

Canton Public Schools  
**Superintendent's Entry Plan**  
**Report of Findings**



**June 9, 2022**

## Introduction

As one component of participating in the Massachusetts Association of the School Superintendent's New Superintendent's Induction Program (NSIP), I outlined the process for my Entry Plan. The goal of this Entry Plan process was to engage with stakeholders in the Canton school community and review District data to gain a deeper understanding of the conditions of learning in the school system, celebrate areas of strength, and identify areas for further inquiry and growth.

During the past ten months, with the support of all stakeholders, I have collected qualitative and quantitative data in the District through many student, educator, and community forums, classroom observations, discussions with School Committee members and local officials, data review, interviews, and stakeholder surveys. In addition, I have listened to District administration, building administrators, and educators who have conducted their own reviews and brought their understandings and findings forward.

The following areas emerged as key points:

- student achievement
- the conditions for student learning
- educator experience
- family engagement, communication
- District effectiveness

Identifying the overarching themes and patterns has been a tremendous learning opportunity that has been both thought-provoking and inspiring.

The goal of this report is to communicate what I have learned through the entry process and provide a high-level synthesis of the main themes that emerged. My Entry Plan findings are based on the data I reviewed and collected.

I hope this document serves as a strong representation of the District's core strengths and foundational elements, while also providing areas of focus for strategic growth and development that will further enhance and elevate the student learning experience. Using this plan as a crucial initial step in our long-term strategic planning process, Canton Public Schools will be on a path for continued growth and excellence.

Sincerely,

Derek Folan  
Superintendent

## Overall: A Promising Foundation for Growth

The Town of Canton has a deep love and commitment to its students, educators and families in the school community. In many towns, the school system is a source of pride and the centerpiece for its residents. Such is true in Canton. The Town of Canton cherishes its traditions and community celebrations. It is also a hub for innovation and transformation in the business world. There is strong financial support for the schools and a solid, trusted relationship with town departments and officials. Canton and its school community also features a diverse population with ever-changing enrollment demographics. While the schools boast strong performance overall, and there is a strong desire to elevate the District to a higher level in student achievement. The community is also calling for an equally firm commitment to upholding the core value of educating all its students well.

The data suggest that enrollment will be fairly consistent in upcoming years, although some population-specific trends deserve attention to best meet the needs of students and priorities for budgeting, specifically:

- There is a noticeable trend that enrollment rates are consistently higher at Hansen Elementary School and Luce Elementary Schools
- There are a greater number of families moving into the District with growing financial needs
- Our student population is progressively becoming more diverse and our youngest students speak a variety of languages.

Enrollment / Race & Ethnicity	2018	2022	+/-- %
Total Enrollment	3,310	3,228	
African American	10.1	11.3	+1.2%
Asian	10.6	11.1	+0.5%
Hispanic	5.0	6.8	+1.8%
Native American	0.0	0.1	+0.1%
White	69.2	63.8	-5.4%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.2	0.2	No change
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	4.8	6.7	+1.9%

<a href="#">Selected Populations</a>	% in 2018-19	% in 2021-22	+/- %
First Language Not English	6.0	8.0	+2.0%
English Language Learners	2.4	2.8	+0.4%
Students with Disabilities	11.0	14.2	+3.2%
High Needs	25.2	34.3	+9.1%
Low Income	13.1	22.0	+8

## **Building Up and Building On via the MSBA Partnership, Refreshed CPS Mission, Vision, Core Values & Strategic Framework**

In March 2022, Canton Public Schools was officially invited into the [Massachusetts School Building Authority \(MSBA\)](#) program to either renovate or replace the [Galvin Middle School](#). A Master Facility Study was conducted in 2017 and resulted in the GMS Statement of Interest, which outlined the need for an updated middle school to serve the educational vision and anticipated space needs in the District. In particular, the feasibility study recommended a restructuring to accommodate grades 5-8 in the middle school to alleviate overcrowding in the elementary schools.

The GMS/MSBA announcement has galvanized the Canton community, as it provides an inspirational, innovative and aspirational and rare opportunity to help significantly impact future generations of Canton students and the town itself. Any new school building uplifts a community, while the visioning and the yearly work allows for idea sharing and a common purpose to bring all stakeholders together.

