Student Opportunity Act Plan

Lynn

# 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)

*The rationale for selecting these student subgroups.*

The LPS strategic plan was finalized in the spring of 2019. In the fall of 2018, the leadership team, which was comprised of all principals, directors, and assistant directors, along with the inclusive planning team, which was comprised of students, teachers, parents, and partners from more than 20 community agencies, worked together in parallel fashion to dive deep on what was working well in the Lynn Public Schools and where we saw ourselves in the next five years. Among other things, addressing the persistent gaps involving ELs and SWDs was a focus of the strategic objectives identified in the final plan. The plan has led to a tight focus on elevating thinking on and strengthening services for these subgroups.

We believe deeply that doing so will not only yield stronger outcomes for the subgroups, but all students. Strategies toward these ends have actualized in the following forms thus far:

* Districtwide professional development on meeting the needs of ELs school years 2018-2019 and 2019-2020
* Increasing inclusion staff and related service providers in FY20
* Implementing Every Student Every Day initiative – a clinical endeavor aimed at addressing attendance challenges at the root cause

We believe that these strategies and those planned in the coming years are portions of an approach to meeting the needs of all students, and ELs and SWDs in particular. Alone, however, the strategies are not enough. LPS simply does not have the human capital to meet state and Federal guidelines and alignment with clinical recommendations for caseload maximums, never mind staffing sufficient enough to effectuate the strategies.

In keeping with the LPS Strategic Plan, we believe we can leverage the proposed Student Opportunity Act funding to more effectively support ELs and SWDs by:

* Better accommodating and responding to the social emotional needs of students
* Improving special education supports by deepening the existing inclusion model, reducing caseloads and the provision of ongoing professional development particularly on Universal Design for Learning.
* Improving services for ELs by building on the existing inclusion model, expanding social and emotional supports at the secondary level, maintaining EL student to English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher ratios (given projected increases), and the provision of focused, district-wide professional development.
* Creating additional opportunities for enrichment for students, while also creating common planning time for teachers at the elementary level.

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

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

LPS will restructure its clinical model to one that focuses on tier 1 supports across the district and aligns social worker caseloads with the National Association of Social Workers recommendation of 1 social worker for every 250 students in a school.

There is long-standing agreement among researchers that learning is substantively disrupted when a student's cognitive resources are consumed by the various forms of trauma and/or anxiety. Often, students who suffer from one or both

are unsuccessful academically without the appropriate supports. The impact of trauma and anxiety also manifests through inconsistent attendance at school. LPS has actively addressed related issues by providing trauma-informed professional development for teachers over the course of the past three years. That said, in cases where the trauma is severe, classroom strategies are insufficient in meeting student and family needs. An evidence-based approach to addressing the issue is to have a social worker on site to offer direct, clinical services to students and connect families to appropriate resources outside of school. At present, the social worker to student ratio in LPS is 1:643. We are unable to provide substantive supports to students with a ratio this egregious.

Much of clinical work to proactively address trauma-related issues exists in the district's Every Student, Every Day attendance initiative. Through this framework, we have looked to create new systems, structures and processes to meet the needs of our most at-risk students and families. Part and parcel of a larger social and emotional learning focus and framework, the attendance initiative focuses on:

* Establishing an equity understanding that our focus is students in the margin and that they deserve our attention and efforts
* Designing a framework that positions absenteeism as the symptom of a larger problem
* Creating a culture and climate of support, knowing that our students and families who will be the focus of our interventions have many hurdles and struggles

We have concentrated on the development of systems as well as personnel that support every student attending school every day. We seek to improve upon this, and other programs designed to meet the social and emotional needs of all students, but particularly our most vulnerable subgroups. We intend to do so by aligning our social worker to student ratio with the recommendation by the National Association of social workers. This calls for the addition of 35 social workers and 4 School Adjustment Counselors.

## Focus Area 2: Inclusion/co-teaching for students with disabilities and English learners (D and/or E)

LPS will build up on the existing inclusion model by increasing staff to ensure that the needs specified on a student's Individualized Education Plan will be met. Additional staffing will also decrease caseloads to allow for more personalized attention.

