

## **Background and Context on Boston Public Schools for Candidates**

### **DRAFT 11/28/18**

After seeking input from the Boston Public Schools (BPS) School Committee members, faculty, parents, staff, students and community via community listening sessions and an on-line survey, the Superintendent Search Committee for the BPS seeks a strong educational and instructional leader who will lead the BPS toward excellence for all its students.

Over the past 20 years, the Boston Public Schools (BPS) has been transformed from a failing school district to one of the most renowned urban public school systems in the country. We educate more than 54,300 students in 125 schools — 71 percent of the school-age children who live in Boston.

We are proud to be one of the most diverse school districts in the nation. Nearly one in every two students speaks a language other than English at home, and our students come from 139 different countries. One in five BPS students has a disability, and half are economically disadvantaged.

Approximately 42 percent of the system's students are Latino/Latina; 34 percent are African American; 14 percent are White; 9 percent are Asian; and 1 percent are of a different background or multiracial. The Boston Public School system employs more than 10,000 persons, including 4,500 classroom teachers. The system's general fund budget for FY19 is \$1.1 billion.

On the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) – also known as the “Nation’s Report Card” – Boston students’ performance is on par with the national average for all public schools, including suburban schools, in grade 4 Reading and in grade 8 Mathematics. This is the first time since measurements began that any urban school district has met this mark in two subjects and grades. Since 2007, the BPS four-year graduation rate has steadily increased, reaching its highest rate ever in 2017 despite more demanding standards required by the state for graduation; and the percentage of ninth-graders who dropped out before graduation decreased to its lowest point ever for the 2017 Cohort.

BPS is the home of many firsts in the nation: first public school (Boston Latin School, 1635), first public elementary school (Mather Elementary School, 1639), first public school system (1647), first public high school (English High School, 1821).

- Our 2017 4-year graduation rate of 72.7 percent was the highest it has ever been—up 14.8 points since 2007.
- 4-year graduation rates for Latino students have risen from 50.6 percent in 2006 to 69 percent in 2017.
- BPS offers pathways to graduation to students who may have dropped out through our Re-Engagement Center, one of the first of these centers in the

nation, and our summer graduation programs. The Re-Engagement Center, a joint initiative between the Boston Public Schools and the Boston Private Industry Council, re-enrolls more than 400 dropouts annually, and has helped to cut the number of dropouts in half since 2005.

- The number of students taking an AP exam has nearly doubled in the past 10 years, increasing from 1,666 students in 2008 to 3,100 students in 2018. Along with greater access to AP courses and exams, 51.3% of students received a qualifying score of 3 or higher.
- Nearly 17,000 additional students now have access to arts learning opportunities during the school year, compared to nine years ago. 96 percent of students in grades pre-kindergarten through eighth receive at least weekly, year-long arts instruction—up from 67 percent in 2009. The number of high school students receiving any arts instruction has more than doubled from 2009 to 2018—from 26 to 63 percent, respectively. The district has seen even greater gains in the percentage of pre-kindergarten through eighth grade students receiving arts instruction two or more times per week, from less than 10% in 2009 to 65% in 2018. High School students meeting the MassCore graduation requirement in the Arts has increased to 61%.
- The percent of students who pass all grade 10 MCAS tests on the first attempt has risen from 39 percent in 2007 to 58 percent in 2018. Passing all grade 10 MCAS tests are part of the state graduation requirements, known as the Competency Determination.
- In the 2018-2019 school year, we will offer full-day pre-kindergarten education for over 2,500 four-year-olds, up from 700 seats in 2005.
- Expanded Learning Time (ELT) is one of the key ways in which the district hopes to provide a high-quality education for all. Schools in BPS can expand the day through the Schedule A initiative, having turnaround status, or becoming an autonomous school. As of the 2017-2018 school year, BPS will have implemented ELT in a total of 57 schools serving over 23,000 students in only three years.
- One in five students attends one of our award-winning summer learning initiatives -- nationally recognized for excellence in summer learning in 2013.

The next superintendent will partner with the BPS community to address a number of ongoing system-wide challenges, including:

- Closing persistent opportunity and achievement gaps by fostering opportunities for marginalized students (Black, Latino, English Language Learners, students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged) to flourish across all areas of their education.

- Implementing BuildBPS, the district's 10-year educational and facilities master plan, to increase equity, expand access to quality, and reduce transitions for families.
- Addressing the complex needs of the district's high population of special education students and English Language Learners.
- Increasing staff diversity, to ensure that our teachers and administrators reflect the students they serve.
- Providing targeted, ongoing support for turnaround schools, the district's lowest performing schools.
- Redesigning the high school experience to prepare every young person for post-secondary, career, and life-long success.
- Addressing the varying admissions processes in high school admittance.

## OPTIONS FOR STRATEGIC PLAN LANGUAGE

OPTION 1 – From Tommy Chang's administration, 2015

### **BPS Strategic Plan**

In 2015, the Boston School Committee, following an extensive community engagement process, approved a five-year strategic plan for the district which set the following aspirational goals for the district:

#### **Improved student outcomes**

- All students will graduate ready for college and/or career as life-long learners and engaged global citizens.

#### **Improved school quality**

- BPS will be a district of high-performing schools, eliminating opportunity and achievement gaps.

#### **Strong district leadership/high-quality, action-oriented teachers and staff**

- BPS will recruit, develop and retain highly effective, culturally-competent school and district leaders, teachers and staff who are held accountable for meeting objectives.

#### **Effective resource allocation**

- BPS will make effective and equitable use of resources.

## Greater community engagement

- All schools will strengthen student, family, and community investment to guarantee opportunities for student success.

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OPTION 2: From Laura Perille's administration, 2018

Strategic priorities:

1. **Improve opportunities for students:** Establish the systemic conditions necessary to improve opportunities for students in order to narrow achievement gaps at all BPS schools.
2. **Differentiate school supports:** Position Central Office to enable rapid and sustainable improvement to teaching and learning in all schools while prioritizing supports to lower performing schools.
3. **Plan for the future:** Align long-term investment decisions of BuildBPS around new or improved facilities with decisions about grade configurations, program placements, and minimizing transitions for students.

Conditions for success:

- Maintain focus on **equitable and culturally and linguistically sustaining practices**
- Prioritize **teaching and learning as the core business** of BPS and recognize the central role of **social and emotional wellness** in that endeavor
- Instill a **sense of urgency** in the improvement of opportunities and narrowing of achievement gaps
- Promote learning environments that are **safe, welcoming, supportive, and affirming** for students and families
- Require **student-centered decision-making** recognizing the Central Office exists to support school communities with focused objectives.
- Cultivate a **collaborative culture** in which staff feel valued and take pride in work done on behalf of students.
- Operate in a **transparent, forthright, and responsive manner** to establish trusting relationships and ongoing dialogue among students, families, staff, and external partners.
- Confront **systemic and long-standing obstacles**.