

Boston Public Schools Academic Support Plan

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Executive Summary

The Boston Public Schools (BPS) has been lauded for its commitment to raising student achievement in every classroom. In 2006, the BPS was awarded the Broad Prize for Urban Education for showing the greatest improvement in academic performance while reducing achievement gaps among poor and minority students.¹ In 2011, the BPS was one of the first urban districts in the country to adopt college and career ready standards through the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (MCF). Just two years later, Boston was identified as one of the leading districts as measured by the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).² From a national perspective, the story of the BPS over the last decade has been one of steady innovation and gradual improvement on behalf of schools and students.

Yet upon closer examination, the story of the district has become what some describe as a “Tale of Two Cities.” Competing district priorities and capacity limitations have hindered successful implementation of higher academic standards in the BPS, allowing for persistent achievement gaps to linger. In the fall of 2014, TNTP began a partnership with the BPS to support the district in its implementation of the MCF, specifically to support Networks B and C. This partnership began with a diagnosis of the current state of academics in district schools. This report outlines our findings from the diagnostic and proposes a plan for supporting the district over the course of the partnership.

Findings

We analyzed the impact that teachers, principals, and the district as a whole on student achievement and actions in the classroom. Our review included student achievement data, over 2,300 responses to the Insight teacher survey data, and MCF readiness data from our observations and analysis of student work from 147 classrooms across 11 schools. We discovered the following:

- **In classrooms:**
 - **Despite the district’s stated commitment to excellence, students have few opportunities to grapple with appropriately rigorous academic content.** Only 55% of the 174 instructional tasks that we reviewed demonstrated “strong” or “excellent” alignment to the standards.
 - **Even when instructional tasks are aligned to the standards, few students meet those rigorous expectations.** In our review of student work on instructional tasks, only 30% of students were meeting the expectations of the standards on tasks that demonstrated “strong” or “excellent” alignment to the standards.
 - **Few teachers fully demonstrate the instructional rigor required of the MCF, even though a majority believe their school is prepared to implement the new standards.** Only 16% of lessons fully demonstrated the instructional shifts that are essential to implement the new standards faithfully. Paradoxically, 67% of BPS teachers surveyed agreed with the statement “My school is ready for the Common Core.”

- **In schools:**
 - **Principals and their teams do not share a consistent vision of excellent instruction.** Only two out of 11 principals interviewed by TNTP articulated a clear vision for excellent instruction that prepares their students for college and career.
 - **Schools are not effectively using existing collaborative planning structures or distributing instructional leadership across teams.** While 82% of teachers report having scheduled planning time, only half of teachers surveyed said they could use this time to develop their instructional plans.

¹ See Broad Prize website: <http://www.broadprize.org/>.

² See NAEP website: <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>.

- **At the district-level:**
 - **Significant achievement gaps persist at the school and district-level between students of color and their white and Asian peers.** The district has embraced the concept of cultural competence to narrow the achievement gap, yet several central office departments work in this area, and it was unclear who “owns” integrating cultural competence into the curriculum.
 - **The district has successfully adapted mathematics curricular materials and has started to implement changes to its ELA curriculum.** Older, district-developed ELA curricular resources remain in circulation but do not consistently focus on complex text and its academic language, evidence-based reading, writing and speaking and building knowledge through content-rich informational text.
 - **School leaders receive inconsistent messages from central departments about what excellent instruction looks like and how to support it.** The Office of Academics, Office of Data and Accountability, and Office of Human Capital all have a slightly different approach to the work, resulting in a lack of clear expectations for school leaders.
 - **The district has adopted the Core Actions to support school leaders and teachers in implementing the shifts, but lacks a compelling vision of excellent instruction.** The district has not yet embedded the Core Actions in a compelling vision that can unify all central office and school staff.

Support Plan

Our findings show the need for a district-wide vision of excellent instruction to guide the priorities, goals, policies, and systems that support MCF implementation at a network level. As such, we propose the following theory of action for our partnership:

Theory of Action

- If we **develop a vision of excellent instruction**, and
- If we **align district priorities and goals** to the vision, and
- If the central team **aligns its systems and policies** to the vision, and
- If we **develop and empower strong Network B and C instructional leaders that support schools to meet district goals**, and
- If we support instructional leaders in Network B and C **schools with the highest need for support**,
- Then we will enable great teaching of rigorous content and **ensure that all students receive an excellent education that prepares them for success in college and career.**

We will work on each aspect of the theory of change simultaneously, but the focus of the partnership will be developing instructional leaders in Networks B and C and supporting their work in the highest need Network B and C schools. In these high-need schools, we will also support principals to implement MCF-aligned curriculum faithfully (i.e. Expeditionary Learning and their revised math curriculum). Parallel to those areas of focus, we will also work to support the district-wide alignment of priorities, goals, policies, and systems to the BPS vision of excellent instruction.

Specifically, we will:

- **Develop a vision of excellent instruction** that is aligned to the work that the district has started through the Core Actions, a set of “look fors” by specific content and grade-span areas. The vision will set the foundation for the district to align its goals, priorities, policies, and systems. We will also support the district in aligning its central work, with a focus on the implementation of a vision-aligned curriculum, PD scope and sequence, and instructional review and walkthrough protocol.
- **Support Network B and C superintendents** to narrow the scope of their responsibilities and focus on the instructional success of their principals and schools.
- **Provide monthly network-level PD** to principals and school instructional leadership teams, aligned to the vision of excellent instruction. The PD will be designed as turnkey sessions for school teams to customize and deliver in their schools.
- **Provide direct, high-touch support to a subset of four schools** with persistent student achievement challenges, increasing the capacity of network leadership teams to provide targeted support to all schools in their network to monitor progress and meet accountability goals. We will work with the schools to implement MCF-aligned curricula with fidelity and to develop individualized support plans based on their unique needs and challenges.

To date, TNTP’s engagement with the BPS has been based largely on planning activities: diagnosing needs, analyzing data, engaging stakeholders, and soliciting feedback. This report marks a transition in our partnership, as we now pivot toward concrete actions to support excellent instruction in schools across Networks B and C. Through our work in similar districts across the country, TNTP brings deep expertise in on-the-ground implementation and is committed to working side-by-side with the BPS staff to improve instruction in schools over the next two and a half years. Our goals include getting our high-touch schools on track to exit the turnaround pipeline by the fall of 2017. We also want network B and C’s students to narrow the achievement gap by the fall of 2017 and outpace all other networks for growth on the PARCC. More details on our goals can be found in the [Support Plan](#) section of this report.

Introduction: A Tale of Two Cities

The City of Boston has a rich, but complicated history with public education. The Boston Public Schools (BPS) was the first public school system in the country to form in 1647. Today, the BPS serves more than 57,000 students across 128 schools. Of those, 85 percent of students qualify as high-need students, 78 percent receive free or reduced-price lunch, 46 percent speak a first language other than English, 30 percent are English Language Learners, and nearly 20 percent receive special education services.

The BPS has been lauded for its commitment to raising student achievement in every classroom. In 2006, the BPS was awarded the Broad Prize for Urban Education as a school district that showed the greatest academic performance and improvement while reducing achievement gaps among poor and minority students.³ In 2013, Boston was identified as one of the leading districts as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).⁴ Yet underneath this success is a nuanced history of inequality. Since the court-ordered desegregation in 1974, the story of the district has become what some describe as a “Tale of Two Cities.” The BPS is still struggling to overcome significant and persistent achievement gaps, particularly with black and Latino boys lagging, on average, five percentile points behind their white classmates and ten percentile points behind their Asian classmates (See **Appendix A**).

