

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chairperson and Members
Boston School Committee

FROM: John P. McDonough
Interim Superintendent

DATE: May 21, 2014

SUBJECT: Council of Great City Schools Academics Memorandum

For your review, attached is a February 24, 2014 memorandum from the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) on Academics based on their site visit from three weeks earlier. We asked the Council to send us this memo as soon as possible after their visit so we could incorporate their observations into our planning for the next school year. The next step is for the Council to prepare a more formal, public report that will be issued later this spring or summer.

This morning I had a good conversation with Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, about what we could expect regarding the final report and the timing of its release. He said that the findings (attached) are essentially the same as what would be indicated in the final report. He and I spoke about how BPS has already used these items to inform our strategic thinking moving forward. I expressed my gratitude for the Council's assistance in this area of work. Their guidance and insight is assisting our Academic team as they put systematic transformations in place to support all schools, educators and students.

So, while this is not a formal or final report from the Council, I believe is just as insightful and just as useful. It is certainly more timely. The Council asked if we had any outstanding issues that required further exploration in a final report, but because we feel comfortable that this memo represents a comprehensive look at our current configuration -- and because we have already been using these insights for our planning -- the Council has agreed that the attached memo serves the same purpose as its final report would. It has let us know that it now considers this its final report. I am happy to share it with you today and we are making it available to the public on the BPS website.

Our Academics team requested the CGCS to come into the district for a review of academics, specifically our work around the Common Core. As timing and planning moved forward, the purpose of the review, and the charge from the Superintendent, evolved into the following:

- Assessing a proposed draft of organizational changes to the district's academic departments;
- Identifying points of disconnection both within the central office and between the central office and schools that restrict the district's ability to implement and support instructional reform;
- Reviewing the instructional program of the school system; and
- Making recommendations for shoring up instructional capacity during this transitional period focused on organizing an Academics unit with the capacity to successfully implement Common Core and PARCC and support and intervene in underperforming schools.

We welcome and embrace constructive reviews of our practice in order to maintain and improve the strength of our organization.

While the focus of this request is on academics, the implications of the report are broad-based. There are areas where the Council points out good practice, but there are also areas of challenge where all of us must work collectively to help position the district and schools for success.

You will notice that the difficulties raised in this memo are familiar ones that we, the School Committee, and individual school leaders and teachers have raised before. These are areas that we as a District have often struggled to resolve systematically. This is a key opportunity for us to demonstrate our collective commitment to working collaboratively and as a team.

The findings have already informed our planning for the next school year. We have been able to align our central Academic reorganization to several of the recommendations made in the memo. For example, the district has already embarked on the following actions:

- The district's Academic unit revised its reorganization plan to support several of the recommendations in the report.
- The Superintendent's Cabinet has begun drafting a coherent, comprehensive theory of action that aligns to the goals and priorities developed and adopted by the Boston School Committee.
- The central office is developing a plan to implement a common methodology for project management, including the identification of project leads, expectations for communication and collaboration, and common tools to document and plan projects.
- The Superintendent has charged the heads of the Offices of Academics, Special Education, and English Language Learners with establishing an action plan to integrate key areas of their work and support individual student learning needs. A working group established a framework to support this effort, and through the reorganization, positions have been dedicated to creating bridges across the departments.
- The Superintendent has established a cross-functional team to continue to ensure that all requirements for ELLs are met under the Department of Justice Settlement Agreement. This team includes the Office of Data and Accountability, which supports data and reporting requirements.
- The Superintendent's Office has established a centralized process to collect all dates, deadlines, trainings, and events organized/led by central offices and to create a district calendar for the upcoming school year. This calendar will be shared with all school leaders prior to the end of the current school year in order to coordinate and minimize the requests

made on schools as well as ensure that consistent information is shared with all schools and departments.

- A cross-functional team has been established to coordinate district-offered professional development that is aligned with district priorities, and has an intentional focus on capacity-building within our professional development opportunities.
- For the upcoming school year, departments responsible for supporting school-based teacher leaders will work in a coordinated way to support and build capacity among these teacher leaders. This effort will also review the areas of concern with teacher leaders and develop an action plan to address them for the upcoming school year.
- To support struggling schools, the Academics Office has established a District Turnaround and Transformation Team to work holistically with schools and build our internal capacity to carry out significant, strategic interventions in underperforming schools.
- The Academics department is leading our efforts to evaluate the first year of implementation of the network model and make changes as needed to ensure that this model is able to address the instructional and operational needs of all schools.

In response to the recommendations and proposals put forth in the CGCS memo, the district is prepared to take the following additional actions:

- **Direction and Goals:** The School Committee's newly adopted Goals and Priorities provide a clear vision and direction for the district to align itself in a coherent, coordinated way. The next steps are for the district to: 1. Clarify its theory of action aligned to the goals and priorities, 2. Work with the School Committee to establish Measurable Outcomes connected to the priorities and 3. Establish strategies and corresponding initiatives to meet these priorities.
- **Organizational Structure:** The district decided to move forward with a modified version of Option A with respect to our organizational structure, specifically:
 - Maintain direct reporting lines for the Chiefs of Academics, SPED, and ELL with a charge from the Superintendent to hold each accountable for joint planning and program execution.
 - Within the Superintendent's office, implement project management tools and methods to help manage and coordinate projects. The Chief of Staff will oversee this effort, which will apply to those projects under the Superintendent's direction.
 - In Academics, redesign the position of Curriculum and Instruction Director to oversee content, special populations' instruction, and early childhood.
 - Maintain the direct reporting lines of the Network Superintendents to the Chief Academic Officer.
 - Redefine and redeploy a number of positions within the Academics Office, while building capacity around instructional research and development and instructional intervention/support. These new areas of focus will strengthen the infrastructure for a district turnaround team to intervene in underperforming schools.

