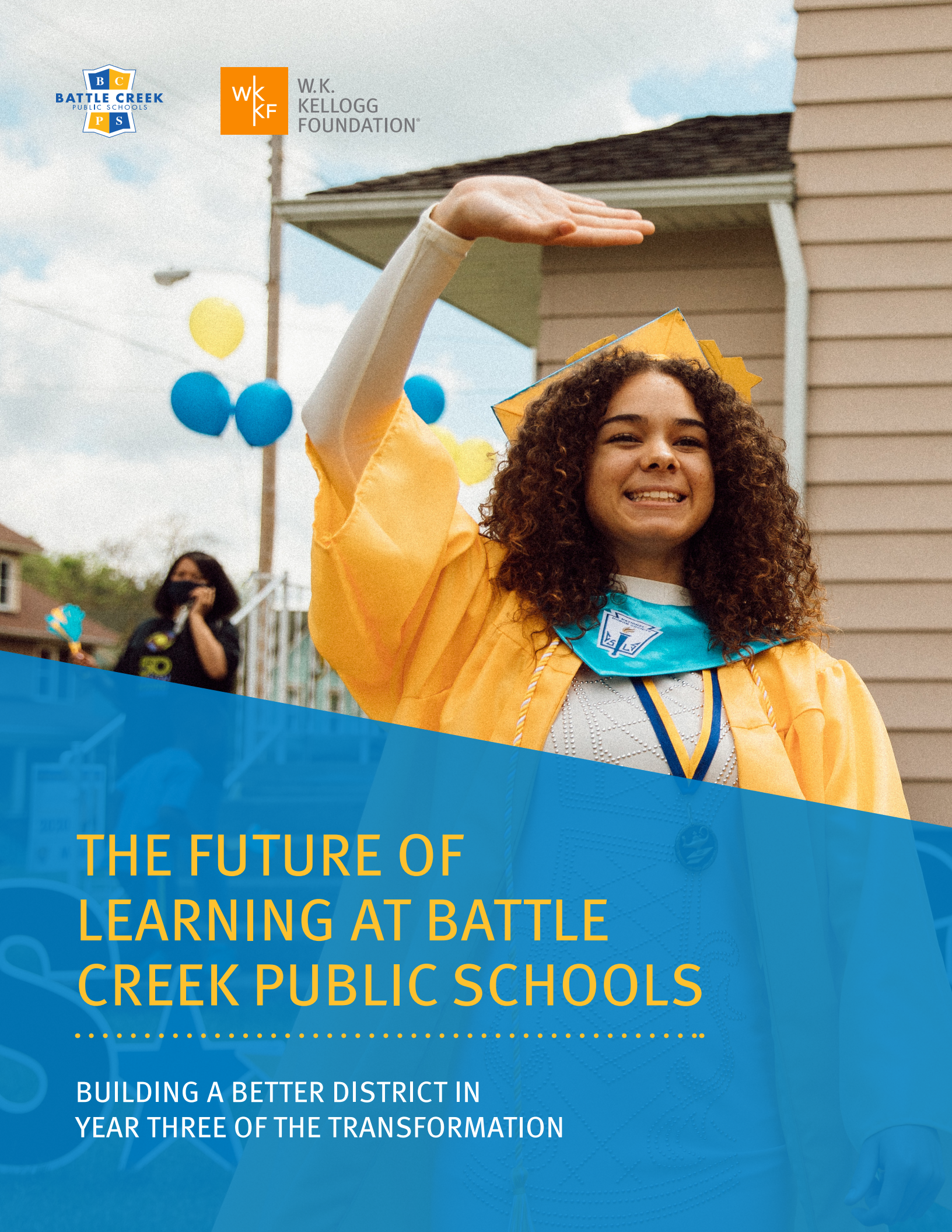




W.K.
KELLOGG
FOUNDATION®



THE FUTURE OF LEARNING AT BATTLE CREEK PUBLIC SCHOOLS

.....

BUILDING A BETTER DISTRICT IN
YEAR THREE OF THE TRANSFORMATION



CONTENTS

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I. INTRODUCTION



This report examines and reflects on year three of a bold transformation effort at Battle Creek Public Schools (BCPS) after a landmark grant made by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) to support the district's strategic plan to attain excellence in its schools and for its students. As the third chapter in this five-year endeavor, the report examines achievements, opportunities and lessons learned thus far, based on data and culled from conversations with students, parents, teachers, community partners and leaders in the district, city and foundation.

The motivation for WKKF's historic \$51 million grant derives from a 2017 New York University [study](#), commissioned by the Battle Creek community engagement initiative BCVision, which revealed how racial bias and segregation had created profound gaps in educational metrics in BCPS. While about 70% of people living in the BCPS catchment area are White, only 36% of BCPS students are White, indicating that a disproportionate number of White families zoned for BCPS use school choice policies to send their children to the neighboring districts Lakeview, Harper Creek and Pennfield. The study also indicated that students in BCPS fared worse on measures like graduation rates and grade-level reading abilities than their peers in neighboring districts as well as along racial lines within the district. Furthermore, common across all districts in Battle Creek and across the country, was the fact that students of color and students with disabilities were suspended at a rate disproportionate to their populations.

The study led to WKKF's investment of \$51 million toward BCPS Superintendent Kimberly Carter's five-year vision and strategy for transforming the district, including establishing new policies, hiring new staff and rolling out a number of new academic programs for students, incentives for teachers and partnerships with the community. Carter's "Six Goals for Greatness" strategic plan has guided the vision and planning for the five-year transformation. The infusion of capital from WKKF enabled Carter and other district leaders to fast track the strategic plan Carter had laid out.

BATTLE CREEK PUBLIC SCHOOLS 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



4 EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT USE OF RESOURCES



2 HEALTHY ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE



5 ACTIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH OUR COMMUNITY



3 HUMAN CAPITAL STRATEGY



6 WORLD-CLASS INFRASTRUCTURE



“

We are constantly reflecting and adjusting, and we have built up the muscle for change. Our team was ready to move mountains to make sure that kids, families and staff are taken care of in this crisis.

Three years into the five-year transformation, BCPS has made tremendous strides across all six goals in the strategic plan. Transformation does not occur overnight, but programs and practices implemented during the first two years have begun to yield exciting outcomes for the students and the community.

For example:

- Students have more opportunities than before, as two new magnet schools opened that are unlike anything else in Battle Creek: the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme Candidate school Fremont International Academy (Fremont), and the rigorous math and science middle school Battle Creek STEM Innovation Center (BC STEM).
- Teacher turnover is improving as BCPS is able to offer teachers greater financial incentives and a robust professional development program through its deep partnership with Grand Valley State University (GVSU).
- The narrative around BCPS has become increasingly positive. More students have enrolled than projected, increasing the district's resources, which in turn enables it to draw top teaching talent.