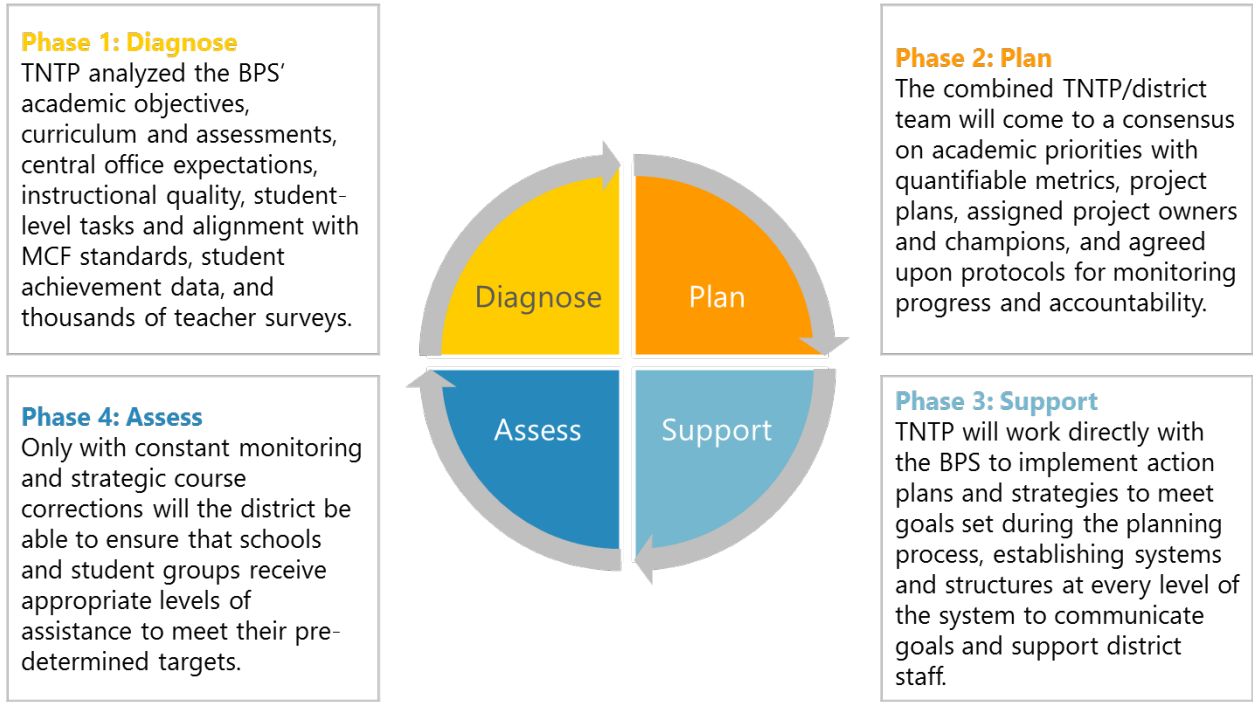
The BPS is still struggling to overcome significant and persistent achievement gaps, particularly with black and Latino boys lagging, on average, five percentile points behind their white classmates and ten percentile points behind their Asian classmates.

Committed to continuous improvement, the BPS was one of the first major urban school systems in the nation to begin implementing standards aligned to college and career readiness. At the beginning of the 2013-14 school-year, the BPS’ Office of Academics turned its attention to putting new academic standards in place via implementation of the 2011 Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (MCF). More than just a set of standards, the MCF sets the foundation for a transformative academic strategy in schools and districts. Students are being asked to master more challenging content in much greater depth than ever before, requiring teachers to change their instructional practices in significant ways. Yet competing district priorities, significant gaps in staff capacity and inconsistent support for execution have hindered success.

Starting in the fall of 2014, TNTP began a partnership with the BPS to help address its capacity and execution gaps. The partnership is designed to assist the district with its transition to the MCF, close achievement gaps within and between schools and provide intervention support to persistently struggling schools. The focus of the partnership is on supporting schools in Networks B and C. The project spans three years in a four-phase cycle:

³ See Broad Prize website: <http://www.broadprize.org/>.

⁴ See NAEP website: <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>.



During the diagnostic phase of our work from October 2014 through December 2014, TNTP collected quantitative data from 2,300 Insight teacher survey responses as well as qualitative data from intensive, day-long site visits at 11 schools that our analysis indicated were generally representative of the district. These schools were from Networks B and C and therefore served only grades pre-K through 8 in the Roxbury, Dorchester and South Boston neighborhoods, but were an otherwise diverse sample in terms of performance on the state assessment and in the composition of student subgroup populations.

This report marks the end of the second, planning phase of this partnership, during which TNTP analyzed the data gathered from the diagnostic and worked with the BPS to distill the key analyses down to a set of clear, actionable priorities for the district and Network B and C leaders and to clearly define the scope of TNTP support.

As this work enters the third, support phase, TNTP will partner with network leaders to provide monthly professional development that assists with the transition to the MCF for all principals in Networks B and C. Beginning in School Year 15-16, TNTP will also follow up on these trainings with direct supports to a subset of Network B and C schools in need of a deeper partnership. As we prepare to implement this plan, the fourth and final stage brings us full circle to monitor our progress and continuously improve our services.

Findings

As a district, the BPS prioritizes student learning above all else, which is why we began our diagnostic work by analyzing what students are being asked to do in the BPS classrooms. By placing the observable actions of children at the center of our approach, we ensure that our understanding of district-wide challenges are grounded in the daily realities of the BPS students and their teachers. Beyond the classroom, we also looked across the district to see how the work of school leaders and the central office plays a role in student success.

Our analysis revealed many findings, the most significant of which are outlined below. One important takeaway to highlight from the student achievement analysis was that there were no statistically significant trends for Networks B and C that did not also apply to the rest of the BPS; schools within those two networks were as different from each other as they were from the rest of the district. Therefore, we dug deeper and used the Insight data and qualitative data from our interviews and walkthroughs, triangulated with student achievement data, to learn more about classrooms in BPS (See **Appendix B** for an explanation of the measures and our methodology). Our findings are organized by classroom, school and district-level.

As a district, the BPS prioritizes student learning above all else, which is why we began our diagnostic work by analyzing what students are being asked to do in the BPS classrooms.

In classrooms:

- **Despite the district’s stated commitment to excellence, students have few opportunities to grapple with appropriately rigorous academic content.** Only 55% of the 174 instructional tasks that we reviewed during our Network B and C site visits demonstrated “strong” or “excellent” alignment to the standards. In some cases, students were asked to demonstrate skills that were years behind grade level and in others, students were assessed on skills that now lie outside of the scope of the new, narrower set of standards.
- **Even when instructional tasks are aligned to the standards, few students meet those rigorous expectations.** In our review of student work on instructional tasks, only 30% of students were meeting the expectations of the standards on tasks that demonstrated “strong” or “excellent” alignment to the standards.
- **Few teachers fully demonstrate the instructional shifts required by the MCF, even though a majority believe their school is prepared to implement the new standards.** Only 16% of the lessons fully demonstrated the instructional shifts that are essential to implement the new standards faithfully. Paradoxically, teachers’ perceptions about their school’s readiness for the new standards was high, with 67% of BPS teachers surveyed agreeing with the statement “My school is ready for the Common Core.” This perception gap suggests that although teachers are not successfully or consistently demonstrating the shifts, there may be a lack of urgency for, or awareness of, the amount of change necessary to usher in this new level of rigor.

