



Eliminating the Achievement Gap Policy Statement

The Boston Public Schools is strongly committed to maintaining high expectations for all students and to eliminating persistent disparities in achievement and performance among subgroups based on race, ethnicity, language or disability. The School Committee and the Superintendent firmly believe that these disparities are unacceptable. Therefore the Boston Public Schools is resolved to eliminating disparities in achievement and performance between subgroups and achieving academic proficiency for all students.

All policies and practices will reflect the goals of eliminating achievement gaps and achieving academic proficiency, explicitly and emphatically. By purpose and design, the district will advance these goals by developing cultural competence, ensuring uniformly high expectations, promoting rigorous curricula, differentiating instruction, and maximizing access for all students to high-level educational opportunities. Given the urgency of this mission, the district is committed to developing a diverse cadre of educators and administrators, ensuring proper emphasis on culturally responsive service delivery, and rigorously examining and monitoring policies, programs, practices, and written documents to ensure that these goals are implemented.

All staff must understand how their positions contribute directly or indirectly to these goals, develop the knowledge and skills needed in their areas of influence to serve diverse students and families, and be accountable for implementing a plan that will achieve these goals. It is expected that district and the entire school community will engage students and families, the private sector, faith-based groups, community-based organizations, and higher education institutions to work in concert to support all of our youth in achieving academic proficiency.

Boston Public Schools
Comprehensive Achievement Gap Plan
Executive Summary of Goals

Goal 1 - Alignment of Policies and Plans with the District Achievement Gap Policy: Adopt and maintain an Achievement Gap Policy that institutionalizes the *district's commitment* to ensuring success for all students and closing the gaps in achievement among the various subgroups as a *primary and urgent priority*. Ensure that all district, school and departmental policies, procedures, department and school plans, and instructional settings reflect that priority in all aspects of their operation.

Goal 2 - Diverse, Culturally Competent Leadership: Develop diverse, culturally competent leadership at all levels; support district *administrators in leading the work* of eliminating the achievement gap; and *set the tone for raising expectations* district-wide.

Goal 3 - Beliefs, Attitudes and Expectations of Student Proficiency: Develop *the beliefs, attitudes, and expectations* of staff that *academic success is possible* and achievable for all students. Integrate in a conscious manner the aspects of teaching and learning that go beyond the technical skills related to instruction.

Goal 4 - Supportive, Professional Learning Communities: Promote school cultures of high achievement that are grounded in high expectations and mutual respect and that show evidence of staff support for removing the impediments to equal access to opportunity for traditionally challenged populations. Use a “whole school approach” to foster *positive, safe, respectful and nurturing school environments that have high standards for student achievement* and build the capacity of schools to ensure that those *same standards are maintained* for all students regardless of program or subgroup.

Goal 5 - Rigorous, Culturally Relevant Teaching and Learning: *Equip educators with the variety of instructional strategies required to address the broad range of student achievement levels, learning, behavioral and communication styles.* Ensure that the curriculum and instruction in all subjects at all levels are rigorous and culturally responsive to the backgrounds, interests, languages, abilities, and learning styles of our diverse students; differentiate instruction to meet the strengths as well as the needs of our students; and build relationships with students through which instruction can be effective.

Goal 6 - Culturally Relevant and Responsive Practices: Ensure that cultural sensitivity and cultural competence are embedded in all aspects of curriculum and instruction so that educators focus on and are sensitive to the strengths and the needs of our students; develop the capacity of school and department leaders, instructional and support staff to embed the principles of culturally relevant service delivery into the overall operation of their respective school or departments.

Goal 7 - Professional Development for Closing the Achievement Gap: Ensure human and materials resources and approaches reflect the socio-cultural characteristics and needs of the populations served. Provide professional development that allows staff at all levels to develop cultural competence; ensure that all academic professional development promotes culturally responsive differentiated instruction and building relationships with students.

