Student Opportunity Act Plan

Methuen

# 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
* Low income/economically disadvantaged students

*The rationale for selecting these student subgroups.*

Methuen has been designated as a Gateway City by the state legislature. Gateway cities are defined as "midsize urban centers that anchor regional economies around the state," facing "stubborn social and economic challenges" while retaining "many assets with unrealized potential."

Methuen Public Schools enrolls 6,927 students (2018-2019 DESE data) in five schools. Methuen Public Schools has four PK- 8 schools: the Comprehensive Grammar School, the Marsh Grammar School, the Tenney Grammar School, the Timony Grammar School, and Methuen High School. The Tenney, Timony, and Methuen High School are designated Title I schools and are all located in the center of the city.

After examining demographic, enrollment, and performance data for our students, several trends arose that need particular focus. Our English learners are exhibiting a lower graduation rate and higher dropout rate than their peers and they are achieving at very low rates compared to their peers in the district and the state on MCAS. Our student needs are also increasing which is taxing on our school counseling staff in all five schools. Methuen is experiencing high chronic absenteeism rates as well as in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension rates. The data regarding these trends is below.

Enrollment, Demographics, and Selected Populations -

Two of the most striking changes the district has seen in the last decade are the enrollment by race/ethnicity and the enrollment by selected populations. Total enrollment for the 2008-2009 school year was 7,387. In 2018, it was 6,935. Since 2008-2009, our White population/subgroup has decreased by 21.5% and our Hispanic population/subgroup has increased by 17.5%. In that same time, the Students with Disabilities (SWD) population has increased 5.3% and the English learner (EL) population has increased by 3.9%.

Methuen is 11.1% below the state average for White student enrollment and significantly above the state average (+20.5%) for Hispanic student enrollment. We are above the state average for enrollment in the following groups: Economically Disadvantaged students (+3.3%), High Needs (+3.8%), SWD (+ .5%), EL (+1.1%), and First Language not English (+5.6%).

The 2019 data at the high school are particularly concerning. One data point is the 2018 4-year adjusted graduation rate for EL and SWD subgroups. Although there were fewer total students counted, these subgroups are graduating at a lower rate in four years than their peers. A second data point is stability rate, which DESE defines as the rate of students remaining in the school for the entire school year. The EL group stability rate was 77% in 2019. This is the lowest in Methuen compared to all other subgroups and selected populations. The 4-year graduation rate (2019) for ELs is 60.5% while the rate for All Students is 90.6%. The dropout rate (2019) for ELs is 18.4% (+3% from 2018) while the rate for All Students is 3.6%.

Each of these data points causes significant concern with regard to our EL subgroup making academic progress and graduating with their cohort. The English Learner Education (ELE) Department at Methuen High School is comprised of four teachers and a department chair. The department is currently composed of 151 English Learners (ELs) and enrollment has increased each year.

Student Mental Health and Social Emotional Learning

The number of students on 504's has increased from 338 in 2015 to 500 in 2020. Guidance counselors are responsible for the development and full implementation of 504's. Support staff are servicing students at a level that is somewhat unfamiliar to schools. We are seeing more students experiencing trauma and displaying behaviors at a much earlier age than in the past ten years. These students are receiving more intensive and intentional service delivery from guidance counselors. Guidance counselors are not simply mediating between one-time peer disagreements or assisting with course selections. They are playing a critical role in the well-being of each student long-term through the providing of evidence-base therapeutic and behavioral services and supports and intensive case management. As a district, we need to consider the needs of our students, not simply the ratio of support staff to students when considering budget implications.