At schools:

- **Principals and their teams do not share a consistent vision of excellent instruction.** Only two out of 11 principals interviewed by TNTP were able to articulate a clear vision for excellent instruction that prepares their students for college and career. In fact, many asked for additional support, with one principal stating, “We don’t have a common vision at this school. My challenge is to get staff to be reflective on their teaching and link that to their instruction.”
- **Schools are not effectively using existing collaborative planning structures or distributing instructional leadership across teams.** While 82% of teachers report having scheduled planning time, only half of teachers

surveyed said they could use this time to develop their instructional plans. Additionally, only 44% of teachers agree that “My Instructional Leadership Team provides the supports I need for instruction.”

At the district level:

- **Significant achievement gaps persist at the school and district level between students of color and their white and Asian peers.** The district has embraced the concept of cultural competence as a way to narrow the achievement gap, yet several central office teams work in this area and it is unclear who “owns” integrating cultural competence into the curriculum.
- **The district has successfully adapted mathematics curricular materials and is beginning the transition to a new English-Language Arts (ELA) curriculum (Expeditionary Learning).** In math, the BPS has reorganized and prioritized the content in older materials to reflect the major work of the grade⁵ in a way that is consistent with the progression in the MCF. However, older district-developed ELA curricular resources, such as Reading Street, are still being phased out of schools because they do not consistently focus on complex text and its academic language; evidence-based reading, writing, and speaking; and building knowledge through content-rich informational text.
- **School leaders receive inconsistent messages from central departments about what excellent instruction looks like and how to support it.** The Office of Human Capital, the Office of Data and Accountability and the Office of Academics all share responsibility for instructional professional development and progress monitoring in schools. However, each team has a slightly different approach to the work. Our interviews revealed a need for greater coordination and consistency across central office departments to send clearer messages to schools about how the district defines excellent instruction.
- **The district has adopted the Core Actions to support school leaders and teachers in implementing the shifts, but lacks a compelling vision of excellent instruction to unify all central offices and schools.** The district has committed to the Core Actions: a research-based, content-specific framework that can guide classroom-level instructional practices into greater alignment with the MCF. However, the district has not yet embedded these discrete sets of actions into a more holistic vision that is compelling enough to unify all central offices. For example, we found a significant gap between evaluation performance ratings and implementation of the Common Core shifts (see **Appendix C.**) This suggests a misalignment between the evaluation rubric and the Core Actions and may also explain why we also did not see more evidence that teachers and principals are familiar with the Core Actions.

⁵ Adapted from [Achieve the Core](#): *The new standards call for a greater focus in mathematics and significantly narrow and deepen the way time and energy is spent in the math classroom. They focus deeply on the major work of each grade so that students can gain strong foundations: solid conceptual understanding, a high degree of procedural skill and fluency, and the ability to apply the math they know to solve problems inside and outside the math classroom.*

Grade High-Level Summary of Major Work in Grades K–8

- *K–2 - Addition and subtraction - concepts, skills, and problem solving; and place value*
- *3–5 - Multiplication and division of whole numbers and fractions - concepts, skills, and problem solving*
- *6 - Ratios and proportional relationships; early expressions and equations*
- *7 - Ratios and proportional relationships; arithmetic of rational numbers*
- *8 - Linear algebra and linear functions*

Support Plan

Based on our findings, we know support is required across all levels of the district to ensure all students receive an excellent education that is culturally sensitive and prepares them for success in college and career. Based on that premise, we adopted the following theory of action for the BPS-TNTP partnership.

Theory of Action

- If we **develop a vision of excellent instruction**, and
- If we **align district priorities and goals** to the vision, and
- If the central team **aligns its systems and policies** to the vision, and
- If we **develop and empower strong Network B and C instructional leaders that support schools to meet district goals**, and
- If we support instructional leaders in Network B and C **schools with the highest need for support**,
- Then we will enable great teaching of rigorous content and **ensure that all students receive an excellent education that prepares them for success in college and career.**

The support plan that follows outlines our approach to activating each “lever” of the theory of action. Although we will work on each aspect simultaneously, the majority of resources and focus of the partnership will be dedicated to developing instructional leaders in Networks B and C and supporting their work in the Network B and C schools with the highest need. Parallel to those areas of focus, we will also work to support the district-wide alignment of priorities, goals, policies, and systems to the BPS vision of excellent instruction.

Goals

Based on our theory of action, we have developed preliminary goals around the instructional priorities of our partnership. From now through August 2016, TNTP will adopt and work toward implementation targets that establish the foundation for academic success, including a focus on network support teams and principals prioritizing instructional leadership. Beginning in August 2015, we will also measure leading indicators of student achievement across Networks B and C to track for growth throughout the partnership. We will set targets and collect evidence of student mastery of MCF-aligned content and the extent to which the instructional shifts or Core Actions are present in the classroom. By December 2015, we will work closely with the district to update the draft goals for the third year of this partnership to include specific PARCC student achievement targets for Networks B and C. To confirm these goals, we require a baseline of achievement data that will not be available until the fall of 2015, the first operational year of the PARCC test. Our provisional goals are therefore as follows:

Partnership goals

| Year | Partner | Measure | Target |
|---|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| SY14-15 | Office of the Superintendent | The BPS vision of excellent instruction is embedded in the BPS strategic plan for SY15-16 | BPS Strategic Plan |
| | Office of Academics | Network B and C monthly network-level professional development (PD) aligns with the BPS vision of excellent instruction. | 100% |
| | | Instructional walkthroughs across all central office departments are used to gather and record consistent data on school progress in instruction as aligned with the vision of excellent instruction. | 60% of department walkthrough protocols are aligned and normed for reliability |
| | | Network B and C principals receive guidance to access high-quality, aligned instructional tasks in all content areas from Office of Academics | 100% of principals (math), 100% (ELA) |
| | Network Superintendents | Percentage of activities in Network Superintendents' (NS) calendar are focused on instructional leadership (IL) | 100% of calendars approach 50% IL activities |
| | | NS PD plans are focused mainly on instructional priorities | 100% of plans exceed 50% |
| | Principals | School plans focus 80% on instructional priorities | 100% of plans focus 80% |
| | | Schools identify a ILT with strong, active instructional leaders | 95% of schools |
| | | School leaders have a PD schedule that aligns to the network schedule | 100% of PD schedules |
| | | Schools have scheduled common planning time available | 100% of schools |
| | | Schools adopt common core-aligned curricula | 80% of schools |
| | SY15-16 | Teachers | Percentage of teachers reporting receiving improved support from ILT |
| Percentage of network B and C teachers decreasing the performance gap with the ANet MA network by EOY | | | 30% of ANet teachers |
| Percentage of instructional tasks aligned to the standards increases against SY14-15 baseline by the end of SY15-16 | | | 30% increase |
| Percentage of lessons demonstrating some/all of the instructional shifts or Core Actions increases against SY14-15 baseline by the end of SY15-16 | | | 30% increase |
| Students | | Percentage of students meeting or exceeding the expectations on aligned instructional tasks increases against SY14-15 baseline by the end of SY15-16 | 5% increase |
| SY16-17 | Teachers | Percentage of teachers reporting receiving improved support from ILT | 10% increase |
| | | Percentage of network B and C teachers decreasing the performance gap with the ANet MA network by EOY | 30% of ANet teachers |
| | | Percentage of instructional tasks aligned to the standards increases against SY15-16 baseline by the end of SY16-17 | 30% increase |
| | | Percentage of lessons demonstrating some/all of the instructional shifts or Core Actions increases against SY15-16 baseline by the end of SY16-17 | 30% increase |
| | Students | Percentage of students meeting or exceeding the expectations on aligned instructional tasks increases against SY15-16 baseline by the end of SY16-17 | 15% increase |
| | | Percentage of network B and C schools in the top 20% of all BPS schools in terms of their reduction of the PARCC achievement gap | 10% of schools |
| | | Improved PARCC results put "high-touch" schools on track to exit turnaround pipeline within three years | 100% of high-touch schools |
| | | Network B and C student growth on PARCC outpaces other networks | Network MGP exceeds district |

See **Appendix D** for more information about project deliverables and their due dates.