Goal 8 - Partnerships in Family and Community Engagement: Use culturally relevant family engagement strategies to ensure that families are treated as equal partners in the educational process and to build meaningful relationships; promote the expansion of partnerships with community stakeholders to create an atmosphere of mutual support and commitment to all students achieving proficiency.

Goal 9 - Human Resources: *Recruit, hire, train and retain a diverse cadre of educators and support staff who are not only proficient in their areas of expertise but also committed to:*
1) working with urban youth, 2) establishing positive relationships with students, families and colleagues and, 3) ensuring that all students achieve proficiency.

Goal 10 - Equity in Operations: Examine and ensure equity in the kind and quality of services provided to students and staff at all school sites in the areas of school facilities, maintenance, transportation, food services, and other related support that impact instruction.

Goal 11 - Assessment and Accountability for Performance: Use a *variety of assessments to measure student and staff progress* and monitor the district's systematic attainment of the achievement gap goals as well as the institutionalization of successful practices. Establish clear performance standards for staff and for programs related to eliminating the achievement gap. Hold staff accountable to these standards through performance appraisal. Hold programs accountable through program evaluations.

Goal 12 - Adequate Funding: *Secure and allocate appropriate resources* and sustain funding to provide the professional development and other services needed to support the work on eliminating the achievement gap.

Boston Public Schools Comprehensive Achievement Gap Plan

Boston Public Schools has major, persistent gaps in achievement and performance between students based on race, ethnicity, language and disability. Review of schools across the country and within Boston Public Schools that have closed the achievement gaps for underperforming subgroups suggests that they share common elements that distinguish them from schools that have not yet attained success. Those elements include: 1) insistence on high expectations, 2) use of performance data to drive educational decision-making, 3) clearly articulated and focused improvement plan, 4) high-quality leadership, 5) school cultures that embed cultural competence, 6) multifaceted formal and informal models of targeted professional development, 7) alignment of curriculum to standards, and 8) family and community engagement. It is essential that BPS and each of its schools align their missions, plans, and practices with the elements of school cultures that have demonstrated success in systematically closing the achievement gap and by incorporating each of these elements in its delivery of services.

In May 2004, Superintendent Payzant gave a presentation to the School Committee and the community identifying specific BPS gaps including the 13 strategies the district would use to close the Achievement Gap (see attached 13 strategies). Using these strategies as guidance the Achievement Gap Committee has developed the following comprehensive Achievement Gap (AG) Plan to ensure the district accomplish the goal of closing the current gaps for Black and Latino students, English Language Learners and students with disabilities. The goals and strategies that follow address in detail each of the critical areas required to ensure a comprehensive delivery system that is committed to all students achieving proficiency and maximizing their potential. Upon adoption of the AG Policy and approval of the below AG Plan, the Achievement Gap Committee will work with department heads and school leaders to craft and ensure an implementation plan.

Alignment of Policies and Plans with the District Achievement Gap Policy

Goal 1: Adopt and maintain an Achievement Gap Policy that institutionalizes the *district's commitment* to ensuring success for all students and closing the gaps in achievement among the various subgroups as a *primary and urgent priority*. Ensure that all district, school and departmental policies, procedures, department and school plans and instructional settings reflect that priority in all aspects of their operation.

The mission of the district to close the achievement gap and ensure that all students achieve proficiency must be evident in all aspects of the district's operations. Policy statements serve as a guide for all stakeholders in setting priorities and as a basis for evaluating the appropriateness of proposed interventions and/or instructional strategies.

Strategies:

1. Administration will develop an achievement gap policy for adoption by the School Committee.
2. Schools and departments will regularly review current policies and procedures to ensure that the language reflects the district focus on closing the achievement gap and make revisions as necessary to address this priority.
3. The district will employ systematic methods for monitoring the performance of school leaders and department heads to ascertain their progress toward achieving the identified goals in maximizing outcomes for subgroups. Successful practices will be documented and shared throughout the district as strategies to replicate on a larger scale.

