

BPS ESSENTIALS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL EQUITY



Appreciations

The Essentials for Instructional Equity are the result of many cycles of revision involving many stakeholders. We thank all of the members of the BPS community who supported this work including:

- The BPS Academics and Student Supports for Equity Team (ASSET). ASSET team members thoughtfully synthesized instructional frameworks and current research across their domains of expertise in order to create the Essentials. They continue to work together to develop professional learning, resources, and tools that support the implementation of the Essentials.
- The teachers of the Boston Teacher's Union's Professional Learning Advisory Board (PLAB). PLAB members provided critical feedback during each revision cycle. Their insight and expertise powerfully impacted the quality of the work. The members of PLAB include:
 - Members of Office of Human Capital team who are doing extraordinary work to support the introduction of the Essentials. Their efforts include a video series that captures teacher voices, and alignment of language, look-fors, and and educator supports.
 - Members of the Office of Data and Accountability and Academic Response Teams who are leading the development of professional learning and tools.
 - Members of the Office of Family and Community Engagement team who are collaborating to develop resources and adult learning for families related to the Essentials.
 - Members of the teams from the Office of the Chief of Schools who have linked the Essentials to instructional foci and leadership development work for teachers and school leaders.

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CITY OF BOSTON • MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
MARTIN J. WALSH

Dear Neighbors,

Young people are our greatest resource. They are creative, they are problem solvers, and they've got big dreams for the future of Boston. They are the future of Boston. Every one of them deserves to reach their fullest potential. It is our job to give them the tools they need to do so.

Boston is booming. More and more companies are flocking here. We're becoming a global headquarters city. Our tech, healthcare, and life science industries are growing every day. This is a city where creativity is everywhere and ambition is the norm. We're making sure all our young people benefit from this success by making sure every BPS student graduates ready for these 21st-century careers.

In the last three years, we have made Boston Public Schools better than they have ever been. We're investing in the kinds of learning opportunities students deserve -- from pre-kindergarten all the way to college. We have:

- Increased the number of pre-kindergarten seats available to four-year-olds.
- Established programs that enable Boston Public Schools graduates to attend Bunker Hill, Roxbury and Mass Bay Community Colleges, and four-year State public colleges tuition-free.
- Pledged \$1 billion to modernize school infrastructure and create high-quality, 21st-century classrooms for every student in the city.
- Extended the school day -- giving many students from kindergarten through eighth grade 120 more hours of learning time per year.

We have come a long way, and we are just getting started. If we want our historic city to continue to make history, we cannot afford to leave anybody behind. We're making sure every Bostonian has access to the learning that will ensure they are ready to contribute to a strong and prosperous Boston --whether their family has attended BPS schools for generations, or whether they're first-generation immigrants.

I am proud to announce the next major milestone in this work: the Essentials for Instructional Equity. This program will give the city of Boston common language to describe what teaching and learning should look like for our students. It will also help the adults supporting them set shared expectations for classroom instruction. I am excited to work with Boston Public Schools, families, and our community partners to implement this exciting new program. These Essentials, and the training and resources that will accompany them, are an investment in our teachers and their professional growth, which is critical to the success of our schools and students.

The Essentials will allow us all to have a common conversation about education within the city and empower parents and community members to advocate for the excellent schools our students deserve. This framework will allow us align resources toward a common goal: **a world-class system of schools in service of a stronger Boston.**

Sincerely,

Martin J. Walsh

Mayor - City of Boston

Letter from the Superintendent

Dear BPS Community,

BPS students are the citizens, leaders, scholars, entrepreneurs, advocates, and innovators of tomorrow. As a city and a district, we must ensure that 100% of students are prepared for college, career, and life in the 21st century.

Our students come from rich histories of resilience and they are already demonstrating leadership in changing the world around them. The youth in our schools today will be the ones that will shape the future of our country and our world to be more inclusive and more equitable. For the survival and future success of our democratic, pluralistic society, we must prepare them for this challenge.

To realize this vision for 100% of our students we must transform teaching and learning in the district. Every student and every adult in BPS needs to be engaged in authentic learning, working together to solve complex, real-world problems.

There are places in BPS where this is happening but we know that authentic learning opportunities are not yet available to every student. In particular, we know that there are students who have been marginalized and have had limited opportunities to engage in this type of learning. Black and Latino students, students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and students of low socio-economic status in our district have not consistently had access to authentic learning opportunities. For 100% of our students to be prepared for college, career, and life we must close these opportunity gaps.

Traditional pedagogical approaches will not enable transformation. For this reason, we are introducing four educator competencies, the Essentials for Instructional Equity, that can catalyze the type of transformation in teaching and learning required to attain the BPS vision for students who have been marginalized. These Essentials are central to the work of our Strategic Implementation Plan and our Opportunity and Achievement Gap Implementation Plan. These competencies are:



CREATE & MAINTAIN SAFE, HEALTHY, & SUSTAINING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS



DESIGN LEARNING EXPERIENCES FOR ACCESS & AGENCY



FACILITATE COGNITIVELY-DEMANDING TASKS & INSTRUCTION



ASSESS FOR LEARNING

I am looking forward to partnering with you all as we work together to leverage and further develop the incredible work that is already happening in these areas around the district to ensure that all BPS students access authentic learning experiences and become independent learners.

Sincerely,

Dr. Tommy Chang

Executive Summary

BPS INSTRUCTIONAL VISION

Boston Public Schools students are the citizens, leaders, scholars, entrepreneurs, advocates, and innovators of tomorrow. BPS must ensure that 100% of those students are ready for college, career, and life.

In order to realize our vision, we must transform teaching and learning in BPS. Our students must have access to authentic learning opportunities that will prepare them for success in the rapidly changing world in which we live. The Essentials for Instructional Equity enable this transformation.

WHAT ARE THE BPS ESSENTIALS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL EQUITY?

BPS's first instructional "Essentials" were the Essentials for Whole School Improvement developed by Superintendent Thomas Payzant and his team in 1996 as part of his "Focus on Children" agenda. The Essentials for Instructional Equity aim to set a similar standard for instruction that reflects the current educational landscape. The BPS Essentials for Instructional Equity are a set of research-based educator competencies that are necessary to effectively facilitate next generation learning for diverse learners. Developing and demonstrating these competencies is foundational to ensuring equitable access and engagement in inclusive, rigorous, and culturally and linguistically sustaining instructional programs that foster the whole child and prepare students for success.

The competencies comprising the BPS Essentials for Instructional Equity are:



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The Essentials were developed in 2016-2017 by a cross-functional team led by the Academics and Student Support for Equity Team (ASSET). The Essentials represent a strategic synthesis of research and instructional frameworks designed to facilitate effective 21st century learning for diverse learners. Specifically, the team focused on research and instructional guidance targeted to support students of color, English-language learners, students with disabilities, and students of low socioeconomic status.

WHY DO WE NEED THE ESSENTIALS?

Our world is evolving at an extraordinary pace. In order to realize our instructional vision, we need to support students in developing knowledge, skills, and mindsets that will help them be successful in a shifting landscape. The jobs they will have and the problems they will solve likely do not yet exist. Traditional pedagogies will not be sufficient. This academic climate calls for rigorous, authentic learning that provides opportunities and supports for developing adaptive skills and mindsets alongside academic content.

