



W.K.  
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# The Future of Learning at Battle Creek Public Schools

BUILDING A BETTER DISTRICT IN YEAR ONE  
OF THE TRANSFORMATION EFFORT





# Overview

This report examines and reflects on year one of Battle Creek Public School District's (BCPS) bold transformation effort and the landmark investment by the W.K Kellogg Foundation (WKKF), and other funders, in the district's plan to attain excellence in its schools and for its students.

This new, audacious initiative will span five years and attempts to upend conventional approaches to improve student achievement. As the transformation reaches the Year One mark, change at BCPS has been steady, with some successes, challenges and several lessons learned. As a first chapter in this five-year endeavor, the report highlights the overarching lessons that the district, foundation and

community have learned thus far in the process culled from conversations with district, foundation and community leaders as well as students and parents.

These lessons are the takeaways that will continue to drive improvements for BCPS to ensure continued student success in the district. The power of transformation lies in the unique roles all stakeholders have contributed to driving change — from district leadership, to the funders, the teachers, parents and the community at large. This report aims to shed light on the district's efforts as well as the collective power of community to aid in district success and student improvement.

## Methodology

Fenton, a strategic communications firm committed to social impact for more than 35 years, has supported the district since 2017 in its effort to leverage communications as a key component of the transformation effort. Given Fenton's intimacy with the transformation, the group was tasked with creating a report that chronicled, or "mapped", the district's lessons learned, progress, challenges and opportunities in year one. Fenton used a combination of qualitative and quantitative sources to develop this report.

Fenton's process included review of student achievement data, the district's strategic plan, qualitative data and analysis by educational researchers. We relied on research from an external evaluator, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) specializing in measurement of education

reform efforts with school districts across the country that was brought onto the team in 2017 to provide formative and summative feedback on the BCPS transformation process.

In addition to reporting and interviews by AIR, Fenton conducted interviews with more than 40 community stakeholders — parents, students, teachers, BCPS leaders, Battle Creek leaders, state education officials and Foundation leadership — to chronicle year one. The stakeholders' professional and personal experience with education, Battle Creek and BCPS provided critical insights on the community, the history of the district that led to transformation, the challenges of such an effort in public education, as well as inspiration to consider moving into the next four years.





# Introduction

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation's landmark \$51-million grant to Battle Creek Public Schools (BCPS) in 2017 focused on ensuring every student, especially the most vulnerable, receive a strong educational foundation to succeed in college, career and life. This grant is the largest investment the foundation has made to a single school district to date. The grant comes after years of giving by the Kellogg Foundation to BCPS through smaller grants for specific projects.

However, the foundation recognized that BCPS was in the midst of an educational crisis that demanded bold, holistic change that addressed all components of a child's learning.

Years of racial and class segregation led to disinvestment in parts of the city and in the school district, weakening BCPS and resulting in a significant student enrollment decline and budget and program cuts. [▶ WATCH THE VIDEO](#)

The Kellogg Foundation recognized the issues of racial and economic divisions in Battle Creek and established BCVision, a community-driven movement focused on making Battle Creek a place to work, live and play. BCVision's discussions around equitable education in the community prompted the call for a study by New York University (NYU) to bring to the fore, with data, the reality of the disparities people believed existed in the Battle Creek area's educational system. The [2017 New York University](#) study revealed that structural bias and segregation, compounded by income inequality, had concentrated poverty in BCPS among people of color and poor white residents in the district and city and perpetuated economic and racial divisions.



The study, *Equity and Excellence in College and Career Readiness*, stated that more than one-third (38 percent) of children in the BCPS district live at or below the poverty line compared to just above 10 percent in neighboring districts. (See WKKF dashboard indicators for Battle Creek on [page 20](#)).

The study proved, and put on paper, what people in the community already knew: there were serious disparities between the four area school districts (Harper Creek, Pennfield, Lakeview and Battle Creek Public Schools), with BCPS faring the worst with decades of disinvestment over time, and with the highest need population having the least access to resources.

With that information and data in hand, the foundation called for action for BCPS to address issues the report made undeniable.

“There needed to be a boldness from the Kellogg Foundation to say that we are courageous enough to address the issue at its root cause,” said WKKF President and CEO La June Montgomery Tabron. “We couldn’t play it safe any longer in our own backyard if we really wanted to see change for children.”

The foundation provided funding to each of the area’s four school districts over the years but, after the NYU study, focused its giving solely on BCPS.

“What we were doing in the past was trying to be fair without a real definition of what fair was. The study gave the definition loud and clear that fairness was only disrupting a pattern that was disadvantaging the most vulnerable children in the community,” explains Montgomery Tabron.

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**“This partnership with the foundation to me, as somebody who’s lived in Battle Creek for 30 years, is an investment in our community. I’ve seen what the community looked like when the recession hit and what that did to our community — to our demeanor as a city. So for the Kellogg Foundation to make such a bold investment, that means a lot to me; it’s an investment in me, in my kids, in my family.”** —Mitch Fowler, administrative director of student data and innovation.

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The economic and racial divisions that the NYU study brought to light have scarred BCPS over the years, and led to a bleeding of students through school choice. In 2015–16, more than one-third of Battle Creek residents transferred out of BCPS — 51 percent of them white and economically advantaged. BCPS also has experienced educational challenges with lower academic achievement than neighboring school districts.

The educational challenges facing BCPS are not unique. Michigan lags behind much of the U.S. in educational gains. Michigan is one of only 13 states with declining academic achievement since 2003, according to the [State of Michigan 2018](#) report by [The Education Trust—Midwest](#). The state is falling further behind on standardized test scores, on-time high school graduation rates, and literacy rates for its youngest readers.

In 2016, Superintendent Kimberly Carter brought together members of the community to create a strategic plan for BCPS that was transformative. The district was making incremental progress in that plan. WKKF’s grant provided the district with the resources and support to move more expeditiously with sweeping, comprehensive changes for all students as part of the superintendent’s vision for BCPS.





# Year One Progress

As the BCPS transformation reaches year one, the district has experienced marked improvements and several successes during the 2017–18 school year. The district [rolled out new student programs](#), new incentives and professional development opportunities for teachers, new curricula and more. (See pages 17–19 for a full list of district accomplishments in year one.)

All of the work done has been in service of the district’s Six Goals for Greatness laid out in the superintendent’s five-year transformation plan.

“We have made huge strides, but we have only just begun,” Carter said. “Big change requires commitment, persistence and patience. It won’t just happen in a year or two.”

This report highlights year one of the district transformation, examining achievements, lessons learned and how the district adjusted to ensure success.

## SIX GOALS FOR GREATNESS

**Our Mission:** We engage, empower, and collaborate to educate and prepare every Bearcat for college, career and life as a global citizen.