Diverse, Culturally Competent Leadership

Goal 2: Develop diverse, culturally competent leadership at all levels; support district administrators in leading the work of eliminating the achievement gap, and set the tone for raising expectations district-wide.

The importance of focused and consistent leadership at all levels of the educational system cannot be underestimated if one is to be successful. Leadership must design learning communities where cultural sensitivity and cultural competence are the norm and services provided are responsive to the socio-cultural characteristics of the students and families served. Educational leaders will model a belief in high expectations for all students where failure is never accepted as an option. Moreover, they must employ deliberate, proactive, and culturally relevant strategies to enlist others in the district and school-wide vision of ensuring educational equity for students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Strategies:

1. District and school leadership teams will demonstrate the continuing priority of closing the achievement gap by having it as a regular agenda item.
2. A multidisciplinary leadership group will be formalized to guide and oversee the implementation of the achievement gap work.
3. All directors will ensure coherent, connected and integrated coordination of the achievement gap efforts that goes beyond isolated, unrelated activities.
4. A senior level position will be created with the responsibility of leading the implementation of the Achievement Gap Policy and Plan.

Beliefs, Attitudes and Expectations of Student Proficiency

Goal 3: Develop the beliefs, attitudes, and expectations of staff that academic success is possible and achievable for all students. Integrate in a conscious manner the affective aspects of teaching and learning that go beyond the technical skills related to instruction.

*The first step in maximizing educational outcomes is having high expectations and supporting the belief that low-performing students can master challenging academic standards. Teachers' standards, expectations and behaviors have an impact on student motivation, engagement, and academic performance. Educators must **believe** that students can achieve at high levels and build relationships to reach students untapped potential to ensure that their pedagogy becomes a natural component of students reaching proficiency.*

Strategies:

1. The district will raise the levels of consciousness and receptivity of educators about the unique characteristics, multiple backgrounds, perspectives and world views that culturally different youth bring to schools.
2. The Institute for Professional Development and all other professional development opportunities will include offerings that focus on changing any negative beliefs and attitudes among staff members as a vehicle for raising their expectations for high levels of student achievement for all.

Supportive, Professional Learning Communities

Goal 4: Promote school cultures of high achievement that are grounded in high expectations and mutual respect and that show evidence of staff support for removing the impediments to equal access to opportunity for traditionally challenged populations. Use a “whole school approach” to foster *positive, safe, respectful and nurturing school environments that have high standards for student achievement* and build the capacity of schools to ensure that those *same standards are maintained* for all students regardless of program or subgroup.

Fostering professional learning communities for all educators is essential to create an atmosphere of collegiality, accountability and mutual growth. These are environments where the emphasis on culturally relevant and responsive education and closing the achievement gap is explicit but also embedded as an integral part of the educational delivery system. Positive interpersonal relationships among adults that value multiple perspectives, engaging in courageous conversations and increasing knowledge about students and colleagues are critical to maximizing a staff’s ability to work with challenged and challenging populations. In addition, the sharing of successful strategies and interventions in all district departments and schools should serve as a vehicle for encouraging a culture of collaboration about practice as well as for celebrating and replicating the successes.

Strategies:

1. Schools will create positive climates that foster mutual respect and cultures of high achievement as evidenced by staff support in removing the impediments to equal access to opportunity for traditionally challenged populations.
2. Adults will model behavior that supports what we expect of children and builds in accountability for respectful professional conduct in relationships with students and colleagues.

