

Aurora Public Schools School Readiness Assessment (SRA) Boston K-8

Mass Insight Education | 2015



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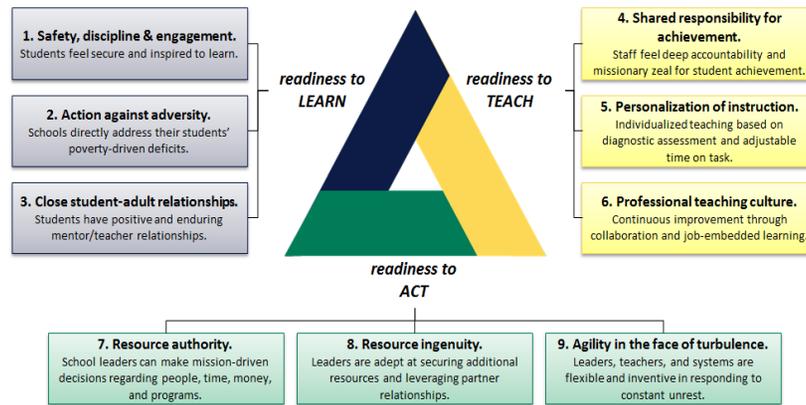
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Part I: School Readiness Assessment Overview

Framework

Mass Insight Education (MIE) conducted a School Readiness Assessment (SRA) for Boston K-8 on September 9th, 2015. The SRA examines a school’s overall performance and effectiveness according to the research-based criteria outlined in MIE’s framework for high-performing, high-poverty schools. The purpose of the SRA is to identify school strengths, opportunities, and areas for growth and improvement to inform planning and school design activities related to participation in Aurora Public School’s (APS’) ACTION Zone.



Findings are organized to align with the four conditions in the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) District and School Performance Unit’s framework for school turnaround. These conditions include:

- **Culture of Performance:** Foster a positive learning environment that supports a focused, mission-driven approach to excellence with high levels of shared accountability.
- **Academic Systems:** Design and implement a rigorous, aligned, and engaging academic program that allows all students to achieve at high levels.
- **Talent Management:** Employ dynamic leadership to develop, support, and evaluate educators in implementing mission driven instructional strategies.
- **Operations and District Support:** Create systems and processes that promote organizational efficiency and effectiveness, including through the use of time and financial resources.



For discussion purposes only
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As a part of the review process, SRA reviewers synthesize findings to identify school strengths and areas of need in relation to the four conditions. This report includes a brief explanation of the SRA process and a detailed description of findings gathered from the data and document review and stakeholder input.

Process

The SRA process involves three phases of data collection and review:

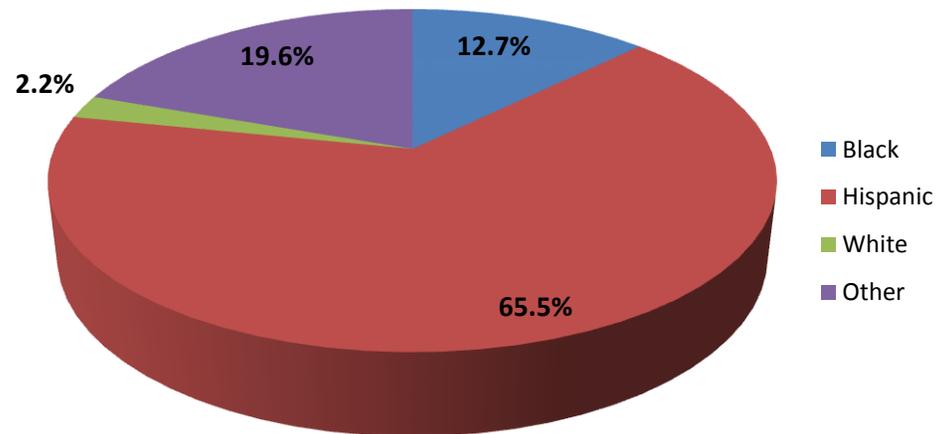
- **Pre-Site Visit:** Prior to the site visit, the MIE team reviews existing data and school audits and works with school leadership to collect any other relevant data and documents that may be helpful to understand school performance. The team reviews these materials prior to the site visit, allowing them to have a fuller understanding of the school and ask more targeted questions during the site visit.
- **Site Visit:** A team of reviewers conducts an on-site visit to meet with members of the school community. During the on-site school visit, the MIE team conducts multiple focus groups comprised of school administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents, and community members to ask targeted questions about school performance. Additionally, MIE administered an anonymous survey as an additional method to gather stakeholder input. Via focus groups, the SRA was able to talk to a representative sample of the Boston K-8 community. Stakeholder focus groups included the principal, instructional coaches and teacher leaders, grade level teachers, student representation, and a group of community partners. **Twenty-four staff members, or sixty-seven percent of staff completed the online survey.**
- **Completion of SRA Report and Follow-up Support:** Following the on-site visit the MIE team reviews and synthesizes available data to generate this SRA Final Report, identifying strengths and growth areas.