**Our Vision:** 100% Success for every Bearcat.



**1 High Academic Achievement**



**2 Healthy Organizational Culture**



**3 Human Capital Strategy**



**4 Effective and Efficient Use of Resources**



**5 Active Partnerships With Our Community**



**6 World-Class Infrastructure**



# Academic Achievements

BCPS placed great emphasis during year one on establishing a system to use data more strategically to identify and measure needs, changes and progress among staff and students. It also focused on implementing programs and changing curricula to improve student achievement and build literacy skills and aptitude. For example, BCPS:

- **Adopted the first new math curriculum in more than a decade for grades K-5.** Developed rigorous curriculum for elementary, middle and high school math and English Language Arts (ELA).
- **Adopted a new Language Access Plan and English Language Learner (ELL) Program Guide.** To support the academic achievement of English learners, 10 language tutors became certified interpreters through a partnership with the local organization, Voces, to work with students in the district.
- **Implemented Accelerated Reader in elementary and middle schools.** To support and boost student reading and literacy skills, the district implemented the Accelerated Reader program in kindergarten through eighth grade. It also established a challenge throughout the district to read 10,000 books by the end of the school year, raising it to 20,000 after students exceeded the initial goal.

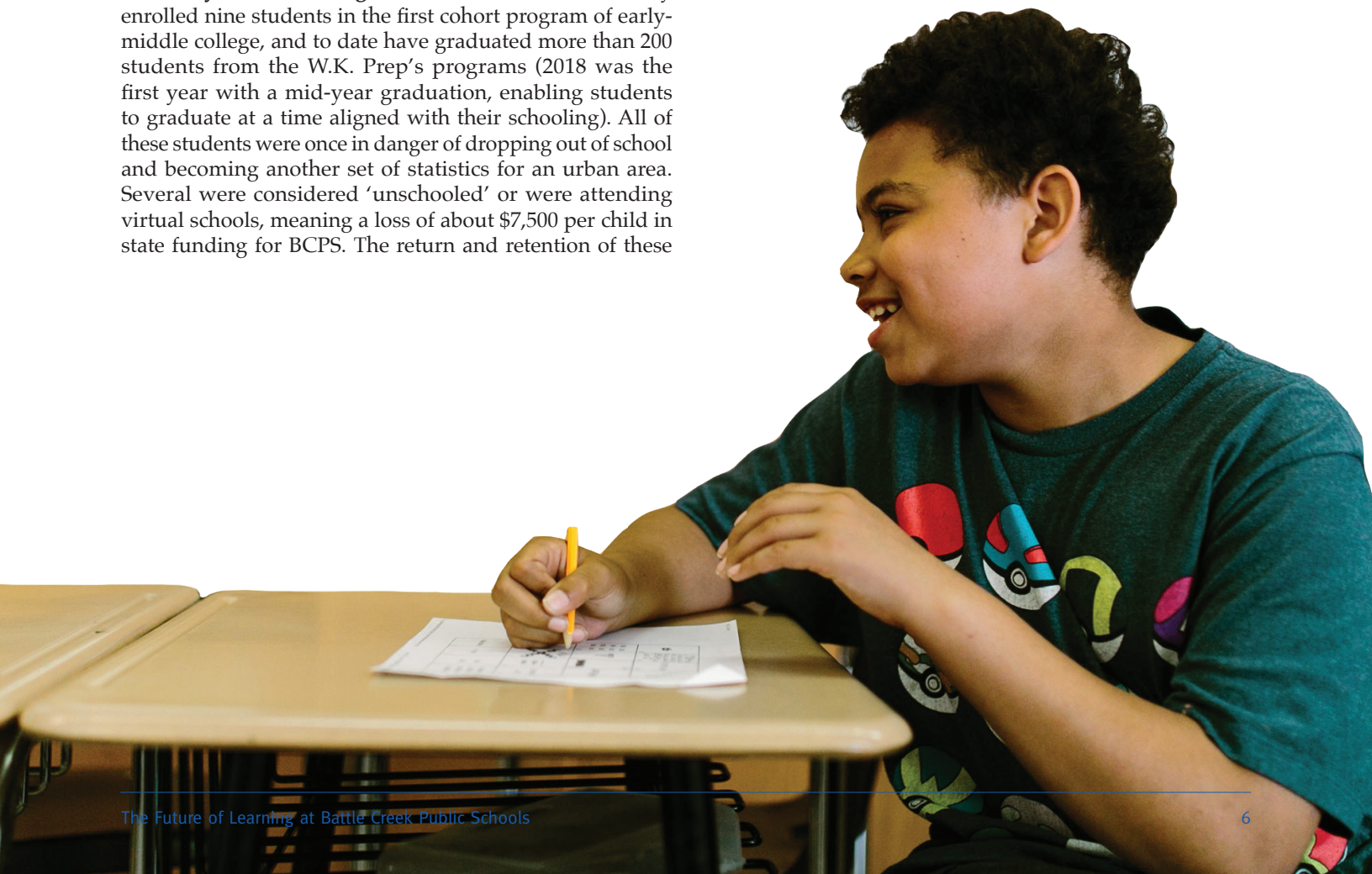
Particularly noteworthy new programs were the **launch of W.K. Kellogg Preparatory High School in 2016–17 and Early-Middle College in 2017–18.** BCPS successfully enrolled nine students in the first cohort program of early-middle college, and to date have graduated more than 200 students from the W.K. Prep's programs (2018 was the first year with a mid-year graduation, enabling students to graduate at a time aligned with their schooling). All of these students were once in danger of dropping out of school and becoming another set of statistics for an urban area. Several were considered 'unschooled' or were attending virtual schools, meaning a loss of about \$7,500 per child in state funding for BCPS. The return and retention of these

students have meant a modest infusion of additional state funding for BCPS and a better livelihood for the students.

The new programs, increased supports and new curricula have yielded some academic improvements during the year, including:

- **Strong academic growth among early grades from Fall 2017 to Spring 2018** on the twice yearly NWEA MAP assessments in math and reading.
- Although not necessarily narrowing the achievement gap, **almost all ethnic groups of students showed academic growth on standardized tests**, which indicated that all student groups are moving in the same positive direction, and at the same pace.
- BCPS kindergarteners who participated in the newly established Kindergarten Success Program (née ROAR into Kindergarten), a full-time free summer program, **scored 15 percent higher on a key literacy assessment that indicates kindergarten readiness than peers who didn't participate.** These students also were more likely to recognize letters and know their letter sounds, key early reading and writing skills that predict later school success.

Learn more about the year one transformation achievements in the superintendent's [State of the District](#) report.





# Lessons Learned

## 1. DISTRICT TRANSFORMATION REQUIRES CREATING A CULTURE OF COLLABORATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY.

