***Report Card on the Schools***

A report on the Holyoke Public Schools. How we are doing. MCAS scores, the new strategic plan and your questions.

Presenters:

Michael Moriarty, a member of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Anthony Soto, Superintendent of Holyoke Public Schools.

Friday, October 14, 2022 at 6:00 p.m.

Flats Community Building, 43 North Canal Street

The following link is to watch the video on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/oneholyoke/videos/840641124047361>

**Nayroby Rosa:** Hello everyone, Nayroby here at OneHolyke we are about to go live with our event tonight, which is a report on the schools, I'll pass the microphone over to Peter and he's going to fill you in on what's going on here tonight. If you're interested, you can still come in, we'll be here at 43 North Canal Street from six to seven-thirty, more or so.

Thank you. Everyone, say hello to the livestream.

**Michael Moriarty:** Thank you all, Gloria and everyone else. And the others to those who are remote. I am Mike Moriarty. I wear two hats and I'm putting both of them on, one of them welcoming you as CEO of OneHolyoke Development Corporation, oh we own this building and we purchased it about five years ago with the intention of having a facility that can benefit the Flats community to be a gathering place to be an asset or a hall that people can rent at a reasonable cost. All these things have been going on for some time.

We have both a Flats Advisory Board and we have Board One Community Group, both of whom look out to this neighborhood to try to identify the problems and offer solutions.

One of our goals, especially through our Community Engagement Director, Nayroby Rosa, is to bring more of the city civic life into the Flats. And so, if there is a civic board meeting that is particularly important to Holyoke, we ask to have them here. We have mayoral debates here; we’ve had meetings with city council candidates. We are constantly looking for those opportunities.

Tonight, is more of a speaker event which we occasionally do Friday night or the last Friday of every month. Sometimes it's just a social event. Sometimes it will have a topic and a purpose, and tonight we do have a topic and a purpose. That's where I'm putting on my other hat and welcoming our guest of honor this evening.

Ah, so, my other hat is that I serve as a member of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. There I have a front row seat on the policy making that affects nearly a million students across Massachusetts as well as access to folks in the department who provide a tremendous amount of insight and information.

If the State Department is good at one thing, it's good at gathering data. One of the things I always hope to pass on to people is that if you go to the department's website, especially Googling school and district profiles there is more publicly available data there than you can imagine. It's not entirely user friendly, but there are places you can go and help make it make more sense. And there are also, once you get used to it, just deep deep reservoirs of detailed information: at the school level, at the district level, at the state level.

Ah so, I encourage people be your own data person. Find information as best as you can yourself. It will help you gain insights for your family, for your kids, for your community. Ah! And that's part of what I do every year when MCAS comes out, because I am intensely interested in a state that has better early literacy outcomes for everyone.

I look at how we did in the last year and I know how to turn all that data into a spreadsheet, start slicing it, dicing it, looking at all the different kinds of places that have results and what their trends have been over the last few years, and this year I want to do it in a more public way than I have in the past.

And so, that's my side of this presentation this evening. After that, because it really is just a numbers review. I want to turn it over to Anthony Soto. Because in our community our school superintendent, our receiver, has the responsibility to take this information and act on it. Take the recommendations and the advice that comes in from our community through our school committee, through the numerous public hearings that happen. Through the voices that come through schools and staff, to try to have better outcomes for kids every year. And I think Anthony’s also got a presentation to speak to what are we looking at ahead of this year.

So, with that, I'll jump into the PowerPoint that’s up here and try to run through it, awful lot of facts and figures, but I open up with this quote from Martin Luther King. That I believe it's as true today in 2022 as it was 55 years ago in 1967 when he wrote it. We have a literacy crisis in the United States that is profound. I think there is a simple recipe that I suggest for everyone. You should expect every school to teach most of our kids how to read. I don't think that's an unreasonable expectation. And yet, in Massachusetts, before the pandemic, nearly a third of schools did not.

390 schools out of 900 that assessed third graders did not have most of the kids meeting or exceeding expectations. So that tells you there's a problem out there. But it didn't tell us that in 2019, it told us that 5 years earlier, 10 years earlier and 20 years earlier. Our outcomes have been flat for the last two decades. And that is information that we keep hoping will result in urgent changes.

And the rest of Brownsville. So, here are the big highlights. Number one; the information that we get that is most comprehensive and reliable is this nation's report card called NEAP. They have their first preliminary information release early in September, there’ll be more detailed information coming up in a couple of weeks. And then there’s our annual MCAS scores. So that testing which takes place typically in May on different subjects, but I'm focused on ELA, happens in other months. Ah, that was released in October, which is a little late. Usually comes in early in September.

When we write digitally to the MCAS next generation, there's been some hope that by digitizing we'll get scores in the summer, where it's more useful for districts going forward. We haven't realized that yet, but we live in a world where we have to have a lot of forgiveness for everybody. Because there's just been a major public health crisis that’s affected everything we do. But one of the things is that’s the academic outcomes.

Another data point that I think is vitally important is the chronic absence data. We are able to see in real time the number of kids that are not attending school on a regular basis. Chronic Absenteeism has a very specific definition, it’s 10% of school days. We are in the middle of October that means we’ve had approximately 30 school days, right now. That means if you missed three school days, you are currently chronically absent.

