Student Opportunity Act Plan

Lowell

# Commitment 1: Focusing on Student Subgroups

*Student subgroups requiring focused support to ensure all students achieve at high levels in school and are successfully prepared for life.*

* First language not English students
* English learners and former English learners
* Students with disabilities
* Low income/economically disadvantaged students
* High Needs students (defined as any student who is economically disadvantaged, has a disability, or is an English learner/former English learner)
* African American/Black students
* Asian students
* Hispanic or Latinx students

*The rationale for selecting these student subgroups.*

Lowell is a diverse urban district and a first stop for many newcomer families who arrive in the United States. With 2019-2020 student enrollment of 15,368, the Lowell Public Schools (LPS) serves a low income, (57.7% economically disadvantaged) diverse population (28.3% Asian, 34.4% Hispanic, and 25.5% Caucasian) of traditionally underserved students who arrive to school each day intersecting with the added challenges of poverty and language/cultural acquisition. Within LPS 24% students identified as English Learners and 31.3% speak a language other than English in the home. LPS has 74% of its students designated as "High Needs" by the DESE. To effectively support the diversity and level of need in our community, it is the charge of the LPS to target programming and supports to meet these challenges.

The 2019 accountability data classified the Lowell Public Schools (LPS) as a district that is "Making substantial progress towards targets" in the 50th percentile relative to similar type districts. Lowell identified a cohort of 6 underperforming schools as part of its "Renaissance Network".

In our subgroup analysis of MCAS results (grade 3-8) over the past three years we have seen a slight improvement in the performance of students who identify as Latino and black, yet Lowell remains below the state average. Performance of students who identify as Asian and white have remained flat for both ELA and Math over the past three years and also below the state average.

Diving deeper into the data and examining the data (grades 3-8) by school we have uncovered that there are 6 schools (4 middle schools, one pre k- 8 and the high school) that are in need of targeted interventions for subgroups. Students at these schools are performing at lower levels than at other similar schools in the district, with average scores for all subgroups more than 10 points lower than other schools in the city. Lowell High School students in low performing subgroups are performing lower than their peers across the state in the same subgroups.

**Commitment 2: Using Evidence-Based Programs to Close Gaps**

## Focus Area 1: Expanded access to full-day, high-quality pre-kindergarten for 4-year-olds, including potential collaboration with other local providers (D, F, and G)

\*\*\*Lowell Public Schools did not receive SOA funding in FY21 to fund this plan.

Additional pre-kindergarten classrooms will serve 400 students in Year 1 (SY21) and will expand further to serve an additional 300 students by Year 3 (SY23). In addition, over the three years, we will reach approximately 1,100 students with high-quality early literacy programs available to all families within the community.

Expanding high-quality pre-K and reconfiguring early literacy instruction requires two complementary strategies for improving student outcomes, particularly in ELA. Increased access to, and enrollment in, new pre- K programs that will flow seamlessly into continued strong early literacy instruction in grades K-3. LPS will be mapping the current early education programming within LPS, the community and with community partners to identify gaps in access as well as areas of opportunities for expansion.

In Year 1, LPS will continue to work with community partners to determine the need unserved within the community and determine a plan to open new early learning classrooms within the community to service the needs.

The pre-kindergarten model will be structured based on the evidence-based model below.

* All pre-K educators will hold a degree in early childhood education and will be prepared to support the needs of all incoming students
* We will continue to research and adopt high-quality curriculum materials aligned to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and based on national models in early education.
* We will establish a progress monitoring and assessment system.
* Teachers will receive professional development throughout the year, with expert coaches providing embedded support both inside and outside the classroom.
* We will continue to ensure all classroom settings are appropriate for pre-K students.
* Pre-K classrooms will feature small class sizes with one teacher and one paraprofessional for no more than 15 students.
* We will seek accreditation for our programming by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).
* We will hire appropriately certified staff to support the individual needs of our families.

Research will also guide our implementation of an effective early literacy program, much of which is consistent with the pre-K structured components outlined above. Our literacy program will include:

* Establishing school-based early literacy teams, including school and district personnel, to ensure program alignment and success across classrooms.
* Implement high-quality, evidence-based literacy curricular materials in pre-K and grades K-3.
* Implement assessments to identify instructional needs and progress monitor student success.
* Differentiating, scaffolding, and accommodating the curriculum to ensure access for all students.
* Implementing evidence-based interventions to address individual student needs.
* Providing professional development and support to teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff, through coaching and collaborative planning time for early educators.