As the expectations for instruction shift, we recognize that we have not done enough to ensure that all learners have access to the instructional opportunities that they deserve. Despite many years of incremental increases in student achievement, opportunity and achievement gaps persist in BPS. The district is committed to closing and eliminating these gaps. The Essentials for Instructional Equity establish a common vision for next generation teaching and learning with a specific focus on the instructional strategies that provide access to authentic learning to students who have been marginalized. The Essentials draw upon current research on effective practices for closing opportunity and achievement gaps and for supporting students to become independent learners. The Essentials are aligned to the instructional aspects of the BPS Opportunity and Achievement Gap Policy (2016) and to the goals in the district's Strategic Implementation Plan (2016).

HOW WILL THE ESSENTIALS IMPACT TEACHING & LEARNING?

Central office teams, school-based leaders, and educators will work together to develop professional learning opportunities and to curate or create tools and resources to support educators in developing and demonstrating the Essentials. These resources will be made available to educators and instructional leadership teams (ILTs) to support school-based learning.

The Superintendent's Team, Chief of Schools Team, the Strategy Team, and ASSET will work with teachers and school leaders to determine the best ways to monitor implementation of the Essentials.

Implementation of the Essentials—along with other efforts articulated in the BPS Strategic Implementation Plan and the 2016 Opportunity and Achievement Gap Policy—will support improved student achievement and promote the closing and eliminating of opportunity and achievement gaps. Implementation of the Essentials will also support attainment of the goals for student achievement outlined in Appendix D of the Strategic Implementation Plan.

Introduction

Our Vision

BPS classrooms and learning spaces need to be places where all students engage in authentic learning opportunities and have access to learning pathways tailored to their unique needs. Authentic learning opportunities engage students at every developmental level with complex, cognitively-demanding, real-world problems. The available pathways need to guide students to develop the knowledge, skills, and mindsets that will allow them to thrive personally and professionally. They must also infuse the topics, coursework, and experiences that will ignite a critically conscious and active citizenry, ready to collectively craft an even better, more equitable Boston and broader world. In Boston, we believe that students who are college, career, and life ready can:

Set a vision: Boston's students and graduates are keenly curious and deeply hopeful. They know that the way things are isn't the only way they could be, and they know they have the power—and the responsibility—to make things better, for themselves and for others.

Choose a course: Boston's students and graduates build plans that account for the realities of their situation. They know their own strengths and weaknesses and can assess those of others; they can get the job done. They can read the context that surrounds them, choose a wise course through it, and stick with their plan when things get hard.

Work with others: Boston's students and graduates bring out the best in others, and do some of their best work through collaboration. They listen to what others say, hear what they mean, and tune in to what they feel. They build on other people's ideas and communicate their own, by argument and by story.

Build competence: Boston's students and graduates have the academic knowledge it takes to do high-quality intellectual work, the technical skills required to practice their craft, and the practical competencies they need to take care of themselves as they make their way through the day-to-day. They know how to learn what they don't already know; they're confident in their power to grow and make change around them.

Change course: Boston's students and graduates can assess what's really going on around them and adapt their plans as needed when their situation changes. Grounded in their self and community, they are able to keep trying when things get hard, and work their way through the problems they encounter—both the clear-cut and the ambiguous—with imagination and rigor. (Boston Opportunity Agenda, 2017)

Our Problem of Practice

Many teachers and school leaders are leading efforts to transform learning in their classrooms and schools so that students are college, career, and life ready. There are bright spots throughout the city. We know that not every student in BPS has access yet to learning opportunities that align to our vision. Our district problem of practice that drives our improvement efforts is:

BPS does not consistently provide authentic learning opportunities for our students who are most marginalized to develop into self-determined, independent learners, able to pursue their aspirations. Our failures lead to disengaged students and significant achievement gaps.

We must be sure that students who have been marginalized now have full access to authentic learning opportunities aligned with our vision. In BPS, we define students who have been marginalized as: students of color, students with disabilities, English-language learners, and students of low socioeconomic status.

BPS has made a multi-year commitment to transforming teaching and learning for students who are marginalized in our schools to ensure that 100% of its students are college, career, and life ready. This commitment includes system-wide professional learning focused on culturally and linguistically sustaining practices (CLSP), decolonization of curricula, analysis and action related to systemic structures that promote exclusionary practices, and focusing professional learning on the Essentials for Instructional Equity.

Essentials for Instructional Equity

Traditional pedagogical approaches will not enable transformation. We believe the four educator competencies of the Essentials for Instructional Equity will catalyze the transformation in teaching and learning that is required to attain the BPS vision for students who have been marginalized. These competencies are:



CREATE & MAINTAIN SAFE, HEALTHY, & SUSTAINING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS



DESIGN LEARNING EXPERIENCES FOR ACCESS & AGENCY



FACILITATE COGNITIVELY-DEMANDING TASKS & INSTRUCTION



ASSESS FOR LEARNING

The Essential Competencies and the tools, resources, and professional learning that will accompany them focus on meeting the unique needs of students who have been marginalized. Each Essential Competency will be described in detail in the following pages, with links to the research that informed it and a description of what students will experience as a result of its implementation.

The Essentials for Instructional Equity are intentionally crafted to draw together two concepts: (1) current frameworks for next generation learning and (2) research on effective practices for designing learning to address the interests, learning styles, and needs of students who have been marginalized. The competencies align to the instructional aspects of key district documents including: Stronger Schools, Stronger Boston: The BPS Strategic Implementation Plan; BuildBPS: The 10 Year Educational and Facilities Master Plan; and the 2016 Opportunity and Achievement Gap Policy.

Why Do We Need Essentials for Instructional Equity?

Authentic, Next Generation Learning

In order to become future leaders, scholars, entrepreneurs, advocates, and innovators, students will need to develop a broad portfolio of knowledge and skills that will allow them to successfully negotiate the social, economic, and political landscapes of the 21st century. Essential 21st century, or “next generation,” skills include:

- **Thinking Critically and Creatively to Solve Problems**
- **Collaborating**
- **Communicating**

BPS classrooms need to evolve into learning spaces in which students are the active agents of their learning. In such spaces, adults do not primarily “deliver” content. Rather, they facilitate authentic learning experiences that engage students with rigorous, standards-aligned content and texts in ways that guide and support students to develop the knowledge, skills, and mindsets necessary for success.

In every BPS learning space we should see:

- Students engaging with complex texts (print, digital, or visual media);
- Students engaging with standards-aligned cognitively demanding tasks that are authentic, which is defined here by tasks that are meaningful, relevant, and include complex real-world problems;
- Students acquiring and applying social and emotional skills that enable them to engage deeply in cognitively demanding, collaborative work and persevere through the challenges this work poses;
- Students talking with peers and adults, asking questions, probing for deeper understanding, articulating their understanding, etc.;
- Students producing responses to tasks in written, verbal, creative, or technological form;
- Students drawing on the entirety of who they are culturally and linguistically in order to understand content, critique the ideas of others, and create solutions to meaningful problems.

The Essentials describe the educator competencies that are foundational to being a facilitator of next generation learning.

Rigorous Standards

BPS educators have worked hard over several years to align instruction to the 2011 Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (Massachusetts’ version of the Common Core State Standards). We know, however, that there is still considerable work to be done in this area. Student achievement data shows us that more than half of our students in grades three to eight did not yet demonstrate mastery of grade level standards that met expectations on the 2016 PARCC assessment. Gaps in the alignment of instructional tasks to the standards may underlie this achievement data. A 2015 survey of instructional tasks in schools throughout the BPS system conducted by TNTP revealed that only 55% were aligned to the 2011 Frameworks.