At the same time, year three of the BCPS transformation has been a year like no other. In Michigan, as of late July, 85,000 people have been diagnosed with COVID-19, with more than 6,400 deaths. In Calhoun County, as of late July, there have been 600 cases of COVID-19 and 38 deaths. Since March 15, more than 2.4 million Michigan residents also have applied for unemployment, and half a million continue to collect unemployment benefits. Black people, immigrants and other people of color have borne the brunt of the pandemic. Although they only make up 14% of the state's population, Black people make up 31% of cases and 40% of deaths attributed to COVID-19. Battle Creek has been hit especially hard: as of June 2020, the unemployment rate in the city was 15.2%.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unforeseen hardships to students and families across the country. As cities adopted shelter-in-place or safer-at-home ordinances, nearly 125,000 schools across America closed and millions of students had to transition to remote learning, posing countless challenges.

But the COVID-19 pandemic has also brought to the fore BCPS's unique strengths, including its forward-thinking leadership, dedication to its students, engagement with its families, ability to embrace new technology and ideas, energized partners and increasing trust with the community.

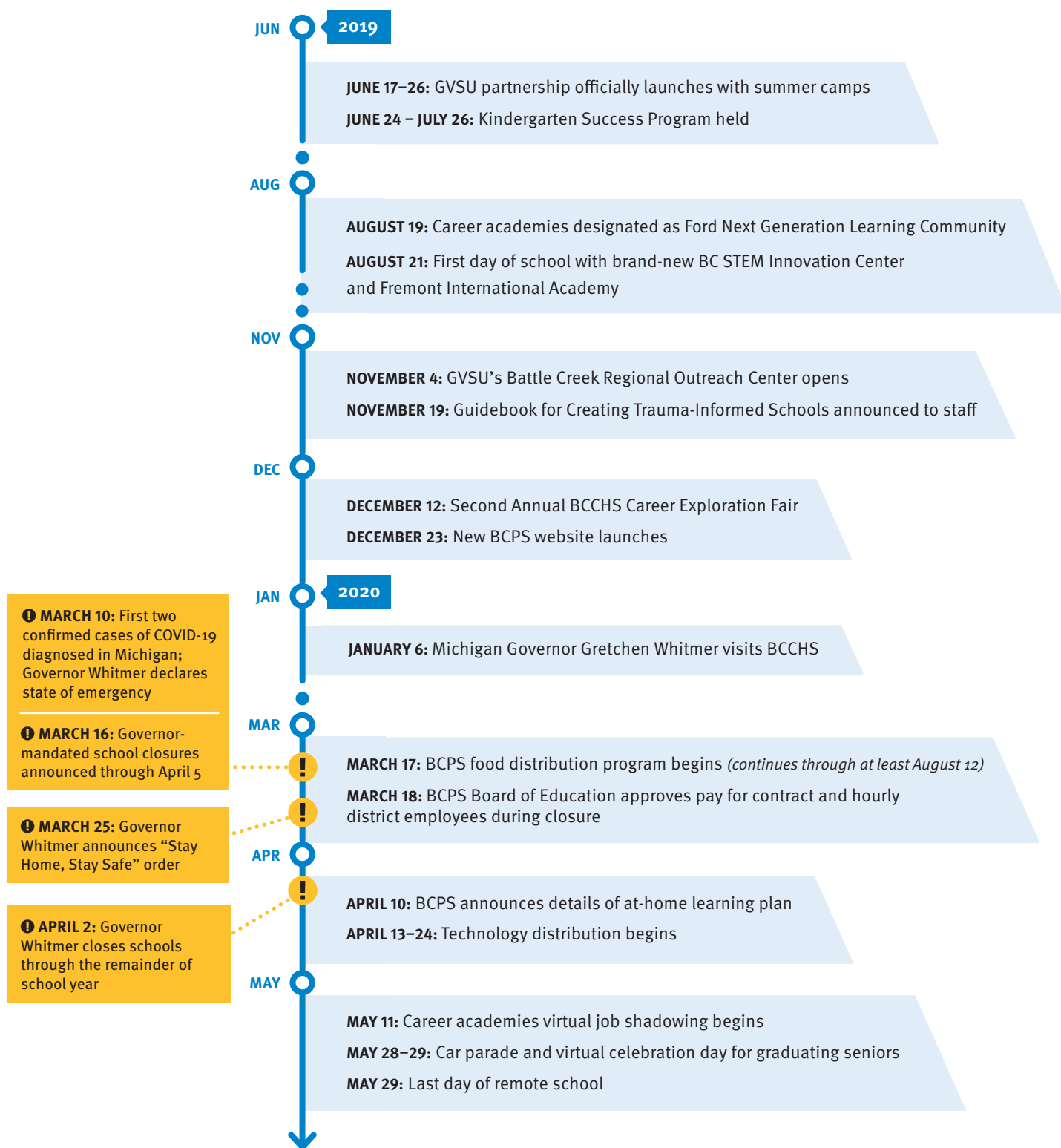
“Our journey on this transformation has prepared us to be responsive in the moment,” said Carter. “We are constantly reflecting and adjusting, and we’ve built up the muscle for change. So when we were faced with a need to respond, our team was ready to move mountains to make sure that kids, families and staff are taken care of in this crisis.”

Looking back over the past year, the overarching theme that emerged is that transformation must be a dynamic and ever-evolving process — one that responds to both internal and external factors. This report aims to shed light on both the district's ongoing transformation efforts and how the trajectory of the transformation has changed in these unprecedented times. The lessons that this year provides will continue to drive improvements for BCPS in years to come.

▶ WATCH VIDEO

INTRODUCTION

YEAR THREE TIMELINE





MILESTONES AT BCPS



MILESTONES AT BCPS YEAR

1



**W.K. Kellogg
Preparatory High
School** relaunches

HIGH ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

**Early-Middle
College
Program**
begins

**Kindergarten
Success
Program**
launches



New K–5 math
curriculum is implemented



**Parent
University**
launches



**Six certified
reading
specialists**
hired in
elementary
schools

**Bearcat
Health Team**
begins meeting



ACTIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH OUR COMMUNITY

**Link
Crew**

launches at
Battle Creek
Central High
School

HEALTHY ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE



**First 14
Bearcat
coaches**
hired



**Nine
parent
advocates**
hired

New partnership with
**National Equity
Project**
launches



NATIONAL
EQUITY
PROJECT

HUMAN CAPITAL STRATEGY

**Financial
incentives**
for
teachers
introduced



**Teacher
bonuses and
2% raises**
announced



**Transformational
Teacher Institute**
begins



MILESTONES AT BCPS YEAR

2

Career academies

launch at
BCHS
with the class
of 2022



Classroom Libraries
project launches to build
K-8 classroom libraries
to a minimum of
**750-1,500
books**
over the next three years

