

June 30, 2015

Dear Mayor Maher and Superintendent Young,

Please find attached a final draft of an equity action framework for the Cambridge Public Schools. As you both know, since attending the MSAN Researchers and Practitioners Council meeting last October with CPSD cabinet members, I have been engaged in a project to develop a framework and strategies that would increase equity and close so-called achievement gaps in the district. I am appreciative of the time you spent with me in November discussing the scope of this project and I'm now proud to present you with a final draft of my work.

The framework is composed of ten goals which were developed based on Dr. Young's stated priorities, School Committee goals, and best practices and empirical research in the educational equity literature. I am grateful to the Superintendent and his cabinet, especially Lori Likis, Maryann MacDonald, and Jessica Huizenga, for their support, insight, and contributions to this work.

Since the framework builds on work already underway in the district, it's my hope that it can serve as a way to guide equity work in a coordinated and interlocking fashion. I am interested in hearing your feedback and how you think this work might be helpful in Cambridge. I believe it could be useful in developing a comprehensive equity action plan that the administration and School Committee could both use to guide their work on behalf of the students of Cambridge.

I hope this framework is in line with your expectations, and I look forward to continuing the conversation with you on how to make it better and move it forward. Thank you both for the opportunity to work on this project, I am grateful for your trust in me, the resources you provided, and your continued commitment to equity in our city and school district.

Sincerely,

Edward Byrne
Coordinator of Student Diversity Programs, CRLS &
Aide to the Mayor

Bridging Educational Equity and Excellence:

A Plan to Raise Academic Achievement and Close Gaps in the Cambridge Public Schools

Draft: June 30, 2015

Executive Summary

This plan identifies ten goals and accompanying strategies for the Cambridge Public Schools that if pursued, would over time help the district become more equitable. The goals are developed from the educational equity literature, best practices, and the stated goals and interests of the School Department administration and elected School Committee. This plan attempts to harness the work that should be done to make schools more equitable for students, and the work that can be done given the political context and possible policy approaches. The plan is organized to build on work already in progress and illuminate other avenues of work that would help the district reach its equity goals. This framework is a comprehensive approach to equity development that is cross-functional/departmental with focus on vision, personnel, curriculum and instruction, and support services. This equity framework is intended to create more coordination, understanding, and accountability for all stakeholders interested in improving outcomes for all students and eliminating disparities.

Table of Contents

Introduction 4

Goals and Strategies:

Vision 6

Leadership 7

Educators 8

Curriculum and Instruction 9

Resource Distribution 11

Student Supports..... 13

Community Partnerships 14

Parent & Family Relationships 15

Early Childhood 17

Basic Life Needs 18

References 19

Introduction

At the core of this plan is a set of ten goals that if actively pursued would bring the Cambridge Public Schools closer to its vision of equity and achievement for all students. These goals were created out of best practices and what is considered necessary for an equitable school district, observed deficiencies in the equitable provision of education, and the Superintendent of Schools and Cambridge School Committee's stated goals and priorities. These major inputs position the plan at the intersection of what should be done and what can be done.

Some of the work outlined in this document is already underway in the district. This plan serves to build on that work, and in some cases, reframe the work through an equity lens. The plan also identifies new avenues of work that are critical for a comprehensive educational equity plan. The purpose of this plan is to bring together, in a coordinated fashion, all the necessary elements to achieve educational equity, increase educational outcomes for all students and close gaps.

The inspiration in format for this plan comes from the work of Dr. Carroll Blake when he was running the Office of the Achievement Gap at the Boston Public Schools. This plan differs in many aspects including the content of the goals, the challenges addressed, and other aspects; but the format proved useful to organize a set of equity goals for Cambridge.

This plan creates multi-department/functional goals instead of department-specific goals. Organizationally, this could make implementation of the plan's strategies harder, but one of the problems this plan attempts to address is making equity work less siloed, and more collaborative, visible, coordinated, and urgent across the organization.

The plan also attempts to address transparency and raise awareness of equity-focused work already happening in CPSD. Equity conversations, and thus the work, have stalled because there is no one, large, collaborative, and inclusive conversation about equity, but rather reactionary conversations when something inequitable rises to the surface. By putting on paper a comprehensive framework and plan, we set ambitious goals and make clear our steps to achieve them. Perhaps not every performance measure will be reached, but regular consultation with accurate data reflecting the actions steps will show us where we're making progress and where we're not.

