

Memorandum

To: Dr. Joel D. Boyd, Superintendent of Schools
From: Robin Desmond, Chief Academic Officer
Michael Fiato, Head of School, Lowell High School
Date: April 1, 2021
RE: Secondary School Reform Update and Next Steps

Overview

Lowell High School has served its students and the community admirably over the past 159 years. Thousands upon thousands of alumni can proudly say they are graduates of Lowell High School (LHS), many planting roots in the community and contributing to the local civic and economic structures that make Lowell such a vibrant and diverse post-industrial city. Unfortunately, at this critical time in our nation's history, LHS is serving many, but not all students well based on the most recent Department of Education accountability data. As the educational landscape changed with the onset of COVID-19, the inequities that have historically disadvantaged young people who are English Language Learners, Students with Disabilities, Black, Latino or Hispanic, or low-income were greatly heightened. Now, more than ever, our students require supportive, caring and flexible learning environments that are welcoming, nurturing, and inclusive.

As we strive to achieve the community-wide vision for our graduates that is articulated in the District's soon-to-be-finalized Portrait of a Graduate (PoG), we are continuing to reframe the classroom learning experience for our students at LHS - exploring new possibilities and experiences for students which are not available within our current structure. This memo provides an update on this multi-year, *Secondary School Reform* initiative, including (1) a summary of our collaborative approach and the many levels of ongoing stakeholder involvement, (2) the immediate steps for improvement that are outlined within the LHS Sustainable Improvement/Turnaround Plan which informed this year's school-based budgeting process and will set the stage for sustainable improvements in the classroom, and (3) the long-term instructional redesign work that is currently underway which will drive the implementation phase of the PoG beginning in the summer, along with the progress and milestones that have already been achieved to date in key programmatic areas.

The Need for Change

The majority of students overall continue to thrive at LHS and move on to successful college and career pursuits after graduation; however, trends in the school's performance data also show significant opportunity gaps and disparate outcomes among the school's diverse populations. These gaps are prevalent across data sets, including both internal and external measures. Fewer than half of our students with disabilities, for instance, graduated in 2019, a rate which is 25% lower than the state average. And the attendance rate for Hispanic/Latinx students was 5.9% below the state average at 86.8%. Discipline data within the school also shows disproportionately high percentages of out-of-school suspensions among Hispanic/Latinx students compared to the overall student population. And due to both low subgroup performance and low participation on the MCAS, under the Statewide Accountability System, LHS is currently designated as "Requiring Assistance" and in the "Focused/Targeted Support" category - which requires the completion of a *Sustainable Improvement Plan*, formerly known as a Turnaround Plan.

Likewise, as many students and families continue to build and share incredible success stories that were only made possible by the extraordinary work that happens on a daily basis at LHS, the qualitative data we are gathering also provides evidence there is a need to rethink certain aspects of our programmatic