- **Cross-Functional Teaming:** The district/senior staff have begun to establish cross-functional teams for key district priorities and have started to develop a training and support plan to help the district make this cultural shift, including systems-thinking training and project management training. Examples of teams include: summer learning, professional development, support for English Language Learners, transportation policy implementation, and the district’s implementation of the Achievement Gap policy.
- **Role of Network Superintendents:** Key positions related to academics and operations have been created to support network superintendents in balancing their dual role of supporting and supervising the instructional and operational needs of schools in the pursuit of student learning and achievement.
- **Institutional Advancement:** Rather than a direct line report to the Superintendent, Institutional Advancement will be housed within the Superintendent’s Office, reporting to the Chief of Staff, to support a more strategic coordination of external support toward district academic priorities.
- **Academic Processes and Capacity Building:**
 - We are implementing recommendations 19 and 20 by developing the District Academic Response and Transformation (DART) teams and intervening as a district turnaround effort in Level 4 and some Level 3 schools based on the new accountability framework. This framework organizes schools into three categories (sustaining, improving, and transforming) to ensure that the appropriate supports are differentiated based on schools’ level of need.
 - We are reviewing these recommendations as part of our overall Academics redesign effort.

As noted above, we have already begun implementing a number of the recommendations outlined in the report, and we plan to carry out many other action steps aligned with these recommendations in order to improve our practices around Curriculum and Instruction. All of the recommendations have helped inform our strategic thinking.

In Curriculum and Instruction and beyond, a key focus of our collective effort is building the systems and structures across central office to reinforce the expectations of collaboration, coherence, and integration. This cultural shift in the central office is a critical step to establish the conditions for success in every school in BPS.

Memorandum

TO: John McDonough, Superintendent
Boston Public Schools

FROM: Michael Casserly, Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools

DATE: February 24, 2014

RE: Review of Boston Public Schools Academic Direction

Thank you for the opportunity to assist you and the school district at this critical moment of transition and challenge. We received all the necessary assistance and cooperation from your staff as we conducted our recent interviews. All arrangements were handled flawlessly by your team.

The Council of the Great City Schools will have a full report with its complete review and recommendations at a later date after we have had a chance to review all the documents we requested. In the meantime, we have prepared this memo to give you a sense of our team's general observations, major concerns, and preliminary proposals for the district as it moves forward.

A Strategic Support Team from the Council of the Great City Schools conducted a site visit to Boston February 4-7, 2014. This team included—

- Michael Casserly, Executive Director
- Ricki Price-Baugh, Director of Academic Achievement
- Ray Hart, Director of Research
- Robin Hall, Director of Reading and Literacy
- Denise Walston, Director of Mathematics
- Amanda Corcoran, Manager of Special Projects

The organization has substantial experience in reviewing instructional and non-instructional operations in major urban public school systems across the country. In fact, the Council has conducted some 250 such reviews over the last 15 years, more than any other organization public or private in the nation. (A list of Council reviews is attached to this memo.)

During its site visit to the Boston Public Schools (BPS), the Council interviewed approximately 50 individuals, including members of the school committee; staff members in the curriculum and instruction unit; network superintendents; directors of early childhood education, elementary and secondary ELA, mathematics, special education, and English language learning; senior staff

from the human capital division and the office of the chief financial officer; the director of the research and accountability unit; the president of the teachers union; representatives from partner organizations; principals; teachers; content specialists; and BPS parents.

The superintendent's charge to the Council team was to help leadership determine how to keep moving the school system forward academically amidst substantial budget cuts. Specifically, the Council team was charged with:

- Assessing a proposed draft of organizational changes to the district's academic departments;
- Identifying points of disconnection both within the central office and between the central office and schools that restrict the district's ability to implement and support instructional reform;
- Reviewing the instructional program of the school system; and
- Making recommendations for shoring up instructional capacity during this transitional period.

General Findings and Observations

The Boston Public Schools is at a critical juncture in its history. The school system has made significant progress academically over the last decade or so, but it is also facing major changes and substantial challenges as it looks to the future. The city has a new mayor for the first time in 20 years. The school committee is under relatively new leadership. The school system itself is being led by an interim, albeit very popular and competent, superintendent (John McDonough), who will need to be replaced after almost 20 years of relatively stable superintendent leadership (Tom Payzant and Carol Johnson). The district is working to put into place new academic standards and turn around a number of chronically under-performing schools. The school system is developing new teacher and staff evaluation procedures and data processes that remain incomplete. And the district is facing significant budget cuts that are necessitating staff cuts and organizational restructuring. The interim superintendent, rightly, has posed the question: How do we keep the school system moving forward on behalf of students in the context of these transitions?

Positive Findings

In its initial review of the Boston Public Schools, the team from the Council of the Great City Schools found a number of significant strengths, including the following—

- Student achievement as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has improved significantly since the Boston Public Schools first began participating in the assessments in 2003. Between 2003 and 2013, fourth graders in BPS increased their math performance by 17 scale-score points, compared with a gain of 11 points by fourth-grade students in large city schools generally and seven points by fourth-grade students across the nation over the same period. Only students in the District of Columbia Public Schools showed larger gains. In eighth grade, Boston students improved their math scores by 21 scale-score points, compared with gains of 14 points by large city schools generally and seven points nationally. Only students in

Atlanta made larger gains at this grade level over the decade. Moreover, the NAEP scores of eighth graders in Boston are not significantly different from the national average, although they remain lower than the statewide average. In reading, fourth graders in Boston improved their NAEP scores by eight points (the same as large city schools generally) while the nation gained only four points over the same period. And at the eighth-grade level, Boston students improved their NAEP reading scores by four scale-score points while large city schools generally improved by nine and the nation gained five.

Exhibit 1. Scale-score Point Change in ELA and Math on NAEP of BPS Students compared with Changes in Large City Schools and Nation, 2003-2013

	Scale-score Point Changes Grade 4		Percentage Point Changes Grade 8	
	ELA	Math	ELA	Math
BPS	+8	+17	+4	+21
Large City	+8	+11	+9	+14
Nation	+4	+7	+5	+7

- Students in BPS are generally making significant gains on the statewide assessment in reading and mathematics (M-CAS). In addition, a special analysis conducted by the Council of M-CAS scores showed that students who were enrolled continuously in the system between grades 3 and 5 and between 6 and 8 showed gains in both subjects among all subgroups that exceeded gains among peer groups statewide. In reading, the cohort improved the percent of students moving into the proficient or above category of attainment by 11.5 percentage points between spring 2011 and spring 2013, compared with a gain of five percentage points statewide over the same period. In math, the cohort that moved into the proficient and above categories increased by 2.8 percentage points while students statewide dropped by five percentage points. Gains among students who were eligible for free and reduced-price meal subsidies generally outpaced students who were not eligible, and former LEP students generally outpaced those who were considered limited English proficient.