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation's multi-million dollar investment in BCPS enabled district leaders to fast track the programs and practices laid out in the ambitious strategic transformation plan. The infusion of capital necessitated first building a core central administrative team to ensure successful implementation of the superintendent's plan.

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**"This transformation will only happen through community and through collaboration. There's a huge subset of community members who want to see us succeed. Utilizing them and their expertise to leverage what we want to do in Battle Creek Public Schools is key. We want to get to a place where everyone feels like they have a place in this transformation; whether it's big or small, there is a seat for you throughout this process. That's one of the lessons I've learned: making sure that our partners in collaborating are seen as valuable."** —Anita Harvey, BCPS parent and director of District Transformation

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Carter assembled key members to create a District Transformation Team that included a director of district transformation, director of student data and innovation, as well as district leaders for elementary and secondary school academics, leadership and those working on parent engagement.

"The power of my district transformation team is that we know what's happening in the district. We identify the challenges, and we have a plan for addressing them, changing and adjusting as needed," said Carter. Indeed, the quick implementation of new programs and new staff has required constant communication internally as well as heightened collaboration across the district. Carter noted that collaboration and communication "has been a fundamental lesson of this first year."

Carter prioritized the use of data among the district transformation team, and for all administrators in the district, as a major tool for accountability and to actively and continuously assess structures and programs, inform decisions and influence changes, enabling them to pivot and adjust in real time to affect change. [▶ WATCH THE VIDEO](#)

The team uses data on a daily basis to evaluate everything from attendance and student behavior to literacy levels and academic improvement. "We collect so much data that to have the capacity to create meaning out of this data

that leads to action has been very, very transformational," says Mitch Fowler, administrative director of student data and innovation.

The Kellogg Foundation's grant to BCPS also opened the door to greater collaboration, within BCPS, across the four districts and throughout the community. For the first time in years, leaders from each of the districts have been meeting regularly to determine together how to achieve the best educational opportunities for children in Battle Creek.

"We're seeing a culture shift in Battle Creek because we're seeing more collaboration and work happening together that's not just because of the transformation grant – it's the commitment to the community for the outcomes for these kids to be beneficial for them in the long run," said Vince Pavone, owner of Lakeview Ford and a longtime supporter of Battle Creek Public Schools.

"With that work together comes accountability," Pavone added "We have to continue to hold leadership accountable and we have to define what those measurements will be, but for them to be successful, for any of this to be successful, they need our support, involvement and willingness to work together. That's the only way we'll see continued progress."

Year one of the district transformation has seen some significant progress in implementing programs, processes and building the staff. The first year saw the expansion of school teams with additional teachers, literacy support specialists, behavioral support staff, books, programs and more.

District leaders employed an extensive system of communication to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders as programs were rolled out and policies were implemented. Each of these measures resulted in internal and external engagement—extensive community partnerships and increased outreach to parents—broadening parent and student engagement and unlocking data to explain to district stakeholders.

"We're seeing the fruits of that [transformation] effort with resources and data-rich assessments to meet students' individual needs for them to be successful and college and career ready," Carter said.



## 2. TARGET RESOURCES AND ENERGY ON TEACHER SUPPORT, TRAINING AND RETENTION.

A steady and robust team of teachers, principals and support staff in the schools is critical for BCPS's success. Parents, administrators, community partners, and teachers themselves, all point to the importance of an investment in a strong staff, especially teachers, for the district to truly thrive. District leaders are acutely aware of that need.

However, like many districts in Michigan and throughout the U.S., BCPS has been hit hard by chronic teacher turnover. The 20 percent turnover rate surpasses the state (16.5 percent) and the national average (15.6 percent). In the 2016–17 school year, 54 teachers resigned, the majority of them retiring, according to BCPS administrative data. In spring 2018, an additional 21 teachers left BCPS with Springfield Middle and Ann J. Kellogg Elementary each losing five teachers, the most of any of the district's schools. By the end of the 2017–18 school year, another 16 teachers announced their departure. Shortly before the start of the 2018–2019 school year, the district suffered the loss of five more teachers, placing the total number of teacher vacancies at 18, on the first day of school, the highest number of teacher vacancies BCPS has ever experienced. Fifty percent of the new teachers hired in the 2017–18 school year did not return to the district this year.

**“Some of the things that I think are working here Battle Creek Public Schools are the teachers. I think we have some of the best teachers I’ve ever seen, well they’re the only teachers I’ve seen, but they’re pretty great.”**

—Gabriel Williams, Class of 2019

The result is a steady flow of substitute teachers in classrooms and, at times, a disruption in teaching and learning for students. There also is a break in continuity which can adversely affect relationships teachers develop over time with students.

“If I’m not mistaken, my son Devon went through at least five different teachers in the school year when he was in fourth grade [at Ann J Kellogg Elementary],” said Brenda Thomas, a BCPS alumna and mother of twins Devon and Devonda. “That was very frustrating because you have people who don’t really get a chance to know that child and he missed an opportunity for a recommendation to the math and science center.”

According to data by the American Institutes for Research (AIR), which provided formative and summative feedback on the BCPS transformation process, **teachers often attributed their departures to high stress, low pay and having to manage significant student disciplinary challenges.**

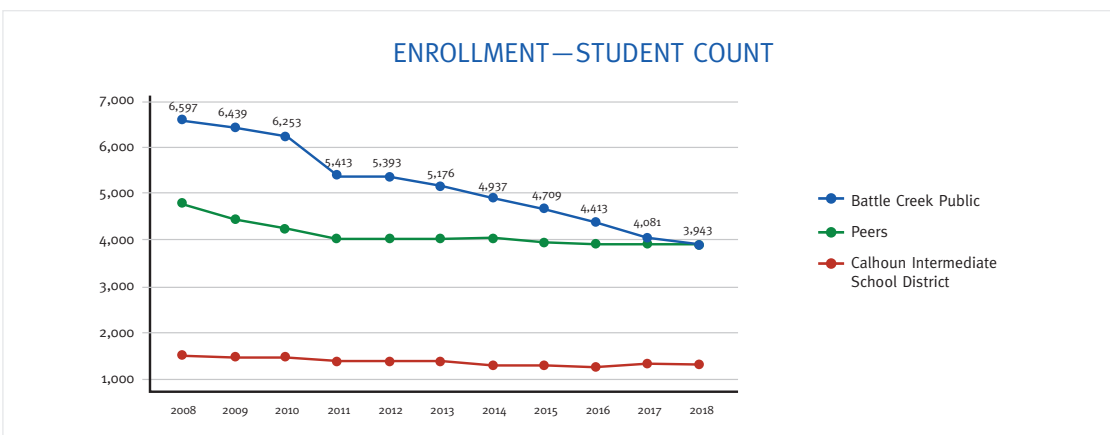
“A challenge for me in teaching at Battle Creek is that it’s a community that has hit some very hard times. We have students with some challenging issues. I think it’s hard for our students to see success in themselves. It’s hard to break that mind set. I also know I can get paid more somewhere closer to my house,” says Chelsea Brooks, a social studies teacher at W.K. Preparatory High School.