The building announcement -- and its need for visioning -- came at the right time for the District as well. Through this Entry Plan process, the data has clearly defined a need to revisit and revise the District's mission, vision and core values (work set to begin July 2022). These foundational elements have been in place for more than ten years.

Additionally, in September 2022, Canton High School is preparing for a [New England Association of Schools and Colleges \(NEASC\)](#) visit, and the District has a desire to develop PreK-12 Learning Expectations that reflect relevant and transferable skill sets for college- and career-readiness. These expectations will be guided greatly by the revised CPS Mission, Vision, and Core values.

Finally, a [CPS Strategic Framework](#) was established in 2018 to provide the focus for the foundational areas of our work. Consistent with our need to update our CPS mission, vision and core values, this data point calls for a revisiting and refining of this tool to match the current needs of the District. More importantly, building upon these refreshed items, the District needs to construct a 5-year Strategic Plan, complete with measurable, actionable goals, complemented by a multi-year and long-range Capital Plan. From this critical long-term planning work, well-informed and targeted annual District acceleration/action plans will flow.

## **Mitigating the Impact of COVID-19 and Emerging Ready**

COVID-19 dramatically impacted school environments over the last two-and-a-half years. The data suggest that the Canton school community navigated the tumultuous time well, and yet the impact remains and lingers in several realms that mirror what is happening across our state and country in most schools. including increases in: challenging student behaviors, social and emotional learning needs, student learning needs, and exhausting educator experiences. Especially after this year, which was described by many as the “most challenging year,” the impact and the data is too significant to dismiss.

In some ways, the data suggest that COVID demonstrated our ability to adapt (especially with technology), learn quickly, rely on community, and stay centered on students. And yet, COVID challenged us to rethink -- in the moment and beyond --about our schools, especially improving/adapting our conditions for learning, instructional approaches, our systems, our District vision, and our standard of excellence. Although no one wants to talk about COVID, its impact remains a significant thread for our present and our future work.

## **Impact Themes**

### **Theme 1: Accelerating achievement for ALL students through equitable systems that promote excellence**

#### **Strengths:**

- Canton holds a strong value of meeting the needs of all students who live in the town and ensuring they have the support and opportunities to excel
- Many conversations highlighted particular programs or staff who have elevated the achievement level of students
- Forums celebrated the foundational work that has been done around equity, especially the establishment of building-based DEI teams, prior professional development, an emerging lens around equitable conditions and instruction, and recent a commitment to performing and activating an Equity Audit in July 2022

- Data noted that Canton embraces the goal of continually being a high-performing District, and there is optimism and momentum that the District will reach greater levels of achievement with greater collaboration, planning and investments made with that focus named as a priority
- Discussions noted an appreciation for the benchmark assessments at various different levels from preK-12, and the recent incorporation of technology solutions that tailor educational activities to best meet a student's individual performance level and needs
- Financial support is strong for the systems, practices and approach needed to support and challenge all students
- An appreciation for [Canton Association of Parents and Teachers \(CAPT\)](#), [Canton Alliance for Public Education \(CAPE\)](#), [Music Counts](#), [CHS Athletic Boosters](#), [Canton Parent Advisory Council for Student Services \(CPACSS\)](#) and other community support organizations whose volunteer service and fundraising activities help ensure that students have access to unique and innovative learning enhancement and educators have additional supports to use in their work with students

### **Opportunities for inquiry, improvement and growth:**

- Student performance data shows that selected populations are performing at a lower level than the overall population. And, as noted earlier in the report, Canton's selected populations are increasing and the student demographics are becoming more diverse, requiring attention through an equity lens
- Data suggested a strong desire to make smaller class sizes a priority -- in order to meet the needs of students and follow best practice as outlined in a preponderance of research that point to smaller classes promoting higher levels of student performance
- Data called for an "action-oriented" vs. a "conceptual" approach to equity, ensuring all students and families get what they need to achieve at a high level.
- In particular, the data noted the need for diversifying texts, implementing "culturally responsive" instruction, and deepening awareness of how bias and barriers can interfere with one's learning. Further, families called for representation in texts and diversifying our staff. "We want to see ourselves in what and how we learn."
- Data also suggested that all students (overall) can reach higher achievement levels, and feedback called for continued attention to academic rigor, personalization, enduring/deeper and "interactive" learning experiences, state standards alignment, and the development of opportunities for academic acceleration, passion areas, and aspirational growth

