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# Boston Public Schools Whole-School Improvement

## The Six Essentials

BOSTON'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS are engaged in an ongoing effort to improve instruction in every classroom and to support every student to reach proficiency. That effort, WHOLE-SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT, is organized around six ESSENTIALS, which provide a framework for the work.

### THE CORE ESSENTIAL: EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION

Use effective instructional practices and create a collaborative school climate to improve student learning

#### EXPECTATIONS FOR SCHOOLS

- In every classroom, teachers use an inquiry-based approach — workshop instruction — that is organized in the following way:
  - Mini-lesson/Objective: The teacher presents and/or models the day's learning objective — a standards-based fact, concept, strategy, or skill (approximately 20% of class time, which includes a "Do Now" task, five-minute warm-up, or review of the previous day's work)
  - Independent Work: Individually or in small groups, students apply the learning objective to their reading, writing, or other work, while the teacher confers with some students about the learning objective (approximately 60% of class time)
  - Share/Summing Up: The teacher sums up the learning objective, and students discuss how they used it in their work (approximately 20% of class time)
- During class and in every subject, students read, write, and solve problems regularly, doing work of high cognitive demand to help them reach proficiency.
- The school uses a year-long curriculum in core subjects that delineates content and skills.
- The school develops positive relationships among staff and students that support a professional learning community for adults and an engaging, motivating learning environment for students. The school has a student behavior policy.

#### EVIDENCE: WHAT YOU SHOULD SEE AND HEAR . . .

##### In Classrooms

- Students can explain what they are learning and why and how it connects to what they have already learned. They are able to talk about the quality of their own work and what they must do to improve it.
- The teacher and students engage in a high level of discourse that goes beyond right/wrong and yes/no answers to an emphasis on evidence.
- Teachers give prompt and specific feedback to students on their work, based on standards. In conferences, both the teacher and students talk about the work.
- Classroom walls display current student work and charts the teacher and students have created together about the content they are studying, standards for exemplary work, and class rules. Students refer to the charts frequently.
- Classroom space is organized so that students can get what they need — books, journals, other materials — on their own.

##### Around the School

- Every classroom has areas for students to read, write, and work on their own and in pairs and a common area for the whole class to meet and talk. Current, exemplary student work is posted throughout the school.
- Every teacher is able to explain what his/her students are learning and why and describe how his/her instruction will get students to proficiency in core academic subjects.
- The principal-headmaster and teachers — including teachers of special needs students and English language learners and teacher-specialists — meet regularly in teams to talk about instructional practice.
- The principal-headmaster spends time in classrooms every day, observing and discussing work with teachers and students.
- The principal-headmaster models learning by observing classroom practice, leading learning walks, and discussing his/her own learning with staff.

#### EXPECTATIONS FOR CENTRAL ADMINISTRATORS

- The superintendent and his teams use expectations for schools when observing classrooms and evaluating principals-headmasters.
- Every employee is able to explain Whole-School Improvement (WSI) and his/her role in that effort.
- Central departments base their decisions on the question, "How will this decision help students become better readers, writers, and thinkers and reach proficiency?"



### The Bottom Line: Closing the Achievement Gap

In every grade, every student will reach Proficiency on MCAS: regular education students, special education students, and English language learners.



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### ESSENTIAL: STUDENT WORK & DATA

Examine student work and data to drive instruction and professional development

#### EXPECTATIONS FOR SCHOOLS

- School staff analyze and use data — MCAS results, student work, formative assessments, classroom observations — for five purposes:
  - to track each student's progress toward proficiency
  - to plan instruction for each student
  - to check alignment among standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessments
  - to plan teachers' and the principal-headmaster's collective learning
  - to hold themselves accountable for students' achieving proficiency and for closing the achievement gap
- The principal-headmaster and Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) use data to develop the school's Whole-School Improvement Plan (WSIP), with ongoing performance measures.

#### EVIDENCE: WHAT YOU SHOULD SEE AND HEAR . . .

##### In Classrooms

- Teachers keep track of each student's learning and share their progress with them regularly.
- Teachers use MyBPS Assessment to track patterns in their students' performance and modify their instruction in response.
- Teachers know the value and purpose of various kinds of assessments.
- Teachers use data to determine the specific content or pedagogical focus of their Collaborative Coaching & Learning (CCL) course of study.