Exhibit 2. Percentage Point Change in ELA and Math Proficient and Above Rates on M-CAS of Continuously Enrolled BPS Students compared with Changes of Students Statewide, 2011-2013

	Percentage Point Change from Grades 3 to 5		Percentage Point Change from Grades 6 to 8	
	ELA	Math	ELA	Math
BPS	+11.5	+2.8	+16.6	+0.7
Statewide	+5.0	-5.0	+10.0	-3.0

- The interim superintendent is universally respected and liked across the city as a person of integrity, transparency, and competence.

- Instructional staff members at the central office were among the strongest that the Council has seen in reviewing academic staff in other major urban school systems.
- The school district moved to a regionally-based network system about a year ago that most people interviewed by the Council team saw as an important and constructive step in attempting to move more support and expertise closer to schools and to counteract some of the fractured and disconnected practices of the central office.
- In general, the networks support about 15 schools each, which is a smaller number than similar networks in other urban school systems across the country—a good thing. The average number of schools under similar networks in other city school systems was 24. The Council’s research indicates that a smaller span of control for principal supervisors or network superintendents enables greater on-site support of schools.
- The BPS was one of the first major urban school systems in the nation to begin implementing the new Common Core State Standards. In fact, the former superintendent, Carol Johnson, and many district instructional personnel provided feedback during the standards development process.
- In working to implement the new common core standards, the Boston Public Schools has consulted with some of the best expertise in the country, including some of the original standards writers.
- The quality of instructional materials and tools prepared by central-office staff members to help improve academic performance is generally high and better-aligned to the common core than the Council finds in other major urban school systems, although the materials haven’t been effectively or systematically disseminated to schools.
- The district has developed units of study in reading and mathematics that are generally of high quality and could be shared with other school systems. The challenge with the materials is less an issue of quality than implementation.
- The district has benefitted from the work done some years ago by its highly skilled math staff to adopt and implement the *TERC Investigations* program, although the system has not applied the lessons about why the program proved effective to other major instructional initiatives.
- The district is attempting to augment *Investigations* with additional common core materials, although the materials do not always clarify for teachers how they should use the multiple sources and tools that are cited.
- The district is using a modified version of Student Achievement Partner’s exemplar templates in English language arts/literacy to guide its implementation of the common core standards and to assist teachers with lesson planning and instructional delivery.
- There is evidence that the school district is assisting teachers in meeting the common core guidelines for incorporating more informational texts into ELA/literacy instruction.

- Some science content specialists are beginning to integrate common core ELA/literacy and math standards into science lessons and units.
- Some schools emphasize argumentation in writing and speaking using Debate League strategies that require students to use evidence from multiple sources in making and supporting their claims and assertions.
- The district is using a modified version of the state’s walkthrough protocols in its turnaround and high-support schools and results are analyzed and reported by the district’s research and data unit.
- About half of the schools that entered turnaround status three years ago have successfully exited. This may be linked to the increased support and resources provided to struggling schools. Still, the district is at risk of losing control to the state of some level-five schools if they do not improve.
- The research and accountability department provides detailed data packets to schools on assessment results. This department has also demonstrated a willingness and capacity to enlist the support of other divisions within the central office in a way that other departments do not.
- Some mid-level staff in the central office work in cross-functional teams to solve problems in ways that the most senior staff in the central office do not.
- The district and the teachers union negotiated an academic lane credit program that involves some 120 hours of professional development with periodic testing throughout the course. The program is being piloted in one school at the moment, and holds great potential if implemented well.
- The district is setting up an open-posting process for teaching positions to allow schools who meet certain requirements more autonomy in the hiring of teachers.

Areas of Concern

The Boston Public Schools has made substantial progress over the years and has considerable capacity to make more, but there are indications that its momentum is in jeopardy during the current transitional period. The following are some of the major areas of concern seen by the Council team—

- Staff members in the district do not have a clear understanding of the school system’s mission, academic vision, priorities for reform, or plans for navigating the challenges ahead, although its leadership deserves credit for asking for assistance in making sure that the system moves forward in this time of transition. The district has written statements, but has not articulated them clearly and consistently. The result is that departments seem free to set their own priorities.
- The district also lacks a well-articulated theory of action for improving student achievement beyond granting more autonomy in decision-making to schools.

- Individuals interviewed by the Council team generally reported that the district had four goals moving forward, but in each instance were only able to cite three at most. In addition, district academic goals and school goals are not always in sync with one another, and school improvement targets do not roll up to a districtwide target for improvement.
- District priorities sometimes conflict or compete with one another. For example, the district's work on the common core seems to have been displaced by its work on teacher evaluations, and its need to boost staff capacity with professional development appears to have been undermined by its use of contractual professional development time to explain the teacher evaluation system.
- Student achievement on NAEP is showing some signs of leveling off. The data in Exhibit 1 indicates that the Boston Public Schools improved on NAEP by an average of 1.6 scale-score points in ELA (fourth grade) in each testing cycle between 2003 and 2013, yet declined three points between 2011 and 2013. In fourth-grade math, BPS students gained an average of 3.4 points between 2003 and 2013, but showed no growth between 2011 and 2013. In addition, in eighth-grade math, BPS students gained an average of 4.2 points between 2003 and 2013, but improved only one point between 2011 and 2013. The district did show a slightly greater gain in ELA (eighth grade) between 2011 and 2013 (2.0) than the average gain between 2003 and 2013 (0.8).
- Senior district staff members work in siloes without much coordination or cooperation across organizational units. In general, central office academic departments could be characterized as badly fractured, distrustful, and lacking a sense of teamwork or shared responsibility for the district's students. In addition, most everyone interviewed by the Council team, including those at the school level, reported that they saw central office departments operating independently and that it was serving as a poor example to everyone throughout the school system. Part of this independent activity is structural and organizational and part of it is relational. In other words, collaboration appears to hinge more on personal relationships than on structures or reporting lines—meaning that turnover can hurt the ability of the district to sustain its agenda. Moreover, nearly everyone interviewed agreed that there was a major lack of connection between the work of the district and the priorities of the schools.
- Under the current organizational structure of the district, the academics unit, the Office of ELLs, and the district's special education division each report separately to the superintendent and do not coordinate adequately with one another. For example, some 57 percent of students with disabilities in the district are in general education classes at least part of the day, but there is little coordination between academics and the special education department.
- The special education department and the ELL department each have only one staff member devoted solely to instruction, according to department heads. Remaining staff are mostly devoted to compliance issues. The ELL director reported that her department produces some 68 reports to stay in compliance with U.S. Department of Justice guidelines.

