



Lincoln Public Schools

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Parry Graham, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Superintendent's Entry Plan Findings Report 2023-24

Dear Lincoln Public Schools Families and Staff,

Since the fall, I have been engaged in a deep process of inquiry in the district, trying to understand our greatest strengths and our greatest areas for improvement. This process has constituted my formal Entry Plan – I am now very happy to share with you the results of that process.

This document is organized into three sections: an executive summary, a nuts-and-bolts description of how data were collected and organized, and the actual findings. While the entry planning work was rewarding and educational for me, it represents only one, initial step in a larger process. The next steps are to engage in a collaborative process that uses my findings to develop a long-term strategic plan for the district; to translate that plan into concrete actions at the school and district levels; to use the plan to drive district and school improvement planning, and annual budgeting priorities; and to ensure that we are continually measuring the progress of our plans and actions.

I appreciate all of the time and effort that went into supporting me throughout the process. I also appreciate the candor that staff, school and district leaders, parents, and students brought to my conversations with them. The perspectives and feedback that were shared with me constitute the heart of my findings.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. Graham".

Parry Graham, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Section 1: Executive Summary

Lincoln Public Schools is a high-quality, high-performing district that serves students in two P-8 buildings: the Hanscom School on the Hanscom Air Force Base and the Lincoln School. The Hanscom School serves the children of military families that live on-base, while the Lincoln School serves the children of residents of Lincoln, of Boston families participating in the METCO program, and of staff members who bring their children to LPS.

Lincoln has engaged in a variety of large-scale initiatives over the last five years: in particular the development of Portrait of a Learner, construction projects and building moves, professional development on Deeper Learning, and work connected to anti-racism, inclusion, diversity, and equity (AIDE). In the midst of all this work, a worldwide pandemic occurred that radically scrambled the district's short-term approach to education and interrupted many of the initiatives that were in place.

My entry planning process involved a considerable amount of data collection and analysis, with a special emphasis on listening sessions with staff and parents. The goal was to identify areas of strength that should be leveraged and preserved, while also identifying areas for improvement. If I could draw out one overall theme that emerged from the process, it was our need to **re-establish our foundations in a post-pandemic world**. While it may feel as though business is back to usual, the impacts of COVID nevertheless have a long tail. Disparities in student achievement remain. Concerning trends around student mental health have continued on a steeper trajectory. Curriculum reviews have been put on hold. Internal systems and structures live somewhere between a pre-COVID and a post-COVID reality.

Despite the challenges, however, Lincoln Public Schools has many strengths. The quality of teachers was repeatedly cited in listening sessions and surveys, and the extent to which teachers know and care about their students. Along with the quality of teachers, the small class sizes at both schools was seen as a real area of strength. Parents and teachers frequently cited the quality and abundance of resources in the district, both in terms of curriculum resources and staffing and in terms of the quality of the buildings and instructional spaces. The Special Education program was regularly mentioned as an area of strength, and the district-wide implementation of Responsive Classroom this year was highlighted as a positive initiative. Finally, many people spoke to the strong sense of community in each of the buildings.

Along with strengths, I also identified a number of areas for improvement, which largely focused on foundational work that ensures a high-quality education for all students. The most critical areas for improvement were:

1) Recommit to excellence and innovation in teaching and learning by:

- Ensuring that we are using two of our greatest strengths – the quality of our teachers and our small class sizes – to maximize instructional attention and feedback for students;
- Putting in place a long-term, continuous curriculum review process, and prioritize the K-3 literacy curriculum as the first area for review;
- Revising our academic intervention structures to ensure that we have tiered systems of intervention and enrichment K-8, and that time for intervention happens in addition to, not in place of, core instructional time;
- Better leveraging our existing middle school staffing structure to A) optimize small class sizes, B) provide more intervention and enrichment opportunities, while C) staying within financial constraints;

- Identifying and tracking key internal and external academic indicators that A) emphasize student growth, B) provide actionable insights into patterns of student learning, and C) inform curricular and pedagogical decision-making.

2) Ensure that our systems and actions demonstrate respect and support for every individual by:

- Putting in place clear and consistent rules and systems to support and respond to student expectations and behavior, with an emphasis on restorative cultures;
- Increasing the proactive mental health supports available to students, with a particular emphasis on expanding regular education/counseling supports.

3) Renew our sense of collaboration and community by:

- More effectively using the Lincoln setting and community as a teaching and learning resource;
- More effectively leveraging our parent communities as resources;
- Improving external communication to caregivers, in particular around student progress.

4) Live our commitment to AIDE work by:

- Ensuring that we are setting high academic expectations for all students;
- Reviewing our recruitment, hiring, and support practices to attract and retain a more racially diverse staff;
- Moving from efforts that are largely aspirational in nature to “true” AIDE work that results in concrete actions, structures, and outcomes.

Section 2: Data Collection and Organizing Framework

This section briefly summarizes the process I used to collect data throughout my entry planning, and the framework I used to organize and present the data in this report.

