



School Committee Meeting
Superintendent/Receiver Report

June 13, 2022

Strategic Plan

We have engaged in an inclusive process to develop Holyoke's multi year strategic plan. Throughout this school year, more than 1,500 students, families, educators, staff, leaders, and community members have shared what is working in Holyoke, what needs to be improved, and their suggestions for the future. This new strategic plan reflects your collective input and identifies a strong path forward for Holyoke. I especially want to thank Mildred Lefebvre for serving on the Steering Committee and Rebecca Birks for serving on the Advisory Committee.

At the School Committee meeting, I will review the PowerPoint presentation. A booklet form, in English and Spanish, of the initial strategic plan will be available later in the week. A final strategic plan will be available in August. This plan will drive our work in the coming years, and I'm looking forward to working with you to implement and refine the plan over time. I have included below, the opening letter that will be shared in the strategic plan booklet.

Dear Holyoke Community,

I am so thankful for all the ways we have worked together in recent years to improve the lives of our students. Even since the release of my entry plan findings report in February, I have witnessed many examples of our community coming together to support our children. Our principals have created instructional designs for their schools that will address many of the challenges outlined in the report. The City Council voted to allocate \$475,000 towards a feasibility study for a new middle school building. And, the [Holyoke Hub](#) Community Mobilization Initiative was announced to coordinate wraparound services for children and families.

Importantly, more than 400 staff, family members, students, and community members have contributed to the development of our initial strategic plan, in addition to the 1,150+ people who contributed to the entry plan process. As one steering committee member shared, this strategic plan was developed “by Holyokers, with Holyokers, for Holyokers.” I couldn’t say it better myself.

Our initial strategic plan, Moving Forward Together, builds on the strengths of our past, while serving as a call to action to dramatically and urgently accelerate student learning. This requires thinking differently about how we teach, how we work together, and how we support students’ well being.

*Our vision paints a picture for the future. **HPS is a high-performing school system where students reach their full potential, educators inspire, families are partners, and the community thrives.***

*Our mission explains why we exist. **Through an equitable, high-quality education and trusting relationships, all Holyoke students develop the skills and access the opportunities to graduate high school ready for life, career, and college.***

*Every single word in the above statements were debated and carefully chosen. I hope that, in both statements, you see how we unapologetically set high expectations for ourselves as educators and for our students, while recognizing that in order to achieve these high expectations, we must work together and support each other and our students. These sentiments have led us to our new tagline, suggested by an Advisory Committee member: **Juntos Podemos! Together we can!***

I also urge you to carefully read and reflect on our equity commitments. We had a strong start with the prior equity commitments developed two years ago, but these refreshed commitments more deeply represent who we are and who we strive to become.

Over the summer, this strategic plan will become a complete strategic plan, where the details are more fully developed and articulated. We will have a larger release of the complete strategic plan in August, just in time for the start of a new school year!

Our journey will not be easy. But that’s OK. The most rewarding moments of our lives are when we come together, persevere together, and emerge stronger together. I truly believe, as former President Barack Obama said, “Ordinary people, when they are working together, can do extraordinary things.” Let’s get to work!

Juntos Podemos. Together we can!

Anthony Soto

Rezoning

As you unanimously supported at the January School Committee meeting, Holyoke Public Schools will complete the transition to discrete elementary (PK-5) and middle (6-8) schools and redraw school boundary lines for fall 2023. This decision was made after many years of soliciting stakeholder input, innovating, and planning. This plan will:

- Better prepare students academically and socially
- Ensure continuity for dual language and special education programming
- Be more equitable
- Dedicate resources to instruction, not operations

This is an inclusive process. We have formed a smaller group Rezoning Working Group, with HPS and City staff, and a larger group Rezoning Task Force, to help guide the thinking for this project. Members of this task force will:

- Learn about the past work that has led the district to the **decision of distinct elementary and middle schools** and the status of the **middle school building project**
- Inform the principles (e.g. guidelines) on how to approach rezoning decisions
- Provide expertise about their neighborhood, micro-communities within Holyoke, safe passage routes, etc.
- Offer input and feedback on various rezoning approaches

The district has also hired technical consultants (AppGeo) to lead the technical analysis of rezoning and community outreach consultants (Cynthia M. Espinosa Marrero, Nayroby Rosa Soriano, Jose Bou, Dr. Anderson) to support the district's efforts in soliciting feedback throughout the project. Erin Linville, Chief of Strategy and Turnaround, is the district's project leader, working closely with the facilities team, data team, family and community engagement team, and district leadership.

