

# THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF THE CITY OF BOSTON



## MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Boston School Committee (BSC)  
FROM: Hardin L.K. Coleman, Member BSC and Chair of the Superintendent's Evaluation  
CC: Dr. Brenda Cassellius, Superintendent of the Boston Public Schools  
RE: Performance Evaluation of BPS Superintendent, SY 2019-2020  
DATE: August 5, 2020

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Colleagues, I want to start with my deep appreciation that you have charged me with organizing the evaluation of our Superintendent's performance for School Year (SY) 2019-2020. Since the supervision of the Superintendent's performance is one of our most important reasons for being, that this is the Superintendents' inaugural year, and this Superintendent has had to perform the role in the midst of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you for your confidence.

In your evaluations of the Superintendent, you have articulated numerous areas of praise for Dr. Cassellius' performance, areas of deep concern for the district, and goals that you want Dr. Cassellius to accomplish as she continues to lead this district. The challenge in preparing this evaluation is separating the actual performance of the Superintendent from the performance of the district as a whole. In addition, it is a challenge to separate the actual performance of the Superintendent from solving, in one year, systemic problems that have challenged this district for more than a century. Specifically, we have asked this Superintendent to significantly reduce opportunity and achievement gaps. Then, we are asking this Superintendent to make this progress while, with a deep commitment to equity, creating a high performing educational program that is digitally mediated, safe for children and educators, and closes opportunity and achievement gaps. As the birthplace of public education, it is clear that we are comfortable with having high expectations and standards. Dr. Cassellius has made it clear, from the first day in this position, that this Superintendent aspires to meet these expectations and standards, and is eager to use this process of evaluation to support those aspirations.

In your evaluations, you have made it clear that the Superintendent has made noteworthy accomplishments, brought to surface some significant challenges to the district's ability to close opportunity and achievement gaps, and that there are important outcomes particularly in the areas of management, operations and collaboration to which you want the Superintendent to attend in the upcoming school year. I will start with a high-level summary of your evaluations and then proceed to present them, in more detail, within particular categories.

## **1. Noteworthy Accomplishments**

1. *Financial Support.* Without question, the committee is impressed that the Superintendent was able to work with Mayor Walsh and the City Council to create a 3-year budget process that will bring an additional one hundred million dollars to meet the needs of our children and our educators' efforts to close opportunity and achievement gaps.
2. *Strategic Vision and Community Engagement.* The committee is also impressed that the Superintendent deeply engaged the broad Boston community in the development of a strategic vision for the Boston Public Schools that puts equitable access to a high quality learning experience for all of our children at the center. The Superintendent has been clear that this is a work in progress that will demand making difficult decisions to be successful.
3. *Focus on Equity.* As we all know, equity is one of those ideas/constructs that has multiple meanings. If we think of equity as meaning that the process by which one acquires access to resources is transparent and accessible and that those who have ownership in the system expands, then this Superintendent has done an excellent job of using these standards of equity to lead the district. The Superintendent has also been clear that we have a long way to go before we get a good grade on being equitable.
4. *Pandemic.* We each recognized that the wheels came off the bus in March in a way that was unimaginable for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning organization. As a district, we have become articulate about the challenges of closing opportunity and achievement gaps while addressing systemic racism, this pandemic has served to highlight these challenges. As a committee, we are deeply appreciative of the character that Dr. Cassellius has demonstrated in efforts to bring this community together in a manner that serves our children.

## 2. Challenges

1. *Central Office.* The Superintendent has shared ideas as to how to address the challenges of central office and Executive Team structure, but needs to follow through on creating a stable and focused structure and fill out key leadership roles. Addressing challenges such as grade configurations, high school redesign, and management of our physical plant cannot be solved in one year, let alone when managing this pandemic disruption. The Superintendent, the District, and the School Committee will be challenged to find a path to continual improvement while dealing with urgent crises. Balancing the urgent desire for change while being focused on solving urgent problems is a challenge.
2. *Culturally and linguistically relevant pedagogy.* Given the diversity of the BPS student population, we are still in need of a systemic approach to creating the academic experience that will be gap closing and youth inspiring. Dr. Cassellius has articulated that this is a primary focus of the district, but the design of that plan is still, to our shared frustration, in progress.
3. *Creating Consensus.* While the superintendent has met the challenge of building relationships with constituents across Boston, the need for building consensus within the district must be a focus in the upcoming school year. In particular, the need to welcome alternative viewpoints in an effort to build consensus toward long-term, systemic change for the benefit of our children will be a challenge, particularly as she continues to build out her senior team and build relationships with school leaders. The Superintendent has been very effective in creating a platform upon which we can build this consensus, the Committee wishes to see this consensus develop, and the community urgently wants desired outcomes to become apparent. We are deeply stressed by a sense of urgency for our children, and understanding that creating the right system will take time.

