

**Worcester Education Collaborative's  
12th Annual Meeting**

# **LEARNING BEYOND LIMITS: COMMISSIONING A NEW WAY**



**Monday, November 1st, 2021**



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# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR WELCOMING REMARKS



Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Thank you for joining us this evening at the 12th Annual Meeting of the Worcester Education Collaborative. Special thanks to our sponsors this evening—particularly UniBank, Harvard Pilgrim Health Care, and United Way of Central Massachusetts.

Recently I have heard the term inflection point a lot. I must admit, I had to look it up. According to one source, it is a term used in differential calculus and differential geometry to refer to a point on a smooth plane curve at which the curvature changes sign. Who knew? There is reason why I didn't major in math. I continued scrolling and found another source that makes more sense for our purposes. An inflection point is a time of significant change in a situation. An inflection point is a turning point. We are at an inflection point with respect to education in our city, our state, and our nation. Here in Worcester, we are at this turning point as a result of a significant infusion of temporary dollars from the federal government into state and district coffers from the COVID Elementary and Secondary Education Relief Fund, a change in the state school funding formula, a consent decree that will change the composition of our School Committee, and a change in district leadership as Superintendent Binienda closes her memorable, notable, forty-year tenure in the Worcester Schools.

This infusion of funding creates a once-in-a-generation opportunity for our state to not only mitigate the impacts of COVID-19, but to confront and address long-standing inequities that have for years undermined learning experiences and outcomes for students of color, students from economically disadvantaged families, English learners, and students with disabilities in Massachusetts. For Worcester alone, this will mean over \$120M in funds to be expended over the next several years. As plans are refined, beyond COVID mitigation, we hope that the following needs will remain a priority: building affirming learning environments, helping kids to thrive academically, increasing educator diversity, engaging families and communities, and strengthening post-secondary pathways.

The past 20 plus months have affected kids in ways that we are only now beginning to understand. With measurable learning loss across all student populations and profound challenges to kids' social development and mental health, it is time for us all to remember as we proceed with our work that education is the work of the full community and that it is best if it focuses on cultivating the gifts of the head, the heart, and the hand. The fall-out from this terrible disease has firmly reminded us of these things. We will need to use the dollars available to build, buttress, and expand the systems and infrastructure that allows us to do this essential work.

Demographic realities, the "Great COVID Quit," and career re-assessment have also impacted the teaching force. As we work to stabilize and re-build the ranks of educators, it will be important to keep diversity and equity at the forefront. Research is unequivocal that all students benefit from teachers who bring to the classroom diverse insights, life experiences, and world views. It is one way to prepare young people for the increasingly globalized world that awaits them.

The resolution to a suit focusing on the intent of the Voting Rights Act has the potential to create a governing body with more equitable representation, more responsive to the voice and needs of the community. As the parties negotiate a settlement, it is our hope that they balance those critical needs with the equally important need for Worcester to advance as a School District—not just an aggregation of voting districts and neighborhood schools but as a system of schools that meets the needs of all kids seeking a sound and challenging education.

Soon Worcester will begin the work to select a new Superintendent of Schools. This person will by necessity not only need to be skilled in the tools of urban school leadership, but to be a visionary to see what is possible for our schools, for our kids, and for our community. Part of that work, I believe, will entail nurturing and sustaining the partnerships—school and community, school and family and so forth—that add so much value by amplifying the work of teaching and learning. While the pandemic has taught us and continues to teach us many hard lessons, one valuable lesson that we have learned is the power of our education ecosystem. We are blessed in Worcester to not only have a network of schools, each with its own distinct assets and culture, but a companion network—no—ecosystem of youth serving organizations, local cultural organizations, ethnic cultural organizations, and a growing municipal population that reflects the diversity of our globe. Yes, we are at an inflection point, we are ready to continue to work together, really together, on behalf of our kids.

*Jennifer Davis Carey*  
Sincerely,



# Pride and Progress



Good afternoon and thank you for joining us for the Worcester Education Collaborative's 12th Annual Meeting — Learning Beyond Limits: Commissioning a New Way.