- Identifying a standard set of data metrics and outcomes -- Indicators of Excellence -- to monitor achievement, school culture and community engagement, student growth and participation, and performance levels in the District. This will be key to monitor our goals around equity and acceleration for all students
- Full implementation of the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) across all of the levels, and the development of professional development and instructional programming to implement with success and fidelity
- Incorporating academic and extracurricular programming with greater access for all students, including but not limited to STEAM activities, digital learning and citizenship, world languages, subject matter interventions and accelerations, athletics and the arts
- Embracing and acting on the findings of the Equity Audit, and ensure the Core Equity Team is representative of all stakeholders, and ensure the building-based DEI teams have a clearly defined set of goals and focus
- Optimizing in-school operations: time, managerial systems and schedules to enhance student learning opportunities and programming
- Examining financial structures, including planning and implementation to ensure equitable access to trips and programs
- Examining student services department structures, systems, practices and personnel needs to best meet the needs of students

## **Theme 2: Enhancing school culture, community engagement and conditions for optimal teaching and learning for every student, educator and family (*Safety, behavior, SEL, Belonging, Communication*)**

### ***Strengths***

- Forums and surveys noted an appreciation for the educators commitment to students and the “community feel” of every school
- Further data confirmed that communication is well received and effective from the District level and the building level, with special appreciation for the communication from teachers

- Numerous students and families noted their love of extra-curriculars, clubs and athletics as an essential and positive element of their school experience. “It connects us to the school. It’s what we love to do.”
- Students noted they are connected to their peers and that school / social relationships are very important to their overall experience
- Parents/guardians noted they appreciate the financial commitment from the town and the resources available to students
- Data suggested the great majority of families are having a very positive experience in the Canton Public Schools and appreciate the strength of the schools and its educators
- Data -- from post-secondary planning and from forums -- suggested that students are well-prepared for the next grade level and/or for college and other post-secondary plans.

***Opportunities for inquiry, improvement and growth:***

- Student behavior emerged as a major concern across all grade levels. Further, there was data calling for consistent documentation for behavior, student accountability, staff safety, communication, and training for restorative practices.
- Several forums among stakeholders noted the need for a consistent District approach to social emotional learning, both in curriculum, messaging and personnel
- Data noted that safety, communication and overall culture on bus transportation needs attention and enhancement
- Tragedies and the evolution of social media issues prompted a re-engagement and re-emphasis on school safety protocols and procedures and the School Resource Officer (SRO) partnership
- Data suggested that there is a need to engage the community in critical conversations and information sharing on important topics including: new educational initiatives, matters of race, social media, and trends impacting students. Parents and guardians hoped the information would strengthen the partnership, and they are looking to support the schools.
- Community forums called for greater visibility for grading, curriculum, resources and progression of units
- Vaping is a major concern, from a student behavior and health perspective. Further, students identified vaping as greatly impacting the bathrooms in schools and the overall



school culture. Parents/guardians are looking for more information about vaping. Additionally, students reported that vaping and loitering have made the bathrooms an undesirable place in the school

- Data confirmed race-based and other civil rights incidents are rising, especially at the elementary level. At the secondary levels, a student said, “It’s there” regarding race-related issues. Parents/guardians discussions called for a consistent approach to addressing these incidents through consequences and learning.
- Data noted that many students are enrolling in the District at the very start of the school year and throughout the year, so it was suggested to invest in a welcoming ambassador program to instill a sense of belonging.
- Further, data is calling for us to survey families and staff who leave the District to accurately capture metrics, trends and feedback to help inform planning and improvement
- Staff survey data noted the professional experience and culture needs attention, action and enhancement, especially around staffing shortages, recognition, collaboration and recognition
- Continued advancement of two-way communication opportunities for families to learn more about the schools
- The District Calendar Task Force identified of a cultural calendar is something to build upon, for awareness, representation and sense of belonging
- Annualizing, standardizing and building upon the community surveys and regular feedback opportunities to measure effectiveness and areas of improvement
- Upgrading facilities and opportunities for athletics, arts and extra-curriculars, across all the levels
- Families, educators and students called for more community-building and social events