If the schools can stop those kids who have missed three days, and maybe get to their families and find out what the problem is; maybe for some of those kids will be possible to turn that around and they won't be chronically absent by the time half of the year rolls around. But if you ignore that data and just let it grow, how do you succeed? It’s also real time in terms of our knowledge. If you missed 10% of school, you’re going to have academic consequences. It is a well-established truism that study after study has put out there. We have great insight into that.

So, we knew there were huge chronic absence issues emerging in the gateway cities all of last year and for some reason Holyoke had outlived the high numbers of chronic absenteeism and I think our academic outcomes this year tell us that those two cases are related. We have more evidence right here in our own hometown based on that.

So, there was a pre-existing crisis, it’s gotten worse, but I want to end on a positive note when I get to the last slide, and that is to say that there are genuinely promising developments in early literacy that can help bring Massachusetts back and start moving with the trajectory that we’ve experienced in the last 20 years. We'll talk about that in a moment.

Ok, the impact on our state in overall. We have a new baseline, a lower baseline than we've had since the beginning of this century.

So, in Massachusetts overall, 12.9% of students in 2019 were chronically absent. So, 12.9% of what. So, I give the hard number and it was a little over 950 thousand students. 2022 that has more than doubled 27.7% of students across our state were chronically absent of a little over 910 thousand. And by the way, ask the hard question, 40 thousand students gone in 3 years? What’s that all about? Where are they?

We're not getting really clear answers to that right now. But many families have given up on traditional public school districts. I don't think that represents 40 thousand, but there’s something going on there. The next thing to think about, especially for communities like Holyoke that have an outsized impact, is something called the mobility rate.

Children showing in and out of our schools during the school year in fairly high numbers and what that means is they enroll after the start of the school year anytime from middle of September right up to the end of the school year and then they leave prior to the end of our school year. These are children who are not served for 180 days in our regular school year.

And the rate tells you certain things about what you can expect will happen because some districts have strong programming to help acclimate kids to get them on board, other districts are so overwhelmed with high numbers they don't quite know what to do. We're all over the map in Massachusetts with that but watching the turn rate can tell you a lot about a district that's going to struggle with academic outcomes. And then there are the academic outcomes.

Why am I choosing 2019 versus 2022? Why am I not looking at 2021? It’s because 2021 leaves huge aspects out, partially because part of that year was remote but partially also because it was not the full test and whenever you change the mode that you use, you’re going to have a reduction in outcome since this happens every single time.

So, we’re back to what we typically had for the first time since 2019. So that’s why the comparison. But also, a before and after the pandemic. Because the pandemic is the elephant in the room. So, what’s happened to us?

Third grades are where I look the most carefully and always have. And the reason why is that data point, that information tells me the following: how have we done by our kids since we started working with them. From kindergarten right until the first time we can do this assessment at the latter part of third grade. And how many places are teaching most of our little kids how to read? What are we doing for the kids who are not? That's in the meeting and exceeding expectations section that we measure. So, in 2019, over half, 56% were meeting or exceeding expectations. But the other very important data point is the not meeting expectations. Because those are the kids who are far off, there are kids on a bubble. Very close. Maybe they had problems with testing, maybe they had problems with that particular day not feeling well. A lot of things can happen. But if you are down to not meeting expectations, you’re either rejecting the test or you don’t know the material. Either way that’s an indication that that is a profoundly illiterate child for their age group. The numbers were not crazy, 8% but remember that's 8% of over 950,000 students. Remember always ask yourself, percent of what? Now all of a sudden, we’re talking about 80 thousand children, it’s a lot of people.

Then in 2022 we dropped down to 44% as an entire state we have not taught most of our little kids how to read. Remote learning did not have a good program design behind it. It had invented the airplane as a mistake. And so, what do you think was going to happen trying to reinvent early childhood instruction over a screen, it did not end well, with 44%. That is our new baseline, this is the new low point from which we need to build.

But equally troubling is that we nearly doubled the percentage of kids who are in the not meeting expectations, they are far far behind. And remember these third graders, last year was their first full year in school and it was not by anybody’s reporting a typical year. We had to exclude kids in high numbers because of Covid-19 protocols. We had other issues nearly strangulating kids creating a lot of serious problems in day-to-day school operations. All of that is bound to have an effect on academic performance, even if the kids were to show up at chronic absence rate.

**A Guest:** Comments support on what was stated by Mr. Moriarty who extends thanks and congratulations to Commissioner Jeff Riley for having a keen eye for the social-emotional needs and mental health issues facing students in Massachusetts and mentions this as a topic that’s being brought before the Board more than anything else before the pandemic because they knew that that was a reality that was having a tremendous impact.

**Michael Moriarty:** We are in the learning and information business, but we are also in the safety and well-being business, and the safety and well-being were seriously compromised by the pandemic.

So, you will see that in the scores. But the third graders also one year of normal school since kindergarten. Something very similar happened with 4th and 5th graders because they’re just not used to being in school the way we were as kids, they haven’t had years of experience, year after year. And so, those numbers are also severely deflated. Fourth grade is extremely disconcerted, 36% meeting and exceeding, so watch out fifth grade teachers. You’ll probably need to get a lot of professional development on how to do core reading skills that normally you have not thought you had to deal with. But since we have so many kids already, maybe we did anyway. Maybe it’s time to work something we’ve been meaning to for quite a while.

And then you see the numbers are fairly identical going up the grades. And that tells you a great deal about how flat things are and about how that’s going to be a problem that’s going to linger for some time to come. So those are the data points I study every year very carefully.

