



December 15, 2020

Minneapolis Public Schools
Board of Directors
1250 West Broadway
Minneapolis, MN 55411

Subject: Annual Letter from the 2020-2021 World's Best Workforce Advisory Committee

Dear Directors of the Minneapolis Public School Board,

This letter is written on behalf of the World's Best Workforce Advisory Committee to the Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS). Under Minnesota's Statute, section 120B.11, school districts are to develop a World's Best Workforce annual report and summary of each school year. In addition, the legislation requires there to be an advisory committee that provides recommendations focusing on the following six goal areas:

- All children are ready for school
- All third graders can read at grade level
- All racial and economic gaps between students are closed
- All students are college and career ready
- All students graduate
- Teacher equity: All students have access to excellent teachers, and low-income students, students of color and Native American students are not taught by ineffective inexperienced teachers at a disproportionate rate than other students

In the Minneapolis Public School District, the World's Best Workforce (WBWF) committee leverages district data and reports, meetings with key district staff, and input from various stakeholders to inform the development of an annual letter that provides key recommendations and/or questions related to how the district is making progress in the goals noted above.

There are several unique challenges and circumstances that have influenced the focus and the content of the WBWF letter this year. This letter provides 1) an overview of the context informing our approach to the annual letter; 2) an overall recommendation regarding the need for a comprehensive academic plan and permanent academic leadership; and 3) specific recommendations to build future collaboration and engagement with MPS leadership and the WBWF committee as a means to strengthen our collective approach and planning to address the six WBWF goals.

Context Informing Approach to WBWF Committee Annual Letter

We understand that both planning for the Comprehensive District Design (CDD) and responding to COVID-19 last spring and this school year have required significant district time and resources. During the 2019-2020 school year, the Board asked the WBWF committee for its participation and feedback in regards to the CDD meetings and public commentaries, in addition to the committee's regular attention to the six WBWF goals. The CDD and COVID-19 have made it more difficult for the WBWF committee and district leadership to dedicate the time needed to partner on a thorough assessment and dialogue on the progress in the WBWF six goal areas. For example, during the November 24, 2020 Board of Education Committee of the Whole Meeting, there was limited time for the district to present details on academic data as well as an assessment of district progress related to a comprehensive academic plan.

Due to the circumstances noted above, the WBWF committee has approached this year's annual letter by anchoring on a few key recommendations and areas for further exploration and dialogue to better understand current progress against WBWF goals and the district's current academic plan. Additionally, the WBWF committee would like to develop a thoughtful and proactive engagement process in partnership with the district to be implemented over the next few months to strengthen our approach to reviewing academic progress and developing recommendations to inform the 2021-2022 World's Best Workforce Annual Letter.

Development of a Comprehensive Academic Plan and Permanent Academic Leadership

Members of the WBWF committee have reviewed resources, meeting slide decks, and recordings (where applicable) from the MPS Committee of the Whole meetings from the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years. Several members of the WBWF committee also attended the most recent virtual Committee of the Whole meeting on November 24, 2020. While the meeting materials presented data on several key academic metrics, neither the meeting materials nor the Committee of the Whole discussions have provided greater insight or a comprehensive analysis of why we are still experiencing persistent equity gaps in our academic data. Additionally, there is not sufficient information on an aligned comprehensive academic plan to determine if actions the district is taking (including but not limited to recently adopted curriculum, professional development approach, the 2019-2020 kindergarten math pilot project and the launch of curriculum transformation) are showing any early indicators of shifting our current academic outcomes or reducing equity gaps in our academic achievement data.

Recommendation(s): The WBWF committee recommends that the Board direct the district to develop a comprehensive academic plan that outlines how the district is addressing persistent equity gaps in our student academic data. This comprehensive academic plan should be accompanied by an implementation plan that provides details as to how the district will assess progress and outcomes from district and school-based initiatives designed to reduce equity

gaps in our academic achievement data that are necessary for MPS to achieve results in each of the six WBWF goal areas. While acknowledging the present realities of the CDD and COVID-19, the WBWF committee strongly believes that this should be a top priority for the Superintendent, MPS Board of Directors, and the District Senior Leadership Team. We are deeply concerned that little to no progress will be achieved on the WBWF goals without a comprehensive academic plan or permanent academic leadership.

