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Committee Members

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John F. Monfredo, Vice-Chair
Tracy O'Connell-Novick

Administrative
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Jennifer Boulais
Helen A. Friel, Ed.D.

OFFICE OF THE
CLERK OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE
WORCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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WORCESTER, MA 01609

AGENDA #5

The Standing Committee on GOVERNANCE AND EMPLOYEE ISSUES will hold a meeting:

on: Tuesday, August 10, 2021

at: 4:30 p.m.

virtually in: Room 410 of the Durkin Administration Building

ORDER OF BUSINESS

- I. CALL TO ORDER
- II. ROLL CALL
- III. GENERAL BUSINESS

The following items will be discussed:

(Consider these items together.)

ros #0-9 - Administration (September 23, 2020)

RENNIE CENTER FOR EDUCATION RESEARCH & POLICY – REPORT ON THE
TECHNOLOGY SECTION FROM THE STRATEGIC PLAN

ros #1-7 - Administration (April 7, 2021)

RENNIE CENTER-PROGRESS ON STRATEGIC PLAN

STANDING COMMITTEE: **GOVERNANCE AND EMPLOYEE ISSUES**

DATE OF MEETING: Tuesday, August 10, 2021

ITEM: Administration (September 23, 2020)

RENNIE CENTER FOR EDUCATION RESEARCH & POLICY – REPORT ON THE TECHNOLOGY SECTION FROM THE STRATEGIC PLAN

PRIOR ACTION:

10-1-20 - Superintendent Binienda introduced Dr. Chad d’Entremont, Executive Director of the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy and Vibha Honasoge, Operations Coordinator at the Rennie Center. Its mission is to improve public education through well-informed decision- making based on deep knowledge and evidence of effective policy making and practice. Dr. d’Entremont, Ms. Honasoge and Ms. Nyamekye provided the following overview of the Technology and Operations section of the Strategic Plan.

BACKUP: (Consider with ros #1-7.)

Annex A - (4 pages) contains a copy of the Worcester Public Schools State of the Strategic Plan – Technology and Operations which was presented on October 1, 2020.

Annex B - (7 pages) contains a copy of the State of the Worcester Public Schools Strategic Plan - Technology and Operations – PowerPoint which was presented on October 1, 2020.

PRIOR ACTION (continued)

10-1-20 - The district's plan supports increasing use of technology, opening up the possibility for educators to look beyond textbooks for instructional content. By investing in educator professional development related to technology, the district is encouraging individual flexibility and creativity with technology use.

In response to student and educator feedback on the need for technology support, the WPS launched a teacher leadership model in which 100 certified Google trainers known as "iTeachers" train their colleagues.

To complement this training, WPS has increased technology ratios. Starting in the 2020-21 school year, WPS is providing a device for every student and 5,000 hotspots for students who need WiFi access at home.

Educators used technology to connect with families in new ways by engaging in two-way communication with families through videoconferencing and family-school communication apps. The district's response to COVID-19 has furthered strategic plan goals and exemplified a district-wide commitment to technology access and equity.

District leaders are also developing a WPS Caregivers Academy, based upon the urgent need to support families with remote learning. When in-person schooling resumes, the district must develop a plan to repair and/or replace devices at appropriate intervals.

Mayor Petty allowed Ms. Maria Drury to speak.

Ms. Drury stated that she believes that the students need to be in the classroom with the teachers and the technology.

Ms. Novick questioned how the Rennie Center was being paid and how much to which Superintendent Binienda stated that they are being paid \$25,000 through the Barr Grant and that the grant is good until November.

Ms. Novick questioned how much was spent on technology since the pandemic to which Mr. Allen replied that about \$6.2 million dollars was spent or committed to be spent for technology purchases since March.

Superintendent Binienda stated that the three year Technology Plan will be completed this year and will be forwarded to the School Committee at that time.

On a roll call of 7-0, the item was referred to the Standing Committee on Governance and Employee Issues.

2020

WORCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS
STATE OF THE
STRATEGIC PLAN

technology + operations



Excellence in Instructional Technology

When special education teacher Liza Nyamekye was a child, she recalls reading countless books that felt disconnected from her daily life. As a Black woman, she yearned for texts written by and about those who looked like her. In becoming a Worcester educator, she was determined to offer her students a different experience. Over the past several years, she has harnessed the power of technology as a tool for culturally affirming and engaging instruction.