Now let’s take it to Holyoke. Five years of receivership under Steve’s Rike had certain gains, some of which you will see in this chart, and they've been wiped away. They’ve been wiped away not because the teaching force and the leadership of this district was incompetent but because we're in an extremely vulnerable community and when a massive impact hits a vulnerable community, you're going to see an outsized consequence and that’s what’s here. But these numbers are generally shocking. It is a genuine crisis in the City Council.

First of all, chronic absenteeism. 2019 a little over a quarter of our kids were chronically absent. That’s a high number for our 5,241 kids. But we’ve traditionally year after year been in the mid-thirties, sometimes the high 30%. In the years preceding this. We had brought our district down to the 25% area. That represents, when you’re talking about over 5000 students, hundreds of kids were coming to school more and getting a better educational opportunity. So we had made that incremental gain over those years, and chronic absenteeism was fluid because of the pandemic.

So Holyoke, unfortunately has the highest percentage of any community in Massachusetts at 54.1%. We really do need to take a deep deep look at why is that the case. Why if we look at our peer gateway cities are we experiencing it in a larger way? And it’s going to be about social determinants of health, it’s going to be about social emotional things. But it’s also going to be about what’s that workforce turn over. What’s our training been like for people who are coming in new and in high numbers all the time? It’s all the factors coming together.

Our mobility rate, that’s an interesting thing, it actually went down, it was about the same. My day job as an affordable housing person, I can tell you why. You're never want to leave a low-cost apartment because you're never going to replace it.

We actually stabilized our mobility rate. Because people can’t afford to leave where they’re at unless they find something to replace it or else they’re going to end up homeless. So that turn probably looks very close to what people will tell you is our homeless population of our city. And then what we saw for years sometimes higher numbers than these and some schools by the way significantly higher numbers the decision prime rate. But that actually stabilized, sometimes we get weird surprises when you look at data. You can actually see the answers if you’re in the right field. Alright but now let’s look at what that meant for learning how to read.

And by the way, here is the other side of the story. The MCAS tells us how we did for those kids for those first four years. But it also is about whether it was, it is a formative test for what we can expect to see in the years to follow. And unless some very profound remedial interventions are taking place, that you're not going to see the numbers increasing year by year as you go forward. And while you put that data on a chart, we’re flat across the grades. And by the way, with some places where we actually did do ok, compared to 2019, but not in third grade. Third grade was really hit and that means ninth grade teachers take a serious look at what this is going to mean for you in six years, because we don’t retain typically in our school districts and that means they’re coming through either way, be ready for what you’re looking at.

So district one, we doubled our issues because we went from about a quarter of our kids being proficient to only 12% of 5100 kids. And then the worst part is almost half were promoted, these are kids who really do not have any fundamental skills in literacy. And then going into individual schools we can see some things that need to be pointed out. One thing that’s interesting most of the schools were fairly leveled with their student populations year by year, but not all of them.

Kelly School reduced in population by about a third. That matters. Similarly you can see that McMahon School increased in population, that’s probably an anomaly for the neighborhood that year because we really have been talking about 8 kids, but percentage wise that’s a thing. And Lawrence is significantly smaller than it was two years ago which is maybe a good thing and that’s because of the outcomes we have.

EN White looks like it went up a point, which basically means it is flat but then there’s the problem of the kids not meeting expectations. That the kids who weren’t responding to the remote learning are far far behind and in much higher numbers.

Lawrence has dropped from 16% to 5%, again the smaller numbers that means probably a roughly similar number of kids who were not proficient from one point to the next. But again a high number of kids who were not proficient.

Metcalf is one that really breaks my heart, I was able to say in 2019 that something kind of special happened because never in the whole time that we had this information have we seen a school in Holyoke where most little kids learn how to read on time. And then came Metcalf which grew from an early childhood center into a full service school, dual language program, I believe, and became the first at 58% that’s a credible outcome in suburban districts and look at the not meeting expectations, no body, not a kid. Then hit with a stick called Covid-19 and all of a sudden you’re at 20% of your kids not making it and a quarter of your kids far behind. That is a demonstration of what Covid has done to us more than any other place I could look at, and also though it’s the place where I’ve got the greatest hope. I think last year’s just regulated unusual year with high absenteeism and talking to teachers whenever I can asking them “what’s the vibe like this year, does it feel a little bit less pressured and hectic than it did last year?” And most of the answers I’m getting are yeah somewhat. We’re getting more than the baseline. So if we’re starting out that way maybe we finish in a better place. And a school that was doing well is typically be a school that starts doing well again.

Similarly, I’m going to jump down to Sullivan school and get back to Kelly in a minute. Sullivan school used to be lively in the 30/40% range and they now are in a real stressed zone. I think there's change in the demographics of that school it partially reflects that but think it’s also a sign that sometimes when a school gets hard hit, it snowballs and Sullivan school I think a lot of potential.

McMahon relatively high except for the kids who need the highest amount of help.

Donohue deeply concerned, down by a third its student population is up, but 63% of the kids are so far behind that it's something to really sit up and take note of.

