



BEDFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

Superintendent Cliff Chuang Report of Entry Plan Findings – March 2024



*... Something's lost, but something's gained
In living every day
I've looked at life from both sides now
From up and down and still somehow ...
—“Both Sides Now” by Joni Mitchell*

If you need this document translated, please contact translations@bedfordps.org.
Si necesita este documento traducido, por favor comuníquese translations@bedfordps.org.
Se você precisa este documento traduzido, entre em contato com translations@bedfordps.org.
Si vous avez besoin de traduire ce document, s'il vous plaît contacter translations@bedfordps.org.
Si w bezwen tradui dokiman sa a, tanpri kontakte translations@bedfordps.org.

如果您需要翻译本文件, 请联系 translations@bedfordps.org
إذا كنت بحاجة إلى ترجمة هذا المستند إلى اللغة العربية، فيرجى الاتصال بـ translations@bedfordps.org
이 문서의 번역이 필요하면 translations@bedfordps.org 에 문의하세요.
Если вам нужна помощь в переводе этого документа, свяжитесь с translations@bedfordps.org



March 2024

Dear Bedford Public Schools Community,

It has been a great pleasure and privilege to get to know this community over the past year. As part of the entry process outlined in my [entry plan](#), I have spoken with hundreds of stakeholders of all kinds; observed hundreds of lessons and activities; attended dozens of school and community events; and reviewed reams of surveys and other data and documents. Though I certainly have much more to learn, I feel well-positioned to take advantage of this one-time opportunity to use fresh eyes to share what I have heard and found to the community, and to frame the next phase of our work together.

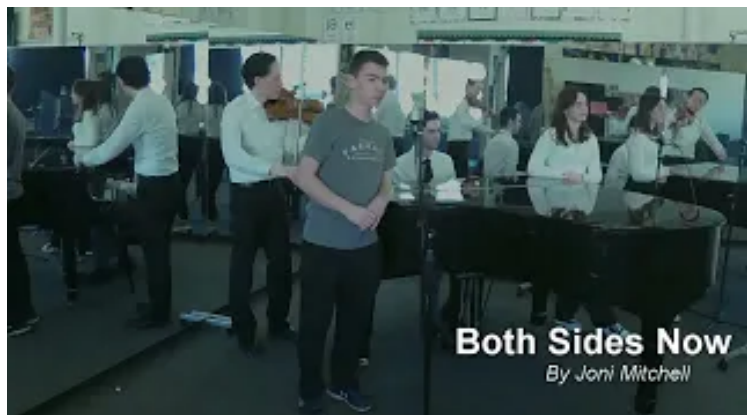
In the report that follows, I will summarize the evidence base that informed my analysis; share findings which represent a synthesis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats from all data sources; and provide a framework for the collaborative strategic planning process that will commence shortly. I know that I did not hear from all voices and perspectives during this process despite efforts to reach as many stakeholders as possible. Nevertheless, I am fairly confident that I heard from a sufficiently diverse cross-section of stakeholders to get a good pulse on the overall current state of the Bedford Public Schools. Though I fully own and stand by the findings and themes shared in this report, please note that I shared preliminary findings and received feedback iteratively from the district leadership team, instructional leadership team, full staff team (though optional virtual meetings), and the Parent Diversity Council board as part of the findings development process.

Finally, as has been my habit, I am sharing a musical collaboration (featuring BHS Senior Hayden McAllister, BHS Junior Yoana Dimitrova and Lane Music Teacher Natan Wythe) that I hope will also serve as call to action for the open-minded discourse and both/and-disposition that I am hoping for as we work together to determine strategic priorities for the next three years. I also want to thank the creative team of Choral and Theater Director Katrina Faulstich (casting). Band Director James Felker (sound engineering), and Performing Arts Director Nicole O'Toole (video) for their support. Please enjoy our rendition of [Both Sides Now](#) by Joni Mitchell (inspired by the performance/arrangement by Josh Groban and Sara Bareilles).

I look forward to hearing your thoughts and perspective as we move forward together into the strategic planning process that will culminate with a comprehensive three-year district improvement plan for 2024-2027 in fall 2024. Please feel free to email me at superintendentoffice@bedfordps.org with any questions.

Sincerely,

Cliff Chuang 莊宏毅
Superintendent of Schools



Report of Entry Plan Findings Table of Contents

<u>Evidence Base and Context for Entry Plan Findings.....</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Entry Findings.....</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Finding #1. Overall, BPS educators are dedicated, talented, and student-centered. Additionally, the people and groups in the district regularly work together productively and collaboratively.....</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Finding #2. Bedford is deeply committed to a strong, public school system and resources it accordingly..</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Finding #3. BPS provides a rich and diverse array of extracurricular offerings, charging no fees to families, with a commitment to including all interested students at all levels of skill development.....</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>Finding #4. BPS stakeholders are grappling with a “false trilemma” between rigorous academics; supporting students’ mental health; and diversity, equity, & inclusion (DEI).....</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>Finding #5. BPS Special education services are strongly praised, though many express concerns with navigating the system and staffing levels.....</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>Finding #6. The small, close-knit community culture of BPS is both an attractive feature and a challenge which can make it harder for “outsiders” to feel like they belong.....</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>Finding #7. We have more work to do to engage and support every learner.....</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>Subfinding #7a. Large achievement/opportunity gaps persist for many subgroups of students, and some current systems/structures may make it more difficult for students to progress.....</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>Subfinding #7b: Kids in “the middle” may be overlooked.....</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>Subfinding #7c: Many parents/caregivers and students (especially those who are academically advanced) are “bored” and report lack of opportunities to be academically challenged.....</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>Finding #8. The district faces several challenges related to supporting student well-being.....</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>Subfinding #8a. School start times are too early for secondary learners and too late for early elementary learners.....</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>Subfinding #8b. Parents and students express concerns about safety—both physical and emotional—which is compounded by the lack of security cameras.....</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>Subfinding #8c. Parents and students desire improvement in school meal quality and more time to eat/relax at lunch/recess.....</u>	<u>14</u>
<u>Subfinding #8d. Parents are requesting improvements to our process in supporting students with their post-secondary plans.....</u>	<u>14</u>
<u>Finding #9. BPS should consider three key opportunity areas for additional strategic investment.....</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>Subfinding #9a. Resiliency strategies as articulated by Dr. Alex Hirshberg, Psy.D. hold promise to address growing mental health needs among students.....</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>Subfinding #9b. Many students, parents, and educators are eager for more experiential learning opportunities like hands-on projects, field trips, internships, and STEM exploration activities.....</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>Subfinding #9c. Diversify our educator workforce.....</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>Finding #10. Stakeholders identified a variety of potential threats to the progress of BPS, including challenges with educator compensation/support and increased politicization in the classroom.....</u>	<u>16</u>
<u>Proposed Framework for Collaborative Strategic Planning.....</u>	<u>17</u>
<u>Next Steps.....</u>	<u>18</u>
<u>District Improvement Plan Development Timeline.....</u>	<u>19</u>

Evidence Base and Context for Entry Plan Findings

As outlined in my [entry plan](#), the “Listen, Observe, Learn” phase included three major components.

