

## Meeting The Needs Of ALL Learners In The Framingham Public Schools

April 2016

We live in a rapidly changing world of complexity, diversity and uncertainty. The challenges *all* of our students face in the Framingham Public Schools (FPS) are not unique to Framingham. They mirror what is happening locally, nationally and globally.

District data reveal:

- 24% of our students receive Special Education services
- 30% of our students are economically disadvantaged
- 54% of our students are identified as “high needs” as defined by Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)
- 20% of our students are identified as English Learners (EL)
- For 42% of our students, English is not their first language
- There are over 400 students identified as homeless currently enrolled in FPS
- There is also a transient nature to a percentage of our population, with students moving in and out of the school system throughout the year
- Since July 2015, 600 new students have enrolled in the FPS system
- 18% of middle school youth and 22% of high school youth report depressive symptoms (feeling sad or hopeless for more than two weeks).
- 15% of high school youth seriously considered suicide and 6% attempted suicide in the last 12 months. For middle school students the numbers are 12% and 4% respectively.
- An increasing number of students are being hospitalized for serious behavioral health issues: 30 students last year and over 25 students so far this year
- 13% of middle school students and 35% of high school students report life is very stressful during the past 30 days

### **Department of Bilingual Education**

The number of students who are learning English as a second language and require direct English Language Development (ELD) instruction has increased at twice the rate as the general education population within the last three years. 20% of our English Learners (EL) speak a language or languages in addition to English at home. The majority of our students are born in the United States, while others come from various parts of the world at anytime during the year. Some of our students are also identified as having limited or interrupted formal education and require an individualized plan of education. As contributing members of our community, these families are committed to their children’s education and in becoming an integrated part of our society.

As per federal and state laws, our English Learners require direct service instruction in English Language Development (ELD) that accelerates their rapid acquisition of English. The increase of time on learning for ELs as per recent DESE guidelines (August 2015) has put added stress on

already limited staff resources in the district. Recent findings of DESE's Coordinated Program Review of 2014-2015 finds FPS out of compliance in consistently supporting all English Learners in and out of their classroom. Strengthening successful program models SEI (Sheltered English Immersion), TBE (Transitional Bilingual Education), and TW (Two-Way) promotes the academic achievement of linguistically diverse students. This enables them to develop academic skills while learning English and makes the best use of district and community resources. In order to narrow the achievement gap, meet the recommended guidelines of direct service to ELs and support the social and emotional needs of our students, additional resources must be in place at each of our district schools, including our pre-school program to support this work.

### **Department of Special Education**

Currently there are approximately 2,110 students receiving special education services, including therapy only, partial inclusion, full inclusion and substantially separate. While the total percentage of special education students has remained just below 24% for the past five years, the complex social and emotional needs of our students have increased. Specifically, building leaders are seeing students at a much younger age, including as young as preschool age, exhibiting significant emotional disabilities. Out of our 236 students placed in out-of-district schools, 23% are under the age of 12. Just three years ago in June, 2013, 18% of our out-of-district students were under the age of 12. This notable spike supports the increased need that principals are reporting. Unfortunately, FPS and the town will continue to feel the financial impact of the out-of-district tuitions. For FY17, we will experience a \$500,000 increase due to private school reconstruction costs and private school cost of living adjustment (COLA) increases. These are two examples of unpredictable costs that significantly impact the budget each year. Additionally, it is important to note that tuition costs have a wide range. Our lowest out-of-district tuition is currently \$36,000 and our highest tuition is \$321,000. At the present time 28 students are attending schools that have a tuition over \$100,000 per year. We are continuing to develop internal programs to support our students in the district to mitigate the increasing costs of out-of-district placements.

### **Department of Health and Wellness**

All children in our schools are dealing with an increase in everyday stressors. Stressors include academic pressure, pressure to succeed, peer relationships, family issues, poverty and impact of social media. As a result, we are seeing students with feelings of significant emotional stress, anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems. Evidence also suggests a higher incidence of children exposed to trauma which can impact, among other things, academic progress, behavior and school attendance. This changing problem is further exacerbated by the acute lack of outside clinical providers, psychiatric hospitals and crisis centers. The lack of resources in this time of critical need has extended the wait for students in need of psychiatric intervention. These students remain in school and the school often becomes the "default" for the mental health system. Recent changes in student discipline regulations have often required schools to maintain students who do not possess the social emotional skills to be successful or even to negotiate the stimulation of the traditional school environment.

FPS must think strategically to address the increasing complexity and needs of *all* of our students by developing and providing strong social emotional learning (SEL) programming. The principles of social emotional development and learning -- continuity over time, interconnectedness with academics, supportive relationships, importance of culture and climate -- highlight the need for SEL approaches to be integrated and embedded in ways that are both deep and wide. Support is necessary to implement professional development across all disciplines and integrate SEL programming throughout all schools, Pre-K-12. Our efforts to date have been fragmented and have met with mixed results as the student need continues to grow. Support for a more focused approach to this work is critical. We must strike a balance between the quest for high academic standards with the importance of maintaining safe, supportive and positive school culture. We have an obligation to develop students who are socially, emotionally, and academically competent and successful. At the same time, we must be attentive to supporting the social-emotional needs of the staff so that they can create the conditions necessary to achieve for students to achieve this objective. The health and success of our schools and the Framingham community depend on it!

The needs associated with our increasingly complex school community create significant barriers to learning. Failure to directly address these barriers ensures that too many of our students will continue to struggle in school. Educators will be forced to divert precious instructional time to dealing with behavior and other problems that can interfere with classroom engagement for all students. We are committed to and passionate about continued collaboration across our three departments in ensuring the success of *all* of our students.

Thank you for your support.

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Judy Styer, Director of Health and Wellness

#### References

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