The BPS Vision of Excellent Instruction

To unify the central offices around the work of preparing students for college and career, the district needs to place a stake in the ground as to what student actions define excellent classrooms across the district. To support implementation of the instructional shifts required of the MCF, the district adopted Student Achievement Partners' Core Actions prior to the start of SY 2014-15. These Core Actions identify "look fors" by specific content and grade-span areas. The Core Actions can support the work of teachers and principals in identifying strong student learning and instructional practices. At the same time, every stakeholder in the BPS community, particularly those outside of academics, needs to understand the district's vision of what students should be doing in excellent classrooms.

Every stakeholder in the BPS community, particularly those outside of academics, needs to understand the district's vision of what students should be doing in excellent classrooms.

Working closely with the Office of Academics, we engaged teachers, principals, and district staff in articulating the following Vision of Excellent Instruction for the BPS. The vision comes directly from our findings in the diagnostic and is aligned to the Core Actions (See **Appendix E**), with a focus on content-specific disciplinary literacy, and will enable the district to set priorities and goals in service of student learning.

The BPS Instructional Vision

In excellent classrooms, where teachers are providing relevant and culturally responsive⁶ opportunities for students to feel validated and affirmed in their culture, Boston Public School students are:

- Fully engaged in the work of the lesson from start to finish;
- Working with the major work of the subject and grade at the appropriate level of rigor demanded by the standards;
- Responsible for doing the thinking in the classroom; and
- Demonstrating their understanding.

Going forward, it will be critical that the superintendent, Office of Academics, Office of Data and Accountability, and the Office of Human Capital elevate the instructional vision as a district priority and set goals aligned to that priority. Furthermore, each department in the district will need to ensure that its policies and systems are aligned to the vision. We believe the following requires immediate attention:

- **Alignment of ELA curricular materials to the rigor required of the MCF and support for teachers in understanding how the materials align to the instructional shifts in the MCF.** While the district has started to

⁶ Culturally responsive teaching is defined by the BPS as using the cultural knowledge, prior experience, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective in promoting academic achievement; it teaches to and through the strengths of students. It is culturally validating and affirming. (Geneva Gay. 2000)

take action to replace current ELA materials with MCF-aligned curricula, adoption of aligned materials is not in and of itself sufficient. Teachers need to be supported by their school’s instructional leadership team in understanding how the new curriculum supports rigorous instruction and how to implement those materials with fidelity.

- **Adoption of a single, district-wide PD plan for network-level supports.** To maximize the use of PD time with a focus on instruction and ensure that instructional leaders and teachers are receiving a consistent message, the Office of Academics, the Office of Data and Accountability, and the Office of Human Capital should collaborate to provide vision-aligned supports to the networks.
- **Modified district instructional reviews and walkthroughs, focused on the district’s instructional priorities.** A school’s progress toward implementing the BPS Vision of Excellent Instruction should be assessed using a consistent protocol. Data from these school visits should inform supports for schools.
- **The implementation of an evaluation system that is aligned with the BPS vision of excellent instruction.** The district should emphasize components of the evaluation rubric that provides teachers accurate and actionable feedback aligned to the district’s vision of excellent instruction.

Network Implementation Support Plan

We will partner with Networks B and C to support their transition to the new standards, increase student achievement, and reduce achievement gaps. In order to maximize resources, provide support to the greatest possible number of schools, and build BPS capacity to support this work going forward, we have developed a five-pronged approach to network support:



We will provide supports to network superintendents, including creating opportunities for them to learn from each other and learn from the practices in their schools. We will also build the instructional capacity of principals and a small core of their instructional leadership team at monthly network-level PD sessions. By inviting a core of teacher leaders to join the sessions, each school will have a critical mass of instructional leaders to support in schools. We will also provide more intensive, direct support to a subset of schools instructional teams in Level 3 and 4 schools with the greatest need and demonstrated readiness for instructional leadership in Networks B and C. We will also support the network leadership teams to monitor progress and strategically manage toward clearly defined goals.

Network Superintendent Support



Although a detailed analysis of the network superintendent’s role was outside the scope of TNTP’s work, our observations of Network B and C superintendents indicate that there is opportunity for the district to improve the way it supports its principal managers. TNTP’s partnership is primarily with Networks B and C, so our proposed supports for network leaders focus disproportionately on those two teams. However, we know that excellent principal managers are critical to the success of all BPS schools and the district should address the possibility that the supports we identify in this section are helpful for all BPS network superintendents.

The BPS definition of a “network superintendent,” as well as the recommendations that TNTP will make in this section of the report, draw heavily on Meredith Honig’s research as well as the Council of Great City Schools’ (CGCS) 2013 report *Rethinking Leadership, The Changing Role of Principal Supervisors*⁷. TNTP’s own observations during the diagnostic phase echo the findings of the CGCS’s 2014 analysis of the BPS⁸ which found that network superintendent capacity is drawn in multiple directions without clear priorities to help principal managers narrow their focus on instruction. We also did not find evidence of consistent goals and progress monitoring expectations from the district that would enable course correction and continuous improvement.

With the arrival of a new superintendent, there exists a clear opportunity for the BPS to make its vision of excellent instruction the “true north” that network superintendents—and indeed all BPS staff—use to narrow their focus. For example, each network should create a clear action plan showing how its leaders will manage the transition to the new standards for its principals and how they will measure whether the vision of excellent instruction is being implemented in classrooms. To implement this plan, network superintendents should maximize opportunities to develop principal instructional leadership skills in one-on-ones or in small groups. They should also leverage their Directors of Network Academics (DNAs) during day-long, monthly principal PD sessions and activate other resources that can help school leaders facilitate the transition to the MCF.

TNTP informally observed and participated in parts of four monthly PD sessions with Network B or C. Our observations coupled with informal feedback from the Office of Human Capital indicates that it is extremely difficult for network teams to sustain the engagement of busy school leaders for an entire day without a clear through-line to principal’s own goals. Network teams that established group norms with principals, focused content on instructional improvement, provided “transactional” updates concisely (e.g., in hand-outs instead of lengthy discussion), provided a consistent experience for learners, and committed to act on principal feedback also seem to have increased the buy-in from school leaders at monthly PD. TNTP proposes to bring together Network B and C teams to share good practices in this area, as well as to provide them with tools to deliver new content to principals, aligned with the district’s vision of excellent instruction.

