Student Opportunity Act Plan

Fitchburg

# 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)
* Hispanic or Latinx students
* Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic/Non-Latinx students
* White students

*The rationale for selecting these student subgroups.*

Fitchburg Public Schools is a small, urban district of 5,338 students located in North Central Massachusetts. The Hispanic/Latino demographic accounts for 25% of the city's population. Additionally, 52% of all students enrolled in the Fitchburg Public Schools identify as Hispanic/ Latino. Fitchburg has the highest student mobility rate averaging between 19% and 21% yearly over the past five years. Only 35% of the graduating class of 2020 attended Fitchburg since kindergarten. 73% of the students classify as high needs, and 61.9% are economically disadvantaged.

According to the 2019 MCAS Accountability Data, Fitchburg Public Schools received 60% on its overall progress towards improvement, which classifies Fitchburg as making substantial progress towards improving our improvement target. Although FPS is making substantial progress in 4 out of 8 of our schools, McKay Art Academy, Memorial Middle School, Longsjo Middle School, and Fitchburg High School, are among the lowest 10% of schools. Throughout the district's schools, the Special Education, EL and Former EL, and Hispanic/Latino subgroups continue to be the lowest performing. In addition, our special education rates continue to be higher than the state average at 24.2%.

Despite the efforts of many dedicated and talented staff, there continues to be an achievement gap for our most marginalized students. In the fall of 2019 district administration began examining the structures and systems our district and schools have a place to support students by completing the DESE's Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Self Assessment. The results from the self-assessment indicated that improvements to both Tier 1 Academic, Social and Emotional supports are needed. The District continues to improve our support system by having all elementary and middle schools join the S3 academy to develop integrated student service plans for social and emotional support as well as continued integration of a robust instructional leadership team at each school that will utilize data to improve instructional practices.

The number of students exceeding and meeting expectations on Grade 3 ELA MCAS in 2019 was 51%. After third grade, the number of students exceeding, and meeting expectations declines in grades 4-8. Furthermore, the majority of FPS students in ELA in grades 3-8 are scoring in the partially meeting expectations category. These findings suggest a focus on early literacy/ foundation reading skills needs to be greater at the elementary level. Teachers need professional development on the latest research around structured literacy instruction, especially at grades k-2. Teaching foundational skills is a complex, multi- dimensional process that unfolds at different rates with individual students. Through no fault of their own, teachers are generally underprepared in both the knowledge and pedagogy necessary to effectively teach this array of skills (Binks- Cantrell et al., 2012). To fill the gap between what students, need and teachers know, a research-based foundational skills program becomes critical for the teacher, ultimately increasing the probability that students will leave the early elementary grades knowing how to read.

Fitchburg Public Schools goal is to be the best urban district in Massachusetts. In order to achieve our goal, we must provide the best education possible to all student subgroups in our district. After reviewing our data, we summarize the following conclusions:

* Disparities in student subgroups performance are apparent in all grade levels
* Our student subgroups for special education and English learners are our lowest performing
* Based on our data collection, we have many students who require increased support for their social emotional needs
* Literacy growth for our students remains low at all levels because students are lacking the foundational skills in early literacy

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

The Student Opportunity Act offers an opportunity for the Fitchburg Public Schools to commit to additional evidence-based programs to close the opportunity and achievement gaps among our student subgroups. The Department has recommended that, based on our district's projected increase in Chapter 70 state aid and less a reasonable factor for inflation, Fitchburg Public Schools should allocate a minimum of $2,058,124 (FY21) incremental Chapter 70 funds towards evidence-based programs. We anticipate that the incremental Chapter 70 funds for evidence-based programs will continue to increase in Years 2 and 3.