Morgan the other one that kills me. Morgan was the first school to go into receivership among our elementary schools. And they had done some practices that actually moved the needle in a really impressive way. They went to 44% in one year. They seemed to be on a path were they would get most of the little kids over there. But then they kind of slipped a little bit in 2019 and that would happen. You can’t expect a straight line, it’s a different group of kids every year. Then they were back in single digits, which is where they were when they were originally put in receivership. And again one of our most vulnerable neighborhoods South Holyoke, that’s a lot of the story right there. But then with 4% of the kids to 57%, it’s like they have to go back to square one.

And then I'll go back to Kelly. That's our neighborhood school here in the Flats. That is a credible place where families like putting their kids. I see more Kelly parents than I do parents from any other school now that my kids have all aged out. And people genuinely like their teachers, and they genuinely like their neighborhood and they genuinely like the kids that go to their school, but no one is learning to read. And it’s very frightening, very disheartening. Because the 2% that we had this year, which is pretty much what they were in 2019, that’s a child when we do the math on the number of kids there. Then of course the fact that they’ve gone up to 67% and not getting it at all, that’s another school that needs a tremendous amount of attention. Kelly and all the Massachusetts with poor performing schools.

So Holyoke had made some incremental range and things to talk about and I will tell you as a member of the board who oversees this receivership, we own that, the school board doesn’t own that, the community doesn’t own that, we took this responsibility on, we have to rise to the occasion. It’s not about who we go after, it’s about what we bring to the table to change the trajectory we’re on right now, and I’m hoping as I see the year evolve that’s what the conversation is going to be.

So what these numbers mean for the state, and what does that mean for receivership districts and schools? And now I’m talking to you, I want to make this very very clear, I am speaking as one member appointed to the board. I don’t speak for the Board, this is not a position that BESE has at all. When they wrote the receivership statute it was designed to come in with a sweeping turnaround plan and change the trajectory of the district in a big way and get out.

Never has that happened. It’s 10 years old, nobody who’s ever got in has come out and I think a real conversation will happen both with the upcoming change in administration, but because also we see what’s happening here, that tool that was given to us in 2010 is not the tool. Maybe it's got its place but it can’t be the only thing we have to work with. If you read what’s available for the state for accountability, that’s what we’ve been given to work with. And we have to challenge that and we have to address what’s going on with our districts.

I have asked in the last three meetings that we address receivership districts exclusively in our Board meetings. Throughout Covid, justifiably it was not really like happening. We were so busy with the health issue, so busy with the regulatory problems that were coming up. But they can’t be forgotten, they can’t be left behind. The state took on a responsibility and the state still has that responsibility. And maybe the state should let go of that responsibility but it should be done in a way that it’s supportive and strengthening and not simply engendering chaos and abandonment, and so what’s the answer to that? If I can figure that out I’ll patent it and retire a wealthy man, I don’t know. And finally, it's very important to understand receivership is always always a political issue, it's a policy move, and it is a decision that's going to be fought in every angle, from every way, from every side. So, where Massachusetts is right now, it's almost impossible to read in this moment. I think we’ve got to get past November to know a lot more. So, that I can’t answer for you in any critical way.

So what's next? In Holyoke we have been working with the district, we had a community outreach for reviewing our attendance data. We tried to divide it last year from within the district and we just couldn’t get any tranche. So we’re going to try to do it through community organizations. OneHolyoke is going to try take some responsibility for being in these meetings and they are going to revive hopefully as soon as date in November when we can start meeting schools and reviewing the data and hearing about how they did it as addressed to seeing what’s happening with the kids in schools, it was a practice that was part of how we went from that 30% range to 24%.

Not by itself, most of the hard work happened in the schools. But if the community is not cut in on the deal they can’t be part of the solution. So that’s going to return. Yours truly, has been appointed the chair of a pandemic literacy recovery subcommittee. That is something I’m very very honored by and very pleased with. We’re going to explicitly look at the many facets that we now know make up strong literacy recovery in other states and in pockets of places in Massachusetts. We’re going to lift those up.

We’re going to lift those up. We’re going to offer advice to the department, to the commissioner, to ourselves as board members, what policy should we be looking at going forward. I sent some of the best resources that I have to understand this stuff and I do think I understand it reasonably well. And I shared it with the Board. It’s a bunch of documents so this piece of paper is practically useless, but if people leave me their email addresses I will send the documents later.

There is a movement going on across the country embracing what neurologists, targeted scientists and educational researchers have identified as best practices. They’ve been very difficult to implement in school districts across the country but it’s been happening and we’ve seen the needle move in big ways in states that used to be at the bottom of the pack. We want that for our districts, especially for Holyoke. So that I think is a positive thing. We know more than we did ten years ago about what to do and mechanisms are being put in place to at least amplify to everybody in the field and everybody in the state to what those things are.

**Some guests:** Some comments and questions that were asked online that Michael responded to. Like attendance rates and dropout rates, among others.

**Michael Moriarty:** There is a lot to do. I have always believed that if you start well, you end well.

Public Schools Superintendent Anthony Soto begins his presentation:

His strategic plan can be viewed at the following link:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1W9a_NoqgmmselNSsluyFZrb5ES4Ob1Ln>

**Anthony Soto:** Great, thanks, I think one of the things I wanted to do is share a brief overview of our strategic planning process. During the last year, my first year as superintendent. I got very involved in my entry plan, I really made an effort to seek input from community members and we came up with a strategic plan called Moving Forward Together; and as part of this plan, on the next slide, you'll see our new tagline, which used to be a path for every student. I remember we had a community meeting, so we created a working group to review the entry plan and develop the strategic plan. We had about 40 members present at the time. We ask "is this Holyoke now?" "Is this where we are now?" And 39 of the 40 people in that room said no, we really need to change, and we went through a 3-month process with the task force and with the slogan that we landed on, which I thought was really appropriate in terms of the process to develop our strategic plan, Juntos Podemos.