## 3. Priorities

1. *Build an organizational structure that will drive improvement now, and sustain equity and excellence over time.* When the Superintendent was hired, we had a sense of time to create structures that would sustain excellence over time. The pandemic has changed our sense of focus and urgency. As a Committee, we have come to understand that we need an organizational structure that self-sustains excellent outcomes for all our children. Clarity of authority and responsibility is needed to build trust within and among the various stakeholders in this community and we charge the Superintendent with focusing on the development

and implementation of an organizational structure that serves our children and community.

2. *Opportunity and achievement gap reduction.* As a Committee, we are committed to becoming a gap-closing district, which starts with gap closing schools. We understand that there are many urgent events that distract all of us from this central goal. We hired this Superintendent to keep us focused on closing these gaps and understand that this will involve very difficult conversations across the community. This Superintendent has demonstrated the skills needed to hold important conversations and encourage this focus. Success will demand the creation of an organizational structure that allows the Superintendent to focus on the macro-issues that need to be addressed within this district and empowered Central Office staff to find and implement operational strategies to close these gaps.
3. *Resources.* We encourage the Superintendent to continue to recruit the financial, political, and practical resources that we need to improve our performance as a gap closing district.

Superintendent Cassellius provided us with a self-evaluation in eight areas of performance. Each of you shared your evaluation of the Superintendent in these areas. Below is a composite summary of your evaluations. They are presented in order from what we consider the Superintendent's strongest areas of performance to the ones in which we see areas for improvement. It is important to point out that some of us were focused on process and some on outcomes. The former focus led to a more positive evaluation of the Superintendent's performance as it acknowledged that Dr. Cassellius was focused on solving problems that existed prior to the hiring of this Superintendent. The latter articulated our urgency to move forward on implementing effective solutions.

Overall, we rated the Superintendent's performance as **EFFECTIVE** (or a 3 on a 4 point scale)

#### **1. FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY AND BUDGETARY CONTROLS**

1. Dr. Cassellius quickly demonstrated an understanding of the practical and political nature of the budgeting process within Boston Public Schools. Building on the efforts of previous administrations which developed practices designed to increase equitable access to resources across schools (e.g., weighted student formula and the opportunity index) the Superintendent used an equity lens to examine how resources were allocated and made appropriate adjustments.

2. The Superintendent, working with the Mayor's office recognized that effective equity oriented planning needed more resources and that year by year financial decision making was ineffective. Dr. Cassellius worked to get a multiple year increase in the BPS base budget and negotiated a three-year budget cycle.

## **2. FOCUS ON EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE**

1. There is universal appreciation of how the Superintendent has elevated equity as a central value and decision-making principle in the district. The operational ramifications of this elevation is not fully apparent, but that will take time. Dr. Cassellius has made it clear that the pathway to excellence must be oriented in creating equitable access to opportunity for all of our students

## **3. UNDERSTANDS ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES AS SUPERINTENDENT**

1. Dr. Cassellius came to us with a wealth of understanding as to the roles and responsibilities of the superintendent. The initial listening tour, the redevelopment of the BPS strategic plan, the effective relationship building with the Mayor's Cabinet and City Council all indicate the Superintendent's skill as at managing the public role of the job. Dr. Cassellius' commitment to working closely with community partners demonstrates this Superintendent's understanding that, for the modern urban superintendent to be successful, they must be known by and engaged with the community beyond civic, corporate, and foundation offices.
2. The Superintendent's response to the pandemic reflects Dr. Cassellius' understanding that the Superintendent is a public civic figure whose presence has a meaningful impact on the community's commitment to the work of our district.
3. Dr. Cassellius must continue to build her management team within Central Office to ensure a stable structure and long-term success for our students.

