

THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF THE CITY OF BOSTON



Boston Public Schools Superintendent's Performance Evaluation Dr. Brenda Cassellius, School Year 2020-2021

Evaluator's Name	Collective Summary prepared by Hardin Coleman
Date of Completion:	June 14, 2021

RATINGS

DEFINITIONS

HIGHLY EFFECTIVE (Exemplary)	Performance far exceeded expectations due to exceptionally high quality of work performed in all essential areas of responsibility, resulting in an overall quality of work that was superior; and either 1) included the completion of a major goal or project, or 2) made an exceptional or unique contribution in support of unit, department, or district objectives. This rating is achievable by any employee though given infrequently.
EFFECTIVE (Proficient)	Performance consistently exceeded expectations in all essential areas of responsibility, and the quality of work overall was excellent. Annual goals were met.
DEVELOPING (Proficient)	Performance consistently met expectations in all essential areas of responsibility, at times possibly exceeding expectations, and the quality of work overall was very good. The most critical annual goals were met.
MINIMALLY EFFECTIVE (Needs Improvement)	Performance did not consistently meet expectations – performance failed to meet expectations in one or more essential areas of responsibility, and/or one or more of the most critical goals were not met. A professional development plan to improve performance must be attached, including timelines, and monitored to measure progress.
INEFFECTIVE (Unsatisfactory)	Performance was consistently below expectations in most essential areas of responsibility, and/or reasonable progress toward critical goals was not made. Significant improvement is needed in one or more important areas. A plan to correct performance, including timelines, must be outlined and monitored to measure progress.

UNDERSTANDS ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES AS SUPERINTENDENT

Corresponds to DESE Standard IV: Professional Culture

- Demonstrates discretion and tact in their leadership
- Understands the political and ethical context to position
- Interacts effectively with the School Committee, City Council, and State on policy.
- Is able to effectively articulate the position of, and be a proxy for, the School Committee
- Interacts with the public and external stakeholders with respect
- Builds trusting relationships with their staff
- Acts with integrity

XX	HIGHLY EFFECTIVE
XX	EFFECTIVE
X	DEVELOPING
	MINIMALLY EFFECTIVE
	INEFFECTIVE

COMMENTS: Dr. Cassellius took over a school district that had not had stable leadership for the previous eight years, with the most recent full time superintendent having being asked to leave before the end of their appointment. During that time there had also been turnover in the Mayor’s Office as well and in the City Council. It is a fair assessment that there was no coherent professional culture within the district and there was a community-wide discomfort with how the district was functioning when she arrived. In her first year, Dr. Cassellius was zealous in her efforts to reach wide and far within the Boston community to make connections with its diversity of interest groups, communities of privilege, and communities of need. During that year, she collaborated with the School Committee to revitalize the BPS Strategic Plan and to center that plan on significantly increasing equitable access to a high quality learning experience for all students in Boston. Then DESE established a demanding MoU to drive change in our most vulnerable schools, then the pandemic hits, then there is a turnover in the Mayor’s Office, then we work with the Council of Great City Schools to become an outcome focused district, then we re-evaluate the admissions policies to the Boston exam schools, and then the Chair of the School Committee abruptly resigns, then the Student Member resigns in protest to concerns about his role on the committee and problems with the adult management of the District Student Council and then the successor Chair and a committee member resign. Through this chaos, Dr. Cassellius has continued to make herself available to our diverse community, has lead a reorganization of the central office and recruited local and national talent to fill important positions. She has created a nested set of Equity Roundtables from individual schools to the district as a whole in which the community has opportunities to engage in problem solving efforts with the Superintendent and her staff. Throughout this demanding period, Dr. Cassellius has made significant efforts to maintain open lines of communication with all of the BPS constituents to hear their voice and integrate those views into the development and implementation of policy. Her efforts to build a powerful professional culture in the district that is centered around the needs of all of our children in the face of substantive barriers has been remarkable. Obviously, not everything has gone well, but she has engaged in an interative process of change that is moving us forward.

Going forward, developing a productive working relationship with the BTU is critical to the overall well being of our schools and district, particularly in advance of contract negotiations. Developing a

productive working relationship with DESE is also critical as we move from the pandemic reactions to creating gap-closing approaches to educating all of our students.

COMMITMENT TO ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION

Corresponds to DESE Indicator I-E: Data-Informed Decision-Making, and Indicator IV-A: Commitment to High Standards

- Understands the educational landscape of the Boston Public Schools and can speak to strengths, challenges, and successes
- Understands education policy direction of the Boston School Committee and can effectively articulate them to the public
- Is committed to improving education for all students in the Boston Public Schools, especially those in historically marginalized populations
- Recognizes the importance and appropriate role of school-level autonomy and shared responsibility between schools and central office departments
- Demonstrates a sharp focus on data in the continuous improvement of student performance
- Is committed to supporting teachers and schools to share best practice and research to improve academic achievement

X	HIGHLY EFFECTIVE
X X X	EFFECTIVE
X	DEVELOPING
	MINIMALLY EFFECTIVE
	INEFFECTIVE

COMMENTS: As indicated in her self-evaluation, Dr. Cassellius is focused on creating coherence to the academic expectations within BPS through the implementation of the MassCore and the Panorama Student Success platform. Through the re-organization of the central office and implementation of the nested equity roundtables, she is working on clarifying the relationship between the central office and schools. Working with her Chief of Staff and Chief of Accountability, she has moved school committee meetings to be more focused on data than theory and policy to focus on improving student performance. The Office of Academics needs to significantly improve its ability to meet the professional needs of teachers and schools to identify and implement evidence-based best practices in all of our schools. The early childhood division is providing a model that is worth replicating throughout the district. The Superintendent is to be recognized for taking on challenging practices, such as the grading policy initiative.