Terms and Concepts

Equity in education can be defined as the policies, practices, programs, personnel, and resources that are required to eliminate barriers to educational opportunity and achievement for all students. It recognizes that not all students come to the education system with the same resources and abilities, and it is a school's task to provide what is necessary to get each child to a pre-defined, universal, and high-level of academic success.

From this definition of equity, we can derive three additional concepts: **equity consciousness**, **equity development** and **equity-focused leadership**. Equity consciousness is the awareness, and acceptance by educators that there is inequity in a system, and that they have a role in reproducing or eliminating inequity (Skrla, Kathryn, & Scheurich, 2009). Equity development is

the process of moving towards one's equity goal (i.e. becoming more equitable in a given domain). Equity-focused leadership is an emerging leadership framework that identifies the attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and techniques that leaders of organizations and teams utilize to achieve equity.

Measuring equity can always feel a bit subjective. There is a whole industry of equity “toolkits” and audits which can measure how equitable an organization is among a variety of domains. For the purposes of this plan, measuring will be against the definition of equity and the interim measures defined for each strategy. However, full implementation could include quantitative measures for each strategy (e.g. an amount achieved by a specified time), and a qualitative rubric for each goal—e.g. emerging equitable practice → proficient equitable practice (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014). Equity can be a moving target because the contexts, demographics, and socio-political culture of the city and district are dynamic. Measuring equity is about setting ambitious goals and having transparent and honest conversation to track progress and recognize what is not working.

Goal #1: Align community vision, School Committee leadership, and School Department administration

Rationale:

One of the difficulties of moving towards equity for Cambridge is the lack of a comprehensive plan to address the goals the district wants to accomplish not just in one year but over multiple years. The political context within which the School Department must pursue its goals, has truncated planning into 1-2 year increments to track with budget cycles and School Committee terms. Jeffrey Henig et al. find that these political contexts stymie school district change because the ambitions, interests, and agendas of the political actors force the school department to focus on immediate concerns over long-range planning (Henig, Hula, Orr, & Pedescleaux , 2000). To address equity issues, the city and district need an approach to guide the work over multiple years, terms, and personnel changes. The recent Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education District Review Report also acknowledged a mismatch between the administration's priorities and the School Committee meeting agendas (2014). A shared vision and work plan are critical for moving equity work forward.

Equity work is challenging when not all stakeholders agree with problem definitions, nomenclature, concepts, scope of work, and the empirical research behind equity practice. The district administration would benefit from articulating its vision and then a plan for equity so the community at large can better understand the challenges it is trying to solve and solutions it believes might work. Secondly, the School Committee as a body does not have a singular definition or understanding of equity development. In a recent meeting, the discussion centered on a long-held Committee goal of closing so-called achievement gaps, and in the discussion it became evident that members had different ideas and understandings about what that meant and what progress should look like for the district. In order for the School Committee to provide oversight, evaluate, and champion the school department's equity efforts, they must come to a shared understanding—and ideally agreement—of what those efforts should be and how success is measured.

Ultimately equity work must involve all voices and stakeholders and should reflect the needs and wishes of the larger community. However, the community also needs to come to terms with how some wishes like preserving the uniqueness of individual schools can be at odds with a larger district vision for equity. The School Committee must balance ideas and requests from community members with the long term vision and plan for CPSD.

Strategies:

1. The school district could adopt a comprehensive equity development plan, but would benefit greatly by creating and adopting district-wide improvement plan that addressed issues beyond the scope of equity. These action plans should have clear action steps, accountability, clearly defined outcomes, and interim measurements to gauge progress.
2. The School Committee could consider engaging in a training together or in-depth dialogue about their vision for equity development work in the district. This vision should be developed collaboratively with the administration and the community.

Goal #2: Recruit, develop, and support a diverse cadre of equity-focused leaders

Rationale:

In any organization, effective, intentional, and respected leadership is an important factor in helping a team reach its goals. In schools and school districts it's critical. School leaders in Cambridge individually and collectively must build and support teaching and learning environments that are sensitive and responsive to the cultural identities of staff, students, and families. School leaders set the tone for their communities. They should be proactive in their approach to promote a sense of urgency in the work, inspire a belief system that all students can achieve at high levels, and demonstrate accountability for the work.

