MEMORANDUM

TO: School Committee

FROM: Dr. Linda Chen, Senior Deputy Superintendent for Academics

CC: Superintendent Mary Skipper
   Monica Hogan, Assistant Superintendent, Data Strategy and Implementation

DATE: Wednesday, November 16, 2022

RE: Council of Great City Schools Report on Special Education

Tonight, Ray Hart, Executive Director of the Council of Great City Schools (CGCS), will summarize findings and recommendations from the CGCS report on Special Education: “Building a Unified System of Service Delivery: Inclusive Education that Improves Outcomes for Students with and without Disabilities.” This report is required as part of the Systemic Improvement Plan.

The presentation will cover some key data points and the 10 areas of recommendations from the CGCS. The recommendations include:

1. Improve consistency and appropriateness of referrals, assessments, and eligibility decisions for special education.
2. Establish and implement an MTSS framework consistent with information from DESE and the federally funded MTSS Center.
3. Have focused conversations at the central, regional, and school levels about the achievement of students with disabilities and ELSwD and develop key performance indicators with targets against which to annually measure growth.
4. Use KPIs aligned with federal reporting categories and state targets to assess BPS growth in meeting the targets and add subsets of KPIs to identify/address outlier data requiring attention.
5. Significantly improve EL identification for special education and improve instruction for ELSwD, including access to native language instruction.
6. Configuration of and Support for Special Education
   i. Establish a broad vision of inclusive practices and a unified system of service delivery that is culturally responsive/linguistically appropriate, robust, and sufficiently flexible for a larger group of SwDs to learn together
with peers without disabilities in general education classes for varying amounts of time.

ii. Phased-in Inclusion Planning and Implementation: To address the complexity of transitioning to inclusive practices and unified system of service delivery upon which inclusive education is founded, a phased in school-based planning and implementation approach is necessary.

iii. McKinley Schools and ODU School Attention: Ensure students with emotional impairments educated in separate schools inside/outside BPS are educationally justified and free from racial/ethnic bias, and support expedited McKinley Working Group activities.

7. Have the School Committee and Superintendent commit and act to reduce the high proportion of SwDs in a small number of schools and transition to having equitable enrollment proportions of SwDs who receive the education/supports necessary to meet their needs.

8. Establish expectations of interdepartmental collaboration and collaborative interactions with School Superintendents and schools, consider recommendations for OSE’s organization, and strengthen OSE support to schools and COSEs.

9. Establish expectations for earned autonomy, monitor for these and other expectations, and hold persons accountable when expectations are not met both at the school and at central office. Apply accountability measures for performance when there has been notice of expectations and training along with physical/material resources for implementation have been provided.

10. Hire an expert partner team to support implementation.

The district has begun some of this work already. At the start of this school year we invested in additional Assistant Directors (AD) with disability specific expertise. These individuals are providing support and knowledge to school-based staff to improve supports for students with specific learning disabilities, emotional impairments and intellectual impairments. In addition, the ADs will support appropriate referral practices which we anticipate will address the overidentification of multilingual learners and the disproportionate representation of black and Latino boys in substantially separate placements.

The OSE and the Academics teams are currently reviewing the high special education referral rates, especially for our early childhood students and designing inclusive supports for educators and school leaders to allow more of our early learners to be educated in the least restrictive environment. In addition to this work, OSE is providing professional learning with a focus on increasing the continuum of service options, strengthening outcomes for students with disabilities (especially our multilingual
students with disabilities) and decreasing noncompliance with special education regulations.

We have also been intentional about how this work is supported through our regional school network model. Our Special Education Assistant Directors are doing “learning walks” with school leaders and regional leaders, like our school superintendents, to provide direct instructional and compliance feedback and to learn as a team. In addition, our Offices of Multilingual and Multicultural Education (OMME) and Special Education (OSE) are creating ongoing systems and structures to support collaboration between offices, including shared positions with expertise in both special and multilingual education.

In addition, the district has taken multiple steps in order to address the concerns around inclusion. During the last round of contract negotiations, we partnered with the Boston Teachers Union (BTU) to establish the following regarding inclusive practices:

- A common vision for inclusion
- An Inclusion Working Group, that will provide monitoring and oversight
- School based Inclusion Planning Teams (IPT) to support school specific inclusive education planning
- Created the Inclusion Liaison, a joint BTU/ BPS position, who will support the school based IPT and district coordination.

The district has committed to funding $6.2M ESSER Investment for inclusion as well as $11.5M in additional ESSER funds that will go directly to schools to support inclusion.

Finally, our Academics team has led the MTSS planning work over the last year. All regional team members are trained on how to use the DCAP and all staff are using MAP fluency specifically for planning interventions. We have made significant investments in social workers and psychologists as we look to increase tiered behavioral health and social emotional support. We are in the process of posting a senior level MTSS position who will coordinate and lead this work across the District.

Tonight’s presentation from CGCS will provide the School Committee with an understanding of these recommendations from an external partner. The district team will present at a later School Committee meeting on the work currently underway and the district’s implementation plan for the recommendations within the report.

The report and slides will be submitted to DESE and made available on the BPS website at www.bostonpublicschools.org/strategicprogress.