Mike highlights many issues. There are many issues both in our schools and in our community that affect our students and the task is monumental and I believe that the school district alone is not going to change the situation.

I'm a firm believer that we need to work with our partners, we need to consider our family partners, and they need to partner with us and our city leaders and really just lift up our students and lift this district together. I've shared a video with the community from 1992. You should listen to some of the people, some of the local leaders at that time, how they talked about our school district and how they talked about our schools. Those students and that district, a lot of times you don't hear that from people in our community and I strongly believe that we can change that.

The next slide just talks about the engagement process. So, we heard from over 1,500 families, students, staff members. I went to all the schools and met with a group of teachers and other staff members. I met with a group of students and asked them what is working in Holyoke, what needs to be improved, and what suggestions they had for the future. I really appreciate all the input we received from that process.

Three important components of our strategic process: The Vision, we set a new one for Holyoke Public Schools, we have a new Mission Statement, and established Core Beliefs.

I love this community. I was born and raised in this community, went to Holyoke Public School, graduated from DEAN, but I wanted to make sure that whatever strategic plan we had was not just my thinking. That involved people from the community.

Our vision for the Holyoke Public Schools is for HPS to be a high-performing school system where students reach their full potential, educators inspire, families are our partners, and the community thrives.

I'm not saying that's where we are now. That is our Vision of what we want Holyoke Public Schools to be. And our Mission is that through an equitable, high-quality education and trusting relationships, all Holyoke students develop the skills and access opportunities to graduate from high school ready for life, career, and college life.

That doesn't mean every student will go to college or be inspired to go to college, but we want to make sure that when they graduate from high school, that option is available to them.

In our Core Beliefs that we established, one of the most important ones is the one you see on the left and that is that students are at the center of everything we do.

I can't sleep at night knowing that some of the toughest decisions I have to make oftentimes don't sit well with certain adults, but at the end of the day I know that myself and our leadership team and our school committee that we have the students in mind at the center of that decision. This belief that all children can and will learn.

You'll be surprised how many people don't feel that way about our students and we need to change that, we need to have the fundamental belief that our students can learn, we need to raise the bar with high expectations for our students and not have this poor thing mentality, like oh man, the students had such a hard time at home.

We should understand those things, but we also have to understand that Holyoke kids are strong and if we keep students at a high level, they can get there with the right support. Not just give them up and hold up a scaffold. We hold the fundamental belief that a school is a joyful place of discovery, support, and belonging. That students and staff have high expectations for themselves and others. And that trusted relationships lead to successful partnerships.

Another thing we did is we worked on our equity commitment. I'm not going to read them right now, there are about seven, but what we really want to make sure is that we live every day and we live through those equity commitments.

Next slide please!

And this is just a brief overview of our strategic plan, which is why we released it in full in August. These are the priorities we established as part of the strategic planning process.

I know one of them is near and dear to Mike Moriarty’s heart and we've just seen a lot of results based on early literacy students in 3rd grade MCAS. We need to make sure that by third grade students can read at a high level. I know it's a cliché to say that, but if we can teach our children to learn to read in third grade, they will read to learn beyond that. It's not to say that math isn't important or science isn't important, but learning to read in third grade is also very important to the trajectory of their learning in other areas.

Learning Experience: We must ensure that all schools provide rigorous and culturally responsive instruction in all content areas for all students. If you look at our students with IPEs and students who are learning English, the disparities in academic results are clear. So we need to make sure that we provide opportunities for them to access grade level content and really enhance the learning environment for kids to want to attend school.

Next slide please!

Inclusion: Providing differentiated supports in the classroom so that students with diverse learning needs thrive.

We have a culture in Holyoke where so many of our students are pulled out for ELO language access support and are pulled out for special education services; and we know that as Mike said, for decades we have not seen the results that we would like to see for the Holyoke Public Schools and I strongly believe that this is part of it; this does not mean we are getting rid of pull services and it just means students deserve access to grade level content. When we pull them out of the classroom, that doesn't happen.

Whole Child: Providing students with access to social-emotional learning, mental health supports, and opportunities to explore their passions.

We know school is about more than just learning and in Holyoke when our students walk through those doors with a lot going on in their homes, a lot going on in their community that affects what goes on at school and we need to make sure we provide the right support. Now these are strategies, these are just priority areas, this is how we organize our work. So within each of these priority areas, we develop multiple strategies, so we go through part of the strategic planning process.

There are some strategies under early literacy. There are a ton of strategies under learning experience, inclusion, whole child, etc., so I don't want to bog you down with those details, it's available on our website as part of our full strategic plan.

And at Educator Development, we know we need to grow and retain a talented and diverse staff. We have data points that I am proud of. Six years ago approximately 11% of our teachers were teachers of color and that number has risen to 28%. And we know how important having more teachers of color is to the students we serve.

This is just a shout out to everyone involved, over 1,500 people, 31 advisory committee members, and 14 steering committee members. There were 25 people in trainee profile workshop and 11 cabinet members. I really wanted to thank you all.