1. **Listening and Learning from Diverse Stakeholders.** I met with hundreds of stakeholders—both individually and in group settings, formally and informally—here in Bedford, in Boston, on Hanscom Air Force Base (HAFB), and virtually. These stakeholders included students, parents/caregivers, BPS educators and staff, Bedford School Committee members, family and support organizations, town officials, educational and community partners, and elected officials.¹ These conversations were enjoyable and invaluable to help me build an understanding of the Bedford Public Schools. I also solicited feedback via an [open community survey](#) conducted in September/October of 2023, in collaboration with a Harvard Graduate School of Education student research team who independently analyzed the results and summarized them for me and the BPS leadership team.² In summary, I listened and learned from:
 - 450+ community survey submissions with 2000+ qualitative responses and 5400+ quotations to which codes/subcodes were applied and independently analyzed by the research team. I also personally reviewed every single qualitative response.
 - 100+ 1-1 conversations with BPS staff members. This included conversations with every one of the 36 member leadership team; dozens of conversations with randomly selected team members from food service, instructional technology, custodial/maintenance, administrative assistants, nurses, adjustment counselors, and educational/teaching assistants and teachers from each school and department; and dozens of staff-initiated conversations.
 - Dozens of 1-1 conversations with BPS leadership team and School Committee members
 - Focus group conversations with educational/teaching assistants at each school; registrars; and custodial/maintenance staff.
 - 50+ meetings with town and community leaders/groups.
 - Dozens of 1-1 and 20+ community conversations with hundreds of parents (including [Scoops with the Supe](#), [Trail Walk & Talks](#), [Coffee & Cocoa Chats with Cliff](#)).
 - Meetings with student groups at each school.
2. **Instructional and Operational Observations.** Through the fall and winter, I committed to making myself a regular presence in and around our schools, classrooms, fields, courts, and performance spaces in order to observe teaching and learning. These observations were designed to give me an on-the-ground understanding of both instruction and operations. In summary, I observed/participated in:
 - 130+ instructional observations with each of the district’s [33 instructional leaders/evaluators](#).
 - 50+ events; see full listing at [Academic, Arts, Athletics & Community Events](#).
 - 120+ visits to Davis, Lane, JGMS and BHS (at all times of day, including arrival, lunch/recess, dismissal and before/after school).
 - Bus rides to and from Boston on September 13, 14, and 15, 2023.
3. **Data, Document, and Policy Review.** I reviewed the array of key documents, reports, and student outcome data as outlined on page 7 of my [entry plan](#) that tell their own story about the district. In

¹ I met with every stakeholder/group listed on page 6 of my [entry plan](#), with the exception of the listed local employers, a round of engagement I plan for the future. In addition, I also met with Dr. David Gellar (the district’s physician), the English Learner Parent Advisory Council and leaders at Temple Isaiah, First Parish Bedford, Bedford Interfaith Clergy Network, and the Bedford Family Connection, and with the exception for the listed local employers, a round of engagement I plan for the future.

² The community survey was conducted by Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) students Yashna Jhaveri, Mina Kao, and Hannah Morris, advised by Carrie Conaway, HGSE Senior Lecturer on Education Faculty Co-Chair, Education Policy and Analysis. I only viewed the individual responses after the independent analysis was completed, in order to better understand the results and to compare them against the other data I received/reviewed.

addition, I also reviewed and analyzed the [Challenge Success student survey](#) administered to almost every BHS student (>800) in Fall 2023, the [Student Outcome Comparison Tool](#) recently released by DESE, new customized data dashboards created by [Open Architects \(openarchitectsk12.com\)](#) for Bedford that allow for in-depth review of historical student assessment and staffing/retention data, and course registration data. I am also pleased to report that I was able to accomplish the additional goal of doing deeper dives to learn more (through additional conversations with staff and other key stakeholders) about the following areas of heightened interest and discussion which emerged during my initial transition process: METCO and HAFB partnerships; Preschool programs; the district's overall approach to social-emotional learning and restorative practices; diversity, equity and inclusion strategies; and academic leveling.

Before reporting my findings, I want to emphasize some important facets of the entry process and the structure of the findings:

- I did my very best to heed the informal motto of the New Superintendent Induction Program: *go slow to go fast*. I made a commitment to avoid any major policy changes until this entry process is complete, which I believe I have largely adhered to. That said, I want to acknowledge that two significant policy decisions were made this fall: a [shift in our literacy curriculum](#) and a [new security camera policy](#) (and [accelerated initial implementation over winter break at BHS](#)). However, it is important to note that both of these issues were already concerns raised prior to my arrival in Bedford, and as you will see in the findings below, both were top priorities for stakeholders.
- To the maximal extent possible, my inquiries during the process were **open-ended** based on a “SWOT” analysis framework to elicit feedback—asking about strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the Bedford Public Schools as outlined in Appendix A of my [entry plan](#). Though I had some sense of the kinds of issues that might emerge from this process based on the superintendent selection process and some early pre-entry conversations, my findings are based on themes that **emerged organically** from the voices of stakeholders who engaged in this process and the data/documents I reviewed.
- A myriad of topics and concerns were raised, including very general and very specific concerns. However, my findings focus on issues with **broad district-wide applicability raised by multiple individuals and types of stakeholders** that were also supported by my observations and quantitative data when available. For each finding, I provide representative comments (quotations are from the community survey unless otherwise noted), data, and/or anecdotes from my observations that provide context for each finding.
- In order to promote thematic coherence and to reduce redundancy, I've done my best to **address each main topic in only one finding**, since many stakeholders discussed the same issues in different SWOT categories or what was viewed as a strength by some was viewed as a weakness by others, etc. For similar reasons, I do not discretely categorize each finding within the SWOT framework; the nuances in the finding and accompanying context should hopefully be self explanatory.
- Finally, in my entry plan, I indicated that I would include an assessment of organizational structure and initial design thinking regarding changes, if any, needed to ensure optimal student learning. I have determined that at this time, the **district's current overall organizational structure and operational performance is sufficient to drive necessary work forward**, and I am not proposing any substantive organizational changes at this time. Accordingly, the findings in this report focus on programmatic areas raised by stakeholders.

Entry Findings

Finding #1. Overall, BPS educators are dedicated, talented, and student-centered. Additionally, the people and groups in the district regularly work together productively and collaboratively.

There is strong support for the work of our educators based on feedback gathered through the community survey and in my conversations with stakeholders, including staff, parents, and students. It was by far the top cited theme in survey data and conversations. Representative comments included:

- Parent: “The staff are extremely dedicated, responsive, and helpful to families and students, and there is a genuine sense of caring about students in all the school buildings.”
- Bedford parent: “I feel like my child is seen as an individual and that her teachers and the school staff know who she is as a person, not a random body in a classroom.”
- Boston parent: “La educación, la formación y la calidad de los profesores es lo que cualquier padre desea para sus hijos.” (Translation: The education, training and quality of teachers is what any parent wants for their children).
- JGMS student: “The teachers really do give attention to students individually and make an effort to connect with us.”
- Educator (from 1-1 conversation): We care about the students wellbeing and do everything possible to see them as their authentic selves and push rigor so they're not mediocre.