Finally, as the structure of the district changes and budgets shrink, network superintendents will need to find creative ways to build the capacity of principals as instructional leaders. TNTP has provided a draft scope of work for a partnership with Network B and C superintendents to help prepare them not only for the strategic challenges of instructional leadership (such as goal-setting in line with the district’s vision, strategic school planning and creating a master calendar for network activities) but also to provide experiential opportunities for the practical/logistical ones (such as chances to calibrate and practice with peers on how to coach principals on the Core Actions). Other examples of capacity-building support we will provide to network staff include in-school co-observations and walk-throughs, network-wide data analysis, action planning, PD planning and facilitation support, and ongoing feedback on instructional coaching work with principals

⁷ See *Rethinking Leadership, The Changing Role of Principal Supervisors*: <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/district-policy-and-practice/Documents/Rethinking-Leadership-The-Changing-Role-of-Principal-Supervisors.pdf>

⁸ “Review of Boston Public Schools Academic Direction” memo to Supt John McDonough from Michael Casserly, Executive Director of the Council of the Great City Schools dated February 24, 2014.



Network-Level PD Support

Network-Level PD Support

To form a critical mass of instructional leaders in each Network B or C school, the principal and their teams from each school will participate in monthly network PD that will be co-facilitated by TNTP. This network PD will be aligned to the district's Vision of Excellent Instruction and the Core Actions. We will support principals to select the right teacher leaders and, through a model of distributed leadership, will translate professional learning from the monthly network PD into aligned school-based PD. Our approach is defined by the following guiding principles:

- **Strategic, data-driven year-long scope and sequence:** We make clear connections to previous PD sessions, building on prior knowledge, and preview upcoming sessions, linking what participants learn in PD to what they do in their schools in between PD sessions. We also build in explicit connections between PD content and goals-based management and implementation within schools to ensure a constant feedback loop.
- **High levels of differentiation:** We vary session structure to provide customized support for participants that support different grade bands or content areas. Whenever possible, we collaboratively design and facilitate PD sessions with network leaders, principals, or lead teachers to position them as the leaders of this work and build their understanding of how to support these changes beyond the PD sessions themselves.
- **We commit to follow-through:** Our sessions provide structured time to collaboratively action plan and to establish clear next steps before the next PD session. This increases the likelihood that participants will carry their PD learnings back to their schools. Many of the sessions are accompanied by supplementary tools and resources that support participants to act on newly acquired knowledge, independently with their school teams. We embed ample time to practice what participants learn and apply their learnings to their school context.

Additionally, as part of this specific engagement with the BPS, we will:

- **Use the Core Actions and progress monitoring** as the organizing framework to sequence the PD, building off of existing BPS resources and teachers' growing familiarity with them.
- **Coordinate across central office departments** to align PD structures and progress monitoring expectations.
- **Co-facilitate PD with BPS** central staff, network staff, and school staff to build capacity and ensure alignment.
- **Leverage a model of distributed leadership** to expand the impact in schools, building a critical mass of Common Core instructional experts.
- **Design "turnkey training kits"** that mirror the network PD content to allow participants to customize and share training content with their school teams during Common Planning Time (CPT) and after-school PD.

The following table highlights the primary objective for each phase of PD over the course of the year. This sequence will provide structure for tailored in-school interventions as well as informing network-level PD.

Network PD Scope and Sequence

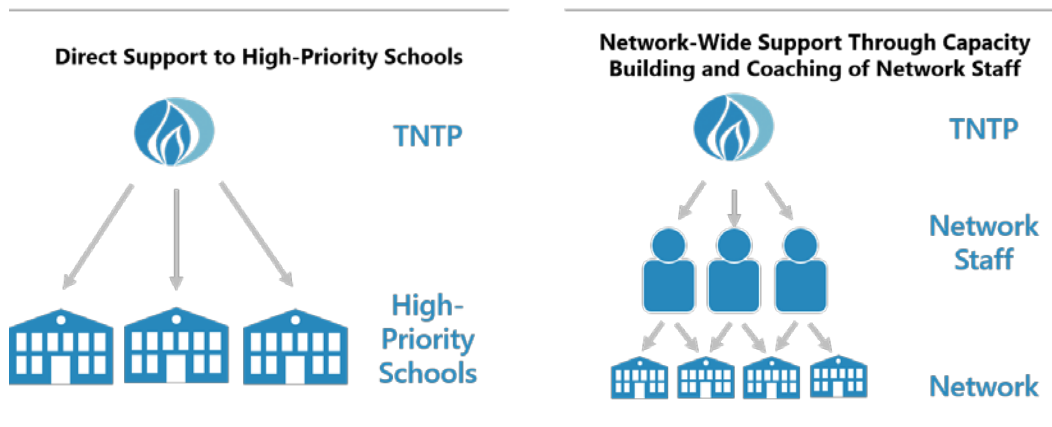
| | |
|------------------|---|
| Spring '15 | Lay the foundation for the rollout of the BPS Vision for Excellent Instruction. |
| Summer Institute | Share the BPS Vision for Excellent Instruction and prepare school teams to accelerate MCF-aligned instruction in their schools. |
| Fall '15 | Position school teams to be true instructional leaders of their school. |
| Winter '16 | Deepen participants' content-specific knowledge. Provide opportunities to step back and evaluate progress. |
| Spring '16 | Deepen the horizontal and vertical understanding of the standards and provide opportunities to reflect on progress over the course of the year. |

Tiered Support Model



Isolated PD opportunities—regardless of quality—are insufficient to fully equip principals and teachers to carry out a vision of excellent instruction in classrooms. As such, TNTP will provide differentiated support to instructional leaders in a subset of four Network B and C schools with persistent student achievement challenges and larger achievement gaps. We will help these principals and their teams to apply the knowledge and skills they will gain through our network-level PD offerings. TNTP will also coach them as they monitor progress and move teachers towards the instructional shifts necessary to prepare their students for college and career.

In addition to the direct supports to four high-touch schools, TNTP will provide side-by-side coaching and support to Network B and C staff to expand this impact across the entire network. By supporting Network Superintendents and Directors of Network Academics through a capacity-building model, we will embed coaching practices into the network culture and ensure that all schools receive follow-up support interventions that are relevant and differentiated to their individual needs and consistent with the content principals and lead teachers receive during monthly professional development.



Supports offered in these two categories will likely include:

- **Network-wide support to all schools in Networks B and C:**
 - Principal and lead teachers attend monthly PD sessions with network cohort.

- TNTP serves as a connector to identify in-district learning opportunities in other schools.
 - Access to TNTP staff through differentiated small group sessions at network PD and by email/phone in between PD sessions, but no regular site-based follow-up support is guaranteed.
 - Differentiated support from their network staff.
- **Direct supports to High-Priority Schools (two from each network)**
 - TNTP and district leaders conduct a comprehensive school review to inform differentiated support plan.
 - TNTP provides regular coaching and support visits differentiated by need. Activities may include: goal-setting, observation and feedback cycles aligned to the core actions, review of instructional task alignment to standards, student work analysis, CPT planning, assessment coordination, customization and facilitation prep turnkey trainings, change management planning and support, scheduling and logistical support for prioritizing instructional leadership activities.
 - TNTP supports faithful implementation of MCF-aligned curriculum (i.e., Expeditionary Learning and their revised math curriculum).
 - TNTP coaches principals and teacher leaders to conduct walkthroughs aimed at increasing MCF-aligned teacher practices and monitoring of school-level progress.