Rigorous, Culturally Relevant Teaching and Learning

Goal 5: *Equip educators with the variety of instructional strategies required to address the broad range of student achievement levels, learning, behavioral and communication styles. Ensure that the curriculum and instruction in all subjects at all levels are rigorous and culturally responsive to the backgrounds, interests, languages, abilities, and learning styles of our diverse students; differentiate instruction to meet the strengths as well as the needs of our students; and build relationships with students through which instruction can be effective.*

The underlying philosophy of an instructional delivery system that maintains high standards and high expectations for achievement for all students must be one that acknowledges and affirms that students who may not have yet reached proficiency arrive with the cultural capital that, when combined with a culturally responsive, rigorous curriculum, and meaningful connections with educators and students can achieve consistent academic improvement. Culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogy involve instructional practices that demonstrate a deep understanding of the socio-cultural groups served by the district and methodologies for embedding this pedagogy into content area instruction. In addition to adapting instruction to accommodate the wide range of student needs, the curriculum should provide opportunities for students to learn about the cultures, histories, experiences and contributions of diverse groups.

Strategies:

- 1) The district will examine all of the relevant aspects of service that directly or indirectly impact the quality of curriculum and instruction, the improvement of student performance to ensure they promote the priority of closing the performance gap between subgroups.

- 2) Program Directors and school staff will increase student engagement and motivation by emphasizing the critical role of relationship building as a means of making instruction relevant to all students.
- 3) The district, Program Directors and school staff will review curriculum content to ensure that it reflects the socio-cultural characteristics of the populations served.
- 4) Program Directors and school staff will ensure that the instructional process is culturally relevant and differentiated to accommodate the wide range of students' preferred learning styles, communication and behavioral styles, linguistic characteristics and achievement levels.
- 5) The district will increase opportunities and expectations for underrepresented students to have greater access to higher level classes and educational experiences offered including but not limited to Advanced Work Classes, Advanced Placement courses, admission to and retention in exam schools and participation in district academic competitions.
- 6) District and school leaders will ensure that the human and materials resources available to the most challenged populations are maximized to improve their performance.
- 7) The district will foster a data driven culture that employs systematic methods for monitoring the performance acquisition of skills by all subgroups at all levels.
- 8) Staff will integrate skill-building in cultural competence and the goal of closing the achievement gap into the Dimensions of Effective Teaching and ensure that all professional development for instructional staff will be aligned with and embedded in the Dimensions.

Culturally Relevant and Responsive Practices

Goal 6: Ensure that cultural sensitivity and cultural competence are embedded in all aspects of curriculum and instruction so that educators focus on and are sensitive to the strengths and the needs of our students; develop the capacity of school and department leaders, instructional and support staff to embed the principles of culturally relevant service delivery into the overall operation of their respective school or departments.

The focus on cultural sensitivity and cultural competence must be an integral part of curriculum and instruction and the district must develop the capacity of school and department leaders and instructional staff to imbed the principles of culturally relevant service delivery into the overall operation of their respective settings. This process is one that regards educators as learners who are committed to increasing their knowledge and appreciation of the socio-cultural characteristics of the population served and utilize that information to inform educational practice.

Strategies:

- 1) School and department leaders will ensure that the focus on cultural sensitivity and cultural competence are embedded in all aspects of curriculum, instruction, and support services.
- 2) The district will model and foster a culture that encourages openness in sharing feelings and the multiple perspectives that each person brings to the table. BPS will engage in difficult areas of discourse to address any impediments to achieving the desired goals.

Professional Development for Closing the Achievement Gap

Goal 7: Ensure human and materials resources and approaches reflect the socio-cultural characteristics and needs of the populations served. Provide professional development that allows staff at all levels to develop cultural competence; ensure that all academic professional development promotes culturally responsive differentiated instruction and building relationships with students.

Given the diversity of Boston students in race, ethnicity, language, learning and behavioral styles and achievement levels, professional development will ensure mastery not only of curriculum and instruction but also of the relationships required for effective teaching and learning. To ensure that all students have equal access to the resources needed to achieve proficiency irrespective of the differences they bring, professional development will prepare and support educators in developing the cultural

competence required to understand and value the diversity of students and families, to demonstrate high expectations for all students and to differentiate instruction so that all can meet high standards.