- There appears to be little collaboration between the research and accountability department and the Office of ELLs on compliance reporting, a situation that risks producing erroneous reports to the DOJ.
- Some principals reported getting mixed or erroneous messages from the central office and network leaders about scheduled activities and priorities. For instance, some principals interviewed by the team reported receiving differing dates for when ELL plans were due and for when formative assessments would be administered. Individual departments can send out messages to principals without having to coordinate them.
- Identical jobs in the district have dissimilar titles, creating confusion among school staff.
- The district’s network structure was initiated in part to improve non-instructional support to schools, but has expanded to include an instructional mission. However, in their first year, network leaders have struggled to reconcile their role in providing instructional support and professional development to principals with their non-instructional roles and responsibilities.
- The rollout of the network structure remains incomplete. Some networks appear to be unevenly staffed, and the purpose and function of network staff and leaders continue to be unevenly defined and understood by district staff. In general, there is no clear definition of what network superintendents are responsible for accomplishing, and how they will be held accountable for meeting these objectives.
- Network superintendents were generally of high quality, but they have not been adequately trained or equipped by the curriculum and instructional department to serve as instructional leaders of the schools for which they are responsible.
- District staff is not confident that *Reading Street* is well-aligned to the common core or is producing better reading outcomes for students. (However, many teachers do appear to be using the Basal Alignment Project developed by Student Achievement Partners and the Council of the Great City Schools to spur text-dependent questioning using the basal. In fact, coaches and teacher leaders in Boston contributed significantly to the project.)
- Professional development provided by the central office lacks any cohesive strategy or broad focus on district instructional priorities, and is offered to networks separately by each district department. In addition, the amount of contractual professional development is limited and remains optional for teachers. (Higher priority professional development can sometimes be trumped by professional development for which there are stipends from various external grants. Example: professional development for the health initiative.)
- District professional development is designed more to deliver information than to build capacity. This seems particularly detrimental when it comes to providing professional development on the common core, where the training is perceived as focusing more on communicating “what” the standards are than on “how” to implement them.

- Professional development is not regularly evaluated to determine the degree of its implementation or its effects on student outcomes—and the district appears not to be leveraging the results of the MyLearningPlan site to inform professional development for teachers.
- The district has adopted a train-the-trainer approach to providing professional development to teachers. This model employs teacher leaders as the main mechanism for ensuring that central office guidelines and training are shared in the schools. However, there is no check or quality control to see if teacher leaders have mastered the information they are being asked to turnkey. (The team encountered a situation where a teacher leader had passed along incorrect information, which reminded Council staff of the “telephone game,” where the initial message became increasingly garbled as it moves from one person to another.) Overall, this leads to additional unevenness in the professional development provided at the school level.
- The district has teacher leaders for its schools in the areas of ELA, math, data, and educator effectiveness. However, the district has not articulated how the teacher leaders in these areas are coordinated or how their work is supposed to align with district academic priorities. It is also unclear how the principals reconcile and schedule the professional development that the leaders in these four areas are supposed to provide.
- In addition, these teacher leaders are chosen by school-based personnel committees, but there has been no special effort to align effectiveness data with whom the committees choose as teacher leaders. In general, the selection process does not necessarily result in the most effective teachers being selected as leaders. In addition, principals reported to the team that teacher leaders and coaches may not be the same from year to year, and there is no process by which new personnel would be caught up on the needs of the school.
- There is no mechanism by which teacher leaders are able to regularly work with other teachers because there is little time set aside uniformly from school to school for this purpose.
- Some schools reported as much as 90 minutes for common planning time for teachers; other schools reported having no planning time for teachers. Planning time can even differ for teachers within the same school. In addition, some schools reported using planning time for professional learning communities; others did not. The district has provided no scheduling guidelines or templates to principals on how they might create more planning time or how PLCs could be effectively used or sequenced over the course of the school year.
- Principals do not regularly attend the same professional development as their teachers attend, and there were few individuals interviewed who could give example of how professional development was informed by and changed as a result of data. In addition, principals are not kept in the loop about the work done by central office and networks with teacher leaders.

- To supplement support to struggling schools, content specialists (or coaches) are deployed to level 4 and level 5 schools in six-week cycles. However, the quality of these content specialists was widely cited as uneven. Although coaches are expected to log and report their activities, the team saw no data or reports that evaluated the effect of the coaches on student achievement. Moreover, the six-week cycles do not always align with instructional or assessment cycles in schools, and are seen by many as an inadequate span of time to develop the relationships and familiarity necessary to improve teaching practice. It also appeared that content specialists were not as strategically matched to their schools as might be expected. Principals reported that coaches are deployed to their schools based on data triggers from grades 3 to 8, but that the principals often have needs in other grades or on other issues that the coaches are not equipped to handle. (The district set up this situation by design because they found that the earlier format was too broad based to get results.) Finally, some principals indicated to the Council team that they sometimes receive coaches without notice from the central office.
- The district is facing sizable budget cuts resulting in losses of federal Race-to-the-Top funds, Title I dollars, and some state aid in conjunction with increasing costs. To its credit, the district's leadership is using the budget situation as an occasion for rethinking the district's overall direction, organization, and instructional processes.
- The district holds about half of its federal Title I funds for central-office initiatives involving external partnerships and community engagement among other activities.
- The district used its federal Race-to-the-Top funds over the last several years in a very focused and constructive manner to build its teacher evaluation and data systems and to deploy instructional support through coaches and teacher leaders. However, there appears to have been little long-term strategic thinking about how to fund these core functions after Race-to-the-Top funds run out.
- There is little coordination of external partners in pursuit of common district goals. Some schools have multiple grants and partnerships that sometimes compete with each other, while others schools have no partners.