In 2016–17 (the most recent year for data), the average annual teacher salary in BCPS was about \$48,000, less than colleagues in neighboring school districts as well as the state. The following chart shows annual BCPS salary compared to neighboring districts, the state and nation. However, Carter asserts that people overlook the additional add-ons of financial incentives (see [page 9](#)) that can bump up teachers’ salaries, making them more competitive.

District	2016–17 teacher salary
BCPS	\$48,215
Kalamazoo	\$56,769
Lakeview	\$58,511
Pennfield	\$52,935
Harper Creek	\$58,817
Michigan	\$62,820
U.S.	\$59,660

Source: [Michigan Dept. of Education](#); [National Center for Education Statistics, Education Week](#)

The loss of state revenue has stymied district efforts to provide raises for teachers since 2013. The district loses about \$2 million a year in state funding due to students leaving the district. **The chart below shows the precipitous decline in enrollment that BCPS has suffered since 2008** (at a cost of about \$7,500 per student in state funding).





One of the district's toughest challenges is keeping teachers past the first year, partly due to hour-plus commutes and possible jobs in other areas. Of the 67 new teachers the district hired in the 2017–18 school year, 13 percent resigned.

The superintendent believes enticing teachers and staff to want to live and settle in Battle Creek will mitigate the commuter flight issue. To tackle that hurdle, in March 2018, in partnership with the City of Battle Creek and supported with a WKCF grant, the district introduced a housing incentive program, providing down payment or renovation cost assistance to teachers buying or owning a home in the BCPS district area. [▶ WATCH THE VIDEO](#)

Tyler Gilland, a teacher at Battle Creek Central High School, relocated to Battle Creek and now lives about two miles away from the high school. He and his wife hope to take advantage of the district's housing incentive program to purchase their first home.

**“It would be nice to have the potential to permanently live in the area where I work.”** — Tyler Gilland, ninth grade teacher, Battle Creek Central High School

While teachers acknowledge the challenges, many also remain at BCPS schools. Many point to the strong relationships with students. Says Brooks of W.K. Prep: “It’s

a very personal thing to get people to stay. I stay because I just like these kids. I don’t feel like W.K. Prep is like any place else. These kids are special and it’s just fun to teach. You have your bad days but on those good days it’s just really enjoyable. I do like being here.”

## FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

BCPS implemented a number of financial incentives, teacher support programs and professional development opportunities during year one to spur morale and teacher buy-in. They also increased internal communication between principals and teachers and central administration, including holding “listening tours” to seek feedback and input.

The WKCF grant enabled the district to set aside more than \$1.9 million to recruit, retain and reward teachers, including awarding retention bonuses of up to \$4,500 for the 2017–18 school year to BCPS teachers considered effective or highly effective.

**Sixty-five new teachers received signing bonuses of up to \$1,500, and other teachers received smaller stipends for attendance.** In July 2017, the district announced a 2 percent salary increase for administrative and central office staff who had agreed to connect their pay increases to enrollment.

The following provides an overview of the financial incentives introduced to attract and retain teachers in year one.

INCENTIVE	MEASUREMENT	COMPENSATION
<b>District Retention Bonus</b>	<p>This bonus is paid to teachers as a reward and incentive to stay in the district</p> <p>To be eligible, teachers must achieve satisfactory evaluations (Effective and Highly Effective) and remain employed with the district through the end of the school year</p>	<p>\$3,000 for teachers at the top of the salary schedule to be paid half in December and half in June</p> <p>\$4,500 for teachers on the salary schedule within the step ranges to be paid \$2,000 in December and \$2,500 in June</p>
<b>Priority School Stipend</b>	To reward the challenging work of improving student outcomes, this additional stipend is paid for working in a Michigan Department of Education identified priority school for one complete year	<p>Teachers will receive \$1,000, paid at the completion of the academic year</p> <p>School leaders will receive \$2,000 paid at the completion of the academic year</p>
<b>Transformational Teacher Institute (TTI)</b>	To recognize the importance of continuing development, this additional stipend is paid for participation in the TTI and completion of eight district provided professional development sessions over the academic year	Teachers and school leaders will receive \$1,000 to be paid at the completion of the academic year
<b>Educational Reimbursement</b>	Any teacher or school leader can receive tuition reimbursement on successful completion of board-approved coursework	Teachers and school leaders will receive \$300 per credit hour for up to 12 credit hours per year
<b>Teacher Attendance Incentive</b>	Our students model our attendance habits — to reward you for good attendance, this additional stipend is paid for teachers with 0–3 days of absence within the contract year	<p>\$700 for teachers with perfect attendance</p> <p>\$600 for one (1) absence</p> <p>\$500 for two (2) absences</p> <p>\$400 for Three (3) absences</p> <p>No stipend for more than 3 absences during the school year</p>



BCPS experienced a slight increase in enrollment of students entering kindergarten and fewer students leaving the district than projected, in part because of the Believe in the Change campaign, resulted in staff receiving those increases from the incentive effort. In June 2018, the district announced that it was giving teachers a one-time lump-sum payment for the 2017–18 school year equal to 2 percent of their pay, as well as a 2 percent pay increase for the 2018–19 school year. Both were made possible because of stronger than projected enrollment and savings incurred because of funding partnerships, including support from WKKF.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PREPAREDNESS

The district made professional development an important through-line in its work. BCPS offered a wide range of professional learning opportunities to teachers in 2017–18 that have started to build capacity within the district. These measures include the transformational teacher institute (TTI) and an on-site year-long professional development conference that enables teachers to select the professional practice they want to learn more about. While 84 percent of surveyed teachers participated in and learned from the professional development sessions, less than half of BCPS teachers (43 percent) took advantage of the TTI opportunity because of family obligations and long commutes, among other reasons. Feedback from teachers is prompting district leaders to adjust how the TTI is offered for the 2018-19 school year to enable more teachers to participate.

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**“Our teachers are taking advantage of the TTIs, the PD opportunities and the higher education credit reimbursement piece connected to the grant. I have a teacher that has already gone to 20 of them.”**

*—Meridith Shabani, principal, Springfield Middle School*

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The district also introduced professional learning communities, instructional coaches for every school and a new teacher mentoring handbook among the instructional supports for teachers. The results have been promising: 63 percent of BCPS teachers participated in a professional learning community meeting, which are used primarily by instructional coaches to share information and model best practices with teachers. And, 45 percent changed their teaching as a result of those meetings.