Strategies:

- 1) Professional development planners will focus on building the capacity within district schools and departments to provide more specialized professional development in a variety of areas in which the principles of culturally relevant and responsive education and closing the achievement gap are explicit but also embedded as an integral part of the educational delivery system.
- 2) All departments will focus on collaboration and teamwork among various entities to ensure that resources are integrated and that professional development offerings are the product of joint efforts where possible to maximize outcomes and to be more cost effective.
- 3) Staff will design a professional development orientation package that ensures new staff members are inducted into the vision and culture of the district in a manner that builds commitment to the goal of closing the achievement gap. They will design and implement a multiyear professional development package for new teaching staff that includes a primary focus on culturally relevant and responsive education for urban youth.
- 4) The district will take advantage of the expertise available throughout the country and in local colleges and universities to ensure that we use consultants who are knowledgeable about the needs of urban students of color and other populations served.
- 5) Staff will develop materials and methods that address issues of beliefs, attitudes and expectations that incorporate student and community voices as sources of knowledge as a vehicle for improving student-student and student-staff relationships.
- 6) Staff will develop and implement a process for the solicitation and dissemination of successful practices and celebrations of success related to the goal of closing the achievement gap.
- 7) The district will ensure that coaches and support staff who represent the primary professional development strategy of the district are experts not only in curriculum and instruction but also in building relationships, cultural competence, differentiating instruction for diverse learners and employ relevant principles of adult learning in working with educators.
- 8) Staff will monitor and evaluate the outcomes of professional development offerings to ensure that learning objectives are met, including not only immediate feedback on satisfaction with professional development activities but also assess changes in attitudes, beliefs, expectations, teaching practices and, most importantly, in student performance.

Partnerships Family and Community Engagement

Goal 8: Use culturally relevant family engagement strategies to ensure that families are treated as equal status partners in the educational process and to build relationships with families; promote the expansion of partnerships with community stakeholders to create an atmosphere of mutual support and commitment to all students achieving proficiency.

The characteristics of families and communities will be regarded as help in achieving positive educational outcomes. BPS will recognize, understand, and capitalize on the strengths that families and community members can bring to the teaching/learning process. Establishing meaningful relationships with families whose values and expectations may be different from those traditionally expected by the schools must begin with a belief in the premise that families are the primary caretakers and educators of their children and desire them to be successful. District departments and schools must adopt a family friendly approach to service delivery based on a strength rather than a deficit model in assessing and responding to the unique needs of the families served and focus on removing any impediments to positive relationships between educators and community members in order to accommodate the wide range of students served.

Strategies:

- 1) District and school staff will employ culturally relevant and responsive family and community engagement strategies in which the unique characteristics of the socio-cultural community environment are used to empower families to become more effective in negotiating the system.

- 2) Schools will help parents advocate and support their children by regularly communicating the resources available to them, offering increased culturally relevant opportunities to learn about, engage in and support instruction and school programs.
- 3) The district and schools will host forums to both inform and solicit input from family and community members about school-related issues and to serve as a vehicle for maximizing communication between educators and the community.
- 4) The district and schools will promote partnerships with community stakeholders to create an atmosphere of mutual support and commitment to mutually beneficial goals where families and community are regarded as part of the extended family of the schools they serve.
- 5) The district will design a process for regular communications with staff throughout the district and the broader community to demonstrate its continuing focus on the priorities related to closing the achievement gap.

Human Resources

Goal 9: *Recruit, hire, train and retain a diverse cadre of educators and support staff who are not only proficient in their areas of expertise but also committed to: 1) working with urban youth, 2) establishing positive relationships with students, families and colleagues and, 3) ensuring that all students achieve proficiency.*

A significant component in closing the achievement gap is the assurance that all students will be provided with instructional and support staff who are knowledgeable, competent and committed to high standards for all students. The recruitment, placement, retention and promotion of staff should be grounded in a deep commitment to ensuring that those who are most challenged by the traditional educational delivery system are provided with the highest quality staff who are sensitive to the unique characteristics of urban youth, competent in their areas of expertise and open to new learning about the strategies for closing the achievement gap between the subgroups in the populations they serve.