Targeted School Support Activities

Targeted School Support Activities

The Network PD Scope and Sequence will guide the trajectory of TNTP’s targeted support to four high-priority schools, which will be differentiated based on school-level progress monitoring data, instructional priorities, existing structures, and teacher/principal capacity. We will start by reviewing school needs and then developing individual school support plans for our high-priority schools.

- **School Review:** Schools are incredibly complex and the underlying causes of the findings from our diagnostic may vary widely from one school to another. TNTP will therefore review existing data, conduct baseline classroom observations, and engage in conversations with network staff and principals to identify and sequence the most strategic set of interventions for each high-touch school.
- **Individual School Support Plan:** TNTP will develop individualized support plans for each high-touch school. In-school supports will be organized around five broad categories:
 - Communicating the Vision of Excellent Instruction/Change Management;
 - Teacher Support and Development;
 - School-Wide Curricular and Instructional Support;
 - Building Necessary Structures;
 - Goals-Based Management

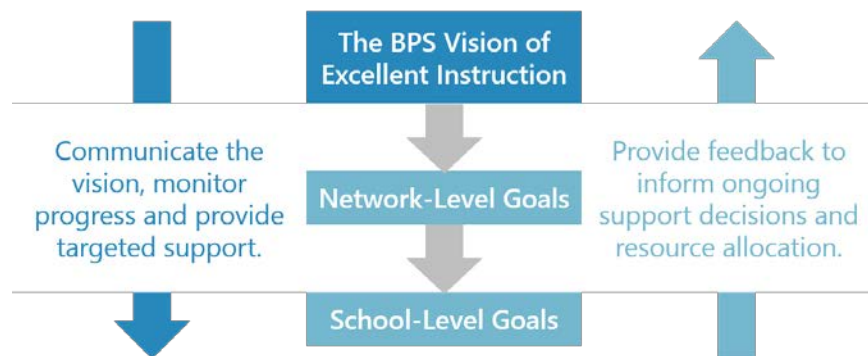
Appendix F provides examples of sample supports within each category and **Appendix G** provides a sample agenda for a “high-touch” school support visit.

Setting Goals and Monitoring Progress



To translate a district-wide instructional vision into MCF-aligned teacher, principal and network actions, a strategic goals-driven management approach is necessary. Such an approach will provide structure, set clear expectations for staff at all levels, monitor progress over the course of the year, and establish a critical feedback loop to responsively adjust support priorities as needed.

TNTP recommends a process of Goals-Based Management (GBM) to help communicate the instructional vision and build ownership among BPS staff for the supports and interventions that we will co-develop with BPS staff. The GBM framework is flexible and data-driven and will allow network superintendents to monitor year-round network progress.



Through the structure provided by Goals-Based Management processes, BPS staff at all levels will be able to articulate a shared vision for excellent instruction, define their role in achieving that vision, and understand the suite of planned, differentiated supports, resources, and interventions that will help them make progress toward that vision. By the end of this project, teachers, principals, network leaders and district staff will share a clear picture of what great teaching and learning looks like in practice and have an aligned understanding of what it will take to support this type of instruction.

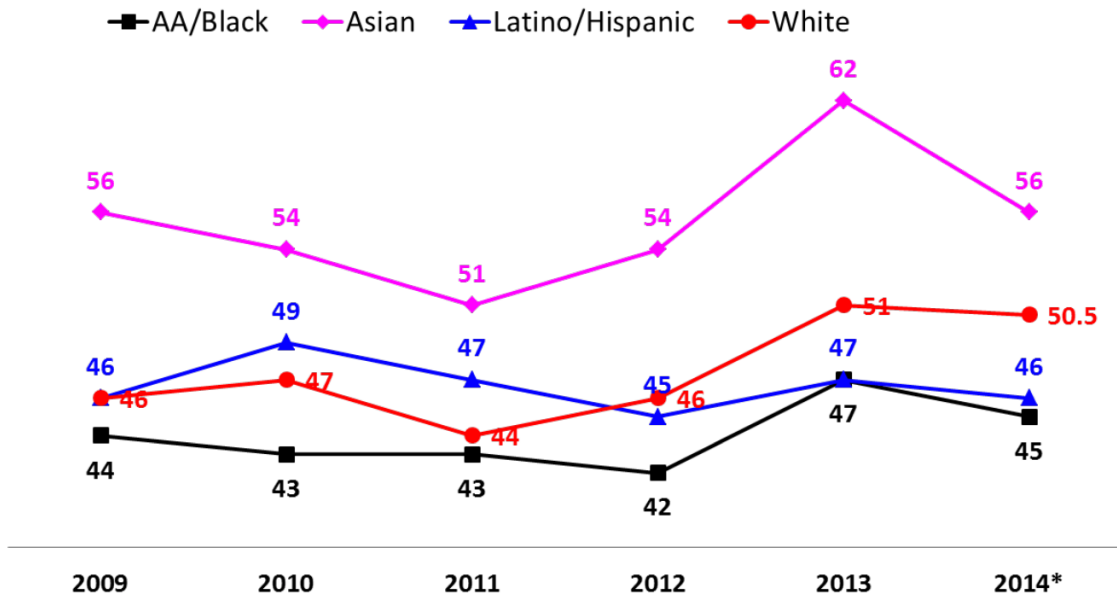
Conclusion

To date, TNTP's engagement with BPS has been based largely on planning activities: diagnosing need, analyzing data, engaging stakeholders, and soliciting feedback. This report marks a transition in our partnership, as we now pivot toward more concrete actions that will directly support excellent instruction in classrooms across Networks B and C. Through our work in similar districts across the country, TNTP brings deep expertise in on-the-ground implementation and is committed to working side by side with BPS staff, at all levels of the system, to improve instruction in schools over the next two and half years.

Appendix

Appendix A: BPS Achievement Gaps

**MCAS ELA Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP): 2009 - 2014
All Grades Combined by Race/Ethnicity**



Appendix B: Diagnostic Methodology

TNTP's diagnostic comprised analysis of data from two major TNTP tools, in addition to student achievement data, a curriculum and assessment artifact review and interviews with BPS colleagues.

TNTP's tools included:

Common Core Quality Reviews

During the December diagnostic, TNTP conducted day-long visits at eleven schools in Networks B and C. The reviews were conducted by TNTP's instructional experts and were adapted for the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. We observed 147 classrooms and analyzed one or more anonymized examples of instructional tasks completed by five students in almost every class. We also conducted interviews with school leaders and led focus groups with teachers to understand their instructional strengths and needs. In addition to collecting valuable information for our diagnostic, TNTP also ensured that each participating school received a customized report describing our observations and making suggestions for specific improvements.



