Student Opportunity Act Plan

West Springfield

# 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
* 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
* Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic/Non-Latinx students

*The rationale for selecting these student subgroups.*

Over the last 25 years, the demographics of West Springfield have changed dramatically. Once a very homogenous suburban population, West Springfield has transformed into a community with great diversity. West Springfield went from 2% non-native speaking families in the mid-to-late 80's to 30.4% non-native speakers in 2020, with more than 47 different languages spoken by our students. Additionally, embedded in these statistics are 57.8% identified in the High Needs category and 46.5% identified as Economically Disadvantaged. Historically speaking, this rapid shift in our community's demographics has required the district to continuously examine and adjust English Learner programming and supportive services we offer to meet the language and high needs of our ever-changing and growing population. West Springfield is also one of the only school districts still maintaining and/or experiencing a slight enrollment increase in the Pioneer Valley.

The definition of high needs by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education correlates seamlessly with new families to the United States. West Springfield is a resettlement community for both Jewish Family Services and Ascentria Care Alliance. West Springfield does not forecast this increased trend of demographics to change in the near future. High-needs students, both English Learners and Special Education students, require our focused attention and targeted SOA support.

Additionally, as a result of the shift that West Springfield has undergone in the last two decades, the district has been challenged to ensure that services and requirements meet the regulations and needs of our Special Education populations. West Springfield has a Special Education population of 18.9%. Although we are proud of our recent implementation of an Inclusion Model and expansion of in-district services, the work around identifying and servicing dually identified students continues to be a challenge, and that is highly evident in our SOA request.

Services In Need of Attention To Ensure Future Success:

Trauma informed support: Understanding that many of our families come to us from traumatized backgrounds, West Springfield feels that if we don't properly support this area of Social Emotional Learning, accessing the curriculum will be stunted.

Family Engagement: The families of greatest need are families for whom the parents and students have very little formal education or come from areas in the world where the government is oppressive. This distrust causes WSPS to focus on strategies to bridge building trust.

Dually identified students are a challenge across the country. West Springfield is dedicated to enhancing every opportunity to ensure we are providing services that meet the needs of all students. In this proposal, WSPS will use funds to hire EL specialists who will provide explicit tiered instructional strategies for students, and coach staff to intensely support students who are both EL and have learning disabilities.

West Springfield High School is now an Innovation Pathway School as well as a Project Lead the Way school. The focal areas of industry are currently Advanced Manufacturing and Biomedical fields of certification. The district engagement in the Pathway approach is one that comes from understanding the needs and objectives of our population. Although a certain population of students is focused on accessing a 4-year college pathway, we also understand that another pathway for our students and families is direct access to local industry. The goal of allocating funds in this area would be to expand opportunities for community college access, leading to appropriate certification programs that allow for immediate post-high school employment and/or higher ed. opportunities.

How do we meet the needs of our EL, Special Education and high needs population? We will use the SOA funding to employ evidence-based strategies and interventions to help accelerate both academic and social emotional needs. This will come in the form of content-area specialists that work with families, students, and teachers in providing the latest research, data, evidence-based programs, and techniques in developing foundational skills to meet students at their entry point and customize their learning to close gaps and advance quickly.

Supporting Data:

Though the data is not comparable from the legacy MCAS to the Next Gen MCAS, it is evident that student achievement scores in the three focus areas remain either stagnant or in the case of EL students, a downward trend.

At West Springfield High School, we identified a 15.2% dropout rate in comparison to 4.9% All Students rate, and 63% graduation rate for EL students in comparison to a 90% for All Students.

High School Attendance Rates: EL students average absence 12.5 days per year, High Needs average absence 11.8 days per year, and Special Education students average absence 12.2 days per year. This compares to 9.4 days for All Students.

West Springfield is proud, excited and passionate about our diversity and will embrace the challenges that come with such

challenges in meeting the needs of all learners. This passion spans the community, from the Mayor to the classroom - one community, one success.