“Accelerated Reader”
program begins

**BC STEM Innovation
Center** and
**Fremont International
Academy** announced

HEALTHY ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE



**Restorative
conversations**
introduced for
student behavior

Multi-year
**Challenge 5
attendance
program**
launches



**Student
success
centers**
open in all
schools

ACTIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH OUR COMMUNITY

GVSU partnership announced



Grace Health
partnership
adds health
services



**First
Career
Exploration
Fair**

HUMAN CAPITAL STRATEGY

Virtual
Transformational
Teacher Institute
added



Three-year contract with
teachers guarantees
**salary raises
and lump
sum bonuses**
to reconcile previous
step freezes



MILESTONES AT BCPS YEAR **3**

HIGH ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT



Project-based learning implemented at BCCHS and BC STEM

BCCHS career academies expands to include **grades 9–10**

ACTIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH OUR COMMUNITY

First career academies **industry tours and job shadowing** opportunities



Communities in Schools partnership launches



Communities In Schools®



BCCHS career academies designed as **Ford NGL Community**

Attendance Works launches root cause absenteeism study



Attendance Works

GVSU partnership begins and **Battle Creek Regional Outreach Center** opens

GVSU announces six recipients of **full scholarships** to **BCPS graduates**

HEALTHY ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Guidebook for Creating Trauma-Informed Schools is released

491,128 meals

distributed during school closures, through June 30



EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT USE OF RESOURCES



BC STEM opens

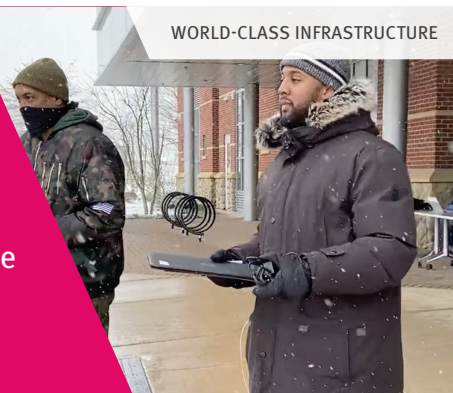
Fremont opens as an **International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme Candidate School**



Primary Years Programme

WORLD-CLASS INFRASTRUCTURE

\$1.5 million investment is made to upgrade technology for students



New district website launches



2,000 Chromebooks distributed to students for remote learning

● ● ● ● MILESTONES AT BCPS LOOKING AHEAD TO YEAR 4

HIGH ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Fremont
to expand to
include grades
pre-K–3



BC STEM
to expand to
include
**grades
6–7**

BCCHS
career
academies
implementation to
expand to include
**grades
9–11**

HEALTHY ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

BCCHS
Bearcat
**Student
Ambassadors**
to launch



BCCHS
students to
experience first
year of
internships

WORLD-CLASS INFRASTRUCTURE



Remote
learning
to be available to
all students



ACTIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH OUR COMMUNITY

Springfield
Middle School
to launch as
**“service
learning”**
school



New
**healthcare
simulation lab**
at BCCHS to open,
the only one of its kind in the region





II. KEY ACTIVITIES & ACHIEVEMENTS

During the third year of the transformation, the district realized a number of successes based on initiatives put in place during years one and two. The district also launched exciting new initiatives to sustain or scale existing efforts. The following section contains brief highlights of district activities and achievements during year three as they relate to the “Six Goals for Greatness.”



II. KEY ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

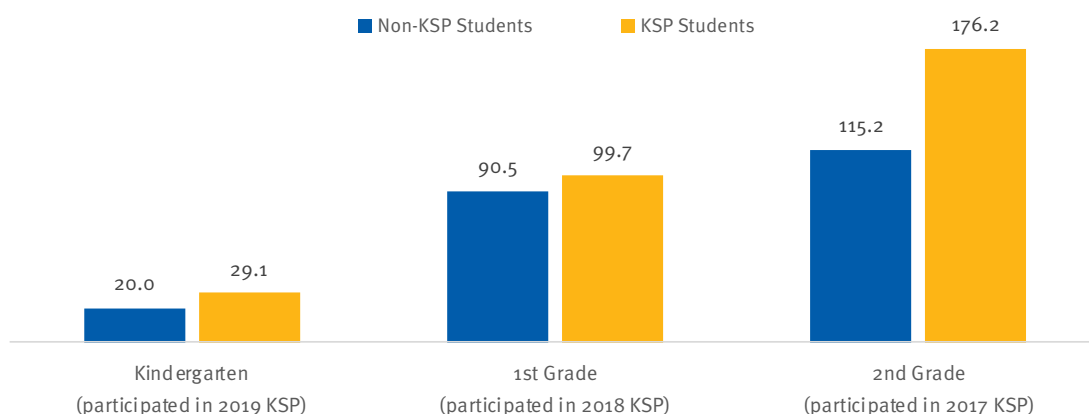
1 HIGH ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT



Students have greater opportunities.

- **BCPS opened two new magnet schools in fall 2019.** Fremont is an academically rigorous magnet school with an International Baccalaureate curriculum, where all students receive instruction in Spanish. BC STEM is a middle school focused on science, math and engineering. In year three, two hundred forty-five students enrolled in these two schools combined. American Institutes for Research (AIR) data showed that these programs continue to generate excitement among families. *(For further detail on these two new schools, see sections [III.3](#) and [III.4](#).)*
- **BCPS implemented new project-based learning (PBL) structures** at BC STEM and Battle Creek Central High School (BCCHS). PBL is a teaching method in which students learn by actively engaging in real-world, personally meaningful, long-term interdisciplinary projects. At BCCHS, 65% of teachers were trained in PBL in the 2019–20 school year. Students completed 659 PBL projects and 32 community members helped evaluate these projects. At BC STEM, students completed five PBL units. *(For further information on PBL at BC STEM, see section [III.3](#).)*
- **The Kindergarten Success Program (KSP) continued to provide long-term positive academic growth.** For the third consecutive year, students who attended KSP — a five-week, full-time, free summer program hosted by BCPS — continued to outpace their peers academically and show lower absenteeism than students who did not participate in KSP. *(For further detail on KSP, including data on absenteeism, see section [III.4](#).)*