We intend to use our Student Opportunity Acts funds to adopt or deepen three new programs, and intend to make multi-year, sustained commitments to these priority areas:

* Increased personnel and services to support holistic students’ needs
* Supporting educators to implement high-quality, aligned curriculum
* Research-based early literacy program in pre-kindergarten and early elementary grades

In addition to the narrative below, the accompanying budget files provide a detailed FY21 budget for these programs totaling $2,058,124. These investments are as follows: $550,000 for increased personnel and services to support holistic student needs, $1,193,000 for supporting educators to implement high quality, aligned curriculum and $315,124 for a research-based early literacy program.

## Focus Area 1: Increased personnel and services to support holistic student needs (C and/or D)

Students impacted: This tiered system of support would impact every student attending Fitchburg Public Schools. The DESSA assessment and instructional practices will support every student K-12 and the DECA for preschool age children. In addition, the district support positions will increase the professional development opportunities and monitoring for all staff.

All elementary and middle schools began working with the S3 academy in FY20. Each school is in the process of creating plans that will address support systems for students. This work aligns with the district tiered system of a support plan that will focus on collecting data on the social-emotional needs of students, training staff in Michael Linsin's classroom management makeover, and utilizing a social emotional curriculum designed through data collection and reviewed by school data teams. The district is also in the start of equity work that is a multiple-year project through The Disruptive Equity Education Project (DEEP). The evidence-based programs for this work includes the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) and unclassified Adverse Childhood Experience ACE which will now be included in the enrollment package.

This work will affect all students in Fitchburg through the assessment and alignment into a tiered system of support.

Tier I: Universal screening, ACE screener added to enrollment package for all incoming families, Code of conduct that is geared towards learning, continue with S3 academy to implement school/district plan, RULER training and implementation in all schools, direct instructional materials from DESSA-DECA and Second Steps, adoption of social standards in grades K-12. Counseling referrals for any student by school level guidance.

Tier II: Integrated student support teams to review current data and provide recommendations, Counseling support by guidance or social adjustment counselor in small groups, The BRYT program (high school and middle school level), guidance counselors providing more directed support to classrooms for teaching and behavioral approaches.

Tier III: 1:1 counseling by a clinical interventionist (LICSW), Support from a BCBA, Referral to special education, programming for students with emotional impairment.

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

As a district we see supporting educators to implement high quality, aligned curriculum as a major need throughout the district. Access to high quality, standards-aligned curricular materials is a critical component of the student learning experience, with growing evidence that curricular materials matter particularly for those students experiencing opportunity and performance gaps.

Based on our curriculum review completed internally by district teachers and instructional coaches and external by the Public Consulting Group (PCG), we need to begin improving the implementation of high quality, aligned curriculum. FPS must hire four curriculum directors to oversee the curriculum analysis, selection and adoption, and coherence and professional learning in ELA, math, science and social studies. Currently, the district has no curriculum directors in any content area who oversees the implementation of high quality, aligned curriculum.

Curriculum adoption is necessary for science and social studies throughout the district. District-wide there continues to be a lack of curriculum resources for science and social studies at all levels. In Year 1, Fitchburg will utilize an inclusive curriculum adoption process drawing on DESE's Curate initiative and EdReports to investigate evidence-based curriculum to purchase for science and social studies.

In addition to selecting and implementing high quality, aligned curriculum, teachers are asking for professional development directly from the vendor of our curriculum products. Also, Fitchburg Public Schools does not have an ongoing course catalogue or structure for offering professional development, which causes gaps in our implementation of high quality, aligned curriculum.

With the adoption of high quality, aligned curriculum the district has committed to supporting evidence-based strategies for successful turnaround at Fitchburg High School and McKay by partnering with Focused Schools. They will be providing professional development and working with the Administration at each building to mobilize an urgency of improvement with classroom instruction.

In order to properly implement aligned curriculum and improve instructional practices the district will need to continue to improve the technology infrastructure through the expansion of 1:1 devices and direct online interventions with students through a tiered model.