##### Around the School

- A data management team, including the principal-headmaster, manages data and presents findings (disaggregated by ethnicity and program) to school staff twice each year to track each student's progress toward proficiency.
- School teams analyze data and student work to plan instruction and identify their own learning needs.
- The ILT uses data to identify schoolwide professional development needs in content or pedagogy, to select teams to participate in CCL, and to identify CCL courses of study.
- The school posts data publicly and in a timely manner.

#### EXPECTATIONS FOR CENTRAL ADMINISTRATORS

- The superintendent, deputy superintendents, and central administrators use data to examine the effectiveness of major initiatives and to make decisions.
- The district makes available formative assessments in core content areas for each grade that are aligned with state standards; the formative assessments are for schools to use strategically to learn about their students in a timely manner.
- The district makes student performance data available to schools through MyBPS Assessment in a timely manner.
- The district provides training on data analysis and MyBPS Assessment to central and school staff.

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### **ESSENTIAL: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT** Invest in professional development to improve instruction

#### **EXPECTATIONS FOR SCHOOLS**

- The school's Whole-School Improvement Plan (WSIP) is based on data and includes a professional development plan that:
  - outlines the school's implementation of Collaborative Coaching & Learning (CCL)
  - explains the school's use of contractual time
  - addresses the school's content and pedagogical learning needs
  - reflects the staff's understanding of the cultural, economic, and family factors that affect student learning
- With its coaches, each CCL team outlines its course of study, reads inquiry texts, demonstrates, and analyzes practice together in classrooms. By engaging in CCL, teachers continue to learn to teach more effectively and get better student results.
- Choices about off-site courses and other professional development in which teachers participate are based on the school's goals and students' learning needs.
- The principal-headmaster makes his/her professional development public and reviews each teacher's professional development so that it is aligned with the school's goals.

#### **EVIDENCE: WHAT YOU SHOULD SEE AND HEAR . . .**

##### **In Classrooms**

- Teachers adopt and refine instructional strategies they learn.
- Teachers use workshop instruction in reading, writing, math, science, social studies, and other subjects.
- Teachers make their practice public and visit each other's classrooms.
- Teachers know their content and their students well, and help each other improve their practice.

##### **Around the School**

- The principal-headmaster and other administrators participate in at least one CCL cycle each year.
- The principal-headmaster develops a schedule that allows all teachers to participate in CCL over time.
- The principal-headmaster meets weekly with the school's content coaches.
- The school's norm is one of continuous learning for everyone; staff discuss instructional problems and solutions in formal and informal settings, such as in hallways and teachers' lounges.
- The school's professional development plan and schedule are posted and shared with staff, families, school partners, and visitors.

#### **EXPECTATIONS FOR CENTRAL ADMINISTRATORS**

- The superintendent and deputy superintendents are responsible for ensuring that professional development in schools and the central office has coherence, is aligned with the six Essentials, supports the improvement of practice, and enhances the sustainability of whole-school and whole-district improvement.
- The superintendent and the administrative team organize professional development for central staff so they understand Boston's reform framework and their role in it.
- The superintendent, deputy superintendents, and key central staff participate in CCL sessions when they visit schools.
- Deputy superintendents and assistant superintendents regularly review schools' professional development plans and schedules and look for evidence of implementation.



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### **ESSENTIAL: SHARED LEADERSHIP** Share leadership to sustain instructional improvement

#### **EXPECTATIONS FOR SCHOOLS**

- Principals-headmasters have concrete strategies to develop and share leadership with teachers and other staff.
- Teachers have opportunities to assume leadership roles outside of the classroom.
- Teachers share responsibility for the school's instructional decisions.
- The principal-headmaster and administrators make it "safe" for teachers to talk about their practice.

#### **EVIDENCE: WHAT YOU SHOULD SEE AND HEAR . . .**

##### **In Classrooms**

- School administrators are in classrooms every day, talking with students about what they are learning and conferring with teachers about their informal observations and decisions on next steps.
- Teachers describe their colleagues and school leaders as resources for helping them improve instruction and meet their goals.
- Teachers teach each other, and some teach courses for colleagues.
- Teachers demonstrate lessons for CCL.

##### **Around the School**

- Teachers lead looking at student work sessions, data team meetings, inquiry groups, ILT meetings, and ad hoc committees.
- The agenda for ILT meetings is set by the principal-headmaster and ILT members.
- Teachers and other members of the ILT take part in learning walks in their own and other schools.
- Teachers help create school policies and practices, an indicator of an environment that is encouraging, inclusive, and "risk free."
- Staff refer to the school as "our" school, not "my" school.

