

Linus J. Guillory Jr., PhD
Chief Schools Officer
155 Merrimack Street
Lowell, Massachusetts 01852

LOWELL PUBLIC SCHOOLS Phone:
(978) 674-2163
E-mail: lguillory@lowell.k12.ma.us

TO: Dr. Joel Boyd, Superintendent of Schools

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

DATE: January 15, 2021

RE: *Identifying Deficits/Missing Skills & Prep Courses*

The following report is in response to two motions made by Andy Descoteaux:

Identifying Deficits & Missing Skills (Made on 10/21/20):

Ask the Superintendent to form an ad hoc committee with representation of a cross section of educators from LPS, including UTL, and higher education with the principal aim of identifying the deficits and methods to address any missing skills and knowledge resulting from the changes to the instructional day and learning environment since March 2020 and continuing into the 2020-2021 academic year. The goal should be; how can we minimize any learning loss that has occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic and what can be done to narrow or eliminate those academic gaps for students.

Prep Courses for Seniors (Made on 12/16/20)

Ask the Superintendent to look into ways of streamlining high school electives in order to offer various pandemic related prep courses for seniors, who would otherwise have a need of remedial college courses, along with the cost.

The response motion contains information from District Ad Hoc Committee as well as the LHS assessment team; we thank the team members for providing the information contained in this report. The “blue” links will take you to relevant/additional resources that accompany/contain and additional information.

ADHOC Committees

LPS K-8 teachers and support staff have implemented a wide range of classroom interventions, students support systems, social emotional curriculum and extracurricular 21st century activities all designed to promote active student engagement during remote learning. We have sought to remain consistent with our high quality, standards aligned curriculum and our tiered system of support, but we also recognize the need to adapt our support for the remote learning environment. The K-8 Assessment Task Force has

been formed to review the most current data. The Task Force will be looking at and comparing iReady data from 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. The Task Force will also review progress on math benchmark and literacy assessments.

The Assessment Task Force consists of:

- 5 School leaders
- Math & ELA Curriculum Coordinators
- Director of Research, Testing, and Accountability
- Social Emotional Learning Coordinator
- English Language Development Coordinator
- 1 Literacy & 1 Instructional Specialist
- 1 Math Resource Teacher
- 1 Social Worker
- 6-8 Teachers
- 1 Special Education Administrator

The Assessment Task Force will be reviewing current data and investigating the following questions:

1. Are we seeing concerning trends in the data or learning loss? If so, what are we doing to remediate? What interventions are available in District? What interventions are still needed?
2. Where are we seeing successes in the data and practice? What led to those successes? How do we replicate them?
3. How do we quantify anecdotal data? What are we seeing and why?
4. What are the current assessments we are using? How are they captured and used?
5. What data do we need that is missing?

The Assessment Task Force K-8 will be meeting biweekly as a large group with smaller, breakout groups meeting in the weeks in-between. The goal is to complete this round of the task force by the end of March to examine beginning and middle of the year data.

Due to the size and scope of LHS, there are many committees looking at and addressing learning loss, assessments, scheduling as well as college readiness. Below is a comprehensive report on how the high school is identifying, examining and supporting student needs.

LHS Overview

As the first semester comes to a close, Lowell High School has implemented a wide range of classroom interventions, students support systems, socio-emotional support and extracurricular activities designed to promote active student engagement during remote learning and to address learning loss. We have sought to remain consistent to our tiered system of support, but recognize the need to adapt our supports for our current environment. Outlined below are our efforts to respond to the technological, academic, and social emotional challenges/needs associated within the current pandemic.

Following the abrupt school closures due to COVID-19 last March, LHS, like other

schools, scrambled to develop a learning plan and platform to re-establish school based programming. Entering into this school year, LHS wanted to ensure we closed the digital divide by providing Chromebooks to all students, including hot spots, and ensuring that every student had access to consistent live instruction.

It was determined that in the fall of SY 2020-21 LHS would adopt a bell schedule similar to the one that was used in past years to provide students and teachers with a familiar learning environment. To address the lack of structure and learning loss resulting from the spring shut down, LHS is offering all classes in a synchronous format to provide structure and familiarity. Teachers spent time during the in-service training before students returned to school to develop a robust virtual learning platform including the use of Google classroom and other applications. Teachers worked with each other and their department chairs to modify the curriculum to focus on essential grade level standards and develop formative assessments to determine the degree of re-teaching necessary. Deans and office support staff strive to employ a variety of engagement strategies to increase student participation, engagement and attendance.