Data collection process

Through the entry planning process, I collected a broad range of qualitative and quantitative data on a variety of topics: curriculum, pedagogy, student learning, student sense of belonging, and student social-emotional needs; staff, family, student, and community priorities; and school and district structures and practices.

As I went through the process, I found that some of the most important feedback came as a result of listening sessions I conducted with parents, staff members, and students. All-told I conducted 10 listening sessions with parent groups, 6 listening sessions with student groups, and 31 listening sessions with staff groups. This rich set of qualitative information was particularly helpful as I worked to identify broad areas of strength and areas for improvement, and I used the information from the listening sessions in an iterative way, frequently returning to it as I looked at other types of information.

In addition to the listening sessions, I also reviewed the results from parent and staff surveys; I reviewed student academic performance data (for example, MCAS scores, literacy screenings, and i-Ready scores); I reviewed student feedback from the VOCAL survey in 2023 (this is administered as part of the MCAS, and captures student perceptions around engagement, safety, and school environment); where available, I reviewed student disciplinary data; I reviewed feedback from Responsive Classroom consultants from their building walkthroughs; I visited classrooms throughout the district; and I reviewed a variety of school and district documents, such as the Equity Audit, the current AIDE plan, school schedules, prior strategic plans, the student and family handbook, and curriculum review information.

Organizing framework

While collecting the data was a time-intensive process, the more challenging step was analyzing the data to pull out key themes, and then organizing those themes in a way that felt coherent, digestible, and actionable. Schools and school districts are remarkably complex organizations, and it can be difficult to find the signal in all of the noise. In order to pull it all together, I relied on [the framework of the district's three core values](#):

- Excellence and Innovation in Teaching and Learning
- Respect for Every Individual
- Collaboration and Community

In addition to those three values, another theme emerged that both overlay and connected those values: [the district's commitment to AIDE work](#). AIDE was a topic that came up consistently across different data sets, and using AIDE as a lens helped to highlight and expose both areas of strength and areas for improvement.

These findings, therefore, are organized into four sections that reflect the three core values and AIDE work. In many cases, the findings do not live in just one category – many of them stretch across different values and themes – but for ease of analysis and explanation, I have tried to place them each into a single category.

Section 3: Entry Plan Findings

This section provides my entry plan findings, organized into four themes: Excellence and Innovation in Teaching and Learning; Respect for Every Individual; Collaboration and Community; and AIDE Work. Each theme includes patterns that were identified through my entry planning, along with relevant data. I also include a number of identified areas for improvement within each theme.

Excellence and Innovation in Teaching and Learning

The greatest strength and asset in our district is our teachers. This was repeatedly cited by both parents and staff in listening sessions and surveys. As one parent said, “We have a stellar faculty. The faculty communication and ideas, reaching out to my family with things my kids need attention to... Teachers are incredible.” Another important strength, also cited by parents and staff, is our small class sizes. These two strengths work in close tandem with one another: we have high-quality people with small student-to-teacher ratios, meaning that students should be able to receive a high degree of individualized attention and feedback from skilled educators.

While individualized attention and feedback occur to a certain extent, however, one important area for continued improvement is more effectively balancing whole-class, small-group, and one-on-one instructional approaches to maximize individual attention. But teachers cannot do this on their own or in isolation – there are a number of key supports that are necessary: high-quality curricula selected with significant teacher input; K-8 horizontal and vertical curriculum review and coordination; intervention structures K-8 that ensure that students do not miss core instructional time; high-quality information about student academic progress; supportive professional development focused on topics directly connected to teacher needs; and well-trained support personnel.

High-quality curricula selected with significant teacher input

One general strength noted frequently by teachers was the amount of curriculum resources available in the district. As a general rule, teachers felt that they were provided with a sufficient amount of resources across curriculum areas.

In terms of curricular content, the two curriculum areas most commonly cited by K-5 teachers as areas of strength were Social Studies and Science. Social Studies was commonly cited because the materials had been created by teacher teams, and Science both because of the quality of resources and the collaborative process that was used to select the Science program. In both cases, teacher voice played a heavy role in the development and/or selection of the programs.

The K-3 literacy curriculum was identified by a large majority of teachers, and a number of parents, as the area most in need of improvement. When looking at student reading data, there appear to be groups of students who persistently have below-grade-level reading skills, and this underperformance does not appear to be reduced as students move from kindergarten through third grade. For example, analysis of literacy data from the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years showed that roughly one-third of students in grades 1 - 5 were not meeting benchmark expectations by the end of the year and, for the 2022-23 school year, the percentage of 3rd graders at or above benchmark was lower than it was for 1st and 2nd graders. It was this group of students

– those with below-grade-level reading skills – that teachers felt were least successfully served by the current literacy curriculum.