As I thought about how I might welcome you this afternoon, two words or themes kept coming to mind: Pride & Progress.

During this afternoon's program you are going to hear about challenges and setbacks — many of which are daunting. As well as questions and solutions — many of which may also feel quite daunting. And all of which we at WEC find exciting — yes, all of it.

I am incredibly proud of the work that WEC's staff, board, and our informal network of advisors have accomplished — in partnership with the Worcester Public Schools, city leadership, and a variety of community organizations.

Immeasurable is the positive impact made on children, families, and educators in the City of Worcester, lead by Jennifer Davis Carey our fearless, founding executive director, Deputy Director Julia Kilgore, Assistant Director Emily Dodge, and their team of part-timers, interns, and volunteers — as well as the current and former members of our visionary, volunteer board of directors. This entire squad is dedicated, tireless, student-centered, community-focused, and — most of all — mission-driven. I have deep and wholehearted appreciation, respect, and admiration for each and every one of them.

None of the tremendous progress WEC has made would have been possible without the support of our loyal and generous funders who support our programming throughout the year — year in and year out! (And who are featured in this program book.)

The past two years have presented extraordinary challenges... and I appreciate the ways in which we have ALL worked hard and risen to the task of creatively serving our students and families in the midst of a global pandemic. We cannot forget that there has been a monumental load of heavy lifting on both sides of that equation.

I am especially grateful for (and proud of) all of the devoted Worcester Public School educators, para-professionals, staff, and leadership who have stepped up when it wasn't easy, but the need was great. I am also thankful for (and proud of) the enormous effort, sacrifice, flexibility, and patience of the students and families of this great city.

You will hear more about some of the vast and varied programs with which we are involved. You can find more detail in tonight's program and on our website, so I won't even begin to attempt to list them all. Although, I do want to call attention to three of the areas in which significant and appreciable progress has been made:

- First, the growth and development of Early College Programming in the district has already begun to deliver crucial rewards. Early College Programming not only represents incredible opportunities to prepare our oldest students for careers and further education — but they are a tangible, financial benefit that make it that much more affordable and attainable.
- Next, is the WEC-supported, groundbreaking, Worcester Public Schools' multi-year Strategic Plan "Defining our Path." Can you believe that we are more than halfway through that plan's window? Do you remember the lofty goals we set for ourselves just a few years ago? Naming only one, I'm amazed to think about the enormous progress the Worcester Public Schools have made in the realm of technology. From our educators being leaps and bounds ahead on their technological prowess, to the dream realized of each student possessing their own device — we are way ahead of schedule.
- Finally, I'm proud of the progress we've collectively made on the fronts of social and emotional learning — notably, the community-wide recognition of the very real impact of trauma on learning and how it has become so critical in the midst of the ongoing pandemic. Making progress along that complicated path, leveraging our assets both in and out of school, and complementing Worcester Public School programs, has been the launch of "Woo-Labs," a network of community-based partners.

These three areas of triumph represent the tip of the iceberg of our collective progress... progress for which we should all be proud! Progress in living and fulfilling our mission. Progress in serving the students, families, and educators in the city of Worcester... and progress in helping to meet their needs both in and out of school.

I am proud beyond measure of this nimble, non-profit organization, everybody involved, and the progress it has made — and continues to make. And I know you are, too.

Thank you.

Kate Salmon-Robinson, MHSA  
Worcester Education Collaborative Board Chair



# WEC 12th Annual Meeting

# AGENDA

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**Welcome** | Kate Salmon-Robinson, WEC Board Chair

