

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SYSTEMIC IMPROVEMENT PLAN
FOR IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENTATION

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) released a district review report of Boston Public Schools (BPS) in May 2022, following up on the previous report released in March 2020. As outlined in the follow-up report, DESE uses review reports to identify resources and/or technical assistance to provide to the district—because ensuring all students have access to an excellent public education is a shared responsibility of school districts, municipalities and the state.

While the May 2022 district review report notes that BPS has made progress since March 2020, key findings include significant, persistent challenges in BPS. The parties agree that urgent action must be taken to address the long-standing challenges facing BPS. The City of Boston, the Boston Public Schools, and DESE agree to work together in a targeted, strengthened partnership to immediately address systemic barriers to educational opportunity, build the operational capacity to implement systemic change, and support Boston’s most vulnerable students—including students with disabilities and English learners—in achieving their full potential.

Mayor Michelle Wu, Superintendent Brenda Cassellius, and Boston School Committee Chair Geraldine Robinson on behalf of the City of Boston and the Boston Public Schools, and Commissioner Jeff Riley, on behalf of DESE, agree to pursue urgent corrective action to immediately address the concerns identified in the 2022 BPS follow-up district review report.

All parties will work together to meet the requirements of this Systemic Improvement Plan. The City of Boston and BPS agree to undertake the initiatives outlined below and to be held accountable for reaching specific, identified goals on a clear timeline, and DESE agrees to provide concrete support to BPS via provision of resources and technical assistance. Work to advance the commitments outlined here will begin immediately and will continue after the hiring of the new Boston Public Schools Superintendent and the formation of a City of Boston Children’s Cabinet, chaired by the Mayor and the Superintendent.

Student Safety

Support the physical, social, and emotional well-being of students and ensure a safe school environment.

BPS Commitments

- Respond in a timely manner to complaints received from DESE’s Problem Resolution System (PRS), including allegations of bullying, as outlined in the Complaint Procedures Guide.
- Continue relaunch of Operation Homefront, a collaboration between BPS, the Boston Police Department, and faith leaders, to meet with and connect City youth most impacted by violence with support and services.
- By August 15, 2022, commission an independent student and staff safety audit to assess safety protocols at schools and make recommendations to ensure safe learning environments for all students across the District, including an evaluation of the transition of BPS school police officers to BPS civilian safety service specialists in schools after the Police Reform Law took effect July 1, 2021, and any impacts of this transition on coordination and communication between BPS and BPD.
- By September 8, 2022, hire a Coordinator of Problem Resolution who will ensure coordinated district and school investigation and response of all complaints received through the Problem Resolution System.

DESE Commitments

- By August 15, 2022, begin to provide periodic professional development for BPS educators and special education staff members, tailored to the specific needs of BPS, with a focus on understanding guidance within the PRS Complaint Procedures Guide.
- By July 1, 2022, assign a DESE point-person to serve as a technical assistance partner to support BPS with improved response to PRS complaints.

Special Education

Undertake a deep redesign of BPS special education services. Inclusion must be the foundation of special education in every school. BPS is committed to inclusionary practices that directly address disproportionate placement of students of color in substantially separate programs.

BPS Commitments

- By August 15, 2022, engage a consultant or hire a highly effective special education leadership team whose members have a proven track record of success working in urban school districts and who will work with a sense of urgency on improving special education services. The team will report directly to the Superintendent.
- With the support of the leadership team, by February 1, 2023, release a district-wide inclusion policy that incorporates specific models for high-quality, inclusive education and includes short-term objectives and a timeline for implementation. The policy will transition from a minutes-based to a percentage-based definition of inclusion and incorporate models to significantly expand partial inclusion.
- By August 15, 2022, develop an updated policy and procedure manual on special education. BPS will train staff on effective implementation of the policies and procedures as part of the professional development provided at the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year.
- By November 1, 2022, create a McKinley Schools Working Group that will include representatives of the Boston Public Schools' Special Education Parent Advisory Council, the Boston Teachers Union, and the McKinley Schools Parent Council, with other members named by the Boston School Committee Chair. The Working Group will be charged with implementing the recommendations of the McKinley Schools intervention team and guiding the Needs Assessment phase of the building renovations proposed in the City's FY23-27 Capital Plan.

DESE Commitments

- By July 1, 2022, commence a customized version of the IEP Improvement Project tailored to the specific needs of BPS.
- By July 1, 2022, assign a DESE point-person to serve as a technical assistance partner to support BPS with implementation of the IEP improvement project, including transitioning from a minutes-based to percentage-based definition.
- By December 1, 2022, incorporate language goals into the state's IEP template for dually identified students.