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

West Springfield Public Schools intends to use the Student Opportunity Act as a means to provide evidence to extend funding for our already committed District Improvement objectives, and intend to make multi-year, sustained commitments to these priority areas:

* English Learners: Develop tier supports to make content accessible, accelerate literacy and language acquisition, and provide greater cultural, social and emotional adjustment support.
* Special Education: Further develop MTSS process and stronger Tier I and II supports and interventions.
* Pathways: Develop more opportunities within our Innovation Pathway designation to support greater post high school occupational interest.
* Family Engagement: Delve deeper into providing the whole family with language support to bolster family-to-school engagement.

West Springfield wants to approach this opportunity in a methodical and laser-focused manner. WSPS is very much locked into our District Improvement Plan. We have developed a community-wide understanding that our District Improvement Plan is our fiscal and programmatic target. With this mindset, we want to be sure that the goals we have for SOA stay true to all that we have committed to in our District's guiding document. The plan that will be submitted to the School Committee, and ultimately the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, will not embed any new directions but rather deepen the resources that will facilitate areas of student need and family support leading to higher student achievement. West Springfield Public Schools feel that we have done the background analysis to target our needs. The funding of SOA will help accelerate our goals and targets for increasing achievement levels in the area of High-Needs, English Language Learners and Special Education population in West Springfield.

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

Co-taught Model: West Springfield began the implementation of co-taught classrooms in 2015-2016. The District did extensive professional development over two years. Resources dedicated to this element would be: Resources allocated to this element: Continued embedded work with Ribas Associates and specifically Dr. Deb Brady. Additionally, the hiring of Special Education Teachers to be able to expand the Co-taught Model. DIP SO#2

Inclusion Model: The District has also begun to employ an inclusion model defined as: "Inclusion embraces the concepts of awareness, acceptance, respect, and understanding. Inclusion is defined by the equal opportunity for participation. Each individual must be valued for his or her distinctive skills, experiences and perspectives. Inclusion is also about creating a global community (Diversity Best Practices 2009)." Though there are many definitions of what an inclusion model may look like, this definition fits West Springfield as it better defines the focus of a wider perspective that incorporates ELs, advanced learners, diversity and all student needs. Resources allocated to the is an element: The employment of content specialists to help support our Tier II interventions. DIP SO #3

Trauma-Informed Teaching: West Springfield Public Schools embedded a separate strategic objective within the District Improvement Plan. Understanding that with our demographics and the resettlement within our community, many of our children and families come to us with moderate to severe trauma. Additionally, we know that it takes learning specific strategies and acquiring a necessary skill set in order for our faculty and staff to be able to prevent triggers that may cause an unsafe environment for that child. The SOA funds would allow the District to employ more school adjustment support, a Bilingual Family Liaison, and provide further professional development to teachers and staff. Resources allocated to this element: The hiring of an additional adjustment counselor to support direct service to students and support for staff around trauma-informed practices. The hiring of a Bilingual Family Liaison to support family engagement, support, and connections to local and regional services. DIP SO #2

EL Instructional Coaching Model: As described in the above text, the rapid change in demographics and complexity of learning has gone beyond our professional development offering, and more needs to be done to affect the type of changes needed in our district. The SOA funding would provide WSPS the ability to employ EL Instructional Coaches to facilitate this change. This would allow us to use a coaching model embedded in our highest-need schools in year one and growing this model in years two and three. Resources allocated to this element: Hiring of an Elementary EL Instructional Coach: DIP SO#1

Innovation Pathway Support: West Springfield High School was designated an Innovation Pathway school beginning in September 2019. The program began with 40 students registering for the Advanced Manufacturing. The program has received wonderful traction and we expect approximately 100 students beginning 20-21. This success has allowed WSHS to expand our pathways by now offering a Biomedical pathway. The influx of interest has been attributed to the wonderful working relationship with Springfield Technical Community College, on-site field trips, participation in regional competitions and the ability to earn an industry certificate to begin working in high-need industries right out of high school and earning above average salaries. Resources allocated to this element: Expand support in the area of EL and Special Education to encourage more inclusion for all students. DIP SO #4

Expansion of Autism Behavior Analysis Program: In an effort to best serve all students within our District, Special Services has identified a spike in the number of students entering into Early Childhood with moderate to severe autism. After analyzing our Sub Separate classroom enrollment for next year, we have identified the need to expand services to maintain student/teacher ratios. This year we moved one of our ABA teachers from Tatham to Cowing EC because of the significant increase in pre-k students with Autism in need of ABA Services. We are currently servicing 30 of these students this school year. Next year, as we look at our Elementary ABA numbers, we are anticipating 11 students, which is very high for one teacher. The other complication is that this group of students will fall outside of an acceptable age span range. We are not eligible for an Age Span Waiver next year because we received a waiver this year. At this point, we will need an additional ABA Teacher at the elementary level to meet the needs of our students and keep them in-district.

