



TO: Dr. Joel D. Boyd, Superintendent

FROM: Linus J. Guillory Jr., PhD, Chief Schools Officer
Robin Desmond, Chief Academic Officer

DATE: May 13, 2020

RE: Report on Dropout Data

The following report is in response to the motion by Jackie Doherty:

Request the Superintendent provide the committee with a report that examines the factors that may have contributed to tripling the number of student dropouts over the last few years including staff reductions, discontinued actions, or program changes.

The Lowell Public School (LPS) drop-out rate for the 2016-2017 school year was 1.2%, for 2017-2018 school year the dropout rate rose to 2.8%, and for 2018-2019 school year the dropout rate increased to 3.7%. This increase has been a result of a myriad of factors to include staffing, programming, policies, community resources and the student population.

LHS has weathered a number of reductions to staff over the past three years due to budget constraints. Though LHS maintained staffing within the house offices with a dean, two guidance counselors, a social worker and two clerks, other areas of the school were impacted to include teaching, administration and support positions which may have negatively affected student engagement and management. Each lost position required a reallocation of responsibilities on the remaining staff which impacted the efficiency and effectiveness of the operations.

Due to a decrease in funding, the LHS summer school programming was eliminated which has been detrimental to students engagement efforts. The more a student falls behind his/her peers, without the opportunity to recover credits over the summer, the easier it is for students to disengage, making re-engagement more challenging.

The enrollment process and interactions with community advocacy groups has also changed. Students are being enrolled at LHS that in previous years would have been redirected to other community programming based on age, educational attainment and goals. LHS is enrolling students who are not in a position to meet graduation requirements of 90 credits and pass required MCAS exams. Some of these students' primary goal is to improve their language skills and find work to support their families, and once a job becomes available, they leave school with no intention of completing high school. This makes re-engagement extremely difficult.

The enrollment process lacks a counseling component in the appropriate language that would help identify students who would be better served in programs outside the traditional comprehensive high school model. Students are enrolled and then quickly drop out before the school can make a connection, because they are misplaced and do not understand the requirements of a traditional high school. The limited availability of alternative programming within the community contributes to the problem.

Lowell Public Schools (LPS) continues to work as a school community to engage students, and when possible, re-engage students and improve attendance. During the LHS budgeting process, LHS proposed additional supports, cognizant of the fact that there are limited funds to do so. The positions requested include: Freshman Academy Student Support Specialist, Career Counselor, six teachers (English, Math, Science, Social Studies, Health and SPED transition) and reconfiguring the In-house Suspension Room to become a Learning Center with paraprofessional support.

Beyond the proposed positions at LHS, below are some additional factors, provided by the LPS Attendance Office, that may have contributed to the increase in dropouts with strategies for improvement.

1. Database Coding and Tracking of Student Withdrawals

- The Attendance Officer will provide LHS staff with annual training on student database entry. Data entry will be consistent with Chapter 222 of the Acts of 2012.
- The Attendance Team will conduct a review of the LPS Attendance Intervention Plan and Policies with leaders to highlight the importance of accurate data entry.
- Dropout data and re-engagement strategies will be shared with LHS Head of Schools, LHS Student Support Services Coordinator and House Deans quarterly throughout the school year.

2. Dropout Prevention Task Force

- In 2016, a LPS dropout task force was in place. The task force is no longer functioning. The team was composed of Central Office and LHS members.
- The Attendance Officer will reinstate a drop-out intervention team.

3. Outreach to High-risk Students and Dropouts

- The Attendance Team will utilize chronic attendance data to flag at risk students and perform on-going outreach before students dropout.
- The Attendance Team work with LHS staff to create a graduation map and visual plan for students who only need a few credits to graduate to develop interventions.
- The Attendance Team will work with staff to allocate time during the year to conduct home visits.
- The Attendance Team will work with LHS staff to connect students to alternative educational programs prior to dropping-out and create scheduling to support students with substantial credit recovery needs.

We would like to thank Marianne Busteded, Head of Lowell High School, and Heather Ganley, LPS Attendance Officer, for providing the information in this report.