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Part II: Boston K-8 Background Information

Student Enrollment and Demographic Data 2014-2015¹

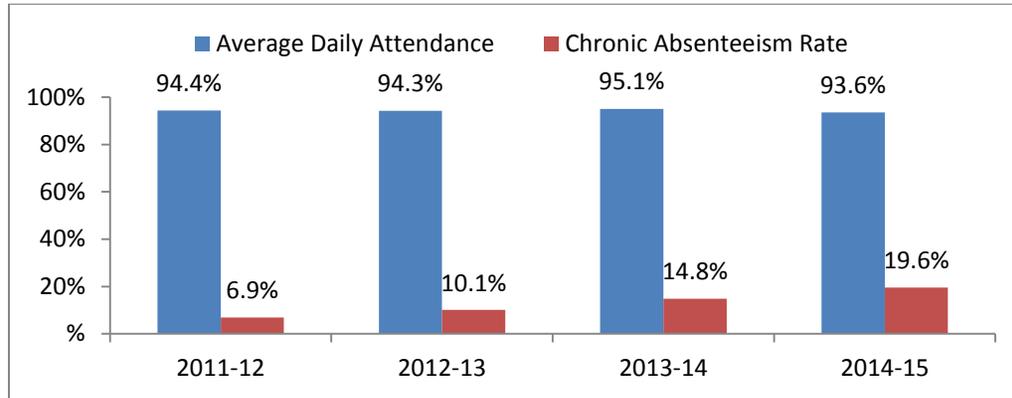
Grades	K – 8	5 Year Enrollment Trend	Upward
Student Enrollment	444	Mobility Rate	33%
% Male	49.9%	% ELL	66.7%
% Female	50.1%	% ESS	9.4%
% Free and Reduced Lunch	86.1%	% Gifted/Talented	2.9%



¹ Source: Colorado Department of Education SchoolView Data Center <http://www.cde.state.co.us/schoolview>

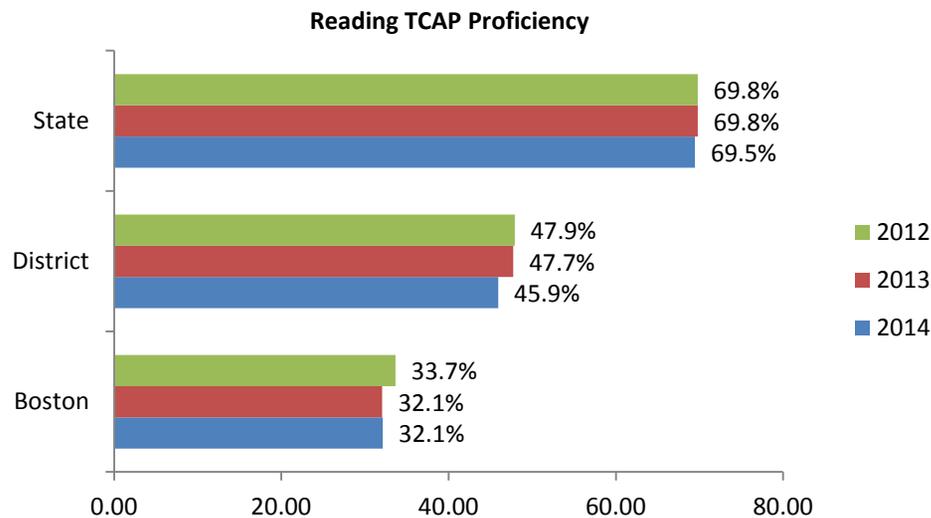
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School Climate Data Trends²



Although the average attendance rate at Boston K-8 remains steady between 93-95%, the rate decreased slightly from the 2013-14SY. Chronic absenteeism has nearly tripled since 2011, yielding a rate of nearly 20%. Schools with average daily attendance rates higher than 97% rarely have a problem with chronic absence and the school is at risk of moving further from this benchmark.

