

To: Cambridge School Committee
From: Dr. Victoria L. Greer, Superintendent *Dr. Victoria L. Greer*
Date: March 21, 2022
Re: Explanation of the Proposed Reorganization

This memo is a response to the questions and concerns raised by members of the School Committee during the budget presentation on Thursday, March 17, 2022.

Over the past eight months I have had the opportunity to engage internal and external stakeholders, observe the way in which we lead, coach and manage school leaders, curriculum leaders and other staff along with the day-to-day operations of the district. It became clear very early in my time in CPS that something was off with the way the district ran and how that has impacted the effectiveness of how we operate. Each time a problem or issue arose, I took time each week and conducted a root cause analysis of the problem or issue. Every root cause analysis pointed back to one or more of the following causes (this is not an exhaustive list but the most frequent).

- 1) Lack of clearly articulated goals, objectives and metrics (*What is the purpose of this action/activity, what do we intend to accomplish, how do we know it was successful*).
- 2) Lack of an identified primary office of responsibility (*The decision-maker, the one responsible person*).
- 3) Lack of a clear and concise project/action plan for initiatives and district projects.
- 4) Lack of leadership, management and oversight (*Are we checking on the status of the work, are we evaluating the staff's work product, are we supporting staff to improve if needed*).
- 5) Lack of coherence and alignment of practices (*Do schools implement policies in the same/similar manner, are families and students having same or similar experiences across the schools*).
- 6) Lack of written and clearly articulated procedures (*How would someone know that, where is the written procedures, a dependence on someone's knowledge rather than written procedures*).

In addition to conducting these root cause analysis, I also engaged an outside consultant to begin working with the Executive Leadership Team to support us to address challenges with the manner in which we collaborate and partner in the work. We had several two and three day retreats to work on our team dynamics, develop rules of engagement and come to agreements about how we would lead the district. We made some progress but we also realized that the Executive Leadership Team was unclear about their areas of responsibility and decision making authority. At the same time, I was also

synthesizing all of the data and feedback during the entry process and identified several [findings](#) related to our implementation practices and our organizational capacity and alignment.

Implementation Practices:

- 1) A lack of implementation plans for district-wide projects and initiatives.
- 2) Confusion amongst staff and families about the primary office of responsibility for varied projects and initiatives.

Organizational Capacity and Alignment:

- 3) Inconsistencies in how decisions are made across schools and departments.
- 4) Lack of clear reporting structures and identification of the primary office of responsibility for multiple areas of the district, specifically as it relates to teaching and learning.
- 5) Lack of clarity in communication of expectations and supporting the work in schools and departments.
- 6) Lack of alignment of the curricular areas which includes the delivery of interventions, special education services and coaching of educators.
- 7) Lack of a clearly articulated and aligned principal supervision and coaching framework.
- 8) Lack of identified and clearly articulated district priorities.

The student achievement and student outcome data was also reviewed and found that while there have been pockets of improvement in certain areas and for certain groups of students, the improvements are not district-wide and it does not include all students in the district. There have been years of waning achievement specifically for students with disabilities, students from lower socioeconomic families and students who identify as persons of color. Additionally, the growth for students who have performed well is flat and is showing low or no growth at all.

Clearly, something is not working. It definitely is not an issue with the number of resources. There have been multi-millions of dollars poured into the schools to add human resources (people) to support students. Most often, the resources were added without clearly identifying the goals, objectives, metrics or primary office of responsibility. These new resources and staff were left to determine their own focus and their own jobs to meet the needs of students.

Two additional issues are glaring and are definitely a problem.

- 1) The district currently does not have a curriculum and instructional department. It was eliminated almost two years ago and everyone who was assigned to that department was reassigned to the Deputy Superintendent.
- 2) The staff and positions in schools continue to grow to a point that it is out of balance with the capacity at the district to support and lead effectively. The Executive Leadership Team (Cabinet) has remained the same with relatively no increase for at least 10 years. Structure has changed but the number of individuals have not increased although the number of school-based personnel have increased substantially over the past 10 years. Currently, the district is reaching its tipping point. There is not enough capacity at the top to direct, guide, support and manage the work on the ground.

After careful consideration, I realized that the district needed more than a few retreats and platforms designed to gather data and information. The district needs structure and capacity building. There are four primary objectives in establishing highly effective organizations.

- 1) Profit
- 2) People
- 3) Products
- 4) Pride

In the case of CPS, our profit is post secondary success for every student by ensuring that each student leaves us ready for college and career. In order for us to make a profit (our students), we must support and invest in the people, who in our case are our students, educators, leaders, and support staff. We do this by having strong structures for support, coaching, development and accountability. Our people must produce a product which ensures our profit. In CPS, our product is high quality teaching, learning and leadership practices. Last, to ensure public confidence and to continue to motivate our educators and students to success, we must have pride. Our pride goal is to be recognized as the number one district and high school in the Commonwealth.

In order to become a highly effective organization, it will take a three pronged approach.

- 1) Address Structural Issues- there must be a structure in which there are clear expectations for performance and sound practices for improvement by implementing the continuous improvement model. Each member of the Executive Leadership team as well as Principals and Assistant Principals now have updated job descriptions which outlines the expectations and functions of their work. This will allow for thoughtful and clear feedback, coaching and accountability for every leader. All gaps in the organization must be addressed. For example, if there are functions of the district that need to be done but there is not a primary area of responsibility, this must be addressed quickly. I plan to reestablish an area of the district whose sole focus and responsibility is teaching, learning and student support. In addition, this area of the district also is being designed to close the gap between the curriculum leaders and school leaders by having one individual who leads curriculum and schools (*The Chief of Academics and Schools*). This gives a clear reporting structure for the Assistant Superintendents to support principals and curriculum leaders.
- 2) Develop a multi-year district plan- the multi-year district plan establishes the roadmap for the work. It clearly outlines the vision, mission and core values of the district while identifying strategic objectives (goals) that guide our work and the initiatives that will be implemented.
- 3) Design an aligned professional learning, coaching and feedback model for leaders and educators- the real work begins after addressing the structural issues. In order to realize improved practice of the people doing the work, there must be a structure that includes observation, coaching, feedback, and professional learning. In high performing school districts, there are aligned

coaching, professional learning and feedback systems, structures and tools that ensure clarity, coherence and focus for educators, staff and leaders.

The primary responsibility of the Chief of Academics and Schools is to set the instructional vision and framework for the instructional programs of the district aligned to the district's mission, vision and core values. The Chief of Academics and Schools is a leader, spokesperson and resident expert on curriculum, instruction, pedagogy and learning. The Chief of Academics and Schools will be responsible for developing the long and short-term instructional vision for CPS and works in collaboration with the Superintendent and other district leaders, curriculum leaders and school leaders to establish a culture of high expectations and shared responsibility and equitable access to high quality and culturally relevant instruction. Adding this role to the Executive Leadership Team will fill a gap in the district that has lingered for a long time and that has had a tremendous impact on our students, educators and leaders.

Based on my professional knowledge and experience, this is a key lever to realize our desired outcomes. I do not believe that we will be able to address our lingering issues and concerns about clarity, decision-making, focus, capacity, student outcomes for reading and math, educator support and capacity or leadership support and capacity building if we continue with the current structure and the way we work as an Executive Leadership Team (ELT).

I hope I have provided a clear rationale about our current condition, needs and plans to improve that will support your decision-making about the request for the position of Chief of Academics and Schools.

I look forward to discussing this more with you.