Common Planning Time

This is the first year in recent memory that all teachers have been afforded the opportunity to have common planning time within their departments. This was purposefully planned into the development of the master bell schedule to provide structured opportunities for staff to work together to review student work, make curricular agreements and develop common ways and approaches to assess students. Administrators and teachers use this time regularly to check in on student progress and make curricular revisions and recommendations. Teachers, in conjunction with their department chairs, meet regularly to review lessons, unit plans and assessments

Community Partnerships and Learning Loss

Community partners have reviewed the impact of learning loss and have been part of the conversation to incorporate strategies, support structures, and curricular adjustments and adaptations. For example, the expansion of the early college program with Middlesex Community College in the Freshmen Academy, in collaboration with Project Learn, affords all 9th grade students the opportunity to take a 1 credit college course as part of the seminar class. This class offers students a rigorous curriculum with built in support to develop their executive functioning skills, time management and to expose and prepare students to access higher level courses at LHS to best prepare them for college. Project Learn has been an integral part of the conversation to support the work between Middlesex and LHS. LHS teachers, administrators and students have been a part of the Portrait of a Graduate work, pathway development initiatives and early college expansion. The Boy's and Girl's Club and CTI provided on site support for students as a virtual tutoring center during in-person learning. Seniors in need of alternative placements are referred to partners such as Youthbuild, UTech, Middlesex Community College (OSY) program.

In addition to academic learning loss, LHS is collaborating with Mass Hire to offer virtual 1 on 1 support for students to assist with their foray into the workforce and offer career exploration and preparation. [Elevate New England](#), a partner built within the high school, is servicing our most at-risk students who have suffered from learning loss. Elevate staff were teaching a curriculum to at-risk students in person and online at the start of the year, and now fully online. The curriculum has an emphasis on study skills,

time management, and executive functioning. Elevate staff serve as mentors and role models and build relationships with students to increase their engagement and academic success.

As noted above, LHS teachers and administrators worked during the late spring, summer, and fall to implement various strategies to deal with student learning loss.

Some specific initiatives are listed below

- Grade 9 Math teachers met with grade 8 Math teachers on three zoom meetings to discuss areas of student strength and struggle in order to be better prepared for the start of AY 2020-2021.
- Remote summer school allowed students to earn credits in Math, English, Social Studies, Freshman Seminar, and Health. LHS teachers assigned to small groups of students provided support and encouragement, including face-to-face, socially distanced support outdoors at LHS.
- LHS offered Summer Programming for Grade 8 Students Transitioning into Grade 9 - Jumpstart Algebra 1 and English 1 allowed students to review and preview skills in these subjects and earn 1.25 (one quarter worth) of credit for each Jumpstart course.
- LHS has continued its partnership with Mass Insight to Education (MIE) to support students in AP English, Math and Science classes as they work through content and prepare for anticipated in-person exams in Spring 2021. Students have had the opportunity for remote study sessions, and teachers have been offered training opportunities. AP teachers have continued to engage with colleagues on best practices for remote learning.
- The school has instituted [WIN Blocks](#), purposefully designed class periods each week to respond to student needs in order to stay on track with course work and provide additional instruction as needed.
- The Freshman Academy has introduced Seminar Support/Case Management. Five seminar intervention blocks were created for Grade 9 students who struggled significantly in quarter one. Students who failed classes were referred through their guidance counselor and were invited to join a Seminar Support Block with an increased focus on tutoring, academic management and support, and work completion with the goal of getting back on track for Q2.
- Increase in Home Visits - Our House Teams have conducted, and will continue to conduct home visits to support students who have had difficulty accessing remote learning. 350 home visits have been completed, so far.
- Teacher flexibility in accepting work to demonstrate competency even after end of quarter and semester
- Using Special Education paraprofessionals to provide additional 1:1 instruction within breakout rooms as needed

Credit Recovery Opportunities for Seniors

1. A variety of credit recover opportunities were provided to students during the Spring and Summer of 2020. These opportunities include:
 - a. Spring 2020 credit recovery offered in core subjects. This course work was offered outside of the school day and was overseen by the Academic Department Chairs within designated Credit Recovery Courses. Similar opportunities were provided to seniors during June of 2020.
 - b. Additional ELA credit recovery was offered through after-school programming in the spring of 2020.