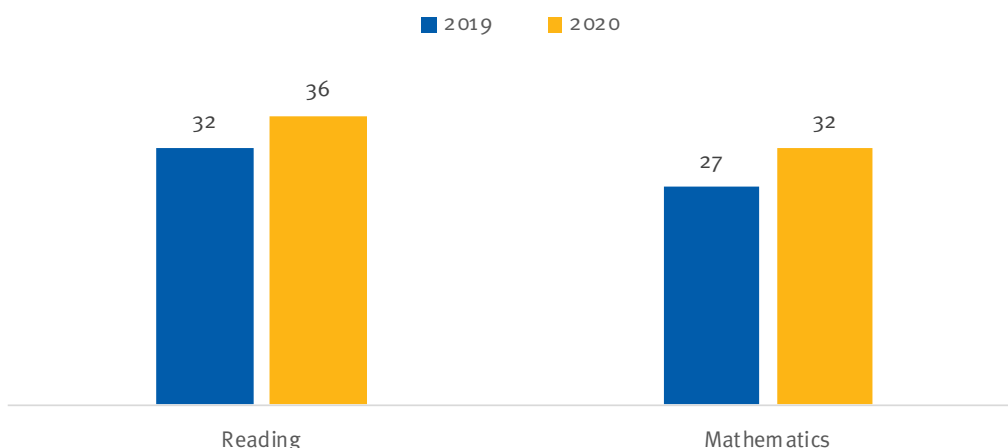
FALL 2019 DIBELS COMPOSITE SCORES FOR KSP VS. NON-KSP STUDENTS



Student outcomes are improving.

- **The average BCPS K–8 student improved performance in both reading and mathematics** in the Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP) over the past year. In winter 2020, the mean K-8 student percentile ranks rose to the 36th percentile in reading and the 32nd percentile in mathematics, up from 32 in reading and 27 in mathematics one year earlier.

MEAN PERCENTILE RANK IMPROVEMENTS ON K-8 NWEA MAP FROM WINTER 2019–20



- **Ann J. Kellogg Elementary School (Ann J. Kellogg) makes significant strides.** After being listed as a “priority school” due to performance by the state of Michigan for five years, in year three, Ann J. Kellogg was assigned a higher category (a “Comprehension Support and Improvement School”), indicating significant improvement. *(Read about Ann J. Kellogg’s transformation process in section III.4.)*

Families are more engaged in academics.

- **As part of its continued focus on literacy, the district engaged 111 parents in six family literacy nights** during the 2019–20 school year. (Additional literacy nights were planned but were canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic). Literacy nights at BCPS are unique, structured intentionally to showcase student work, engage families through activities at various literacy stations, and provide free books and reading tips to support literacy progress at home. Literacy nights are often held on the same night as parent conferences and offer free dinner to increase parent participation.

Teachers and staff receive better support in the classroom and on curriculum.

- **The district offered more literacy support in the classroom than ever before** with 37 tutors in its K–2 classrooms and six certified reading specialists in every elementary building to support focused literacy instruction.



~130

K–3 students were assigned a buddy through the reading buddies literacy mentoring program

Around 130 K–3 students were assigned a buddy through the reading buddies literacy mentoring program, partnering with 82 volunteer adults (including 40 Battle Creek Fire Department firefighters). Data from October 2019 to January 2020 demonstrates that 68% of students who participated weekly in the reading buddies program achieved growth.

- **Third grade pilot project showed promising early results.** With funding from WKKF, BCPS launched a project with Western Michigan University called the PREP project, led by Dr. Jianping Shen. The program instituted new curriculum and teaching practices as a pilot for third grade students at Ann J. Kellogg. Preliminary data from February 2020 showed exciting results. The percentage of children who met the expected amount of growth in math between fall and winter 2018–19 and 2019–20 at Ann J. Kellogg rose 17 percentage points, from 44% to 61%, compared to the BCPS average, where the percentage of children who met the expected amount of growth rose only 10 percentage points (from 44% to 54%).





II. KEY ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

2 HEALTHY ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE



Students are receiving more social and emotional support.

- **BCPS continued its growth in rolling out trauma-informed practices.** Work is underway for BCPS to become a more positive school environment by implementing essential practices like restorative justice, alternatives to suspension and a strong social-emotional curriculum. BCPS implemented more restorative practices and maintained strong behavioral supports across the district, with 21 Bearcat coaches (with one new coach joining the team in the 2020–21 school year), one resilience coach and student success centers — physical spaces outside the classroom for behavior intervention — in every building. (*Changing school climate is further discussed in section III.5.*)
- **The Bearcat Health Team (Bearcat Health) continued to provide wraparound services.** Bearcat Health meets monthly, bringing together health, human services and law enforcement leaders from across the community to solve student and family challenges. Bearcat Health consists of three separate cross-sector subgroups: a crisis team focused on developing relationships with community partners to enable more effective transitions to community treatment providers; a community child fusion team focused on cases where parents have refused services for their children; and a chronically absent subgroup focused on addressing chronic absenteeism, particularly among elementary students. During the 2019–20 school year, the team has provided wraparound services, including mental health services and in-home interventions, for more than 101 high-needs students. Fifty-one of these students are receiving mental health services and continued receiving those throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Link Crew continued helping freshmen start high school strong.** Link Crew's student-led high school transition program helped 66 student leaders lead the way for 277 freshmen at BCCHS, improving peer-to-peer connections in the 2019–20 school year.

Families experience more engagement and outreach.

- **New partnerships and staff positions were added to support family engagement.** BCPS added a new position this year, a family and community engagement coordinator, who plays a significant role in advocating for families. BCPS hosted more than 80 family engagement events, in partnership with Communities in Schools (CIS), 21st Century, Parent University and other school-based collaborations.

Teachers and staff receive more support and training.

- **BCPS reached a major milestone by distributing its Guidebook for Creating Trauma-Informed Schools to staff in year three of the transformation to inform disciplinary practices.** (*For further detail on trauma-informed practices, see section III.5.*)



62% OF TEACHERS
agreed or strongly agreed
that the student success
centers were making a
positive change

- **In the 2019–20 school year, 62% of BCPS teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they've received adequate training on effective practices for dealing with trauma.** Additionally, 47% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they have the resources to support students who have had traumatic experiences. School staff reported some perceived improvements in student behavior and discipline, and the associated policies and practices.
- **Student success centers continued to boost the use of trauma-informed practices.** Student success centers are a restorative practice alternative to student discipline. In the 2019–20 school year, 61% of teachers either agreed or strongly agreed that the student success centers were making a positive change in their school, according to AIR data.



Administrators are becoming more effective.

- **Use of restorative conversations increased.** In year three, restorative conversations were used 1,163 times and are having positive effects, according to district data. With staff members across the district relying more on restorative conversations, BCPS saw a notable decrease in detentions between fall 2018 and fall 2019 (from 1,091 detentions in 2018 to 370 in 2019).
- **BCCHS continued to implement changes to respond to school climate.** The district has implemented several changes to improve school climate, including changing the lunchroom structure from two rooms to three, which has successfully reduced lunchtime disciplinary incidents.