One noted area of strength within the early literacy curriculum was the use of the Foundations program at multiple grades for phonics instruction. Foundations is currently used in grades 1 through 3 at the Hanscom School and grades 2 and 3 at the Lincoln School, with plans to adopt Foundations in 1st grade at the Lincoln School in the 2024-25 school year. As one early elementary teacher said, “Having Foundations has been wonderful. We did not have a consistent phonics curriculum prior to that – having a real systematic approach to teaching phonics, I have seen a big difference in the last few years.”

Writing was mentioned in both positive and negative ways by staff and parents, with a fair amount of variability depending on the grade level. The math curriculum was generally viewed favorably by teachers, but some concern was expressed that teachers new to Lincoln might struggle with the wide collection of disparate resources – while Lincoln does use Everyday Math as the curricular foundation from 1st grade through 5th grade, a variety of resources have been developed and pulled from other sources over the years, and the math curriculum has not had a formal, district-wide review in over a decade. Math was identified as an area of concern by some parents, in particular for students with more advanced math skills. Specials classes (e.g., art, music, wellness, computer science) were generally viewed favorably by parents, and students frequently cited specials classes as their favorite experiences.

Some teachers and some parents also expressed interest in more elementary interdisciplinary curriculum opportunities, or projects. A number of project-based learning activities were highlighted by both teachers and parents as areas of particular curricular strength, with an emphasis on the high levels of student engagement and creativity that resulted from them. Two perceived barriers to the increased use of interdisciplinary projects are the current way in which subjects are scheduled in discrete blocks of time for K-5 teachers, and perceived concerns about keeping up with existing subject pacing guides.

Based on the feedback and information, several possible areas for improvement include:

- *Prioritizing the K-3 literacy curriculum as an area for review and revision;*
- *Ensuring that teachers are significantly involved in the selection of any curricular programs or resources;*
- *Exploring opportunities for increased project-based learning experiences, while balancing that against the need for curricular consistency.*

K-8 horizontal and vertical curriculum review and coordination

The current structure of curriculum leadership at the elementary level includes a full-time K-5 literacy coordinator, a full-time K-5 math coordinator, and a part-time K-5 science coordinator; there is no current position directly associated with Social Studies curriculum coordination. At the middle school level, each curriculum area has a Department Lead Teacher, which is a full-time classroom teacher who is paid a stipend to help coordinate curriculum conversations. There is minimal curriculum coordination between K-5 leadership and middle school-level Department Lead Teachers, and the Department Lead Teachers do not have the same availability to coordinate vertical curriculum work because of their full-time teaching responsibilities. The Assistant Superintendent oversees the curriculum coordination process district-wide, but the range of that position’s responsibilities allows for minimal direct participation in day-to-day curriculum work.

The lack of explicit K-5 and 6-8 curriculum coordination, along with the lack of more formal curriculum leadership positions at the middle school level, led to frequent parent perceptions that there is not a coherent curricular sequence within each subject area from 6th through 8th grade, and from the elementary structure into the middle school grades. Additionally, teacher interviews and [a review of district documents](#) showed that there is not currently a scheduled curriculum review process in place across the district at either the elementary or middle school levels.

Based on the feedback and information, several possible areas for improvement include:

- *Developing a long-term, continuous curriculum review process that begins with K-3 literacy;*
- *Identifying opportunities to put in place curricular leadership that spans the K-8 sequence;*
- *Ensuring a high level of curriculum coordination in the middle school grades.*

Intervention structures K-8 that ensure that students do not miss core instructional time

Teachers across grade levels frequently noted concerns about the academic intervention structures currently in place. One of the most common concerns was that students are frequently pulled from class to receive academic intervention during core instructional time; in other words, interventions may occur *in place of* core instruction rather than *in addition* to it. When asked what student sub-group is least effectively served in the district, one of the most common answers was students who are achieving below grade level, but who do not have an identified disability or Individualized Education Program – these are exactly the sorts of students who benefit from highly effective, regular education intervention systems. As one teacher said, “We have students who stay in interventions for years who don’t have a disability... it’s not a lack of people’s ability, it’s the structure and system.”

There was also a general perception among some Lincoln School parents and some staff that high-achieving students are not as effectively served as they could be, particularly in the area of math in upper elementary and middle school grades. Somewhat related to this observation, in a survey of parents approximately 28% indicated that their children participated in additional non-school-based academic experiences: the most common subject area for these additional academics was math, and the most common reason was to provide extra academic challenge beyond the school curriculum. This 28% of parents rated their children as being less happy in school (average score of 3.24 on a five-point scale, versus 3.81 for parents whose children were not participating in additional academic experiences), and rated their children as making less academic progress (average score of 3.13 versus 3.46). There is a chicken-and-egg question around causality – are parents choosing to give their children additional challenge because they perceive their children as being less happy and not making sufficient progress, or are their children accelerated beyond grade level expectations because of extra-school programs and therefore they feel bored by a curriculum that they have already learned (the term “bored” was used by multiple parents in survey feedback)?

