



Lowell Public Schools
Lowell High School
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Memorandum

To: Dr. Joel D. Boyd, Superintendent of Schools
From: Michael Fiato, Head of School, Dr. Jill Rothschild, Associate Head of School
Date: April 5, 2023
RE: Secondary School Reform Update and Next Steps

Overview

This memo provides an update on the multi-year, *Secondary School Reform* initiative, including (1) an update on student level data including progress, outcomes, and next steps; (2) update on secondary school reform, including instructional redesign and post-secondary pathways, aligned and informed by the Portrait of a Graduate (PoG); and (3) next steps for continuous improvement.

Progress Report/Update

LHS is at the cusp of fully operationalizing the *Portrait of a Graduate*¹ (PoG) - a set of knowledge, skills, and work habits that will prepare students for college, careers, and after high school. As we simultaneously rebound and stabilize our school community from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we continue to lay the foundational groundwork to fully realize PoG which is at the forefront of our high school redesign process quality improvement planning.

Student Level Data

LHS is committed to ensuring that all students have access and opportunities to achieve their post-secondary goals through consistent efforts to close performance gaps, improve student engagement and school climate and culture. Academic outcomes in the classroom continue to trend in the right direction, with improvement of course passing rates among grade 9 students from 47% to 63% in the first semester. While we have not seen the same improvements across grades 10 through 12, we continue to work towards our school wide goal of increasing the number of students, especially those who have been marginalized from accessing advanced coursework, to enroll in honors, AP and Early College courses. Through a concerted effort to promote advanced coursework enrollment from teachers, guidance counselors, and college and career counselors, we expect to reach our goal of increasing last year's enrollment of 42% to 50% among Hispanic students.

This year's improvements have resulted in reducing out of school suspension rates by 41.5% as compared to this time in the previous school year and a moderate reduction in chronic absenteeism from 42% to 35%. Some of this success can be attributed to the addition of the ongoing administrative and systemic alignments and increased student support. Student Support Specialists were added to each House Office to provide personalized student support and interventions. Additionally, LHS offers mediation and restorative practices

¹ Comprised of: Mind, Heart, Spirit, Skill, Network, Leadership

to address and prevent students in conflict through a partnership with UTEC and our preexisting partnership with the SCORE mediation program.. These partnerships, increased relationship building among the entire staff, and our house level interventions have resulted in a decrease in suspensions and overall incidents.

While we are pleased with our reductions in incidents and suspensions along with the strong start of our Grade 9 students, we have room for improvement in our student academic performance data. Our state testing data, though reflective of the national post-pandemic trend of declining scores, is not where we want it to be. When comparing the 2019 and 2022 data, the percent of students who earned meeting or exceeding expectations has decreased for both ELA and Mathematics. Specifically, 49% to 44% in ELA and 45% to 32% in Mathematics. Through our work to support educators to improve instruction and increase support for students, we fully expect to see improvements in MCAS test scores in the coming years.

The graduation rate declined by 2.4% from SY21 to SY22 from 82.8% to 80.4%. The dropout rate has increased from 3.1% in SY21 to 5.8% in SY22. Close monitoring of these trends among our administrative and student support teams, alongside the efforts of the district’s re-engagement team, are resulting in efforts to identify root causes of the drop out data and implement a case management model to provide flexible graduation pathways for students at risk of dropping out.

While there have been some decreases in the 4-year cohort graduation rate from 2021-2022, the district's 5-year cohort graduation rate has remained relatively consistent from the 2019 cohort to the 2021 cohort at around 83%, with a slight dip with the 2020 cohort. The Class of 2021 is the most recent 5-year graduation rate available, as the data lags one year behind the 4-year rate.

Table 1- Lowell High School Graduation Rates in Percentages (Last 10 Years)

Year	LHS 4 year grad rate	LHS SWD 4 year grad rate	LHS Hispanic 4 year grad rate	LHS ELL 4 year grad rate
2013	76	41.4	56.2	60.9
2014	75	28.1	61.3	62
2015	80.3	30.8	72.4	67.2
2016	82	46.7	73.1	69.9
2017	85.1	54.3	73.7	70.5
2018	82.7	47.1	65.5	55.7
2019	82.5	48.4	66.7	61.6
2020	84.5	61.2	79.5	66.9
2021	82.8	59.4	69	70.6
2022	80.4	51.6	69.6	67.5

Secondary School Reform

LHS has established a shared vision for high-quality, student-centered instruction to achieve the PoG competencies. This vision serves as the core of current and future improvement efforts, and offers a framework leading to a viable standard of practice that will inform all subsequent next steps. This vision is centered around a focus on high standards, high support, and equity to ensure all students experience a guaranteed, engaging and viable standards based curriculum aligned to the POG.

A significant step in this long-term process is the gradual revision of our graduation requirements, starting with the Class of 2026 and Class of 2027, requiring all LHS students to successfully complete one additional year of mathematics, social studies, and science. This new standard will provide LHS students with the same

opportunities as area schools with the goal of college and career readiness after graduation and better equip them for post-secondary success in college and/or career.