II. KEY ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

3 HUMAN CAPITAL STRATEGY



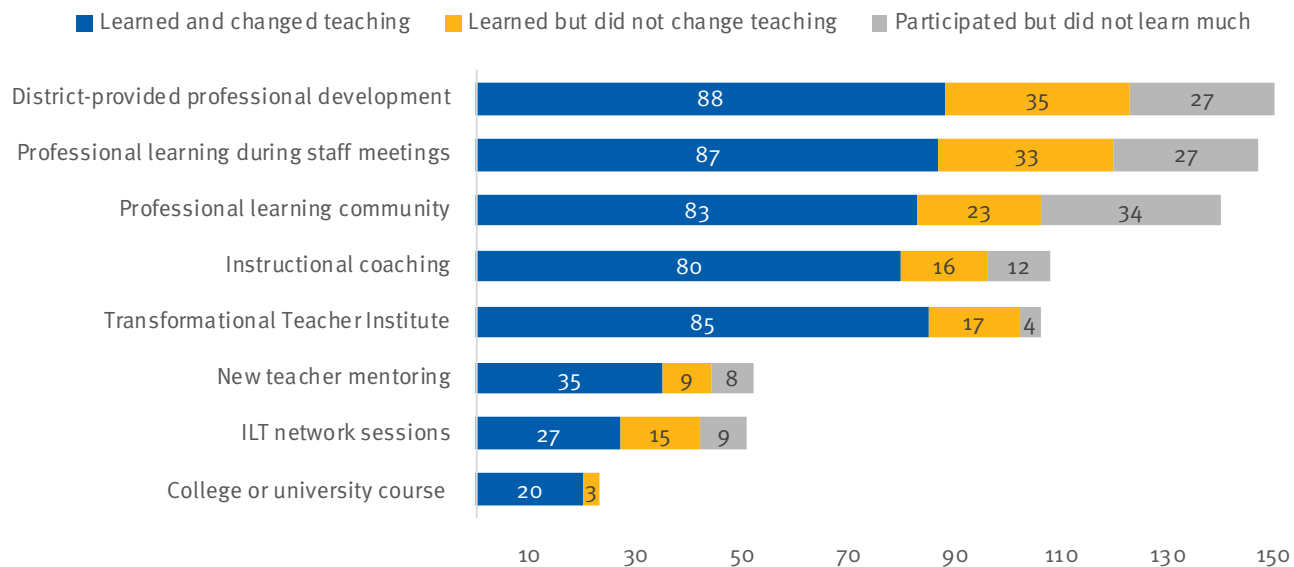
Teacher and staff turnover is improving.

- **Teacher turnover remains a challenge, but is improving.** Overall teacher turnover at BCPS was approximately 21% in the 2019–20 school year, compared with 19% for the state of Michigan overall and 24% in urban Michigan districts (based on 2018–19 data). The majority of teachers (86%) surveyed by AIR in year three reported that they are proud to work for BCPS, an improvement of 5% from the previous school year. *(For further information on teacher turnover, see section III.6.)*
- **Financial incentives help teachers decide to stay at BCPS.** According to 2019–20 AIR data, 83% of BCPS teachers reported that one of the financial incentives — such as performance bonuses, housing incentives or tuition reimbursements — would influence whether they stayed at BCPS, an increase of 7% from 2018–19. The retention bonus for effective teachers remains the most popular financial incentive, with 80% of teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing that the bonus influences whether or not they stay in the district. As of June 2020, 229 BCPS teachers had taken advantage of the bonus.

Teachers and staff benefit more from professional development.

- **BCPS continues investment in professional development, with positive feedback from teachers.** In the 2019–20 school year, BCPS provided 285 hours of mandatory district-provided professional development (DPPD) training to teachers. Eighty-eight percent of teachers participating in DPPD reported to AIR that they learned and changed their teaching as a result. In addition to DPPD, BCPS also offers several other professional development opportunities to staff:
 - **Transformational Teacher Institute (TTI):** BCPS introduced the TTI in the first year of the transformation, which offers seven “institutes” that cover different areas of interest for teachers, each with eight professional development sessions. In the program’s third year, BCPS offered 142 in-person TTI sessions and 56 virtual sessions, enabling the district to offer 503 hours of TTI opportunities in the 2019–20 school year. Fifty-five percent of surveyed teachers reported that they participated in at least one TTI activity and teachers generally found the sessions beneficial. Of the teachers who attended, 80% reported they learned and changed their teaching practices as a result.
 - **Professional Learning Communities (PLCs):** PLCs are embedded in the organizational structure at BCPS as the primary opportunity for teachers to collaborate with colleagues and about three-quarters of surveyed teachers reported participating. Of these teachers, 76% learned from it and 59% reported that they changed their teaching as a result (an increase from 45% in 2018–19).
 - At Fremont specifically, teachers were trained in the **International Baccalaureate** model with more than 25 hours of professional development and shared collaboration time as part of the school’s certification process for this distinguished label.

NUMBER OF TEACHERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVENESS IN 2019–20



Administrators are receiving more support.

- Leadership support is increasing, although it is still identified as a growth area.** Supports for BCPS principals in 2019–20 included monthly learning sessions with the superintendent, peer collaboration opportunities through the principal network, district transformation coaches (DTCs), GVSU mentors, meetings with directors and conference attendance. Three-quarters of principals reported that they were appreciative of the additional support that they received from DTCs and praised them as “thought partners.”





II. KEY ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

4 EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT USE OF RESOURCES



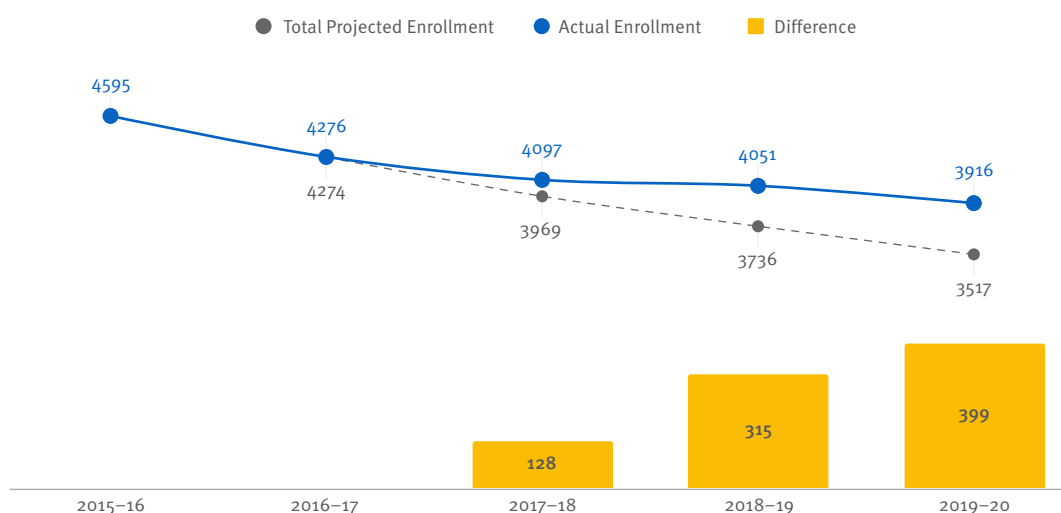
Students will have access to more resources.