The Director of School Mental Health and Behavioral Services supervises and evaluates all guidance staff K-12. He oversees the data from all screeners for students in grades 3-12 to determine student and staff needs. He provides professional development for not only the guidance department but all teachers. Most recently he has worked with general education teachers regarding trauma informed classroom practices. He works with the administrative teams to support PBIS, Non-Office Discipline Referral (Non-ODR) teams, Office Discipline Referral (ODR) teams, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) development and implementation. He has also secured many grants to support Methuen's ability to provide training for teachers and support for students. After review of recent screening data, it is clear that students are being identified as needing support earlier and getting more support from school staff and/or outside agencies. This ability to screen students for services does mean that more students are receiving services and therefore the guidance staff in each building is feeling more overwhelmed.

Attendance and Suspension Data

Our out-of-school suspension (OSS) rates for 2018-2019 indicate that there is a greater number of SWD, High Needs students, and Economically Disadvantaged students being suspended compared to the overall population. In addition, a higher proportion of those students suspended are males. The in-school suspension (ISS) data show the Multi-race and Economically Disadvantaged subgroups are suspended at a slightly higher rate. The high school in particular has identified a group of at-risk students who continued to struggle academically and socially emotionally. These students are having difficulty conforming to the traditional school day for a variety of reasons. This includes but limited to difficulty at home, being homeless or in foster care, needing to work to care for family members, struggling in the classroom, and getting into trouble both in and out of school. Ongoing data meetings indicate a need for an alternative high school program that can run with alternative time schedules that fit the students need with staff who can work with individuals and their families and re-engage them in school.

The district student attendance data is also concerning. Approximately 40% of our students are absent 10 days or more. Almost 19% are chronically absent, which is defined by the DESE as being absent 10% of the school year (18 days) or more. The data indicate that this issue is widespread among all groups, ethnicities, and selected populations. When students are not in school, they are losing valuable instructional time. The number of students in the district missing two or more full weeks of school is too high and needs to be addressed.

After reviewing the subgroup data, we summarize the following conclusions:

Our ELs are the lowest performing subgroup at most levels and are further away from the state average than other subgroups for meeting/exceeding expectations.

Our ELs have the lowest graduation rate and highest dropout rates. There is a critical need for more direct support for these students.

High school review of suspension and attendance data shows potential need for an alternative high school and other opportunities for students struggling during the traditional school day.

Evidence-Based Programs

In addition to the narrative below outlining the evidence-based programs, Methuen is submitting a long form budget workbook for these programs totaling $1,517,033. which is $97,967 above the minimum requirement.

Our first evidence-based program is co-teaching/inclusion and totals $370,381.

Our second evidence-based program is increasing staff to support the holistic needs of students and totals $754,517.

Our third evidence-based program is creating an alternative high school program for dropout prevention and reengagement and totals $392,135.

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

The Student Opportunity Act offers an opportunity for Methuen Public Schools to commit to additional evidence-based programs to close opportunity and achievement gaps among our student subgroups. The Department has recommended that Methuen Public Schools should allocate a minimum of $1.4 million in Year 1 (FY21) incremental Chapter 70 funds towards evidence-based programs.

Methuen intends to use our Student Opportunity Act funds to adopt and deepen three areas and we intend to make multi-year, sustained commitments to these priorities:

* Co-teaching/Inclusion English Learner program at Methuen High School.
* Support the four grammar schools' students with social emotional and behavioral supports. Create an Alternative High School Program for Methuen High School at-risk students.

## Focus Area 1: Inclusion/co-teaching for students with disabilities and English learners (D and/or E)

Students impacted: Methuen High School hosts 151 English Learners who will be impacted in Year 1 (SY21) and will expand to serve additional students by year three due to increasing enrollments of ELs in Methuen. Currently, many ELs at all levels are receiving core content instruction from ELE teachers. For optimal achievement, we propose students be delivered instruction from certified core content teachers as soon as they are ready and with appropriate language support. We are proposing the following:

English: Level 1 and 2 ELs take ELD with ELE teachers. Level 3, 4, and 5 ELs (students identified as Developing, Expanding, and Bridging) take mainstream English along with ELD courses with ELE teachers. This creates the need for one additional English teacher.

Mathematics: Continue with ELs taking courses with certified math teachers.