There is a solid foundation for meeting the needs of special education students in LPS. Leveraging Dr. Thomas Hehir's 2012 Review of Special Education in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as an impetus and anchor text, the district shifted to stronger regular education supports, more sound identification mechanisms, and a commitment to an inclusion model 8 years ago. Since then, LPS has consistently worked to limit the number of students identified for self-contained programs. That practice has been regularly refined through professional development. Further, the district has prioritized Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in order to provide more students points of entry in classes. In keeping with the current strategic plan, we are systematically building upon and expanding tier one instructional practices, by going from the 9 schools currently trained UDL to all 25 schools in the years to come.

With an existing, evidence-based inclusion model in place and plans to expand UDL, the focus of the allotment of SOA funds in the first year is to fundamentally and comprehensively address long-standing service delivery shortcomings based exclusively on understaffing. For years, LPS has struggled to meet student needs. The staff have gone to incredible lengths to serve students, but caseloads have been unwieldy. For example, LPS Speech Pathologists average caseload is in the mid- seventies. A typical caseload is around 50 students. Adjustment counselors have caseloads in the mid-eighties. A typical adjustment counselor caseload is about half of that. These and other ratios in special education have made it extremely challenging to service students well, not to mention meeting special education timelines. Because we are unable to meet the services delineated on a student's plan, we must provide compensatory services at a later time at an additional cost. This additional financial cost to the district pales in comparison to the detrimental impact this cycle has on the education of the students in this subgroup, to say nothing of the related erosion of trust and partnership between the district and their families.

The proposed 50 FTEs in this realm feature roles and responsibilities that will allow the district to take a monumental step forward in servicing students' needs sooner and in more comprehensive fashion and align with special education timelines.

LPS will also build upon the existing inclusion model by increasing staff thus decreasing the student to English as Second Language teacher ratio. Further, LPS will open two dual language kindergarten classrooms at a high-incidence elementary school in the fall of 2020.

LPS has worked diligently toward an inclusive model for English Learners. Moving away from the pull-out model to a small group instruction, push in model on the elementary level reflects a shift in mindset and approach. As a Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) district, the learning environment has been one of providing sheltered content instruction and ESL support. In these classrooms’ students:

* Receive sheltered content instruction with appropriate English language scaffolds from an SEI-endorsed classroom teacher to develop skills in grade-level academic content aligned with state standards
* Receive ESL instruction from a certified ESL specialist

Over the past two years, the district has developed and facilitated professional development for all levels designed to address core tenets of effective instruction for ELs. That professional development will continue a SY20-21. We seek to build upon the existing program by reducing student to ESL teacher ratio, first and foremost. The extent to which the specialists are able to personalize instruction with a manageable caseload will only lead more positive outcomes. We are also implementing a dual language program at a high-incidence elementary school. The research overwhelmingly supports the varied benefits of such a program. This is the case for all dual language models, but particularly the two-way immersion model which we have chosen for implementation in the fall of 2020. The SOA funds will support the deepening of the current service model for English learners at the elementary level, professional development for all educators, and costs related to the implementation of the dual language program.

## Focus Area 3: Increased staffing to expand student access to arts, athletics, and enrichment, and strategic scheduling to enable common planning time for teachers (B and D)

In an effort to create more an opportunity for preparation and common planning time for elementary teachers, LPS will add "technology" as a course offering for all elementary students.

The provision of time for teachers to collaborate and learn from one another is a research-supported best practice. As part of a recent agreement with the Lynn Teachers Union, the district now releases students from school early once per month to provide time for school-based or district-directed professional development. While this is a step in the right direction, instructional staff needs more time to collaborate around practice and engage in data analysis and response.

At the secondary level, creative scheduling has allowed for the practice of common planning time for clusters and content area teachers at the middle school level and content teachers at the high school level. On the elementary level, teachers have historically been provided with three opportunities for preparation and/or common planning time per week. By agreement with the Lynn Teachers Union, we will expand the preparation time at the elementary level to 4 times per week through the addition of technology teachers. This will necessitate the hiring of 16 teachers. Each week, every elementary student in LPS will receive direct instruction focused on the fundamentals of technology, digital citizenship, cultivating and managing an online identity, coding, among other topics.