I'm going to skip over to the next slide. I have some information from MCAS that is a little different than what Mike Moriarty was presenting. But I'll try to figure them out quickly because I feel like we've shown a lot of numbers, but this is a presentation that we'll share with the school committee on Monday night. Therefore, anyone who wants to see the full presentation can visit Zoom on the school committee on Monday night.

So this is an image and this is what Mike Moriarty was talking about when he opened this meeting.

It is important to compare 2022 with 2019 because it was the last time a full test was administered. You can see that in 2020 there was no test.

And then in 2021, only half of the test was administered for students in grades 3-8. So when we review this presentation, when our team looks at this data, we're not just looking at what happened last year and comparing it with this year, we're also looking at how these results compared to 3 years ago in 2019; which is the last time a full test was administered.

And in short, we had mixed results. Math scores increased slightly in grades 3-8 and decreased slightly in grade 10. ELA scores decreased for most grade levels, and science scores increased slightly for Holyoke. But when you look at and compare this information to 2019, we are nowhere near where we need to be or even; I'm not saying 2019 was something to strive for because the data wasn't that great back then either. But we would like to get to the pre-pandemic level and move in that direction for sure.

In ELA specifically, the team is focusing on areas for improvement. When you look at the written scores themselves; that's a concern, in early literacy challenges, you see; what you saw before was only 3rd grade. But grades 3 and 4 are really very worrying. And these are the students that I feel have been hit the hardest by the pandemic and it's evidenced by the decrease in learning loss that you can see in their scores.

Student absenteeism remains a challenge. The state has been sending messages about this across the board. Now it's clear to me. I'm not saying it wasn't before, but this is a great challenge. You can see that students in ELA in grades 3-8; they are twice as likely to meet expectations if they are not chronically absent and in math it is like 3 times. So we really have to do something about that.

I'm going to be working alongside Mike and he's hooked me up with the support jobs to really come in and help us think about what our current strategies are, hopefully help do some good stuff. I'm sure we're laying the groundwork, we're putting structures in place to improve teaching, but we need our kids to show up. If there was something, I would ask the families; that's where I feel like we really need to partner with you, is making sure that we emphasize the importance of getting students in.

I was in the parking lot. Mr. Mahoney was in the parking lot and had talked to a teacher about a mother whose daughter was out of school for 5 days and Mahoney asked her why and she said, "I heard one of the teachers had Covid so I just I was going to keep them at home." We have to take our children to school. We need to educate our families about the impact of keeping them out of school, the impact will be on their learning which will ultimately prepare them for life.

**A Guest:** She makes a comment about how well her children have done now that they are back in school compared to before, even though they have IPE, and how happy one of her children is about getting a perfect attendance award, and about the impact that assistance has had in them.

**Anthony Soto**: The next slide really just looks at participation, it was 93% to 98% district-wide. On slide 14, we can see the three-year change by grade in terms of meeting or exceeding ELA, you can see that across the district in 2019 in grades 3-8 it was about 18% and we saw a 9% drop. In grades 3 through 8; and when you look at tenth grade, we're right where we were. There was actually a slight increase in grade 10 between 2019 and 2022.

But more concerning is what we're talking about, look at that eleven point drop in 3rd and 4th grades, that's really very concerning.

**Michael Moriarty:** Did you notice that the fourth grade follows the trends of the state? The fourth graders actually follow the third graders and I think that's the unusual life experience they've had with the school closing, again, it's not a real thing, it's not something to drop on our community.

**Anthony Soto:** The next slide is interesting. This is what I was talking about earlier. We analyzed this information for students who were chronically absent and students who had 90% or higher attendance; and we can see that students who were chronically absent in grades 3-8 were twice as likely to meet or exceed expectations.

And then when you go to the 20th percentile, which is about 30th, so 10% is about 18 no-shows, 20% is about 36 days no-shows, you can see that drop off. So this just shows you how important it is. We can implement the whole system, we can have great teachers, but if students don't go to school, it’s going to impact their learning.

**A Guest:** I know that historically they have missed the whole day for an appointment instead of coming half a day and leaving. Did you dive into that data?

**Michael Moriarty:** It is a message that you would think that we have been doing this chronic absence work in our community for years and that is something that is done every year, but it was so unnecessary to waste five hours for a one hour appointment.

**Anthony Soto:** Slide 19. This is math over time. You can see that in grades 3-8 in 2019, about 12% of our students in grades 3-8 were meeting and exceeding and that's dropped about 6 points. Look at that fourth grade, it was an 11 point drop for students meeting and exceeding three years ago. Looking year over year, we did have a slight increase, but as Mike Moriarty said, it's important to look at our information and compare it to 2019 and then in the 10th grades it went from 17% to 9%. The same story in math. You can see how important it is for students to come to school. You can see that students who are chronically absent are three times more likely to not meet expectations than those who are 90% or more in school.

The same in grade 10, almost double and then when you get to 36 absences, almost zero chances, they are really low to meet expectations. The same information for science. I think we can skip over it because I don't think there's anything surprising about it.

Some of the next steps, our team has looked at this; firstly by working on their own data and I think the first two are really attentive. I know we sound like a broken record, but we really have to do something. If you look at the slide where we had all these priority areas, one of the challenges is this. We have a strong focus on early literacy. We brought in a partner to help with early literacy, to help lead professional development, to help sharpen our principles and in terms of early literacy, we have SBO, there's a lot of things that we're trying to do, but this is something that we really we need to pay attention to it.

