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TO: Rob Curtin, Associate Commissioner of Data and Accountability  
CC: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Boston Public School Review Team  
FROM: Boston Public School Leadership team  
RE: Post Review Reflection  
DATE: April 1, 2022

The Boston Public Schools (BPS) thanks the review team from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for the time you have taken to learn about the progress made by BPS over the last two years. During this time our district undertook an expansive and necessary body of work, including responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing recovery efforts. We have not only stayed the course, but have in fact made significant and strategic progress during one of the most challenging times in public education history. BPS has demonstrated an unwavering commitment on racial equity, a laser-like focus on the unifying academic priority of equitable literacy, and ensured significant investments in operations, equity-based policies, culturally responsive leadership, and hiring staff that reflects our student population. We believe the evidence of our progress - in the face of a pandemic - is irrefutable and we are thankful that you took the time to learn about it and provide feedback so that we may remain focused on driving student outcomes.

BPS engaged in an after action team review and we offer these important reflections for your consideration as you prepare your draft report. Additionally, as not to forget the power of partnerships to our overall strategic implementation and bettering of outcomes, we share a set of letters from local and national partners to demonstrate that the core work you've learned about this week is deeply embedded into the fabric of our organization and our key partnerships.

### Centering Equity: Strengthening the Foundation and Staying the Course

1. District Strategic Plan: Built on a lengthy community engagement process of nearly 90 community meetings, visits to all 125 school buildings, and feedback from more than 2,100 participants, the BPS Strategic Plan guides our review of policies, directs our funding strategy, and outlines our decision-making process. Anchored in six core commitments (Eliminate Opportunity and Achievement Gaps, Accelerate Learning, Amplify All Voices, Expand Opportunity, Cultivate Trust, Activate Partnerships), the plan is the foundation for our work.

2. Equity-Based Policies: BPS strengthened expectations for accountability by developing and adopting new equity-based policies. We designed systems and structures and secured investments to enact those policies—all in an effort to deliver on a promise to maximize access to programming and opportunities known to positively influence student achievement. Some of the examples participants discussed during the district review include: instituting MassCore college and career graduation requirements, overhauling the exam school admissions policy, updating the code of conduct, revising attendance and grade level retention practices, improving grading policies, increasing accountability and guidance on hiring of candidates who contribute to the overall diversity of BPS, and comprehensively implementing the BPS District Wellness Policy. BPS also requires the use of the Racial Equity Planning Tool (REPT) for all major policy decisions. This ensures that all the work we do is done through a racial equity lens and with stakeholders involved throughout the process.

Collectively, these policies, along with other examples we've shared over the course of the week, have worked to strengthen our system and bring a sharper focus on the achievement and opportunities afforded to students, especially for those for whom we must do more.

3. A Unifying Academic Vision (Equitable Literacy and Multi-Tiered System of Support): You've heard clearly from BPS staff members at all levels of the organization about our deep commitment and focus on equitable literacy and a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS).

We are proud of the work we have done to build an infrastructure to support this work. There has been significant educator participation in the early phases of the Equitable Literacy roll-out across content and role, starting with a formal launch at the 2021 August Leadership Institute. Though this year's professional learning focus was primarily on school leaders and Instructional Leadership Team members, 57 Equitable Literacy learning events were offered in SY21-22 that enrolled over 1,800 educators (40% of the district's educators). Our schools have already started to plan for a required Quality School Plan (QSP) focused on equitable literacy in SY22-23, including 15 contractual professional learning hours to support implementation. The district published a professional learning [course catalog](#) so that school teams can incorporate district supported professional learning opportunities into their school-based plans utilizing an MTSS lens. We will also continue to incentivize educators to enroll in courses by offering Academic Ladder Credits.