Student Achievement Data³



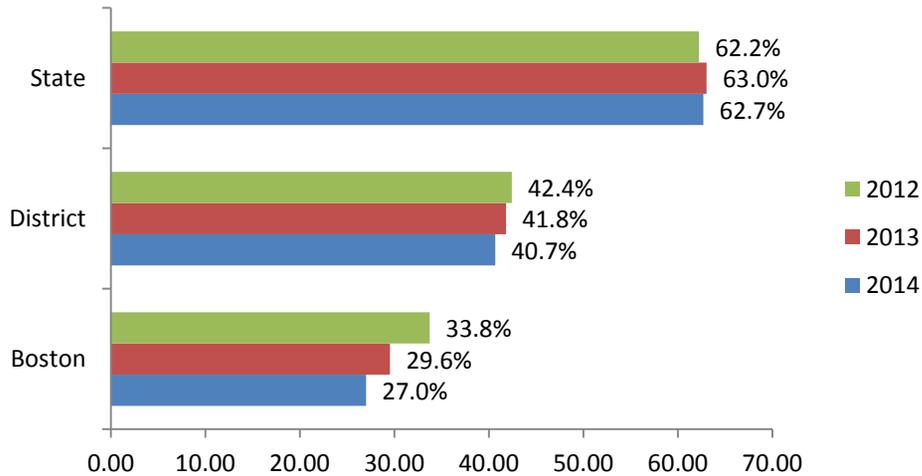
Overall proficiency at the state level has remained steady at 69%. District-level proficiency declined slightly from 2013 to 2014, but overall is steady. Reading proficiency at Boston K-8 has remained steady around 32-33%, **reflecting that two-thirds of the student population consistently is not proficient in reading.**

² Source: Colorado Department of Education SchoolView Data Center <http://www.cde.state.co.us/schoolview>

³ Source: Colorado Department of Education SchoolView Data Center <http://www.cde.state.co.us/schoolview>

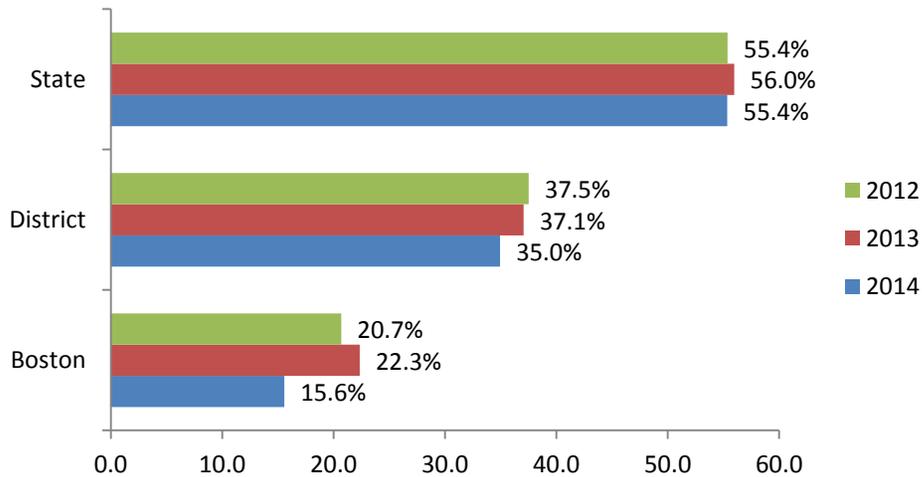
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Math TCAP Proficiency



While math proficiency at the state level remains steady between 62-63%, proficiency at the district level is trending downward. Boston K-8 proficiency remains below the district average and continues to decline. **Over two-thirds of the student population is not proficient in math.**

Writing TCAP Proficiency



State-level writing proficiency remains steady between 55-56%, while district-level proficiency decreased from 2013 to 2014. Boston K-8 proficiency remains below the district average and decreased by 7% from 2013 to 2014. **Nearly 85% of the student population is not proficient in writing.**

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Part III: Summary of Main Findings

Rating System

To provide detailed school level information, the MIE SRA team synthesized collected focus group and survey data and organized findings across the four conditions. Additionally, the SRA team utilizes a scale to help in the prioritization of areas of need and strength. The scale is explained below.