CCQR Service
Overview_BPS_jb.pptb

Insight teacher self-assessment

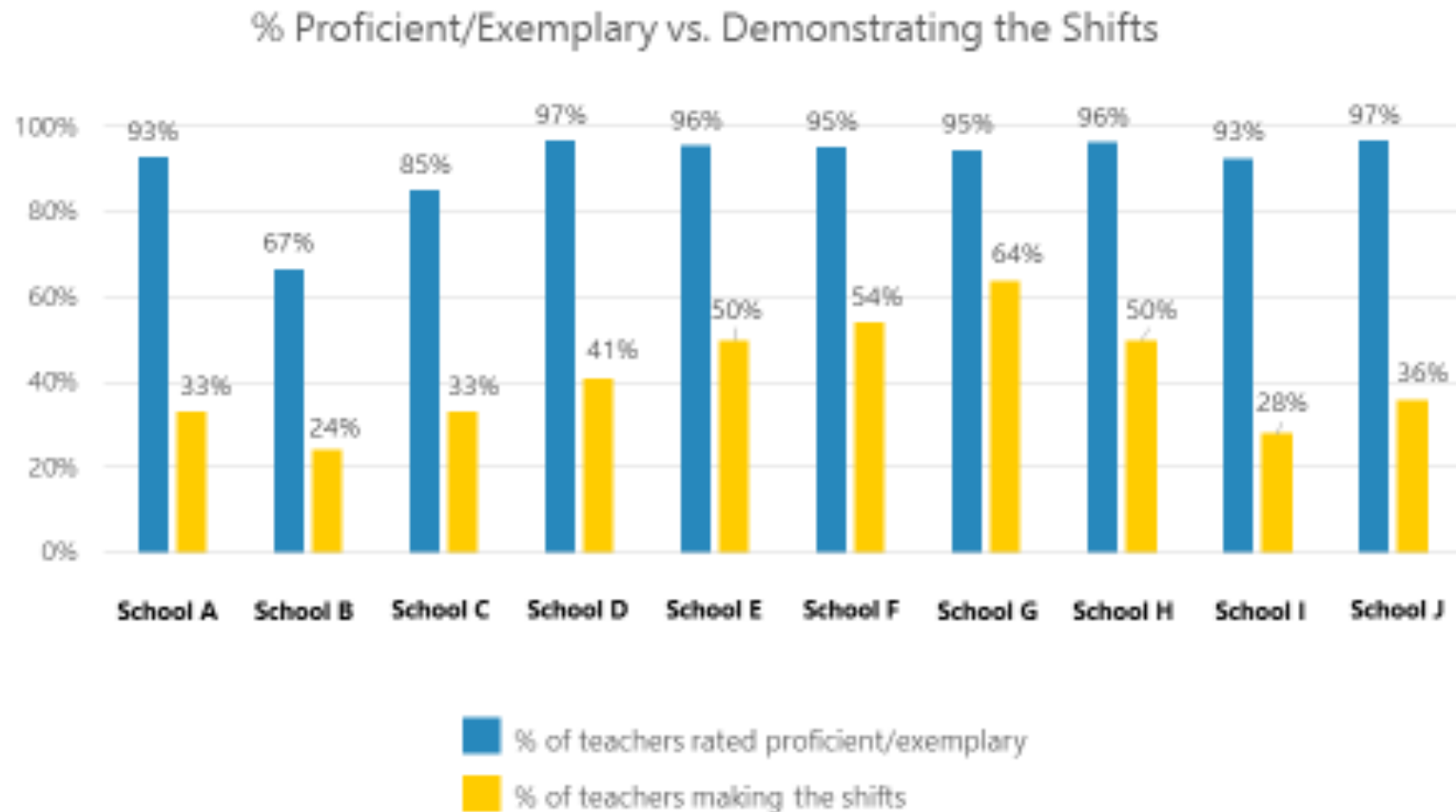
In Dec 2014, the BPS administered TNTP's Insight teacher perception survey to 2,298 teachers, some 62% of the district's instructional workforce. The survey measures teacher perceptions of instructionally-significant domains and provides insight into indicators like how ready they think they are for the Common Core, the quality of the feedback teachers feel they get from school administrators and whether they intend to stay at the school or move on.

In addition to collecting valuable information about Networks B and C, and the broader district, TNTP also created 107 individual school-level reports which we shared with BPS school leaders along with guidance and resources on how to use the information to build a stronger instructional culture in their building.



Insight Overview for
appendix.pdf

The vast majority of teachers are rated “proficient” or “exemplary,” but far fewer teachers are demonstrating the shifts in their practice.



Appendix D: High-Level Project Milestones

| | |
|-------------|--|
| Spring 2015 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District-Level Supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Partner with the Offices of Academics, Data and Accountability (ODA), and Human Capital (OHC) to develop a single, vision-aligned PD calendar. ○ Partner with IR&D in the Office of Academics to support the roll-out of rigorous, MCF-aligned curricula. ○ Partner with the Office of Academics and the Office of Data and Accountability to develop instructional review and walkthrough protocols aligned to the BPS Vision of Excellent Instruction. • Network-Level Supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Launch supports for school leaders by helping them understand their role as an instructional leader and how to build a “critical mass” of instructional leaders in their schools. • School-Level Supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Build relationships with schools that may receive additional high-touch or medium-touch support. Identify the unique circumstances in each school and develop an individual school support plan. |
| Summer 2015 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District-Level Supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Partner with IR&D to conduct a review of curriculum materials. ○ Partner with IR&D, the Office of Data and Accountability, and Network B and C Superintendents to test-run instructional review and walkthrough protocols during summer school. • Network-Level Supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Conduct a network superintendent boot-camp focused on developing network superintendents as effective principal managers and increase their capacity to manage change. ○ Launch the Summer Institute for principals and their school team to share the BPS Vision for Excellent Instruction and prepare school teams to accelerate CCSS-aligned instruction in their schools. |
| Fall 2015 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District-Level Supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Partner with IR&D, ODA, and Network B and C Superintendents to conduct instructional reviews and walkthroughs to monitor progress. ○ Support IR&D, ODA and OHC with formative assessment strategy • Network-Level Supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continue to support network supts to coach principals on working through change and dig deeper into PARCC assessment data. ○ Provide supports to Network B and C principals and their school teams at monthly PD sessions to become true instructional leaders within their schools. • School-Level Supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Launch high- and medium-touch supports to ten schools within Networks B and C. |
| Winter 2015 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District-Level Supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Partner with IR&D, the Office of Data and Accountability, and Network B and C Superintendents to conduct instructional reviews and walkthroughs to gauge mid-year progress. |
| Spring 2016 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network-Level Supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continue to support network superintendents in their coaching of principals through change and conduct a mid-year step-back to determine progress against goals. • School-Level Supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continue to provide high- and medium-touch supports to ten schools within Networks B and C and conduct a mid-year step-back with school teams to determine progress against goals. |

Appendix E: BPS VOEI and Core Actions Alignment

We believe that the Core Actions and Instructional Vision are aligned.

| Content/Grade-Span | Core Action | Aligned Instructional Vision |
|--|--|--|
| ELA (3-5) (Note: ELA K-2 and 6-12 Core Actions are similar, with slight variation in language for grade appropriate actions. Thus, they are not listed here separately). | CORE ACTION 1: Focus each lesson on a high quality text (or multiple texts). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with content aligned to the appropriate standards for their subject and grade |
| | CORE ACTION 2: Employ questions and tasks that are text dependent and text specific. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with content aligned to the appropriate standards for their subject and grade |
| | CORE ACTION 3: Provide all students with opportunities to engage in the work of the lesson. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully engaged in the work of the lesson from start to finish Responsible for doing the thinking in the classroom Demonstrating their understanding |
| | CORE ACTION 4: Provide all students with writing instruction in each of the four text types (opinion, informational, narrative, and poetry) with at least 6 multi-draft pieces of writing published by each student. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with content aligned to the appropriate standards for their subject and grade |
| Math (K-12) | CORE ACTION 1: Develop disciplinary literacy in mathematics by ensuring all work of the lesson reflects the content shifts required by the CCSS for Mathematics. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with content aligned to the appropriate standards for their subject and grade |
| | CORE ACTION 2: Develop disciplinary literacy in mathematics by employing instructional practices that provide opportunities for all students to master the content of the lesson. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully engaged in the work of the lesson from start to finish Responsible for doing the thinking in the classroom Demonstrating their understanding |
| | CORE ACTION 3: Develop disciplinary literacy in mathematics by providing all students opportunities to exhibit mathematical practices in connection with the content of the lesson. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible for doing the thinking in the classroom Demonstrating their understanding |
| History/Social Studies (K-12) | CORE ACTION 1: Focus each lesson on a high quality text/source or multiple texts/ sources. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with content aligned to the appropriate standards for their subject and grade |
| | CORE ACTION 2: Employ questions and tasks that are grounded in evidence. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible for doing the thinking in the classroom Demonstrating their understanding |