The Essentials call for a continued focus on ensuring that all students have access to authentic, standards-aligned, cognitively demanding tasks. They describe how educators effectively design and facilitate the learning experiences in which the tasks are situated in such a way that students are able to develop college, career, and life readiness skills at the same time they are developing content knowledge.

Persistent Opportunity and Achievement Gaps

Today, not every BPS student has access to the types of learning experiences that will prepare them to thrive. In particular, students of color, English-language learners, students with disabilities, and students of low socioeconomic status have not consistently had access to these types of learning experiences. Our failures lead to disengaged students and significant achievement gaps (MA DESE District Report Card Overview, 2016; BPS NAEP Results, 2015; Miranda et al., 2014). District schools, in aggregate, have not met annual gap closing targets for most sub-groups.

In a study commissioned by Interim Superintendent John McDonough and conducted by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University and the Center for Collaborative Education, Miranda et al. (2014) articulate the opportunity gaps that exist in the district for Black and Latino male students. These students are underrepresented in Advanced Work classes and exam schools, more likely to be placed in substantially separate classrooms if they receive special education services, and more likely to be chronically absent, to be suspended, and to drop out of school than their White and Asian counterparts. There is significant work to be done to address these gaps, and gaps that exist for other students who have been marginalized.

The Essentials articulate instructional shifts that address the need of students who have been marginalized.

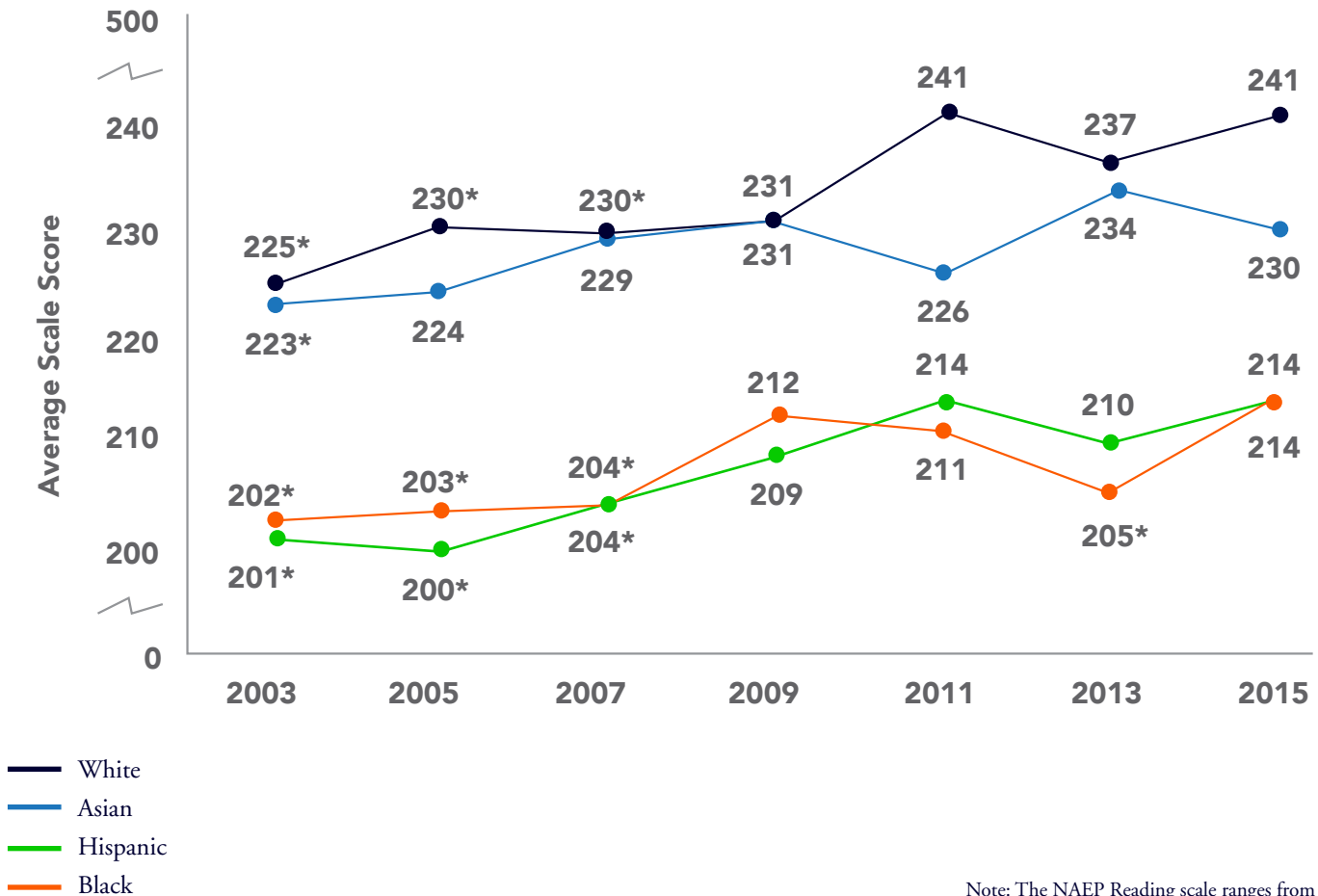
Evolving Instructional Improvement Strategy

The educational landscape in Boston has shifted in recent years. The increasing demand for a workforce prepared for innovation, a shifting political climate that demands increased advocacy and activism, rigorous college and career readiness standards, increased school autonomy, and information being made available through current educational research have motivated the development of the Essentials for Instructional Equity as a cornerstone of the district's instructional strategy. The strategy takes a targeted universalism approach to improvement (Powell, 2009). With this approach, we have a singular goal—100% of BPS students prepared for college, career, and life in the 21st century—and we intentionally focus on

what the research tells us about the conditions we must create in order to meet the needs of students who have been marginalized. The majority of the BPS student body of today are student groups that are defined as being marginalized. Of BPS students, 77% are Black or Latino, 30% are English learners, 20% are students with disabilities, and 70% are students of low socioeconomic status.

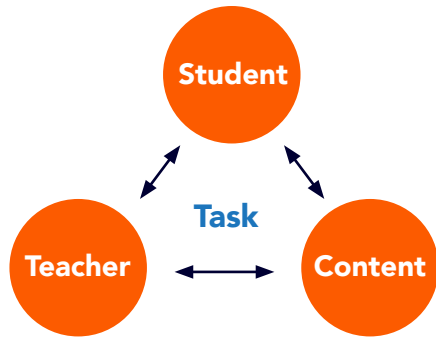
The Essentials for Instructional Equity identify specific instructional practices that are likely to enable our students to exceed today's rigorous standards and be prepared for success in college, career, and life.

Grade 4 Reading by Race / Ethnicity Average Scale Scores: 2003-2015



What are the Essentials for Instructional Equity?

The Essentials for Instructional Equity are four educator competencies that, when effectively implemented, establish a strong foundation for next generation learning that is tailored to the interests, learning styles, and needs of students who have been marginalized. The Essentials enable educators to design learning experiences that can transform what happens within the instructional core for these students. Research is clear in showing that improvement efforts that do not impact the instructional core will not change student outcomes (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009).