Rather than relying solely on classic texts like Shakespeare, Liza uses technology to identify and provide students with access to texts that are relevant to their lives, such as the *Bronx Masquerade*. The text focuses on high school students who are asked to write an essay on the Harlem Renaissance. One student in the text—Wesley Boone, a passionate, aspiring rapper—opts to write a poem rather than an essay. Instead of penalizing him, Wesley’s teacher asks him to read his poem aloud to the class. Quickly thereafter, Open Mic Fridays become a weekly tradition for students at the Bronx Masquerade.

Between chapters, Liza’s students use Chromebooks to watch videos about people who have overcome obstacles to pursue their passions. These videos help students make connections between the text and their lived experiences. After finishing the book, Liza’s students explore the range of ways that individuals express themselves through poetry. Using district-provided devices, they listen to poetry through music and watch slam poetry videos. In writing their own poetry pieces, several students have opened up about stories of abuse, abandonment, and homelessness. According to Liza, these deeply personal stories would not have been possible without the slam poetry exercise.

When rapper Nipsey Hussle was killed, Liza knew her students, many of whom looked up to him, were seeking ways to respond to the news of his death. Using technology, Liza produced a timely lesson on Hussle’s life, focused on topics that inspired students to think about their own potential. Students used Chromebooks to read news coverage memorializing Hussle and watched interviews showcasing Hussle’s community activism. Through the lesson, students saw someone who looked like them being remembered as a community leader. Technology provided a powerful medium to make this rich content available to students. According to Liza, integrating technology in the classroom is what enables her to create lessons that are relevant to student’s lives and experiences. “You can’t do this with just a book,” she said. “Technology provides those visuals and that engagement.”

An Update on Technology Goals

OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES SET OUT BY WORCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS' STRATEGIC PLAN

1. Coordinate and align school administration, governance, and municipal processes to prioritize and support educational improvements for the success of all students
2. Identify and establish support for fiscal strategies that enhance and scale improvements with demonstrated effectiveness
3. Establish a strategic communication and outreach approach that promotes district opportunities and establishes Worcester as a leader in urban education
4. Establish the infrastructure necessary to support technology access and integration across the district

Though educators note that significant work remains, progress on Worcester's strategic plan has created a foundation for the type of instruction described above. The district's plan supports increasing use of technology, opening up the possibility for educators to look beyond textbooks for instructional content. By investing in educator professional development related to technology, the district is encouraging individual flexibility and creativity with technology use.

In focus groups to guide strategic plan development, WPS students and educators voiced a need for better wireless infrastructure and related technology support in schools. Responding to this feedback, WPS made the switch from Microsoft Office to the Google suite. District administrators launched a teacher leadership model, wherein anywhere from 2 to 4 teachers in each building were trained as technology champions.

So far, more than 50 educators have received their Google Certification with support from WPS. After receiving the certification, educators train colleagues in their building to harness the power of technology in classroom instruction. These technology champions are known as "iTeachers" (innovative teacher leaders), and there are currently over 100 iTeachers in the district.

To complement this training, WPS has increased technology ratios. Starting in the 2020-21 school year, WPS is providing a device for every student. This investment includes iPads for students in PreK and Kindergarten, Chromebooks for students in grades 1-12, and 5,000 hotspots for students who need WiFi access at home. Students, families, and educators have expressed excitement about the newly introduced technology.

50

**GOOGLE
CERTIFIED
EDUCATORS**

100

iTEACHERS

1-t0-1

DEVICES

5,000

HOTSPOTS

COVID-19 and Remote Learning

In Worcester, like most districts, the unexpected transition to remote learning was incredibly difficult. However, there were bright spots. The district's robust technology training ensured that every teacher had access to support in the transition to remote learning. During a time of extreme uncertainty, educators were able to ask questions and receive advice from building-specific technology champions. The process was effective given that these relationships had been established before school closures.

Though the district faced challenges in distributing devices to students, family-school communication was successful once devices were in place. Educators used technology to connect with families in new ways, often engaging in two-way communication with families through videoconferencing and family-school communication apps. Worcester educators report a desire to continue this level of family engagement when in-person schooling resumes. The district's response to COVID-19 has furthered strategic plan goals and exemplified a district-wide commitment to technology access and equity. As evidenced by an investment in hotspots and 1:1 device ratios, WPS is taking significant steps to close the out-of-school digital divide.

Looking Forward

Worcester's strategic plan, and aligned investments in technology and operations, have created a strong foundation for improved teaching and learning. Educators have deepened their familiarity and expertise with instructional technology. Many, like Liza, are using technology to make their teaching more relevant to students' lives and aligned to skills students will need after high school.