- **Marshall Plan for Talent (MPT) funds provided an additional financial boost.** In June 2019, BCPS, with support from GVSU, was awarded \$842,858 in grant funds from the state of Michigan through MPT, which aims to fund educational initiatives that will help students explore in-demand careers and address the skills gap in Michigan. *(Read about BCPS and GVSU's application process and plans for funding in section III.3.)*

Teachers and staff will have access to more resources.

- **Over the past three years, the district has seen an upward trend of revenue exceeding expenditure for the first time in over a decade due to diligent budgeting and effective management.** BCPS has also grown its fund balance over the past three years.
- **Stronger enrollment numbers are leading to increased state funding, enabling the district to retain top teachers by raising salaries.** Based on projections made in an enrollment study conducted prior to the WKKF investment, BCPS enrolled 399 more students this school year than originally projected, which amounts to \$3,236,289 more than expected in state funding. This continues the positive enrollment trends which began two years ago.

PROJECTED ENROLLMENT VS. ACTUAL ENROLLMENT (FULL-TIME STUDENTS ONLY)





399

more students enrolled
than originally projected

- At Fremont, **128 of the 197 students were new to the district** and 22 non-resident students enrolled in Fremont through schools of choice. At BC STEM, four of the 48 students were new to the district. *(Read about new programs in section III.3.)*
- At BCCHS, 18 non-resident students enrolled through schools of choice, a positive sign for the school's new career academies program.
- Burrell Communication's brand tracker results found across-the-board improvements in community members' interest in enrolling in BCPS: 21% more people this year than in 2019 said that BCPS is "exactly or very close to what I want for my child."





II. KEY ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

5 ACTIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH OUR COMMUNITY



Students receive more support and care.

- **The district began a new partnership with CIS in fall 2019.** CIS is a national organization that trains and employs a school-based site coordinator to deliver needed resources so that students can focus on learning. CIS brings community resources like food assistance and mental health and medical services into schools to help remove barriers for vulnerable students, improving attendance and academic achievement. *(For further details on the CIS partnership, see section III.1 and III.3.)*
- **Bearcat Health engages community partners from the city, county and law enforcement community** for monthly meetings to ensure Battle Creek families and children have what they need to be successful.
- **The district partnered with Grace Health to continue offering student health centers** in secondary buildings, and with the Calhoun County Health Department to ensure that every elementary school has a full-time school nurse. Grace Health also offers mobile dentist visits to each elementary and middle school twice a year, and can provide basic six-month checkups and cleanings.
- **Attendance Works partnership provided data on absenteeism.** Chronic absenteeism at BCPS remains high, with about 34% of students still categorized as chronically absent (missing 10% or more of school days). In spring 2017, BCPS partnered with Attendance Works to gather data on chronic absenteeism, funded by WKKF. This year, through parent focus groups and school data, Attendance Works sought to produce a list of root causes of absenteeism and solutions to increase school attendance. Two hundred eighteen parents and caregivers and 208 students participated in reflection groups or took surveys to help BCPS understand chronic absenteeism.

Families are receiving more assistance.

- **United Way Disaster Relief Fund helped support BCPS families, especially during the pandemic.** The fund received an additional \$850,000 from key donors to apply to COVID-19 related support in the Battle Creek area, with significant funding from WKKF. The fund provided essential support to BCPS families during school closures in the spring, including food, housing, financial assistance, childcare and other basic needs.

Teachers and staff have more opportunities.

- **In a major milestone for the district, its partnership with GVSU launched in year three.** This year, GVSU and BCPS collaborated to provide a number of exciting new programs, including college counseling services at the Battle Creek Regional Outreach Center for 398 BCPS students, career pathways for all high school students, professional development and mentorship opportunities for 67 BCPS teachers, support building a pipeline of future

II. KEY ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS: OUR PARTNERSHIPS WITH OUR COMMUNITY



teachers through the BCPS mentorship program (with five of six student-teachers receiving offers to stay on full time), and two summer programs for students, with 19 participants in STEPS (Science, Technology and Engineering Preview Summer Camp) and 27 students participants in SHAPE (Summer Health Activities and Professions Explorations). *(For further detail on the partnership with GVSU, see section III.3.)*

- **The district is continuing to partner with the city of Battle Creek to offer housing incentives** — including matching funds on down payments or remodeling — in support of teacher recruitment and retention incentives. As of June 2020, 28 teachers and staff had taken advantage of the housing incentive through purchasing homes, renting or renovations.

The community is more impressed and engaged.

- **The district's reputation within the community continues to improve.** The Burrell brand tracker survey found favorability toward the district is high (61%). The brand tracker also found high levels of awareness (74%) of BCPS communications among city parents whose children attend and don't attend BCPS. All city parents showed an increase of 11% in favorability toward BCPS from last year's survey.

PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS WITH FAVORABLE OPINION OF BCPS*



**Based on Burrell brand tracker survey including parents in Battle Creek both with children attending BCPS and children attending other districts.*

- **Career academies implementation continues to attract high community participation.** In partnership with Ford Next Generation Learning (Ford NGL) — an organization designed by the Ford Motor Company Fund to mobilize communities around preparing young people to graduate from high school ready for college, careers and life — the district continued implementing the career academies program that it launched in 2018 at BCCHS. *(For further detail on community involvement in career academies, see section III.3.)*



II. KEY ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

6 WORLD CLASS INFRASTRUCTURE



Students have better resources.

- **Improvements to infrastructure support school safety.** BCPS received a grant of \$560,150 from the Competitive School Safety Grant Program to improve school safety across all buildings. These repairs will primarily focus on renovating new vestibules for an additional layer of security at Ann J. Kellogg, Dudley STEM Elementary, Post-Franklin Elementary (Post-Franklin), LaMora Park Elementary and Northwestern Middle School (Northwestern), as well as adding protective film in all buildings and upgrading public announcement systems in six buildings.
- **K–12 building infrastructure renovations are underway.** In total, BCPS has \$3,876,960 planned in renovations ahead of the 2020–21 school year. Renovations include kitchen remodels, equipment purchases, auditorium equipment and building enhancements.
- **Additional investments are being made in classroom technology.** In the 2019–20 school year, BCPS significantly improved classroom technology at both Northwestern and Springfield Middle School (Springfield), installing new modern projectors, in-ceiling speakers and equipment so that teachers can provide audio and video content to students. BCPS also deployed more than 500 phones to every classroom across the district.