| | | |
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| | CORE ACTION 3: Develop disciplinary literacy in history/social studies by employing Massachusetts' 2003 Curriculum Frameworks for History & Social Studies and 2011 ELA Curriculum Frameworks p.71-79 practices during each lesson to develop understanding of core ideas. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with content aligned to the appropriate standards for their subject and grade |
| Science (K-12) | CORE ACTION 1: Develop disciplinary literacy in science by employing the science and engineering practices from the MA STE Curriculum Framework during each lesson to develop understanding of disciplinary core ideas. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with content aligned to the appropriate standards for their subject and grade |
| | CORE ACTION 2: Develop disciplinary literacy in science by employing lessons focused on high quality texts, as well as questions, tasks, and dialogues that are evidence-based. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with content aligned to the appropriate standards for their subject and grade |

* Core Actions also exist for Health Education, Physical Education, Visual and Performing Arts, World Languages, and WIDA (ELL) students. The BPS Vision of Excellent Instruction is aligned to the Core Actions in each of these subject areas as well.

Appendix F: Targeted School Support Activities

Targeted School Support Activity Examples

| |
|---|
| Communicating the Vision of Excellent Instruction/Change Management <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Calibration on VOEI: Co-observations and debriefs, review of student work, side-by-side video observations of core actions.• Unpack diagnostic data: Support principals and teacher leaders to understand school-level reports (Insight, CCQR) prioritize domains and content areas, grade levels, and core actions, and practice communicating the data to teaching staff.• Change management planning and support: Provide tools, templates, and thought partnership to support principals and teacher leaders to promote changes in school culture and increase staff receptiveness to new instructional vision. Support with developing strategic communications plan and talking points to deliver complicated or difficult messages. |
| Teacher Support and Development <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Infuse CCQR walk-throughs into observation and feedback cycles: Support instructional leaders to establish a regular schedule of frequent observations differentiated by teacher performance level. Develop protocols to ensure that principals and lead teachers are regularly engaging their colleagues in formative conversations about teacher practice and student learning that are rooted in the language of the standards. Practice delivering content-specific, bite-sized, actionable feedback that is aligned to the core actions through role-play exercises with opportunities to debrief and discuss feedback.• Student work analysis: Share protocols and guidance for engaging teachers in ongoing student work analyses that foster deeper understanding of content area standards.• Turnkey training support: Customization and facilitation prep for delivering turnkey trainings• Prioritizing instructional leadership activities: Scheduling and logistical support in order to maximize or repurpose existing structures, capacity, and resources in a way that allows instructional leaders to focus on instruction. |
| School-wide Curricular and Instructional Support <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of instructional tasks and alignment to standards: Build principal and lead teachers' familiarity with the standards by analyzing the alignment of instructional tasks to the standards and properly leveling assignments.• Curriculum landscape analysis: Ensure that principals and teacher leaders understand the strengths and gaps in their curricular materials by grade-level and incorporate this knowledge into their support plans. Differentiate teacher support based on the strength of the existing curricular materials in each grade and subject.• School-level assessment coordination: Review assessment options at the school-level and support principal and teacher leaders to make strategic assessment decisions that provides their teachers with frequent, formative data in an accessible format. |
| Building Necessary Structures: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• School PD and CPT planning: Support instructional leadership teams to develop a long-term PD and CPT plan that is data-driven and aligned to relevant network-level PD content. Provide opportunities to practice delivering relevant turnkey content and hone adult learning/facilitation skills.• Content team or grade-level team deep dives: Guide teachers of one grade-level or one content area through an intensive review of what standards-aligned instruction looks like in that particular content area or grade-level.• Vertical team standards-mapping exercises: Deepen understanding of the connections across grade-levels by analyzing content strands, anchor standards, and the major work of the grade across all grades in a given school.• Leverage network PD as a forum for building inter-school connections: Facilitate follow-up opportunities for individual teachers or leaders from different schools to collaborate, engage in instructional walk-throughs, share resources, or meet in cross-school content area teams.• Identify model classrooms: Identify classrooms within the school or at nearby schools where the teachers are consistently demonstrating the CC shifts to create "demonstration classrooms" and coordinate teacher visits.• Partner with Teach PLUS to expand the Core Collaborative (teacher-led PD) and publicize opportunities to principals and teachers. |
| Goals Based Management (including goal setting and progress monitoring) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Goal-setting and progress monitoring: Support principals to set instructionally-focused goals aligned to network-level goals and track progress throughout the year. This |

Appendix G: Overview of “High-Touch” School Support Visits

TNTP’s school visits will not be conducted in isolation. They are designed to serve as follow-up on content delivered at Network PD, The school visits will be TNTP’s opportunity to provide direct, differentiated support to principals and teacher leaders. It will provide the qualitative lens necessary to ensure that the PD we provide on a monthly basis is relevant, timely, and strategic. The school visits will also provide an opportunity for TNTP to identify specific challenges and develop tools and resources to support principals in addressing those challenges.

The Network PD Scope and Sequence will guide the trajectory of TNTP’s targeted support to schools, which will be differentiated based on school-level progress monitoring data, instructional priorities, existing structures, and teacher/principal capacity. We will start by reviewing school needs and then developing individual school support plans to tailor the school support visits.

Sample Agenda

1. **Meet with principal and review agenda and align on objectives for visit.** (15 min)
2. **Conduct instructional walkthroughs.** (75 min)
 - We will conduct several 15-20 minute observations of high, medium, and low teachers from different content areas.
 - We will debrief each walk-through with the principal and or teacher leader to gauge their mindset, skill, and comfort-level with identifying excellent, standards-aligned instruction, and determining appropriate levers and delivering feedback that is rooted in the core actions and the standards for the grade and subject.
 - We will establish systems for tracking Core Action implementation across classrooms and collaboratively practice recording data.
3. **Prepare for and conduct debrief/feedback meetings with teachers** (30 min)
 - We will collaboratively discuss observations, calibrate on the Vision of Excellent Instruction,
 - Use a protocol for delivering standards-aligned feedback and practice delivering feedback through role-play exercises.
 - We will observe teacher debriefs and give principal feedback.
4. **Observe a CPT, ILT meeting, or after-school PD.** (45 min)
 - Depending on school needs identified during planning sessions at Network PD, TNTP will provide additional ad-hoc support in school-specific areas jointly determined by principal and TNTP to support school-level implementation and build principal and lead teacher capacity.
5. **Check-in on goals/progress monitoring** (15 min)
 - Review available data (walkthrough data, Insight data, and student achievement data)
 - Discuss with the principal what steps he/she has taken and what steps h/she plans to take