At the district level, we are running a campaign. We used to have to fight for five, defend this as this punitive approach to getting students to attend; we are really trying to make this huge effort to educate our families about the importance of coming to school; but we need to do more at the school level because that's where we'll get the most traction.

Having teams in schools constantly looking at this data, constantly solving problems. Dr. Mahoney and I have been talking about this at length over the last few weeks. I had a meeting with Mike Moriarty as well, finding out about some potential partners.

The next one is really around phase three, on our relay work to develop our school leaders and really put structures in place to endorse teacher practices. So the next phase is really looking at the unmet needs of the students and making sure they are meeting grade level expectations; we're going to have data meetings, we're really going to lean on that with our partners and relays, and our school leaders so that we're constantly looking at student data at a granular level, we're just trying to make sure that we're doing it for our students and guide them where they need to be.

We are supporting teacher teams across the district by making sure they are looking at the data together. We have powerful lesson plans for accelerated learning. One of the things we look at is our curriculum recently. Teachers are doing what we ask them to do, especially in grades 3-8, when we walk through classrooms it's really no different than what we've seen in recent years. They are following the curriculum.

We are especially finding a district that has around 20% turnover. We rotate about a hundred new teachers each year. The curriculum is hard for them to implement, they're following it but it's not rigorous, it's not giving students what they need, it's not culturally relevant, so we're really looking into how we can make it easier for teachers.

The last one is on early literacy, I sound like a broken record, but that's going to be a big focus for the next couple of years. He wanted to call Dr. Mahoney. The only thing is the MCAS scores, and I don't want to give the perception that all those percentages mean that a lot of students won't get a diploma because they didn't pass the MCAS.

So I just want to call on Dr. Mahoney to explain the difference between MCAS scores and passing vs. failing which will earn you the diploma.

**Dr. Mahoney:** Dr. Mahoney: Slide 27. What's important for people to understand is that our goal is to get our kids proficient to meet or exceed grade level standards. That's 1,000 percent of our goal when you look at high school scores and you see 31% proficient or meeting or exceeding expectations in English and 21% in math, what's going to happen? The other 70% will graduate because MCAS is tied to graduation.

What's important to know is that at the rate at which the state scores students' MCAS scores, you may be closing in on the competition and still qualify for your diploma and therefore what they show this data is that blue captures the percentage of our tenth graders; Juniors from last year who met or exceeded expectations.

Green and yellow capture students whose scores did not meet or exceed expectations, who were approaching grade level proficiency, and those scores qualify them to graduate from high school at this point. Greens will not have to retake the test, they are done with MCAS. Students in yellow are those whose scores were on the lower end, approaching proficiency.

If they take the tests twice and pass the related course and pass that course in the subject for the next four years of high school, they will graduate, even if they fail to meet or exceed expectations during those two tests. So you can see that the number of students is broken down by 3 high school campuses: Holyoke High School North, Holyoke High School East, and Holyoke Uptown Academy.

Students who are at HCC in the college program or are in our success center and can see that the number of students who qualify for a high school diploma is far greater than the number of children who meet or exceed expectations.

This is ELA. The next slide you can see it's much more yellow than green, our math scores are much lower than our ELA scores. Then again in the science on this side, you can see the same thing.

I think what Anthony and I want to make sure that families and the public understand is that MCAS is the standard that all students must meet to graduate, but the standard does not necessarily meet or exceed expectations. Children can pass. And it's important to know that that bar will be raised next year.

The board voted a couple of months ago to increase the qualifying scores to meet and exceed and graduation scores starting for next year's sophomores, so this year's sophomores will have the same standards we had last year, and this year's ninth graders will be held to a higher bar.

**Michael Moriarty:** He comments "the bar is still in that partial middle, it's not all the way up. Also, could you translate the acronym EPP?"

**Dr. Mahoney:** Science doesn't require it, PPE. But if you go to mathematics, those students who are in yellow have to conclude what is called the Educational Sufficiency Plan. So if I were in the yellow group, I would sit down with my school counselor and he and I would have to map out my plan for the next two years. That plan has to include taking an MCAS test in Math at least twice, although I ask students to take it four times before you can take it. And we will also map out a course of study in mathematics. Because three of our math courses are required to be passed in order to graduate; In my case, I will have to pass a 4th year to demonstrate that I have mastered what I need to master in terms of solving mathematical problems, so that is EPP.

**Michael Moriarty:** And obviously, as a Board member, I didn't fully understand that that was an option until we went through this process. So I think for most people in the public, they just hear that you pass or you don't, you get your diploma or you don't. This has been around before we did this.

**Dr. Mahoney:** And it exists because there are students for whom sitting for a standardized tests is very difficult. It could be due to your ability to access the language, your tests; it could be due to socio-emotional reasons they have around test anxiety and performance anxiety or, generally, their student profile does not meet a cover and paper test, but in a course that is taught live because trained teachers have multiple opportunities to show what they know in many different formats and varieties, children can demonstrate that they are proficient in the subject matter through a paper-based test.

**Michael Moriarty:** And I think that's an important point because we're really talking about who you are, what a sophomore is supposed to know when they finish their senior year and get their diploma.