## **4. COMMUNICATION AND INTERPERSONAL SKILLS**

1. There is no doubt that Dr. Cassellius is ready and eager to connect with the broad constituency of the district. In particular, this Superintendent is effective at communicating with students, community partners, and the media. Dr. Cassellius has very strong interpersonal skills that work well in building relationships.

2. The quality and clarity of the BPS public announcements have improved since the appointment of this Superintendent.
3. Although Dr. Cassellius is eager to be available to meet with a wide range of individuals and groups, not everyone leaves feeling that they have been heard. Part of the challenge is that the Superintendent, to meet our expressed goals, is making changes with which not everyone is comfortable or in agreement. Managing these challenges effectively is needed to maintain a trusting relationship with the community, and with BPS school leaders, teachers and staff.

## **5. COMMITMENT TO ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION**

1. Dr. Cassellius has demonstrated a deep commitment to creating equitable access to a high quality learning experience for all of our children. The Superintendent is to be commended for creating school based and district wide equity roundtables to support school based focused on improved performance.
2. The Superintendent has been effective at initiating broad-based discussion as to how we will create an effective learning system in BPS to address historical inequities and develop a more coherent experience for all of our students. Dr. Cassellius has demonstrated courage in sharing ideas with the community about possible solutions rather than coming with fully articulated plans.
3. One result of this approach is that we do not yet have a plan for moving forward. The relationship between the high school redesign plan, the results of the DESE review, the work with the transformation schools, grade configuration, and managing or physical resources remains unclear. After managing school re-opening and before budget season, it will be important for us to see a more coherent plan for driving academic excellence and innovation.
4. A cross cutting issue that also needs to be addressed with greater clarity in our district plan for meeting the educational needs of our ELL students, our Special Needs students, and the intersection of ELL and Special Needs.

## **6. JUDGMENT/DECISION MAKING**

1. The members of the committee commend Dr. Cassellius for the effective manner in which opinions and ideas have been solicited from the community during the

initial listening tour and how that was used to inform the re-development of the strategic plan.

2. In the drive to make this plan operational, however, the committee wishes the Superintendent had spent more time working with various stakeholders exploring the unintended consequences of proposals. For example, the initial report on the high school redesign had not fully integrated the thinking of those staff who are responsible for our alternative education programs or the plans for converting current high schools to a grade 7-12 model.

## **7. PRODUCTIVITY, ORGANIZING AND PLANNING**

1. The committee has found Dr. Cassellius to be remarkably responsive to questions and concerns that we raise. It has been impressed by the multiple initiatives in which the Superintendent has engaged in a timely and effective manner from the listening tour, through the DESE review and then the pandemic. To accomplish this while building relationships with a new city, new colleagues, and working with an engaged Mayor and City Council is remarkable.
2. We are concerned that this level of productivity cannot be sustained within the current organizational structure. We strongly encourage Dr. Cassellius to develop an organizational structure into which authority and responsibility can be delegated so that the Superintendent can be focused on managing the system rather than running the system. Since Dr. Cassellius intends to be here for more than a decade, we want to make sure that the Superintendent does not get burned out.

## **8. COLLABORATION/TEAMWORK**

1. The committee believes that Dr. Cassellius is to be commended for the effective manner in which the Superintendent has engaged external stakeholders, in particular parents, students, and community partners, who had not, historically, felt engaged by or with the District.
2. Although communications, internally and externally, have improved this year, the Committee encourages continued efforts to improve communications about plans challenges in a timely manner so that stakeholders can feel engaged in the decision-making process.

*Superintendent's Summative Performance Evaluation, SY 2019-2020*

- The Committee acknowledged that this has been an incredibly complex and challenging year for the District and Superintendent. Given that Dr. Cassellius is new to the district and managing within the pandemic, the outcomes have been remarkable. Nevertheless, we need to point out that further moving forward, more effective collaboration and teamwork with school leaders will be essential to implement effective programs to improve our ability to close achievement and opportunity gaps.