Strategies:

- 1) Human Resource staff will participate in cultural competency training related to personnel issues.
- 2) The district will review procedures for the screening, selection and orientation of prospective staff members to ensure that they include the necessary elements to determine that employees demonstrate competency in working with urban youth and commitment to the goal of closing the achievement gap.
- 3) The district will create a criteria for advancement to higher level positions that includes an assessment of candidates' beliefs and attitudes as evidenced by observed behaviors that demonstrate their level of commitment to the goal of closing the gap as well as competencies in areas related to cultural sensitivity, cross-cultural communication and knowledge of the cultural characteristics of the student populations and families served.

Equity in Operations

Goal 10: *Examine and ensure equity in the kind and quality of services provided to students and staff at all school sites in the areas of school facilities, maintenance, transportation, food services and other related support that impact instruction.*

The quality of the environments in which students learn has an impact on student engagement, motivation and belief in the institution's commitment to their success. It is important that school facilities are clean, well-maintained and conducive to learning throughout the district and that disparities in the kind, quality and maintenance of learning environments available to students be minimized. In addition, services that impact teaching and learning such as Transportation and Food Services and related services need to be examined to ensure that they are culturally sensitive and enhance rather than inhibit equal access to high quality educational options.

Strategies:

- 1) Facilities Directors and staff will examine and correct any disparities among school facilities to ensure that all students have comparable environments in which to learn.
- 2) Facilities Directors and staff will provide a system of oversight that ensures that those who are responsible for facilities do so in a manner that provides equally well-maintained facilities for all students.
- 3) Transportation staff will conduct a comprehensive analysis of the transportation system to determine if there are inequities in the manner in which schedules are allocated and student behavior is managed. With the assistance of appropriate staff professional development will be provided for bus drivers and bus monitors.
- 4) Food service Directors and staff will demonstrate sensitivity and responsiveness to the dietary needs and desires of young people and the specific dietary restrictions of newly arrived immigrant populations and make modifications in food offerings where appropriate.

Assessment and Accountability for Performance

Goal 11: Use a variety of assessments to measure student and staff progress and monitor the district's systematic attainment of the achievement gap goals as well as the institutionalization of successful practices. Establish clear performance standards for staff and for programs related to eliminating the achievement gap. Hold staff accountable to their standards through performance appraisal. Hold programs accountable through program evaluations.

Ongoing assessment is critical to monitoring the success of the achievement gap goals and bringing all students to proficiency. All Boston Public School employees must be held accountable to their role in closing the achievement gap by establishing and monitoring clear and measurable performance standards. NCLB/AYP has also provided us the opportunity to look at our district through the lens of each individual subgroup's level of progress. The existence of an assessment and accountability system to monitor our schools and departments will help us identify students' learning needs and successful district strategies.

Strategies:

- 1) The district will provide an easily accessible formative and summative assessment system to assure student's academic performance is regularly monitored and will support all subgroups to reach their academic potential.
- 2) The district will make clear the goal of closing the achievement gap by holding staff accountable at every level of the organization by introducing performance standards related to this goal.
- 3) The district will evaluate all programs and departments, in part, by how they support schools in the goal of closing the achievement gap.

Adequate Funding

Goal 12: Secure and allocate appropriate resources and sustained funding to provide the professional development and other services needed to support the work on eliminating the achievement gap.

In order to adequately educate every student, the funding to schools must be equitable and at the same time differentiated by each school's identified needs.

Strategies:

- 1) The district will secure and allocate appropriate resources for the implementation of the plan to close the achievement gap.
- 2) The district will examine and ensure that financial resources are maximized to support students not yet reaching proficiency and to close the achievement gap.
- 3) The district will maximize professional development allocations by encouraging collaboration across departments and programs and integration of offerings.