An analysis of student learning data provided a more complicated picture. When reviewing i-Ready student data in math, students on the Lincoln campus who scored in the 91st - 99th percentile nationally in the fall generally made *more* academic progress over the course of the year than did other student groups. The charts below summarize Lincoln School i-Ready growth data for the 2022-23 school year based on fall achievement levels (the Fall Percentile indicates where a students’ fall score placed them relative to a national sample, so a student in the 91-99th percentile had a fall score that was higher than 90% of students in the national sample;

the Met Expected Growth and Met Stretch Growth columns indicate the percentage of students in each group that achieved i-Ready assigned growth targets when reassessed in the spring).

Lincoln School Growth for 1st - 5th Grade, based on Fall Percentile		
Fall Percentile	Met Expected Growth	Met Stretch Growth
1-25%	61%	32%
26-50%	63%	40%
51-75%	66%	26%
76-90%	46%	26%
91-99%	65%	44%

Lincoln School Growth for 6th - 8th Grade, based on Fall Percentile		
Fall Percentile	Met Expected Growth	Met Stretch Growth
1-25%	69%	50%
26-50%	56%	30%
51-75%	68%	32%
76-90%	71%	51%
91-99%	73%	57%

At the Hanscom School, students in 1st - 5th grades scoring in the 91st - 99th percentile nationally in the fall were *less likely* to make expected or stretch growth than several other groups, while students in 6th - 8th grade were *less likely* to make stretch growth.

Hanscom School Growth for 1st - 5th Grade, based on Fall Percentile		
Fall Percentile	Met Expected Growth	Met Stretch Growth
1-25%	52%	30%
26-50%	62%	38%
51-75%	51%	23%
76-90%	57%	20%
91-99%	43%	29%

Hanscom School Growth for 6th - 8th Grade, based on Fall Percentile		
Fall Percentile	Met Expected Growth	Met Stretch Growth
1-25%	57%	29%
26-50%	76%	30%
51-75%	67%	27%
76-90%	56%	11%
91-99%	67%	0%

Several key take-ways emerge from the parent and staff feedback, and the i-Ready data. First, independent of the progress that students might be making on standardized assessments, there is a persistent perception that high-achieving students are not sufficiently challenged, particularly in math and particularly in the upper elementary and middle school grades. Second, teachers are limited in their ability to customize curricular or instructional experiences for students during core instruction; while a certain amount of differentiation is possible, teachers are not in a position to provide higher-achieving students with above-grade-level material and instruction on a consistent basis. And third, a more comprehensive review of i-Ready data shows that there is variation between different achievement groups at each school, and between different grade levels. All of this speaks to the need for more structured, systemic opportunities for support and enrichment that happen outside of core academic instruction; doing so ensures that students who are below grade level receive

additional support, and that (to the greatest extent feasible) students who are achieving above grade level have opportunities for extension and enrichment.

It is important to note that a subgroup of students frequently cited by both teachers and parents as being effectively served is students with IEPs. The consistent perception is that, if a student has been identified with a disability and has been determined eligible for special education services, they will be provided with high-quality services and support. At the same time, there were some concerns expressed that more effective regular education interventions might have prevented the need for special education identification and/or services in some instances. Overall, these two pieces of feedback – that students on IEPs are effectively served and that more effective general education interventions can help to mitigate the need for special education services – point to the quality of the special education staff and programming in LPS, and underscore the importance of having clear, consistent intervention plans and structures in place for students who may experience academic struggle.

Finally, a consistent set of teachers and parents at the middle school level noted the lack of academic intervention and academic enrichment opportunities available for students in grades 6 - 8. Based on a review of school structures, staffing, and scheduling, both the Lincoln School and the Hanscom School are fortunate to have staffing configurations that allow for small class sizes, small overall student loads (i.e., the total number of students that a teacher teaches), and flexible staff assignments within the master schedule. The opportunity for teachers to work in collaborative teams that share common students is one of the most important strengths of a traditional middle-level learning model that supports young adolescent development. With current staffing, there appears to be an opportunity to A) maintain this traditional model, while also B) using staff and scheduling creatively to build structured intervention and enrichment opportunities, and C) implementing targeted professional development on young adolescent development and middle-level learning.

Doing so would create additional opportunities for students, leverage the expertise of our staff, and help us stay within our already well-resourced staffing structure.

Based on the feedback and information, several possible areas for improvement include:

- *Revising our academic intervention structures to ensure that we have tiered systems of intervention and enrichment K-8, and that time for intervention happens in addition to, not in place of, core instructional time;*
- *Better leveraging our existing middle school staffing structure to A) optimize small class sizes, B) provide more intervention and enrichment opportunities, while C) staying within financial constraints;*
- *Implementing targeted professional development focused on young adolescent and middle-level learning; and*
- *Balancing the need for district-wide consistency in our intervention structures with a recognition that the Lincoln School and Hanscom School may have different intervention priorities and may benefit from a certain degree of flexibility.*

High-quality information about student academic progress

One personal observation during my entry planning process was that it was frequently difficult to access and analyze student learning data. LPS does not have a common data warehouse or dashboard, and the data

analysis process frequently involved exporting data from one platform to another, combining data from disparate sources into spreadsheets, and converting data from one format to another.