Recommendations and Proposals

The Council of the Great City Schools has a number of recommendations and proposals to address the issues raised in the previous section of this memo. The recommendations are focused around three major issues: the direction and goals of the school system; the organizational structure of the district's instructional functions; and the instructional processes that appear to hinder the district's academic effectiveness. These proposals aim to more clearly articulate the district's objectives, improve coordination among staff, save the district scarce resources and redeploy dollars closer to schools, and strengthen instructional processes in order to enhance achievement.

Direction and Goals

1. Communicate clear goals for the district in this time of transition around (a) accelerating student achievement, (b) narrowing achievement gaps, (c) turning around the district's chronically low-performing schools, (d) improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the district's use of scarce resources, (e) strengthening the public's confidence in the work of the school system.
2. Develop a plan for how the school district is going to coordinate its work better both internally and with external community partners on behalf of a clear set of district priorities.

Organizational Structure

3. Consider two options for reorganizing and coordinating the work of the instructional staff of the school district, as well as the possibility of having option A convert to option B over time—

Option A.

- Have a chief academic officer report directly to the superintendent. Have the SPED and ELL directors also report separately to the superintendent. Charge the superintendent with ensuring collaboration between the curriculum and instruction unit and the departments of SPED and ELL and hold them explicitly accountable for joint planning and program execution. (See Exhibit 3.)
- Create a new project management function reporting to the superintendent—as a staff rather than a line function—to help manage the cross-functional work of the C&I, ELL, and SPED departments, ensure alignment between external partnerships and district strategic priorities, and to administer other projects under the superintendent's direction.
- Have a director of curriculum and instruction oversee content, special populations' instruction, and early childhood.
- Have each network superintendent report to the chief academic officer (CAO) and charge the CAO with coordinating their work with the ELL and SPED departments.
- Retain the compliance responsibilities of the SPED and ELL departments, but move the limited number of instruction-oriented staff currently under each unit to the curriculum and instruction department. Augment the SPED and ELL instructional staff as appropriate.
- Delete the proposed positions for professional learning, instructional implementation, instructional support & supervision, project management, research & development, and instructional compliance that are showing on the draft academic organizational chart. The Council has made this proposal to encourage collaboration through cross-functional teaming rather than by adding people to the organizational structure.

Option B.

- Place the SPED and ELL departments under the chief academic officer and move the compliance-reporting functions of each unit to the accountability department, which would remain as a direct report to the superintendent. Move the ELL and SPED instructional staff to the C&I unit, which would report to the CAO. (See Exhibit 4.)

Exhibit 3. Option A

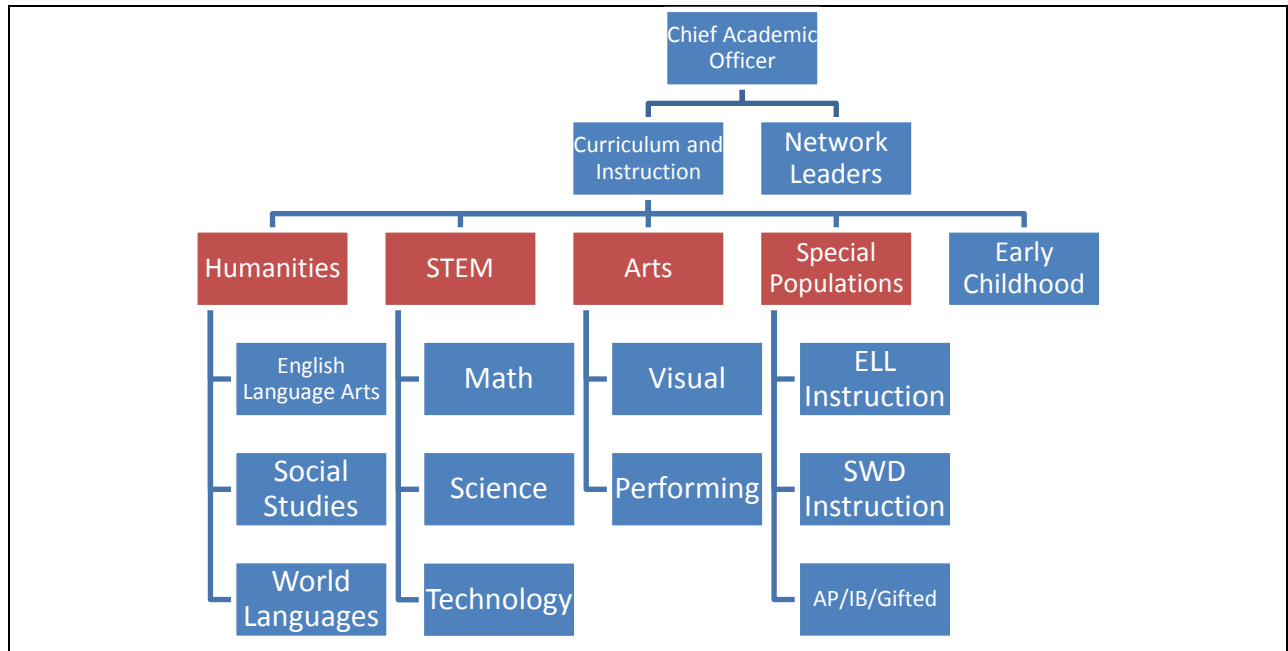
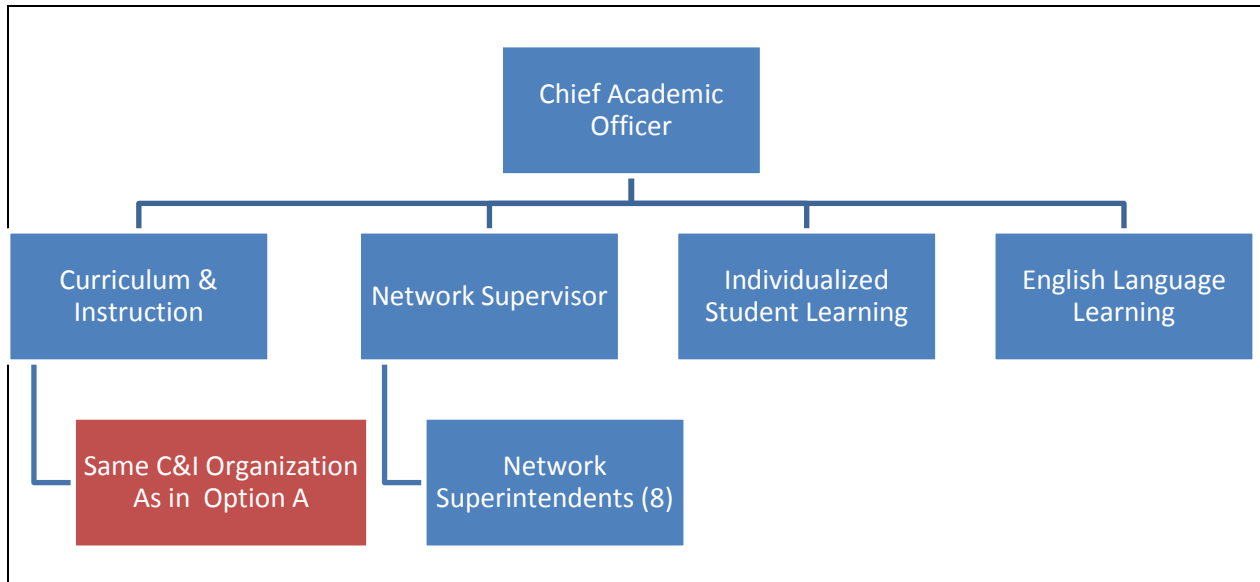


