

Tracking the Progress of Former NBS Students in their New Schools

Update to the Salem School Committee Prepared for the 4/22/19 Committee of the Whole Meeting

4/22/19

Introduction

When the decision was made to close the Nathaniel Bowditch School and re-assign students to new schools throughout the district, a commitment to track and report on the progress of students in their new schools was made. The school closed at the end of the 2017-18 school year and students transitioned to their new schools at the beginning of the 2018-19 school year. Since then, a team of district leaders has worked to develop a draft plan to track the experience and progress of these students in their new schools. The plan includes a variety of methods to, over time, gain a more comprehensive picture of how things are going, what is working, and what may need adjustment.

This report both outlines a draft plan for longer-term tracking of student progress and provides a summary of findings from interviews conducted with former NBS students and families during February and March of this year. The purpose of the interviews was to learn how students and families experienced the initial transition into their new schools as well as an early indication of their how things are going in their new schools. A summary of the findings from these interviews can be found in Part 1 of this report. An overview of the quantitative indicators that will be used to track progress in the future can be found in Part 2 of the report.

Part 1: Transitions to New Schools: Summary of Interviews Conducted in February-March 2019

Background

In February-March 2019, a team of 15 school staff members conducted interviews with a sample of former NBS students and parents/guardians. A total of 99 individuals were interviewed, 56 of whom were students and 43 were parents/guardians. The purpose of these interviews was to gather firsthand information from a sample of former NBS students and caregivers regarding their transition to new schools. In an effort to ensure the students and caregivers were comfortable during this process, City Connects Coordinators and Family Engagement Facilitators (FEFs) from each of the K-8 schools were asked to conduct the interviews. This team is in regular contact with students and families in schools and has spent time getting to know the community in an authentic and genuine way. A letter was sent to the families to notify them of the interviews and the

possibility of being selected for either a student or parent interview. City Connects Coordinators then made time to meet with the selected students to conduct the interviews during the day. Family Engagement Facilitators interviewed the parents and/or guardians.

Sample Selection Method

A sampling methodology was used to ensure that the students and families interviewed were representative of the total population of former NBS students. Students currently enrolled at each of the schools were selected at random. Attention was paid to ensure that the number interviewed from each school reflected the proportion of students currently enrolled at each school. For example, more students were interviewed at Collins Middle School and Witchcraft Heights Elementary School, which currently enrolls a greater proportion of the former NBS students than were interviewed at the Carlton Innovation School, which currently enrolls fewer of the students. Attention was also paid to ensure that there was a balanced representation of student grade-levels and other demographic factors. Caregivers were selected for the interviews in a similar manner. In order to extend the reach across more families, students and caregivers were intentionally not selected from the same family or household.

Limitations of the Data

While the findings from the interviews provide insight into how students and families have experienced their transition as well as early indication of how things are going in their new schools, there are limitations to these data that should be kept in mind. First, while care was taken to select a representative sample, in some schools the sample size was small and thus findings should not be generalized at the school level. Second, the interviews were intentionally kept brief, asking only a few questions. They were not meant to comprehensively explain their experience, but to provide an indication of how students and families were doing within the first six months of the transition. Finally, the information presented does not purport to be representative of all opinions but does identify themes and a few quotes to help our district community get a sense of personal experience with the transition.

It should be noted that unless stated in the trends, there were no significant differences in responses across schools. In addition, the Family Engagement Facilitators (FEFs) were asked to make at least three attempts to reach families. The number of families interviewed is fewer than the number of students interviewed, as some caregivers did not respond to FEFs' requests for an interview.

Findings from the Interviews

Student Interviews

A total of 56 students were interviewed by the City Connects Coordinators in each of the K-8 schools. Notes from the interviews were captured using a documentation tool and organized by

interview question. Notes included a summary of key themes as well as direct quotations in some cases. Once all of the data were collected, they were then analyzed across the whole sample for key themes and trends. Findings from these interviews are summarized below. A list of the questions can be found in Appendix A.

Positive and Helpful Relationships with Adults

- More than 9 out of 10 students interviewed (93%) reported that they had formed positive and helpful relationships with adults in their new school. Over half of students interviewed (52%) indicated that they had “many” positive and helpful relationships with adults in their new schools and 41% said they had “some.” Only three students (5%) said they had “very few” and one (2%) said they had “none.” A selection of quotes that were captured is provided below.

“Many. [My teacher] is very nice. She is the best teacher I know.”

“Many. I already knew some of the teachers because my brothers and sisters went to this school.”

“Very few. My reading teachers. That’s all.”

Made New Friends at School

- All but three of the students interviewed shared that they had made new friends at their new schools. Over 73% said they had made “many” new friends. Approximately 22% said they had made “some” friends. Only three (5%) reported making “very few” friends. No one reported making “none.” A selection of quotes that were captured is provided below.

