

100-Day Plan

A Report for the Boston School Committee

By Dr. Tommy Chang, Superintendent of Schools

About this plan

Over the past three months, the Boston Public Schools Transition Team has committed to inform the thinking for this 100-Day Plan and the start of a strategic 3-Year Plan. Our team has traveled across the city to learn about Boston's schools and listen to stories of bright spots and areas that need attention to ensure every student achieves excellence. In total, we have met more than 1,500 members of the community and visited nearly 30 schools in June alone. Together, we have built a library of more than 1,000 suggestions and recommendations.

The 100-Day Plan begins on the first day of school (September 8th) and is centered around five value statements, which are at the heart of our approach:

1. All youth can and must achieve at high levels.
2. We innovate and transform teaching and learning to inspire excellence.
3. Those closest to students must be empowered and held accountable for making the most critical decisions that lead to student achievement.
4. Every child should have access to a high quality school of their choice close to home.
5. We must build a "Culture of We" that is embraced by students, staff, families, and community.

Under each value statement, we describe one or more projects that we intend to complete by the end of January 2016. Our 100-Day Plan work will inform our 3-Year Plan that will be unveiled in September 2016. Throughout, we will continue listening and learning about what our schools are doing well and what we need to do in order to better support all of our students.

We are excited to engage with students, staff, families, and communities over the next 100 days to make the vision in this document a reality, so that we can be one step closer to having all of our students graduate prepared for college, career, and life.

Value Statement I: All of our students can and must achieve at high levels.

We have made significant strides to improve equity in our system. Graduation rates for Black and Hispanic students have been steadily improving since 2006, with a 10.1 point gain for Black students and a 9.2 point gain for Hispanic students. Dropout rates overall have been cut by almost a third. More minority students are taking Advanced Placement (AP) classes than ever before, with Blacks and Hispanics accounting for 56% of the district's 11th and 12th grade AP enrollment.

We recognize the variety of existing bright spots in BPS. Our early childhood programs are preparing our students for success. The deep commitment to the inclusion vision in BPS, especially among schools and families, will guide our ongoing work to expand inclusive practices. Our dual language programs give more students the opportunity to be biliterate, a critical 21st century skill. In addition to benefiting all students, these programs particularly serve the needs of our English language learners (ELLs).

Even so, racial disparities emerge early in our system and become more pronounced as students move up through the grades. We recognize the diversity of BPS students in their culture, language, and abilities, yet in the Class of 2014, only 65% of Black students and 59% of Hispanic students graduated high school in four years, compared to 72% of White students and 87% of Asian students. Nearly 40% of ELLs and 41% of students with disabilities did not graduate on time. Moreover, African-American and Hispanic students were far more likely to be placed in a substantially separate special education setting than their White or Asian peers.

One of the greatest imbalances is the low completion rate of the recommended MassCore curriculum, particularly for Blacks and Hispanics. This is worrisome, since MassCore is “intended to help our state's high school graduates arrive at college or the workplace well prepared and reduce the number of students taking remedial courses in college” (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education). In 2013-2014, Asian students in BPS had a 59% MassCore completion rate and White students had a 55% completion rate, whereas Black and Hispanic students only had 30% and 34% completion rates respectively.

These unacceptable inequities are present even within the offerings for our youngest youth. Advanced Work Class (AWC) is one such example: African-American and Hispanic students are significantly underrepresented in AWC compared to peer White and Asian students.

We will address opportunity and achievement gaps from the earliest stages of learning through graduation. Our students' futures depend on it.

Project: Create a plan to expand AWC to all students who wish to enroll and submit the preliminary plan to the Boston School Committee's newly created Opportunity and Achievement Gap Task Force for review.

Source: Center for Collaborative Education and Annenberg Institute for School Reform Report, Transition Team Session #1, Listen & Learn - June 3 - Curley School, Advanced Work Class/General Education Integration Team

Leads: Office of Academics, Office of Strategy, Office of Equity

Project: Complete an audit of all high schools to identify (i) which offer the necessary coursework to complete MassCore curriculum, and (ii) what is needed to ensure that all schools offer a complete MassCore program. Present the preliminary findings to the Opportunity and Achievement Gap Task Force for their review.

Source: Focus on High School Achievement, Boston Opportunity Agenda Report

Leads: Secondary Principal Leaders, Administrators of Operations

Value Statement 2: We innovate and transform teaching and learning to inspire excellence.

In many ways, Boston serves as the model for what public education can be not only in the United States, but across the world. We have topped Forbes list for “Best Education in the Biggest Cities.” Our Early Childhood and Parent University programs are often hailed as among the best in the nation. Our BPS Arts Expansion Initiative has led to significant academic gains over a 5-year period. And our graduation rates are at an all-time high and dropout rates at an all-time low.

Our work, however, is far from over. We cannot accept the status quo when one in three of our students do not graduate high school on time. We must continue to adapt our practices to better meet our students’ needs.