**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.*

* Custom District Metric 1: Pearson TELL - English language proficiency progress-monitoring assessment
* Custom District Metric 2: Student Success Plans (SSP) customized for individual learning needs for ELs not meeting benchmarks
* Custom District Metric 3: STCC Data: Early College programs focused primarily on students under-represented in higher education (I)
* Custom District Metric 4: MCAS: English Language Arts (ELA) achievement; Mathematics achievement
* Custom District Metric 5: High School Innovation Pathway and Project Lead the Way Data: Benchmark and progress data: First semester college matriculation rate: Third semester college persistence rate
* Custom District Metric 6: ELA mean student growth percentile (SGP) and Mathematics mean SGP

**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.*

Engaging families is one of the most complicated barriers West Springfield faces for many different reasons. The demographics of our community naturally makes parent involvement more of a challenge, but one that we are most excited about addressing. Data is very clear that students who have parents involved in the educational process tend to achieve at higher rates. In West Springfield, we need to tackle this issue in very specific ways. Our EL families need one type of support versus native English speaking Special Education families who need another approach, and this is all wrapped around our overall high needs families. West Springfield has identified that educational and government trust are areas we see as key barriers. The approach West Springfield will take is to look at each of the three areas separately to identify access points for change. We will use our school councils, SEPAC and ELPAC committees to continue the discussions of what is needed to increase family engagement.

Family Engagement requires district leadership to construct a workable platform that facilitates each building's own age span, cultural aspects, and diversity in designing strategies to better engage families. This work needs to be based in research and developed around the understanding that one strategy will not work for every school community. The SOA will allow West Springfield to put in place a point person to spearhead this work in the form of a Bilingual Family Support Liaison. We foresee this person providing districtwide leadership in developing a structure with building leaders that employs research-based strategies to effectively promote family involvement that address that population. The Bilingual Family Support Liaison will work with community services, inter-faith groups and district leadership to develop a community-wide understanding of the importance of family involvement in their children's education.

West Springfield would begin by focusing on the Harvard Graduate School of Education's family engagement guidance four competencies to build a foundational understanding of the objectives.

* Understand what the latest research on family engagement means for your school
* Understand what systemic, integrated family engagement looks like, as opposed to random acts of engagement Explore the infrastructure, roles, and skills required to sustain an effective engagement strategy
* Learn how to define and measure outcomes and to evaluate practice

In this model, we will take a step back from the "one hit wonder" approach of chasing data gaps and throwing a new program that is not based in research or does not have wider community lense. We think of family engagement as the most untapped potential in reducing student achievement gaps. We also know that we have, as a school district, tried to employ strategies that have produced limited change in reduction of achievement gaps. Family engagement is not simply a school desire, rather it needs to be viewed as the community linchpin that strengthens all aspects of our city. To this extent, WSPS will facilitate a community-wide conversation that involves our civic leaders/partners, including our Mayor, inter-faith leaders, city-wide department chairs, business owners, civic organizations and of course the schools. This work does not have to be created as cities such as Salem, Massachusetts have done a lot of work around this topic using the Harvard Graduate School of Education Model of School Reform entitled, By All Means.

**Certifications**

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

West Springfield Public Schools used many modes to gather input from both the WSPS school community as well as the greater community as well.

Modes Employed:

1. Thought Exchange Survey Software (One Community and One Districtwide)
2. School Committee of Public Hearing
3. District Leadership Team
4. School Councils
5. District Council Team
6. SEPAC
7. ELPAC
8. Public City Council presentation and publicly aired.
9. School Committee presentation and publicly aired

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

Date of Approval: 03/31/2020