



LOWELL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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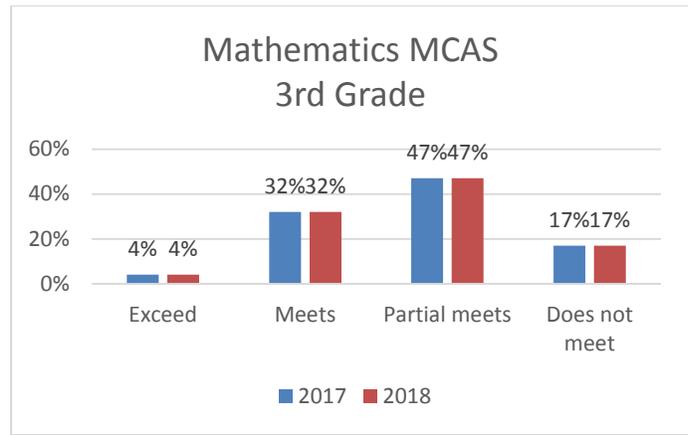
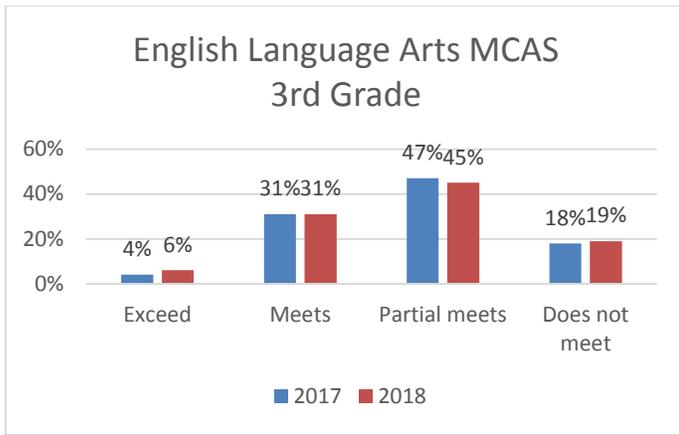
TO: Jeannine Durkin, Superintendent & School Committee Members Lowell Public Schools
FROM: Lisa Van Thiel, Early Childhood Coordinator
DATE: May 13, 2019
SUBJECT: Preschool Standards Based Report Card

This memo outlines the challenges our community faces in regards to the opportunity and achievement gap of our students. Over fifty-seven percent of the third graders in the district do not meet or exceed English Language Arts benchmarks. Sixty percent of third graders do not meet or exceed standards in mathematics. We have an urgent need to close the achievement gap before it begins.

Access to preschool increases vocabulary and reading achievement in third grade. The National Early Literacy Panel (2008) found that one-third of America's fourth graders read at levels so low they cannot complete schoolwork successfully. Achievement level of Latino and African Americans are more likely to be below basic level. Research by Fletcher & Lyon (1998) found that seventy-four percent of children who perform poorly in reading in third grade continue to struggle into high school. Graduation rates of English Learner, students with disabilities, and Hispanic/Latino students are lower than other student groups.

In Mathematics, we find similar differences. While young children have a natural interest in learning mathematics, many young children come to kindergarten without the predictive skills in mathematics. Clements & Sarama, (2014) have linked what young children know in mathematics to their later reading achievement. Of particular difficulty are story problems, we can address these issues by boosting students' vocabulary, comprehension, and oral language skills in preschool before a gap begins.

Approximately, forty-six percent of all eligible preschool children enter the lottery for preschool. Our district enrolls a diverse group of preschool students. Fifty-five percent of all enrolled preschool students are economically disadvantaged. Seventy-one percent are High Need Students. Twenty-five percent are English learners. Finally, fifty percent of enrolled preschool have a diagnosed disability. Collecting data on student outcomes from preschool to third grade will enable us to identify the root cause of gaps in student achievement.



The Early Childhood Department and the District’s Preschool Teachers developed a standards-based report card for implementation starting in the fall of 2019. The new report is similar to the approved Kindergarten report card. Moving to this format enables educators to enter cards in Aspen. Placing report card data in Aspen makes it easier for others to access a student report card to monitor progress and/or attendance.

The new report card documents attendance and consists of the following developmental areas linked to state standards:

- Responsibilities & Expectations (10 Indicators) – which align to the *Massachusetts Standards for Preschool and Kindergartens Social Emotional Learning, and Approaches to Play and Learning (2015)*
- Physical Development & Activity (6 Indicators)– *Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experience (2003)*
- Art and Music (3 Indicators) – Align with *Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experience (2003)*
- Reading, Writing & Written Language, and Speaking & Listening (17 Indicators) – align to the *Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks English Language Arts and Literacy Grades Pre-kindergarten to 12 (2017)*
- Counting & Cardinality, Operations & Algebraic Thinking, and Measurement & Data (8 Indicators) – align to the *Mathematics Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks Grades Pre-kindergarten to 12 (2017)*
- Science (5 Indicators) – align to the *2016 Massachusetts Science and Technology/Engineering Curriculum Frameworks (2016)*
- Social Studies (1 Indicator) – aligns to the *2018 History and Social Science Framework Grades Pre-K to 12 (2018)*

Finally, the new report card uses a rating system similar to that used in the system for Kindergarten through grade 4. Letters document behaviors and social skills, and numbers document academic ratings using a five-point scale.

We look forward to making upgrades to the Aspen system this summer to begin using the new system in the fall of 2019. Using this format will enable us to have access to aggregate grade level data in preschool. This data

will be useful and provide all preschool teachers with information to inform instructional practices and to develop continuous improvement plans.

As a district, access to report card data can help inform future policy decisions regarding universal access to preschool and the length of the school day. Child Trends reports nationally, since 2012, roughly sixty-one percent of children attend (public school or private centers) prior to kindergarten entry. However, children below the federal poverty line or from low-income families are less likely than their affluent peers to attend preschool are. Only forty-six percent of children in poverty attend preschool prior to kindergarten. Child Trends statistics are clearly reflective of our community.

We must consider ways to increase access to preschool program especially for English Learners, children from immigrant families, and the working poor. Our data shows that the percentage of students coming from homes where English is not the primary language is considerably lower in preschool than in other grades. Yet enrolling more English Learners in preschool would lower the cost of interventions given young children are naturally language learners. Our immigrant families have a difficult time accessing preschool programs due to the complexity of the enrollment process to gain access via the lottery or a voucher. Many working and low-income families in our community do not have access to public preschools programs due to work schedules. Working families are unable to provide transportation to and from a two-hour program during the workday. Many of these same families are unable to afford access to preschool so they rely on family or friends for childcare prior to school entry.

To change the learning trajectory of our community, we must consider closing the achievement gap before it begins. We must make a commitment to equity, justice, access, and opportunity for all students regardless of their age and income. For many children lack of access to preschool limits their development of predictive skills in language, literacy, and mathematics. If our community were to commit to universal access to preschool with full and/or half-day options, we would begin to close the achievement gap before it begins. In the meantime, the Early Childhood Department and Preschool Educators in our district will diligently work to collect baseline data on the predictive skills in mathematics, language, and literacy with the goal of collaborating with parents and the District to close the achievement gap before it begins.

Bibliography

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