District leaders have to instill in school personnel and the community that equity is a lens for every day decision-making not a long-range project. The goal of equity development work certainly lies in outcomes, but it is achieved through daily modeling and decision-making processes. This is evident in personnel decisions, coaching and professional development, supervision and evaluation, and resource allocation. School and district leaders must acknowledge that their individual decisions about personnel, budgeting, and other core competencies either further the district's equity goals or they don't. District and building leaders should be encouraged and supported to make decisions within the purview of their position to further the district's equity goals, and be asked to provide a rationale when they don't.

Strategies:

1. The school department could review and assess its recruitment, hiring, and retention strategies for central office and school-based leadership positions to make sure they are actively recruiting potential district leaders that reflect the equity development goals of the district. The department could also work to hire and retain leaders who contribute to the district's goal of a leadership that is reflective of the diversity of the Cambridge community it serves.
2. The Cultural Proficiency team could review its goals for training district and school leaders to determine the key outcomes for administrators (e.g. equitable decision-making strategies for leaders, coaching and evaluating educators' responsive practice, and equity considerations in resource allocation) and pursue a comprehensive training for all administrators.
3. Define and build equity-focused leadership measures into central office and school administrators' evaluations
4. Central office administrators could make frequent visits to schools to support school leaders and teams in implementing best practices that support equity development.
5. District leadership could regularly assesses decision-making, building and staff management decisions, and growth of school leaders under their supervision.
6. Provide time and forum for school building leaders to provide peer-to-peer insights, best practices, and problem-solving on their leadership and equity development dilemmas.
7. The Cabinet, ILTs, and teams could demonstrate the ongoing priority of equity development by including it as a regular agenda item at meetings.

Goal #3: Recruit, develop, and support a diverse, effective, and culturally competent faculty of educators

Rationale:

Dr. Jeffrey Young often says, “the most important interactions that happen every day in our school district, are the interactions between a student and their classroom teacher.” To successfully move towards a more equitable district, the Cambridge Public Schools must recruit, hire, train, evaluate, coach, and support a workforce of educators who align themselves with the district’s equity goals.

Hiring and developing the teachers who will power the district’s equity goals means being clearer about the skills and competencies required for teaching in Cambridge, but also an examination of the beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions educators and prospective educators have about who students are and what they can do. Teachers also need to be trained and coached so that they develop the deep content knowledge in their subject(s) and hone skills of their practice that are culturally responsive, facilitate equity, and drive student achievement. Educators must acknowledge that their beliefs about student abilities, expectations, and behaviors, all influence student motivation, self-esteem, effort, and academic performance. Many of these skills and techniques can be taught, trained, and coached; however educators must believe that all students can achieve at high levels.

Strategies:

1. The school department could review the policies and practices that drive the educator recruitment and hiring process to make sure the teaching workforce is reflective of the community it serves. It could also review hiring committee practices to make sure prospective educators are assessed on their beliefs and assumptions about student learning.
2. District leadership could investigate developing a more robust pipeline of potential educators through supporting and developing student-teachers and paraprofessionals who learn their practice in Cambridge as well as the feasibility of a teacher residency program. This allows the district to train and assess the teacher’s skills in a much more robust way.
3. Support the work of the High Expertise Teaching Task Force and its forthcoming recommendations to establish a coaching program that enhances teacher practice.
4. Provide professional development that explicitly addresses responsive practices, teacher-student relationship quality, growth mindset, self-affirmation, self-efficacy, stereotype threat, and pedagogy that research shows supports the achievement of students of color and students from low-income families.
5. Provide school-based professional development that focuses on changing the deficit-frame beliefs and assumptions among staff, that is based on research and connects that research to practice, and promotes the school and district norms of high expectations and levels of achievement for all students.

Goal #4: A rigorous, responsive, aligned, and equity-focused curriculum and instruction system

Rationale:

Richard Elmore writes that the factor that matters most in how much students learn is the “instructional core,” or in other words, the rigor of the curriculum, the skills and abilities of the teacher, and the engagement of the students (Elmore, 2004). Equity development in this area is about delivering consistent and challenging curriculum to every child by teachers who are responsive to student needs and care about their learning. Inequity is worsened when curriculum and instruction are delivered inconsistently across schools and vary across student sub-populations.