I also personally observed this dedication and focus on students through my observations and participation at events through the fall and winter. The behind-the-scenes preparation and legwork by staff for various events and learning experiences is remarkable. Here are a few examples that I had the privilege of participating in: the Nature’s Classroom 6th grade field trip, the BHS homecoming dance; the BHS/JGMS community days, all-school assemblies at Davis and Lane, and the JGMS socials, especially the fall social around Halloween time which included a massive dedication of staff time and resources to create the entertaining environment.



Caption: *The big clown welcoming students to the Haunted Hallway at the JGMS Fall Social on Friday, October 19, 2023.*

Finally, I think it’s worth noting the remarkable **absence** of broad-based criticism of “the teachers,” “the union,” “the school committee,” “the administration,” or “the town,” that I read, heard, or saw. This is also evident in the remarkable **lack** of both informal and formal grievances and complaints levied by any one party against another (e.g., union, human resources, special education, or otherwise). I have also observed and experienced strong partnerships with parent and community groups (including the School Committee!). Overall, BPS enjoys and has worked hard to establish functional, collaborative relationships across the district organizationally and between colleagues and teams. We should not take this for granted.

Finding #2. Bedford is deeply committed to a strong, public school system and resources it accordingly.

Bedford's per-pupil in-district expenditures of \$22,107/pupil (compared to \$20,134/pupil statewide) from all funds puts it just outside of the top quartile of local educational agencies in Massachusetts based on [FY22 data](#) (the most recently available comparative data). Staff and parents I spoke to repeatedly acknowledged that BPS is "well-resourced," though there are concerns about whether we can sustain this. A former parent and former BPS educator noted that "the resources available to staff and families are incredible in Bedford." An educator shared, "we are given a lot of resources to help us make our classrooms enriching and safe clean spaces." An additional indicator of appreciation for Bedford's investment in education is the extremely high proportion of resident families (along with Boston and HAFB families) who choose to enroll their children in BPS, 95%, which is among the highest in the state.³ You can explore a wide array of relevant resource data (including staffing levels) with comparable districts (e.g., by demographics or wealth) using DESE's [Resource Allocation and District Action Reports \(RADAR\)](#), but on many resource metrics, Bedford fairs generally favorably. This list of demographically similar districts was created by a RADAR algorithm, which demonstrates that Bedford is near the top in resources invested per-pupil (and also academic performance), especially when taking into account relative district wealth.⁴

Topic	2022			Enrollment (2022-23 school year)				Grade 10 MCAS (2023)			Grades 3-8 MCAS (2023)			
Org Name	Region	\$/In-district per pupil	Relative District Wealth	Total Enrollment (2022-23)	EL %	Low Inc %	SWD %	ELA % M/E	Math % M/E	ELA Avg SGP	ELA % M/E	Math % M/E	ELA Avg SGP	Math Avg SGP
Bedford	Gr Boston	20,546	96.1%	2,539	4.1	12.2	18.5	84.0	79.0	53.5	70.0	67.0	57.1	51.0
Grafton	Central	15,737	67.6%	3,080	2.6	16.7	18.5	72.0	65.0	52.8	54.0	53.0	49.6	53.9
Holliston	Gr Boston	15,364	75.7%	2,776	2.8	10.3	17.6	72.0	71.0	48.7	61.0	62.0	57.4	58.2
Marblehead	Northeast	20,029	164.3%	2,622	4.4	12.5	21.2	79.0	77.0	43.7	60.0	59.0	58.2	58.7
Medway	Gr Boston	17,645	77.1%	2,108	3.8	14.2	15.7	68.0	67.0	38.9	55.0	58.0	45.2	45.7
Mendon-Upton	Central	18,067	76.2%	2,105	3.8	15.7	16.3	68.0	60.0	61.1	44.0	46.0	48.7	53.9
Nashoba	Central	19,195	83.8%	3,051	2.5	12.3	17.7	82.0	75.0	57.4	63.0	59.0	51.7	49.7
Newburyport	Northeast	19,852	141.1%	2,155	3.8	12.4	21.5	71.0	71.0	53.0	56.0	47.0	52.4	48.7
Sharon	Southeast	18,293	80.4%	3,542	3.2	11.9	16.1	80.0	75.0	57.3	64.0	69.0	51.7	51.3
Wakefield	Northeast	18,138	95.3%	3,305	3.1	17.1	18.2	65.0	58.0	56.9	55.0	51.0	51.3	51.4
Wayland	Gr Boston	20,986	149.5%	2,754	3.8	8.1	18.1	88.0	85.0	55.7	72.0	76.0	54.5	57.8

This list of comparable districts which BPS stakeholders often compare us to also demonstrates Bedford's investment in education, despite lower relative district wealth.

Topic	2022			Enrollment (2022-23 school year)				Grade 10 MCAS (2023)			Grades 3-8 MCAS (2023)			
Org Name	Region	\$/In-district per pupil	Relative District Wealth	Total Enrollment (2022-23)	EL %	Low Inc %	SWD %	ELA % M/E	Math % M/E	ELA Avg SGP	ELA % M/E	Math % M/E	ELA Avg SGP	Math Avg SGP
Bedford	Gr Boston	20,546	96.1%	2,539	4.1	12.2	18.5	84.0	79.0	53.5	70.0	67.0	57.1	51.0
Belmont	Gr Boston	16,493	136.9%	4,378	9.8	11.1	14.3	84.0	84.0	56.6	71.0	76.0	49.5	56.2
Billerica	Northeast	19,018	83.9%	4,822	2.9	26.0	23.2	58.0	50.0	48.4	45.0	41.0	50.3	46.2
Burlington	Gr Boston	23,033	109.8%	3,412	7.2	18.2	16.3	71.0	61.0	52.0	52.0	56.0	51.5	52.5
Carlisle	Gr Boston	21,955	179.2%	601	2.5	4.5	14.0				75.0	74.0	58.1	58.5
Concord-Carlisle	Gr Boston	23,059	186.8%	1,306	0.4	7.8	18.7	85.0	80.0	61.2				
Lexington	Gr Boston	21,352	167.2%	6,845	8.5	7.6	14.7	90.0	92.0	58.3	76.0	79.0	58.2	58.9
Lincoln	Gr Boston	29,477	266.9%	1,007	4.0	12.9	20.5				54.0	51.0	50.5	51.3
Lynnfield	Northeast	17,761	109.8%	2,195	2.0	10.2	17.5	79.0	76.0	45.8	62.0	64.0	52.6	50.7
Nashoba	Central	19,195	83.8%	3,051	2.5	12.3	17.7	82.0	75.0	57.4	63.0	59.0	51.7	49.7
Sudbury	Gr Boston	20,039	121.2%	2,535	2.4	7.7	21.0				71.0	72.0	55.8	53.9
Wayland	Gr Boston	20,986	149.5%	2,754	3.8	8.1	18.1	88.0	85.0	55.7	72.0	76.0	54.5	57.8

³ [2022-23 School Attending Children Statewide Report \(mass.edu\)](#)

⁴ *Relative district wealth* represents the percentage of the district's [foundation budget](#) that the Chapter 70 school aid formula determines that the town can fund based on its wealth metrics ([Equalized Valuations \(EQV\) | Mass.gov](#) and income.

Finding #3. BPS provides a rich and diverse array of extracurricular offerings, charging no fees to families, with a commitment to including all interested students at all levels of skill development.