2. Re-Engagement Academy - At the conclusion of semester one, LHS will identify students requiring additional intervention/coursework . Funds will be allocated for a 9-week period of Credit Recovery/Academic Enrichment beginning on 2/20/21. LHS will use both vacations, February and April, as well as Saturday Sessions, to support learning loss and student academic readiness.
3. LHS is working to explore the feasibility of creating credit recovery opportunities for second semester in core classes such as Algebra 1. For example, students who failed Algebra 1A would be placed into a new section of Algebra 1A/1B to work on skill acquisition before moving ahead to more complex material. The goal of this course, and others like it, would be to have students recover credit and skills, while simultaneously working to stay on track for promotion to the next grade.
4. In addition to the Re-Engagement Academy, additional credit recovery opportunities are in development for students who have shown significant improvement/progress since the Spring of 2020. For example: January 2021 ELA credit recovery is being offered to students demonstrating re-engagement after Spring 2020 NC
5. College coursework - MCC agreed to explore offering summer classes to augment gaps in remote learning. Target seniors in May, students offered safety net, intensive programs before graduation, as part of our concurrent programming.
6. College coursework - MCC offers intensive programs February vacation and April vacation and early summer in various content areas in a range of intro courses and courses. (Leadership course, First Year experience course).

Technology

The obvious need for virtual learning and teaching revolves around technology infrastructure, robust virtual platforms and professional development to build teacher capacity to thrive in this new and challenging learning environment.

In the early fall we distributed 2,805 Chromebooks to students so that they could have access to the virtual learning platforms supported by our staff. For students who required additional support with wifi or bandwidth we distributed 240 hotspots and continue to do so as needs arise.

Google Classroom Teaching During A Pandemic for Teachers and Students

Google classrooms were created for LHS teachers and students as a repository to share information and provide updates. It contains many resources organized by topic including videos, “How To” documents, weblinks, and more. All the resources posted are connected to questions specifically posed by staff. There is a section that includes ideas to enrich the teacher's lesson and plans and have been accessed by much of the staff. The following link will allow LHS staff to join the Google classroom entitled [Teaching during a Pandemic](#)

All Advisory classes are housed within the Google platform which enables students and families to have access to school wide updates and information. This platform is particularly helpful for seniors to track senior information and stay connected to during remote learning.



Curricular Support / Adaptations for Remote Learning

All departments have adjusted and adapted to meet the needs of our students during this time. An emphasis on maintaining standards while creating flexibility for teachers to support students in this unprecedented time.

- The Math department adopted a new Algebra 1 curriculum in FA, offering a HH Algebra 1 course. Utilizing data from a new online program (Savvas/ enVision) to adjust instruction.
- Geometry team has reviewed scope and sequence to focus on most critical topics for MCAS. Teachers are sharing electronic resources and utilizing a team goal that focuses on algebraic connections to geometry. Course requirements have been adjusted to allow expanded access to courses such as Financial Algebra, which allow students to meet EPP requirements.
- The Biology PLC adjusted curriculum map to focus on priority topics in the shortened school year. Grade 9 PLC adjusted curriculum map to increase focus on the Biology segment since this class will need to pass the Biology MCAS for Competency Determination for graduation in 2024. Use of WIN blocks to support student learning.
- Repeated emphasis in departmental meetings, communications, and PLC work on reducing content focus, slowing pacing, and focusing on core literacy, communication, research, media awareness, and critical thinking skills.
- Reworked curriculum to support different means of showing mastery of content and skills.
- Deadlines extended or (functionally) removed to accommodate individual student circumstances.
- Ability to re-engage material from MP1 or to reconsider MP1 grades on the basis of MP2 re-engagement and positive growth in the mastery of content.
- Integration of new digital material (both purchased and created) in the psychology classes.
- Integration of new digital material (created in-house, including textbook-based) in

World History.

- Creation of a new approach for action civics for S1 in American Civics (4226) to respond to difficulties seen in S2 of AY2020.
- Significantly increased collaborative work based on the discussion of classroom dynamics. (The twice weekly CPT makes a significant difference.)
- Several teachers have acted as tech guides for other teachers for tools that help foster communication with students.

Parent Engagement/Communication

In addition to offering various orientations and information sessions for parents at the start of the school year, LHS has worked to provide consistent communication to students and families on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. Examples of our communication include:

- The Week Ahead Video has been and will continue to be a useful method of communication between the high school, and school community. The Head of School, in collaboration with with Bryan Wilkins from the Colleen Creegan TV Studio, have been producing a weekly news show to share relevant news, information and updates to the greater LHS community ([The Week Ahead](#)).
- Weekly Communications from House Office Teams and the Head of School
- Our House teams, composed of deans, directors, clerks, social workers and guidance counselors, employ a variety of outreach methods, including phone calls, emails, apps such as Remind, and home visits to conduct outreach to students and families. The majority of the visits have been conducted to address attendance issues and to determine the root cause followed by a personalized student action plan. To date, our administrative team, support staff, including our parent liaisons, have conducted **over 350** home visits.
- On-Site Support (e.g. Help Tents, Outside Meetings, FAST Tent, etc).
- Delivery of materials for core classes and electives to hundreds of students to provide opportunities for hands on learning.
- Student Support Newsletter - An additional publication, published monthly since October, to increase staff, student and parent awareness of important, timely - events, due dates, opportunities