The district’s curriculum and instruction system can perpetuate inequity by curricular tracks; for example, the high school employs leveled courses beginning in the 9th grade, and the proposed accelerated math pathway in the upper schools—which runs the risk of resegregating students create inequity in the system. It can also increase inequity through a lack of rigor in the curriculum as well as teachers not “stretching” students beyond their present ability level. Both struggling and striving students need access to rigorous curriculum and high-quality teaching, but it’s the struggling students that get left out (Equity and Excellence Commission, 2013). Detracking in heterogeneous schools is often feared by families whose students are doing well and are in higher-tracked courses or programs. Research into schools that provided one high-track math curriculum to all students found that all students, including high achievers, did well in a mixed-achievement setting and even narrowed so-called achievement gaps associated with race and poverty (Burris, 2014).

Teachers need training and support in assessing the effectiveness of their instruction. Instructional coaching is one approach where teachers can receive support and generate ideas for their practice. Through professional development opportunities, the district needs to expose educators to emerging skills and practices that can improve their skills and abilities. The district recently co-sponsored a lecture series from Dr. Chris Emdin about instructional practice and student engagement in the sciences. One of Emdin’s key strategies is using “cogens” to support student engagement especially with students who are struggling (Emdin, 2010). While many educators in Cambridge heard his lectures, we have not found a way to effectively bring this learning back to the whole district. There is a patchwork of best practices across the district with little linkage across schools or departments.

Strategies:

1. The district could continue its focus on increasing rigor and support instructional leaders and coaches in earlier detection through assessment, observation, and reviewing student work to prevent a decline in the quality of instruction.
2. The implementation of the Curriculum Review Cycle created in 2014 is a breakthrough, ongoing, comprehensive plan to address inconsistencies and misalignment across curricula. The Review Cycle framework could be reviewed to make sure it allows for proper equity development work with each curriculum review phase.

3. The DESE District Review Report cited curriculum consistency concerns across the elementary schools. Proficiency rates vary in some cases greatly across the elementary schools. The District could prioritize curriculum alignment work from coordinators, coaches and the teachers themselves to ensure every school is using a curriculum consistently and doesn't vary among subpopulations.
4. The District could investigate ways to detrack the CRLS academic programs. Success was seen in the 9th grade physics heterogeneous classes, and expansion to additional detracked grade-levels and subjects could be considered. Teaching in "mixed-achievement" classrooms requires different teaching skills, and appropriate training and support for those teachers and teams should be provided in advance of any implemented changes.
5. The District could examine the demography of enrollment in the accelerated math pathway and set goals for ensuring enrollments are inclusive of underrepresented subgroups. While an accelerated course program for all would further equity and has shown success, the implementation plan as it currently stands runs the risk of creating a tracked middle school math program.
6. Design a repository of new, emerging, and best teaching practices that educators, coaches, and instructional leaders can access to optimize instruction and student engagement techniques. These practices should emphasize the skills that have proven effective working with sub-populations who struggle the most.

Goal #5: Facilitate equity in distribution of resources and enrollment

Rationale:

The Cambridge Public Schools has made great strides in desegregating schools through the Controlled Choice Policy, initiatives in the Innovation Agenda, and guaranteeing high levels of resources for all schools. Still, despite these efforts the distribution of students and resources in schools is not equitable.

A recent analysis by community members inventoried the demographics of students, school overall size, staffing distribution, and the median income levels of neighborhoods where a school resides for all the Cambridge Public Schools elementary schools. Their analysis concludes that because of the aforementioned factors, that our elementary schools have unequal challenges. In fact, they find that the two elementary schools with most challenges to be the Kennedy-Longfellow and the King Open, which happen to be the two level 3 elementary schools (Dexter & Brunetta, 2014). These factors are not the only ones that influence student achievement outcomes, but there are structural imbalances present.

In recent years elementary school classroom sizes in Cambridge have increased. In the 2007 school year, class size targets for grades 1-3 was 18 students. In the most recent year, caps have risen to 22 (the cap for grades 6-8 as well). While there's no magic number in the literature that proves a certain class size supports achievement, most of the literature does show that smaller class sizes are better, particularly for low-income students and students of color. (Schanzenbach, 2014) There is also variation in class sizes across the elementary schools due to overall school size and enrollment.

The Controlled Choice policy goal is to protect against the segregation of students by income and/or race/ethnicity. The policy has led to significant balancing of schools especially since the primary factor used to balance schools shifted from race to socioeconomic status. The interaction effect between the proximity consideration and popularity of attractive school choices likely is one factor that results in higher numbers of students of color and low-income students enrolling in the schools with lower proficiency rates.