The uncertainty presented by COVID-19 has sped up district progress on several outstanding technology-related strategic plan goals. WPS is hiring four additional technology coaches, bringing the district to a total of eight. Technology coaches will support educators in aligning instructional practices with standards set forth by the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE). ISTE-aligned professional development will equip educators with the digital skills needed to empower students to drive their own learning. District leaders are also developing a WPS Caregivers Academy, based upon the urgent need to support families with remote learning. The Caregivers Academy will consist of resources, videos, and one-pagers for caregivers translated into 7 different languages. WPS is working closely with community partners to disseminate this information to families.

As the district begins rolling out a 1:1 device program, it is a critical time to focus on strategic plan goals related to wireless access in school buildings and funding for device maintenance. When in-person schooling resumes, students and educators will need to access the wireless network simultaneously, with hundreds of devices connected to the network at any given time. WPS must ensure that school wireless networks are equipped to support this level of usage. In addition, the district must develop a plan to repair and/or replace devices at appropriate intervals. This will ensure that shifts towards digital learning continue to progress beyond the lifecycle of current devices.

During this uncertain time, technology is a critical tool to support students' agency, creativity, and independence. However, it can only meet these goals when educators and district leaders center a commitment to access and equity within technology-related initiatives. For example, educators like Liza can use technology to make instruction more culturally responsive and engaging. By progressing on strategic plan goals related to technology and operations, WPS has the potential to promote more engaging, culturally responsive, and inclusive instruction. Worcester's significant progress in this area provides a critical foundation for continued growth during a time in which new digital approaches to instruction are critical to student success.



State of the WPS Strategic Plan

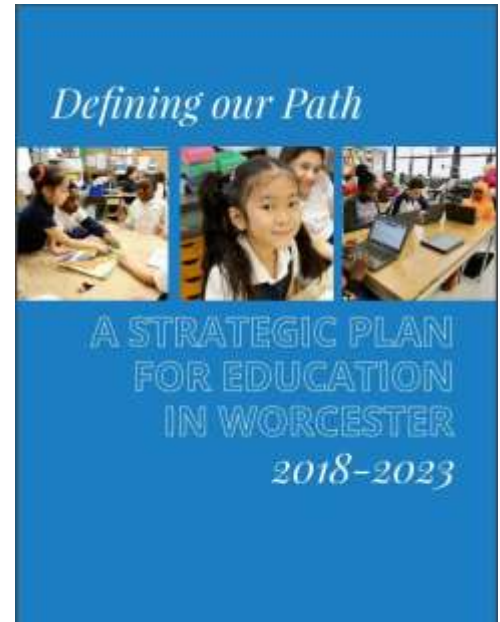
Technology & Operations

Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy

About the Rennie Center

Our mission is to improve public education through well-informed decision-making based on deep knowledge and evidence of effective policymaking and practice.

- Independent, non-partisan research
- Focused on translating research into action
- Facilitated development of 2018-2023 WPS Strategic Plan



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

184

Survey Responses

130

Focus Group
Participants

300

Community Forum
Attendees

50

Advisory Committee
Participants

40

State and District Data
Sets

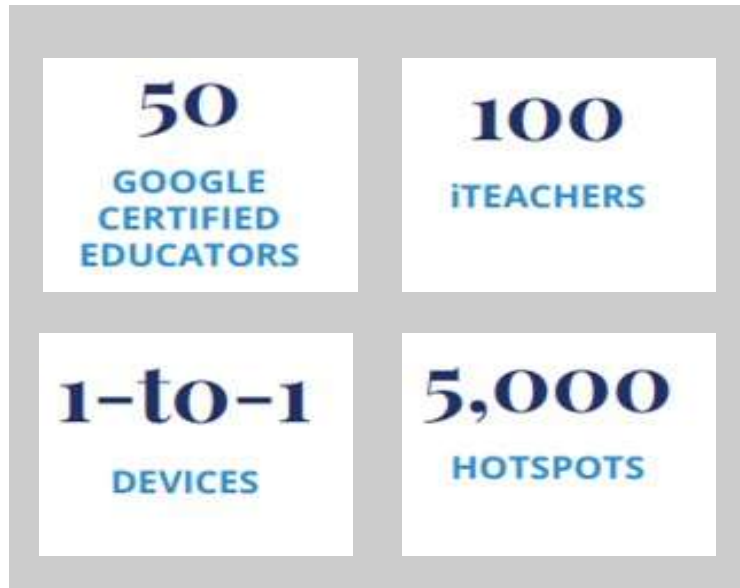


Methodology





Technology & Operations: Key Findings



- Switch from Microsoft Office to Google suite
- Robust teacher leadership model
- Hotspots for at-home WiFi



Bright Spots

Liza Nyamekye, Special Education Teacher

“Integrating technology in the classroom enables me to create lessons that are relevant to student’s lives and experiences... You can’t do this with just a book, technology provides those visuals and that engagement.”