I have been continually impressed by the rich and diverse array of extracurricular activities offered by BPS (especially given the relatively small size of the town), along with a bona fide effort to include all interested students at all levels of skill development. The breadth of BPS' extracurricular offerings was readily apparent from my pre-entry visits in Spring 2023—there were a plethora of events to visit and see! Throughout my entry process, I have had the chance to personally learn so many new things about scoring on the rifle team, slalom, various configurations of cheer, marching band formations, art techniques, etc. This parent's comment was representative of the thoughts of many students, caregivers and staff: "The schools foster a sense of community with a broad spectrum of activities to engage all the different types of students. We have arts, drama, academic, social, sports, etc."

I chatted with dozens of parents on the sidelines of various sports events and after various performing arts concerts, and a common appreciation expressed was openness of these programs to students of all abilities. With respect to performing arts, parents appreciate the ability to begin getting instruction/lessons starting in 4th grade, and the support for exploration to switch and try new instruments (e.g., see this clip [Star Wars \(with light saber bows!\) from the JGMS Beginner's Orchestra performance](#) from the winter instrumental concert in December 2023). Many sports parents shared their appreciation that Bedford does its very best not to cut students if at all possible, allowing players of all abilities the chance to participate. I was heartened by the team camaraderie I saw at various sporting events, including the heartening support amongst teammates at a gymnastics meet I attended, no matter the skill level of the individual athlete. Swim team parents also cheered so loudly at the league championships for a senior student who decided to try swimming for the first time this year, even though that student may not have been the fastest swimmer. I appreciate how hard our administrators, arts and athletic leaders, and the myriad of coaches/advisors (mostly Bedford staff) work to create these additional learning opportunities for our students.



Caption: The BHS Marching Band at a competition in Fall 2023.

Finding #4. BPS stakeholders are grappling with a “false trilemma” between rigorous academics; supporting students’ mental health; and diversity, equity, & inclusion (DEI).

The tension between rigorous academics, supporting students’ mental health, and DEI (which align to the general focus areas of our current district improvement plan) emerged as early as my interview process for the superintendent role. The HGSE survey research team found that most respondents addressing academics were concerned about a decrease in rigor and requested academics to be prioritized more seriously (often equated with the elimination of gifted education at the elementary level or the threat of “deleveling” courses at the secondary level); however, a handful of respondents voiced that there is too much pressure to be rigorous. But the team also found that bullying, mental health, and student DEI were also prominent concerns among respondents. My conversations with parents/caregivers and community members indicate that there are strong feelings on all sides of these issues, and differing opinions on how to prioritize them, with the focus on one viewed as necessarily deprioritizing another by some. Here are some comments that represent this complex tension:

- Bedford parent: “Recently there is too much emphasis on non academic ‘social emotional’ topics. These are taking away from the core subjects like math, civics, literature. If Bedford wants to improve their test scores they need to get back to basics...Less DEI and more academics.”
- Bedford parent: “Ensuring students feel welcomed and safe in school is most certainly of critical importance, but it doesn’t need to be a choice between that and academics. I would like BPS to recommit to academic excellence and restore the school to its former prominence.”
- Bedford parent: Anxiety and stress are a growing problem in teens and even younger students. Balance in [the] value of academic skill development vs. mental health should be emphasized in actions as well as words.

Students do appear more concerned about mental health and stress based on the following Challenge Success survey data.

Which of the following changes would really improve your school experience? Pick one or two at the most.	%	#
Reduced homework load	60%	444
No homework on weekends/over breaks	55%	407
Have teachers coordinate due dates for major projects and assessments	38%	285
Opportunities for more hands-on, active learning, such as real-world projects and role-plays, debates, etc.	31%	232
Change the schedule (i.e., later start, longer passing periods, etc.)	31%	231
Improve culture and community in the school	12%	92
Other	3%	26

However, survey data also reveals that more than two-thirds of BHS students have some level of confidence in their ability to cope with stress, which is something to build from.

How confident students are in their ability to cope with stress?	%	#
Not at all confident	7%	52
A little confident	24%	179
Somewhat confident	30%	224
Quite confident	30%	224
Very confident	10%	75

Finding #5. BPS Special education services are strongly praised, though many express concerns with navigating the system and staffing levels.

Given the legal framework and process for securing special education services in Massachusetts, it can be an inherently adversarial process, where parents' expectations for individualized services for their child must be balanced with the district's responsibility for fiscal stewardship for all students. As such, some parents may feel that their children aren't receiving the services that they need, and Bedford is no different in this regard. The HGSE survey research team found that some respondents report that the special education program is difficult to navigate and does not effectively serve students. Several parents and BPS staff members also shared concerns about challenges related to staffing.

- Educator: [We have an] extensive special education population without the staff to appropriately service students. Teaching assistants are continuously pulled from their support positions to substitute for staff absences impacting IEP services....unfilled staff positions, which impact special education services on all levels. Again, teaching assistants are forced to cover long-term absences impacting the delivery of special education services and requirements of an IEP.

It is important to note that staffing challenges (which are not unique to Bedford) should not be equated with the quality of special education program design, though they certainly contribute to very real challenges in implementation. Despite these challenges, it is notable how many parents and educators praise the overall quality of special education services provided by BPS. Many BPS staff I spoke with appreciate the investment the district has made in special education, inclusion, and in-district programming, and the quality and expertise of special education staff.

- Parent who is also a BPS Educator: "The special education department goes above and beyond to advocate when necessary and teach our children to advocate for themselves."
- Parent: The special education dept in Bedford is amazing. The services provided are comprehensive and there is never a fight to get services. The support all throughout Davis and Lane, having dedicated teachers aids or special education teachers 50% in two classrooms is a better system than I have seen in other towns. It really brings the student to teacher ratio down and allows the maximum number of kids to thrive in each room.

I have also found that the relationship between BPS special education administration and the SEPAC (Special Education Parent Advisory Council) is notably collaborative and constructive, even when there are disagreements about policy or individual circumstances.

Finding #6. The small, close-knit community culture of BPS is both an attractive feature and a challenge which can make it harder for “outsiders” to feel like they belong.



***Caption:** Superintendent Chuang with Boston and Bedford parents at Coffee & Cocoa Chat.*

Many stakeholders described the benefits and attractiveness of the small, close-knit feel of the Bedford Public Schools, which fosters strong bonds among students, families, and educators. In fact, the following terms were most frequently used by community survey respondents (and were also prevalent in my conversations) to describe our culture and climate: inclusive, community, welcome, supportive, good, cares, small. “Caring and welcoming” were also the most common words used to describe BHS by students in the Challenge Success survey. I saw all of this in action in the community’s overwhelmingly supportive and positive response to welcoming migrant families placed in the emergency shelter opened in Bedford in August 2023. Many parents shared that they specifically moved to Bedford for its smaller-yet-still-rigorous schools, instead of communities such as Lexington or Concord/Carlisle. The unique nature of the structure of Bedford’s four schools—with the entire grade-level cohort moving up from one school to another together—often means that students have grown up

together from a young age, forming deep-rooted friendships and social circles. While this can provide a sense of belonging and support for those who have been part of the community for years, it may inadvertently create barriers for newcomers trying to integrate into established social networks. This tension was a theme that came up in multiple conversations with parents and staff.