Throughout the school year, LPS will continue to plan for the expansion of pre-K seats and the continued implementation of the high quality, standards aligned early literacy program in grades K-3. The plan includes the hiring of early learning coaches, embedding school-based common planning times for early educators to meeting with team members and coaches, reviewing the existing high-quality instructional materials in place and purchasing additional materials as needed, purchasing additional classroom equipment and materials as needed, and providing teachers with professional development on the District's high quality, standard based instruction within grades K-3.

In Year 1 (FY21), in addition to ensuring a successful opening of new pre-kindergarten seats, LPS will focus primarily on core instruction in pre-kindergarten and early elementary literacy. With support from instructional coaches, educators will continue to implement the high-quality, standards aligned instructional materials, participate in ongoing curriculum-specific professional development, and utilize assessments to inform their instructional practices.

In the following years, we will focus more intensively on selecting and utilizing appropriate interventions. Teachers will receive training on specific evidence-based interventions that complement the adopted instructional materials, while instructional coaches provide ongoing support to educators to implement interventions appropriately.

## Focus Area 2: Supporting educators to implement high-quality, aligned curriculum (E and F)

\*Lowell Public Schools did not receive SOA funding in FY21 to fund this plan.

Using the Student Opportunity Act funds, LPS will make a significant investment to support rising personnel costs to provide the best learning environment for our children. Additional funding from the Student Opportunity Act will allow LPS to increase the number of full-time teaching positions with the goal of lowering class sizes at all levels and increase the number of instructional coaching positions to provide a stronger professional development system of support for effective implementation of high-quality, aligned curriculum at both the elementary and secondary levels.

* One teacher for every 25 students in elementary schools
* One teacher for every 30 students in middle schools
* Every elementary school with 400 students funded for a Literacy Specialist
* Every middle school with 500 students funded for an Instructional Specialist
* Leveling caseloads for equity

LPS will also make a significant investment to increase technology hardware to move toward achieving a 1:1 student to device ratio.

* 1:1 student to device ratio will decrease inequities among students and schools
* Students’ device use will improve the writing process, expanding the genres and formats
* Support student-centered, individualized, and project-based learning increases engagement
* Support increased student-teacher communications
* Support state assessments which have moved to an online format

## Focus Area 3: Increased personnel and services to support holistic student needs (C and/or D)

\*Lowell Public Schools did not receive SOA funding in FY21 to fund this plan.

Throughout the District there are large variances in subgroup outcomes by school. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has identified six schools within LPS for low performance either as a whole or within specific subgroups. All of the schools have created a DESE turnaround plan and are in the implementation stages. Based on the data and the schools' turnaround plans. it is evident that these schools are in need of additional supports. In a review of the data, the largest disparity occurs in middle school for all subgroups. LPS will be using Student Opportunity Act funds to continue to build out the Renaissance Network. The Renaissance Network is the strategic grouping of our chronically underperforming schools. The Renaissance Network provides supports in the form of data analysis, coaching and customized staff professional development. LPS is working to differentiate supports to these schools based on readiness and accountability percentiles.

6 schools have been identified in need of targeted interventions for subgroups

* 4 middle schools
* 1 pre k- 8
* Lowell High School

Students at these schools are performing at lower levels than at other similar schools in the district, with average scores for all subgroups more than 10 points lower than other schools in the city.

LPS recognizes that these six schools require additional time, attention, support and services to dramatically change their trajectory and course of action. LPS is setting the stage for long-term improvement by focusing on the implementation of high quality, standards-based curriculum and student achievement at every school site and investing in targeted and intensive support for chronically underperforming schools.