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**“I have a lot of co-workers with the same mindset I have and it’s nice that even when we all have a bad day, that we can just look at each other and be like, ‘Yeah, today was really bad, but we’re all gonna come back in the morning. And we’re all gonna be here for them still.’ ”**

*—Kayla Bartem, teacher, Springfield Middle School*

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Bartem meets a few times a month with teachers from both Springfield and Northwestern middle schools as part of her professional learning center. “It’s nice for me to have that support from my peers and to have a group to work together on what will work best for students. That’s keeps us all moving forward,” she said.

District leaders also have made intentional choices during the school year to build a strong core of school leaders. Central administrative leaders and the superintendent, for example, spent considerable time at Northwestern Middle School and with its principal, Stephenie Bruce, providing rapid response support and ongoing coaching to help address tough disciplinary issues at the school. The district continues to explore new strategic partnerships focused on transforming middle schools and developing strategies to implement trauma-informed practices.

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**“I’ve just felt really well supported on a district level, and on the school level. I definitely would not have been able to be a success without this system of teamwork, where you have coaches, leaders and mentors you meet with on a regular basis and address your questions or concerns.”**

*—Sima Thurman, principal, Post-Franklin Elementary School*

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### 3. COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP DRIVES DISTRICT SUCCESS

The combination of collaboration and strong leadership have been key ingredients in the district transformation effort and the Kellogg Foundation's support of the district. From the time Carter was appointed interim superintendent in August 2015, she made sure to meet with leaders across the board within Battle Creek — business owners, parents, community organizers, etc. — to learn their perspective on what was working and what needed to change for the school district.

As superintendent, Carter has mastered the ability to listen to stakeholders and a strategic planning prowess to broker and negotiate relationships and partnerships, both inside the district and with external stakeholders to benefit BCPS students, staff and parents.

"We can't do this work without community partnerships; they are instrumental in actualizing this plan. One of the many lessons we're learning is how to really organize and coordinate all of the resources that are within the City of Battle Creek so that they can actually reach students and families," she said. "Right now, we're bringing everybody to the table at the same time so that we can determine where the gaps are and how best to address them and ensure that everyone is accessing needed resources."

Together with her district transformation team, the superintendent has established several partnerships and outreach initiatives, including:

- **Family outreach and engagement** — Bearcat coaches and family advocates are key positions in nearly every BCPS school. They provide front-line support for families and welcome and engage parents in the schools. Carter keeps a pulse on and maintains presence within the community by conducting her own outreach through ongoing meetings with different parent groups and individuals in the community with regular listening tours. "The more we engage the community and the more that they get out what's going on with the grant money and where the dollars are going, that's important. The more trust you'll have," said Melvin McKnight, an alum, parent and head of PULL (Parents Ultimately Limiting Loss), a local group he founded to reduce the number of families leaving the district.
- **Regional partnerships** — Since the first joint school board meeting in the region's history in early 2017, all four area school boards have held annual meetings in a concerted effort to work toward a shared, equitable vision for education in the community. In May 2018, the four school boards held an open public meeting to work on collective restorative practices for their respective districts. In addition, the superintendent has forged stronger relationships with area superintendents, meeting regularly to discuss staffing, curriculum and address issues of school choice and its impact on BCPS, work on collective restorative practices.
- **Health and wellbeing partnerships** — The newly created Bearcat Health Response team provides various services for BCPS students through a partnership with 11 agencies and organizations in Calhoun County and the city of Battle Creek. The team brings together a juvenile court judge, county prosecutor, the Battle Creek police chief, heads of the county's departments of Health and Human Services and Public Health, and more under the umbrella of the Battle Creek Foundation to provide a 360-degree system of support for children and families in BCPS. "We have all of the social service agencies in the City of Battle Creek coming to the table to talk about what does it look like for supports for students," Carter said. "What was surprising to me about that is we have the juvenile judge sitting at the table with us, alongside the county prosecutor, the chief of police, the CEOs of our Department of Health and Human Services, Child Protective Services, Family and Children Services — all of these organizations. I never would have imagined that I could get all of them into the room."

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**"I've been in education for 25 years, and this is the first time I've ever seen an entire community wrap around a school system to provide support for students. It's just incredible."** — Wesley Seeley, coordinator, state and federal grants and programs, BCPS

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- **Policy partnerships** — One of the more important partnerships in year one was the districts agreement with the Michigan Department of Education (MDE). With a school on the state department of education's priority designation list, BCPS took a proactive approach to spin the narrative to a positive for the district. BCPS and the MDE entered into an agreement in early 2018 that fostered a commitment from multiple partners to be actively involved in the success of BCPS. More importantly, the partnership set the standard for how the MDE aspired to work with other school districts in the state. The district's partnership with the state is unique in Michigan in part because of the quality and comprehensiveness of the district's transformation plan as well as the breadth of stakeholder engagement, noted MDE Deputy Superintendent Venessa Keesler. Stakeholders weren't just sitting at the table; they were already invested and talking about 'Believe in the Change,' what they were contributing and what it all meant for the community. "It was much easier for the department to think about how we use the partnership model to supplement or enhance the work that was already ongoing," said Keesler. ▶ WATCH THE VIDEO

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**“Dr. Carter’s leadership not only for the district but for the community, and her ability to broker and negotiate relationships and partnerships, are inspirational and something that we should try to help all of our superintendents in the state to know.”** —*Venessa Keesler, Michigan Department of Education Deputy Superintendent*

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- **Community partnerships** — A wide-range of community organizations provide support to BCPS schools, including United Way, Urban League, Calhoun Public Health and the Battle Creek Community Foundation. “Having individuals who are committed to the success of the district and then being that convening organization to get everybody to the table to say, ‘How do we make sure that we’re coordinating and integrating resources in a way that our families have access to them?’ That has been an amazing accomplishment this year,” Carter said.

[▶ WATCH THE VIDEO](#)

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Despite outreach efforts in year one, parent involvement in BCPS was mixed. Almost half of teachers (48 percent) in interviews described insufficient parent involvement as a major challenge. Parents who do actively participate in their schools, point to a need for additional resources for outreach.

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**“Because leadership decides ‘Yes, we have to have all this stuff translated and we have to have interpreters at all these meetings and we have to have culturally relevant teaching practices, that doesn’t always happen, often because the supports just aren’t available to allow them to do that. Of course they want to serve the students as best they can, that’s clear, but if no one is able to provide that guidance then, you know, whose fault is it really that the kids aren’t being served?’”** —*Josh Dunn, executive director, Voces*

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Parent focus groups revealed that non-native English speaking parents still struggle with getting enough translators for children in schools and with receiving communication from their schools in their languages to support their children.