Science: Level 1 ELs take Science Topics for ELs, which would be co-taught by a science certified teacher and an ELE teacher. Level 2 ELs take Biology with a certified science teacher and a program assistant. Level 3, 4, and 5 ELs take mainstream science courses. This creates the need for one additional science teacher.

History and Social Science: Level 1 students take History Topics with ELE teacher. Level 2 students take US History for ELs with a certified history teacher and a program assistant. Level 3, 4, and 5 ELs take mainstream history and social science courses. This creates the need for one additional history and social science teacher.

English Learner: In order to focus on direct English instruction, our Level 1 and Level 2 students will take ELD courses by certified ESL teachers. This and the opportunity for co-teaching/inclusion in the content areas creates the need for two additional ESL teachers. We are also including a request for 2 program assistants to assist in the inclusion settings.

These proposals allow our ELs to receive the intense support they need to make progress in attaining English proficiency while satisfying high school graduation requirements. This will ensure that ELs are receiving ELD instruction and core content instruction from certified teachers. Level 1 and 2 ELs will be supported by PAs or they will be in co-taught classes. Finally, these changes allow capacity in the ELE Department to offer more specialized courses while providing all ELs, especially Grade 9 ELs, to have a schooling experience similar to that of their mainstream peers.

Along with the narrative above, the attached budget sheet indicates that the financial impact of this program to be $370,381.

## Focus Area 2: Increased staffing to expand student access to arts, athletics, and enrichment, and strategic scheduling to enable common planning time for teachers (B and D)

Students impacted: Increasing our K-12 school counseling staff and BCBA support staff will impact all of our students. By Year 3, our goal is that each school will have one school counselor per grade level (nine) at the Timony and Tenney and seven total counselors at the Marsh and CGS in order to best support the entire child and build relationships with students, families, and staff.

Our school counseling staff has experienced an increase in responsibilities in the past several years. Counseling staff are responding to an increase in crises that require intensive coordination of services (filing 51As, conducting suicide risk assessments, etc.), oftentimes in conjunction with community agencies, and an increase in challenging behaviors that require intervention. More than ever before, counseling staff are directly supporting the needs of students with mental health concerns, trauma, and other social factors that impact learning, including an increasing number of students on IEPs and 504s. These services occur in addition to the continued focus on academic counseling and engagement in consultation with teachers and admin in support of students. Methuen was one of the first school districts in Massachusetts to conduct mental health screening for students in grades 3-12. The screeners help identify students in need of support with anxiety and depression, among other presenting concerns, in a proactive manner that allows for referral to preventative therapeutic services offered by counseling staff. Specifically, our school counseling staff have focused on

providing identified students with cognitive behavioral therapy individually and in groups as needed. Data is collected to monitor the efficacy of therapeutic and behavioral interventions and to inform adjustments to practice. Although we have been committed to the work for several years, the extraordinary needs of our students coupled with the sheer number of students on each school counselors' caseload is unmanageable in a district of our size. The number of IEPs and 504s have increased in the past five years, and we are filing more 51As than ever before. Our students need more direct support from school personnel in order to regulate their behaviors and emotions, safely interact with peers and staff, and effectively access academic time. Methuen was able to increase our BCBA (Board Certified Behavioral Analyst) staff by three last year and are expecting to increase that by two more this year. Currently, our school counselors create and implement 504s, however, we are seeking to remove this responsibility from their day-to-day work and assign that task to a 504 coordinator in each building in order to allow for an increase in direct services to students.

Year 1 will yield additional school counseling staff and behavior support staff in all five buildings. All staff, including new staff, will receive additional professional development focusing on; services across a tiered system of social emotional and mental health services and supports. This includes the use of psychosocial data to identify at risk students and monitor interventions, trauma-sensitive classroom strategies, social emotional learning, positive behavioral interventions and supports, critical incident management, and evidence-based therapeutic services, including cognitive behavioral therapy. Supporting counseling staff to engage in this work will ensure students who present with mental health concerns, trauma, or other social risk factors receive quality services and are able to effectively access their education. Instructional staff will benefit from not only additional school counseling staff but also from additional BCBA's. These staff will be able to support classroom teachers more often when implementing behavior plans, responding to student crises, and working with families.