### **Theme 3: Empowering educators to engage in professional learning that advanced high-quality instruction and achievement for every student.**

#### ***Strengths***

- Canton features a strong professional staff who is deeply committed to students and learning

- Professional collaboration is greatly valued by staff, understanding that the team approach benefits student and professional growth
- Areas of expertise and best practices are modeled by colleagues and can serve as basis for professional learning
- Deep commitment to a growth mindset and engagement with professional courses to advance one's learning
- Development and advancement of the Professional Learning Council engages educator voice and allows for collaborative planning and priority setting for professional development
- Continued alignment between professional development and goal setting for the District and the School Improvement Plans
- The development of Instructional Learning Teams (ILT) and Academic Learning Team (ALT) at the elementary level, and the greater preK-12 collaboration time for departmental leaders

***Opportunities for inquiry, improvement and growth:***

- Data noted a need to incorporate educator voice and agency in planning for professional learning and greater focus on high priority areas
- Developing a shared understanding of best instructional and assessment practices, and a “clearly defined” approach to designing instruction for high-level student engagement and outcomes in the District
- Allocating collaborative time for horizontal and vertical curriculum development and refinement, ensuring continuity and through line from preK-12.
- Designing professional development that is focused around key priorities and allows for educator-driven professional learning as well
- Establishing collaborative time to examine student data to inform instruction, intervention and extensions, and curricular approaches
- Data showed the need to showcase, celebrate and recognize best practices that have high impact on students, and create a culture of innovative approaches
- Survey data also showed that the current educator evaluation approach is not highly effective for moving professional practice and warrants a review and adaptation

- Engaging student voice and agency to help empower educators to refine their professional practice
- Professionalizing the Educational Support Personnel positions and engaged staff in learning pathways and opportunities, both in and out of school
- Reviewing and advancing food service offerings based student and staff interests and nutritional considerations

#### **Theme 4: Strategically optimize finances, resources and operations to support excellence and achievement for every student and the school community**

##### ***Strengths:***

- Data showed that Canton has a strong financial foundation to support its schools on a yearly basis
- Canton also features strong and collaborative relationships between school officials and town officials
- Several forums noted the cleanliness of the buildings and regular capital upgrades to the facilities, especially the air ventilation systems
- Data notes that recent and intentional moves to improve budgeting collaboration and transparency is effective and well received by the community

##### ***Opportunities for inquiry, improvement and growth:***

- Data suggests an opportunity to accelerate performance of the District by adopting a clear, impact-driven long-term planning process. Through improved, measurable goal-setting and data-driven progress monitoring and planning, the District will have better information to inform investment, programming and yearly planning.
- Feedback suggests the heightened need for clear alignment of strategic planning and data at all levels of District operations to help optimize resources and accelerate achievement

- Data suggested that the District had a clear and present need for Human Resources expertise and support, specifically around school matters
- Data also called for long-term financial capital planning to better forecast and plan to replace, upgrade or expand aging facilities and older vehicles and/or plan for new needs on the horizon, including investments in sustainable infrastructure where possible
- Discussions noted that the Student Information System (SIS) requires review and needs an upgrade that better serves our families and educators and interfaces with other software in the District
- Data also pointed to an overall need to review and upgrade our systems and approaches to proactive financial reporting and auditing, building rentals, contracts, workflows, HR systems, and project development
- Data from students and community members called for a review of school lunch and food offerings, especially with regard to options and nutrition

## **Summary and Next Steps**

The report of Entry Findings captures a high-level view of themes, strengths and areas of improvement and further inquiry for Canton Public Schools. This Plan will be a guide post for the leadership team's collaborative strategic planning moving forward. In particular, it will be the foundation for the development of the Theory of Action, the annual District Acceleration and Action Plan, and the 5-year Strategic Plan. As a team, we are looking forward to this intentional and strategic work.