Through conversations with curriculum specialists and participation in data meetings, the current difficulty with accessing data was reinforced. Curriculum specialists need to spend significant time managing data, and principals and teachers have minimal access to individual student-level, grade-level, or school-level information. Staff have created work-arounds to overcome these challenges – often with a heavy reliance on Google sheets – but the challenges with storing, accessing, and analyzing data mean that teachers are less able to turn student information into curricular and instructional actions. In addition, different types of student academic achievement are not combined together to provide a more comprehensive picture of individual students, nor are they tracked longitudinally in ways that make it easy to monitor progress from year to year.

The data tracking and analysis that does occur frequently focuses on proficiency information – i.e., whether or not a student reached a certain level of mastery – as opposed to growth data, which shows progress over time. Proficiency information is important, especially when looking at key milestones (such as reading on grade level in the primary years), but fails to capture a sense of student progress. In particular, for students who start out below grade level or for students who start out above grade level, proficiency information can paint an incomplete picture. When combined with growth data, however, proficiency information can show a fuller and more accurate picture of how a student is progressing. When looking at the student learning data available in the district, there is currently an overall lack of consensus on the most important student learning indicators to track across years to determine student and district progress.

In listening sessions, parents at the elementary level frequently agreed that teachers knew their children well. Parents were impressed by the extent to which teachers understood their children, both in terms of their academic progress and their personality. As one parent noted, “I’m really impressed with how staff have gotten to know the kids... We had a situation where there was a conflict, and the teacher really knew the core of my child’s being. That feels really nice.”

Nevertheless, parents frequently indicated that they did not feel particularly well informed about their children’s progress. They appreciated the information they received in parent-teacher conferences, and saw that as valuable, but they did not feel as informed by other feedback, such as report cards. Some middle school teachers noted challenges with the use of standards-based reporting at the Hanscom School given that some families may be moving from school systems that use a more traditional grade reporting format.

Based on the feedback and information, several possible areas for improvement include:

- *Developing data warehouses that make the data collection process more efficient, combine student information from disparate sources, and allow for tracking longitudinal information over time;*
- *Creating data dashboards that are accessible to a broader group of staff (e.g., principals, teachers) and allow for more efficient analysis of student achievement trends;*
- *Identifying and tracking key internal and external academic indicators that A) emphasize student growth, B) provide actionable insights into patterns of student learning, and C) inform curricular and pedagogical decision-making;*
- *Identifying types of student learning information that will be particularly helpful to share with parents to give them greater insights into their children’s progress.*

Supportive professional development focused on topics directly connected to teacher needs

While certainly noted positively by some teachers, a somewhat underappreciated strength in the district is the professional learning time available each Wednesday. When adopting a new curriculum, exploring different instructional approaches, developing a new system, or thinking about alternative approaches for an individual student, the foundational element is time, and in particular the time for staff to work, plan, and learn together. From the perspective of an outsider coming in, the amount of time available for professional learning in LPS is a critical asset, and one that many districts wish they had.

In addition to time, teachers frequently expressed appreciation for the financial support available for their professional learning. Teachers noted that they are able to attend workshops or take graduate classes in areas that are important to their improvement, and that the district is generous in supporting these efforts.

When talking about the content of professional learning, teacher feedback was more mixed. Newer staff members frequently spoke positively about the support they received through the mentoring program and from their colleagues, and some individual professional development experiences were highlighted as positive, such as Responsive Classroom training. The all-faculty professional development day on October 6th received particularly good feedback, and one of the consistent strengths of that experience was the extent to which teachers had choice both in developing workshops for their colleagues and in choosing the workshops in which they would participate.

In contrast, when professional development was highlighted as an area for improvement the common themes were that there are too many different topics and not enough teacher voice and choice. There are decades of data on the characteristics of effective professional development: to the greatest extent possible, school- or district-sponsored PD should tie directly to school and district priorities; it should focus on a small number of topics at any given point in time; individual topics should extend over a long period of time (as opposed to one-time workshops or conferences); it should feel practical and relevant to teachers' day-to-day responsibilities; and teachers should feel invested in the topics. Many of the other priorities mentioned earlier cannot come to pass without a clear, relevant, and focused plan for professional development that includes these characteristics.

Based on the feedback and information, several possible areas for improvement include:

- *Ensuring that school- and district-sponsored professional development are tied directly to a small number of key priorities;*
- *Including teacher voice in the professional development planning process;*
- *Differentiating professional development to meet the different needs of different teacher groups;*
- *Continuing to maintain financial support for teachers to explore PD topics and opportunities of their own choosing.*

Well-trained support personnel

Education support professionals (for example, instructional assistants and tutors) work directly with children, and are often critical components in supporting student academic and social-emotional progress, particularly for students on IEPs. The role and work of ESP staff, both in general education and in special education, are

viewed positively by teachers; however, a consistently noted area of improvement was in providing better training for ESP staff.