Focused WBWF Goals Recommendations

Goal 1: All children are ready for school (Early Childhood, Pre-K, Kindergarten Readiness)

Context: COVID-19 has had implications for Early Childhood, Pre-K, and Kindergarten enrollment. There is a trend of lowered enrollment across multiple sites.

Lower trends in enrollment estimates:

- ECSE: -149
- High 5: -229
- Kindergarten: -449

COVID-19 has also had implications for Early Childhood, Pre-K, and Kindergarten child development, and readiness. From suspending normalized activities such as attending school and interacting with family and friends - this disruption has consequent socio-emotional and academic ramifications.

The WBWF Committee recommends that:

- The Board direct the district to invest resources to both diagnose and recover from this enrollment deficit in 2021-2022.
- The Board direct the district to incorporate goals for Kindergarten readiness and student achievement into a comprehensive academic plan with details on how academic outcomes and progress to reduce Kindergarten equity gaps will be assessed and reported to families and the public.

Goal 2: All third graders can read at grade level

Context: Reading proficiency rates in MPS have remained stagnant for years, and there is a need to act with urgency regarding literacy due to the persistent reading disparity gaps between white students and students of color. According to the Minnesota Report Card (Minnesota Department of Education), MPS students of color, American Indian students, students receiving special education services and students receiving EL services experience some of the largest literacy equity gaps in the state. For example, in 2019 about 24% of American Indian and 23% of black students in Minneapolis Public Schools were reading at grade level by third grade, compared with 76% of white students. MPS is not making adequate progress to close equity gaps in reading, and the future of tens of thousands of our students is at serious risk if we don't address this. Third-grade reading skills are a critical benchmark for students' future success. By

the end of third grade, students should have the literacy skills they need to transition from learning to read to reading to learn.

According to MPS district leaders, 40% of the achievement gap is seen before students enter kindergarten and by third grade the gap rises to 60% — and remains at that level year after year. As a result, district leaders have identified K-2 grade levels as the most important developmental years to address and intervene to ensure children are developing foundational reading skills that will foster learning in 3rd grade and throughout a student’s academic journey within the school system. In 2016, MPS developed a plan that included efforts to identify and roll out a new reading curriculum in pre-K through fifth-grade classrooms across the district to boost reading skills and improve learning overall. In the 2017-2018 school year, the district purchased and started implementing Benchmark Adelante within a balanced literacy framework to focus on addressing literacy.

The WBWF Committee recommends that:

- The Board direct the district to invest resources to develop a comprehensive evaluation and report of K-5 literacy, including determining if there are any early indications of whether the balanced literacy framework, Benchmark Adelante curriculum, Lexia Core5, and Lexia PowerUp programs are effective at moving student achievement, especially for students of color, students receiving special education services, and students receiving EL services.
- The Board direct the district to address community stakeholder concerns regarding district progress in literacy by providing a public and accessible overview of literacy data overlaid with a thorough progress update on recent literacy plan changes (literacy instruction, curriculum, and professional development) and impact on current student learning and academic metrics related to literacy.
- The Board direct the district to provide greater clarity on the current state of early intervention assessments and services as well as resources and support for students that are at highest risk for not achieving grade level standards in K-5 for literacy.
 - The committee acknowledges the necessity for instruction and assessment methods that support the language growth and achievement of multilingual students and would recommend the district use additional measures to assess the growth and achievement of multilingual students.

Additional Considerations and Recommendations WBWF Goals 3-6:

The WBWF committee recommends that MPS leverage the WBWF committee overall recommendation that the district align on a comprehensive academic plan and permanent academic leadership in a manner that incorporates and provides thorough updates on WBWF goals 3-6. With this in mind, the WBWF committee has captured preliminary thoughts on topics for further exploration and engagement with district leadership to address WBWF goals 3-6.