Here are some representative survey comments that address this tension:

- Bedford student description of BPS’ culture: “Tight-knit, diverse, but cliched. Our students are often put into groups early on, because they’ve been together for so many years, and have trouble going out of that box....”
- Bedford parent: “My biggest praise for BPS is the community. From the first day of Kindergarten, BPS teachers teach our kids how to be part of a community and how to value the tight knit community that is Bedford. [Transitions from Davis to Lane]—It was so seamless. When we go out in the community, we constantly run into other families, the kids happily greeting each other... I worry it is too tight knit and by the time my kids are in high school cliques will have formed.”
- Parent: “By design, the students in Bedford are with the same cohort of 200 children all the way through high school. They get to know their peers very well, but it can also be problematic when social issues arise. Bedford needs to continue to focus on being an open, inclusive environment with zero tolerance for discrimination.”

Feedback shared from several HAFB and Boston parents was compelling and somewhat difficult to hear/read. One HAFB parent shared a deep sense of being “othered” and a feeling of being “refugees” and not getting the same type of communication or information as resident students for sports, which makes it more difficult to “break into” student social groups (though praise was heaped on staff who work hard to include and for the JROTC program). These sentiments were echoed by other HAFB parents. Many Boston parents also mentioned a desire for strong connections between the Boston and Bedford communities and for their kids to be treated as BPS students who happen to live in Boston, rather than “the METCO kids.” Other representative comments include:

- HAFB student: “I speak for all of the Hanscom AFB students when I say that it is very difficult to feel welcomed at this school...”
- Boston parent: “The community needs to be more open to Boston families. It has not always felt like a community that my students have felt welcomed in.”

Finding #7. We have more work to do to engage and support every learner.

In the aggregate, our students generally perform relatively well, consistently outperforming the state on the metrics used in the state accountability system. When compared to districts identified by DESE as comparable based on demographics, BPS also fares well.

District Name	2023 Enrollment				2023 Next Gen MCAS								
					% Meeting or Exceeding Expectations					Growth average SGP			
	Total Enrollment #	Low Income %	SWD %	ELL %	Grades 3-8		Grade 10		Grades 5 and 8	Grades 3-8		Grade 10	
					ELA	Math	ELA	Math		Science	ELA	Math	ELA
Bedford*	2,539	12.2	18.5	4.1	70%	67%	84%	79%	63%	57	51	53	60
Grafton*	3,080	16.7	18.5	2.6	54%	53%	72%	65%	55%	50	54	53	43
Holliston*	2,776	10.3	17.6	2.8	61%	62%	72%	71%	62%	57	58	49	54
Marblehead*	2,622	12.5	21.2	4.4	60%	59%	79%	77%	55%	58	59	44	39
Medway*	2,108	14.2	15.7	3.8	55%	58%	68%	67%	54%	45	46	39	50
Mendon-Upton*	2,105	15.7	16.3	3.8	44%	46%	68%	60%	48%	49	54	61	65
Milton*	4,321	13.4	17.7	2.7	64%	62%	77%	71%	69%	55	53	60	65
Nashoba*	3,051	12.3	17.7	2.5	63%	59%	82%	75%	62%	52	50	57	56
Newburyport*	2,155	12.4	21.5	3.8	56%	47%	71%	71%	50%	52	49	53	58
Wakefield*	3,305	17.1	18.2	3.1	55%	51%	65%	58%	54%	51	51	57	62
Wayland*	2,754	8.1	18.1	3.8	72%	76%	88%	85%	75%	55	58	56	61

[District Analysis and Review Tools \(DARTs\) - Overview - Bedford \(00230000\) \(mass.edu\)](#)

However, this generally strong performance in the aggregate masks concerns expressed by many stakeholders, and aptly captured in this survey response from a Bedford parent: “We need to focus on meeting the academic needs of all students—currently, our students that are behind don't get the help they need, our advanced students aren't challenged, and the ones that are in the middle aren't motivated or encouraged to excel. We also need to recognize and reward academic excellence, like we do for everything else.”

Subfinding #7a. Large achievement/opportunity gaps persist for many subgroups of students, and some current systems/structures may make it more difficult for students to progress.

The district continues to face challenges in serving certain student subgroups, particularly students with disabilities, Black, and low-income students. Though these challenges are not unique to BPS, because we have committed to be educational partners to both students from Boston (via the METCO program) and HAFB, we take on additional responsibility to ensure that we can serve a diverse student body effectively. This can be seen at a high-level using DESE's [Student Outcome Comparison Tool](#), where gaps for these subgroups across a variety of measures persist. It's not just that the gaps are large—approaching 60 percentage points for some subgroups/grades/subjects gaps are not small—it's also that we have much more work to do to raise the absolute level of performance for some subgroups in which only a handful of students are achieving proficiency.⁵

⁵ I do want to acknowledge the hard work of the BHS/English Department teams resulting in strong recent progress for some subgroups, particularly in grade 10 ELA, where we made significant (double-digit) progress Spring 2022 to Spring 2023 for learners in the low income, high needs, Black and students with disabilities subgroups. We need to build on the systems, structures and efforts of these teachers and students for other grade levels and subjects.

WELCOME

DISTRICT HEAT MAP

STATE HEAT MAP

ENGLISH LEARNER

SWD

LOW INCOME

RACE/ETHNICITY

DEFINITIONS

All Students Rate

Student Group Meets or Exceeds All Students Rate

Student Group Does Not Meet All Students Rate

Greatest Disparities from All Students Rate

How to interpret this page

This page displays student group performance across multiple metrics. Each metric is color-coded to show whether the student group meets or exceeds or falls below the district average for "All Students." The student groups experiencing the greatest disparities are indicated in dark red and may be most in need of intensive support. See DEFINITIONS page for more info.

A cell with 0.0 indicates a 0.0 rate for that student group on that measure, while an empty cell signifies no publicly available data.

District Heat Map

Student Group

All Students

English Learner

Students with Disabilities

Low Income

African American/Black

American Indian or Alaskan Native

Asian

Hispanic or Latino

Multi-race non-Hispanic or Latino

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

White

2023

2023

2023

2022

2023

2022

2021

% Total Enrollment

% Chronic Absenteeism

% Out School Suspension

% Ninth Graders Passing

% Pathways Enrollment

% Dropout

% 5 Year Graduation

11.2

1.0

95.6

0.1

96.3

4.1

25.0

3.6

18.5

21.1

1.4

84.2

12.2

29.5

2.3

85.3

6.1

25.5

3.8

76.9

1.9

92.3

0.0

7.9

97.6

0.0

100.0

20.2

7.4

25.0

2.9

100.0

0.0

0.0

60.3

9.4

0.9

97.3

0.0

0.0

95.1

2023 MCAS

Show % Meeting & Exceeding

Show SGP

Subject / Grade

All Students

English Learner

Students with Disabilities

Low Income

African American/Black

American Indian or Alaskan Native

Asian

Hispanic or Latino

Multi-race non-Hispanic or Latino

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

White

ELA

3

6

8

10

MATH

3

6

8

10

70

74

71

84

68

61

60

79

30

15

17

47

37

18

7

40

50

48

44

53

43

40

24

55

27

36

42

67

18

21

8

42

85

90

85

93

87

97

90

95

10

100

33

64

10

40

33

67

86

79

74

88

79

83

59

59

70

72

74

88

70

56

59

81

However, even the disaggregated state-level data can mask the deeply-felt concerns of parents and educators about the challenges their students face. There are three systems/structures worth noting that may impact particularly with respect to literacy.