Across all subject areas, teacher teams are developing rubrics to transition the vision from theory to practice leading to the PoG domains coming to life in the classroom. In the coming year, the student experience will be enhanced through the infusion of PoG domains into the curriculum and the implementation of analytic rubrics that monitor progress towards attainment of PoG competencies. Department Chairs are partnering with Write Boston to build their coaching capacity to better support teachers and increase student engagement, specifically through increased student discourse and use of academic language. Interdisciplinary teacher teams are developing and piloting Transformative Learning Experiences (TLEs) aligned with the PoG to make learning more relevant, meaningful, and engaging for students. Throughout this process, we are collecting student and staff feedback regarding equity issues including access to advanced coursework and progress monitoring.



Post Secondary Update - A Path for Every Student

Through the Portrait of a Graduate, LHS is reimagining the high school experience to align with today's workplace demands and the skills and competencies required in today's rapidly changing economy.

Early College

The Lowell Early College program continues to allow students the opportunity to earn college credit while in high school which results in significant cost savings to students and families. Since 2019, 4,011 LHS students have participated in Early College. With 5,117 courses taken and 9,806 college credits earned, Early College Lowell has saved \$2,471,112 for the students and families of Lowell. Reducing student debt and increasing student persistence in higher education and degree attainment remains a top priority. LHS will continue to expand Early College enrollment in the coming years while simultaneously increasing overall enrollment in advanced coursework as part of our secondary reform initiative and realization of the PoG.

Early College Promise

LHS recently added the Early College Promise Program, which is a one-year extension program of Early College Massachusetts that allows students the opportunity to remain enrolled at LHS for a 5th year while continuing to earn college credits at Middlesex Community College. Over the past two years, 54 students have enrolled in the program. In 2021-22 ECP students earned over 550 free college credits and our current cohort is on track to surpass that amount. Our goal is to expand the Early College Promise Program by increasing the number of spots available and offering more students the opportunity to participate.

After Dark Program

The After Dark program, launched in 2021, is a collaboration between Lowell High School and Greater Lowell Technical High School (GLTS) and provides LHS students with an opportunity to receive technical skills training in select fields at GLTS in addition to their core academics at LHS. The program requires a two year commitment and is open to LHS students in their junior and senior years. The After Dark Program has grown from 31 students in SY 21-22 to 33 students in SY 22-23, with expected growth and expansion into future years. Last year, After-Dark students earned 169 industry certified credentials that can be applied to future employment opportunities and/or post-secondary education.

Career Pathways

Career Pathways provide students with a series of sequential career focused coursework and experiences that allow them to pursue their passions and establish industry-specific pathways. Currently LHS is working to align all of its Career Pathways with the guiding principles for Early College which center on:

1. Equitable Access - targeting underrepresented students in higher education
2. Connections to Career - through workplace and experiential learning experiences
3. Academic Pathways that are well integrated and aligned with college and career
4. High-Quality & Deep Partnerships
5. Robust Student Support

Most recently, LHS has worked to redesign its Education and STEM pathways and will continue efforts to revamp its remaining pathways in future years. For example, students in our Education Pathway recently completed Teaching in the Inclusive Classroom, the first course in UML's B.A. Ed program. As part of the course work, they gained field experience by working with students and staff in LPS elementary schools. Additionally, LHS has partnered with MCC to create a BIO Tech Learn and Earn Pathway at LHS and align STEM offerings for greater postsecondary success in the coming years. Our goal is for all students to be exposed to postsecondary opportunities through career exploration courses in their 9th and 10th grade years. Such coursework offers early exposure and allows them to develop and apply real world skills.

Seal of Biliteracy

LHS launched the Seal of Biliteracy in SY 22-23, The Massachusetts Seal of Biliteracy is a designation that provides a means to recognize high school graduates who attain high functional and academic levels of proficiency in English and a world language. Students have been encouraged to consider applying for this credential and are required to demonstrate language proficiency through a battery of tests that measure their speaking, comprehension, and writing skills. Currently, 300 students are engaging in the testing process. Full results are expected to be available by the end of April 2023.

Next Steps

Our continued focus on our school-wide goals will transition the PoG domains from theory (a poster on a wall) to improved learning environments and outcomes for students (what happens in classrooms) as the primary lever of high school redesign. Our continued work will include:

- Aligning PoG with the graduation roadmap, instructional vision and programming
- Narrowing performance and opportunity gaps so ALL students have equitable access to high quality instruction, advanced courses and extracurricular activities
- Increasing deeper learning experiences, coupled with intensive student supports to raise expectations and outcomes
- Establishing increased flexible pathways towards graduation through increased options for students
- Increasing effective coaching and support for teachers to grow their professional practice and student learning goals aligned with the instructional vision and PoG competencies
- Further developing PoG success criteria that will align competencies with performance tasks and/or portfolios that demonstrate mastery of content and authentic learning

Student Impact

These next steps will create multiple benefits and opportunities for Lowell High School students. These changes will allow for students to enroll in rigorous and relevant courses at the same rate as their peers across the state while identifying and exploring a post-secondary pathway that prepares them for college or the workforce. Students can expect to receive personalized wrap-around support from trusted adults that align to their specific academic and social-emotional needs, while enhancing their high school with engaging programs in a state-of-the-art facility. At the end of this process, students will be able to thrive and succeed in a newly redesigned high school experience in a newly redesigned space.

Cc: LPS Executive Cabinet