Central to these efforts is the redesign of our city’s high schools. Many of our current secondary programs were not designed for students of the 21st century, so we must innovate and remodel our existing programs. The initial phase of our high school redesign effort began this spring with citywide forums co-sponsored with the City of Boston's Education Cabinet. Since the initiative's launch in May, over 1,000 community stakeholders have participated in 20 forums to begin re-imagining the high school learning experience—from curricular design, to the configuration and use of time, to the engagement of partners throughout the city.

There is no better place than Madison Park to launch our high school redesign strategy and showcase our belief that every high school in Boston must be high-quality. Led by a new Executive Director and strong student advocacy, the school is positioned to make significant improvements. As a district, we can support the school to ensure its sustained success into the future.

Project: Develop a three-year plan for Madison Park that serves as the launch site for initial high school redesign strategies. The plan will better align its academic and vocational education programs so that students receive the academic and real world foundations they need to prepare them for college, career, and responsible civic participation. This will include expanding and deepening partnerships with community colleges, universities, and local businesses.

Source: Transition Team Session #8

Leads: High School Principal Leaders, Turnaround Office

We are also transforming teaching and learning by addressing the length of our school day. In 2015-2016, sixteen of our schools will add over 3 hours of instructional time to each week of school. Over the next two years, more than 40 additional schools will join this initiative. This change has the potential to have a huge impact: a report from the National Center for Time and Learning stated, “Both research and practice indicate that adding time to the school day and/or year can have a meaningfully positive impact on student proficiency and, indeed, upon a child’s entire educational experience” (2015).

We must ensure that this first phase of implementation is of high quality and that the additional time is used well. If we succeed, we can have an enormous impact on students' futures in college, career, and life.

Project: Carefully examine the use of instructional and adult collaborative time in the 16 schools that comprise the newly created Extended Learning Time initiative. Draw immediate lessons about promising practices and effective management strategies from this implementation process. Refine the application and school selection process based on lessons from the first round.

Source: National Center on Time and Learning, Summer Progress Data, Boston Opportunity Agenda Report

Leads: Principal Leaders, Office of Academics, Office of Extended Learning Time, Office of Operations

Value Statement 3: We must empower those closest to students and hold them accountable for making the most critical decisions that lead to student achievement.

Those who are closest to students have the biggest impact on our students' lives. Teachers, school staff, families, and community members are with our city's youth every day, and they are the ones positioned to make the best instructional decisions for our kids.

As it stands, school leaders are not being adequately supported. In a recent survey of BPS school leaders, principals and headmasters wrote that they sought more professional development to develop leadership skills, as well as more tools for collaboration with their Instructional Leadership Teams and faculty members. We also heard through our Listen and Learn Tour that school staff and community members seek more support from Central Office.

We are already rethinking the ways that we support principals and headmasters. This summer, we hired 8 principal leaders who will coach school leaders throughout the year. They will help leaders engage their Instructional Leadership Team, deepen leaders' and teachers' understanding of how to develop Common Core-aligned student assignments, use resources to support instructional improvement, schedule time daily to engage in instructional support and coaching with their teachers, ensure adequate supports to students who are performing below grade level, and integrate the work of internal and external partners.

Support for schools needs to extend to all departments in Central Office. Throughout our Listen and Learn tour, we heard many stories of successful collaboration between schools and Central Office, but we also heard stories of schools that felt removed from Central Office. Many Central Office staff feel "silo'ed" in their department, and according to the Boston Public Schools operational review, department goals are rarely connected to district-wide goals. We must reverse this trend: to successfully educate our students, school leaders need supportive, coherent customer-service engagement from the Central Office.

The Central Office exists to support our schools, school leaders and Instructional Leadership Teams. If we are to empower those closest to our students, then we must do everything we can to assist them.

Project: Undertake a design process with school leaders to identify what effective Central Office support should look like for school leaders and Instructional Learning Teams, what professional development is needed to build Central Office capacity to deliver that support, and what metrics schools will use to provide input on the quality of Central Office support.

Source: Council of the Great City Schools, Principal Surveys, Transition Team Session #8

Leads: Principal Leaders, Office of Human Capital, Assistant Superintendent for Professional Learning, Deputy Superintendent of Student Support Services, Office of Data and Accountability, Director of Professional Learning at the Boston Teachers Union

Value Statement 4: All of our students should have access to a high-quality school of their choice close to home.

No matter where a student lives in Boston, he or she should be able to receive a high-quality education at any school. Nationally, report after report has shown that a student’s zip code is the biggest determinant of his or her academic career. This need not be true in Boston; we must break this cycle and ensure that all of our students can attend a high-quality school that prepares them for college, career, and life.

We launched a Home-Based Choice System last year that will continue to offer families a variety of school options for their children. This was one step in ensuring that every family has high-quality school choices that are near their homes. Over the coming year, we will continue to review the implementation of the new student assignment plan with a particular focus on equitable access.