<i>Needs Improvement</i>	Stakeholder feedback reveals there is little or no elements present across the school, or individuals may demonstrate application of indicators but do not do so systematically.
<i>Developing</i>	Stakeholder feedback reveals that although there is some evidence related to the indicator, not all practices are consistently present across the school.
<i>Proficient</i>	Stakeholder feedback suggests that all indicators are present and implemented consistently across the school.
<i>Exemplary</i>	Stakeholder feedback reveals all indicators are consistently present across the school, and the school has a system to evaluate effectiveness and monitor and continuously improve each practice.

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1. Culture of Performance

1. Culture of Performance: Foster a positive learning environment that supports a focused, mission-driven approach to excellence with high levels of shared accountability.				
Indicators:	Needs Improvement	Developing	Proficient	Exemplary
1.1. Executive Leadership Systems			X	
1.2. Performance Monitoring and Accountability		X		
1.3. Communication		X		
1.4. School Environment Systems		X		
1.5. Culture of Success		X		
1.6. Shared Responsibility for Success		X		

Strong Foundations on Which to Build:

- Universal behavior expectations for continued behavior improvement
- Clear school priorities articulated by staff and school leaders
- Staff satisfaction with committee structure

Areas of Need:

- Systematic school-wide efforts to support student non-cognitive skill development
- Structures and processes to monitor and evaluate performance against school priorities

Summary of Culture of Performance Findings:

Executive Leadership Systems

Staff and school leaders can articulate clear priorities for this school year, including a focus on writing integration across content areas, data-driven instruction, observation and feedback cycles, and culture. **Ninety-six percent of staff survey responses either “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “School leadership establishes and focuses on school mission and strategic direction with staff, students, and**

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*families.” While staff appear to appreciate the new leadership’s focus and clarity regarding priorities for the school year, **sixty-eight percent of staff survey responses either “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “My school has a manageable set of goals and clear set of strategies to achieve those goals.”***

Performance Monitoring and Accountability

Staff overwhelmingly expressed satisfaction with the committee structure established for this school year. The committee requires participation from all staff in one of four committees: ILT, PBIS/Building Council, Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), and Climate and Culture. Staff communicated a strong understanding of the purpose for each committee, which matches the direction established by leadership. Each committee appears to own a specific body of work for the year including decision-making authority within that area.

While there is a consistent understanding of school priorities it is unclear what process and structures the school will put in place to regularly evaluate performance against these priorities. **Fifty-six percent of staff survey responses either “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “The school regularly evaluates its performance against school-wide goals and benchmark targets.”** Staff acknowledge that while they have an understanding of the goals, they are not sure what the benchmark measures are or how the school will determine if they are “on-track” to reach the goals.

Communication

Most staff reported feeling well-informed about school-wide events and activities. The principal sends out a weekly newsletter containing critical information such as PD topics, and other important updates and events. The school leader appears to strategically think about communication to be as transparent and forthcoming as possible. Staff noticed the change from previous administration. **Ninety-two percent of staff survey responses either “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “School leaders regularly communicate with staff through a variety of methods, including but not restricted to emails and meetings such as all-staff meetings, leadership team meetings, data meetings, committee meetings, recognition assemblies, and monitoring meetings.”**

External stakeholder communication is an area of need. Staff members, students, and parents noted they are not aware of formal communication systems between the school and home. Parent focus group participants acknowledge they receive robocalls with information, but they also noted they don’t always find out about district or school events in a timely fashion. Students also communicated that parents typically only receive calls or notes from teachers with bad news. Families and staff noted the school could do more to differentiate parent engagement efforts to accommodate for working schedules, language and literacy barriers, and cultural differences. Staff members noted the school is planning events to increase parent participation in school. For example many shared about upcoming monthly events tied to academic initiatives. **Seventy-one percent of staff survey responses either “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “The school implements school activities designed to build relationships with families and build their perception of the school as a source for themselves and their children.”**

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School Environment Systems

The school has implemented universal behavior expectations that educators report as effective for the overwhelming majority of students. Students and staff acknowledge that behavior is much better than in previous years. Despite the acknowledgement that behavior has improved this year, staff believes there is still some work to be done with regards to the discipline policy. **Sixty-one percent of staff survey responses either “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “There is a school-wide system in place to use data to identify students in need of intervention and regularly assess progress.”** There are isolated instances where individuals are working to support non-cognitive skill development such as character education lessons from the counselor and individual teacher efforts. It is unclear how the school plans to develop student soft skills systematically, especially as they prepare to transition to high-school.

