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**SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT— JANUARY 19, 2021**

**1. Congratulations and Celebrations**

*A Heartfelt Thank You to Our Special Educators and Nurses!*

Today, January 19th, is our first day back to in-person school since December for the majority of students and staff in the district. What you may not know is that during this period of remote teaching and learning, we put out a query to special educators, asking who might be willing to service students with disabilities in-person during our remote status. We are grateful to the more than 60 educators who volunteered to serve LPS students with disabilities in-person. Our LPS school nurses also continue to do an extraordinary job of taking on all of the added responsibilities that come with keeping students and staff healthy and safe during a pandemic, including flu vaccinations, contact tracing, and their new roles in surveillance testing. We are truly blessed with a selfless staff who put our students first and take care of one another, and I cannot thank them enough for their dedication and service.

*Linda Chen Named Top 300 Scholar!*

Lexington High School Senior, Linda Chen, has been named a "[Top 300 Scholar](#)" in the 80th Regeneron Science Talent Search—the nation's oldest and most prestigious science and mathematics competition for high school seniors. As a "Top 300 Scholar," Linda receives a \$2,000 prize, and Lexington High School receives another \$2,000 to use toward STEM-related activities. Congratulations, Linda, we are so proud of you, and many thanks to your fabulous chemistry teacher, Dr. Parul Kumar for all her support.

*Students as Active Agents*

An important part of our LPS vision is for students to be primary agents in their own learning, recognizing that they experience higher levels of engagement and a greater sense of enjoyment by actively participating in their own learning. We want students to know their schools are places where their ideas are honored and challenged, exploration and discovery are supported and encouraged, and they feel safe and secure.

Tonight I want to share two great examples of how our LPS students are making a difference in our community. At the last School Committee meeting, we shared the challenges associated with middle school scheduling, and the principals shared their ideas for ways that they can improve the middle school schedules. Thank you to Sara Mei and Ali Mosalleai for developing this thoughtful [Lex Work Together Proposal](#), with an offer to create a website where offerings

from high school students can be posted, and middle school students will have the opportunity to sign up and join a club or activity.” The proposal raises some exciting possibilities, and I assume student engagement and interest would be extremely high. The proposal is currently under review by the two middle school principals.

In other exciting news, Aditya Koul, a Lexington High School sophomore, has found a wonderful way to support his K-5 alma mater, Bridge School, and his love of math. Adi approached Dr. Chris Lyons and K-5 Math Department Head, Linda Menkis, about creating an after school math class especially for students from Bridge School that focuses on doing math just for the fun of it! Fast forward a couple months, lots of conversations, planning, collaboration with Lexington Community Education Director, Craig Hall, and we have, "Math with Adi - Giving Back With Math!" Fourteen Bridge 5th Graders will work with Adi and Linda Menkis for one hour, once a week for five sessions to work on fun math problems and puzzles and develop their love of math! Thanks to Adi for his perseverance, growth mindset, and willingness to give back to his community.

## 2. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

### *Annual Report of LPS Efforts to Reduce Systemic Barriers, 2020-2021*

On January 14, 2021, the Director of Planning and Assessments, the Director of Equity and Student Supports, and I presented the Annual Report of Lexington Public Schools Efforts to Reduce Systemic Barriers, 2020-2021. The full report is available [here](#). We provided updates on bullying; suspensions and student discipline; civil rights harassment/discrimination; diverse staffing and professional development; and inclusion efforts of historically marginalized groups. In positive news, approximately one-third of our new LPS hires are people of color, but we have more work to do in this area. We also discussed ongoing challenges in discipline disparities at the secondary level and plan to have staff report directly on these issues next year.

### *Special Education Disproportionality*

An important update in the Annual Report includes information on disproportionality in special education, which is a shared challenge for general and special educators. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires states to collect and examine data to determine whether significant disproportionality, based on race and ethnicity, is occurring in school districts with respect to:

- The identification of students as students with disabilities, including the identification of students with disabilities in accordance with a particular impairment;
- The placement in particular educational settings of such students; and
- The incidence, duration, and type of disciplinary removals from placement, including suspensions and expulsions.

These data can be used to assess disparities among racial/ethnic groups. A review of LPS special education data shows that **our Black/African American students are significantly more likely than other racial or ethnic groups to be referred to special education for two categories: the communication and specific learning disabilities**. This review is based on data from 2017-2018 to the present. The State recently began the public reporting of these

data; therefore, it is quite possible that this pattern of disproportionality has existed for much longer. Similar to the disparate outcomes we see in discipline, disproportionality in special education in Lexington is, unfortunately, similar to the outcomes found in broader educational research and data across public school systems. This analysis did not show significant differences by race/ethnicity in their general identification rates for special education or other disability types (i.e., intellectual, emotional, autism, and other health impairments).

In response to high identification for certain disability types for Black/African American students, LPS has begun to coordinating a team of school leaders to address disproportionality in special education with a focus both on the specific student groups highlighted in the data, but also the broader systems and educational experiences that precede referral to special education. To start, teams will create and review in depth student learning profiles to better understand the educational experience prior to their referral to special education. LPS is also participating in a related statewide professional learning community (PLC), which will meet periodically throughout the spring.