**A Guest:** Comment on student transportation and cases where students miss the bus.

**Anthony Soto:**  If a student misses the bus and it happens early enough, call the bus route; sometimes there is enough time on the route to turn around, but normally we don't. We have, our bus contract gives us two trips in the morning and two trips back home. We don't have access to a bus all day, every day, where we can send another bus and so on. Our routes are quite narrow, we do not like to have students on the buses for more than 45 minutes.

If we get used to turning around and doing that, the bus route tends to get longer and then there are other families who are upset because their children are on the buses too long.

But any problem I will contact the school, the family engagement coordinator, who you can talk to if you have any problems. Each school has a Family Engagement Coordinator and is a good resource to send you those types of questions.

The next section is going to be very quick, I just want to provide a quick update on an important part of our strategy which is going back to elementary, middle and high school and when I first got there years ago we went through a similar entry plan process and I've heard loud and clear from a lot of community members, a lot of family members, a lot of teachers, that we need to go back to this model of elementary, middle, high school and we're moving in that direction and we've already taken some steps to moving in that direction, we started at the same high school, Holyoke Middle School now, but we still have a couple of; last year we had about 9 schools with 11 grade configurations and it's hard to have an instructional design when there are so many different schools so we want to move to a model where we have two middle schools and six elementary schools where 3 elementary schools feed into at each of the middle schools.

Mike Moriarty said, "if you think changing the grade settings will fix the problems then that's a big mistake" so it's bigger than just changing the grade settings back is to create an instructional design and once we change that, that meets the needs of our students and support staff. Now we're in the middle of that and on the next slide you can see that we're breaking it down into two phases.

The first phase is deciding which of the 3 schools will become a middle school. On the table are Sullivan, Donahue and Kelly and we are very close to making the decision. We have done a lot of outreach. Happy that many community members attended the meetings we had when we shared information. We're going to have a school committee retreat next week where we'll discuss the recommendation of which school will become a middle school and then the next phase that we plan to release information about.

As part of phase one, at the end of October we will announce which school will be a middle school, both in 2023 and 2026. We hope to have a new middle school by 2026. We have a project right now in the pipeline with MSBA. We will let the community know by the end of October who will be the principals next year at each of the schools and are planning who they will be and the reassignment process for any impact on staff.

**A Guest:** So when will everything be decided on what the middle school will be? It looks like the rezoning will be in 2026, is that correct?

**Anthony Soto:** The rezoning is happening in 2023, but we need to develop a plan that works in 2023 and also works in 2026. When we get a new middle school, we don't want to design a plan for 2023, displace a bunch of students, and then go through that process again in 2026. So we're developing a plan and we want to make sure that what we do next year also works in 2026 when we add a new building.

**A Guest**: So, for example, if Kelly School ends up being the high school, does that mean the kids that are there right now are going to be displaced?

**Anthony Soto:** Yes, some will go to Morgan and some to Lawrence, if that option is what we choose. But what we are committing to is that by the end of October we will communicate these portions of the plan. And then phase two of the plan, that's where we'll get into the technicalities. We will draw the exact dividing lines by the end of November. This is the information we want to share with families and staff; what are the exact boundaries and attendance zones.

Whichever school you decide will be a middle school, a list of all the updates could be happening over the summer to make sure it is; I'll give you an example: any of the schools we select are elementary schools with middle schools in them. Therefore, the toilets are more appropriate for younger children. What we may need to do is redo all the bathrooms to the appropriate size.

We have meeting days! It arrives on the first of November. Anthony continues with the announced dates for the November meetings and the fact that there is a virtual option for people to keep track of school committee meetings.

**A Guest:** Question: when will they decide which school?

**Anthony Soto:** At the end of October we will name the middle school.

**A Guest:** She says she asks why her children have been hopping from one school to another due to their IPE status and she wants to know for sure when school will start.

**Anthony Soto:** I'm sure you know what middle school it will be and who its principals will be, and where the bilingual programming will be. What will not be certain, depending on where you live, is which school you will go to, until November.

That's where we're going to draw the boundaries and you'll be able to find out in November what your attendance zone is where you live. That information will come in November. You mention that you have children in the dual language program. So they'll know, they'll have a good idea by the end of October, where those programs will be.

I will say that there is a big decision point that will not happen at the end of October and that will be the full dual language elementary school. Will it be Kelly or EN White? That's something we need to do more planning and thinking about and making sure we make the right decision there. But surely the students who are currently in the bilingual program in the elementary grade at Metcalf; that building will potentially become a bilingual middle school in terms of the options we have on the table right now. Therefore, there will be no elementary school dual language children in the Metcalf building. They will be at EN White or another school depending on which school is chosen as the middle school. By the end of October, you will have a lot of information about it, and then by the end of November, our plan is to have all the information available to families and staff.

I just encourage anyone and everyone to join in. I am very happy with the contribution and participation. We learned a lot throughout the process, it really was a very interesting process. At Kelly School there were 50 families showing up and at Holyoke High School we probably had the largest community meeting I've seen since we started asking families to come together and provide input, we just don't have a lot of people to come and I'm really happy to have this. We are doing this now, but it will impact Holyoke Public Schools for many many years to come. Lots of people are giving us a lot of great information that is helping us make informed decisions.

**Michael Moriarty:** Well, with that it is 7:30 and I promised Anthony that I would leave at 7; so I take full responsibility for that. Thank you very much, this has been a great idea.

The following link is to watch the video on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/oneholyoke/videos/840641124047361>