Exhibit 4. Option B



4. Create a network supervisor position that would report to the CAO and have the individual network superintendents report to the network supervisor. This would reduce the CAO's span of control to account for the addition of the ELL and SPED directors. In other words, under this option, the following heads would report to the CAO: ELL, SPED, a network supervisor, and curriculum and instruction. (To ensure that network superintendents are continuously in the leadership loop, include them in all leadership team meetings and planning sessions.)
5. Create a new project management function reporting to the superintendent—as a staff rather than a line function—to help manage the cross-functional work of the new instructional department, ensure alignment between external partnerships and district strategic priorities, and to administer other projects under the superintendent's direction.
6. Delete the proposed positions for professional learning, instructional implementation, instructional support & supervision, project management, research & development, and instructional compliance that are showing on the draft academic organizational chart. The Council has made this proposal to encourage collaboration through cross-functional teaming rather than by adding people to the organizational structure.
7. Whether using option A or option B, charge department heads with meeting regularly and coordinating their work and supports to schools on behalf of all students. Hold all department heads accountable for coordinating on key district priorities. Senior staff should build on the cross-functional teaming that some mid-level staff members are pursuing. Name additional cross-functional teams to pursue emerging district priorities. Teams should include department heads, network leaders, and lead school staff, and they should meet regularly and report to senior leadership on the progress they are making on those priorities. (The district might want to look at the “Priority Committees” that Denver Public Schools has created to serve this purpose.)
8. Define the primary purpose of the networks as providing direct instructional support to principals and schools, and brokering (but not directly providing) operational assistance to schools. Define the role of the network superintendents uniformly across the networks. Articulate the skills that network leaders need to fulfill their responsibilities and ensure they have the professional development they need to grow into these new responsibilities. (The district might look at the network structures in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Hillsborough County, and Denver.)¹ Locate or house network operations and staff at a school in each network region.
9. Charge the accountability office with arranging focus groups of teachers, principals, and others to provide regular feedback to central-office leaders on central-office and network coordination, materials, initiatives, and support for schools. Modify plans and initiatives based on feedback from these focus groups.
10. Elevate the profile of the district's institutional advancement efforts to pursue strategic partnership opportunities and to better coordinate and allocate external support for schools.

¹ *Rethinking Leadership: The Changing Role of Principal Supervisors*. Council of the Great City Schools and the Wallace Foundation. Washington, D.C. 2013.

Regularly brief the school committee on this work to provide them with a clearer sense of the district's priorities and strategies for making the best use of external partnerships.

Academic Processes and Capacity Building

11. Consolidate, define, coordinate, and provide professional development to networks across instructional departments. In addition, ensure that professional development provided by the human resources department is coordinated with the instructional units. Hold both accountable for coordinating their work. Finally, have central-office content directors provide professional development to principals and teacher leaders in each network and across networks to ensure greater cohesion in training coming from the central office.
12. Focus network professional development of principals and teacher leaders on *how to implement* the Common Core State Standards in classrooms, as well as how to use data to inform instructional practice and what to look for in student work. Ensure that other district instructional initiatives are included when providing professional development on the common core so schools understand the connection between district priorities.
13. Build in a mechanism by which teacher leaders must demonstrate understanding and mastery of concepts on which they have received training. Analyze teacher effectiveness data to see if teacher leaders are, in fact, effective teachers, and use the results to inform the professional development of teacher leaders.
14. Have central office staff members—in collaboration with school-based staff— develop models and guidance for creating, using, and sequencing adequate planning time around common core implementation and the use of student work to inform instruction in every school.
15. Charge principals and teacher leaders in ELA and math with creating professional learning communities in each school so teachers build and support their own instructional capacity. Have these teacher-led PLCs meet regularly to discuss how to adjust their instructional practice based on student data and student work. Allow teacher leaders to have a lighter teaching schedule to be able to meet with each PLC on district and school priorities. Fund the extra time by redeploying part of the 25 percent of Title I dollars that the district holds centrally for funding external partnership efforts.
16. Examine the Council of the Great City Schools' key performance indicators (KPIs) to see if there are opportunities for cost savings that the district might redeploy for instructional improvements.
17. Establish a mechanism by which principals contribute to the evaluation of network superintendents and staff members.
18. Expand the district's peer-observation system to allow more teachers to see and study the exemplary practices of their peers. Ensure that there is no evaluative component in the observations.
19. Repurpose a reduced number of the district's best content specialists and central-office curriculum and instructional leaders into SWAT teams to provide intensive technical

assistance, coaching, and support to level 3 and 4 schools over an extended period (daily for three weeks at minimum). SWAT teams should be prepared to address the specific needs and challenges of each school. Eliminate the six-week cycle time for content specialists.