Looking Forward: *Next Steps for WPS*

Priorities		Aligned Goal	Initiatives in Development
1	Prioritize Robust, Strategic Communication	Tech & Ops #3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WPS Caregivers Academy
2	Close the Out-of-School Digital Divide	Tech & Ops #4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student hotspots• 1:1 device rollout
3	Strengthen Technology Use in Classrooms	Tech & Ops #4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1:1 device rollout• Alignment to ISTE Standards

STANDING COMMITTEE: **GOVERNANCE AND EMPLOYEE ISSUES**

DATE OF MEETING: Tuesday, August 10, 2021

ITEM: Administration (April 7, 2021)

RENNIE CENTER-PROGRESS ON STRATEGIC PLAN

PRIOR ACTION:

4-15-21 - Superintendent Binienda stated that the Rennie Center partnered with the WPS in the formulation of the Strategic Plan and was given the task of looking at data, working with and interviewing personnel regarding the progress being made on the Strategic Plan. Annelise Eaton, Research Director at the Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy, presented a mid-point progress report focusing on three sections:

Welcoming Schools

This section focused on the climate of schools in order to make students and families feel welcome along with discipline and attendance. She indicated that attendance was better and there was a decline in punitive discipline rates, but there is still a significant racial gap.

Academic Excellence

This section focused on career exploration. The work with Innovation Pathways and AVID were presented as bright spots. Culturally Responsive Teaching and elementary math instruction were areas in need of continued growth.

Culture of Innovation

This section focused on evidence based best practices and support of school leaders. The Reggio Emilia early childhood opportunity in Head Start and ST Math were highlighted as positives. Aligning and adapting high quality curricula were areas that still need to be addressed.

(Continued on Page 2)

BACKUP: (Consider with ros #0-9.)

Annex A - (7 pages) contains The Progress of the Strategic Plan which was presented on April 15, 2021.

Annex B - (5 pages) contains a copy of a proposed report submitted by WEC (Worcester Education Collaborative) entitled Defining our Path – A Strategic Plan for Education in Worcester 2018-2023.

PRIOR ACTION (continued)

- 4-15-21 - Mr. Monfredo asked for an update on The Worcester Future Teachers Program.
Superintendent Binienda stated that she met with Worcester State University on continuing the Worcester Future Teachers Program. Due to COVID, there will be no summer program for WFT, so a two-day program will be held. There is a partnership agreement in progress with Generation Teach which would involve 250 WPS students next summer.
Mr. Monfredo suggested recruiting more Latinx students for the Generation Teach program and also would like to have them as mentors assigned to assist on the attendance issues facing Latinx students. He also suggested having businesses provide incentives and rewards to Latinx students to encourage greater attendance.
Mr. Foley requested that representatives from the Worcester Education Collaborative and the Worcester Research Bureau be present at the next update of the Strategic Plan in order to provide community perspective and feedback.
Ms. Novick stated that having a five-year Strategic Plan is no longer considered among best practices within other school districts. The district should be looking at building a culture within the schools that encourages students to stay and become teachers as well as enticing them to want to part of the WPS.
On a roll call of 7-0, the item was referred to the Standing Committee on Governance and Employee Issues.

Progress on the Strategic Plan

Worcester Public Schools
April 15, 2021



Introductions



The mission of the Rennie Center is to improve public education through well-informed decision-making based on deep knowledge and evidence of effective policymaking and practice.

Chad d'Entremont
Executive Director

Annelise Eaton
Research Director

Background

Overview of the Work

5

Rennie Partnership with WPS

Strategic Plan Development

In 2018, the Rennie Center partnered with the Worcester Education Collaborative and Worcester Public Schools to facilitate a community-engaged strategic planning process.

State of the Strategic Plan

Over the past year, we have partnered with WPS to assess progress on the strategic plan, identifying bright spots and areas for continued growth.

Today's Focus

Welcoming Schools



Academic Excellence



Culture of Innovation



Welcoming Schools



We meet and greet every family member that comes in during the school year. It makes a lasting impression on the family that we really care about their kids.