**Executive Director Address** | Jennifer Davis Carey, WEC

**Spotlight: Woo-Labs** | Emily Dodge, WEC Assistant Director

**Critical Conversation:** "Reimagining Education; Breaking Down Walls"

Jeffrey Riley, MA Elementary & Secondary Education Commissioner

Carlos Santiago, MA Higher Education Commissioner

Juana Matias, Chief Operating Officer, MassINC

**Audience Q&A** | Facilitated by Juana Matias, MassINC

**Closing Remarks** | Kate Salmon-Robinson, WEC Board Chair

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Meet

# OUR SPEAKERS

## Dr. Jennifer Davis Carey

Executive Director, Worcester Education Collaborative



Jennifer is the founding Executive Director of the Worcester Education Collaborative. Jennifer received her Master's and Doctoral degrees from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and her Bachelor's degree from Harvard and Radcliffe Colleges. In 1998, she served as Special Assistant to Governor Paul Cellucci of Massachusetts, and a year later she became Director of the Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulations under Governor Jane Swift. Dr. Carey served in Governor Mitt Romney's and briefly in Governor Deval Patrick's administrations as Secretary of the Executive Office of Elder Affairs.

From 2007 until 2009, she oversaw the development of education and training solutions at Commonwealth Medicine, a division of University of Massachusetts Medical School. Before joining Massachusetts state government, Dr. Carey worked at Ohio University, Harvard University and Bancroft School, an independent K-12 school in Worcester. Dr. Carey is also the founding director of the initiative for Engaged Citizenship, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that provides educational workshops about effective, meaningful participation in the public policy processes of the local, state and federal governments.

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## Juana Matias

Chief Operating Officer, MassINC



Juana Matias joined MassINC as Chief Operating Officer in 2019. In her capacity, Juana oversees the organization's internal operations, performance, growth, development and marketing efforts.

Prior to joining MassINC, Juana served as the State Representative for the 16th Essex District, becoming one of the first Latina immigrant women elected to the Massachusetts State House. During her time at the State House, Juana sponsored key legislation to make college affordable, protect immigrant rights, promote access to minority owned and women owned businesses, address inequities in our public-school systems and expand opportunities for working class Americans. During her time as a State Representative, Juana launched a congressional race and became the first Latina to run for Congress in Massachusetts.

Juana graduated from the University of Massachusetts Boston in 2009 with bachelor's degrees in Political Science and Criminal Justice. In 2014, she received a Juris Doctor from Suffolk University Law School. After graduating from law school, Juana dedicated years of her career to public service by enlisting in AmeriCorps as a Justice AmeriCorps Legal Advocate. There she fought for humanitarian based immigration relief for unaccompanied children in removal proceedings. Juana is a member of the Massachusetts Bar Association.

Prior to her service with AmeriCorps, Juana served the Merrimack Valley region as a social worker, where she assisted families and children suffering from abuse and neglect. The experience further instilled in her that through service to others, she could have a positive impact in the lives of ordinary people, especially those in need.

Juana currently serves as a Corporator of Eastern Bank Corporation, Lawrence General Hospital's Board of Trustees and is a member of the UTEC, Amplify Latinx, and The Community Group Board of Directors.

Juana believes we need to continue to elect servant leaders who represent people over politics, and country over party. Her commitment and passion lies in working to eradicate racial, social, and economic inequities and ensure that every person has an opportunity to achieve the American dream.

Juana resides in Lawrence with her partner Pavel and their beautiful dog, Teja.

## Jeffrey Riley

### Massachusetts Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner

Jeffrey C. Riley is currently serving as Massachusetts' Commissioner and is supported by the Department's chief of staff, deputy commissioner, and an executive team responsible for seven key strategic areas: administration and finance, district support, educational options, instructional support, legal, planning and research, and student assessment.

Jeffrey C. Riley was appointed Massachusetts' 24th commissioner of elementary and secondary education in early 2018 and began serving as commissioner on April 5, 2018. A Massachusetts native, Mr. Riley's experience spans urban and suburban districts and includes teaching in Baltimore, Md., being principal of Tyngsboro Middle School, and being principal of Boston's Edwards Middle School. In January 2012, Commissioner Riley was appointed superintendent/receiver of the Lawrence Public Schools. During his more than six years there, he led a team that brought major improvements by shifting more resources and autonomy to the school level, expanding the school day, increasing enrichment opportunities, and ensuring all schools had great leaders and teachers.