Please see Figure 1:

Figure 1: World's Best Workforce Goals 3-6: Additional Considerations and Recommendations

<p>Goal 3: All racial and economic gaps between students are closed</p> <p>Consistent access to high quality instruction, minimizing learning time loss, and access to resources and support are key factors in addressing and closing all racial and economic gaps between students.</p> <p>The WBWF Committee recommends that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Board direct the district to act to address the academic impact of disproportionalities in MPS' disciplinary data as to students of color in a comprehensive academic plan.• The Board direct the district to work in partnership with community leaders and the State to develop a plan that will ensure students have equitable access to technology and digital resources and programs to support academic learning and efforts to close racial and economic achievement gaps. COVID-19 has amplified awareness of gaps in access to technology in our community. These gaps have had a significant impact on academics. We believe that consistent access to instruction and additional resources and support are needed to remedy these gaps.• The Board direct the district to incorporate an overview of district plans for addressing racial equity and social justice in training and professional development for district and school staff within a comprehensive academic plan as well as human resources plans for the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years.• The Board direct the district to develop and share school level best practices for closing all racial and economic gaps between students so that teachers, school leaders, and staff can learn from schools, programs, and initiatives that are showing promise and early success.
<p>Goal 4: All students are college and career ready & Goal 5: All students graduate</p> <p>In order to assess progress in WBWF Goals 4 and 5, the WBWF reviewed multiple data points including: MPS and MDE data regarding 4-year high school graduation and 5-year high school graduation trends as well as the Committee of the Whole academic data trends in the On-Track system broken down by race.</p> <p>The WBWF Committee recommends that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Board direct the district to conduct additional root cause analysis to determine factors influencing On-Track rates for specific racial/ethnic groups in middle school and high school.• The Board direct the district to develop and disseminate best practices from schools and district initiatives that are demonstrating promising progress for addressing: On-Track academic progress, remediation strategies for off track students, success in credit recovery, and college preparatory course enrollment by racial/ethnic groups.• The Board direct the district to invest resources to develop a comprehensive

evaluation and report on middle and high school curriculum and academic initiatives to determine if current approaches (i.e. curriculum, assessment, instructions, and course offerings) are aligned to college and career readiness standards (ie. ACT college ready benchmarks by subject, percentage earning college credit coursework, AVID, Naviance) and to determine greater access and engagement options for specific racial/ethnic groups in middle school and high school.

- The Board direct the district to assess the impact of COVID-19 on attendance, risk for course failure, and dropout rates especially for specific racial/ethnic groups in middle school and high school and develop action plans for re-engagement, credit recovery, and district re-enrollment.

Goal 6: Teacher Equity:

In 2018 MPS completed a Human Resources Equity and Diversity Impact Assessment (EDIA) and produced a final report that contained several recommendations related to teacher equity and teacher diversity. Additionally, the district continues to work with its unions to optimize its processes (including placement, Interview and Select, and “Last-In, First-Out,”), relative to the distribution of experienced teachers throughout the district and the ability of building leaders to recruit and retain teachers of color.

The WBWF Committee recommends that:

- The Board direct the district to provide a specific update on the changes and initiatives that have been implemented to address the recommendations from the 2018 EDIA Assessment that were specifically focused on teacher diversity and teacher equity.
- The Board direct the district to continue to review its hiring practices and the timing of Interview and Select to allow building leaders flexibility to hire as early as possible; and MPS continue to review with its unions of any flexibility in Interview and Select and LIFO processes that would encourage movement of tenured educators to high priority schools.
- The Board direct the district to incorporate specific actions aimed at improving teacher equity across the district into the hiring plans for the CDD between the 19/20 and 20/21 school years.

Proposed Next Steps for WBWF and District Engagement

The 2020-2021 WBWF committee would like to understand the Board’s high level goals for the district in each of the WBWF focus areas for the remaining school year and the 2021-2022 school year. Again, we acknowledge the strain of both the CDD and COVID-19 on our school system particularly in this transition period. With that in mind, we look forward to working in partnership with the Board and its district delegates on the recommendations and observations made in this letter. The committee would appreciate hearing from the Board with regard to the recommendations we have offered. Our committee will soon be engaging with district staff and inviting them to present information to our members on various topics of interest, including the district academic plans and human resource updates. We look forward to engaging with our

Board liaison and hope to have an opportunity to engage with other Board Directors as the year moves forward.

Sincerely,

The 2020-2021 MPS WBWF Advisory Committee

Co-Chairs:

Mikisha Nation

Scott Schluter

Members:

Fatimah Hussein-Asayr

Carrie Johnson

Basilio Diaz

Blanca Caldas Chumbes

Thomas Anderson

Jasmine Harbin

Jillian Stockmo Chapman

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Mikisha Nation

Carrie Johnson

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Liaisons:

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Sarah Hunter– Staff Liaison

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