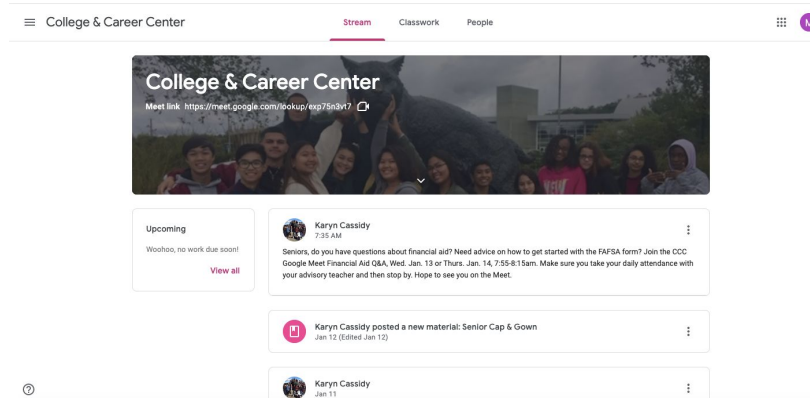
Progress Monitoring

We learned quickly in the spring of 2020 that monitoring student attendance, engagement, and academic progress was challenging. As such, we made significant changes to our daily procedures and included additional progress monitoring tools in the fall of 2020. Examples of these include the following:

- **Data Studio** - In order to better track student engagement, attendance and academic progress in core academic G9 classes, the Freshman Academy launched a data studio to collect bi-weekly data on student work completion, attendance on Zooms/Google Meets, and current academic progress. This allowed for additional outreach to students (and the families of students), who were failing, or in danger of failing classes. This outreach and progress monitoring was done in addition to progress reports and report cards. We are planning to build out a modified version of the data studio in grades 10-12 this year and into SY 20-21 to strengthen and ensure consistent methods of progress monitoring across all grades.
- **Graduation Monitoring - Senior Tracking** - In response to the senior slide that could impact student progress towards graduation, LHS has developed a color

coded system to easily identify on track and off track seniors both individually and in the aggregate for the purpose of accelerated intervention.

- **One on one meetings with School Counselors** - Counselors have incorporated one-to one meetings to serve as touchpoints for identifying students in need of emotional support and to build relationships with students in all grades.
- **Senior Class Meetings** - Quarterly Senior Class Meetings with Deans to review expectations, monitor progress and share information. Provides seniors with another touchpoint with LHS staff.
- **Senior 1 on 1 meetings** - Career Counselors from the College and Career Center have worked to better support senior post-grad planning and life readiness. A Google classroom was created and shared with all seniors.



Social Emotional Supports

DESSA- teacher administration of SEL surveys to all students, total of 3 SEL data collection surveys will be conducted by the end of the year. Lowell High School is the first school in the district to adopt a common format and structure to discuss and make next step decisions, to address students' needs. Currently, social workers are in the process of developing an SEL tool box for faculty student resources and will deliver SEL PD to increase staff awareness, understanding and use of SEL classroom strategies and relationship building.

Panorama surveys administered to over 2,300 students, ranking LHS in among the highest percentiles of student completion rates among comparable urban high schools. Time will be spent to unpack the data with the full faculty and social workers have been working to address Tier 1, 2 and 3 supports in the coming weeks.

Academic and Socio-emotional Supports

Providing the necessary academic and social emotional supports remains challenging but we have been able to adapt some past practices and interventions while expanding our systems of support in response to COVID 19 and other identified student needs (as evidenced in our most recent Panorama Survey Data).

- **Advisory** - Advisory was moved to the first period to provide all students with a daily morning check-in to start the day. Additional emphasis was placed on advisory, its place as a touchpoint, and the purpose it serves within a student's day.
- **After-School Tutoring** - Tutoring opportunities were provided to all students requiring additional support and were offered after school between the hours of

3:00pm and 5:00pm. During November and December there were 125 after-school tutoring sessions led by LHS teachers.