Commissioner Riley lives in Boston and holds a bachelor's degree in philosophy from Pomona College in California, a master's degree in counseling from Johns Hopkins University in Maryland and a master's degree in school administration, planning and social policy from Harvard University.



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## Kate Salmon Robison

### Board Chair, Worcester Education Collaborative

A Wheaton College graduate with a degree in Sociology and Education, Kate also earned a Master's Degree in Health Services Management and Policy from The George Washington University.

After working for a large nursing home company, Kate came to SALMON Health and Retirement as administrator of Beaumont Rehabilitation and Skilled Nursing Center at Westborough. Later assuming the role of director of marketing communications and community relations, Kate led campus teams in developing marketing, sales, and community outreach and SALMON's Marketing Communications department. After nearly 25 years at SALMON, Kate recently stepped away from day-to-day operations to spend more time on other projects and with her nearly 'grown and flown' children.

Active in a variety of community organizations, Kate sits on the boards of directors for The Worcester Education Collaborative (WEC), UniBank, and SALMON Health and Retirement. She has also proudly has served on the boards of other organizations, including The Alzheimer's Association of Eastern Massachusetts and The Massachusetts Assisted Living Facilities Association.



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## Dr. Carlos Santiago

### Massachusetts Higher Education Commissioner

Carlos E. Santiago is Commissioner of Higher Education for Massachusetts, appointed to this position by the Board of Higher Education (BHE) in July 2015. Working with the BHE, he is responsible for providing overall direction to public higher education in Massachusetts and helping shape state-level policies that maximize the benefits of higher education to the Commonwealth and its citizens.

On October 1, 2019, Santiago was named the chair of the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) Executive Committee.

Santiago joined the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education in April 2013 as the Senior Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs.

His past academic appointments include that of Chancellor of the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee (Wisconsin's second largest research university). He brings over 30 years of experience in public higher education. Santiago also served as provost and chief operating officer at the University at Albany, (SUNY). He was a professor of economics at UWM and SUNY-Albany and holds a Ph.D. in economics from Cornell University.

Santiago is also the author or co-author of six books and has published dozens of articles and book reviews, of which many focus on economic development and the changing socioeconomic status of Latinos in the United States. On two separate occasions, in 1996 and 2011, Santiago has been named one of the 100 most influential Hispanics in the United States by Hispanic Business magazine.

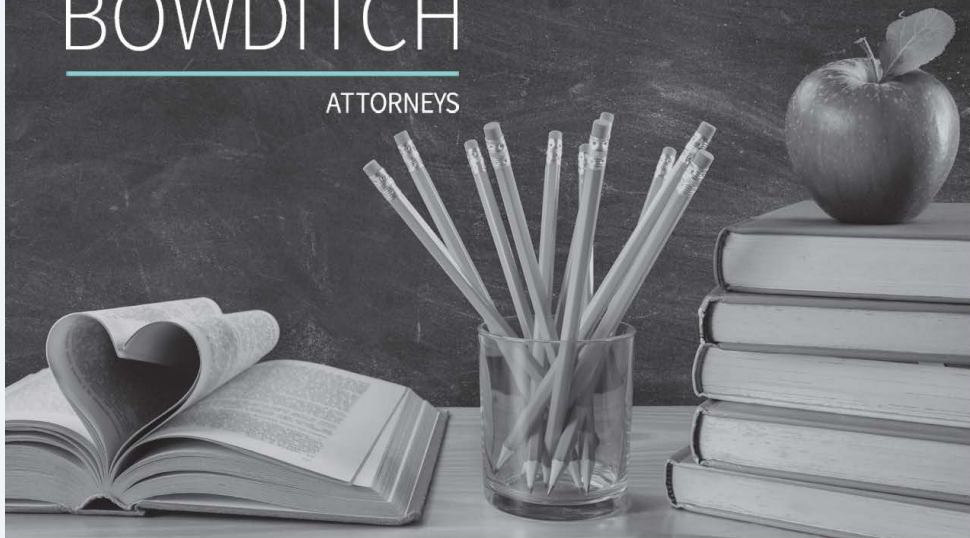


*thank  
you*

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who have worked so tirelessly  
throughout the pandemic  
to support our students through  
unimaginable challenges

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# WEC's Work: A Year in Review

## WORCESTER EDUCATION EQUITY ROUNDTABLE

The Worcester Educational Equity Roundtable is a coalition of partners—colleges, universities, cultural organizations, nonprofits, businesses, youth, and families—working to align key programs, outreach, and advocacy efforts with a commitment to equity for historically marginalized people in the PreK-12 public education system in the City of Worcester.