“Many. Some from Bowditch that came here and some that are new.”

“Yes. Many. I have [a new friend], she is very kind and I always get to play with her...whenever I’m sad she cheers me up.”

“Very few. In some cases maybe more enemies.”

Like their New School

- Students were asked whether or not they liked their new school. Over three quarters of the students (76%) reported that they did like their new school and shared many of their reasons. Approximately 19% of the students indicated that they “kind of” liked their school or weren’t sure about it. Only three students (5%) said that they did not like their new school. A selection of quotes that were captured is provided below.

“Yes. When I came here I turned into a better student.”

“Yes. It’s more respectful here. At my old school kids ran out of class.”

"Yes. I am learning here. Friends help me."

"They're teaching new things I hadn't known before."

"Yes. It's bigger and I am learning more things in more subjects."

"Yes, because I trust the [school] staff here and feel safe and protected from bullying."

"Yeah, it's fine. It seems more organized than my old school."

"A little bit. School is not fun. My old school had hot chocolate and marshmallows and we got to watch movies."

"I kind of like it, but it's a lot more work."

"I'm in between. I don't like it, but it's better for my learning because they are more strict over here and they actually care about my learning."

"No, I don't like it. It's too strict."

"Not really. I don't know. I'm not used to it."

Helping with Transition

- Students described several ways in which they were supported with the transition. Several students identified the site visit they did before the end of last year along with summer programs or other welcoming activities organized by the school as very helpful to them. Others shared that they had friends who were already attending the new school and this provided support for their transition. Other factors identified by the students included:
 - Teachers in the new school
 - Assigned buddy was helpful
 - New friends they made at the new school
 - Friends helped with transition
 - Figured out themselves
 - Parents and families
- A selection of quotes that were captured is provided below.

"I stuck with my NBS friends for support in the beginning."

"I had this one friend I met and she...helped me and we became friends. I also came to this school for two summer programs so I knew the school. I met a teacher during the tour in the spring."

"[A teacher], I met him over the summer and he made me feel comfortable here and seems really nice. One of my friends came here before the move and told me all about it and that really helped me out."

"My teacher walked us around the school and showed us where all the things were. She took the whole class. There were a few people in my class from Nathaniel Bowditch who helped me because they understood what I was going through."

"Coming here last year for a tour, I got to know what the school was all about and it took my worries away. I liked that it was big and I got to meet some of the friends that are in my class now and I got to see some old friends I knew back in Kindergarten."

"I sort of figured things out on my own."

"I don't really remember. That was a long time ago – over 100 days ago!"

Support for Learning

- When asked whether they felt supported in their learning at the new school on a scale of 1 to 5, with one being "not supported" and 5 being "very supported," about 45% selected "5" indicating that they felt very supported. Approximately 28% selected "4" indicating that they felt "supported." Another 27% selected "3" indicating that they felt "somewhat supported." None of the students interviewed selected a "1" or a "2." A selection of quotes that were captured is provided below.

"I feel like my teachers explain the directions and expectations are better here."

"I am supported a lot."

"Yes, I feel supported. I'm getting a lot of respect and a lot of friends and teacher help. They help me a lot and I like that. Even my friends help me sometimes."

"People are helping me learn."

"They are helping me learn math better...so I know and by the time I will be in middle and high school I will be better."

"I would say a 3. In some classes I am lost and in some classes the teachers help me a lot."

Supports Needed to be Successful

- Students were also asked to identify things that would help them be successful at their new school. Several students reported that they did not need anything more than what they were already getting in their new schools. Some said they did not know what they needed.

The rest identified a variety of things that they felt would help them to be successful, including help with:

- Math
 - Reading
 - Writing
 - Staying focused and paying attention
 - Managing anger and frustration -- their own frustrations as well as those of some of their teachers they felt were too easily frustrated at times
 - Homework
 - Doing community service hours
 - More time to complete tasks
 - Getting to school on time
 - Getting through the longer day
 - Social things
 - Organizing a way for former NBS students to see each other again
- A selection of quotes that were captured is provided below.

"I think my teachers are doing everything they can do to help me. I don't think I need anything more."

"I think the school is as successful as it gets...Cuz my math teacher is very nice and helps me learn. My ELA teacher can be strict but she is good and helps me learn. She has to be strict because my classroom is a little chaotic at times."

"I kinda like it the way it is."

"No yelling. Teachers yell a lot."

"Sometimes I miss my old friends and sometimes I want to see them again...I would like to see the Bowditch kids from all the schools get together."