In addition to these comments on the eight areas of performance, below are our collective ratings on Dr. Cassellius' progress on stated goals, over rating, and ratings on standards.

**GOAL PROGRESS (SEE EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT PLAN, ATTACHED)**

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

Goal #	Goal Rating	Comments
1	Met	Developed 5 year Strategic Plan
2	Met	Secured dollars for Strategic Plan
3	Met	Negotiated MOU with DESE

**OVERALL RATING (Consider progress toward goals and performance categories)**

	<b>HIGHLY EFFECTIVE (Exemplary)</b>
<b>X</b>	<b>EFFECTIVE (Proficient)</b>
	<b>DEVELOPING (Proficient)</b>
	<b>MINIMALLY EFFECTIVE (Needs Improvement)</b>
	<b>INEFFECTIVE (Unsatisfactory)</b>



**ED EVAL ONLY: STANDARDS RATINGS**

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

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

Dr. Cassellius has proposed a set of goals for School Year 2020-2021 which are enclosed in the attached appendix. In addition to discussing the Superintendent's evaluation, the Committee needs to determine if we are in consensus that these are the goals on which we intend to evaluate the Superintendent’s performance next year.

Appendix I.

**Employee Development Plan (EDP)  
Dr. Brenda Cassellius, SY 2020-21 Goals**

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
Communication and Community Outreach	I will focus my growth this next year on EL learner development and bilingual education. I will conduct an internal audit and develop a plan for improving student outcomes for our EL Learners.
Data and Accountability	I will continue to reform BPS special education service for children, especially our sub-separate environments. To do this effectively I need to also design in collaboration with teachers and experts excellent and equitable inclusionary practices.
Strategic Planning, School Finance/Budgeting and School Improvement	I will continue to seek new ways to develop diverse leadership and leadership pipelines in the district. This includes a sharp focus on linguistic diversity given our large proportion of students who are multilingual.

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
<p>1 - Student Learning Goal</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Implement plan for bilingual and dual language learning in BPS</li> <li>2. Develop problem-solving model to disrupt the disproportionality that exists in special education referrals, especially substantially-separate settings</li> <li>3. Develop high-quality inclusion classroom practices</li> <li>4. Develop district-wide MTSS Student Support Teams (SSTs)</li> <li>5. Expand Full-Service Hub School strategy</li> </ol>	<p>Increase K2 literacy rate of EL students</p> <p>Decrease the percentage of Black and Latinx male students referred for special education</p> <p>Effectiveness of inclusion student success</p> <p>Establishment of functioning SST at every school in which SSTs use data to drive success plans for students</p> <p>Increase the number of schools implementing Full-Service Hub</p>
	<p>6. Redesign 7 High schools</p>	<p>School strategy</p> <p>Teachers trained in AP, IB, and create Early College &amp; Career Pathways</p>
<p>2 - Professional Growth Goal</p>	<p>Create positive and effective relationships with school leaders so we become a highly effective team that works together for the goals of the district beyond the work of their individual schools.</p>	<p>Measured by evaluation and perception surveys</p>

Superintendent's Summative Performance Evaluation, SY 2019-2020

<p>3 -</p>	<p>Take care of the health and wellness of BPS employees and implement actions steps through our Equity Office to deploy training toward a positive anti-racist culture within BPS.</p>	<p>Measured by perception surveys</p>
<p>4 -</p>	<p>COVID-19 Response and Reopening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure a safe and successful reopening</li> <li>● Ensure processes for accelerating learning for students who need support</li> <li>● Ensure staffing and other operational supports for a successful opening</li> <li>● Attend to the immediate needs of students with disabilities and the learning needs of our English learners</li> <li>● Provide timely and transparent communications in multiple languages to parents and other stakeholders regarding the reopening</li> <li>● Establish dashboards and continue the use of equity roundtables to hold ourselves accountable and problem solve in real time</li> </ul>	<p>Results from staff, student, and parent perception surveys</p> <p>Publication of guidance for school reopening and expectations for supporting ongoing learning</p> <p>Formative assessment results measuring student learning progress and effectiveness of efforts to address unfinished learning</p> <p>Development and monitoring of publicly-accessible data dashboards</p> <p>Calendar of equity roundtables and resulting action steps arising from roundtable discussion</p>