Strategies:

1. The District needs to ensure that schools that need more support and/or have high numbers of high-needs students receive more staffing and resource support. While additional funds accompany level 3 status designation, the district could assess what it would actually require to support each school and allocate resources appropriately.
2. The District could review its class size targets in light of research that suggests class size matters in achievement and behavioral outcomes. These targets need to be weighed against facility and staffing considerations, and that one approach to equitable enrollment is to reduce class size targets especially in schools with higher needs populations.
3. The School Committee with the administration could review the Controlled Choice policy and examine options that it could be adjusted to yield more equitable results.
4. With higher demand for 3-year old programs, the feasibility of expanding access could be explored such as adding more 3-year old programs and adding more Special Start classrooms.

5. Examine the overall district budget to assess whether the current budgeting level is sufficient to fund the equity needs of the department.

Goal #6: Create an aligned, equity-focused system of student supports for academic needs, and social, emotional, and behavioral health needs.

Rationale:

Students don't come to school as just their academic selves, they come as a whole person, and that's whom schools educate. When a child has emotional or behavior health needs it can be a barrier to them accessing the curriculum. Students with unaddressed mental or behavior health needs are likely to be children from lower-income families. Qualified, credentialed staff equitably distributed throughout schools, such as social workers and adjustment counselors are critical in assessing student needs and providing support.

Academic and nonacademic supports need to be coordinated in order for them to have impact. Schools that have successfully closed gaps typically have created an "interdependent architecture" of academic and nonacademic supports. Successful schools not only provide access to nonacademic services, they control the provision within their schools so they can adjust the level, mix, and type of supports that lead to more positive academic outcomes (Horn & Freeland, 2015).

Cambridge has an overrepresentation of students of color involved in its school discipline systems. In recent years, the high school has worked to reduce the overall number of suspensions, but office referrals and other disciplinary outcomes still disproportionately involve students of color. Upper Schools also have disproportionality in school discipline. A recent analysis of Teen Health Survey data found that students who had been suspended from school in the past year also were more likely to report not having an adult in their lives they could trust or talk to when they have a problem (Byrne, 2014). This analysis offers an important insight into the needs of students with behavioral concerns in school.

Strategies:

1. CPS could assess the caseloads of behavioral health personnel and the needs of the student populations in schools to make sure resources are deployed equitably. These roles in particular must be integrated into the school community to build trust with students, families, and staff, and so the staff member is familiar with the school environment.
2. CPS is responding to social-emotional and behavioral needs of its elementary and upper schools by developing its own social-emotional learning framework based on a multi-tiered system of supports. While this may be sufficient, the district should make sure there is an adequate level of in-school personnel to support students and coordinate interventions.
3. CPS could explore expanding restorative practices as alternatives to other school discipline but also as a set of techniques to address social-emotional learning. This is especially necessary in the upper schools.
4. CPS could address its race disproportionality in school discipline by getting better data and analysis on school discipline, and adopt a student-centered approach to behavioral concerns.

Goal #7: Optimize community partner collaboration

Rationale:

Cambridge is fortunate to have a variety of community partners who are engaged in supporting children and families both in and outside of school. CPS can't and shouldn't have to provide every service that every child or family needs themselves, but CPS has an obligation to help all children get connected to services and programs that they need and that will help them thrive. Some community organizations who work with Cambridge youth receive a small amount of funding in the CPS budget or through a service agreement to do their work. CPS has not developed a strategic approach to engaging providers for specific needs the School Department cannot or does not provide.

There is very little information available about which students attended a program by a community partner and how successful the program was for a student or sub-population of students. It is important to understand if the students attending programs run by community partners, and funded by the school department, are students with high needs. A strategic and equitable approach would fund programs that have track-record of success working with high-needs students.

A barrier to better understanding how community partners can be helpful in developing equity is sharing information about specific students or cohorts of students between the school department and outside providers. It would be important for a classroom teacher to know how a specific student is doing in an after-school basketball club if that teacher is concerned about the student's performance in class (and vice versa). While the technology for such information sharing exists, and some cities and school districts have found effective ways to share data about youth, laws, regulations, and policies continue to inhibit the exchange of student information (The Aspire Institute, 2009).