Many of our city’s schools are already performing at high-levels. We seek to identify and publicize these “bright spots” across the district, so other schools can learn and replicate best practices that already exist within our city limits. At the same time, we must also support underperforming schools. If we are to have high-quality schools near all homes, then we must find ways to assist those schools falling behind and transform them into high-performing schools.

One tool to support high-quality schools is a strong performance management culture that is based on regular review of key metrics associated with school improvement. These metrics, aligned to the School Quality Framework, will provide ways to monitor school progress, identify and differentiate actionable school supports, and pinpoint system-level barriers that hinder school progress. While it will take longer than 100 days to establish this performance management culture, the creation of key metrics as part of a Performance Meter is an important first step towards identifying effective supports for schools.

Project: Create a Performance Meter that is available to parents, students, and the community.

Source: Transition Team Meeting #8

Leads: Office of Data and Accountability, Office of Communications, Office of Engagement, School Leaders, School Quality Task Force

Our commitment to high-quality schools will require that we make additional investments in our schools. But with limited funds, there are difficult choices on the horizon. We will create a long-term financial plan that guarantees the district’s financial stability while continuing our emphasis on equity, school site decision-making, and effective investments of available resources. This process will also take longer than 100 days, but we must make progress towards the reorganization of our existing budget.

Project: Convene a working group, led by the superintendent, which includes district, city, and state officials to begin planning the creation of a multiyear financial plan.

Source: Listen & Learn Tour, Transition Team Meeting #6, Operational Review

Leads: Superintendent, Finance

Value Statement 5: We must build a “Culture of We” that is embraced by students, staff, families, and community.

For all of our students to achieve at high levels, we must be united in our belief that all children can succeed, and we will only reach that point if we work closely together. The concept of the “Culture of We” emerged from our Transition Team meetings as a way of committing to work collectively on behalf of our students. Schools are only one piece of the puzzle; families and community must be close allies in our pursuit of educational equity and success.

To build a united “Culture of We,” we must have effective two-way communications and coordinated actions among all of our stakeholders that promote shared ownership and mutual accountability. Only when we include the work of students, staff, families, and community will we realize the full potential of our city’s schools for our students.

Project: Create an internal communications plan that both sets guidelines for school to community communications and also sets a strategy for two-way communications between (i) Central Office and principals, (ii) Central Office and teachers, and (iii) Central Office and parents.

Source: Transition Team Session #5, Transition Team Session #6

Lead: Office of Communications

Looking Ahead

There are many other projects that we will be initiating over the next few months, but we expect them to take longer than 100 days to complete. These projects will be laid out in more detail in the 3-Year Plan, to be released in September 2016. Like this plan, projects will fall under the same five Value Statements as above. A few of these projects include:

Value Statement 1: All of our students can and must achieve at high levels.

- Seek ways to increase Advanced Placement (AP) and dual enrollment offerings system-wide in 2016-2017 to expand student opportunities for advanced coursework

Value Statement 2: We innovate and transform teaching and learning to inspire excellence.

- To support our transition to Common Core, continue developing professional learning communities at each school and throughout BPS that:
 - Are focused on personalized learning that encompasses the cultures, languages, and abilities of our students
 - Emphasize literacy in reading, writing and speaking that is grounded in evidence from text, both literary and informational
 - Push rigor in math that demands conceptual understanding, procedural skills/fluency and application
 - Develop Common-Core aligned, cognitively-demanding tasks in all content areas
 - Contribute to a culture of data-driven instruction, where we are clear about grade level expectations, monitor student performance, and respond to students who need support

Value Statement 3: We must empower those closest to students and hold them accountable for making the most critical decisions that lead to student achievement.

- Develop a BPS Graduate Profile that specifies skills and knowledge expectations which define college, career, and life readiness to better understand what future BPS graduates need to know and be able to do during their academic careers (K-12)

Value Statement 4: All of our students should have access to a high-quality school of their choice close to home.

- Review the implementation of the new student assignment plan with a particular focus on equitable access to ensure that all students have high quality schools near their homes
- Develop a comprehensive capital plan for Boston Public Schools that anticipates educational needs and population shifts across neighborhoods in order to guide infrastructure investments and the right-sizing of the district over the next decade as described in the operational review

Value Statement 5: We must build a “Culture of We” that is embraced by students, staff, families, and community.

- Create a “Culture of We” campaign that identifies and publicizes “bright spots” across the district to share successes in BPS and increase the likelihood of replication

We have a lot of work ahead of us over the next 100 days and beyond. But if we provide autonomy to drive transformation and innovation in every classroom, resource schools appropriately, and believe that all youth can achieve, we can and will inspire excellence in every corner of our city to create a world-class education system and establish Boston as the premier urban school district in the nation.

Let’s get started.