Student Opportunity Act Plan

Needham

# 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
* Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic/Non-Latinx students
* American Indian or Alaskan Native students

*The rationale for selecting these student subgroups.*

Our district is committed to continuously improve how we provide an enriching, accessible, and equitable education for each child in the Needham Public Schools, including those students who have historically not achieved at levels commensurate with many of their peers. We monitor subgroup achievement gaps in Math and English Language Arts and subgroup vulnerabilities on SEL measures, particularly for students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, EL students, and students with disabilities. Needham Public Schools is working on building capacity to deliver a continuum of programs and services to support student needs, such as: the middle school Launching Scholars program (based on the Calculus Project) to reduce the achievement gap in math; the high school Castle Scholars program to increase representation of under- represented groups in Honors, Accelerated and Advanced Placement courses and improve students' sense of belonging; specialized programs for students with autism and emotional disabilities; and adjustments to caseload based on DESE Guidance for special education liaisons, related service providers, ELL teachers, and counselors.

For the purposes of this Student Opportunity Plan, our district is responding to the Commissioner's Priority Programs which align with priorities in the district's five-year strategic plan. The first evidence-based program is the district's launch of a full-day kindergarten program which recognizes the sustained and long-term gains in achievement and social-emotional development for all students. The second is the implementation of a recruitment and retention process for diversifying the staff. Needham has less than 8% staff of color and close to 23% students of color. The research demonstrates the positive academic impacts of increasing the number of staff of color to better reflect the student population.

**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 (SOA categories D, F, and G)

The district moved from half-day to compulsory full-day kindergarten in FY20 and this evidenced-based program will continue to support all of Needham Public Schools families in FY21 and going forward. Our district followed the Boston Public Schools "Focus on K2" model with an integrated curriculum that promotes developmentally appropriate practice, creativity, collaboration, communication, critical thinking, self-regulation, and child-directed learning. The Needham community recognized that DESE standards were written with the implicit need for full-day kindergarten and that implementation was a matter of equity, inclusion, and access. The increase in Chapter 70 revenues resulting from the launch of full-day kindergarten (which will be received in FY21, the year after implementation) will be used to continue the support for additional staff members hired in FY20 and to purchase new early literacy curriculum materials, as shown in the budget table below. This FY21 budget represents a portion of the costs incurred by the District in FY20 to implement full-day kindergarten which totaled over $2 million including all benefits, supplies and materials.

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|  | **FY21 budget item** | **Amount: enter number, do not use the $ character** | **Foundation Category** |
| **1** | **Teachers, Specialist Teachers, Literacy Coaches (11.91 FTE)** | **778091** | **Classroom & Specialist Teachers** |
| **2** | **Teaching Assistants (18 FTE)** | **480823** | **Other Teaching Services** |
| **3** | **Literacy Materials for full-day kindergarten** | **31146** | **Instructional Materials, Equipment, and Technology** |

## Focus Area 2: Diversifying the educator/administrator workforce through recruitment and retention (D and/or H)

This is a district-wide initiative. The Human Resources team is working with hiring managers to increase the recruitment and retention of teachers and staff of color, as well as the support we offer them. In FY20, participation in an Anti-Bias training program is a requirement for hiring managers. We joined Massachusetts Partnership for Diversity in Education, developed and shared with hiring managers a database of diverse candidates, and established a MALANA working group supporting Multiracial, African American, Latino-Hispanic, Asian-American, and Native American staff. These strategies will be continued for the next three years along with a formal mentoring program and additional methods of creating inclusive school environments as they are identified with support from the MALANA Leadership team.

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|  | **FY21 budget item** | **Amount (enter number, do not use the $ character)** | **Foundation Category** |
| **1** | **Mentor Stipends for new hires of color** | **9040** | **Professional Development** |
| **2** | **MALANA group facilitators (Multiracial, African American, Latino- Hispanic, Asian-American, and Native American staff)** | **1200** | **Professional Development** |
| **3** | **Professional learning and recruitment opportunities for staff of color** | **5000** | **Professional Development** |

**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 Growth: ELA mean student growth percentile (SGP)
* Student Growth: Mathematics mean student growth percentile (SGP)
* Custom District Metric 1: Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessments
* Custom District Metric 2: Children's Hospital Universal Screener
* Custom District Metric 3: STAR Math Assessments
* Custom District Metric 4: MetroWest Adolescent Health Risk Survey
* Custom District Metric 5: District survey of parents, students, and staff

**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.*

There are regularly scheduled meetings, in most cases held monthly, with families representing different stakeholder groups including the Special Education Parent Advisory Council, the newly-formed English Learner Parent Advisory Council, METCO parents (with meetings held in Boston), PTC President meetings with the Superintendent, as well as PTC meetings and School Council meetings with principals at each school. The ongoing conversations at these meetings provide an opportunity to engage representatives from the student subgroups most in need of support. To complement these conversations, the district established a 30-member REAL Coalition (Race, Equity, Access, Leadership) with students, parents, educators, and community members who focus on equity in our classrooms. The REAL Coalition also partners with community-based organizations (e.g., Needham Human Rights Committee and Needham Housing Authority) to move forward toward our equity goals. All these groups benefit from the data collected biennially through the District Survey where the Parent response rate historically has been between 34% to 55%. The issues emerging from the District Survey are researched more deeply, as needed, through focus groups with the affected families.

**Certifications**

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

During a yearlong planning process (2018-2019), Needham Public Schools engaged a broad-based group of 53 people to prepare the district's five-year Strategic Plan. Using multi-pronged approaches, these representative students, educators, parents, business and civic leaders from our community communicated with large numbers of stakeholders by presenting information and soliciting feedback so that everyone's voice could be heard. In the 2019-2020 school year, key staff continued to engage families of students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, EL students, and students with disabilities.

During February and March 2020, meetings were held with SEPAC, ELPAC, METCO parents, PTC presidents, and School Councils. We asked for suggestions on ways the district can enhance the support we provide for all our children, what existing programs best support children's needs, and ways the district can partner with families to address unmet needs. We will respond to these suggestions with updates to the School Improvement Plans and Year 2 Actions (FY21) within the District's Strategic Plan.

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

Date of Approval: 03/24/2020