

April 9, 2020

Dear Wilmington Community,

The Massachusetts Legislature recently passed what is commonly known as the Student Opportunity Act (SOA) (Chapter 132 of the Acts of 2019). The SOA requires each district to develop a 3-year plan that focuses on efforts to close disparities in achievement among student subgroups. While the SOA provides additional state funds to school districts across the Commonwealth, it is important to note that the majority of these additional funds will be awarded to approximately 35 districts with large populations of students classified as economically disadvantaged and/or as English Language Learners. A summary of anticipated funds from the state shows that Wilmington will receive an increase of \$96,600 for FY21. This increase is in line with the typical increases in state funding Wilmington has received during the previous 2 fiscal years. While the passage of the SOA does not equate to a larger than normal increase in state aid for Wilmington, we are required to develop an SOA plan.

In guidance issued to school districts in February 2020, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) indicated the following:

- SOA Plans were due on April 1, 2020 (*the deadline has subsequently been postponed due to the COVID-19 health crisis. A new deadline has not yet been established*)
- Activities/initiatives within the SOA plan must be evidence-based
- The SOA plan is *not* a comprehensive strategic plan. It should commit to doing a “few things well.”
- The SOA application requires districts to address four “commitments.” (see the draft plan below)
- The district must engage with the community when developing the SOA plan

The DESE identified 17 examples of high-quality programs to help districts focus their SOA efforts. We determined that nine of these programs align with our existing District Strategic Plan and ultimately decided to build our plan around inclusion/co-teaching for students with disabilities.

The draft SOA has been reviewed by the district leadership team and the Wilmington School Committee. We are now seeking input from the community and staff. After reviewing the plan (below), please click [here](#) to access a feedback form. You may also consider participating in a special public comment session which will be added to the agenda of the April 29 Wilmington School Committee meeting. The SOA Plan will be submitted to the DESE once a new deadline is established. Thank you for reviewing our SOA Plan and for providing feedback.

Regards,

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Student Opportunity Act Plan: SY 2020-2023

DRAFT (4.9.2020)

Commitment 1: Focusing on Student Subgroups

Which student subgroups will require focused support to ensure all students achieve at high levels in school and are successfully prepared for life?

As evidenced by a variety of initiatives within the Wilmington Public Schools' 2019-2022 Strategic Plan, the district is focused on improving student achievement and success through a commitment to inclusive instructional practices. This strategic focus is based on a review of district data, which shows that our students with disabilities (SWDs) perform at much lower levels on MCAS. Local reading and math assessment data largely mirrors state assessment results for this same subgroup. Data shows that SWDs at our middle school are especially performing poorly when compared to aggregate data. For example, in 2019 only 15% of 6th grade SWDs scored exceeding or meeting expectations on the ELA MCAS as compared to 57% for the all students category. Similarly, only 24% of 8th grade SWDs scored exceeding or meeting expectations on the math MCAS as compared to 70% for the all students category. Consequently, the rate that SWDs at the middle school are scoring "not meeting expectations" is more than 4-times the rate than the all students category. In addition to MCAS performance metrics, SWDs are lagging behind with respect to growth when compared to the all students category. Student growth percentiles (SGP) for SWDs is lower than the SGP for all students for 5 out of the 6 MCAS tests (ELA and math). The only exception is grade 8 ELA where the SGP for SWDs is 3 points higher than the SGP for all students (49.6 compared to 46.6).

During the 2018-2019 school year, 18.3% (n=46) of grade 6 students were included in the SWD cohort; 24.1% (n=64) of grade 7 students were included in that cohort; and 14.8% (n=36) of grade 8 students were included. Our data shows that students who perform poorly on the MCAS and local assessments in the middle school typically continue this pattern into high school where their performance is connected to graduation.

Commitment 2: Using Evidence-Based programs to Close Gaps

What evidence-based programs will your district adopt, deepen, or continue to best support the closure of achievement and opportunity gaps? What resources will you allocate to these programs?

Inclusion/co-teaching for students with disabilities. Wilmington Middle School employs a typical middle school team model distributed over 3 houses. Each team consists of 4 teachers, one from each academic discipline (ELA, math, social studies, and science). Most teams have a dedicated special education inclusion teacher as a fifth member. Staffing limitations have, however, required that some teams share a special educator. This practice has limited the amount of inclusion support/co-teaching for those teams sharing personnel. We will use FY21 funds to add a full-time special education inclusion teacher to the middle school, which will allow us to better optimize staffing and provide

more targeted student support and increase co-teaching opportunities. We will also use funding to provide professional development related to inclusion and co-teaching.

FY21 Budget Item	Amount	Foundation Category
Inclusion teacher (1)	\$81,675	Classroom & Specialist Teachers, Employee Benefits / Fixed Charges
Inclusion Professional Development	\$25,000	Professional Development
Evidence-based program identified by DESE:		Inclusion/co-teaching for students with disabilities
SOA program categories:		(D) Hiring school personnel that best support improved student performance; (E) Increased or improved professional development

Commitment 3: Monitoring Success with Outcome Metrics and Targets

What metrics will your district use to monitor success in reducing disparities in achievement among student subgroups? Select from the list of DESE metrics or provide your own.

DESE Outcome Metrics	Custom District Metrics
1. Percentage of SWD scoring meeting or exceeding expectations on ELA MCAS in grades 6, 7, and 8	1. Reading data from iReady for students with disabilities in grades 6, 7, and 8
2. Percentage of SWD scoring meeting or exceeding expectations on Math MCAS in grades 6, 7, and 8	2. Pearson enVision Math unit assessment data for students with disabilities in grades 6, 7, and 8
3. Mean student growth percentiles for ELA and math MCAS for students with disabilities in grades 6, 7, and 8	

Commitment 4: Engaging All Families

How will your district ensure that all families, particularly those representing the student subgroups most in need of support, have the opportunity to meaningfully engage with the district regarding their students' needs?

The Wilmington Public Schools is committed to increasing family engagement across all schools. To this end, we have identified 2 strategic initiatives within our 2019-2022 Strategic Plan that speak specifically to relationships and partnerships: 3.2 *Enhance school and community relationships by increasing communication and collaboration*; and 3.3 *Engage families in multiple and meaningful ways to bridge home and school partnerships*. As the Student Opportunity Act Plan is specific to students with disabilities at the middle school, efforts related to family engagement for this identified population are as follows:

- Wilmington’s Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) has struggled to maintain adequate membership in recent years. A small group of committed parents in partnership with our Director of Student Support Services have kept SEPAC in place, but meeting attendance is low and not representative of our 8 schools. The district is committed to participating in the Advancing Parent-Professional Leadership in Education (APPLE) Institute through the Federation for Children with Special Needs next year. APPLE was designed to help parents develop leadership skills that they can use to strengthen community support organizations like SEPAC. APPLE promotes skills that will help foster collaborative relationships between SEPAC parents and educators and help them develop action plans for increasing parent involvement in the district and community.
- The district will engage with a guest keynote speaker in the fall to jump-start our year-long professional development focus on inclusive practices. We will seek a speaker who also has experience speaking with parents and look to have him/her facilitate an evening session specifically for middle school parents (but open to all) about learning styles, inclusion, and the middle school.
- Middle school teachers will work to increase the number of parents of SWDs who take advantage of the two scheduled parent/teacher conference days (winter and spring). Efforts will include personalized outreach and providing flexibility with respect to meeting times
- The middle school administration and special education leadership are committed to scheduling and facilitating multiple “parent coffee” sessions and parent information nights that focus specifically on special education topics. These events will be advertised by the middle school and through SEPAC and will feature guest facilitators from the Office of Student Support Services.