PRODUCTIVITY, ORGANIZING AND PLANNING

Corresponds to DESE Standard II: Management and Operations

- Understands related position functions and performs daily activities without supervision
- Establishes effective and challenging task priorities
- Schedules time with staff effectively and resolves conflicts
- Manages calendar request in a timely manner
- Meets deadlines, demonstrates effective time use and simultaneous handling of several assignments
- Appropriately organizes work so others can find work in progress and/or necessary files and information, when necessary
- Ensures all contact whether by telephone, email, or mail with colleagues, families, and students is positive and productive in nature - constructive criticism followed by problem-solving suggestions
- Responds promptly, within 24 hours, to all internal and external requests whenever possible
- Shows initiative and demonstrates learning and expanding knowledge to further enhance performance

	HIGHLY EFFECTIVE
X X X X	EFFECTIVE
	DEVELOPING
X	MINIMALLY EFFECTIVE
	INEFFECTIVE

COMMENTS: As Dr. Cassellius works to create a highly effective organization, she is deeply engaged in the iterative process of developing policies and procedures that can be applied to develop a coherent and cohesive organization. One can hope that one outcome of responding to the pandemic is most of the district’s weak links have been exposed so that we can systematically re-invent an efficient and effective organization. Taking a risk of doing the Gallup poll is indicative of her commitment to use data to guide change and improvement. The district has made a great effort to provide a large and diverse number of opportunities for staff, families, and community members to listen to, respond and provide feedback to district plans. The School Committee and City would be well served exploring alternative models of managing complex public operations, such as BPS, particularly as it relates to issues such as around operations--facilities; development of talent from within; allocation of resources; communications etc.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY AND BUDGETARY CONTROLS

Corresponds to DESE Indicator II-E: Fiscal Systems

- Uses resources effectively and conservatively and is a good steward of resources
- Forecasts accurately and maintains budgetary projections consistently
- Controls operating costs effectively, optimizing human and other capital
- Is resourceful in securing funding to accomplish goals and ensure team has capacity to follow through

X X X X	HIGHLY EFFECTIVE
X	EFFECTIVE
	DEVELOPING
	MINIMALLY EFFECTIVE
	INEFFECTIVE

COMMENTS: The Committee is in agreement with the Superintendent’s self-assessment in this domain. The process she has initiated to direct the use of new funds seems reasonable. Evaluating its effectiveness will be part of the FY2022 evaluation. Looking forward to seeing a comprehensive facilities work plan for EVERY school facility and an appropriate completion time line.

JUDGMENT/DECISION MAKING

Corresponds to DESE Indicator II-D: Law, Ethics, and Policies

- Identifies and evaluates issues, reaches sound decisions and generates alternatives
- Takes into account the effects/impacts of decisions
- Understands the political nature of the position and takes care to see all sides
- Seeks prior advice and approval if needed before taking action
- Demonstrates well-balanced thinking between taking “risks” and practical consideration

X	HIGHLY EFFECTIVE
X X	EFFECTIVE
X X	DEVELOPING

	MINIMALLY EFFECTIVE
	INEFFECTIVE

COMMENTS: It is clear that Dr. Cassellius consults, both internally and externally, broadly prior to making decisions. It is also clear that she is willing to be held responsible for the outcomes of her decisions, both positive and negative. Most important, she is able to learn from these outcomes and use that learning to guide subsequent decision-making. Taking time to build consensus around decisions has been challenged by the pandemic and the Superintendent’s urgency for improvement. Not every decision has been as clearly understood as would allow a rating of highly effective and accounts for the variance of ratings by the committee members.

COLLABORATION/TEAMWORK

Corresponds to DESE Standard III: Family and Community Engagement and Indicator IV-E: Shared Vision

- Is a good team player - demonstrates positive, motivated behavior, provides support, accepts guidance, and keeps an open door
- Keeps others informed of the status of initiatives, including the Strategic Plan, on a consistent basis
- Uses and values the talents of other staff and/or team members
- Provides support and feedback to team members
- Participates fully and collaborates with internal and external stakeholders
- Modifies individual objectives and desires to support the efforts of the team
- Demonstrates openness to new ideas and suggestions
- Shares responsibility for outcomes and workload equity
- Is dependable and can be counted on

X	HIGHLY EFFECTIVE
X X X	EFFECTIVE
X	DEVELOPING
	MINIMALLY EFFECTIVE
	INEFFECTIVE

COMMENTS: In general, the committee supports the Superintendent’s self-evaluation in this domain. In the next few years, we are going to get lots of post-hoc analysis of how districts responded to the pandemic. We can predict that the ones that look “successful” will be the ones with lots of resources. When, however, they look at the Great City Schools, one can hypothesize that, thanks to Dr. Cassellius, Boston will be seen as one of the districts that effectively collaborated with public health organizations,

community based organizations, and public officials to address emerging crises in a manner that was centered on the needs of children. No one is going to be happy with many of the outcomes, but our process will be well reviewed. That will be driven by this Superintendent centering collaboration in her process and a willingness to make final decisions when there is no consensus, and then adapt to new data. In the next year, the Superintendent would be well served by taking a strategic approach to talent development both within schools and the central office.