The Working Group has met five times and the Task Force has met two times. We have also solicited input on this project through three "Moving Forward" meetings I held in May and June about the strategic plan and rezoning project.

There are many factors to consider when redrawing attendance zone lines for school. From your perspective, what are the most important factors or guidelines you'd like us to consider? Tell us by taking this [2-minute survey](#).

You can learn more about our rezoning efforts by watching this [nine-minute video](#).

Update on Grading Guideline / Procedure

To: Anthony Soto, Superintendent
From: Stephen Mahoney, Assistant Superintendent
Re: Proposed grading policy for grades 6-8 for Holyoke Public Schools

Over the past 4 months we have been engaged in an analysis of middle school grading policies and practice. Over the course of multiple work sessions and meetings with teachers, expert teachers, principals, directors, and cabinet members we have sought to better understand how student grades in

middle school are determined, and then to understand how those systems align with best practice. What we have found are two essential flaws in the current state of our schools:

1. There is no consistent grading policy throughout the district's middle grades, and there is significant inconsistency within schools themselves, and
2. For the most part student grades are determined more by behavioral inputs (like participation in class discussions, answering teacher questions, on task with teacher directed classwork, and organization) much more than they are by formal assessments designed to gauge what a student knows and can do independent of teacher support, correction, and direction (like tests, quizzes, on-demand essays, presentations, etc...).

These flaws result in students and families significantly over-estimating their readiness for rigorous, standards based assessments like the MCAS (our A/B rate for MS ELA and Math is consistently and significantly greater than our MCAS meets or exceeds rate). That over-estimation plays a large role in students becoming disaffected regarding their academic performance in school. And the incoherence among the various middle grades results in increased difficulty planning for and meeting students' needs during the all important 9th grade year.

Emerging from our discussions was a strong consensus that HPS teachers and students needed and deserved a more cohesive, standards based assessment system. Fundamental agreements included the following:

- Student grades in middle school need to reflect the quality of their formal assessed work products **more** than their academic and social behaviors
- The proportional weight of those two elements of learning should be the same or close to the current weighting given at the high school campuses (80% formal assessments and 20% academic behaviors)
- Moving to a common algorithm that reflects this proportional weighting will:
 - Better reflect what students know and can do vis a vis content and skill,
 - Provide more accurate information to students and families, and to receiving teachers/schools as to what students know and can do,
 - Better prepare students and families for the expectations they will encounter in high school, and
 - Increase our school system's coherence, consistency, and, ultimately, academic equity.

Based upon our analysis I am recommending the following:

1. All middle grade classes (grades 6-8) employ a 75% to 25% formula in determining students' course grades.
 - a. 75% of that grade will be based upon student performance on formal assessments that call on students to demonstrate what they know and what they can do independent of their teacher
 - b. 25% of that grade will be based upon academic behaviors that contribute to their success in the course. Linked here are the [Habits of Work and Learning rubric](#) used by

Holyoke High School, North Campus and the [STEM Independent Learning Rubric](#) as examples of how to guide and evaluate student performance on these critical “soft skills”.

2. The HPS Academic Team will develop an articulated guide for grading that helps teachers understand what stands for a “formal assessment independent of teacher direction/support/correction” and what stands for an “academic behavior”. Included with this guide will be an articulated set of expectations for grading and communication based upon best practice. This guide will be ready for teachers, expert teachers, and school leadership by August 1, 2022.
3. The HPS data team create a default gradebook in SchoolBrains that calculates course grades based upon this algorithm.