### 3. LPS COVID-19 Surveillance Testing Updates

On January 9 and January 16, 2021, approximately 60 students, staff, and family volunteers gave up their Saturdays to gather and assemble COVID-19 test kits at Central Administrative Offices at 146 Maple Street in Lexington. The volunteers put together more than 22,000 test kits! On January 12-13th, all LPS staff had the opportunity to participate in the free surveillance testing prior to our return to in-person learning today. Approximately 616 LPS staff participated in the first round of testing, and we were thrilled to see that Mirimus Clinical Labs did not detect the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). [The LPS COVID-19 Surveillance Testing Plan](#) began today for Cohort A students, and all went according to plan. The most recent (January) LPS [staff](#) and [family](#) updates are linked here. On January 18, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. our fantastic Surveillance Testing Project Managers organized a parent forum to provide parents with an overview of the surveillance testing program and to answer questions. The Director of School Health Services and I participated on the panel, along with several other dedicated partners and School Committee members, Kathleen Lenihan and Sara Cuthbertson. Please click [here](#) to view the full LPS Surveillance Testing Presentation.

### 4. Full Return Community Input Team

My plan for this evening was to provide you with a detailed timeline and plan for convening the Community Input Team for Full Return. In my December 1, 2020 [letter](#) to the school community, I indicated the following:

Now is not the time to turn our attention to a full return to school. We are experiencing a second surge and rates of transmission continue to increase in Massachusetts and throughout the nation. Our goal is to continue with in-person learning for as long as it is safely possible to do so. There are times when we have to go slow to go fast, and a premature rush to a full return to school ultimately could compromise our ability to offer in-person hybrid learning. **Once the pandemic subsides and the rates of infection are lower—perhaps early in January depending on the trajectory of the virus—we plan to assemble a Community Input Team (CIT)** to explore our local data and the possibility of bringing our youngest students (starting with Kindergarten, then first grade, and so on)

back for a full return to school first. For those interested in sharing your ideas or expertise, please consider applying to the [Community Input Team for Full Return](#).

On December 1, 2020, the rates of positive cases in LPS were 6.9/100,000, and we were in the “yellow category,” or what the Harvard Global Health Institute (HGHI) and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health refers to as “community spread.” Clearly, the rates of infection are not subsiding, and LPS has moved past the “orange category” (or “accelerated spread”). For the first time ever (and as expected with holiday gatherings) both our schools and the Town of Lexington are in the “red category” with 25/100,000 positive cases or what HGHI refers to as the “tipping point.”

While I was hoping to share a timeline tonight about when we would begin the CIT, I cannot in good conscience ask LPS staff and school community members to turn their attention to a focus on a full return when our community is at increased risk. Moreover, we must contend now with variants of the virus that add new public health threats, and it would be misleading to convene CIT for Full Return now. The bottom line is that if it was a bad time to discuss a full return in December, it is an even worse time to do so now.

There will be a time when we convene a CIT for Full Return. When we see the number of positive cases trending in the right direction, and LPS is back in the “yellow category” or “community spread” with no more than 9/100,000 positive cases and there are no additional and unforeseen complications flagged by public health experts, I will convene the CIT for Full Return. We have received over 50 applications from school community members (students, staff, and parents/caregivers) who are interested in being part of the planning process. Right now our time and attention needs to remain focused on keeping our students and staff healthy and safe.

## **5. Community Events and Highlights**

It's always such a pleasure to interact with community groups in Lexington. Here are just a few highlights of some of the events that were happening around Town!

- On January 14, 2021, I attended a moving unveiling ceremony of the Black History Project of Lexington's Portrait Banners hosted by the Association of Black Citizens of Lexington. As noted by the ABCL, “The banners provide an opportunity to introduce Greater Lexington and neighboring communities to other Black people who have shaped the history and culture of the Town of Lexington, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and the United States of America from the 18th century to the present.” I was moved by the inspirational personal stories guest speakers shared about notable Black people who continue to have a great impact in our community today. The portrait banners commemorating notable individuals in history will be on display in Lexington Center through March 1st.
- The Town's eighth MLK Day of Service was a beautiful and inspirational event that made me feel proud to be part of such a wonderful community. Six of our middle school student essay winners were recognized, including: Resara Seneviratne, Krish Gandhi, Lucy Kontos, Vasu Meel, Sejal Mammai, and Miranda Liskov. We are so proud of these students who did a terrific job writing and in their public speaking. They were poised,

articulate, and full of great ideas for how they can do their part to ensure racial justice in Lexington. I thank everyone who worked hard to make this special day possible!

- In honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Lexington Human Rights Committee organized an engaging discussion on disproportionality in the healthcare system with Lexington's very own Alison S. Bryant Mansha, MD, MPH, who is an LPS parent and the vice chair of quality, equity, and safety at Massachusetts General Hospital. The presentations were eye-opening, and the historical inequalities that exist in healthcare are regrettably similar to the issues of disproportionality that we see in public education. One of my main take-aways is that if we truly want to solve issues of equity rather than perpetuate the racist systems that have existed for hundreds of years, then workplace diversity must be a top priority for every city, town, and our school system. After the presentations, we met in small groups to discuss concrete ways that we can help to change and make the healthcare system more equitable. The conversation in my breakout session was highly engaging and thought-provoking. I enjoyed being able to hear from LHS students, family, and community members.
- In other news, I enjoyed being a guest speaker (albeit a virtual one!) at the Rotary Club of Lexington once again this year. The Lexington Rotarians are a thoughtful group of people who care deeply about the community and residents. I gave an overview of how the Lexington Public Schools are managing through the pandemic and the challenges we have faced thus far. Please click [here](#) to view the full presentation.