A focus on the instructional core has been central to the BPS theory of action since July 2015.

The instructional core is the interdependent relationship that exists between the teachers' knowledge and skill, students' engagement in their own learning, and academically challenging content. At the center of this teaching and learning is the quality of the task, defined by its rigor and accessibility. The Essentials for Instructional Equity maintain this focus on cognitively demanding tasks while drawing additional attention to the interaction between teacher and student.

In order to effectively transform what happens within the instructional core for students who have been marginalized, development and demonstration of the Essential competencies must occur simultaneously with development of the three competencies of the BPS CLSP Continuum (Appendix A). Educators at every level of our organization must engage in this work.

The Essentials-At-A-Glance

Every BPS educator must develop and demonstrate the following competencies:



CREATE & MAINTAIN SAFE, HEALTHY, & SUSTAINING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS



DESIGN LEARNING EXPERIENCES FOR ACCESS & AGENCY



FACILITATE COGNITIVELY-DEMANDING TASKS & INSTRUCTION



ASSESS FOR LEARNING

The research-based practices and frameworks that the Essentials draw upon contain multiple points of overlap and therefore have been synthesized in such a way to make them easier to operationalize. The pages that follow include a description of each competency, a research-based explanation of why it is essential, a set of supporting sub-competencies, a description of the student experience as a result of the implementation of the competency, and connections to important metrics within the system, including the MA Educator Evaluation Rubric and the CLASS Observation Tool. Additional resources for professional learning will be available on the Essentials for Instructional Equity website.





CREATE & MAINTAIN SAFE, HEALTHY, & SUSTAINING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Why is This Competency Essential?

People learn best in environments that feel physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy and safe.

Safety is essential because the human brain is designed for survival. Systems in the brain constantly scan the environment for potential threats. A threat may be a situation that is potentially harmful to one's physical body, emotional health, social status, or sense of identity. Regardless of the threat, the body responds in the same way – by initiating a stress response that floods the brain with cortisol. Cortisol in the brain impacts other cognitive processes, making learning difficult (Hammond, 2015). Educators need to demonstrate the capacity to create a learning environment that reduces or eliminates conditions that may induce a stress reaction for students. Educators need to be able to explicitly teach students how to recognize the onset of a stress reaction and to draw on social and emotional skills in order to mitigate negative effects.

Healthy learning environments are essential because poor health makes it challenging for students to focus on learning and leads to missed school days. Research clearly indicates that health inequities in nutrition, physical activity, vision, teen pregnancy, behavioral and mental health, and asthma interfere with learning and disproportionately impact low-income youth of color. Educators need to be able to create learning environments that teach and model healthy choices including nutrition, physical activity, and risk taking.

Sustaining learning environments use the cultural knowledge, prior experience, frame of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective in promoting academic achievements; they teach to and through the strengths of students. Their practices are culturally and linguistically validating and affirming (Gay, 2000).

Establishing trusting relationships between educators and students is foundational to this work. John Hattie's (2009) work articulated clear evidence from research on the positive impact educator-student relationships have on student outcomes. Hammond (2015) describes the ideal educator-student relationship for culturally responsive teachers as that of the "warm demander." Warm demanders build warm, trusting relationships with students. They ask students about the important people and events in their lives. They hold high standards for students. They offer effective feedback, encouragement, and emotional supports. Warm demanders know that every student can achieve at high levels and their relationships help students know it too.

Safe, healthy, and sustaining learning environments support students in acquiring and applying inter-personal, intra-personal, and decision making skills.

Sub-Competencies

- 1.1** Educators examine their personal biases to become aware of the ways in which their own cultural experiences influence the learning environments that they create for students.
- 1.2** Educators express interest in getting to know each student and use what they learn to shape the learning environment.
- 1.3** Educators create and maintain a safe, healthy, and sustaining learning environment—and engage students to do the same—by...
 - Supporting and nurturing everyone's physical, emotional, and psychological well-being.
 - Celebrating, valuing, and affirming the diverse identities of colleagues and learners.
 - Maintaining a physical environment with fresh air and sunlight, clean water, comfortable climates, healthy snacks and meals, and increased accessibility.
 - Incorporating physical activity as a part of learning and life
- 1.4** Educators create learning spaces and environments that encourage learners to:
 - Take purposeful and intentional ownership of their own learning spaces including walls, furniture configuration, decibel levels, etc.
 - Take risks and share feedback in pursuit of continuous learning (Ghaith, 2003; Kerr, Ireland, Lopes, Craig, & Cleaver, 2004; Finnan, Schnepel, & Anderson, 2003).
 - Listen and think critically to solve problems collaboratively (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).
 - Increase self-awareness, use active listening and positive communication
 - Develop healthy, respectful relationships
 - Cooperate and resolve differences
 - Demonstrate empathy, tolerance and community among students and adults.

How this Essential Prepares Students for College, Career and Life:

Students are college, career, and life ready when they can:

Safe, healthy and sustaining learning environments support college, career, and life readiness when:

SET A VISION

Learning spaces include visual and print materials that support the social/emotional and academic goals of students.

CHOOSE A COURSE

Interactions between students and adults positively reinforce social and academic risk taking and include opportunities to recognize and discuss successes and failures.

Learning spaces reflect the identities, needs, and interests of students.

WORK WITH OTHERS

Learning spaces facilitate active, cooperative, problem-based learning that exemplifies next-generation learning.

Students form caring and trusting relationships with adults and peers.

Adults nurture and facilitate peer to peer learning opportunities including academic and social emotional.

Interactions between students and adults encourage active engagement in rigorous work.

BUILD COMPETENCY

Learning spaces are physically safe, clean, and organized.

Learning environments encourage and enable students to take risks and pursue interests.

CHANGE COURSE

Students make connections between the content and their background knowledge and experiences in terms of their emerging understandings, questions, and proposed solutions.





DESIGN LEARNING EXPERIENCES FOR ACCESS & AGENCY

Why is This Competency Essential?

No two learners are exactly alike. Though every brain has the same basic structures, each person's brain is entirely unique, with neural pathways that have been established through the myriad experiences they have had throughout their lives (Meyer, Rose, and Gordon, 2014). Many of our neural pathways are influenced by our cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Hammond, 2015).

Learning happens when neurons connect and become efficient in transmitting information. In order for this to happen, the brain's structures need to be activated to pay attention to the new information, the information needs to connect to existing schema, and the brain needs the opportunity to process the information and store it in long-term memory (Meyer, Rose, and Gordon, 2014). In order to potentially produce learning, learning experiences must be designed to engage the brains of the learners present, tap into their existing schema, and offer opportunities for application and processing.

Students who are marginalized often receive instruction that has been generically designed or "one size fits all." The generic design elements (content, lesson design, products or activities, etc.) often reflect the cultural and linguistic values and learning styles of the curriculum authors or the teacher. These design elements may be unlikely to engage students' brains effectively or yield deep learning. Repeated exposure to this type of experience can make the learning environment stressful and anxiety-provoking for learners, leading them to disengage.

Access is essential to the development of agency. When students have agency, they choose pathways and strategies, share ideas, make mistakes, revise their thinking, and reflect on and celebrate their growth. Agency is linked to students' developing sense of identity, ownership of their learning, and their ability to continue to take an active role in the path of their lives.