“El año pasado, en Post-Franklin, tenía un traductor de tiempo completo que trabajaba ocho horas al día, cinco días a la semana,” said parent Rebecca Gomez. “Y este año, tuvo que mudarse a Verona, pero en Verona, la persona que debe estar allí para ayudarlos solamente por cinco horas al día y no cada día. No tienen a alguien que pueda ayudarlos a tiempo completo. Cinco horas al día. ... Tanto dinero les dio la fundación ¿para qué? ¿Para que no traductor?”

[[[“Last year, at Post-Franklin, they had a full-time translator who worked eight hours a day, five days a week,” said parent Rebecca Gomez. “And this year, he had to move to Verona, but in Verona, the person who should be there to help them [is] just for five hours a day, part-time. They do not have someone who can help them full time. Five hours a day. ... So much money did the foundation give them for what? For no translator?”]]]

The district has made concerted efforts to reach out to non-English speaking parents with translated materials, but they’ve learned that isn’t enough.

“Part of the hope we have for the school district in its transformation process is that it cultivates the asset that it has, which is the diversity in the student body and the community. So far, I feel that diversity has not been quite cultivated yet. The diversity is acknowledged, but I don’t know that we are doing anything out of it, especially in the Burmese community. We haven’t been brought into the conversation,” said Elizabeth Lian, program manager for the Burma Center.

Jorge Zeballos, executive director of the Center for Diversity and Innovation at Kellogg Community College, said BCPS must make concerted attempts to meet non-English speaking communities where they are to build deep relationships. “I think that’s key to create a better educational process for students and families. Meet them where they are...don’t just ask them to come to your space,” he said.

**The district will pivot for year two** to work closely with Voces, the Burma Center and other local organizations to address the gap in reaching non-English speaking families, including revisiting a plan to bring back the Latino Parent Council, holding regular meetings with Burmese and Latino families in their communities and having dedicated translators at all meetings. The superintendent said two-way communication is a priority in year two.





## 4. TRANSFORMATION REQUIRES CHANGING THE NARRATIVE—IN THE DISTRICT AND IN THE COMMUNITY.

BCPS' reputation has long taken a hit as a troubled district marred by violence and unruliness, which has left a sting felt by everyone in the district from administrators to students. Alumni remember the district as a large and vibrant, but in a city that has had long racial and economic divisions between the city and the township of Battle Creek.

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**"My advice to other people if you want to know about BCPS, talk to students, staff, teachers here, and see what they think about it, because we're the ones who are actually here and we experience it every day. We have so many great kids here who have gone and are going on to do amazing things." —Megan Wright, BCPS Class of 2021**

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Growing up in Battle Creek, BCPS school board President Art McClenney remembers the township of Battle Creek—the south side—as Lakeview while the City of Battle Creek was home to BCPS. "Back then, you had Lakeview school district, which was really where most of the white kids went, and the City of Battle Creek, which is where all of us in the 'inner city' went," McClenney explains.

Even then, McClenney remembers a strong district. "We used to be a really big district with several elementary and middle schools and kids from all over," McClenney recalls. "It was a great school district and I still think we are. To see what's happened, over the years, it's really been heartbreaking."

As businesses moved out of the city and the economic opportunities decreased, more affluent families moved, violence increased and the perception of the city, as well as the school district, shifted. "I think there were some unfair myths that were generated that didn't do the district any favors," notes Kathy Wilson, co-executive director of BC Pulse, a nonprofit organization focused on creating systemic change to improve the overall well-being of children.

"There's the perception that we have a dangerous student population, and it's really tough, because our students feel that's the way they're perceived, among their peers at other schools," said Battle Creek Central High School Principal Noah Hollander.

The district has aggressively worked to change the perception by (1) reshaping the narrative and (2) telling its own story rather than leaving it to the local media or gossip. The intentionality to shift the narrative is based on proactively weaving regular communications into every aspect the district's engagement with its diverse circle of audiences. It is critical to note that shaping the narrative is not just a function of increased and improved external communications. BCPS teachers, administrators, and in fact employees at every level, are important ambassadors in the community for the district's reputation, requiring a comprehensive effort to inform and engage them of the transformation through many vehicles.

In year one, reshaping the narrative has included a push to establish a social media footprint that includes not just the usual updates (such as upcoming events), but compelling human-interest content. The monthly newsletter in the *Battle Creek Shopper News* and *Nueva Opinion* is a particularly important vehicle as it is consumed by a cross-section of external and internal audiences. It offers robust and curated content that not just informs but celebrates important BCPS news, enabling the district to tell its own story. [▶ WATCH THE VIDEO](#)

BCPS also is active in community forums that provide two-way dialogue at the grassroots level. This engagement helps the district get in front of issues and hear directly from the community, as well as help build trusting relationships. While Carter is central to these convenings, all principals and district office staff are assigned to attend neighborhood council meetings as ambassadors in narrative change.

During year one of the transformation, the superintendent and her staff also integrated marketing and communications strategies and tools to showcase students' achievement. They launched the "Believe in the Change" campaign, which included short videos, printed materials, social media ads, taglines and a manifesto that told everyone in Battle Creek that the district heard their frustrations and was ready to make a change for the better, with the community's support and engagement.

District leaders and administrators used key messages to focus on the district's continued progress. Carter appeared regularly on local radio stations and in the community to discuss changes at BCPS. Most importantly, the district has engaged and enlisted ambassadors to spread the message of change in Battle Creek Public Schools — parents, students, community partners and more.

The district's efforts to counter the negative impression of the school district doesn't discount that sometimes bad things happen in the schools. However, district leaders and several community stakeholders also realize that issues of race and class play a role in the perception and those impressions can be harder to shake. Carter said the district in year two will build on its outreach to the community for more people to experience the real Battle Creek Public Schools.

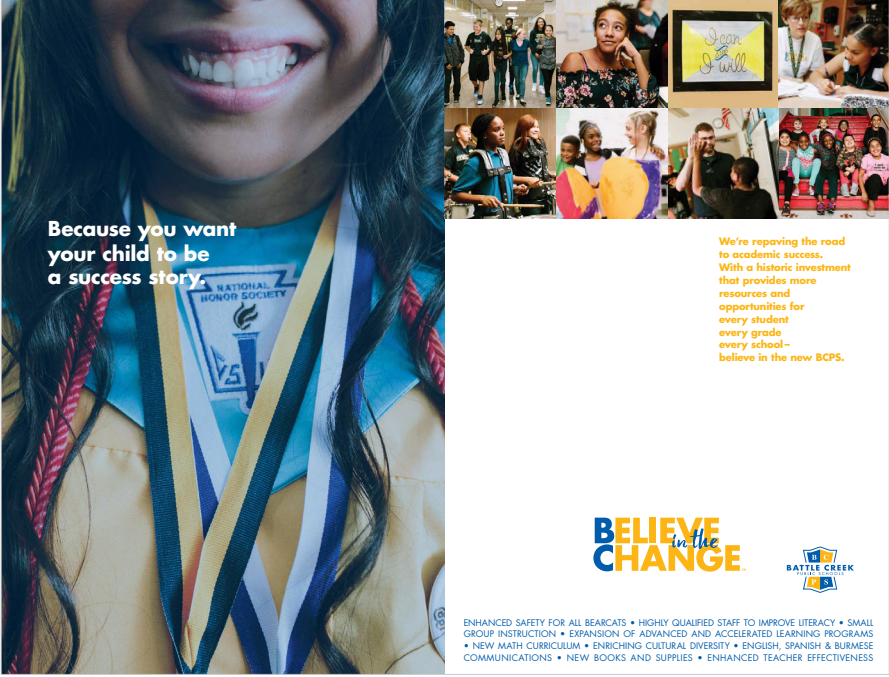
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**"I think for a long time we've allowed other people to tell our story and influence our image—local newspapers and the unfortunate incidents that occasionally pop up on social media. So, I think it's really important that we control the message that comes from our district and that we tell a story of all the things that are actually happening within our four walls." —Tyler Gilland, ninth grade teacher, Battle Creek Central High School**