— Principal Ishmael Tabeles, Union Hill School

Bright Spots

- Improved connections with families to address barriers to attendance
- Staff training focused on empathetic, student-centered discipline
- Professional development focused on trauma-informed practices
- Significant decline in punitive discipline rates
- Chronic absenteeism data monitoring in every school
- Social emotional learning surveys in grades 7-12



Academic Excellence

Bright Spots

WPS has made significant progress on strategic plan goals focused on leveraging community partnerships, increasing career exploration, and strengthening opportunities for students to demonstrate higher-level thinking skills.

- Career exploration through Innovation Pathways
- Curriculum and professional learning resources to support Culturally Responsive Teaching
- Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) support for rigorous coursework
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) professional learning communities and professional development



Areas for Continued Growth

- Continued investment in curriculum and professional learning to support culturally responsive teaching
- Focus on elementary math instruction
- Earlier opportunities for career exploration
- Consider expansion of Innovation Pathways program

Culture of Innovation

Bright Spots

- Expansion of the Reggio Emilia approach in Worcester Head Start
- District-wide network to promote shared learning across schools
- Community-wide Portrait of a Graduate effort
- Adoption of ST Math to support conceptual understanding of math content

Areas for Continued Growth

Close **monitoring of all curricula** to identify areas where materials should be supplemented/adapted to improve instruction

Identification and implementation of **evidence-based math interventions** at the elementary level





The Research Bureau

In Collaboration with:



We believe that the cooperative approach that founded this plan remains key to its implementation; soliciting meaningful community engagement, calling on expert insight, and working with civic leaders and associations is integral to sustaining the forward momentum that will ensure the ongoing success of our schools and our children.

- From Defining Our Path: A Strategic Plan for Education in Worcester 2018-2023

Defining our Path



A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR EDUCATION IN WORCESTER

2018-2023

Overview

The Community Engagement Committee (CEC) will work with the District, through the Worcester School Committee's Standing Committee on Governance and Employee Issues, to update the Worcester Public Schools' Strategic Plan, *Defining Our Path*. The COVID-19 pandemic, and corresponding remote learning models, are major factors contributing to the need for an overall update of the plan. The Community Engagement Committee (CEC) will incorporate lessons learned through the Strategic Plan's implementation, reflect current circumstances caused and exacerbated by the pandemic, and provide community engagement and input on appropriate benchmarking, outcomes, and data metrics for each of the five elements of the strategic plan.

1. Culture of Innovation
2. Academic Excellence
3. Welcoming Schools
4. Investing in Educators
5. Technology & Operations

Objectives

- To evaluate progress toward the stated objectives of the strategic plan, providing transparency and input on appropriate benchmarks for success, outcomes, and data metrics
- To engage members of the community to incorporate public input in the strategic plan update
- To update the plan to reflect current circumstances, inequities, learning models, and priorities.
- To update the plan to consider the current challenges with Student Opportunity Act funding and the Strategic Plan's reliance on such funding.

Workplan & Responsibilities

Standing Committee on School Governance and Employee Issues

The Standing Committee will host a series of five open meetings, held between August and December. Meetings of the Standing Committee will collect public input, request information and data, and discuss progress on the five elements of the strategic plan.

By the conclusion of the first quarter of FY22, the Standing Committee will review the findings and recommendations of the Community Engagement Committee (CEC) and will submit for review by the full School Committee for consideration.

Community Engagement Committee (CEC)

The Community Engagement Committee will be composed of community members, business leaders, Worcester Education Equity Roundtable members, and Worcester Public Schools District representation.

The Community Engagement Committee will review the work of the Working Groups in its totality. This Committee will identify any gaps or areas of intersection that should be addressed in the update. This Committee will finalize the findings and recommendations for consideration by the Standing Committee on Governance & Employee Issues.

Working Groups

Working Groups will be established for each of the five elements of the strategic plan. Working Groups will be made up of members of the Community Engagement Committee and one member of the Standing Committee on School Governance and Employee Issues, or designee.

The Working Groups will be charged with reviewing the public input and information collected at the Standing Committee's meetings, collecting additional community feedback, evaluating current progress, making recommendations for updates to the plan, and considering funding solutions.

Working Groups will submit a brief document outlining its findings and recommendations to the Community Engagement Committee.

Structure

School Committee				
Standing Committee on School Governance & Employee Issues				
Community Engagement Committee (CEC)				
Culture of Innovation Working Group	Academic Excellence Working Group	Welcoming Schools Working Group	Investing in Educators Working Group	Technology & Operations Working Group

Contact:

To offer input or get involved, please contact:

wpsstrategicplan@gmail.com