4. Recruitment and Cultivation of Educators: BPS has made significant progress in selecting educators who contribute to the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of our organization. For example, through our focus on recruitment and cultivation efforts for school leaders, we have been successful in hiring School Leaders of color over the past

three years, with 87% of SY21-22 new hires identifying as a leader of color. Additionally, in SY 21-22, we reached a goal of hiring a majority of leaders that speak languages represented in our student population, with 53% having fluency in one or more of these languages. New programmatic innovations designed by BPS at the educator level have led to significant improvements in progress toward our educator diversity goals.

We made a strategic investment into the cultivation and retention of first year educators with the addition of full-time New Teacher Developers (NTDs). NTDs provide robust support specifically tailored to the needs of early educators. This includes: observation and feedback, targeted new teacher and mentor professional development throughout the school year, and a focus on educator growth utilizing common high-leverage tools, such as the principles of equitable literacy and the Culturally Responsive Instruction Observation Protocol tool. These cultivation supports are designed to ensure our earliest educators are implementing instructional strategies and embodying the dispositions required to move outcomes for our students.

5. Quality Guarantee: The District has developed a Quality Guarantee: a framework of resources, opportunities, and supports that will be available at every school and for every classroom in the Boston Public Schools. The Quality Guarantee serves as a social contract between the district and the community about what should be true in every school. The district has already made major investments in this Quality Guarantee and worked to ensure all schools have important roles (i.e., social workers, school nurses, family liaisons, school counselors and psychologists) while also promoting new academic innovations consistent with our academic vision (e.g., new native language programs, expanded implementation of Excellence For All (EFA), academic-focused partnerships). The district has also made a number of investments in our facilities grounded in the Quality Guarantee (e.g., commitment to library access, athletics, and arts programming) and is planning for the longer term with renovations and new buildings.

#### Greater prioritization and coherence to ensure a precise focus on teaching and learning

1. Outcomes and opportunities for students with disabilities: One of the driving areas of focus for the District over the past several years has been increasing inclusive opportunities for all our students with disabilities. This has resulted in a 4.2% decrease in students in substantially separate classrooms and a 9.1% increase in students in inclusive settings. However, we continue to see a disproportionate number of our Black and Brown students being assigned to our substantially separate settings, especially in programs that serve students with emotional impairments. We know that in order to dismantle this and improve student outcomes, we must continue to address both structural issues in our system as well as issues related to bias. Structurally, we are

moving from a disability-based system to a needs-based system when looking at funding and assignments for students with disabilities. This new approach is student-centered, flexible, and individualized. The Reimagining School Funding Project and the Cross Functional Inclusion Team have identified this updated approach as a key piece of their work.

In terms of addressing issues of bias, we are engaging our Coordinators of Special Education (COSE) in a professional development series that addresses issues of disproportionality, including in referrals and initial evaluations, through utilization of Boston's Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices framework. Our strategic plan lays out how we will continue this work so that we can continue to address issues of bias with COSE and other staff across the district.

While we recognize changing systems and bias will improve outcomes for our students, we also know that it is critical that every student attends a classroom with a highly skilled instructor. We are investing \$6.2 million of our ESSER funding for school-based work focused on pedagogical practices including Universal Design for Learning to ensure that all students have access to the curriculum. We are providing coaching for all special education educators in innovative and research-based best practices in supporting the different disabilities of our students. Our students with disabilities, like all students, need both a high-quality Tier 1 curriculum as well as a robust MTSS, and this is why the district's work of Equitable Literacy and MTSS will directly impact our students with disabilities.

Additionally, we thank DESE for their commitment to supporting the Office of Special Education (OSE) as we improve our work outlined in DESE's Tiered Focused Monitoring (TFM) report. OSE will continue to explore collaborative efforts in aligning the vision between general education and special education, beginning with collaborative meetings with School Superintendents. OSE will expand its professional development opportunities to include their general education colleagues and district administrators. We will strengthen our approaches in improving selection of placements for students with disabilities utilizing a student-centered approach. Finally, we will continue to review our staffing infrastructure within the OSE to ensure district services provide an equitable opportunity for all students.