ESP staff do not currently participate in structured professional development on Wednesday afternoons, and do not generally participate in whole-school or whole-district trainings. In a staff survey, ESP staff were less likely than other staff groups to agree with the statement: “I receive effective training and feedback to help me get better at my job.” In addition, ESP staff frequently cited the need for additional training in the survey.

One financial challenge with training ESP staff is that there is minimal time during the day for training to occur, and because ESP staff are hourly employees, they would need to be paid for any additional time they work outside of current contract hours. The district budget does not currently include the funding necessary to provide regular training opportunities for ESP staff.

Based on the feedback and information, a possible area for improvement includes:

- *Identifying financially-effective opportunities to provide targeted training for ESP staff.*

Respect for Every Individual

Both parents and staff communicated a strong sense that teachers at both schools care about their students. This was noted repeatedly in parent listening sessions, and received the highest score of any question on a parent survey: 68% of parents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement “My child’s teacher cares about my child.” In addition, in student listening sessions, students generally indicated that they see their teachers as caring about them, although there were some sub-group disparities; in particular, in student listening sessions at the Lincoln School Boston-resident students were less likely to report their teachers as caring about them than were Lincoln-resident students.

In a review of VOCAL survey data from 2023 (this is a survey administered to 4th, 5th, and 8th graders as part of the MCAS, and captures student perceptions around engagement, safety, and school environment), students gave generally positive feedback. For example, in response to the statement “Students respect one another,” 79% of 8th graders indicated that this was always or mostly true, in comparison to only 55% of 8th graders statewide. The chart on the next page summarizes some additional VOCAL data points from 2023 where 8th-grade scores differed markedly in positive ways from state averages (4th and 5th grade scores were also analyzed, but rarely showed more than a 10% difference from state averages):

Item Description	% of Lincoln 8th graders indicating always or mostly true	% of 8th graders statewide indicating always or mostly true
Students from different backgrounds respect each other in our school, regardless of their race, culture, family income, religion, sex, or sexual orientation.	91%	77%
Students at school try to stop bullying when they see it happening.	65%	44%
Teachers, students, and the principal work together to prevent (stop) bullying.	92%	76%
In my school, bigger students taunt or pick on smaller students.	8%	30%

The Responsive Classroom initiative was mentioned favorably by many teachers. Teachers appreciated the way in which Responsive Classroom strategies helped to build a sense of community with students and to help students feel empowered. Teachers also frequently mentioned that building Responsive Classroom time explicitly into the schedule was a helpful structural step. Teachers saw the Responsive Classroom initiative as helping to support social-emotional work with children, but noted that RC is not a social-emotional curriculum per se; a number of teachers identified the need for a more structured social-emotional curriculum in the district. In listening sessions, parents frequently mentioned social-emotional learning as an area of strength in the district, particularly at the elementary level. A number of parents commented positively on the emphasis on CARES values, and the extent to which the schools emphasize the importance of kindness and caring. As one parent said, “With the CARES values, my child comes home and talks about them. The school’s doing a good job of teaching students about those values.”

One area of particular need identified by a wide number of teachers was supporting student mental health. There were broad perceptions that student mental health challenges have increased in recent years, and that current mental health efforts are frequently reactive rather than proactive. Many teachers also pointed to the need for additional mental health supports for regular education students, noting that our mental health support staff spend a significant amount of their time working with students with identified disabilities who have mental health services as part of their IEPs and carrying out assessments. In addition, the need for more traditional “guidance counseling” or “school counseling” services and supports was noted. As described by one teacher, “Our counselor has such a huge caseload for students who are on IEPs and it doesn’t leave room for students who are in regular education... there is a high need for regular education students to have access to counselors.”

There are limited school- or district-wide data points around mental health. The district does not currently administer mental health and/or risky behavior surveys to students, such as the [MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey](#) or suicide screenings.

A large number of parents, teachers, and students identified student discipline as an area for improvement. A variety of different needs were noted: the two most prominent were developing clearer and more consistent

rules, and ensuring a sense of “fairness” when identifying student behaviors and imposing disciplinary consequences. There were some perceptions by parents that bullying is an area of concern, particularly at the middle school level. There was also feedback that any student behavior system should include an emphasis on restorative cultures.

A review of disciplinary data suggested that the number of disciplinary incidents has stayed relatively stable over the last three years. When it happens, inappropriate behavior is far more likely to occur out of the classroom: behavior data suggest that inappropriate behaviors most frequently occur in the halls, at arrival or dismissal, in the lunchroom, or at recess. Looking at both the current year and at prior years, districtwide there are very few cases of more extreme student behavior (e.g., fighting, threats, sexually inappropriate conduct, vandalism, weapon possession).