Along with the narrative above, the attached budget sheet indicates the financial impact of these additional staff to be $754,517.

## Focus Area 3: Dropout prevention and recovery programs (I)

Students Impacted:

The high school staff has identified approximately 50 students for Year 1 of this program with additional students recommended each year thereafter, not to exceed 75 by Year 3. Indirectly, the entire high school body of 2000 will benefit from this. as staff will be able to focus their attention on more students if they are not constantly working with the same at-risk students each day.

The proposal for the Alternative High School Program is as follows:

* Methuen High School will hire four content teachers - English, Math, Science, and History working to support the students in their graduation requirements.
* Methuen High School will hire one social worker/mental health worker to support, engage, and work with each student and family. This staff member will make home visits, workplace visits, potentially support students navigating the foster care, homeless, or court systems, and providing direct service and counseling to students.
* Methuen High School will hire one administrator to oversee this program. The administrator will be responsible for all data collection, supervision and evaluation of staff, programming, and student behavior. The administrator may also visit homes, workplace, work with families, work with the courts on behalf of our students, and provide direct service and interaction with the students.
* The physical location of this program will be off site and away from the comprehensive high school in order to accommodate a more flexible schedule for classes and services. This program will not operate during a 7:00am-2:00pm schedule as the current high does.

The high school principals visited another alternative program in December of 2019 to spend time speaking with staff about starting a program and lessons learned in the first year.

Along with the narrative above, the attached budget sheet indicates that the financial impact of these additional staff to be $392,135.

**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: 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)
* Additional Indicators: Percentage of 11th and 12th graders completing at least one DESE-identified advanced coursework
* Custom District Metric 1: Mental health screeners

**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.*

Methuen recognizes the need to engage parents in our work. Methuen recently created an English Learner Parent Advisory Council (ELPAC) modeled after our Special Education Advisory Council (SEPAC). As we continue to focus on our work with English Learners, it is critical to engage the families in that partnership. We intend to attend ELPAC meetings with focused topics on student needs in the classroom, acclimation to the school community, and support systems for parents and guardians. Additionally, Methuen has established a Mental Health Parent & Student Advisory Council (MHPSAC) in order to engage stakeholders in conversations regarding the mental health services and supports available to students. This group has met periodically over the past four years and is being revitalized and expanded to the grammar schools in the 19-20 school year in order to broaden the perspective of the group and ensure stakeholders are continually engaged in the design and implementation of Methuen's comprehensive school mental health system (CSMHS).

We have also begun work with our school counseling staff around home-visits. We have training at the high school level scheduled and will bring that training to the grammar schools in Year 2 if not by the end of Year 1. With increased staff working with students, our school counselors will be able to spend more time building relationships with families of students in need.

**Certifications**

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

The district engaged the community in the following ways since December 2019:

* Superintendent attended and spoke about SOA at each school council in December and January
* Principals gathered feedback from their school councils on priorities and submitted those to the superintendent
* Principals met in February with superintendent and business manager to discuss FY21 budget
* Superintendent sent out a budget priority survey to all district staff that included many of the SOA programs
* Superintendent met with the ELPAC board
* Superintendent met with K-8 guidance staff in January and again in February to discuss department needs and vision
* Superintendent presented the SOA information and obligation to the School Committee on February 24
* Superintendent held two staff SOA information session on February 25 (2:30-3:30 and 3:30-4:30)
* Superintendent held a parent SOA information session on March 2 (6-7pm) - invited parents to attend SC meeting on March 9th for public participation and input
* Superintendent will present a draft SOA to the school committee at March 9th meeting Superintendent will present SOA information to City Council on March 16

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

Date of Approval: 03/30/2020