Strategies:

1. The district could develop a strategic plan to examine the programs CPS currently funds, who gets served by the programs, and what needs are still not being met.
2. CPS could require more detailed outcome reports from community partners to better understand who the program is serving and whether it is addressing the School Department's equity vision.
3. The community partner strategic plan would inspire new types of collaboration with other city departments and community organizations. The School Department could engage in public-private partnerships where a program/service is funded outside the CPS budget, but the school department retains programmatic oversight.
4. CPS could commission outside evaluators to better understand how long-funded programs have benefited CPS students. The School Department needs to better understand which programs have been successes, and then build on those successes.
5. Community partners are critical in addressing inequity in Cambridge. CPS could explore how to optimize those relationships and share pertinent need-to-know information about common students with each other.
6. CPS could explicitly address summer learning loss by intentionally connecting students and families to summer learning opportunities and monitoring which students are not par

Goal #8: Intentionally develop meaningful relationships with parents and families

Rationale:

Parents and families who feel connected to their child's school and education have a positive effect on that child's learning (Henderson & Mapp, A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement, 2002). Some parents and families feel very comfortable calling or walking into their child's school, emailing a teacher, volunteering for a school event, etc.; but many do not. Building meaningful relationships with parents and families is a critical component to achieve educational equity.

CPS has had success with its school-based parent/family liaison role. Often these are parents or former parents of students at the school who make sure important information gets home, coordinates family involvement in events and school governance, provides information and tours of the school to prospective families, and answers questions from families and the public. Curiously, these positions were not included in the upper school program. While we don't have substantial data on how effective family liaisons have been at engaging parents, we know that family liaisons have developed and utilized effective strategies in their schools. Supporting family liaisons to continue to develop these strategies and share them with each other would yield greater results.

The district is pursuing a district-level approach to create a plan for family engagement, as advised in final recommendations from a consulting relationship with Dr. Karen Mapp. With an equity lens, this surely could help. However, recent research suggests that those parents who are hardest to build relationships with and get to participate, only become closer to schools when another parent or someone in their child's school personally invites/asks them to do something (Posey-Maddox, 2014). Family "engagement" needs to be about intentional relationship-building.

Parent and family engagement with schools is fraught with issues of race and socioeconomic status. It must be acknowledged that middle-income parent involvement is good for the school and its students, but at the same time there's a tendency to crowd out involvement by families of color and families from low-income backgrounds (Posey-Maddox, 2014). Dr. Mapp and colleagues' published advice on this topic includes helping all parents better understand the city and neighborhoods that a school's children and families reside through conversation and tours (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007). It should be noted that the family liaison and principal of CRLS, recognizing the value of this strategy, began holding some site council meetings at different neighborhood locations, and that Fletcher Maynard Academy has held conversations about race and class with parents, families, and teachers. Family relationship development must be authentic and come with a purpose.

Strategies:

1. Continue the work to develop a family engagement strategic plan with the caveat that different parents and families need different types and amounts of engagement for such an endeavor to be considered equitable.

2. Assess the effectiveness of CPS communication tactics with families (email, backpack, robocalls) and how effective they are at reaching different family demographics.
3. School leaders could find ways to helping parents and families discuss, explore, and address issues of race and income within school and neighborhood communities to break down barriers.
4. Support family liaison roles and acknowledge their experience and expertise. Add family liaisons to the upper schools, and provide forums for liaisons to share strategies.

Goal #9: Early Childhood Outreach, Readiness, and Supports

Rationale:

Last year the city convened an Early Childhood Task Force to examine the challenges, needs, and opportunities for Cambridge in helping children ages 0-4 thrive. The recommendations of that task force have not been released yet, but any equity work in CPS must give attention to how children enter the school system before they've even had one day of school.

An abundance of literature exists on the role early childhood interventions play in the child's social and cognitive development. Many cities and states have worked at finding ways to provide universal, free, PK; some have been successful while other attempts withered under the extraordinary cost and strapped state budgets. CPS has come under pressure to expand access to the PK programs it runs. Early access to rich learning environments and early intervention programs for all children, especially those from low-income backgrounds has been shown to benefit children's cognitive development and academic readiness (Reynolds, Magnuson, & Ou, 2010). There are many examples of districts who have closed gaps, and attribute the success in part to the provision of high-quality full-day PK to all beginning at age 3 (Kirp, 2013).

Demand for PK programs in the city exceeds the number of seats available. The lottery creates an illusion of fairness by leaving the selection to chance, but it does not advance our equity goals. The families that do not get a seat for their child but have the means to enroll in a private high-quality provider will do so, meanwhile families from low-income backgrounds are left with few to no viable options.

