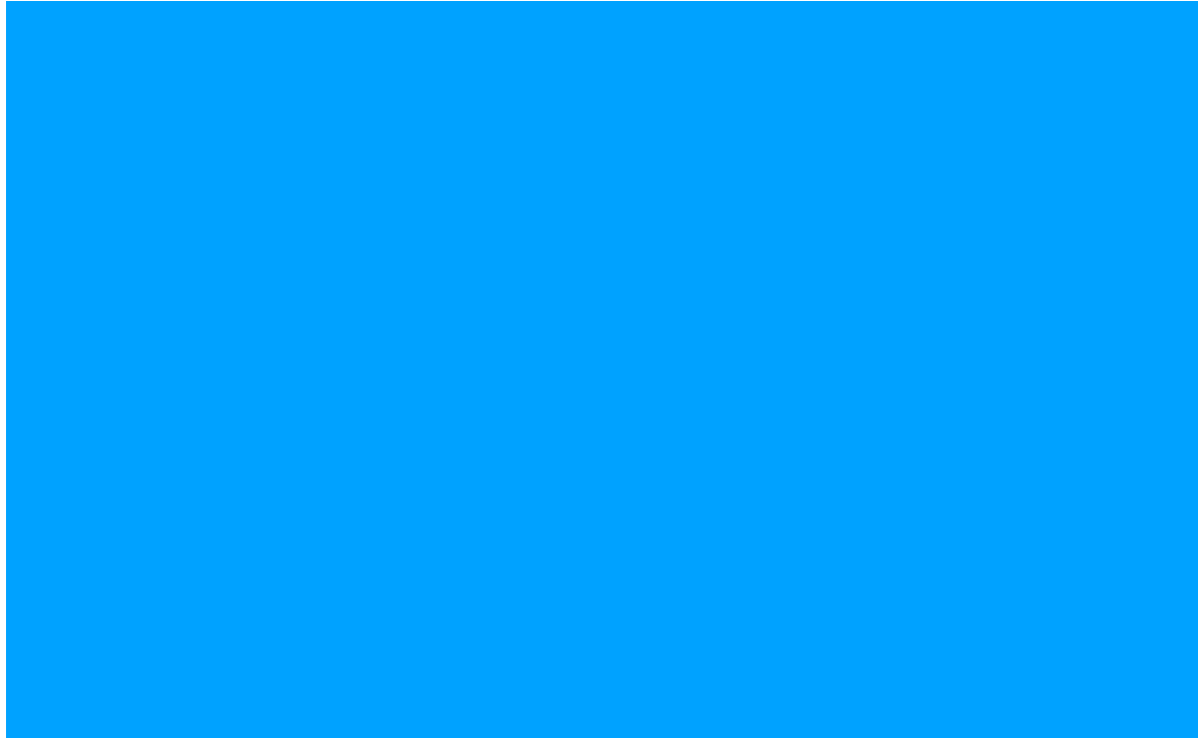
## User Interviews

- Interviewing ‘power user’ parents with complex, multi-stakeholder issues to understand cross-silo challenges
- Street-intercepting parents to discuss BPS experiences and perceptions
- Visiting schools and district events to meet parents in touch with district processes and priorities
- Following parents through Welcome Services orientation and discussions
- ***Staying aware of age, school, language, and network equity challenges***

# Bullseye



# Carmen LastName



*“I will talk to my child’s teacher if any problems arise. I have not needed to contact BPS.”*

## **“The Majority”**

- Mother of 3
- X school
- Runs a parent group

## **Wants:**

## **Needs:**

- To feel

## **Does:**

# Paulo LastName



*“I know how important education is, and I need to make sure that my child is learning good things in a good school.”*

## **“The Disconnected”**

- Father of one daughter
- X school
- Works x many jobs

## **Wants:**

- Wants to be heard by BPS
- Needs a response from BPS
- Tech-savvy
- 

## **Needs:**

- To feel

## **Does:**

- Will go into BPS
- Calls superintended

# Call Center Employee



*“I spend my time responding to incoming calls from parents. I get a lot of questions about transportation, and how to register students, but I also get a lot of questions beyond my normal job description.”*

## **“The Frontline”**

- Father of one daughter
- X school
- Works x many jobs

## **Wants:**

- Wants to be heard by BPS
- Needs a response from BPS
- Tech-savvy
- 

## **Needs:**

- To feel

## **Does:**

- Will go into BPS
- Calls superintended



# The One-Off Fixer



*“I know how important education is, and I need to make sure that my child is learning good things in a good school.”*

## **“The fixer”**

- Father of one daughter
- X school
- Works x many jobs

## **Wants:**

- Wants to be heard by BPS
- Needs a response from BPS
- Tech-savvy
- 

## **Needs:**

- To feel

## **Does:**

- Will go into BPS
- Calls superintended

**Problem/Policy/Other P**

# Insights

Ayna

- 1. Government is not the first stop.** Parents go to teachers or principals first.
- 2. Parents are not satisfied unless they receive a resolution, and, rarely will parents escalate to BPS if the principal does not resolve their issue.** regardless of how smooth the process is.
- 3. “I do not know how to solve my problem.”** Identifying whom to contact is extremely confusing.
- 4. Departments are siloed,** and wholly act on their own.
- 5. Customer service representatives are too busy putting band-aids** for individuals.

# Insights

Ayna

Parents get bounced around,  
regardless of how much privilege they  
have

1. **Government is not the first stop.** Parents go to teachers or principals first.
2. **Parents are not satisfied unless they receive their desired outcome,** regardless of how smooth the process is.
3. **“I do not know how to sc** Many parents do not think customer service with BPS **is a problem, because they do not even *think* about contacting BPS.**  
extremely confusing.
4. **Departments are siloed,**  
**The only parents who find customer service**
5. **Customer service represer** **problematic are those who interact with the system,**  
individuals. **and do not get what they want.**

# Insights

Ayna

1. **Government is not the first stop.** Parents go to teachers or principals first.
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4. **Departments are siloed,** and wholly act on their own.

5. **Customer service representatives are too busy putting band-aids for** individuals.

**Parent handbook**  
**Superintendents number**  
**Welcome Center**  
**Transportation Hotline**  
**Flow of contact on the website**  
**Twitter/Facebook**  
**Email addresses**

# Insights

Ayna

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2. **Parents are not satisfied unless they receive their desired outcome,** regardless of how smooth the process is.
3. **“I do not know how to solve my problem.”** Identifying whom to contact is extremely confusing.
4. **Departments are siloed,** and wholly act on their own.
5. Customer service representatives are too busy putting their side forward.
  1. **BPS customer service is built on relationships.** Cultures of customer service are very different, and representatives do not have a formal way to get to know each other.
  2. **There is more than one “fixer”.**

# Insights

Ayna

1. **Government is not the first stop.** Parents go to teachers or principals first.
2. **Parents are not satisfied unless they receive their desired outcome,** regardless of how smooth the process is.
3. **“I do not know how to solve my problem.”** Identifying whom to contact is extremely confusing.
4. **Departments are siloed,** and wholly act on their own.
5. Customer service representatives are **too busy putting band-aids** for individuals.

**They do not have time to zoom out and develop a system-wide solution.**

***The implication: reactive vs. proactive***