Additionally, the school continues to work on increasing cultural competency to enhance instruction. While the staff communicated awareness and cultural sensitivity to the diverse student and family population, not all staff could articulate how instruction or day-to-day interactions are adapted to encompass cultural competency.

Culture of Success

School stakeholders communicated that in the past the school did not exhibit a culture of success, rather staff and student moral was low. Staff did not feel like the past administration promoted and recognized achievement. Staff believes the new leadership team is different and has already set high expectations for success, communicated appreciation for staff efforts, and recognized achievement. **Eighty-four percent of staff survey responses either “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “We have great culture.”** Similarly, staff strongly agrees that the leader upholds high expectations while also advocating for the school and providing necessary supports. **One hundred percent of staff survey responses either “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “School leaders effectively advocate for school needs and reach beyond the building to pursue needed resources and bring in best practices.”**

Shared Responsibility for Success

While school culture has improved, focus group participants and survey results reveal that the school does not have a shared culture of accountability for results and improvement. There appear to be pockets of staff that do everything it takes to support school improvement efforts, while other are concerned with their subset of students. **Seventy-one percent of staff survey responses either “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “All staff members display commitment to, and hold each other accountable for achieving established goals.”**

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2. Academic Systems

2. Academic Systems: Design and implement a rigorous, aligned, and engaging academic program that allows all students to achieve at high levels.				
<i>Indicators:</i>	<i>Needs Improvement</i>	<i>Developing</i>	<i>Proficient</i>	<i>Exemplary</i>
2.1. Curriculum and Standards	X			
2.2. Data Driven Instruction	X			
2.3. Academic Planning Structure and Systems	X			
2.4. Delivery of Instruction	X			
2.5. Intervention	X			

Strong Foundations on Which to Build:

- Tight observation and feedback cycles
- 95 percent intervention for K-4th
- Communities of Practice (COPs) and common off periods for teachers

Areas of Need:

- Staff mastery of MTSS processes and skills to support students in need of intervention and acceleration
- Accountability for application of PD strategies
- Deliberate, defined, and known school-wide instructional expectations, outside of learning targets
- Consistent data-driven instruction for differentiation and adaptability

Summary of Academic Systems Findings:

Curriculum and Standards

Boston teachers utilize district provided curricular resources for the grade level content areas. While there is an understanding that teachers should use standards in planning; it appears as though standards serve as a reference point and not the driving force for planning and instructional delivery. Teachers mainly plan by following the set sequence in provided curricular resources rather than engaging in deep study

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and prioritization of essential Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The school has limited processes and tools to ensure alignment of standards and grade level expectations across grade levels and content areas. Additionally, teachers noted that while there are some provided assessment resources, not all curricular materials include assessments.

Data Driven Instruction

While teachers communicated there has been an emphasis on using best practices in the past, it appears as though data-driven differentiation does not happen consistently in all classrooms. Outside of the English Language Development (ELD) block and the 95 percent intervention time, it is unclear how teachers regularly use data to create flexible student groups and adapt instruction quickly to best meet student needs. Staff members and instructional staff noted that differentiation - along with standards-based instruction are areas of need.

Academic Planning Structure and Systems

The school implements a regular structure for teachers to plan collaboratively on a weekly basis. Boston has tried to schedule teachers to have similar off periods to encourage collaboration. New leadership has led to changes in the structure and routines for common planning time. At this point not all staff feel they know what they plan is for the use of time during common planning time. As a result, there is inconsistent satisfaction with common planning time across grade levels. **Only twenty-nine percent of staff survey responses either “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “The school has clear protocols to ensure that common planning time is used effectively.”**

Delivery of Instruction

As one of the foci for this school year, leadership is implementing tight observation and feedback cycles where the principal, assistant principal, and coaches observe all teachers at least once per week and conduct debrief conversations that yield bite-sized feedback for immediate implementation. The focus of the start of the school year was to put the system in place so observations and feedback cycles became routine. The leadership team acknowledges they need to do more to norm observations and ensure that all observers are prioritizing the right pieces of feedback. Teachers expressed appreciation for the feedback- especially with the emphasis on celebrating the positive. **Sixty-three percent of staff survey responses either “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “I receive frequent and actionable instructional feedback delivered through a variety of means.”**

Staff and leadership largely agree that the school could do more to support students with disabilities and English language learners. Teachers acknowledge that the staff dedicated to providing special education and ELD supports appear to be stretched thin. Special education students receive some additional push-in supports in core academic content area classes. Beyond that, it is limited. English language learners also receive some push-in ELD support, though most supports are provided in pull-out ELD classes.

