

To: School Committee

From: Emily Parks, Superintendent

Subj.: 2019-2020 District Goals

Date: May 15, 2020

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I am pleased to present this report on the 2019-2020 district goals. There are four strategic objectives in our *WPS Strategy for District Improvement* that guide our ongoing work:

- Meaningful Learning Experiences
- Coherent, Connected Curriculum
- Healthy and Supported School Community
- Facilities for the Future

This district-level strategy represents the shared work of all of our schools. The goals in our school improvement plans also reflect these district priorities.

As you know, the extended closure has forced the District's leadership team to pivot from these goals to focus on quickly designing and implementing distance learning plans. In February, the district leadership team had met to assess our progress to date on district improvement priorities and articulate our focus for the remaining 4 months of the school year. At that time, we were able to identify many areas where a great deal of progress had been made. I have highlighted below some of the work that was accomplished.

### **Meaningful Learning Experiences**

#### High School Bio First Transition

We completed year one of the changed science curriculum sequence at the high school, by eliminating Physical Science from the 9th grade curriculum and enrolling all 9th graders in Biology. This change created significantly increased enrollment this year in Biology, since approximately half of our current 10th graders who are completing the former curriculum sequence are also enrolled in Biology. The HS science department has also been preparing for year two, when this large cohort of students will be enrolled in Chemistry.

This process has been disrupted by the school closure and the resulting cancellation of MCAS this spring. Typically, all students enrolled in biology at WHS take the biology MCAS in order to fulfill the science requirement for the state's competency determination. We don't know yet what the state's plan will be for assessing students in science. However, we are actively considering whether students should take a biology test if offered in the fall or a chemistry test in the spring.

#### Social Studies and Civics Curriculum Review

The Social Studies and Civics curriculum review is nearly complete. We anticipate being able to wrap up the committee's work next fall. In support of this work, middle school social studies teachers continue to work with Primary Source's democracy lab civics curriculum. Teachers attended a summer institute related to this project, piloted curriculum throughout the year, and are scheduled to return for the second part of the institute this summer.

#### Middle School Instructional Leadership Team

An instructional leadership team was developed at the middle school. Over the past year members of the team conducted frequent learning walks to collaboratively observe in classrooms and are using data to set future goals.

### **Coherent, Connected Curriculum**

#### English Language Arts Review

At the December 2019 School Committee meeting, Assistant Superintendent Allison Borchers presented the recommendations of the English Language Arts curriculum recommendations. Over the past year:

- Elementary teachers used professional development time to revise and calibrate effective common assessments. This data was used to plan for intervention.
- Reading and Writing Units of Study were rolled-out.
- High School teachers worked to integrate more diverse types of writing assessments. Professional development time was used to research, create, and integrate new curriculum that is inclusive.

#### Peer Observation

This year we focused peer observation efforts on two key transition points in the district, as well as social studies instruction across the district. Grade 6 teachers visited grade 5 classrooms and Pre-K teachers visited kindergarten classrooms. Following each visit, teachers met to debrief the sessions and to discuss instructional practices and alignment issues.

Members of the social studies curriculum review team visited social studies classes throughout the district as part of the curriculum review work in order to better understand alignment issues and articulate recommendations for improvement.

Finally, Central Office administrators and principals conducted several learning walks in schools across the district in order to inform our discussions about curriculum, instruction, and professional development needs. The high school department chairs and administrators engaged in a similar initiative to conduct inter-departmental learning walks to inform the work as instructional leaders and growth as evaluators.

#### MS and HS Homework Practices

Middle school and high school teachers worked, first with a consultant and then in teacher teams, during professional development time to examine the purpose of homework and effective homework practices that inform instruction and increase student engagement. The work included an examination

of relevant brain science and research related to homework, as well as opportunities for teachers to try new strategies and discuss the impact with colleagues. Unfortunately, much of the follow-up to the initial work was scheduled for this spring and had to be put on hiatus. However, the work will resume when possible.

## **Healthy and Supported School Community**

### Social-Emotional Learning Coordinator/Coach

Last year, the District hired a Social-Emotional Learning Coordinator/Coach. Erin Keuhn works with teachers PK-8 to provide training and support, as well as parent and community outreach. She completed an entry process this fall and identified several actions for the year based on that process. Most notably, the district conducted Responsive Classroom training for an initial cohort of 30 elementary teachers. Another session is scheduled with an additional cohort this summer using a virtual format. Unfortunately, both Ms. Keuhn's report to the School Committee and a parent event that had been scheduled for this spring had to be cancelled in deference to other needs created by the closure.