20. Reduce the autonomy of level 4 and 5 schools and require a more regimented instructional program.

Conclusion

The preliminary recommendations and proposals in this memo are intended to provide a broad framework for the Boston Public Schools to think more carefully about how it is defining and providing its instructional services. It is clear that the school district has made substantial academic progress over the last decade or more. In fact, the district has shown larger gains on the well-respected National Assessment of Educational Progress than most other major urban school systems taking the exam as part of the Trial Urban District Assessment. In addition, the Council's initial review of the district's instructional tools indicates that considerable high-level development work has been done.

At the same time, the district is cognizant that this progress is at risk during this period of transition. The experience of many urban school systems across the country is a story of the years it takes to build capacity and improve results, and the rapidity with which it can fall apart without a clear, unifying vision and vigilant support for high-quality instruction.

In the Council's preliminary opinion, the greatest risks to the Boston Public Schools lie in how it defines, articulates, and communicates its priorities during the transition and moving forward. The district's momentum is also jeopardized by its lack of coordination and fractured organizational structure. This has not only resulted in poorly coordinated instructional services, but it has provided a model for a lack of teamwork across the entire school system. The Council's organizational recommendations endeavor to break down organizational siloes, create cross-functional teaming, and develop greater collaboration around district priorities and student outcomes.

Finally, the district's ability to support continuous instructional improvement is handicapped by the disconnect between the central office and schools. Several different structures and models—including the networks, content specialists, and teacher leaders— have been developed to try to bridge this gap and build school-level capacity, but at present these layers are poorly coordinated and fundamentally fail to create a seamless process for sharing central office resources and guidance, impacting instructional practice, and providing the central office with feedback from school leaders and staff. The Council's recommendations for improving academic processes and building school capacity thus focus not only on clarifying and streamlining the functions of various support structures, but ensuring effective coordination and consistency with a district-defined strategy for improving instruction.

In sum, the challenges facing Boston Public Schools are great, but not insurmountable. The district has proven its ability to support and improve student achievement in the past, and is now approaching the otherwise daunting period of budget cuts and new leadership as an opportunity to reassess and redouble its efforts to support quality instruction in all schools. We appreciate the opportunity to work with district leadership in this endeavor, and trust that the

observations and recommendations we have provided here—and will continue to refine and articulate in coming weeks—will provide a rough blueprint for moving forward.

Individuals Interviewed

- John McDonough, Interim Superintendent
- Eileen de los Reyes, Deputy Superintendent of Academics
- Linda Chen, Assistant Deputy Superintendent of Academics
- Catherine Carney, Assistant Chief Curriculum and Instruction Officer
- Michael O'Neil, School Committee
- Margaret McKenna, School Committee
- Ben Russell, Elementary Senior Program Director for Elementary, ELA/Literacy
- Oneida Fox Roye, Secondary Senior Program Director for Secondary, ELA/Literacy
- Drew Echelson, Network Superintendent
- Rasheed Meadows, Network Superintendent
- Mary Skipper, Network Superintendent
- Cheryl Watson Harris, Network Superintendent
- Marice Eduoard-Vincent, Network Superintendent
- Christine Hall, Director for K-12 Mathematics
- Jason Sachs, Director of Early Childhood
- Antonieta Bolomy, Assistant Superintendent of English Language Learning
- Eileen Nash, Deputy Superintendent of Individualized Learning
- Ross Wilson, Assistant Superintendent of Human Capital
- Erika Giampietro, Deputy Chief Financial Officer
- Kamal Chavda, Chief Data and Accountability Officer
- Richard Stutman, President of the Boston Teachers Union (AFT)
- Karn Engelsgierd , Achievement Network
- Devin Kearns, Boston University
- Johanna Even, Edvestors
- Steve Stein, Boston Debate League
- Kate McNeill, Boston College
- Lisa Fortenberry, City Year
- Abby Morales, Content Specialist
- Connie Henry, Content Specialist
- Dana Murray, Content Specialist
- Karen Silver, Content Specialist
- Marcia Riddick, Content Specialist
- Paul Christian, Content Specialist
- Rajeeve Martyn, Content Specialist
- Bev Nadeau, Content Specialist
- Erin Hashimoto Mardell, Content Specialist
- Patrick Tutwiler, Principal
- Catherine MacCuish, Principal
- Laura Miceli, Principal
- Peggy Kemp, Principal
- Andy Tuite, Principal
- Amelia Gorman, Principal

- Kathleen Tunney, Principal
- Alexander Mathews, Principal
- Kellyanne Mahoney, Teacher
- Lola Hamilton, Teacher
- Robert Baroz, Teacher
- Lisa Portadin, Teacher
- Stephen MacCormack, Teacher
- Katie Pagano, Teacher
- Tracy Koller, Parent
- Natalie Maucelli, Parent
- Steven Marshall, Parent
- JaJaira Mercado, Parent

**History of Strategic Support Teams Conducted by the
Council of the Great City Schools**

City	Area	Year
Albuquerque	Facilities and Roofing	2003
	Human Resources	2003
	Information Technology	2003
	Special Education	2005
	Legal Services	2005
	Safety and Security	2007
	Research	2013
	Anchorage	Finance
Communications		2008
Math Instruction		2010
Food Services		2011
Organizational Structure		2012
Atlanta	Facilities	2009
	Transportation	2010
Austin	Special Education	2010
Baltimore	Information Technology	2011
Birmingham	Organizational Structure	2007
	Operations	2008
	Facilities	2010
Boston	Special Education	2009
	Food Service	2014
Bridgeport	Transportation	2012
Broward County (FL)	Information Technology	2000
	Food Services	2009
	Transportation	2009
	Information Technology	2012
Buffalo	Superintendent Support	2000
	Organizational Structure	2000
	Curriculum and Instruction	2000
	Personnel	2000
	Facilities and Operations	2000
	Communications	2000
	Finance	2000
Finance II	2003	