- School Culture and Climate Team - This team was established in response to needs identified in the spring of 2020 and now meets monthly to identify DEI opportunities for staff and students, including hosting cultural events,
- Sp. Ed. "in person" Learning Labs for Fundamentals Students. Students have the opportunity to take their virtual classes within a lab supervised and supported by Special Education paraprofessionals.
- BCBA consultation with Adjustment, CSA, and LEAP teams. Topics include helping students with mask and social distancing requirements, along with supporting students struggling to engage in remote learning. BCBAs have also assisted in transitioning students from remote to in person learning when needed.
- Guidance Curriculum -adapted content and delivery to virtual group meetings with students and to increase post- grad college and career readiness
- Sp. Ed. "in person" Learning Labs for Fundamentals Students. Students have the opportunity to take their virtual classes within a lab supervised and supported by Special Education paraprofessionals.
- BCBA consultation with Adjustment, CSA, and LEAP teams. Topics include helping students with mask and social distancing requirements, along with supporting students struggling to engage in remote learning. BCBAs have also assisted in transitioning students from remote to in person learning when needed.

Additional Programming

In addition to our past course offerings and pathways, LHS remains committed to meeting the needs of all students and has expanded elective support for students in grades 9-12. These include:

- After Dark - A Two-year career training opportunity for juniors pursuing IT and Advanced Manufacturing, in partnership with GLTech (Currently Virtual)
- Portrait of a Graduate - Significant progress has been made in our virtual setting to build out the Portrait of a Graduate to near completion by the end of January.
- JAG - Jobs for America's Graduates, 9-12 career exploration and academic support class, with wrap around supports. (Currently Virtual)
- Gear Up/Trio - strengthening partnership to expand college readiness and Financial Aid support opportunities to more students, also increased accountability through monthly reporting (currently virtual)
- Post-Secondary Employment - Career Exploration / Mass HireTo address employment and post graduation readiness, LHS has collaborated with Mass Hire to develop virtual resources and expand services to include 1 to 1, small group career services (currently virtual)
- Early College - Expansion of EC opportunities to include 600 9th graders and 100 10th graders to earn free college credit and increase preparedness, also created an EC teacher team. (currently virtual)
- Early College Promise grant submission as a response to learning loss for seniors to engage in a 5th year of high school while attending college.
- Pathways - Re-design Pathways model to better align with student interests, and create an purposeful 4 year experience, connecting academics and potential careers options, also created a Pathways teacher team to enlist buy in and faculty support to better define and roll out pathways at LHS. Partnering with

Project Learn and JFF to incorporate research based practices.

- In conjunction with MRC and American Training, Pre-ETS services are offered in a virtual setting for students with disabilities who will need post-secondary support.
- Scheduling - working to revise and refine scheduling process and oversight to better support students in course selection and appropriate placement into grad reqs.

Athletic, Enrichment Opportunities, Student Voice

Throughout the 2020-2021 year all students have had opportunities to engage in student activities and athletics both virtually and in-person. The majority of these opportunities have occurred virtually due to our current circumstances. Virtual Clubs Clubs are listed by day of which they meet and in most cases if you click on the club it will bring you to their Google Classroom where they are communicating with students through Zoom or Google Meets. Some clubs are a little different, but in most cases this is how they are meeting. We have clubs that meet multiple times a week and other groups who meet once or twice a month. They are all very different. During a regular school year there are many that will meet before school, but right now most of them are working after school hours. <https://www.lowell.k12.ma.us/Page/4320>

LHS Student Advisory Council

In an effort to engage students in the decision making process of the school community we launched the student advisory council which has 105 student representatives. We use Google Classroom to communicate with students and the HOS meets with each grade level on a weekly basis to hear their thoughts and incorporate them into the fabric of the school.

Student Athletics

The Fall Athletics season kicked off with a different look, from masks for all student athletes to no spectators for indoor sports. There were over 350 student athletes that participated in Boys Cross Country, Girls Cross Country, Football (strength and conditioning, practice/no pads), Golf Boys Soccer, Girls Soccer and Girls Volleyball.

Winter Athletics season started December 14. All CDC, Massachusetts Department of Health, Lowell Board of Health, Lowell Public Schools, MIAA and Merrimack Valley Conference Policies and Regulations have been followed. Although there are no spectators allowed per MVC policy, we are able to stream home events in a multitude of winter sports so that parents and spectators are allowed to view their son/daughter's competition. Boys Basketball, Girls Basketball, Boys Gymnastics, Girls Gymnastics, Hockey and Boys Swimming are being offered by the MVC and Lowell High School. We are currently working with the City Manager's office on the feasibility of televising home games.