Led by the Worcester Education Collaborative, the Roundtable is a visionary coalition that leverages the collective impact of partners to interrogate, reimagine, inform, and help enact systems, policies, and practices that impact education. The Roundtable advances its mission by meeting regularly in an on-going, facilitated community of practice; engaging the expertise of partners and their constituents through periodic briefings and presentations; hosting events and speakers to build capacity; and jointly developing programs and initiatives to support the education of children in grades PreK-12 during both in- and out-of-school settings.

Examples of Roundtable activities over the past year include:

- Advocating at a state-level for historically underserved students through our role as a founding member of the Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership, a collective working to advance educational equity statewide (see below)
- Co-hosting a conversation with New York Times best-selling author Heather McGhee on the devastating true costs of racism
- Hosting a School Committee Candidate Q&A blog forum to help inform the public of candidates' positions on key educational issues

Through our work with Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership (MEEP), we:

- Hosted sessions to hear directly from students and families about their learning experiences during the pandemic
- Advocated for policies that would better serve the Commonwealth's students, including the Educator Diversity Act and equitable use of pandemic recovery funds
- Helped develop a toolkit with recommendations for how district leaders can leverage federal recovery dollars and state Student Opportunity Act funding to meet current needs and catalyze future improvement



**MASSACHUSETTS EDUCATION  
EQUITY PARTNERSHIP**

# WOO-LABS

Years of hard work came to fruition this summer as the Worcester Education Equity Roundtable formally launched Woo-Labs, a network of education ecosystem partners committed to advancing educational and racial equity for Worcester K-6 students by improving out-of-school time providers' capacity to provide high-quality, culturally responsive, student-centered, project-based learning opportunities.

Woo-Labs partners reimagine education as an ecosystem that is inclusive of in- and out-of-school learning, centers students' lived experiences and agency, and actively work to dismantle bias and inequity. WEC serves as the backbone organization, providing administrative services including facilitation of a community of practice, coordination of professional development, program support, and fundraising.

## Woo-Labs: A Learning Ecosystem



## Summer 2021: Cooking with Gas



College Corps Fellow Fatima Diallo engages a Girls INC participant in The National Association of Women in Construction's Block Kids Building Competition



**5 SITES**



**775 STUDENTS**



## STUDENT-DRIVEN LEARNING

All sites implemented project-based learning, where students had opportunities to engage in hands-on, multi-week, rigorous projects based on their individual interests



## MEASUREMENT CATALYZED IMPROVEMENT

Collectively, partners improved in 5 critical measures of program quality according to expert third-party observers, including building relationships and stimulating thinking

## Fall 2021: The Network Doubles

We're excited to double in size to 10 partner sites this fall with a projected reach of 500 students. New partners include:





# WEC's Work: A Year in Review

## COMMUNITY AWARENESS & CAPACITY-BUILDING

A key component of WEC's portfolio is educating the public, along with state and local leaders, about critical education issues and essential best practices. This year, WEC continued its longtime community awareness and capacity-building work by hosting the Education Module for Leadership Worcester and co-hosting the Worcester School Committee Debate

New community events this year included:

**More Perfect Union:** In the wake of the civil unrest of 2020, the Executive Director developed and launched a colloquium for local leaders, More Perfect Union, to consider the evolution of current systems of power and learn, unlearn, and act to advance equity and anti-racism