At the middle school, the SEL Coordinator and a team of middle school teachers reviewed the structure of the advisory program. A team of 3 advisory coordinators have designed curriculum related to advisory and provided professional development for teachers for implementing the activities. This is an area that we continue to assess and refine.

### Increased Professional Development Options Related to Cultural Proficiency

The District has continued to build on last year's work to increase educators' cultural proficiency. Whereas last year's professional development was implemented through programs for the entire district, this year, we are using a differentiated, tiered-offering approach to increasing cultural PD. Over the past year:

- Multiple professional development options on cultural proficiency were offered this year, including in-district courses and workshops and opportunities for educators from all levels to participate in outside opportunities, such as the METCO conference.
- The District sent a team to the IDEAS (Initiative for Developing Equity and Achievement for Students) conference.
- High School teachers and administrators were invited to attend workshops for the Let's Talk About Race, Culture, and Ethnicity group.
- The Welcoming Schools Working Group (formed last year) has developed a professional development module to train teachers to assess bias in literature and other instructional materials. The implementation of the training had to be postponed due to the closure.
- We continued our efforts to translate key documents and hope to have translated versions of Student Handbooks for the 2020-2021 school year in Mandarin and Arabic (our most frequent home languages).

### Recruit Diverse Staff

We continue to expand efforts to recruit, hire, and support a diverse staff. Over the past year:

- A team from the District attended DESE’s Diversity Networking sessions and shared findings and proposed action steps with the district leadership team. As a result, just prior to the school closure, in preparation for hiring season, Central Office administrators and principals began examining and revising our job postings and other recruiting materials through this lens.
- Hiring managers participated in job fairs in Milton and Needham.
- Lateefah Franck, the District’s METCO Coordinator, helped to launch an affinity group for staff of color.

### Technology and Digital Literacy

The District has continued to expand efforts to help students navigate the technology-infused environment in a way that is safe, effective, healthy, and well balanced a priority. Over the past year:

- The District provided information and resources for parents to help them establish an appropriate technology balance at home. We offered a Q&A presentation for parents on “Parenting in the Digital Age.”
- Partnered with school PTOs for families to screen the documentary film, “Screenagers,” which examines the science behind teens’ emotional challenges, the interplay of social media, and what can be done to build crucial skills to navigate stress, anxiety, and depression in the digital age.
- Unveiled a new parent dashboard, Deledao, for student computers. The system provides families with the option of receiving weekly reports of their child’s at-home browsing activity.
- Provided a professional course for faculty around supporting positive digital citizenship in the classroom
- Launched a revised, performance-based digital citizenship seminar for high school freshmen.

### **Facilities for the Future**

#### School Building Project

Clearly, this year has been a significant one for the elementary building project. We continue to engage residents in an open dialogue about the qualities of school facilities that will support the next generation of Westwood students. Over the past year:

- Held visioning sessions with the community focused around key decision points for school facilities. This included three rounds of evening forums, events at the Senior Center, Young Women’s Club, and PTOs. A day-long session with the design team was held at Hanlon School in the winter. Principal workshops, with parent representatives, were held throughout the year. The School Committee held evening forums for the public.
- We continue to meet the Massachusetts School Building Authority’s requirements, milestones, and deliverables to complete the Feasibility Study. The designer selection process was completed in October. The Preliminary Design Program, which included a comprehensive review of the Educational Program in the District, was voted by the School Committee in the spring.
- We are entering the final phase of evaluating the project options.

#### Improve School Security Infrastructure and Preparedness

In collaboration with Westwood Police and Fire, the District continues to implement recommendations for the recent safety and security audit. Over the past year:

- Applied for and received a \$60K grant to install new lock sets that better support the emergency lockdown protocol. Between grant funding and town allocation, new lock sets have been installed in all schools.
- Expanded the use of camera systems and communications tools to support supervision of school buildings and response to incidents. At the high school, blue strobe lights were installed throughout the building to provide an additional, visual layer of communication.

### **Conclusion**

The District made significant progress on our improvement priorities this year. However, as a result of the extended closure, as noted above, some work had to be paused or didn't get quite as far as anticipated. A small number of priorities had to be postponed entirely. For example, though we completed the process to identify and contract with a scheduling consultant, the work could not start this spring, which will necessitate our rethinking the timeline for the process. In addition, the intention to form a school start time committee this spring has been put on hold. Finally, though we included a .4 FTE Director of Safety and Security position in the FY'21 budget, and, in fact, had begun to screen candidates for this position in February, that process has been put on hiatus.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the remarkable team of educators and staff in the Westwood Public Schools. We are fortunate to have people across the organization who, no matter what their role, contribute to the District's mission with a focus on working on behalf of students. This year's accomplishments reflect their hard work and commitment to continuous improvement.