A review of the [student and family handbook](#) showed that student conduct is very broadly described, without clear connections made between types of behaviors and typical consequences. In student and staff listening sessions, some racial and gender patterns emerged: there were broad perceptions that teachers were more likely to identify and respond to the behavior of males and students of color than they were to identify and respond to similar behavior from females and white students. Black males were a group that was identified as being particularly over-noticed and over-responded to when it came to behavior. While these racial trends were noted by a broad range of staff, they were particularly evident to staff members of color.

Based on the feedback and information, several possible areas for improvement include:

- *Continuing the implementation of the Responsive Classroom initiative;*
- *Increasing the proactive mental health supports available to students, with a particular emphasis on expanding regular education/counseling supports;*
- *Identifying mental health and/or risky behavior screening tools for district-wide data collection;*
- *Putting in place clear and consistent rules and systems to support and respond to student expectations and behavior, with an emphasis on restorative cultures;*
- *Ensuring that high standards are set for the behavior of all students, and that all students are treated equitably when identifying and responding to inappropriate behavior;*
- *Creating opportunities to proactively educate parents about student behavior, the district’s approach to inappropriate student behavior, and the importance of emphasizing restorative cultures when addressing student behavior.*

Collaboration and Community

Overall, both teachers and parents spoke positively about the sense of community in the Lincoln School and the Hanscom School. At the Hanscom School, teachers felt a strong sense of commitment to and pride in serving military families, and parents appreciated the way that a smaller school and small class sizes contribute to an overall sense of community.

At the Lincoln School, parents repeatedly mentioned that teachers built strong relationships with their children, and that the school had a strong sense of community. As one parent said, “The sense of intimate community that is at the schools, the relationships that both of my children built with their teachers, their peers, and the families that make up the greater community have all been a strength to them through their years here.”

The CARES values were mentioned by a number of parents as a positive framework for building community, and a number of teachers mentioned the CARES values positively. Both Lincoln- and Boston-resident parents expressed a common desire to create greater connections between Lincoln-resident and Boston-resident families. Several Boston parents expressed interest in more opportunities for Lincoln families and students to come to Boston, but also expressed appreciation for the many community events that occur in Lincoln. Within both schools, staff expressed a strong sense of internal community and collegiality.

Multiple Hanscom parents expressed concerns about ways in which political sentiments might be reflected in district values, in particular as part of various curricula or schoolwide practices. At the Lincoln School, a consistent pattern of feedback from parents was to better take advantage of community resources and to create stronger connections between the school and the larger community. Multiple Lincoln parents also expressed a strong desire to have more opportunities to support and participate in school activities; in general, parents saw themselves as an underutilized resource that could have a larger positive impact on the school.

Parents expressed a general desire for students to have greater access to after-school activities. In some cases this meant creating more after-school activity offerings, and in other cases meant creating greater access to offerings; in particular, Boston families expressed a desire for more frequent access to late buses to allow more consistent participation in after-school activities. Teachers and parents saw the two school buildings as high-quality resources, both for school activities and for community activities, and building use data demonstrated that the Lincoln School is used frequently by the community outside of school hours. Teachers in particular appreciated the high quality of instructional spaces that the buildings offer.

School schedules were mentioned by teachers as both a strength – for example, adding explicit time for morning meetings helped to contribute to the development of class communities – and as a challenge. Because there are a number of staff that are shared across both campuses, one school's schedule can be impacted by the other's, and teachers mentioned this multiple times as leading to adverse impacts. Specials teachers identified the need for more transition time between classes, and teachers at both the elementary and middle school levels identified a desire for opportunities to rotate subjects, such that students were not always learning the same subject in the morning, immediately after lunch, or near the end of the day (at the elementary level this meant the option to rotate when a subject was taught within the same class, and at the middle school level it meant the option to rotate when students moved from one class to the next). In general, teachers found the current year's schedule to be an improvement over prior year schedules. Some teachers expressed an interest in scheduling stability – i.e., maintaining the same schedule for multiple years, despite strengths or weaknesses – while other teachers expressed an interest in making changes to the schedule based on feedback.

Communication from the school and district was generally viewed positively by parents: 58% of parents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement “I receive effective communication from school and district administrators.” In listening sessions, parents more frequently expressed satisfaction with communication from teachers than from the school or district, although this was more true at the elementary grades than at the middle school grades. In listening sessions, parents frequently expressed a desire for more information about their children's academic progress (although parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the information shared in parent-teacher conferences), and some parents also expressed a desire for more proactive and explanatory information when disciplinary incidents occurred.

One broad theme that emerged is that, while there are a variety of districtwide strengths and challenges when it comes to supporting collaboration and community, there were also some important differences between the two schools. For example, the Hanscom School serves a very close-knit, geographically tight community of students and families, whereas the Lincoln School serves students who reside in Lincoln, in Boston, and in other communities where staff members live who bring their children to Lincoln. In addition, the Hanscom School community is constantly changing, with staff typically only having one to three years to build relationships with children and families before families change their posting, while at the Lincoln School there is an opportunity to build relationships over the span of up to 10 years.

