



Introduction to the FY22 Budget from Superintendent Boyd

April 30, 2021

Dear Lowell Public Schools students, families, staff and community partners:

I am pleased to present the recommended operating budget for FY22. The annual budget is the District's one-year financial plan for operationalizing the next phase of our multi-year strategic plan - *Equity. Excellence. Empowerment* - that was adopted by the School Committee last spring. With a focus on our collective and fundamental commitment to equity and following our core belief of parents and families being critical partners in the educational process, this budget has been built over the course of five months with direct input from nearly 400 internal and external stakeholders. Leveraging the combined benefits of the Student Opportunity Act and federal COVID-19 relief dollars, **the enclosed financial plan represents an opportunity to welcome our 14,000 students back to school in September with the social, emotional and academic supports they need;** providing the resources required for stability and accelerated improvement in schools and classrooms across the District as we embark on yet another unprecedented academic year.

FY21 was an extraordinarily challenging year across all aspects of our community. In LPS, COVID-19 required us to rapidly redesign the entirety of the school setting on multiple occasions - from remote to in-person to concurrent environments - as we continuously adapted to the evolving health data and shifting recommendations from local and national health officials. **More was asked of parents, guardians and educators this past year than ever before.** And the challenges of FY21 weren't limited to teaching and learning. Like the rest of the country, Massachusetts faced incredible economic uncertainty with statewide revenue shortfalls in the billions that were passed along to local communities and school districts. This additional uncertainty led to an arduous month-to-month budgeting process in FY21 that was drawn out until October and could have further disrupted the schooling experience for our students.

However, since the beginning of the pandemic, **parents, teachers, principals, support staff and community partners across our great City responded to these challenges with an unparalleled commitment to the wellbeing of our children.** In 2020, LPS achieved overall improvements in the districtwide graduation rate and a narrowing of the graduation gaps among all demographics, including the District's racially and linguistically diverse populations, as well as students with

disabilities. In addition, as we continued to refine the in-person and remote settings, average daily attendance continued to climb across all schools with the second quarter attendance rate in 2021 of 94%, nearly matching the pre-COVID high of 95%.

Likewise, we navigated the fiscal environment together with managerial prudence, leveraging savings within the FY20 budget to offset forecasted gaps in the FY21 budget while securing as many federal and state grants as possible to increase revenue. Through the financial turbulence of FY21, LPS managed to not only avoid draconian cuts but also to build up our technology infrastructure which facilitated an improved and more nimble learning environment for students and staff. Every student was provided with her or his own mobile device prior to the start of the school year, increasing the ratio from 1 device per every 3 students to a ratio of 1 to 1 districtwide. And every family in need of Internet access was provided with a mobile hotspot with more than 1,400 hotspots distributed across the district. In addition, despite the unprecedented nature of this past year's budget, we maintained a disciplined, long-term fiscal outlook, ensuring maximum levels of carryover funds in the District's three revolving accounts which further solidified the District's overall fiscal health as we now head into FY22.

The educational plan that is reflected in this budget builds on the successes of this past academic year while addressing the longstanding opportunity gaps that have existed among our diverse populations, as well as the immediate learning needs of our entire student population that have resulted from the COVID-19 environment.

The FY22 budget has been prioritized to achieve four districtwide, strategic goals:

- 1. Improving academics and student achievement at all school sites,*
- 2. Improving operational efficiency across the system,*
- 3. Ensuring that all schools are safe and welcoming for all students and families, and*
- 4. Increasing the level of family and community engagement across the district.*

Within these goal areas, significant funding has been allocated to important initiatives to meet the needs of students in the classroom, including extended learning time at all schools, school-based interventions that are tailored to the needs of individual students at each school, significant increases in professional learning for all teachers and instructional support staff across the district, supports to further bolster the home-school partnership and long overdue facility upgrades that will create physical environments that are more conducive to learning. The attached budget document provides an itemized breakdown of every investment related to these goals and initiatives, including both personnel and non-personnel related costs. It's important to note that these investments are all being made through additional revenue with an eye on maintaining stability across the system, meaning students and families will not experience any reductions or disruptions in FY22 to any of the important services that the District already offers.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the budgeting process up to this point. Due to the hard work of the more than 2,000 staff members, 9,000 parents and caregivers and 14,000 students in the District along with countless community partners, **LPS has remained in a strong financial and educational position despite the obstacles of this past year, and the future is extremely bright for our schools** as we look forward to returning to a greater sense of normalcy this coming academic year. The challenges in front of us may continue to be great, but I know we are ready to confront them head on as one district, one community, one Lowell.

Sincerely,



Joel D. Boyd, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools



Photos from Dr. Boyd's visit to the Pyne Arts in March (left) and to the McAvinnue in April (right) to greet students returning to in-person learning.