Transportation

Create a safe, effective, and responsive school transportation system, with immediate reforms to improve on-time school bus arrival rates and eliminate uncovered bus routes (i.e., bus routes that are scheduled but not run).

BPS Commitments

- Immediately begin implementing the operational reforms negotiated between BPS and the school bus drivers' union, ratified by the union on May 24, 2022, to improve on-time arrivals and help eliminate uncovered bus routes.

- Achieve a district-wide school bus on-time arrival rate of 93% or better each month. The on-time arrival rate includes all scheduled bus routes.
- Ensure 98% of BPS school buses will arrive at school within 15 minutes of the start of the school day.
- Continue to report on-time arrival rates to DESE each month as well as data on uncovered routes, including disaggregation for students with disabilities.
- By October 1, 2022, launch a diagnostic evaluation of the current BPS transportation system in order to analyze efficiency, performance, equity, and cost. The diagnostic should yield recommendations for route and schedule planning and optimization as well as updated service parameters.

DESE Commitments

- By October 1, 2022, provide ongoing technical assistance as BPS conducts an evaluation of its transportation system that seeks to identify inefficiencies, opportunities for improvement.
- Beginning by August 15, 2022, provide ongoing technical assistance on how the district could create community and vendor workforce pipelines.
- Facilitate conversations with MassDOT to add an additional Safe Routes to School staff person who will focus solely on BPS.

Facilities

Provide welcoming, safe, healthy, energy-efficient, and inspiring environments for students and educators that are conducive to teaching and learning.

BPS Commitments

- By August 15, 2022, use the district's new Building Dashboard, including ongoing updates, to review all school bathroom facilities and implement a district-wide plan for necessary renovations. BPS will renovate bathroom facilities in at least 15 schools within FY 2023. Such renovations will be subject to inspection by DESE.
- By October 1, 2022, use the Building Dashboard to create and implement a coherent preventive/deferred maintenance plan.
- By December 31, 2023, create and implement a comprehensive, long-term master facilities plan, incorporating the recommendations of the Facilities Conditions Assessment, expected to be complete by the beginning of SY23-24.

DESE Commitments

- By September 8, 2022, identify a DESE point-person who will monitor student bathroom facilities on an agreed-upon, ongoing schedule to confirm that these essential facilities are properly maintained throughout the school year.
- Facilitate conversations with the MSBA to accelerate the City's work with the state on major renovations and new buildings.

English Learners

Provide high-quality services to all English learners, particularly English learners with disabilities, including rigorous, age-appropriate curricula, enrichment programs, and access to advanced coursework, with a focus on bilingualism.

BPS Commitments

- By October 1, 2022, finalize and present the BPS Strategic Plan for Multilingual Learners.
- Report Compliance Levels regarding English learners receiving appropriate services to DESE each quarter, consistent with the City's successor agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice.

DESE Commitments

- By August 15, 2022, assign a DESE point-person to serve as a technical assistance partner to support BPS with implementation of its Strategic Plan for Multilingual Learners.
- By August 15, 2022, automatically extend ESL emergency licenses until June 30, 2023.
- By August 15, 2022, automatically issue the SEI endorsement to all educators who hold an ESL license rather than requiring educators to apply for this endorsement in ELAR.
- By September 8, 2022, commence a series of free ESL MTEL prep courses with at least one course section specifically dedicated to BPS employees that will be accessible via online instruction or at a Boston-based site.
- By October 1, 2022, establish an observation tool for ESL instruction to support school leadership teams in assessing the quality of ESL instruction. The observation tool should include guidance for ESL instruction for dually identified students with specific consideration of the nature of their primary disability. DESE will provide free training to BPS central office instructional coaches, school leaders, and other evaluators of ESL teachers.
- For Spring 2023 MCAS onwards, offer the MCAS STE and Math subject tests in all BPS home languages (i.e. Spanish, Cabo Verdean Kriolu, Haitian Kreyol, Vietnamese, Chinese, Portuguese, Arabic, Somali, and French) for all grade levels.

Transformation Schools

Improve teaching and learning in BPS's lowest performing schools (see list of Transformation Schools in Appendix A)

BPS Commitments

- By December 1, 2022, produce an equity analysis on funding for Transformation Schools compared to non-Transformation Schools of similar size and programming and to all BPS schools.
- By October 1, 2022, consolidate the number of plans required for Transformation Schools into one clearly articulated, robust, evidence-based Quality School Plan for improvement at each school.