These recommendations are based upon rich and difficult conversations with a variety of professional stakeholders. The decision to weight formal assessments less than the high school model was made in deference to the developmental needs of middle level students, who are developing the skills and mindsets called for in the academic behaviors named above. We are acutely aware that having a common formula and rubric is only part of the solution to creating a more accurate and equitable assessment system. There remains a long way to go, and many conversations to hold, before we arrive to a place where our student grades give students and families the information they need to improve their performance and be confident that they reflect their readiness for external assessments like the MCAS exams.

Summer School Update

Highlights:

The Extended Learning Department applied for an Extension Grant to include Kindergarten students in this year's summer program, and purchase curriculum and materials. First Year High School students will intern in our elementary program. This is the first year we will implement the Picturing Writing program from the Institute of Arts-based Literacy. Students in ELA and SLA will be able to illustrate and narrate their own books based on the grade level ELA standards. Students in rising kindergarten will use the Creative Curriculum which is embedded with social-emotional learning developmental content. The curriculum builds on children's confidence, creativity, and critical thinking skills through hands-on, project-based investigations. Promote discovery and inquiry with opportunities for children to think critically and develop process skills with rich, hands-on investigations of relevant and interesting topics in the classroom. Students will also attend a field trip that is TBD at this time.

Curriculum Information:

Rising Grades 1-5

ELA/SLA Curriculum: Institute for Art-Based Literacy **Picturing Writing** Introduction to Time of day (Students Illustrate and Narrate their own books to take home)

Math Curriculum: Hands 2 Mind (grade 1 only) Do the Math (grades 2-5)

Interventions: ELA: Lexia, **SLA:** Imagine Espanol **Math:** ST Math

Assessments: Beginning of Summer & End of Summer STAR

Rising Grades 6-8 GenerationTeach

ELA: Black Boy Joy and Various DEAR books

Math: ThinkLaw Math Labs

Law: ThinkLaw- Environmental Law

Engineering: Environmental Engineering-Integrated Teaching & Learning

Enrichments(1:00-2:40)

Rising K-3: Culinary, Learn in Motion, Latin Dance art and Culture, Legos & Yoga

Rising 4-5: Culinary, Theater, Myths & Monsters, Gardening, Legos and Coding w/ Ozobots

Rising 6-8: Art, Sports, Games, and Fitness

Locations, Dates and Times

Lower Elementary Kelly School: Rising Grades K-3 **July 5-August 4** Monday- Thursday 8:30-3:00

Upper elementary McMahan school: Rising Grades 4-5 **July 5-August 4** Monday- Thursday 8:30-3:00

GenerationTeach STEM School: Risings Grades 6-8 **July 5-August 5** Monday-Friday 8:20-4:00

Student will be provided with breakfast, lunch and transportation.

Site	Grades Served	School	Totals	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Lower Elementary	rising 1-3	Kelly	98	13	24	31	30					
<i>Dual Language</i>	rising 1-3	Kelly	56	12	15	17	12					
		<i>subtotal:</i>	<i>154</i>									
Upper Elementary	rising 4-5	McMahon	44					22	22			
<i>Dual Language</i>	rising 4-5	McMahon	16					7	9			
		<i>subtotal:</i>	<i>60</i>									
Generation Teach	rising 6-8	STEM	74							34	18	22
HHS North	rising 9-12		5									
HHS Dean	rising 9-12		0									
		<i>Totals:</i>	<i>293</i>	25	39	48	42	29	31	34	18	22

Total Staffing:

Teachers: 21

Paraprofessionals: 19

Enrichment Staff: 5

Site Coordinators: 4

Clerks: 3

Counselors: 3

Nurses: 4

Teach Western Mass Residents: 8

high school Interns: 10

Internship Coordinator: 1

Summer Eats Program

See attached flier with schedule and more information regarding our summer eats programming.

Summer Facilities Update

See attached for more information regarding our facilities updates.

Appendix