	Bilingual Education	2009
	Special Education	2014
Caddo Parish (LA)		
	Facilities	2004
Charleston		
	Special Education	2005
Charlotte-Mecklenburg		
	Human Resources	2007
	Organizational Structure	2012
	Transportation	2013
Cincinnati		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2004
	Curriculum and Instruction	2009
Chicago		
	Warehouse Operations	2010
	Special Education I	2011
	Special Education II	2012
	Bilingual Education	2014
Christina (DE)		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2007
Cleveland		
	Student Assignments	1999, 2000
	Transportation	2000
	Safety and Security	2000
	Facilities Financing	2000
	Facilities Operations	2000
	Transportation	2004
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Safety and Security	2007
	Safety and Security	2008
	Theme Schools	2009
Columbus		
	Superintendent Support	2001
	Human Resources	2001
	Facilities Financing	2002
	Finance and Treasury	2003
	Budget	2003
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Information Technology	2007
	Food Services	2007
	Transportation	2009
Dallas		
	Procurement	2007
	Staffing Levels	2009
Dayton		
	Superintendent Support	2001
	Curriculum and Instruction	2001
	Finance	2001

	Communications	2002
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Budget	2005
	Curriculum and Instruction	2008
Denver		
	Superintendent Support	2001
	Personnel	2001
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Bilingual Education	2006
	Curriculum and Instruction	2008
Des Moines		
	Budget and Finance	2003
	Staffing Levels	2012
	Human Resources	2012
Detroit		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2002
	Assessment	2002
	Communications	2002
	Curriculum and Assessment	2003
	Communications	2003
	Textbook Procurement	2004
	Food Services	2007
	Curriculum and Instruction	2008
	Facilities	2008
	Finance and Budget	2008
	Information Technology	2008
	Stimulus planning	2009
	Human Resources	2009
Fresno		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2012
Greensboro		
	Bilingual Education	2002
	Information Technology	2003
	Special Education	2003
	Facilities	2004
	Human Resources	2007
Hillsborough County (FLA)		
	Transportation	2005
	Procurement	2005
	Special Education	2012
Houston		
	Facilities Operations	2010
	Capitol Program	2010
	Information Technology	2011
	Procurement	2011
Indianapolis		
	Transportation	2007
	Information Technology	2010

Jackson (MS)		
	Bond Referendum	2006
	Communications	2009
Jacksonville		
	Organization and Management	2002
	Operations	2002
	Human Resources	2002
	Finance	2002
	Information Technology	2002
	Finance	2006
Kansas City		
	Human Resources	2005
	Information Technology	2005
	Finance	2005
	Operations	2005
	Purchasing	2006
	Curriculum and Instruction	2006
	Program Implementation	2007
	Stimulus Planning	2009
Little Rock		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2010
Los Angeles		
	Budget and Finance	2002
	Organizational Structure	2005
	Finance	2005
	Information Technology	2005
	Human Resources	2005
	Business Services	2005
Louisville		
	Management Information	2005
	Staffing study	2009
Memphis		
	Information Technology	2007
Miami-Dade County		
	Construction Management	2003
	Food Services	2009
	Transportation	2009
	Maintenance & Operations	2009
	Capital Projects	2009
	Information Technology	2013
Milwaukee		
	Research and Testing	1999
	Safety and Security	2000
	School Board Support	1999
	Curriculum and Instruction	2006
	Alternative Education	2007
	Human Resources	2009
	Human Resources	2013

	Information Technology	2013
Minneapolis		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2004
	Finance	2004
	Federal Programs	2004
Nashville		
	Food Service	2010
Newark		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2007
	Food Service	2008
New Orleans		
	Personnel	2001
	Transportation	2002
	Information Technology	2003
	Hurricane Damage Assessment	2005
	Curriculum and Instruction	2006
New York City		
	Special Education	2008
Norfolk		
	Testing and Assessment	2003
	Curriculum and Instruction	2012
Orange County		
	Information Technology	2010
Philadelphia		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2003
	Federal Programs	2003
	Food Service	2003
	Facilities	2003
	Transportation	2003
	Human Resources	2004
	Budget	2008
	Human Resource	2009
	Special Education	2009
	Transportation	2014
Pittsburgh		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Technology	2006
	Finance	2006
	Special Education	2009
Portland		
	Finance and Budget	2010
	Procurement	2010
	Operations	2010
Prince George's County		
	Transportation	2012
Providence		
	Business Operations	2001
	MIS and Technology	2001

	Personnel	2001
	Human Resources	2007
	Special Education	2011
	Bilingual Education	2011
Reno		
	Facilities Management	2013
	Food Services	2013
	Purchasing	2013
	School Police	2013
	Transportation	2013
	Information Technology	2013
Richmond		
	Transportation	2003
	Curriculum and Instruction	2003
	Federal Programs	2003
	Special Education	2003
Rochester		
	Finance and Technology	2003
	Transportation	2004
	Food Services	2004
	Special Education	2008
San Diego		
	Finance	2006
	Food Service	2006
	Transportation	2007
	Procurement	2007
San Francisco		
	Technology	2001
St. Louis		
	Special Education	2003
	Curriculum and Instruction	2004
	Federal Programs	2004
	Textbook Procurement	2004
	Human Resources	2005
St. Paul		
	Special Education	2011
	Transportation	2011
Seattle		
	Human Resources	2008
	Budget and Finance	2008
	Information Technology	2008
	Bilingual Education	2008
	Transportation	2008
	Capital Projects	2008
	Maintenance and Operations	2008
	Procurement	2008
	Food Services	2008
	Capital Projects	2013

Toledo		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
Washington, D.C.		
	Finance and Procurement	1998
	Personnel	1998
	Communications	1998
	Transportation	1998
	Facilities Management	1998
	Special Education	1998
	Legal and General Counsel	1998
	MIS and Technology	1998
	Curriculum and Instruction	2003
	Budget and Finance	2005
	Transportation	2005
	Curriculum and Instruction	2007
	Common Core Standards	2011
Wichita		
	Transportation	2009