Boston Youth Transitions Recommendations   September 2022

The Youth Transitions Task Force (YTTF) is a cross-sector collective impact initiative that brings a wide array of partners together to support at-risk students, with the goal of bringing the high school dropout rate to zero. The Task Force has partnered with each BPS administration since 2004 in an effective effort – the number of dropouts has decreased from 1,827 (9.9% rate) in 2006 to 631 (4.2% rate) in 2019. Since then, the pandemic has increased disengagement from school to such a degree that we are still trying to determine the impact.

We acknowledge that we are also still trying to determine the impact of the social isolation caused by the pandemic and the current social environment of how students re-engage and recover. This unique period in history calls for new and thoughtful approaches to helping students heal and re-engage both socially and emotionally. It also calls for more individualized ways for students to catch up academically – not simply on-line credit recovery.

What follows is a list of recommendations for the BPS based on evidence, the experience of the frontline youth workers and educators on the Task Force, and our history of collaborative implementation with district leaders. We start with the highest need, those most disengaged, and then move to recommendations that speak to prevention or Tier 1 and 2 interventions. **Priority recommendations are highlighted in bold type.**

1. Re-Engagement

- o Continue to reach out to dropouts and chronic absentees to re-engage them into the Boston Public Schools.
- o Document the reasons they left school and what happens when they try to re-engage, to determine social support needs.
- o **Analyze the cohorts of youth re-engaging at the REC to inform district planning.**

2. Alternative education options

Priority focus for alternative education programs should be on aligning programs to the profile of off-track students in the BPS, providing career programming, strengthening individual case-management, and building a positive culture rooted in caring relationships at these schools.

- **Supply and demand**
  - o **Increase the number and variety of alternative education programs to:**
    - Align program models of existing alternative schools to the scale and profiles of off-track, under-served populations of students that need these programs.
    - Grow the capacity of traditional schools to implement innovative alternative practices shown to be effective with off-track students.
    - Develop alternative programs at the middle school and early high school levels.

- **Innovate instructional and support practices**
  - o Instruction
    - **Career exploration and development,** which uses occupational training, work-based learning, internships, and contextualized instruction to prepare young people in transfer schools for careers.
    - **College preparation and transition support comparable to district high schools, such as the College Advising Corps and curated use of MyCAP.**
    - **Opportunities for off-track students to accelerate progress**, through on-line, summer learning, independent study, and work-based learning.

- Assessments that identify assets and pinpoint gaps in learning.
- Project-based learning, in which students enhance planning and problem-solving skills as well as content skills.
- Consider developing a BPS high school equivalency option tailored to young adults.
  - o Support
    - **Case-management or life-coaching** to support students in overcoming barriers, proactively developing an education and career plan, and persisting with that plan.
    - Professional development and specialized training for teachers in alternative schools.
    - A greater focus on facilitating and incentivizing strong student attendance.

- **Equity**
  - o Elevate alternative schools' district leader to an Assistant Superintendent of Alternative Education who reports to the Superintendent or Chief Academic Officer.
  - o Provide strong ELL and SPED support at these schools for equity in access and experience.
  - o Improve the funding formula to provide more appropriate resources for alternative education.

3. School Culture and Student Engagement Across the District

- **Equity in student assignment**
  - o Address inequity in student assignment practices by getting input from multiple stakeholders to reform district and school policies and practices around admissions, assignment, and transfers between schools.

- **School culture**
  - o Grow a district-wide culture that values individuals and prioritizes caring relationships between staff and students.
  - o Provide supportive interventions for struggling students, rather than pushing them out.
  - o Increase case management support for youth returning from juvenile detention.

- **Student engagement**
  - o **Increase the role of student leadership** and youth voice in both school- and district-level decisions that affect the student body.
  - o **Increase the number of schools incorporating engaging instruction**, including vocational or school-to-career learning, the arts, project-based learning, and community-based learning.
  - o **Create "no wrong door" soft entry points** to identify student interest early on in secondary school.

- **School discipline**
  - o Reduce the number and rate of suspensions and expulsions.
  - o Publicly measure these rates by school level.
  - o **Increase the number of schools implementing positive alternatives to disciplinary interventions, such as restorative justice and positive behavioral intervention support.**

4. Early warning indicators

- Build a district-wide data platform and culture to support consistent, high-quality implementation of an early warning indicator system and intervention protocol.
- **Increase the number of schools that provide quality services and customized interventions** on site rather than transferring students to other schools or programs.

- Increase the number of schools using early warning indicators to identify students in need, with a trauma-sensitive and asset-based process for matching students with interventions.
- Define district-wide quality standards for Tiers 1, 2, and 3 interventions.
- Track the schools implementing EWI trauma-sensitive and culturally affirming practices and their student outcomes.
- Create a district-wide understanding of the commitment and activities needed to support students' future postsecondary activities (i.e. college completion, transition to career.