Additional Comments

- Students were asked to share any additional thoughts they wanted to share to help us better understand their experience and how things are going. Many students said that they were glad to be in their new school. Several students described the sadness they felt when they learned about the Bowditch closure, but at the same time, expressed positive sentiments about their new schools. Still, they said they missed their old school and wished they could still see many of the people they knew there. Many students also expressed that they thought the transition was easier than they had expected. A selection of quotes that were captured is provided below.

"It was easier than I thought to transition."

"I still miss some of the things we did at our old school."

"I mean, it's good because I'm learning more over here and I'm getting more work done. Teachers here push us more."

"Nothing. I am glad I moved to this school."

"I really miss Bowditch. I went to visit the school recently and it wasn't the same. But I think Bowditch was the people and not the building..."

"Every single kid in school was crying, especially me. I was very sad. It was fun at Bowditch, but this is a better school because I am getting a better education and I will be able to do better things."

"I was sad to leave Bowditch but kinda happy. Bowditch was my favorite school but when I leave [my new school] it will be my favorite school."

Parent/Guardian Interviews

A total of 43 parents or guardians were interviewed by the Family Engagement Facilitators (FEFs) in each of the K-8 schools. Notes from the interviews were captured using a documentation tool and organized by interview question. Notes included a summary of key themes as well as direct quotations in some cases. Once all of the data were collected, they were then analyzed across the whole sample for key themes and trends. Findings from these interviews are summarized below. A list of the questions can be found in Appendix A.

Child's Needs Met during Transition

- When asked whether or not their child's needs were met during the initial transition to a new school, an overwhelming number of parents (81%) reported feeling their child's needs were "completely" met. Another 12% said that their child's needs were "somewhat" met during the initial transition and about 7% indicated that their child's needs were not met during that timeframe. A selection of quotes that were captured is provided below.

"Yes. [The new school] was really good at bringing the family and students in and providing many activities to make them feel welcome."

"No, the transition was very hard. At first they were very upset and didn't want to change schools at all. But now everything is great. The problem at first wasn't [the new school], just the process itself."

Parent/Guardian's Needs Met during Transition

- When asked the extent to which parents felt their own needs were met during the initial transition period, 79% said that they were “completely” met and 21% said that their needs were “somewhat” met. A selection of quotes that were captured is provided below.

“Yes they were met. I was satisfied with the activities for the incoming families.”

“I was very satisfied with all the information parents were given during the initial transition. There was good information between schools and they kept me in the loop.”

Valued Member of New School Community

- When asked whether they felt they were a valued member of the new school community, the vast majority (87%) said they “completely” felt like a valued member of the new school community. 13% said they felt “somewhat” valued. A selection of quotes that were captured is provided below.

“Yes. We do. Teachers are good. You are there. These are the things that make us feel good about the school.”

“Yes. I feel very included. [The new school] has good family events and great communication.”

“Somewhat. I’m always working so hard so it’s hard for me to be involved in everything that is happening in the community.”

“Somewhat. Been in contact with liaison regarding school work and in contact with counselor.”

Positive Relationships between Child and Adults at School

- A majority of parents (63%) reported that their child had built “many” positive relationships with adults at their new school. About a third of parents (28%) said their child had built “some” positive relationships with an adult at the school. About 9% reported their children had only built “very few” positive relationships. A selection of quotes that were captured is provided below.

“Yes, [my daughter] identifies with his teachers and has made a lot of new friends.”

“She feels comfortable now.”

“Some. It was hard because some of my son’s friends went to another school.”

“Very few. My son doesn’t express too much so I don’t know, but he seems happy.”

Positive Relationships between Parent and New School Staff/Community

- Approximately half of parents report having built “many” positive relationships with other adults in the school community. About one quarter of them said they had built “some” positive relationships with staff at the school. A selection of quotes that were captured is provided below. The remainder either said they had made “very few” such connections or “none.” Being too busy to participate in organized school activities was frequently mentioned as a barrier to forming these kinds of relationships.

“Yes, I have met some of the teachers.”

“I have a good relationship with the teacher, but not really others. I am always busy and working so I don’t have the opportunity to meet other staff.”

“Very few because I have so limited time, I can only really go to the parent/teacher conferences.”

Experience with Transition to New School

- Parents were asked to describe their experience transitioning to the new school and how they felt now about this experience. About half of the families interviewed indicated that they felt good about their new school and how things had turned out. Approximately one third of the respondents commented that the change and transition was very challenging at first but turned out better than they thought. A few parents said that they missed the extended day time that Bowditch used to have and that this was still causing some logistical challenges for them.

In general, many families said they thought the transition was going to be more difficult than it was, but also said that they felt better about it now. The following also highlights some other themes found in this question.