Students have greater opportunities.

- **State-of-the-art technology is in use at BC STEM.** Even before COVID-19, BC STEM had 1:1 Chromebook distribution, with Chromebooks fully integrated into their education programs. Students were already using Google Classroom, giving them a leg up in distance learning. The school also has special technology including 3-D printers.
- **The district made plans to open a new health care simulation lab at BCCHS.** The new lab will serve as a state-approved training site for both the certified nurse assistant (CNA) and emergency medical technician (EMT) programs and will include cutting edge equipment and technology. Planned with GVSU, WKKF and Kellogg Community College, the lab will open for the 2020–21 school year. *(For further details, see section III.3.)*





**\$1.5
MILLION**

**in new technology devices
to close the digital divide**

Students and families are better connected.

- **Technology investments provide tools for connectivity.** During school closures due to COVID-19 in spring 2020, BCPS invested an additional \$293,000 in order to purchase 300 additional hotspots and 1,000 Google Chromebooks to help families engage in distance learning. These device purchases were also used to ensure that teachers could lead distance learning with their students. In June 2020, BCPS also announced it would invest an additional \$1.5 million in new technology devices to close the digital divide. *(For further detail on technology support during COVID-19 closures, see section III.2.)*
- **Adoption of new software simplified remote learning.** In August 2019, BCPS rolled out a product called Clever, which serves as a single login system to consolidate the district's online learning platforms. This tool proved to be a key resource for remote learning during COVID-19 related school closures. BCPS also expanded capacity on platforms like Seesaw, FlipGrid, Zoom, Google Classroom, Google Voice and Google Docs to facilitate distance learning.
- **BCPS launched a new and improved website, which has already been praised by parents and the community.** The new website went live in December 2019 and features pages for each school and program with detailed information, a regularly-updated events calendar and news page where the district can provide regular updates. Unique page views have increased by 35% compared to the previous website, signifying that more people are viewing the updated website.





III. LESSONS LEARNED

III. LESSONS LEARNED #1: TRUST AND COMMUNICATION

In times of crisis, trust and communication become even more important.

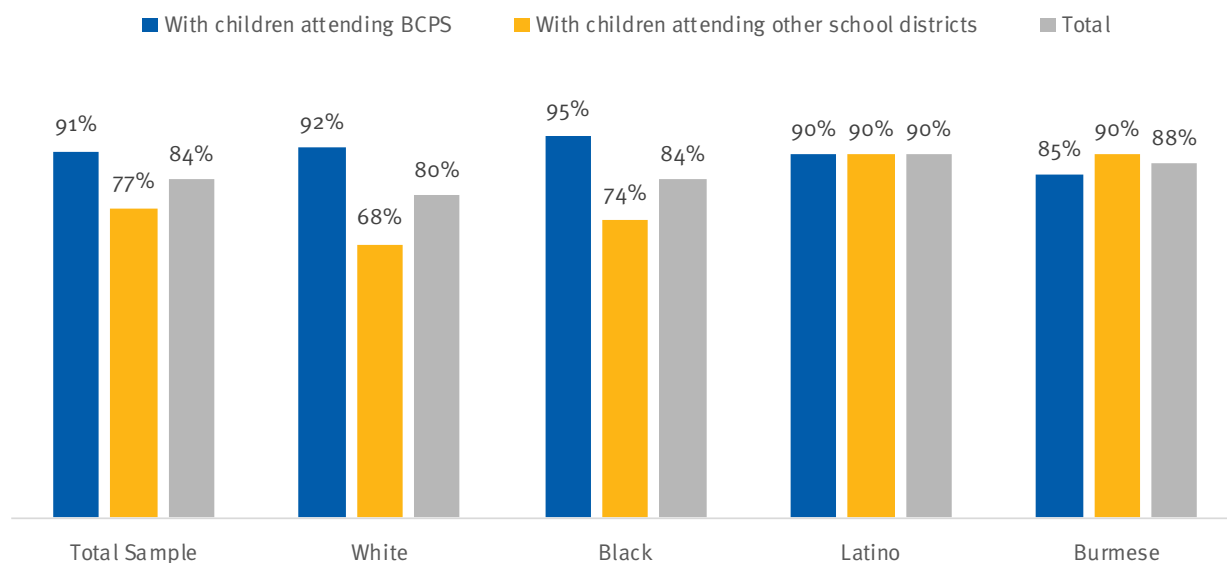


The district's transformation process made it uniquely able to serve children and families during COVID-19.

Beginning in March, COVID-19 began to take a devastating toll on the greater Battle Creek community. Students faced multiple burdens — many experienced economic stress, social isolation, and the loss of family members or friends. Some also had to care for younger siblings due to lack of childcare. For children in traumatic home environments, the school closure deprived them of a safe haven.

[▶ WATCH VIDEO](#)

PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS WHO RECALLED SEEING COVID-19 COMMUNICATIONS FROM BCPS*



*based on Burrell brand tracker survey of parents in Battle Creek.

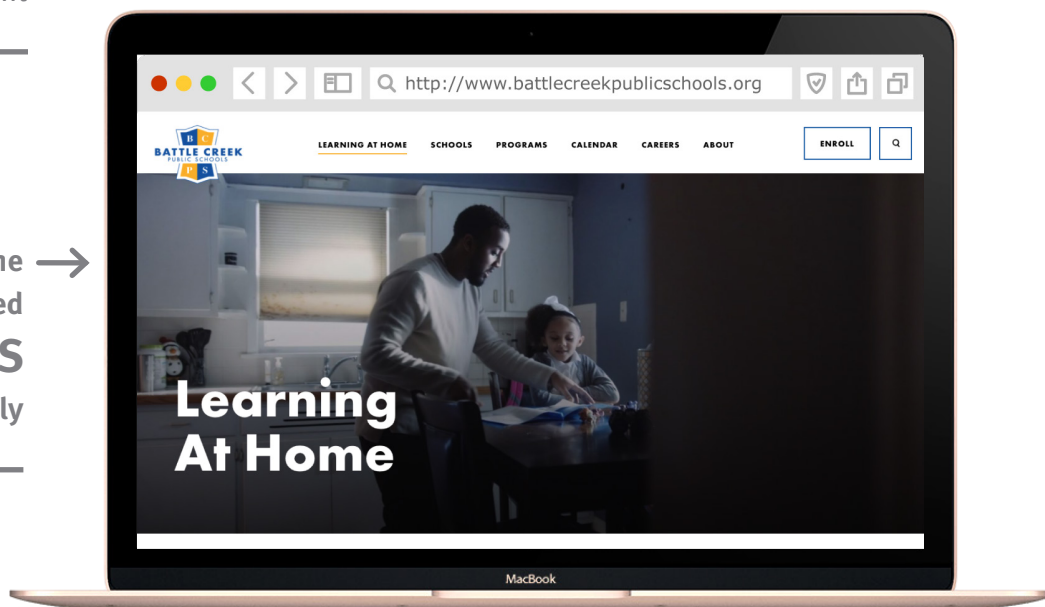
“

Our family feels supported and cared for. I am thankful that communications have come in regular mail, instead of only being electronic, and I'm glad to see communications in multiple languages. — Fremont parent

By investing in communications in the early years of the transformation, BCPS was able to quickly and adeptly find ways to interact remotely with children and families.