It is unclear if the school has a formal system to ensure consistent collaboration between special education instructors and general education teachers. Teachers acknowledge they often seek each other out in passing, before and after to school to try to stay on the same page. **Only twenty-nine percent of staff survey responses either “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “This school adequately meets the needs**

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*of students receiving special education services.” Similarly, only **twenty-nine percent of staff survey responses either “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “This school adequately meets the needs of English Language Learners.”***

Intervention

The school implements some structures for student intervention, such as the 95 percent intervention block for Kinder through 4th grade. Teachers group students based on the 95 percent data and utilize program resources to support foundational skill building in phonics. The school also has plans to offer after school tutoring in the upper grades. The school is in the process of implementing MTSS to identify at-risk students and provide necessary supports. Staff are aware that the school is moving in a new direction with MTSS, however they communicated they do not have a good understanding of the process and steps needed to refer students for supports. **Sixty-one percent of staff survey responses either “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “There is a school-wide system in place to use data to identify students in need of intervention and regularly assess progress.”**

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3. Talent Management

3. Talent Management: Employ dynamic leadership to develop, support, and evaluate educators in implementing mission driven instructional strategies.				
Indicators:	Needs Improvement	Developing	Proficient	Exemplary
3.1. Strategic Staff Placement and Allocation			X	
3.2. Distributed leadership		X		
3.3. Instructional leadership		X		
3.4. Professional Development		X		
3.5. Recruitment and Retention Strategy			X	
3.6. Evaluation Systems		X		

Strong Foundations on Which to Build:

- Clear PD schedule including initiatives aligned with school-wide priorities
- Implementation of increased opportunities for staff recognition, trust-building, and stronger communication systems
- Continued urgency and priority to staff the school and fill all vacancies

Areas of Need:

- Effectively merge formal evaluation systems with the school’s observation and feedback cycle
- Clear understanding of staff roles, responsibilities, and resources to support students with specific needs

Summary of Talent Management Findings:

Strategic Staff Placement and Allocation

In addition to implementing a robust selection process, the leadership at Boston has strategically determined grade level placements, choosing to reassign teachers as needed in order to best meet the needs of students.

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Staff Roles and Responsibilities/Distributive Leadership

Boston has staff designated to provide strategic coaching to teachers in their classrooms and through planning. The school is making efforts to increase teacher leader capacity to support teachers by including them in the observation/feedback cycles- as observers. The school also has valuable Family Liaison and Community Corp staff dedicated to connecting with families and the community. Unfortunately, not all communicated an understanding of staff roles and responsibilities- specifically pertaining to resources available to students with specific needs.

Instructional Leadership

Though the leadership team at Boston is new, they are taking steps to articulate a clear instructional vision for the school- driven mainly by the prioritized areas for the school year: writing integration across content areas, data-driven instruction, observation and feedback cycles. This effort is emerging and as a result not all teachers could speak to the specific school-wide instructional expectations beyond the broad priorities for the year. ***Sixty-one percent of staff survey responses either “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “School leadership sets and communicates a clear instructional vision aligned to the school improvement plan and predicated on the belief that all students can perform at rigorous academic levels.”***

Professional Development

The school has a clear PD schedule, which occurs on Wednesday late start days. Two periods per month are devoted to school-based PD, which appear to be aligned with the established school-wide priorities. For example, the most recent PD session focused on integrating writing across all content areas. School leadership strives to ensure this time is protected for staff development. It is unclear how PD topics will adjust in the next months as school leadership develops a deeper understanding of specific staff needs. ***Sixty-seven percent of staff survey responses either “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “The school consistently offers rich and meaningful PD opportunities that are aligned to the school’s instructional priorities, student needs, and staff growth areas identified through observations.”***

Recruitment and Retention Strategy

Leadership recognizes the need to implement thoughtful retention strategies given the school’s past staff turnover rate. To this end, leadership is implementing increased opportunities for staff recognition, trust-building, and stronger communication systems. Additionally, the school leaders prioritized hiring to fill vacancies during the summer before all other projects, despite being brand new to the building. Leaders had a thoughtful selection process that included resume reviews, committee interviews, and reference checks.