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## CREATIVE MATERIALS

### NEWSPAPER



**Because you want your child to be a success story.**

We're repaving the road to academic success. With a historic investment that provides more resources and opportunities for every student every grade every school—believe in the new BCPS.

**BELIEVE in the CHANGE** 

ENHANCED SAFETY FOR ALL BEARCATS • HIGHLY QUALIFIED STAFF TO IMPROVE LITERACY • SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION • EXPANSION OF ADVANCED AND ACCELERATED LEARNING PROGRAMS • NEW MATH CURRICULUM • ENRICHING CULTURAL DIVERSITY • ENGLISH, SPANISH & BURMESE COMMUNICATIONS • NEW BOOKS AND SUPPLIES • ENHANCED TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS

### ADS

**Because with the support of their community, all children can succeed.**



Believe in the Change is our mantra this year — we are answering your call to make bold, transformational changes at BCPS. You are leaders in our community, and you can help.

**Join us at the next Superintendent's Advisory Council Meeting to get involved and share your insights!**

Monday, November 20  
5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.  
BCPS District Office Board Room,  
3 West Van Buren Street

Contact Anita Harvey to learn more:  
✉ [aharvey@battle-creek.k12.mi.us](mailto:aharvey@battle-creek.k12.mi.us)  
☎ (269) 965-9485

**BELIEVE in the CHANGE** 

### YARD SIGNS

**BELIEVE in the CHANGE** 

Every student, every grade, every school.

### RADIO



### BILLBOARDS



**Every student, every grade, every school.**

**BELIEVE in the CHANGE** 



## 5. STRATEGIC EXTENSIVE COMMUNICATION MUST BE AN INTEGRAL PART OF DISTRICT PRACTICE

Hand in hand with narrative change is a consistent flow of communication that is clear and informative to internal and external audiences. Qualitative and quantitative research among administrators, teacher and parents indicated that communication was fragmented and incomplete, making BCPS leadership communication a central factor of its transformation effort during year one.

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**“The support the district has had from our communications partners has completely elevated how we view communications in our work. It is essential to our work and our success. We’ve changed how our approach to school-to-community communications. And our team has developed a stronger lens to view each issue and aspect in the district to determine what we want communicate and how we want to communicate it.” —Anita Harvey, director of District Transformation**

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With support from the Kellogg Foundation, BCPS worked with Fenton Communications and Burrell Communications to develop top-to-bottom, comprehensive communications strategies and processes and instill intentional communications and relationship building throughout the district and with its stakeholders.

Throughout year one the district made intentional choices on how leverage intentional communications to push out the good news happening in the district, get ahead of crises in a constructive way and to help the community understand the changes happening in the district and, especially how the grant funding is being used throughout BCPS.

An important aim in the plan was to create two-way communications to not only inform, but to solicit feedback and demonstrate active engagement. The district examined every vehicle used for communication and became more strategic in making sure all stakeholders had necessary information in various formats and through numerous methods.

For example, the superintendent holds regular listening sessions to give teachers a vehicle to ask questions, voice concerns and provide suggestions. She also holds monthly meetings with the high school’s student advisory council, giving the district an entrée to hear directly from the student body. In addition, all central office staff are required to attend staff meetings at schools to ensure regular two-way communication. [▶ WATCH THE VIDEO](#)

The district also placed an additional focus on using the website as an information hub and ensuring regular and timely updates to the district Facebook page and strategically placed paid ads to bring attention to campaigns. For example, as part of its enrollment strategy the district created an enrollment landing page for uses to learn more about the opportunities at BCPS and become primed to enroll

their child(ren). BCPS has seen a steady rise in page likes, impressions and engagement on its Facebook page as well as a rise in visits to the website.

“One of the largest lessons I have learned this year is that you cannot communicate enough,” said Carter.

Some major communications changes in year one include:

- **Internal communications**
  - Weekly internal staff newsletters keep all district staff informed of what’s happening at the schools and in the district, such as policy changes, information about the WKKF grant and professional development opportunities
  - Regular teacher and staff meetings with Carter
  - Regular superintendent meetings with the BCCHS Student Advisory Council to hear student concerns
  - District listening tours with teachers and school staff to encourage and solicit feedback and suggestions
- **School-to-home communications**
  - Multiple points of outreach to families via Facebook, phone calls, text messages, and newsletters
  - Translated materials, such as monthly community newsletters in Spanish and Burmese
- **External communications**
  - Recordings of BCPS school board meetings
  - Monthly external ‘newsletter’ in the Battle Creek Shopper News and Nueva Opinion
  - Developed infographics to better and more visually communicate how the WKKF grant is being used to impact every student, every grade and every school
  - Communications campaigns to raise community and parental awareness, such as enrollment for summer pre-K and W.K. Prep High, teacher recruitment, grant allocations
  - Regular meetings with parent groups

As the district enters year two of the transformation, district leaders note that communications will need to express both what the transformation has already accomplished as well as what’s to come. Keeping people informed about these changes is a crucial part of building greater confidence among key audiences so that they Believe in the Change.

Carter and her team have hired a communications manager to build on the processes and strategies established by Fenton and Burrell and shepherd the district through its continued growth with internal and external communications. The district also is exploring revamping its website to make it more compelling visually and easier to navigate for parents, students and the community-at large. A website is important resource for stakeholders and is an important marketing tool and virtual “front door” to the district.



# Looking Ahead

Driving success for all students in Battle Creek Public Schools stands at the center of the district's work — every student, every grade, every school. The BCPS transformation is to produce a sea-change around student achievement, well-being and success. The district has taken a holistic approach to drive success for all students, approaching the needs of students from various angles and working to provide equitable solutions for district students. The goals for greatness have established a benchmark as well as a framework for the work the district continues to do in this five-year endeavor. District leaders continue to make bold, innovative changes to affect change, learning new lessons, making adjustments to propel the district forward.