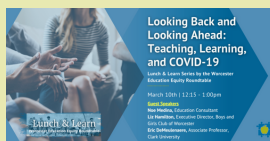
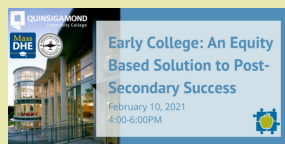
### TOWARD A MORE PERFECT UNION

Achieving our Multi-Cultural,  
Multi-Racial Democracy



**Facilitating Difficult Conversations:** WEC hosted a two-part series with the Boston Public Health Commission and Facing History & Ourselves on having conversations with children on difficult topics in response to the January 6th storming of the Capitol

**Early College:** WEC convened a panel discussion on early college that included WPS staff, Chair of the Board of Higher Education Chris Gabrieli, leaders from WSU and QCC, and an early college student to highlight Early College as an equity-based solution to promote post-secondary success



**Lunch and Learn Series:** WEC's Worcester Education Equity Roundtable organized 3 briefings this spring on relevant education topics such as the WPS budget, lessons learned during the pandemic, and how to create safe and engaging environments during school re-entry

## WEC'S TRAUMA WORK

Since 2013, WEC has worked to address the impact of trauma on learning. WEC has developed and implemented a highly regarded series of trainings and web-based resource libraries for practitioners in the youth development, education, and juvenile justice sectors. Our interactive trainings use videos, clips from popular films, and excerpts from contemporary literature to provide participants with both a theoretical understanding of relevant issues and practical tools and skills to foster students' positive behavior and resilience. The curriculum covers crucial topics such as:



# 10

NUMBER OF TRAUMA  
TRAININGS DELIVERED  
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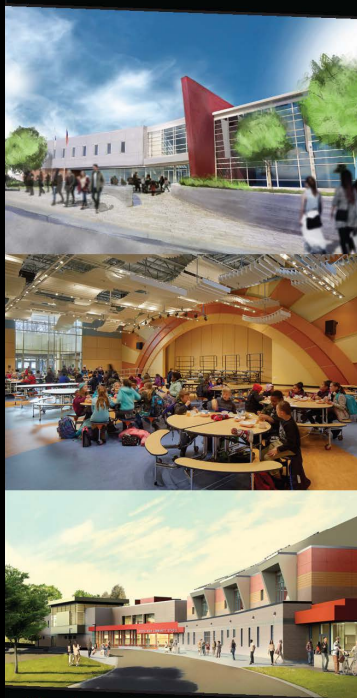
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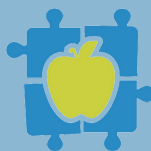
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# WEC's Work: A Year in Review

Educational research is unequivocal that proficiency in reading by the end of third grade enables students to shift from learning to read to reading to learn, and to master the more complex subject matter they encounter beginning in the fourth grade. Students who fail to reach this critical milestone are at significantly greater risk of dropping out of school and failing to earn a high school diploma.

A WEC signature initiative funded by the AbbVie Foundation, Reading Together takes a unique, multi-pronged approach to promoting family literacy in Worcester Public Schools by:

- Providing K-3 students from seven of WPS' most historically under-resourced schools their own copies of high-quality, high-interest books along with tools for their parents and caregivers to support them as they learn to read
- Inviting parents and caregivers to join students four times each year for classroom reading sessions and literacy activities led by WEC Reading Assistants, helping make reading a family event that is fun for everyone



## Summer 2021

### 13,000 HIGH-QUALITY BOOKS

With the generous support of the AbbVie Foundation, WEC expanded its Summer Reading Together program to reach over 1,300 students in grades K-6 this summer. First piloted in response to the pandemic in summer 2020, WEC expanded this program this year, providing over 13,000 books to eight of our Woo-Labs partners, who distributed packs of 10 carefully curated books related to STEM, Health and Wellness, School Readiness, Social Justice, Social Emotional Learning, and more to their students. Book packs were accompanied by activities, journals and writing supplies.



## Fall 2021

### OVER 1,300 STUDENTS

Our Reading Assistants are eager to return to schools this fall. Across the 74 classrooms served, Assistants are on track to reach over 1,300 students and their families.



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READING TOGETHER

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