

November 28, 2017

Dear School Leaders,

We are writing to provide an update and overview of the Partnership Fund, a strategy that we will implement for Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 to increase equity and close opportunity gaps in the Boston Public Schools (BPS). The Partnership Fund will be our first application of the Opportunity Index¹ as a tool for allocating resources in a more equitable, coherent, and innovative way. The Partnership Fund is driven by our core values and rooted in the beliefs that schools are the units of change and school leaders with the right supports and systems will propel their schools and communities forward.

The Partnership Fund allocates funding for partnerships to a subset of BPS schools that serve the greatest concentrations of high need students (according to Opportunity Index data). Using Partnership Funds, the schools will be empowered to choose and fund one or more partners to provide ongoing direct services that best meet the unique needs of their school community and advance their school improvement goals.

Background

Historically, BPS has earmarked a pool of central office funds to contract non-profit organizations to partner with a subset of schools across the district. Central office leaders made decisions about which partners were funded, how much funding they received and which schools they served. In the current fiscal year (FY18), BPS allocates \$6.7M in partnership funding to 14 partner organizations working in a total of 70 schools; these partners provide essential services such as after school programs, behavioral health counseling, college access support services, and workforce development. These district funded partners and the schools that benefit from their services will be impacted by this shift to the Partnership Fund.

In addition to partners receiving district partnership funds, all schools currently partner with external partner organizations through other means, such as no-cost partnerships and/or utilizing school funds to secure partnerships; the Partnership Fund will not directly impact these current partnerships.

Rationale for a New Approach

The current approach for allocating centralized dollars to partner organizations presents a number of challenges that do not align with our core values or theory of change, including:

- District-funded partnerships are not equitably distributed; there is little correlation between currently funded partnerships and schools serving the greatest concentrations of high need students.
- Schools have little to no voice in selection of partners receiving district funding; schools, as the unit of change, are not empowered to make the decisions that are best for their school communities.
- Schools and nonprofit organizations not currently receiving district partnership dollars are unable to access this funding; there is no transparent or open system for accessing partnership funds.

¹ The Opportunity Index is a new tool that BPS will use to increase equity and close opportunity gaps. The Index will serve as a more robust, accurate, and differentiated measure for assessing and addressing the needs of our students and their schools. It is a composite index that includes a range of student data that is predictive of students' academic outcomes, including data about crime, educational attainment and income level of students' home neighborhood, along with individual student and family data, such as their socioeconomic status and past academic performance.



The Partnership Fund

Beginning with the FY 2019 budget cycle, BPS will utilize the Opportunity Index to equitably allocate a total of \$5.7 million in Partnership Funds to a subset of schools identified as serving the greatest concentration of high need students. Eligible schools will receive a per-pupil partnership funding allocation as part of their FY19 school budget, these funds will be loaded into a restricted budget line that can only be used to fund partner organizations. Using their Partnership Funds, schools will have autonomy to choose and fund one or more partners that best meet the needs of their school community and advance their school goals.

For each school receiving FY19 Partnership Funds, the school leaders, together with their School Site Councils and other key members of school communities, will participate in a data-driven process to decide which partner(s) to fund. This decision will be submitted with each school's FY19 budget, and it will require approval by their School Site Council and their Instructional Superintendent.

Central Office Supports

The Office of Engagement's School-Community Partnerships team, Instructional Superintendents and other key central office departments will collaborate to provide schools with supports to ensure the selection of effective partnerships. These supports to schools include, but are not limited, to a Partnership Fund Guide, the Opportunity Portfolio: a menu of partners that have been pre-vetted as high quality service providers, open office hours, and individual school-based technical assistance. In addition, BPS Central Offices will be responsible for completing public procurement that's necessary to create funding contracts with partners.

Next Steps

We realize that schools and partner organizations will have many questions and invaluable input about the Partnership Fund. To that end, below is a timeline with some key next steps toward implementation:

- Dec. 1: Schools receive information about their FY18 district funding partnerships
- Dec. 8: Subset of schools receive FY19 Partnership Fund allocations with school budgets
- Dec. 11-13: Optional Partnership Fund Office hours available for all schools
- Dec. 14 - Jan.11: School-based technical assistance sessions available to schools

We understand this initiative represents a significant and complex shift from current partnership funding practices, and is likely to result in considerable changes – either positive or negative – for your school community and partners as well. As we work together to close opportunity and achievement gaps, we have been repeatedly struck by the depth of school leaders' commitment to our district's core values and advancing our shared goals for student success. Thank you in advance for your help ensuring effective design and implementation of the Partnership Fund.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact your Instructional Superintendent and/or Jonathan Sproul, Director of School-Community Partnerships for the Office of Engagement, at jsproul@bostonpublicschools.org or 617-519-3106.

Sincerely,



Tommy Chang, Ed.D.
Superintendent



Monica Roberts
Assistant Superintendent of Engagement