Sub-Competencies

- 2.1** Educators employ appropriate actions and practices to get to know their students as learners and affirm their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
- 2.2** Educators gather relevant information about students before and throughout each unit and learning experience, and use that information to plan, ask questions, adjust pacing, and target interventions.
- 2.3** Educators purposefully select, design, and prepare tasks and learning experiences to ensure that:
 - The content is aligned to standards
 - The content is represented in ways that access students' prior knowledge and reflect varying learning styles
 - There are multiple means for processing information
 - There are multiple means of expressing what is learned...so that EVERY student can engage in the cognitive demand of the task.
- 2.4** Educators take action to ensure that students exercise agency over what and how they learn by:
 - Using their voices to choose the topics and strategies used in the classroom to develop skills and knowledge.
 - Situating their learning in the contexts that matter to them: home, community, future, etc.

How this Essential Prepares Students for College, Career and Life:

Students are college, career, and life ready when they can:

Safe, healthy and sustaining learning environments support college, career, and life readiness when:

SET A VISION

Important information about tasks is delivered in multiple modalities (in writing, orally, with a visual, etc.).

Tasks are designed to have multiple pathways to a response or more than one possible response.

Tasks are designed to enable students to make or envision themselves making an impact on the real world.

CHOOSE A COURSE

Learning experiences are designed to include opportunities for students to make choices about the content, process, or product.

Students regularly set and revisit goals in relation to academic and social-emotional objectives and growth.

Learning experiences and instructional materials that are tailored to their unique needs and they have opportunities to understand and articulate their learning styles and needs.

Students have regular discussions about their interests, learning styles, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds with adults and peers and they believe that these things are valued parts of who they are.

WORK WITH OTHERS

There are opportunities in every learning experience to process information in different ways, including independently, with peers, with adults, in writing, using visual images or symbols, orally, etc.

BUILD COMPETENCY

The design of a learning experience maintains the cognitive demand of the task.

Learning 'portraits' represent students' strengths and areas of growth.

The design of learning experience makes them the leaders of their learning. They determine what they need to learn and how they will learn what they need to learn.

CHANGE COURSE

They have ready access to tools, including technology, that support them in accessing and processing information and communicating solutions.

Learning experiences are designed to provide opportunities for reflection and problem solving.

Learning experiences are designed to facilitate the acquisition and application of social and emotional skills that they will need to draw upon when things get hard or they encounter problems.





FACILITATE COGNITIVELY-DEMANDING TASKS & INSTRUCTION

Why is This Competency Essential?

Life in the 21st century is complex. The workplace our students will enter will change rapidly. Most new jobs will be in the innovation sector. The Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (2011 and 2017) articulate rigorous goals for student learning that are likely to prepare students to be competitive in the 21st century workforce.

Learning experiences need to be designed so that the learner is the active agent of learning and the educator is the facilitator or guide. Zaretta Hammond (2016) includes the following as one of her Culturally Responsive Brain Rules: “The brain physically grows through challenge and stretch, expanding its ability to do more complex thinking and learning.” Too often students of color, English-language learners, students with disabilities, and students of low socioeconomic status are denied the opportunity to do rigorous, cognitively demanding work because they are presented with watered down or highly proceduralized curricula, or because excessive scaffolding, teacher support, or peer support has reduced the cognitive demand of otherwise rigorous tasks. Denying students the opportunity to productively struggle with rigorous tasks fundamentally denies students the opportunity to physically alter their brain to facilitate increasingly complex thinking.

Every BPS student has a right to rigor.

Sub-Competencies

- 3.1 Educators facilitate learning experiences so that the student, rather than the educator, does the vast majority of the cognitive work of the task.
- 3.2 Educators facilitate student learning through the way they frame tasks. They encourage student engagement by supporting student perseverance, posing questions that elicit student thinking, and promoting student efforts to make sense of the tasks.
- 3.3 Educators appropriately consider students’ background knowledge, opportunities for collaboration, co-construction of new knowledge, and reflection on new learning when designing learning experiences.
- 3.4 Educators are able to design learning experiences that ensure that every student is able to access and actively engage in tasks (in each content area) that...
 - Are cognitively demanding and standards-aligned.
 - Provide opportunities to learn that are consistent with learning trajectories within and across disciplines.
 - Provide all students with access through multiple entry points.
 - Reflect and affirm the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students in the room.
 - Require students to transfer and deepen skills and knowledge between contexts through discipline-specific and inter-disciplinary work.
- 3.5 Educators are able to design and facilitate learning experiences that require that students to grow within the four domains of language (listen, speak, read, write)
- 3.6 Educators are able to design and facilitate learning experiences that require students to reason in ways that are authentic to the discipline and to reason across disciplines when appropriate.

How this Essential Prepares Students for College, Career and Life:

Students are college, career, and life ready when they can:

Safe, healthy and sustaining learning environments support college, career, and life readiness when:

SET A VISION

Tasks activate students' existing schemas and interests

Tasks and instruction encourage students to draw upon these connections between personal background and new topics to extend their thinking.

CHOOSE A COURSE

Tasks have more than one answer or multiple paths to a solution, and when students have opportunities to actively discuss their choices and approach.

WORK WITH OTHERS

Time is dedicated to individual and collaborative work and explicit processing of interpersonal experiences.

Learning experiences require student talk and collaborative meaning making.

BUILD COMPETENCY

Students are actively engaged in cognitively demanding work for the majority of the time they are in school or other learning spaces; a very limited amount of time is spent passively listening or observing adults model thinking or procedures.

Tasks and learning experiences have opportunities to draw upon and extend the academic, cultural, and linguistic knowledge and skills that they possess in order to strategically and creatively respond to the tasks.

CHANGE COURSE

Tasks require extended thinking and have opportunities for reflection and revision.

Tasks have multiple pathways in and out and involve opportunities for choices/alternative scenarios to be explored.





ASSESS FOR LEARNING

Why is This Competency Essential?

Learning is an ongoing process. Assessing for learning is not about testing. When an educator assesses for learning, he or she gathers information about student thinking in order to determine next steps (a new question, a deeper discussion, a link to prior learning, etc.) and to provide instructive feedback to students.

To transform teaching and to ensure students are on track to succeed, every educator needs a clear, coherent, and aligned system of high-quality assessments. A comprehensive assessment system includes formal assessments such as unit or benchmark assessments, performance tasks, and diagnostics, and informal assessments such as observation or conferencing notes, daily exit tickets, and informal classroom conversations. Such a system maximizes the gathering of information about student learning and minimizes disruptions to the learning cycle. The primary emphasis within a comprehensive assessment system should be on utilizing assessments in a formative manner in order to provide feedback to students and teachers.

Feedback is one of the most powerful ways to improve learning (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). In order to provide effective feedback, educators need to design student learning experiences purposefully to create authentic opportunities for students to articulate their thinking and ask questions. These opportunities may happen via observation, discussion, student work, etc. Information about where students are in their thinking and the questions they have must then be used as a foundation of discussions with the student about what the next steps might be.

Feedback is most effective when it is “accepted as valid and actionable by the student” (Hammond, 2015). Educators must establish a trusting rapport with students in order to maximize the effectiveness of feedback.