First, throughout my entry process through the community survey, parent forums, 1-1 conversations, and individual correspondence, a large number of parents as well as some BPS staff aimed specific and direct criticism at the district's continued use of a **balanced literacy approach** (and the use of Lucy Calkins' Units of Study) vs. a structured reading approach. In particular, many parents are concerned that our literacy approach does not effectively serve the needs of students with special needs, those who do not pick up reading without explicit instruction, or those who cannot afford private tutoring. The testimony at the October 24, 2023, school committee meeting as reflected in the [minutes](#) is representative of the intensity and breadth of the criticism.⁶

Second, many parents/caregivers and educators expressed concern that class sizes (primarily at the elementary level) may impact the district's ability to support all students, particularly as the needs of students grow increasingly complex post-COVID. The HGSE survey team found that overwhelmingly, respondents called for smaller class sizes, reduced student-teacher ratios, and hiring more staff to accomplish these goals. However, assessing the impact of class sizes on learning is complicated by Bedford's significant investment in additional support staffing to meet diverse student needs. It was not uncommon for me to observe 2 or 3 additional adults in many elementary classrooms (and this was true to a lesser extent at JGMS and BHS, too), but it is also fair to say that in some cases, the level of "buzz" and activity may be distracting for some students.

⁶ It is important to note that in late November 2023, [BPS made the decision to move completely to a structured literacy program aligned with the science of reading](#) to address the needs of students who still struggle to read and write. See: [Top schools in Massachusetts see large disparities in reading \(bostonglobe.com\)](#).

Third, several educators, parents, and students expressed concerns about the impact that our explicit and de facto (at JGMS) course leveling practices may impact access to more rigorous learning opportunities for many students, particularly those who have been historically underserved. I observed marked differences in engagement/robustness of learning experiences and discussions in different level courses at JGMS and BHS. The differences in demographic representation depending on level was also quite noticeable. I requested and analyzed the course registration data file in order to pressure-test some of my observations and share the following illustrative statistics, which indicate overall disproportionate representation, though I find the absolute number of classes without certain representation more eye-opening:

- At JGMS, of the 17 advanced level classes with 367 total enrolled students⁷:
 - 2 classes enroll English Learners (2 students = 0.5% out of 3% population).
 - 3 classes enroll students w/disabilities (4 students = 1% vs. 19% of population)
 - 5 classes enroll Black students (9 students = 2% vs. 9% of population).
 - 7 classes enroll Hispanic students (10 students = 3% vs 7% of population).
- At JGMS, of the 124 grade-level classes in Math, ELA, Science and Social Studies,
 - 16 classes enroll 33% or more of students with disabilities (compared to 19% JGMS overall), with 4 classes with more than half of the students with disabilities.
 - 40 classes have less than 10% students with disabilities (compared to 19% JGMS overall), with 11 classes with no students with disabilities at all.
- At BHS, of the 80 advanced level (high honors/AP) classes with 1540 total enrolled students (note: students may be enrolled in more than one)
 - 3 classes enroll English Learners (3 students = 0.2% out of 2.4% pop)
 - 21 classes enroll Black students (a total of 24 = 1.5% vs. 6.7% of population); only 3 classes have more than one black student.
 - 25 classes enroll students w/disabilities (30 students = 2% vs. 17% of population); only 4 classes have more than one student w/disabilities.

I believe that this issue merits further exploration and discussion, as there are reasonable points of view related to the need to challenge academically motivated/advanced students (see sub-finding #7c), while also considering intersections with a student/family's ability to access outside resources to support access to higher course levels. I think this comment from a Bedford resident BHS student aptly captures some of this nuance:

The threat of private education and programs is severe right now, combined with the threat of student segregation. Students can get ahead in elementary schools using private, expensive after school programs that many cannot afford. Then in late middle and high school, students are sorted into levels with pull-out math programs and leveled classes. Once you are in a level, it is very hard to recover or improve up to a higher level, and students usually take the same levels across most subjects. Our school could fix this by encouraging students to move up levels over time, instead of the goal of the lower levels being to stay there. Students are often segregated within friend groups based on these levels, because friends are mostly made in class. Higher level kids then engage with only higher level kids, and slowly grow far dissociated from those in lower levels. This creates a gap within our school community that is never resolved.

⁷ Note: This figure includes students who may be enrolled in more than one advanced course, so each enrollment is counted separately. The same goes for the students represented in each subgroup bulleted below, e.g., the 2 EL students enrolled in advanced courses could be one EL student enrolled in 2 advanced classes. I did not have time to disaggregate the data to the student level, but the disproportionality issue I am illustrating remains the same.

Subfinding #7b: Kids in “the middle” may be overlooked.

Though not as prominent, several stakeholders expressed a concern about overlooking students in “the middle” or “average” students who don’t make waves and/or don’t need a lot of support, but who may also not naturally excel. One community member commented: “There is little focus on those in the middle—those who just go along. Those student[s] are pushed through and with a little more attention, they would thrive.” An educator noted: “Our middle of the road kids get lost in the mix because we tend [to] the highest and lowest better.”

Subfinding #7c: Many parents/caregivers and students (especially those who are academically advanced) are “bored” and report lack of opportunities to be academically challenged.

This was an extremely prominent theme in focus groups of parents, particularly those at the elementary level. Some illustrative comments:

- Bedford parent: “One obstacle that I have noticed for one of my children is the lack of accelerated options in elementary school. I worry that my child is bored sometimes and that behavioral issues can come out of this...”
- Bedford parent: Every child deserves the chance to have classes which are appropriate for their ability and challenges and stimulates them to learn.
- Parent: BPS needs to improve its opportunities for accelerated learners, and we need to continue to recognize, highlight, and encourage their achievements. There are few opportunities for elementary school students to seek and receive additional work, resulting in boredom and missed opportunity. It is essential that we continue to support and invest in these young learners, so that they can continue on a path to advanced success at the higher grades.

In the Challenge Success survey, 63% of BHS students reported being “disengaged” (11%) or “doing school” (52%) when asked to describe their engagement level in school. This aligns with my observations across some of the district’s classrooms (at all levels) where students by and large appeared to be “compliant” and following instructions, but I wasn’t always sure to what extent they were learning. This is in stark contrast to what I consistently see on athletic courts and fields and in rehearsal spaces, workshops and stages, where students are actively engaged in pursuing learning/skill goals. Please also see other examples of strong student engagement cited by students and parents in Footnote 11.

Finding #8. The district faces several challenges related to supporting student well-being.

These following issues related to student well-being were raised by a variety of stakeholders.

Subfinding #8a. School start times are too early for secondary learners and too late for early elementary learners.