#### **EXPECTATIONS FOR CENTRAL ADMINISTRATORS**

- The superintendent, chief operating officer, deputy superintendents, and director of human resources align evaluation tools with expectations for instructional improvement and the goal of proficiency for all students.
- Mid-level managers visit schools and confer with school leaders in making decisions about their department's policies and practices.
- The superintendent convenes a teacher advisory committee to help him refine the district's work.
- Deputy superintendents work with principals-headmasters to increase teacher and student voice in each school.
- Cluster leaders are peer coaches for principals-headmasters, modeling best leadership practices in instruction.

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### ESSENTIAL: RESOURCES

Focus resources to support instructional improvement and improved student learning

#### EXPECTATIONS FOR SCHOOLS

- The school's resources — people, time, funds, materials — are allocated to meet its student learning goals, and its budget is the financial plan for implementing the WSIP.
- Corporate, family, and community resources support specific student learning goals.
- School staff use student learning goals to decide whether to start, continue, or discontinue any initiative.

#### EVIDENCE: WHAT YOU SHOULD SEE AND HEAR . . .

##### In Classrooms

- Teachers have help in the classroom from other professional staff and trained volunteers to give students more individualized attention.
- Each student has a daily (uninterrupted) block of at least 90 minutes for literacy and 60-90 minutes for math.
- Teachers start on time, get right to the lesson, and minimize "housekeeping" announcements.
- Teachers give individualized time to each student every week.
- Every classroom has a classroom library and instructional materials and equipment.

##### Around the School

- The schedule maximizes instructional time for core subjects and increases the number of professionals in each classroom.
- School staff use all contractual time for professional development. With few exceptions, teachers are not pulled from school for off-site professional development.
- School staff use MyBPS and other technology to minimize paperwork.
- Before- and after-school time is coordinated with in-school time so that students have extended coherent instruction.

#### EXPECTATIONS FOR CENTRAL ADMINISTRATORS

- Deputy superintendents and the teaching and learning team support principals-headmasters to maximize instructional time and individualize support for each student.
- The superintendent, teaching and learning team, and budget office help schools align budgeted resources with WSIP priorities.
- Deputy superintendents share with schools examples of well-thought-out budgets, professional development plans, job descriptions, school schedules, and use of volunteers to maximize resource use.
- Deputy superintendents, with the high school renewal office, support schools to achieve personalized relationships for every student.

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### ESSENTIAL: FAMILIES & COMMUNITY

Partner with families and community to support student learning

#### EXPECTATIONS FOR SCHOOLS & FAMILIES

- School staff reach out to show they value all children and welcome families and community members as their partners.
- Each school develops a plan to engage families in their children's school life. In middle and high schools, the plan details how staff will communicate with students to identify issues of importance to them. The plan is shared with families and community members and is posted in the school.
- Each teacher communicates regularly with families (in English and in the adult's first language) about their child's progress and ways families can support students at home.
- Families show interest in their children's schoolwork and learning, monitor their attendance, attend parent conferences, and participate in parent councils if they can.

#### EVIDENCE: WHAT YOU SHOULD SEE AND HEAR . . .

##### In Classrooms

- Each teacher sends home an easy-to-understand "syllabus" based on the school's curriculum.
- Teachers call, write, e-mail, and/or meet with students' families regularly to share progress and suggestions about helping students learn.
- Teachers promote home reading and home math and reach out to those who don't participate.

##### Around the School

- Families and community members are present and active in the school, and the school organizes successful parent-teacher conferences each year.
- The school has a written Parent Involvement Policy and Home-School Compact.
- School staff follow a protocol for greeting visitors, take messages reliably, and respond promptly and respectfully to questions and concerns.

#### EXPECTATIONS FOR CENTRAL ADMINISTRATORS

- The superintendent and deputy superintendents hold principals-headmasters accountable for strong and measurable outreach to families and community members.
- The deputy superintendent for family and community engagement shares examples of schools and practices that work effectively with families and community members.
- The high school renewal office highlights schools that are effectively soliciting students' concerns and acting in partnership with them on the solutions.
- Family resource centers provide technical assistance to schools to develop and implement their family engagement plans.

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