Sub-Competencies

- 4.1 Educators enable students to understand where they are in learning, where they are going, and how to get there, by (Wiliam NCTM, 2007):
 - Clarifying, sharing, and understanding learning intentions and success criteria
 - Engineering effective discussions, tasks, and activities that elicit evidence of learning
 - Providing feedback that moves learning forward
 - Activating students as learning resources for one another
 - Activating students as owners of their own learning
- 4.2 Educators use formative assessment as a daily practice that emphasizes assessment for learning rather than as an evaluation of learning in order to adapt classroom instruction. (Wiliam, Teachology Conference, 2012).
- 4.3 Educators develop a trusting rapport with students to create a safe environment for multi-directional feedback.
- 4.4 Educators provide students with feedback that reassures students that they are capable of meeting the standard, identifies a specific gap between student performance and the standard, and presents actionable steps to work on. (Cohen and Steele, cited in Hammond, 2017)
- 4.5 Educators use information gathered through a comprehensive assessment strategy that includes formative and summative assessment in order to monitor student progress and design appropriate supports or opportunities for acceleration.

How this Essential Prepares Students for College, Career and Life:

Students are college, career, and life ready when they can:

Safe, healthy and sustaining learning environments support college, career, and life readiness when:

SET A VISION

Learning anchors in a clear definition of mastery and/or real world metrics.

CHOOSE A COURSE

Students develop a learning plan with opportunities to make thinking visible and adjust their learning process.

WORK WITH OTHERS

Students have daily opportunities to explain their thinking and raise questions about content as well as collaborate on problem-solving with peers and adults.

BUILD COMPETENCY

Students have ongoing opportunities to receive and give “instructive” feedback. That is, feedback that is actionable, specific, timely, and delivered in a low-stress, supportive way.

CHANGE COURSE

Students have multiple opportunities using a variety of modalities to demonstrate understanding or competence.

Students see teachers who shift practice based on new information, which they share with other educators. These shifts may include:

- Probing questions
- Task adjustments or extensions
- Supports provided or withdrawn
- Personalized learning experiences created



How Will the Essentials Impact Teaching Learning in BPS?

By establishing the Essentials for Instructional Equity and aligning guidance, professional learning opportunities, and resources/tools to them, we will bring instructional coherence to the district and ensure equitable access to high-quality learning experiences. Over time, focusing on the Essentials will help us build the collective instructional capacity of educators and positively impact student outcomes.

Central office teams are committed to the wide-scale implementation of the Essentials. Their work will draw upon lessons learned about implementation from within the district and beyond. To date, BPS's most successful effort to establish a coherent vision of effective instruction was the implementation of Dr. Thomas Payzant's Focus on Children plan. The Aspen Institute identified two specific elements of the implementation plan that were highly impactful:

- Create a compelling vision for instruction and implement it in a sustained way
- Focus on building instructional capacity or competency
- (Aspen Institute, 2006)
- Central office work will focus on replicating and improving upon these two elements.
- Create a compelling vision and implement it in a sustained way

The Essentials for Instructional Equity create a vision for student experiences and educator competencies that is both compelling and research-based. ASSET members are working to curate and develop materials to support educators in developing and demonstrating these competencies. This work is being done collaboratively with departments, teams, and educators throughout BPS to ensure that the vision is both compelling and communicated broadly.

BPS is committed to sustaining its focus on the Essentials. In July 2017, Superintendent Tommy Chang and his team included them in the district Theory of Action. Departments across central office are working together to co-create, adopt, or revise tools and guidance to align with the Essentials for Instructional Equity. This work will ensure that educators and families receive consistent information about what should be happening in every classroom and about the experiences every student should have. This will also ensure that all parts of the organization are working toward common goals.

Aligned resources will include:

- District-supported curricula that has been vetted for alignment to the Essentials
- Schedule guidance to help schools use time in ways that facilitate the implementation of the Essentials
- "Learning experience" planning templates (Appendix X)
- Educator Self-Assessment Tool (in development)
- Instructional "Look-For" tools aligned to the Essentials and used consistently across central office teams and schools
- Parent guides for the Essentials accompanied by parent education opportunities
- Guidance and learning experiences for district partners



Focus on Building Instructional Capacity/ Competency

Dr. Chang began his tenure in BPS by identifying “right drivers.” Building group capacity was one of those drivers. His theory of action for this driver centers on adults doing cognitively demanding work and learning together in order to make meaningful shifts in the instructional core.

The implementation plan for the Essentials for Instructional Equity will focus on supporting educators to develop the Essential Competencies in multiple ways:

Professional Learning Opportunities: Foundational professional learning opportunities will be offered, beginning with the August Leadership Institute (for school leaders and ILT members) and the Teacher Summer Institute (TSI) (for educators). This professional learning will be offered multiple times during the year. The TSI will also provide opportunities for educators to learn from each other relative to the competencies.

Additional professional learning opportunities will be available through intentional alignment efforts being made by colleagues in the Office of Data and Accountability, the Academic Response Teams, and the Boston Teachers Union.

Resources to Support Individual and School-Based Professional Learning: Materials will be made available to school leaders and ILTs for use in school-based professional learning. Professional readings, videos, blended learning opportunities, and other resources will also be made available. All resources will be available on the Essentials for Instructional Equity website.

Links to Educator Rubric: ASSET is working in collaboration with the Office of Human Capital to identify which elements of the educator evaluation rubric are reflected in each Essential competency. This will allow educators to set goals for themselves, collect artifacts to represent their learning, and receive feedback in a way that supports the development of their Essential competencies as part of the existing evaluation system. Aligning the district vision with professional learning and evaluation has been proven to positively impact educator growth (Jensen, 2016).

Impact

When all educators have had the opportunity and support needed to develop, strengthen, and model the Essential competencies, the following should be observable:

- BPS students should engage with cognitively demanding tasks more often, as measured by regular data collected from task audits;
- Key behavioral markers for each indicator and domain on the CLASS Observation Tool should be observed more frequently as implementation proceeds;
- Data related to student engagement should improve; if students are more actively engaged in learning that is cognitively demanding, tailored to meet their learning needs, and personally affirming, they should be less likely to miss learning time due to avoidable absences, suspensions, and office referrals;
- Student achievement data should improve. The ultimate goal of the Essentials is to improve student outcomes and close opportunity and achievement gaps. The implementation of the Essentials, in partnership with other action steps from the Strategic Implementation Plan, should result in improvements in student achievement data that meets or exceeds targets set in the Performance Meter.

The Boston Public Schools must prepare all students to unlock the opportunities and problems of the future. Students must feel that they are supported in safe, healthy, and sustaining learning environments so that they can engage in cognitively demanding tasks aligned to authentic, real-world problems. Our focus on equity demands that we design learning experiences for access and agency so that all students, especially those most marginalized, can engage deeply with the tasks they deserve. If we are to constantly improve in pursuit of equitable outcomes for all students, educators and students must assess our progress to learn how to adjust course in pursuit of our goals.

Across the city, the Boston Public Schools community commits to supporting all educators to develop mastery of the Essentials, which will support all students to be ready for college, career and life.



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Appendix A

Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices (C.L.S.P.) Continuum

Definition: Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices use the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective in promoting academic achievements; it teaches to and through the strengths of students. It is culturally validating and affirming. – G. Gay

Cultural Pre-Competence

COMPETENCY 1:

Awareness: Understanding One's Lens and Bias

Sufficient analysis of one's own culture to understand the lens that one brings to his/her role; familiarity with one's cultural and racial biases along with knowledge of where to find compensatory resources; ability to recognize and disrupt the effects of his/her personal bias(es).