FOCUS ON EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

Corresponds to DESE Indicators I-D: Evaluation; II-D: Law, Ethics, and Policies; III-C: Communication; and IV-A: Commitment to High Standards

- Supports and actively builds a culture of excellence and equity
- Engages diverse stakeholders in decision making
- Provides effective supervision to direct reports through clear expectations, appropriate levels of feedback and support, and accountability for results.
- Ensures that all contact whether by telephone, email, or mail with colleagues, families, and students is positive and productive in nature - constructive criticism followed by problem-solving suggestions

X X X	HIGHLY EFFECTIVE
X X	EFFECTIVE
	DEVELOPING
	MINIMALLY EFFECTIVE
	INEFFECTIVE

COMMENTS: Dr. Cassellius stands out for her consistent philosophical and practical commitment to creating equitable access to high quality learning for all of our students. This demands, at times, addressing some of Boston “sacred cows,” which includes school autonomy and the policies for exam school admissions. She is to be recognized for creating data dashboards that will allow us to track our progress and use the data to improve our system. At this time, we are in support of the process in which the Superintendent is engaged. We will be, however, be tracking the degree to which movement in the data demonstrates the efficacy of the process

COMMUNICATION AND INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Corresponds to DESE Indicator IV-C: Communications

- Conveys clear and concise communications, listens well and responds appropriately
- Is tactful, candid, and consistent in words and actions
- Comprehends the importance of interacting positively with stakeholders
- Analyzes complaints and takes steps to address issues immediately
- Demonstrates flexibility with unavoidable tension and pressure
- Demonstrates respect at all times

X	HIGHLY EFFECTIVE
X X X X	EFFECTIVE
	DEVELOPING
	MINIMALLY EFFECTIVE
	INEFFECTIVE

COMMENTS: Dr. Cassellius, on a daily basis, is getting to practice her skills in having difficult conversations. While addressing numerous crises and working on system change, there is no way that everyone is going to feel heard and supported. These differences are real. Dr. Cassellius has, however, managed to communicate that she is putting our children first and is willing to adapt her approach to make changes in our system that serves their learning and aspirations. As part of her efforts at talent development, the Superintendent could empower her staff to engage and speak on behalf of the district. One person alone cannot do the engagement and communication needed to advance the goals of the district

GOAL PROGRESS (SEE EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT PLAN, ATTACHED)

Ratings: Exceeded, Met, Significant Progress, Some Progress, Did Not Meet

Goal #	Goal Rating	Comments
1	Met	Reorganization completed. Some key positions still to be filled.
2	Met	Academic Plans – Mass Core and EL Improvement
3	Met	Pandemic related. Navigated system through unprecedented situation

OVERALL RATING (Consider progress toward goals and performance categories)

X	HIGHLY EFFECTIVE (Exemplary)
X X X	EFFECTIVE (Proficient)
	DEVELOPING (Proficient)
	MINIMALLY EFFECTIVE (Needs Improvement)
	INEFFECTIVE (Unsatisfactory)

ED EVAL ONLY: STANDARDS RATINGS

(Place an 'X' in the appropriate rating box for each standard)

E	P	NI	U	
XX	XX			Standard I: Instructional Leadership
XX	XX			Standard II: Management and Operations
XX X	X			Standard III: Family and Community Engagement
X	XX X			Standard IV: Professional Culture

Employee Development Plan (EDP)

Identify and describe 2-3 areas of strength and 2-3 areas for continued growth based on the categories above, as well as how you arrived at these areas.

Areas of strength	Areas for continued growth
Demonstrated and articulate commitment to creating equitable access to a high quality learning experience for all students	Needs to push harder to create an organizational structure that reflects the needs of the district over having trusted colleagues in position of authority
Ability to work with staff to create the data dashboards needed to track progress towards becoming a gap closing district	Improve ability to delegate authority to Chief's
Strong working relationship with the Mayor's Office	Increase percentage of time spent on strategic plan and external relations and reduce the percentage of time engage in operational details.
Creativity and Fiscal Discipline	Building collaboration and buy-in
Community Outreach and Engagement	Working with BSAC to raise student voice and hear concerns
Teacher and Workplace Diversity	Patience. Balancing the burning drive for improvement with getting it done with fidelity and buy-in for lasting change.

Create 2-3 goals from the competencies evaluated in the process.

Develop SMART goals: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented, and Time-bound.

Goal #	Goal	Measure of Success
1		
2		
3		