- Bowditch was like a family; sadness over the loss of family and trouble finding that in new schools
 - Families consulted with appropriate support personnel to deal with problems that arose (Administrators, City Connects, Family Engagement Facilitators, Counselors, ELL teachers).
 - As time has progressed, students and families felt better about the transition
- A selection of quotes that were captured is provided below.

“Very good experience, very happy with the help the school provides. The teachers are very communicative, they have good process. The office is very open and always receives you well.”

"Transitioning to a new school community has been better than what I had expected. I feel awesome about it at the moment."

"It was really hard. My children did not want to change at all, but after 1 or 2 months they were feeling great."

"I feel very lucky to be at [the new school]. I am seeing very positive things happening at my kids' school."

"Very worried at first. But now, things are going good for her. She is doing well, adjusting and progressing academically."

"The transition was difficult. We were used to the other school."

"At the beginning it was a hard transition. It was a new school and things were hard. The kids are very happy now and that's what is important. The only thing that I'm still having trouble with is the pick up outside. I find it's hard where kids are everywhere."

"Compared to NBS this school is not as tight knit. NBS was more like a big family. School events were more elaborate. I went to an event at the school this year and it was all the kids just talking and the parents kind of just sitting there. It wasn't interactive at all. The transition was like going from a big family to "just a school."

"I used to be able to work until 3:00 and then pick them up, but now I struggle to get them."

Additional Comments

- Families were asked to share any additional thoughts to help us better understand their experience and how things are going. Communication was a theme and there were a variety of responses regarding communication. Some parents reported communication was better in their new school while others still feel like there isn't consistent contact with school staff. One parent expressed a desire to have more after school options available at the new school. Many families reiterated their positive feelings about the new school. A selection of quotes that were captured is provided below.

"I am very happy in general with the school and the help they offer. They help and care for the kids' growth. They give you sort of a humanitarian aid and it feels like they want to help."

"I really like the connection between parents and teachers and students and teachers."

"I was sad the Bowditch closed, but am really happy to be here."

Part 2: Draft Plan to Report on Other Indicators of Former NBS Student Progress in their New Schools

A set of indicators were identified to monitor the academic and other progress of former NBS students, over time. After a review of available data, these indicators were selected based on their ability to offer comparable data from year-to-year as well as their availability, validity, reliability. An overview of the indicators to be used is provided below along with a timeline for when the relevant data are available.

Indicators

Attendance (Summer 2019)

- Comparison of 2017-18 student attendance rate with 2018-19 attendance rate

Conduct (Summer 2019)

- Comparison of reported student conduct incidents for from 2017-18 with 2018-19 conduct incidents (Note: these data may be limited to state reported conduct incidents due to variations in school-level tracking of non-reportable conduct incidents)

English Language Arts

ELA MCAS 2.0 (Data not available until Fall 2019)

- Growth score, for grade levels that apply
- Performance levels
- Comparison of gap between former NBS students and district-wide average in 2017-18 as compared with the size of the gap in 2018-19

Math

Math MCAS 2.0 (Data not available until Fall 2019)

- Growth score, for grade levels that apply
- Performance levels
- Comparison of gap between former NBS students and district-wide average in 2017-18 as compared with the size of the gap in 2018-19

English Language Proficiency

ACCESS Scores (Summer 2019)

- Gains in ACCESS scores since 2017-18

Appendix A: Former NBS Student and Parent/Guardian Interview Questions

Transitions to a New School

Interview Questions to gather feedback from the former NBS students and families about their experiences in transitioning to a new school in SPS. SY 18-19

Questions for the parent/guardian interviews included:

- Do you feel your child's needs were met during the initial transition to a new school? (Completely/ Somewhat/ Not at All)
- Do you feel your needs were met during the initial transition to a new school? (Completely/ Somewhat/ Not at All)
- Do you currently feel you and your child are a valued member of your new school community? (Completely/ Somewhat/ Not at All)
- Has your child built positive relationships with adults at school? Other students? (Many, Some, Very few, None)
- Have you built positive relationships with adults in the school and within the school community? (Many, Some, Very few, None)
- Can you describe your experience transitioning to a new school community and how you feel now about your experience?
- Is there anything you would like to add to help us better understand your experience and how things are going?

Questions for the student interviews included:

- Do you feel you have positive and helpful relationships with adults in school? (Many/Some/Very Few/None)
- Have you made new friends at this school? (Many/Some/Very Few/None)
- Do you like your new school? Why/why not?
- Was there something or someone who helped you transition to your new school? What or who was it? What were some of the things that helped you with this?
- To what extent do you feel supported in your learning at your new school? (scale 1 to 5)
- What kinds of things would help you be successful here at your new school?
- Is there anything you would like to add to help us better understand your experience and how things are going?