**Commitment 3: Monitoring Success with Outcome Metrics and Targets**

*Outcome metrics that will be used to measure progress in closing gaps for selected student groups.*

* Student Achievement: English language arts (ELA) achievement as measured by average scaled scores on MCAS
* Student Achievement: Mathematics achievement as measured by average scaled scores on MCAS
* Student Achievement: Science achievement as measured by average scaled scores (or CPI, depending on grade level) on MCAS
* Student Growth: ELA mean student growth percentile (SGP)
* Student Growth: Mathematics mean student growth percentile (SGP)
* High School Completion: Four-year cohort graduation rate
* High School Completion: Annual dropout rate
* English Language Proficiency: Progress made by students towards attaining English proficiency (percentage of students meeting annual targets calculated to attain English proficiency in six years).
* Additional Indicators: Chronic absenteeism (percentage of students missing 10 percent or more of their days in membership)
* Custom District Metric 1: SEL DESSA
* Custom District Metric 2: iReady assessment results in math and literacy

**Commitment 4: Engaging All Families**

*District plans for ensuring that all families, particularly those representing identified student subgroups most in need of support, have access to meaningful engagement regarding their students’ needs.*

Through the newly formed Office of Equity and Community Empowerment, the district has strengthened its focus on meaningful family engagement, with a strategic focus on building a trust relationship with families and community organizations and increasing access to two-way communication for underserved and linguistically diverse families. In the past, it may have been more straightforward to determine how funding would translate to school-based resources due to the prior centrally controlled decision-making model. However, beginning with FY 21, LPS is moving to site-based budgeting in which more of the decision-making shifted to the schools through collaborative processes that include newly reconstituted school site councils. In doing so, LPS ensures staff and families have a voice in identifying each school community's budgetary priorities while maintaining the oversight and checks necessary to ensure accountability and systemic alignment. Through allocation of pooled funds based on total number of students and individual student needs, educators working directly working with students, are able to determine the optimal supports for their building community. The Office of Equity and Community Empowerment worked with school leaders to reinvigorate the school site councils to be prepared to do this important work.

A team of full-time bilingual family liaisons have been hired and housed at the central office to help provide a direct link between parents and the school community. This includes:

* Weekly translation of materials (emails, texts, social media posts, recorded messages) in the district's most commonly spoken languages: Spanish, Portuguese, Khmer, and Swahili
* Minimum of bi-weekly communications with immigrant and refugee-serving community-based organizations regarding pertinent information related to district programs, processes (such as registration, remote/in person learning opportunities, communications mechanisms)
* Maintenance of multi-lingual Facebook pages

Additionally, the bilingual liaisons conduct information sessions and community forums in the most common languages spoken in the district and liaise with teachers, social workers, school-based family liaisons and principals to understand and alleviate linguistic and cultural barriers to learning. The bilingual family liaisons are partnering with trusted community organizations to conduct listening sessions and collect community-gathered data to inform changes to programs, curriculum, and professional development at the district's flagship high school through the district's Portrait of a Graduate initiative. They are also developing a parent network for families who speak the same language to promote mutual support among parents and help to create a more welcoming and respectful environment for families to participate in school events as well as decision-making meetings at the school and district level. This includes parent showcases for pre-school and incoming kindergarten students, newcomer and refugee families in navigating the school enrollment process, and targeted outreach to linguistically diverse families relating to the transition from 8th to 9th grade and the academic and extracurricular opportunities offered at the high school level.

Furthermore, the bilingual family liaisons are being cross-trained to support the screening of families for McKinney-Vento services. This will enable our district to ensure that language does not serve as a barrier for families to receive the support they need if they are experiencing economic instability or homelessness.

The Office of Equity and Community Empowerment plans to measure the impact of its efforts through a parent/community satisfaction survey related to welcoming environment, access to information, and access to services in the multiple languages. The Office of Equity and Community Empowerment also intends to measure its efforts through the increase of underrepresented students in the pre-registration school enrollment process for pre-school and kindergarten (early lottery- based assignment of demand-programs at elementary school) and a decrease in disproportionate enrollment of under-served students in advanced courses and special programs at the high school level.

**Certifications**

*Certification that stakeholders were engaged in accordance with the Student Opportunity Act.*

During the 19-20 school year, the Superintendent began the process of developing a comprehensive strategic plan. By February 19, 2020, the Superintendent had conducted 54 listening and learning sessions with individual employees and local bargaining unit representatives,16 formal speaking engagements and public presentations were conducted, and 41 listening and learning sessions with community-based and non-profit leaders. Additionally, the Superintendent held over 100 visits at schools, over 16 school-based morning meetings with local parent groups, 5 evening community forums scheduled in different neighborhoods across the city and met with community partners across the city. Through this stakeholder engagement, the strategic plan was developed which led to the development of the Student Opportunity Act document.

*Certification that School Committee has voted (or is expected to vote on the district’s Student Opportunity Act Plan.*

Date of Approval: Pending