***Focus Area 3***: Research-based early literacy programs in pre-kindergarten and early elementary grades (E, F, and G)

Students Impacted: The Research-based early literacy initiative will serve approximately 2,175 students in grades K-4 in Year 1 and will impact middle and high school students in later years.

In order for 90% of students to become skillful readers by grade 3, Fitchburg Public Schools will begin a multi-year commitment to adopting high-quality instructional materials, use of valid assessments, and ongoing professional development. The district is beginning to move away from a balanced literacy approach to a structured literacy approach. In year one, the district will purchase and implement Wilson's Fundations program for grades PK, K and 1. Teachers will receive professional development and coaching on early literacy skills and implementing the Fundations program. In order for students to connect what they are learning for phonics to text, we will purchase leveled readers called Geodes for Kindergarten and Grade 1. To identify students at risk for reading difficulties, Fitchburg Public Schools will purchase and implement the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment. This assessment will be given to all students at the elementary school level. The DIBELS assessment will also be used as one of our Dyslexia screeners for students. Lastly, in year one, teachers at the elementary level will receive training on early reading content and pedagogy in order to understand and respond to individual student literacy needs.

**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 Growth: ELA mean student growth percentile (SGP)
* Student Growth: Mathematics mean student growth percentile (SGP)
* Post-secondary Success: Enrolled in college during the first year after high school
* Post-secondary Success: Persisted in college into the second year Custom District Metric 1: iReady
* Custom District Metric 2: Student engagement social assessment (DESSA and DECA) and the ACE screener (measured by annual district-wide student survey)

**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.*

Fitchburg Public Schools recognizes that family engagement is critical to ensuring successful outcomes for all students. Given our focus on student subgroups, it is particularly important that we find ways to effectively engage the families of our students of color, our EL students, students from low-income backgrounds, and our students with disabilities.

We recognize that existing family engagement opportunities at our schools may not be effective in reaching all families. Therefore, in addition to our ongoing monthly special education parent advisory council meetings, and quarterly PTO meetings at each school, we are also committing to pilot a new parent-teacher home visiting project in FPS specifically targeted to families of students of color, EL students, students with disabilities, and those from low-income backgrounds. In this model, educators will make visits to families at their homes to engage in a dialogue about their shared goals for their students. We will measure the engagement of families who receive a home visit through a follow-up survey and track the number and demographics of families reached through home visits each year. Additionally, we will begin to bring the presidents of the local school PTOs together with district leadership bi-monthly to share best practices, receive information on upcoming district initiatives, and provide input on new initiatives and ongoing work.

The district will begin work with a diversity firm, Disruptive Equity Education Project (DEEP) who will support the district in developing Diversity, Belonging, Inclusion and Equity within the Fitchburg public school and community. The district will be engaging in an equity audit, and professional development for its central office staff and develop a plan to bring this work out to all employees. These services will support the development/awareness of diversity, belonging, inclusion and equity (DBIE) and build the capacity of Fitchburg leaders to vision and to lead with equity as a lens. This will support more effective communication for all stakeholders.

**Certifications**

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

Fitchburg Public Schools partnered with a local community organization, Newvue, to assist us with our community engagement efforts and ensure broad and demographically representative participation from our community. Through these efforts we engaged the following groups: focus groups of educators, special education advisory councils, EL parent advisory councils, the local teacher’s union, and one additional community organization: Stewards Community Group. On Saturday, March 14, 2020 Fitchburg Public Schools had a community forum scheduled to educate the community on the Student Opportunity Act and receive feedback on the community's opinion on how to use the funds. Unfortunately, this event was cancelled because of Covid-19. Although this event was cancelled Fitchburg Public Schools did receive parent and community feedback at our annual Title I breakfast. In addition, we distributed a survey to our high school students to gain insight on their thoughts on how to use the SOA funds. Based on the feedback we received from all of our stakeholders, they are interested in more social emotional and mental health support for students and implementing high-quality, aligned curriculum.

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

Date of Approval: 06/15/20