In [Should School Start Later?](#), JGMS student journalists provide a summary of this issue, which was raised repeatedly by all stakeholder groups as a concern, with particular advocacy from BHS students. This parent's thoughts echo many others: "The research is clear that early [secondary] school start times are fighting against adolescents' innate circadian rhythms. The single biggest action we could take to improve student well being in the upper grades would be to start school later." Concerns about the late start time for younger students at Davis School, who have been up for many hours before school starts, are equally prominent. The late start time also requires multiple transitions for some children who require both before and after school care, and on the 2-hour delayed start day due to inclement weather, all Davis students transitioned to or from lunch within the first hour of their school day!

Subfinding #8b. Parents and students express concerns about safety—both physical and emotional—which is compounded by the lack of security cameras.⁸

Concerns about bullying (primarily at the secondary level and especially at JGMS) were frequently mentioned by stakeholders, though there is some lack of clarity as to what constitutes bullying (as opposed to bullying behavior) and how to approach supporting targets while also addressing the skill deficits for aggressors. For context, in the last three years, four formal bullying/harassment complaints were filed at JGMS. This doesn't mean that we don't have more work to do with respect to unkind and disrespectful or bullying behavior, though it is important to distinguish this from formal, substantiated "bullying." Several parents shared that bullying is one of the reasons why they unenrolled their child from BPS along with concerns about accountability for bullying behavior.

Vaping and drug use is also mentioned as an ongoing concern by BHS students and parents (though this issue is not as frequently mentioned as bullying), with concerns about usage in certain locations in the high school, further compromised by the difficulty in resolving investigations without security cameras, even with staff deployed immediately to follow-up when vaping sensors go off. The student school committee representative raised concerns about the lack of security cameras as a tool to promote school safety on behalf of the BHS community several times during School Committee discussions this fall.

These comments by a parent and an educator are representative of those voiced by many others:

- Bedford student when identifying threats: "The incidents, fights, bullying that goes on within the school but goes unnoticed because of the lack of security cameras."
- Parent: "Bedford should have cameras in the hallways of the middle school and high school so that student behavior could be observed and individuals who are bullying others can be identified and corrective action taken."
- Educator: "I think the lack of security cameras at the high school is a real missed opportunity. I know they are in the works, but the amount of hours spent by the main office team investigating things that could be easily solved by a camera is ridiculous."

⁸ It is important to note that the district has secured a positive FY25 budget recommendation from the Bedford School, Finance and Capital Expenditure Committees to install security cameras in all 4 buildings in FY25, and we were able to install 15 cameras for high-traffic areas at BHS over the winter break, which has already yielded significant improvement in safety, including: decreased incidents of vaping (and identification and follow-up support provided to those who are caught), peer disputes resolved; unknown unauthorized individuals identified; missing student found, and no incidents of theft or vandalism.

Subfinding #8c. Parents and students desire improvement in school meal quality and more time to eat/relax at lunch/recess.

Parents and students appreciate universal access to school meals and also shared feedback regarding their thoughts about food quality and variety, with some additionally commenting on the need for more time for students to eat and relax. This comment from a Bedford resident parent captures common sentiments: “I really would like to see the lunch menu improve...also, the kids do not have enough time to properly eat their lunch.” I do want to acknowledge the significant resource constraints that our food program has historically faced. Our locally-run program and recent additional resource investment from the state provide us with an opportunity for improvement going forward that we have not previously had.

Subfinding #8d. Parents are requesting improvements to our process in supporting students with their post-secondary plans.

The Bedford High School Parents Association (BHSPA), in conjunction with other parents in the school community, have shared suggestions and concerns regarding the current postsecondary transition support process at BHS. This HGSE survey team found that respondents would like students to be better prepared for a variety of post-graduation opportunities and suggest career and college fairs, improvements to the counseling department, and strengthened relationships with top colleges.

Finding #9. BPS should consider three key opportunity areas for additional strategic investment.

Though stakeholders discussed a wide variety of opportunities for BPS to consider, three key areas were prominent in the feedback I received throughout the entry process.

Subfinding #9a. Resiliency strategies as articulated by Dr. Alex Hirshberg, Psy.D. hold promise to address growing mental health needs among students.

Dr. Alex Hirshberg was the keynote speaker during our opening day for staff on August 30, 2024, and focused his remarks on how we can develop children who are resilient to emotional discomfort (rather than seeking to avoid stressors/anxiety or having it removed), so that they can achieve at high levels. He has also engaged in family training events⁹ for our community. I have been struck by the number of times educators and parents either referenced his addresses unsolicited, or when I said, “you mean, like what Dr. Hirshberg was talking about?,” they would respond emphatically, “yes, that!” In the words of one educator: “I think Alex Hirshberg's message was exactly the kind of trend I would like to see us move towards. I have always felt that students should be learning tools and strategies to stay in class rather than the band aid approach of removing stressors.”

Subfinding #9b. Many students, parents, and educators are eager for more experiential learning opportunities like hands-on projects, field trips, internships, and STEM exploration activities.

Many parents have expressed the desire for their students to have more experiential learning opportunities, in part to counter the boredom factor described in Subfinding #7c above. In the Challenge Success survey, a third of BHS students also rated “opportunities for more hands-on, active learning, such as real-world projects and role-plays, debates, etc.” as a change would really improve your school experience, the only request in the list requesting a change for more of something (rather than less). The HGSE survey research team also noted that requests for more experiential and hands-on learning were prominent.¹⁰

Subfinding #9c. Diversify our educator workforce.

Many educators, parents, and students expressed a desire for BPS to create more opportunities to diversify our educator workforce to better reflect the rapidly increasing diversity of our student body (which is 43% students of color in 2023-2024, up from 17% twenty years ago). Based on 2022-2023 data, among our core teaching staff of approximately 243 educators, just 6% identify as individuals of color.

⁹ Recordings for these family training events by Dr. Hirshberg can be found at [Prepare the Child for the Road, Not the Road for the Child: Building Resilience to Emotional Distress \(September 18, 2023\)](#) and [Social-Emotional Challenges in the Inclusion Setting \(February 6, 2024\)](#)

¹⁰ There are several existing examples of experiential learning that students and parents have described with excitement or I personally observed that we can build upon, including [Davis Town](#) for kindergartners, [Project Adventure](#) for fifth graders, hands-on science with animals at the Lane School, [Nature's Classroom field trip](#) for 6th graders, Washington, D.C. field trip for 8th graders, [History Day](#) at BHS, and various internships as outlined in the [BHS program of study](#) to name a few. In addition, examples abound throughout our arts and athletic programs and extracurricular clubs.

Finding #10. Stakeholders identified a variety of potential threats to the progress of BPS, including challenges with educator compensation/support and increased politicization in the classroom.

A variety of potential threats to the progress of BPS were identified by stakeholders, many of which have been already addressed in prior findings above. Others that were raised included:

- the ongoing impacts of technology (e.g., too much screen time, social media, cell phone addiction) on student well-being and the emerging potential threat of artificial intelligence that may further compromise students' learning if not carefully handled;
- The impacts of a hyper-focus on assessment/MCAS may have on students' learning environments; and;
- The continuing impact of racism, especially on students of color.

However, two prominent themes emerged. First, many stakeholders are concerned about Bedford's continuing ability to attract and retain a high quality educator workforce and the town's competitiveness in the educational marketplace with respect to compensation. In particular, low pay for educational/teaching assistants (TAs) was raised repeatedly as a threat to the district's ability to ensure appropriate staffing levels for our most vulnerable students, and the combination of higher TA pay and more TA staffing were the top-cited "magic wand"¹¹ requests. But apart from providing competitive compensation, parents and educators alike expressed concerns about the impact of insufficient training and support for educators implementing new curriculum and handling increasing intensive mental health needs for students.