Evaluation Systems

The school leader has not yet found an effective way to merge the formal evaluation system with the school’s system of observation and feedback. Her focus is on developing teacher skills, especially because many teachers are new to the profession. In the meantime, full scale implementation of the evaluation system has been deprioritized. Despite this, staff members feel that leadership implements a transparent, well-organized plan for evaluations. ***One hundred percent of staff survey responses either “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “The school implements a formal evaluation system for staff in compliance with state, district, and union rules and regulation.”***

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4. Operations and District Support

4. Operations and District Support: Create systems and processes that promote organizational efficiency and effectiveness, including through the use of time and financial resources.				
Indicators:	Needs Improvement	Developing	Proficient	Exemplary
4.1. Use of Funds		X		
4.2. Use of Time		X		
4.3. Use of Facilities and Technology		X		
4.4. Stakeholder Support		X		
4.5. Use of Partnerships		X		

Strong Foundations on Which to Build:

- Strong back to school events and regular family events
- Student access to current technology for academic projects
- Continued efforts to pursue grant opportunities and private donations

Areas of Need:

- Strengthen systems for positive parent/guardian communication to accommodate for working schedules, language and literacy barriers, and cultural differences
- Increased budget autonomy for school leadership
- School-wide emphasis on and understanding of community partnerships, resources, and supports

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Summary of Operations and District Support Findings:

Use of Funds

Currently, the school leader has limited autonomy regarding budget decisions. The school follows district budgetary guidance, but doesn't have the ability to make strategic decisions outside of those guidelines. School stakeholders communicated accessing grant opportunities and private donations.

Use of Time

For the most part, teacher schedules have been arranged to accommodate common off periods and encourage collaboration. The school has established Communities of Practice (COPs) that meet once per week for approximately 55 minutes. While this structure is just getting started, it appears as though each COP will have clear expectations and protocols to maximize time. The school has limited opportunities for extended learning opportunities.

Use of Facilities and Technology

Students report that up-to-date technology is accessible and utilized daily for academic projects. In previous years, Boston received a grant to help increase the presence of technology in the building. Students noted that they often have access to one to one computers in most classrooms. Staff expressed concern regarding the maintenance and replacement of the hardware overtime. ***Forty-six percent of staff survey responses either "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement "Up-to-date technology is accessible and utilized by students and teachers on a daily basis, especially to personalize learning and drive further levels of student achievement."*** Boston is housed in a newer building that is bright and modern, and decorated with student work.

Stakeholder Support

Staff at Boston acknowledged that family and community involvement in student learning is an area of growth. Boston has re-established a strong back-to-school event that parents and teachers praised, and holds regular family events focused on math, literacy, etc. Students also noted, however, that nearly all communication with parents is the result of poor performance in class, behavior problems, or attendance problems.

Use of Partnerships

While it appears there are some community partnerships facilitated through reportedly strong Community Corp and Family Liaison staff, not all students, staff and families could speak about these partnerships and what resources or supports they bring to the school. It's also unclear to what extent any partnerships are aligned with school priorities or regularly monitored to evaluate impact. The Family Liaison has also taken the initiative to pursue external funding and grant sources.

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Part IV: Recommendations and Action Planning

Priority Area

1. Enhance instructional quality through an emphasis on 1) deliberate and defined instructional expectations and measurements for success and 2) consistent data-driven and standards-based instruction for rigorous, personalized learning.
2. Increase staff mastery of MTSS processes to offer greater supports for students in need of intervention or acceleration.
3. Create positive stakeholder communication systems that accommodate for working schedules, language and literacy barriers, and cultural differences in order to strengthen parent/guardian and community engagement.
4. Establish a system to regularly collect, analyze, and communicate non-academic data school-wide to increase shared responsibility for student performance across all areas including attendance, behavior, and more.
5. Continue new school improvement initiatives and develop standards/structures for evaluating and monitoring program success.