ATTRIBUTES

- **Recognizes** and considers one's own surface, shallow and deep cultural influences and social location and how these impact his/her personal communication style, performance expectations, pedagogy, etc.
- **Acknowledges** and values culture as fundamental to relationships and learning.
- **Understands** that culture can be used to empower or enervate, especially in contacts with marginalized cultures.
- **Understands** the power dynamics between dominant and marginalized cultures and/or persons from different social locations as well as the historical and sociological contexts of these dynamics.
- **Is willing** and able to recognize and intentionally disrupts personal biases by reflecting on his or her cultural frame and/or social location, widening interpretations, and recognizing triggers.

COMPETENCY 2:

Cultural Learning/Relationship Building

Ability to build authentic relationships with students, families, and communities to create a learning partnership. Rigorous inquiry and investigation into students' backgrounds.

ATTRIBUTES

- **Proactively examines cultures** in order to build relationships with students, families, and communities through communication that refrains from making assumptions about class, race, ethnicity, ability, age, home life, language etc.
- **Builds strong, working relationships with students and families** employing a two-way communication style that proactively engages them beyond problem issues or concerns and acknowledges differing degrees of comfort with traditional schooling from different families/subgroups.
- **Uses rapport and alliance building techniques** to create the trust needed for deep learning in the classroom.

Cultural Proficiency (CP)

COMPETENCY 3:

Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices

Utilizes the cultural knowledge of students, families, and communities to adapt practices, materials and environments to engage, motivate, and facilitate deep learning. Is culturally and linguistically sustaining, both validating and connecting to cultural schema to maximize learning opportunities through rigorous instruction and the use of data to reflect and adjust practices.

ATTRIBUTES

- **Empowers students** by setting high academic goals and expectations for all students. Refrains from deficit-based thinking and provides students with appropriate academic and social/emotional supports and encouragement.
- **Provides learning opportunities and experiences** that prepare students to persevere and become independent and critical learners.
- **Prepares students for standardized assessments** but more importantly gives opportunities to learn through authentic assessments.
- **Uses quantitative and qualitative data** to inform practices and necessary adjustments.
- **Challenges traditional curricula** that excludes the contributions and perspectives of traditionally underrepresented racial and ethnic groups; allows students to "see" themselves reflected in the curricula in positive and substantial ways.

Appendix A

Cultural Pre-Competence

Cultural Proficiency (CP)

COMPETENCY 1: OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:

Individuals:

- Evidence of **reflective behavior** (e.g. journaling, regular meetings)
- Evidence of **positive offsets** for cultural safety, informed by self reflection (e.g. positive proximity and visibility techniques, trigger control, etc.)
- Evidence of **closing disparities** such as those regularly found in disciplinary/punitive tools
- Evidence of **reading texts**, especially those assigned, relevant to Race, class, gender and culturally proficient instruction

Open to feedback

Educator Rubric Elements:

- IV- A-1: Reflective Practices
- IV- B-1: Professional Learning and Growth

LEADERS/ORGANIZATION:

- Scheduling and/or administration of O.O.A.G. professional development sessions
- Intentional scheduled time for reflective exercises for staff
- Evidence of collective assessment of organizational structure, policies and school-wide practices for bias(es)
- Routine implementation of the "7 Forms of Bias Protocol" to vet instructional materials
- Evidence of text-based discussions with staff

[AVID CP examples](#)

[Individual Classroom Tool](#)

[7 forms of Bias Tool Kit](#)

Updated on 11.1.16

COMPETENCY 2: OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:

Individuals:

- Evidence of **proactive and positive contact** with students and parents with regular and timely communication
- Evidence of **soliciting feedback/suggestions** from students, parents, and community when possible
- Evidence of **rapport and alliance building techniques** (e.g. knowledge of student's interests, affirming language), especially for triggering students/that trigger the instructor
- **Instruction that is void of destructive actions** such as microaggressions
- **Provides timely asset-based feedback** that holds high standards and specific actionable steps that conveys assurance of capability
- Evidence that **students are involved** in setting learning goals

Educator Rubric Elements:

- I-C-3: Sharing Conclusions
- II-B-1: Safe learning environment
- II-B-2: Collaborative environment
- II-B-3: Student motivation
- III-B- Family Collaboration
- III-C-1: Two-way communication
- III-C-2: Culturally Proficient Communication

LEADERS/ORGANIZATION:

- Parents and community members on decision making bodies
- Structures for feedback from students, families, and communities
- Events and structures at school and in communal locations to increase the engagement of all families with flexibility for those who cannot meet at traditional times

COMPETENCY 3: OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:

Individuals:

- Evidence that **social/emotional needs of students** are responded to appropriately
- Curriculum and instruction is **culturally relevant and rigorous** for all
- Teacher **provides appropriate scaffolds** for students to progress and become independent learners on grade level tasks
- Employs **cooperative grouping and co-construction** of knowledge, representing different modalities
- Explicitly teaches **norms of school**

Open to feedback

Educator Rubric Elements:

- I-B-2: Adjustment of Practice
- II-A-1: Quality of Effort and Work
- II-A-2: Student Engagement
- II-A-3: Meeting Diverse Needs

LEADERS/ORGANIZATION:

- Welcoming school/classroom environments that celebrate diversity and accomplishments of students
- On-going professional learning that develops staff's instructional and relational abilities and allows for collaboration and reflection
- Provides opportunities for students, parents/ community to learn/construct curriculum
- School-wide disaggregation of data including educational and social measures (e.g. discipline measures) to monitor for gaps
- Systemize CLSP (e.g. Monitoring for CLSP for all staff and structures for the work to be ongoing)

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Appendix B

Learning Experience Design Template

Selecting and Planning for Cognitively Demanding Instruction

Session and Description of Lesson Task(s):

Identify [Standards](#) aligned to learning experience

DOK Level:

Content Goal(s)/Learning Target

What are the core ideas and essential questions for this learning experience? What do you intend all students to know and be able to do by the end of this experience?

Language Objectives/Target

(includes academic discourse, phrases, and vocabulary aligned with content target):

What content-related language will you use during the experience? What content-related language do you expect to hear during student discourse?

Social Emotional Target

Consider culturally and linguistically relevance to students

Anticipating:

What are the different ways the task can be solved?

What strategies and tools might students use?

In what ways does this experience build on students' previous knowledge?

What misconceptions and barriers might students have? **

[Means of Expressing Proficiency](#)**

What accommodations and modifications might you employ to support your students with IEPs?

Appendix B

Learning Experience Design Template

What accommodations and modifications might you employ to support your ELL students?	
Barriers (Language, Learning Needs, Social/Emotional, etc.)	Strategies for Access
Barrier:	Strategy: For All _____ or for _____ (identify students)
Barrier:	Strategy: For All _____ or for _____ (identify students)
Barrier:	Strategy: For All _____ or for _____ (identify students)
Resources Needed / Materials needed:	
Student Grouping Decisions: <i>How many and which students will be grouped together?</i>	
Launching the Task Recommended Time: 5-15 minutes	
CONNECT: Be succinct & engaging. Communicate learning target. Activate schema and connect to previous learning. 3 C's and I	
PRESENT TASK: How will you introduce students to the task to provide access to all students, while maintaining the cognitive demand of the task? How will you ensure that students understand the context of the task? Consider how to use more than one way to represent the information.	