Second, many parents and a few community members (but very few students or educators) expressed concerns about increased politicization in the district and political activity in the classroom. I believe that the anonymity of the community survey allowed for this topic to be raised (more than 50 respondents), particularly from parents who may hold more conservative viewpoints. Stakeholders shared a range of concerns about how DEI, gender identity, and other political topics are addressed by the districts and in individual classrooms. Note these contrasting concerns:

- Bedford parent: "I'm concerned with teachers and school leaders pushing their own political agendas in the classroom. It is rampant. Students should not have to feel pressure to comply with "woke culture" to be successful."
- Bedford parent, when asked to identify weaknesses: "Lack of diversity, inclusion and belonging for students of color; Transphobia; Racism."

There is no consensus among stakeholders about what constitutes the greater threat, which harkens back to the "false trilemma" described in Finding #4 above.

¹¹ I ended many of my entry conversations with this question: "If you had a magic wand and were not constrained by resources, time, or politics, what is one thing you would change in the Bedford Public Schools?"



Proposed Framework for Collaborative Strategic Planning

With the release of this entry report, we move into a period of collaborative strategic planning process that will culminate in fall 2024 with a comprehensive three-year district improvement plan for 2024 to 2027. Based on the preceding entry findings, I ask the community to consider the following framework to guide our planning efforts.

How can we work together to design and grow a *model public school system* that:

1. Holds no learner back **and** leaves no learner behind.
2. Promotes well-being and resilience for learners from every background **and** at different stages of growth and development.
3. Steadily increases the array of experiential learning opportunities aligned with states standards that are learner-propelled **and** educator-scaffolded.

As we embark on this planning process together, I ask the community to consider these three particular core values (previously outlined in my [entry plan](#)):

Core Value	Meaning...	Which guide my actions & decisions in the following ways:
Ujima ¹²  <i>We're in this together.</i>	Ujima is a Swahili (an East African language) word, and one of the seven principles of Kwanzaa, a celebration held from December 26 to January 1 that honors African heritage in African-American culture. It means collective work and responsibility; to build and maintain our community together and make our brothers' and sisters' problems, and all in our community's problems, our problems and to solve them together. ¹³	I practice ujima by taking personal responsibility (through self-reflection and self-correction) and collective responsibility (a problem for one is a problem for all) in order to solve problems. To the maximal extent possible, I work with impacted stakeholders to serve our learners better. This requires gathering multiple perspectives and seeking out and elevating voices that aren't necessarily the loudest.
Con Ganas  <i>We are all in.</i>	Con ganas is a Spanish phrase that means to give all your effort; to act wholeheartedly with courage, passion, purpose and conviction. ¹⁴	I will work con ganas until all learners are successful. I will not shy away from tackling hard issues that affect the families we serve, even if it is uncomfortable and means navigating difficult circumstances, taking risks, or challenging the status quo. We will have courageous conversations when necessary.
Both/And <i>We are open to all possibilities.</i>	Both/And means that multiple things can be true and oftentimes there is a "third way". ¹⁵	I am committed to remain open to creative possibilities and to seek solutions that may result from the best of multiple perspectives. I reject false either/or dichotomies and make space for new approaches.

¹² **Note:** I have chosen to borrow concepts and words from other languages and cultures that more fully capture what I'm trying to communicate. [Click the audio symbol for pronunciation support.]

¹³ [Official Kwanzaa Website](#)

¹⁴ [Con Ganas We Can Blog - Latinos for Education](#)

¹⁵ [Both/And Thinking by Wendy K. Smith & Marianne W. Lewis \(bothandthinking.net\)](#)

Next Steps

Though I am committed to a collaborative and iterative planning process, I thought it may be helpful to outline a few of my initial thoughts based on what I learned during the entry process for potential areas of focus in the three areas identified in the proposed planning framework.

1. Holds no [learner](#)¹⁶ back **and** leaves no learner behind.

Potential areas of focus include but are not limited to:

- Deeply invest in the implementation of the new literacy curriculum.
- Develop support structures to significantly enhance differentiation and extension opportunities.
- Explore new approaches to delivering middle school mathematics.

2. Promotes [well-being](#)¹⁷ and [resilience](#)¹⁸ for learners from every background **and** at different stages of growth and development.

Potential areas of focus include but are not limited to:

- Enhance structures to support the explicit teaching of resiliency strategies.
- Set school start times later for secondary students, earlier for early elementary students.
- Establish a clear and consistent approach to student discipline and bullying prevention that focuses on safety and skill-building.
- Develop specific systems and structures to increase the diversity of the educator core.

3. Steadily increases the array of [experiential learning](#)¹⁹ opportunities that are learner-propelled **and** educator-[scaffolded](#)²⁰.

Potential areas of focus include but are not limited to:

- Build on existing traditions of experiential learning with a potential “anchor” experience for each grade level.
- Empower current educators who do this well to support their colleagues.

Over the next several months, I will work with the BPS leadership team to develop specific strategic objectives and initiatives for consideration. At this time, I do not believe that a formal strategic planning committee will be necessary or helpful given the competing demands on educator and stakeholder time this spring. That said, I will be embedding multiple opportunities to provide feedback as the plan is developed, including the use of shorter, targeted surveys; various forums (in-person and virtual) to provide feedback; and consultation with key stakeholder groups. If your stakeholder group would like to be included in the consultation process, please reach out to superintendentoffice@bedfordps.org. The timeline below provides the key activities in the process.

¹⁶ [Being a Student vs. Being a Learner: They Really Aren't the Same | by Sol Smith, MFA, EdS | Age of Awareness | Medium](#)

¹⁷ [Wellness vs. Wellbeing: What's the Difference? \(gallup.com\)](#). We will also need to consider ways to measure success. I suggest that we consider DESE's free [Views of Climate and Learning \(VOCAL\) Survey Project](#) to augment our current tools.

¹⁸ [Family Training Event: Prepare the Child for the Road, Not the Road for the Child: Building Resilience to Emotional Distress, Alex Hirshberg, Psy.D., | Bedford Public Schools \(bedfordps.org\)](#)

¹⁹ [3 Ways to Encourage Experiential Learning in Middle and High School | Edutopia](#)

²⁰ [What is Scaffolding in Education? - XQ \(xqsuperschool.org\)](#)

District Improvement Plan Development Timeline

Date in 2024	Activity
March	Superintendent Chuang releases Entry Report Findings
March	Gather initial stakeholder feedback on entry findings and planning framework
April	Begin strategic objective and initiative development with leadership team
May/June	Gather stakeholder feedback on initial proposed strategic objectives and initiatives.
July/August	Develop and refine draft strategic plan and identify metrics to measure success
September	Release draft strategic plan for community feedback and comment
October	School Committee approval of 2024-2027 District Improvement Plan
November	Ensure FY25 staff goals are aligned with Year 1 Plan goals



Caption: Community Meeting at Davis School in Nov. 2023, where I shared “When You Wish Upon a Star” by Leigh Harline and Ned Washington, because dreams can come true!

Thank you!