Strategies:

1. CPS could partner with the School Committee and the City to explore ways to expand access to pre-K seats in existing programs.
2. Review the recommendations from the city's Early Childhood Task Force and explore ways CPS can advance equity goals through early childhood readiness.

Goal #10: Accurately assess the basic life needs of students and families and provide, support, and/or connect to the provision of those needs.

Rationale:

School equity dilemmas don't just occur within school walls. Many students are forced to attend school every day unprepared to learn because they don't have access to basic life needs. No one is going to perform well on an exam when there isn't any food in their home, or they're so worried about where they're going to sleep tonight, or how they're going to do their homework without a computer or internet.

Many federal and state programs and laws attempt to address these issues. For instance, the McKinney-Vento Act provides transportation to school if a student is homeless and they are in a shelter out of district. The Federal School Lunch Program provides free or reduced breakfast and lunches to students whose family incomes qualify. The FCC requires cable providers to provide free or significant discounted internet to low-income homes. Still, even with these interventions, students experiencing these challenges don't perform as well academically and have higher risk of medical and mental health concerns.

Decades of research now seems to suggest that if schools only see their mission as the delivery system of academic content, it undercuts the larger goal of academic success for all students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Horn & Freeland, 2015). These students are experiencing great instability and depending on their age may be entirely on their own. CPS needs to support these students by better assessing, understanding, and addressing their challenges and connecting them to services that can stabilize and support them. The best results will be realized when the school department can integrate these basic life needs alongside the other academic and nonacademic services provided through the school.

Strategies:

1. Examine school breakfast and lunch policies to ensure no student is denied access to nutritious food due to inability to pay or lack of eligibility paperwork.
2. Study districts that have adopted more progressive or alternative strategies to providing subsidized breakfast and lunch programs.
3. Partner and support organizations like the Weekend Backpack program that fills in a gap that the school lunch program couldn't provide. Determine what other programs exist that the school department could partner with and integrated into schools.
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of homelessness services/liaisons in CPS and explore opportunities to better connect children and families to shelter and homelessness programs.
5. Develop deeper relationships with city departments and agencies that can provide services to students and families.
6. Develop communications and collateral that points students and families to resources and train school personnel on helping families access those resources.

References

- Burris, C. C. (2014). *On the Same Track*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Byrne, E. (2014). *Association of Self-Reported Youth Health and Safety Indicators on School Suspensions*. Cambridge, MA: Self-published.
- Dexter, E., & Brunetta, L. (2014). *Unequal Schools - Unequal Demographic, Staffing and Neighborhood Challenges That Create Unequal Opportunities for Low-Income Students to Learn in CPS Elementary Schools*. Cambridge: Self-Published.
- Elmore, R. (2004). *School Reform from the Inside Out*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Emdin, C. (2010). *Urban Science Education for the Hip Hop Generation: Essential Tools for the Urban Science Educator and Researcher*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Equity and Excellence Commission. (2013). *For Each and Every Child - A Strategy for Education Equity and Excellence*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Library.
- Henderson, A. T., Mapp, K. L., Johnson, V. R., & Davies, D. (2007). *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*. New York: The New Press.
- Henig, J., Hula, R., Orr, M., & Pedescleaux, D. (2000). *The Color of School Reform: Race, Politics, and the Challenge of Urban Education*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Horn, M., & Freeland, J. (2015). *The Educator's Dilemma: When and How Schools Should Embrace Poverty Relief*. Lexington, Mass. : Clayton Christensen Institute.
- Ishimaru, A., & Galloway, M. (2014). Beyond Individual Effectiveness: Conceptualizing Organizational Leadership for Equity. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 93-146.
- Kirp, D. (2013). *Improbable Scholars - The Rebirth of a Great American School System*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2014). *District Review Report*. MALDEN: MA DESE.
- Posey-Maddox, L. (2014). *When Middle-Class Parents Choose Urban Schools*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Reynolds, A. J., Magnuson, K. A., & Ou, S.-R. (2010). Preschool-to-third Grade Programs and Practices: A Review of Research . *Children and Youth Services Review* , 1121-1131.

Schanzenbach, D. W. (2014). *DOES CLASS SIZE MATTER?* Boulder: National Education Policy Center.

Skrla, L., Kathryn, M., & Scheurich, J. (2009). *Using Equity Audits to Create Equitable and Excellent Schools*. Corwin.

The Aspire Institute. (2009). *Shared Youth, Shared Strategies*. Wheelock College. Cambridge: The Mayor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Middle School Youth.