Appendix B

Learning Experience Design Template

Explore: Independent and Small Group Work

Recommended Time: 25–45 minutes

During the explore phase, you may use the “Share Out” template to monitor and prepare for summary discussion. Engagement Strategies might include: *Strategic groups or pairings, Use of technology like Google Read & Write, Graphic organizers, Sentence starters, Word banks, Language frames/structure, Representations*

Give students at least 5 minutes of independent think time, and then have them work with partners or in small groups. What questions will you ask to help them get started on or make progress on the task?

What questions will you ask to assess students’ understanding of key ideas, skills and strategies?

Planned check-ins:

What questions will you ask to advance students’ understanding of the ideas and related skills?

How will you engage students who complete the task early?

Summary: Sharing and Discussing the Task

Recommended Time: 5-15 minutes

How will you orchestrate the class discussion so that you accomplish your goals?

What follow-up questions will you ask the group to guide students to clarify, justify and extend their thinking and consolidate learning?

Which ideas, strategies, or solution paths might you share during the class discussion? In what order will these be presented?

Evidence of Learning/Formative Assessment:

How will you know what all students understand? What evidence will you collect? For example: discussion notes, exit task, annotated data collection, collecting student work. How will this data be used to inform your instructional next steps?

Appendix C

The BPS Parent Guide to the Essentials for Instructional Equity

BPS students are the citizens, leaders, scholars, entrepreneurs, advocates, and innovators of tomorrow. Our schools must work closely with families and communities to ensure that 100% of students are ready for college, career, and life. We are working to transform what happens in BPS classrooms. We need your partnership! Our educators are working to develop the following four competencies. You should expect to see them in your child's classroom

Essential Competency 1: Create a Safe, Healthy, & Sustaining Learning Environment	
<p>Why is this essential? <i>Students need to feel safe, cared for, and well in order to learn effectively. Safe learning environments are free of physical, social, and psychological dangers. Safe environments are designed to reduce or eliminate negative stress reactions that can interrupt learning (Hammond, 2015). Healthy learning environments support students in developing healthy habits and mindsets such as choosing nutritious food, exercising, and building respectful relationships. Sustaining environments validate students' identities and seek to teach to and through students' strengths (Gay, 2000).</i></p>	
<p>What might this look like at school? Learning spaces are physically safe, clean, and organized. There is space for movement.</p> <p>The pictures and print in your child's classroom reflect who he or she is.</p> <p>There is time in your child's schedule for social and emotional learning, physical education, and health education.</p> <p>Your child feels cared for by his or her teacher and is comfortable talking to him or her.</p> <p>You child and his or her peers smile and there is a sense of joy in the room.</p>	<p>How can you be engaged? Share with the teacher the cultural and linguistic practices that are important to your family. Share with him or her what helps your child learn well.</p> <p>Ask your child about his or her relationship with the teacher.</p> <p>Ask your child's teacher about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How she or he supports your child's social and emotional development. ● Opportunities student have for physical movement during the school day. ● Physical and health education classes your child has access to.

Essential Competency 2: Design Learning Experiences for Access & Agency

Why is this essential?
No two learners are exactly alike. Though every brain has the same basic structures, each person’s brain is entirely unique, with neural pathways that have been established through the myriad experiences they have had throughout their lives (Meyer, Rose, and Gordon, 2014). Many of our neural pathways are influenced by our cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Hammond, 2015). Learning experiences must be designed to engage the brains of the learners present, tap into their existing schema, and offer opportunities for application and processing in order to result in learning. Learning experiences must be designed to allow students to be leaders of their learning.

What might this look like at school?
Student discuss their interests, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and learning styles with adults and peers. Students confidently discuss these things because they know that these things are valued.

Students receive important information about tasks in multiple modalities (in writing, orally, with a visual, etc.).

Students have opportunities in every learning experience to process information in different ways including; independently, with peers, with adults, in writing, using visual images or symbols, orally, etc.

Students have multiple options available to them to demonstrate their learning.

How can you be engaged?
Talk to your child about how he or she learns best. Share this information with his or her teacher or encourage him or her to share it with the teacher.

Review your child’s assignments when they come home. Look for:

- Assignments that can have more than one “right” answer or more than one way to complete the assignment.
- Assignments that allow students to choose how to demonstrate what they know (write, speak, create, etc.)

Find opportunities to ask your child how she or he might do something. *“How would you have done that?” “What do you think _____ should do?”*

Essential Competency 3: Facilitate Cognitively Demanding Tasks & Instruction

Why is this essential?
Life in the 21st century is complex. The workplace our students will enter will be rapidly changing. The Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks articulate rigorous goals for student learning that are likely to prepare students to be competitive in the 21st century workforce.

Learning experiences need to be designed so that the learner is the active agent of learning and the educator is the facilitator or guide. Zaretta Hammond (2016) includes the following as one of her “Culturally Responsive Brain Rules:” “The brain physically grows through challenge and stretch, expanding its ability to do more complex thinking and learning.”

<i>Every BPS student has a right to rigor.</i>	
<p>What might this look like at school? Students are active for the majority of the time they are in school or other learning spaces. A very limited amount of time is spent passively listening or observing adults model thinking or procedures.</p> <p>Learning spaces are filled with student talk.</p> <p>Time is dedicated to individual and collaborative work.</p> <p>Tasks that students are presented with generally have more than one answer or multiple paths to a solution.</p> <p>Tasks activate students' existing schema and and interest and students are encouraged draw upon these connections to extend their thinking.</p>	<p>How can you be engaged? Review assignments with your child. Look for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assignments that require students to research information or to solve real-world problems. • Assignments that students work on for multiple days or weeks <p>Ask your child about what work at school is the most interesting.</p> <p>Visit your child's classroom looking for collaborative work and listening for students talking about their work.</p> <p>Review information being sent home about your child's performance. Talk to the teacher and ask how he or she is doing relative to the standards for his or her grade level.</p>

Essential Competency 4: Assess for Learning

<p>Why is this essential? <i>Learning is an ongoing process. Assessing for learning is <u>not</u> about testing. When an educator assesses for learning he or she gathers information about student thinking in order to determine next steps (a new question, a deeper discussion, a link to prior learning, etc.) and to provide instructive feedback to students. Feedback is one of the most powerful ways to improve learning (Hattie and Timperley, 2007).</i></p>	
<p>What might this look like at school? Students have daily opportunities to explain their thinking and raise questions about content with peers and adults</p> <p>Students have multiple opportunities using a variety of modalities to demonstrate understanding or competence.</p> <p>Students have ongoing opportunities to receive "instructive" feedback. That is, feedback that is actionable, specific, timely, and delivered in a low-stress, supportive way. (Hammond, 2016)</p>	<p>How can you be engaged? Ask your child to explain his or her thinking when they work on assignments.</p> <p>Ask your child about what he or she is working on right now in each subject.</p> <p>Review your child's assignment looking for feedback from the teacher. Feedback should be specific. Check marks, smiley faces, and grades are not enough.</p> <p>Talk to your child's teacher about his or her progress. Ask about the ways that the teacher gathers information on progress and how he or she shares feedback with your child.</p>



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