We see the benefits of this addition in two ways. First and foremost, all elementary students will have the opportunity to engage meaningfully, once per week for 40 minutes, with a locally developed curriculum with highly engaging topics and applicable skills. This will be an opportunity for all students to deepen skills and knowledge with technology. For ELs, the technology course will provide an opportunity for engagement with tier 2 and 3 vocabulary. For the educator, this is an opportunity for outreach with families, preparation, or grade or content-based collaboration. Each of the activities is aligned with best practice.

## Focus Area 4: Facilities improvements to create healthy and safe school environments (J)

There is strong agreement in feedback solicited for this plan as well as for the development of the strategic plan that the facilities in LPS are in desperate need of attention.

Many respondents expressed limits in the ability of teachers and students to engage in 21st century learning activities given the age of the buildings. Further, whether from the standpoint that schools are too small to accommodate the burgeoning student enrollment, are inappropriately or ineffectively maintained, or that there are safety concerns driven by the age of the buildings, there was broad agreement around the idea that the facilities are and will continue to be a challenge in the coming years. Here again, observation matches empirical data. On average, school buildings in LPS are more than 80 years old. Ten school buildings are more than 100 years old.

In partnership with the Inspectional Services Department for the City of Lynn, a list of projects will be identified that prioritize the safety and well-being of students and staff, first and foremost. These will be followed by those inextricably tied to the most optimal conditions for learning.

**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
* High School Completion: Four-year cohort graduation rate
* High School Completion: Extended engagement rate (5-year cohort grad rate plus percentage of students who are still enrolled)
* 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)

**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.*

As is evidenced in LPS strategic objective #4, we believe in the critical importance of families as partners in our commitment to meeting the academic and social-emotional needs of every student, and we know from the work of Anthony Bryk and the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research that family-community engagement is one of the five key levers for school success. Additionally, while we are fully dedicated to this practice for every student and family, we are cognizant of the impact that family engagement can have on ensuring the success of students in subgroups most in need of support.

Therefore, we are dedicating resources to increasing the effectiveness of our family engagement in general, and with these particular subgroups.

Currently, there are several formal structures within our system that proactively foster family engagement: Lynn Parent Groups, the SPED Parent Advisory, the EL Parent Advisory, the partnership with Migrant Education Parent Group, and School Site Councils with parents/guardians as members at every school. We have already engaged each of these groups in the process of determining where and how to increase investment with the additional funds through the SOA, and their input has helped shape our plan. We are committed to regular meetings and dialogue with each of these groups, which represent the students in the targeted subgroups.

Also, we currently have a Parent Liaison in fourteen of our schools--our high schools, middle schools, and largest elementary schools. Starting in SY 20-21, we are proposing the hiring of 11 additional Parent Liaisons, so that all Lynn Public Schools will have a Parent Liaison dedicated to the school full-time. All of our Parent Liaisons are bilingual so that we can ensure access for all families with whom we partner. Furthermore, we are proposing a district level position:

Program Specialist for Family and Community Engagement. This position will serve to coordinate the supports offered by the Parent Liaison at each school. The Program Specialist will help set and implement a cohesive, district-wide vision and strategy for family engagement, while also working with each Parent Liaison to tailor their work to meet the needs of their particular school community. This structure creates equitable access for families across the Lynn Public Schools and creates avenues for school-level and student-level differentiated support.

**Certifications**

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

LPS went to great lengths to solicit stakeholder input. In summary, the following took place between the months of December and March:

* In all 25 schools, principals were directed to feature "Student Opportunity Act Input" in a school site council meeting between the months of December in February. The minutes from those meetings were forwarded to the superintendent's office.
* Two city-wide Student Opportunity Act forums
* An online feedback portal on the Lynn Public Schools website to allow anyone to offer feedback
* Dedicated Special Education Parent Advisory Committee meeting
* Dedicated English Learner Parent Advisory Committee meeting
* Dedicated Migrant Worker Education parent meeting
* Dedicated Superintendent's Student Advisory meeting
* In partnership with the Lynn Teachers Union, input meetings for staff at all 25 schools
* 300 written submissions by students

These data were coded and grouped into themes. Ideas and concerns expressed among the various groups largely align with those expressed in the development of the strategic plan during the 2018-19 school year. The priorities of significantly restructuring and increasing tier one social and emotional supports, expanding and improving supports for special education and English Learner education, and providing more meaningful time for staff collaboration LPS are reflective both of feedback and in keeping with the LPS strategic plan.

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

Date of Approval: 01/14/2021