2. Outcomes and opportunities for Multilingual Learners: In 53 schools, 90% or more of students are receiving fully-compliant ESL instruction (i.e., correct type, minutes, grouping, and ESL licensed teacher). We will continue to improve by increasing the number of teaching staff who are ESL licensed and Sheltered English Immersion and Bilingual Education Endorsed. Given the progress BPS has made in meeting compliance areas, we are excited to re-vision the work of the office to shift our primary focus from

compliance to one that also focuses on quality teaching with direct, job-embedded instructional support to educators.

BPS is in the process of re-envisioning the Office of English Learners to focus on Multilingual and Multicultural Education. We are aligning our strategic priorities with the resources, investments, and positions needed to improve quality teaching and learning by: increasing native language access and instruction; directly supporting Multilingual program schools; coaching teachers on Equitable Literacy and Bi-literacy; and providing tiered professional development and services in support of all of multilingual students, particularly special populations of students (e.g., multilingual students with disabilities, newcomers, Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education, undocumented students). Our restructure will include investments aligned to our strategic goals, including hiring 12 bilingual Multicultural Instructional Coaches who will support native language instruction and programs, staffing the new Special Populations team to specifically align the MTSS framework to support students with the highest needs, and implementing a compliance platform that will be utilized to continuously monitor our compliance areas.

#### A reliable operational system that works to ensure students are healthy and safe.

1. Transportation: Students must have safe and reliable transportation to and from school in order to access learning and support services.

To address lingering challenges in transportation, we have developed and implemented an outcome-focused and metrics-based monthly performance review process with monthly system-wide reviews along with daily meetings focused on issues impacting on-time performance. We regularly review operational outcomes such as missed stops, fidelity of route completion, incident response, and resolving data quality and sharing issues as part of these meetings to guide improvement recommendations. While there is still significant room and need for growth, during the first two days of the 2021-22 school year BPSDOT achieved 69% on-time bus performance, the highest rate in the past seven years. So far this school year, BPSDOT has achieved 91% average daily on-time bus performance. We continue working to solidify and build on improvements to ensure safe, reliable, on-time transportation.

To improve communications with schools and families, we hired additional staff to add language capabilities, redesigned the website with easier to access information, introduced a new customer service ticketing system to track all requests and incidents, translated start-of-school mailers into families' home languages, improved access to the "Where's My Bus" website, and expanded the use of the School Messenger system to include all charter schools.

Our largest and most immediate concerns are the ongoing national bus driver shortage and continuing efforts to fill open positions for drivers and monitors. We have and continue working with the Recruitment, Cultivation, and Diversity and Communications departments, along with Transdev HR, to recruit new drivers and monitors.

We are partnering with the Mayor's office on labor negotiations to ensure that we secure operational efficiencies that remedy long-standing issues such as driver attendance and absentee rates.

2. Facilities: Students must learn in buildings that are reflective of the high expectations we know they can reach.

We are partnering with the Mayor and her team at City Hall to include BPS buildings as part of their larger strategy for buildings city-wide and a unified approach to planning and funding to ensure our buildings are modernized and have the support for ongoing and emergency maintenance projects.

BPS is addressing lingering issues with facilities through an indexing system that prioritizes projects based on the condition of building and the needs of students who learn there, implemented a new project request system so school leaders and staff can request work via an online portal, upgraded bathrooms, expanded access to clean water, and invested in air quality via purchasing air purifiers, installing indoor air quality sensors, and repairing or replacing 12,000 windows.

Letters from Partners: The district's strategic plan calls for the "activation of partnerships." These partnerships must work to drive key district strategic priorities. We did not have an opportunity to speak with you about how partners help us focus on and make progress toward district priorities. Please note letters from a sample of key partners in which they describe the nature of their partnership with the BPS:

- Council of the Great City Schools
- City Year Boston
- UMASS Boston
- EdVestors
- Boston After School and Beyond

Thank you again for your time and honest review. We look forward to your draft report and your continued partnership as we leverage our momentum and progress and work to ensure all of our students graduate from high school prepared to succeed in college, career, and life.