The district has made significant progress in just a short time, focusing on building and shaping a strong internal culture and establishing, early on, key academic programs, professional development support and communication measures to lay the foundation for success as the district progresses. [▶ WATCH THE VIDEO](#)

There have been numerous lessons learned from the first year that will drive the work in the district for year two. The work planned for the 2018–19 school year includes:

- Launch of an attendance campaign to raise awareness in the community of the connections between student attendance and academic achievement
- Improvement of outreach and two-way communication for non-English-speaking families and communities
- Preparation for a new middle school STEM and a new elementary school language program for 2019 launch
- Growth for employee incentives
- Roll out of a new trauma-informed approach to supporting students
- Launch of the High School Career Pathways program
- Increased professional development opportunities by expanding the Transformational Teacher Institute program and stipend to include all BCPS staff members

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**“Throughout my 20-year career in education, the goal has always been to make sure every child has an opportunity to succeed. Today, I now have a new opportunity to ensure that all 4,000 plus students in Battle Creek Public Schools have access to and the benefit of a quality education. That they are enrolled in rigorous programs. That the community is talking about the great things happening in Battle Creek Public Schools. That we are being noticed for our graduation rate, and our college access rate. That kids are leaving us college ready and ready for life.” —Superintendent Kimberly Carter**

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# Year One Progress in BCPS



**23 teachers**

worked

**2,242 hours**

this summer developing curriculum for elementary, middle, and high school Math and ELA



**40** Literacy assistants and

**6** Certified Reading Specialists

hired to provide more support and individualize instruction in our early elementary classrooms

**15,875**

**books read**

in the first three months of our "Reading our Way to 10k" initiative, using the newly implemented **Accelerated Reader**



**9**

students enrolled in the first cohort of the **Early-Middle College** program



**13,396**

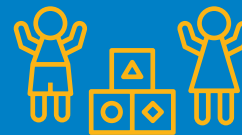
**books purchased**

for elementary classroom libraries to increase students' access to quality text



**10** English Language Tutors

became certified Interpreters through a partnership with Voces



**130**  
**students**

attended **ROAR**, now known as the Kindergarten Success Program, a summer learning program to help students start kindergarten ready to succeed

**56 hours**

of additional instruction were added for our youngest Bearcats by **extending the pre-kindergarten school year**





26

students graduated mid-year from **W. K. Kellogg Preparatory High School**, our alternative high school program

196

teachers were awarded retention bonuses



15



## Behavior Interventionists

were placed across the district to ensure on-site support and care for students who struggle to meet expectations



14

## Bearcat Coaches

were placed in our schools who interact with more than

3,000

students daily and support more than

200

teachers each week



277

## staff members

attended the showing of "**Resilience: The Biology of Stress & The Science of Hope**"



31

staff members took advantage of the **tuition reimbursement program** that supports the ongoing learning and professional certification



115

## staff members

enrolled in

109 hours

of professional development in our **Transformational Teacher Institute**

32 families

were supported with the **transition program** to help address behavior challenges



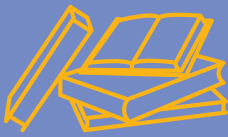




9

## family advocates

placed in every building to help eliminate barriers for families, create tighter relationships, and build trust in our ability to care for all kids



3,052

books sent home to families over the course of the school year through our partnership with United Way in the **Early Grade Reading Achievement Program**



30

## family events

and over

1,300

## personal contacts

with families to provide supportive services coordinated by family advocates

420,000  
breakfasts served



to students in grades K-8 made possible through our partnership with United Way **Breakfast in the Classroom**



79

new staff members received feedback, guidance and support through the **Teacher Mentor program**

60



## Link Crew Student Leaders

lead the way to improve peer-to-peer connections



126

## more students

enrolled district wide than expected in 2017–2018



7

## monthly newsletters

published in the *Battle Creek Shopper*, as well as a Spanish edition in the *Nueva Opinion* and a Burmese edition on our website, to improve external communication



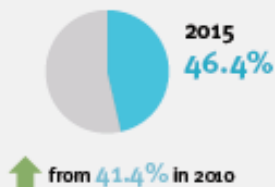
# Battle Creek, MI Dashboard Snapshot

## KEY CONTEXT INDICATORS

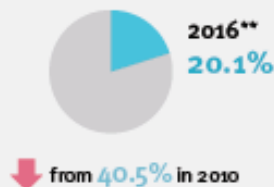
	2010	2015
Number of children under 5 years of age*	4,030	3,972
Number of Head Start seats	908	910
% children living in poverty	35.1%	34.1%

## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (ECE) & EDUCATION SYSTEMS OUTCOMES

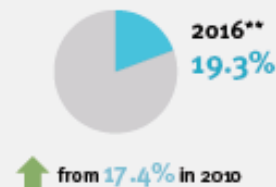
% children enrolled in publicly funded ECE



% 3rd grade reading proficiency (state test)

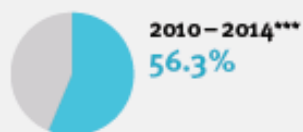


% 3rd grade math proficiency (state test)

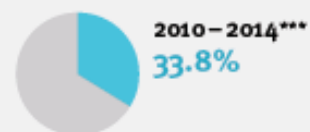


## EMPLOYMENT EQUITY OUTCOMES

% children with at least 1 parent having full-time year-round job

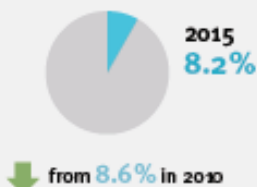


% children with at least 1 parent having full-time year-round job and at or above 200% poverty

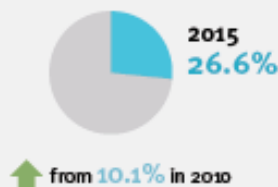


## FOOD, HEALTH, & WELL-BEING OUTCOMES

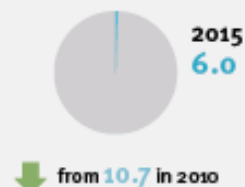
% babies born with low birth weight



% babies exclusively breastfed at 6 months\*\*\*\*



Infant mortality rate per 1,000 births



\* 2015 numbers are estimated using 2010 Census percentage for children under the age of 5, since actual is only reported every 10 years.

\*\* All states changed their academic achievement tests in 2015, so caution is needed to make comparison to previous years.

\*\*\* Calculated based on 5-year data estimates.

\*\*\*\* Exclusively breastfeeding at 6 month data is currently only available at state level, so these are state data.

Key: ■ positive trend ■ negative trend ■ minimal or no trend

Updated July 2017





W.K.  
KELLOGG  
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