This creates a big-picture challenge of finding the right balance between establishing *districtwide* systems, structures, and practices, versus allowing more flexibility at the *individual school level* to adjust practices to meet the needs of the different school communities.

Based on the feedback and information, several possible areas for improvement include:

- *More effectively using the Lincoln setting and community as a teaching and learning resource;*
- *More effectively leveraging our parent communities as resources;*
- *Improving external communication to caregivers, in particular around student progress;*
- *Recognizing, and continuing to work through, the need to balance consistent district structures and expectations with the reality of individual school needs.*

AIDE Work

AIDE work (work focused on anti-racism, inclusion, diversity, and equity) was a common theme that came up in a variety of settings and spanned all three core values. In this way, AIDE work was both its own theme and an overlaying lens that exposed a connected set of needs spanning across all other categories. As one staff member said, “We need to figure out how we show the application in every interaction and not just when we’re ‘doing’ AIDE work. It needs to be in every way that we engage and talk with families, that we prepare instruction – it is a layer of everything that we do and not a separate thing.”

Across all standardized assessment information (MCAS data, reading scores, and i-Ready data), there were race-based patterns of achievement. In many cases, these patterns existed both in terms of proficiency data and in terms of growth data. For example, the charts on the next page show data from i-Ready scores for the 2022-23 school, disaggregated by race. i-Ready defines “at mid level” as having met grade-level expectations in the spring (proficiency information), and also provides information on the extent to which students meet expected growth and stretch targets between the fall and spring.

Lincoln School i-Ready Growth Data 2022-23			
Race/SPED	At Mid Level	Met Expected Growth	Met Stretch Growth
Asian	64%	74%	55%
Black or African American	25%	55%	30%
Hispanic	50%	59%	45%
Two or More Races	55%	59%	35%
White	71%	66%	39%

Hanscom School i-Ready Growth Data 2022-23			
Race/SPED	At Mid Level	Met Expected Growth	Met Stretch Growth
Asian	54%	62%	38%
Black or African American	29%	59%	35%
Hispanic	21%	45%	17%
Two or More Races	40%	63%	25%
White	40%	59%	28%

In addition to student learning data, there was a broad perception among staff that students of color, in particular Black boys, are not as effectively served as other student groups, and that white students in upper-middle-class families are most effectively served. In addition, many staff, in particular staff of color, see disparities in the expectations set for students; this manifests in lower academic expectations set for many students of color, in particular Black and brown students. As one teacher said, “I have seen kids go through middle school and enter high school and were so far behind because we made allowances. Not holding every kid to a high standard is not equitable.”

In addition to different academic expectations, there was also a broad view among staff, in particular staff members of color, that there are different behavioral expectations for students of color. These perceptions were echoed in student listening sessions: Boston-resident students frequently mentioned that their behavior is noticed and acted upon by adults when similar behavior in white students goes unnoticed or unremarked.

In listening sessions, staff members of color noted unconscious bias and microaggressions that occur on a regular basis, toward both students and staff of color, that white staff members are far less likely to perceive. As one staff member said, “The unconscious bias and microaggressions, they are plentiful, and white staff don’t typically see them or take responsibility for them. People lean a lot into what their intention was as opposed to what the harm was.” There was also a perception among many staff members of color, and some

white staff members, that the district too often shies away from difficult, concrete discussions about race and the ways in which race can complicate the work we do with students, families, and staff.

There was a broad consensus among staff, families, and students that the district needs to do more work to attract, hire, and retain a more racially diverse staff. Efforts in this area were seen as steps that would be good for students of color, but also good for white students: a more racially diverse staff was seen as beneficial for *all* students. At the Lincoln School, both Lincoln-resident and Boston-resident families expressed an interest in creating more two-way opportunities for community building. There was also a broad interest in increasing access for Boston-resident students to after-school activities.

Overall, there was a broad commitment to AIDE work across the district, but there was additionally a broad perception that this commitment exists more as an aspiration than as a set of concrete actions. Two statements – one by a teacher, and one by a Boston-resident parent – summed up these sentiments: “When it comes to AIDE work, we talk a big game but we don’t follow through. That is around an unwillingness to have difficult conversations – we say we are fully in this and we totally oppose these things, but when it comes down to it the conversation is very different at times.” And, “DEI work needs to be better because I still feel that we are more performative than action oriented.”

Based on the feedback and information, several possible areas for improvement include:

- *Ensuring that we are setting high academic expectations for all students;*
- *Developing academic goals that emphasize the growth of individual students and student sub-groups;*
- *Reviewing our recruitment, hiring, and support practices to attract and retain a more racially diverse staff;*
- *Recognizing that race is a factor in the experiences of many students, staff, and families of color, and working to ensure that our systems, structures, and actions do not ignore or eliminate race, but rather work to mitigate the negative experiences that people encounter based on their race.*