Data

Put in place the necessary systems and internal controls at the central office and school levels to ensure transparency and accurate data reporting.

BPS Commitments

- By July 15, 2022, complete an independent diagnostic evaluation that identifies areas of strength and weakness within current BPS student withdrawal procedures and yields recommendations for improvements that will inform revisions for SY22-23 policies. Based on the findings from the diagnostic evaluation, produce a report that outlines planned corrective action and timeline for implementation.
- By September 8, 2022, publish revised student withdrawal procedures that outline specific controls that will be in place within the central office and all schools to ensure that state data reporting regarding graduation and dropout requirements are met in a timely and accurate way. BPS will train applicable staff, such as guidance counselors and school leaders, on effective implementation of the policies and procedures for student withdrawal as part of the professional development provided at the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year.
- By October 1, 2022, launch a Data Working Group with community, school and expert members appointed by the Superintendent, including a DESE representative, charged with monitoring data quality and reporting on withdrawal procedures, graduation rates, on-time arrivals, and other key metrics to be identified.

DESE Commitments

- By August 15, 2022, DESE will provide the Superintendent with a list of potential members to serve on the Data Working Group.
- By November 15, 2022 and April 15, 2023, and thereafter on an annual basis following the October and March SIMS submissions, provide the district with a comprehensive list of all students included in the current four graduation cohorts. The file will identify each student’s accountable school, graduation cohort year, and last-recorded enrollment status.
- By September 8, 2022, facilitate monthly meetings with BPS and City of Boston-identified staff members who are responsible for data quality and state reporting in order to gather user feedback, understand challenges, and collaboratively implement systemic solutions that support accurate and timely reporting. Through this ongoing collaboration, document the end-to-end process for submitting data files for state reporting with the goal of diagnosing the technical limitations that impact timely submissions for a district of Boston’s size.
- By August 15, 2022, to support effective data reporting, DESE will provide technical assistance to BPS on procuring a new business intelligence tool and leverage available state contracts to optimize pricing.

Accountability

Establish enhanced accountability measures.

- The City of Boston and BPS will make regular reports on the matters set forth in this Systemic Improvement Plan to the Boston School Committee. DESE will make regular reports on the matters set forth in this Systemic Improvement Plan to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). The first regular report shall occur before August 31, 2022.
- The parties will engage in a multistakeholder process to set student achievement and other outcome metrics after the employment of the new Superintendent.
- The Superintendent and the Commissioner, or their designees, will meet on a monthly basis to discuss the priority initiatives.
- DESE commits \$10 million to support the City of Boston and BPS in the implementation of initiatives in the Systemic Improvement Plan.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties execute this MOU under seal.

The Honorable Michelle Wu
Mayor, City of Boston

Date: _____

Geraldine Robinson
Chair, Boston School Committee

Date: _____

Brenda Cassellius
Superintendent, Boston Public Schools

Date: _____

Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Date: _____

Appendix A
Transformation Schools

For purposes of the Systemic Improvement Plan, the BPS schools identified as a “Transformation Schools” include:

Washington Irving Middle School Roslindale¹
James P. Timilty Middle School Roxbury²
Madison Park Technical Vocational High School Roxbury
David A. Ellis Elementary School Roxbury
Higginson/Lewis K-8 School Roxbury
Lilla G. Frederick Middle School Dorchester
Brighton High School Brighton
Dearborn STEM Academy Roxbury
Sarah Greenwood K-8 School Dorchester
Young Achievers K-8 School Mattapan
King K-8 School Dorchester
Blackstone Elementary School South End
Community Academy of Science and Health Dorchester
James J. Chittick Elementary School Hyde Park
John D. Philbrick Elementary School Roslindale
Lyon High School Brighton
Mario Umana Academy East Boston
Excel High School South Boston
Orchard Gardens K-8 School Roxbury
Roger Clap Elementary School Dorchester
Samuel W. Mason Elementary School Roxbury
Edison K-8 School Brighton
Mission Hill K-8 School³ Jamaica Plain
Curley K-8 School Jamaica Plain
Condon K-8 School South Boston
Charlestown High School Charlestown
English High School Jamaica Plain
TechBoston Academy Dorchester
James W. Hennigan K-8 School Jamaica Plain
Joseph Lee K-8 School Dorchester
Henry Grew Elementary Hyde Park

¹ On December 15, 2021, the Boston School Committee voted to close the Washington Irving Middle School.

² On December 15, 2021, the Boston School Committee voted to close the James P. Timilty Middle School.

³ On May 5, 2022, the Boston School Committee voted to close the Mission Hill K-8 School, effective June 30, 2022.