In December 2019, BCPS launched its new website, which was a useful tool to communicate with students and families during the school closures. The website blog was regularly updated, with 30 posts between March and July 2020 providing clear information about meal pickups, at-home learning, state health guidance and more. BCPS also created a specific page on the site devoted to remote learning, featuring grade-specific information for students and families about online learning platforms and resources that were mailed home, as well as 37 videos of staff reading to students.

The Learning At Home →
page was viewed
15,000 TIMES
between April and July



The district's communications regarding COVID-19 enhanced opinions of BCPS for 68% of those surveyed, and 57% of respondents were more strongly considering enrolling their children in BCPS as a result of COVID-19 communications, according to the Burrell brand tracker.

“

We have adopted a mantra of seeing every child by name, need and strength, so when a crisis came up, we were ready to respond and coordinate resources. — Kimberly Carter, Superintendent

The district has made a clear commitment to caring for each student, which enabled it to find unique ways to provide wraparound services during the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic proved that, outside of providing an education, BCPS is seen as a trusted source of care and support for families. Superintendent Carter's priority at the start of the pandemic was meeting the basic needs of students. This isn't a new mode of thinking for the district; rather, it has been a core component of the transformation's process.

During school closures, BCPS teachers and staff made an intentional effort to have consistent communications with students, reaching out twice per week and working hard to ensure that they had up-to-date contact information for families. Lalro Mawi, a rising junior at BCCHS, said, "I really do think that the district is doing so much for the students, the parents, the families and the staff. Being a Bearcat is being a part of this family that actually really cares for you. They're like a second family to students."



CIS distributed

\$18,203

worth of supplies including
food, home cleaning products,
clothing and school supplies
to BCPS families

Prior to COVID-19, the district had established strong relationships with key partners in the community which enhanced its ability to coordinate resources for student well-being.

For example, CIS, a new partnership as of the 2019–20 school year, distributed supplies including food, home cleaning products, clothing, school supplies and 3,913 books to BCPS families, as well as conducted weekly social-emotional check-ins for 227 students and wellness checks for 647 BCPS families.

Grace Health also remained open in its Michigan Avenue location so students who sought health care through school health centers could still access care. BCPS also continued its relationship with the counseling service Summit Pointe, enabling 51 students to continue receiving mental health support throughout the pandemic. Both partners were open to intake appointments with new children and families during this time.



III. LESSONS LEARNED #2: EQUITY ISSUES

Address equity issues first.



67%

of families did not
have active wireless
internet service at
home in April 2020

The transformation of BCPS is at its core an equity-driven effort to ensure positive outcomes for all students, regardless of race, income, background, identity or ability. Racial equity has been a guiding principle of the transformation process since its inception, although there still remains a great deal of work to do.

The COVID-19 pandemic, according to district leaders, is likely to exacerbate inequity because some students and families will be impacted more than others.

One of the clearest sources of inequity is the “digital divide,” the fact that when learning supports and school resources can only be provided remotely, children and families without laptops, internet access or language access are at an alarming disadvantage. The digital divide exacerbates disparate outcomes for lower-income families, Black families, immigrant families and other families of color.

In addition to a lack of access to devices, a number of district students also lacked a home internet connection. In Battle Creek, Comcast is the primary internet provider. Mitch Fowler, Administrative Director of Student Data and Innovation, explained that the district tried to get the word out about Comcast Essentials, a program that allowed free Wi-Fi for 90 days. But there are barriers: families needed a credit card to sign up, the system utilized a “free trial” model where families would begin to be charged after 90 days, and the program did not allow anyone holding previous debt with Comcast to subscribe.

The district moved quickly to invest in technology in order to enable students to continue their education and mitigate equity issues.

The district’s buy-in from the board and high levels of internal trust allowed it to move quickly to invest in technology and begin implementing a remote learning plan that took advantage of the opportunities of digital learning, while written packets were supplied to all pre-K–8 students as well. The district was able to use funds from the WKKF grant to purchase an additional 300 wireless hotspots and 1,000 Chromebooks to ensure each BCPS family had access to a device for remote learning. BCPS then mobilized a team to distribute devices during pickup hours. Unlike a number of school districts that charge families for the warranty programs or require a device deposit, BCPS made an additional investment in robust warranty and replacement protection services for all devices to ensure students would not miss out on learning because of the inability to pay even a small fee or deposit.

From the beginning of the transformation, BCPS also has made improvements in software and technology services, setting itself up for an improved response during the pandemic. In the 2019–20 school year, the district had begun to address challenges with digital learning that teachers were seeing in the classroom. For example, in 2019, the district implemented a new program called Clever to allow for single sign-on access to all the different learning platforms BCPS takes advantage of. The fact that many students and families were already familiar with this program helped ease the transition to remote learning.

“

I'm concerned that this closure is just going further drive a wedge between those who have access and those who do not.

— Mitch Fowler, *Student Data and Innovation*

One of the clearest representations of BCPS's equity-centered approach to COVID-19 is in its meal distribution program.

According to state data, 72% of BCPS students rely on its free or reduced lunch program. With the recognition that these students would be at serious nutritional risk without access to these meals, BCPS made this a top priority in its response.

Within days of the school closures announcement, BCPS implemented a robust food distribution program, providing meal kits three days a week (each with enough to last until the following pickup day) with breakfast and lunches at 18 sites throughout the city of Battle Creek. Moreover, free meals were distributed not only to enrolled students but to all residents with children, which the district took care to note publicly, engendering additional positive community regard. BCPS messaging also made it clear that children could pick up food in the company of a non-family adult or older sibling if needed, in recognition that not all families would be able to accompany children to pick-up sites. CIS also stepped in to coordinate delivery to families who couldn't get to a pickup site. The distribution program will continue through August 12 (and likely beyond).

“

Giving out food shows that BCPS supports us and really cares.

— Shayla Artis, *BCCHS '22*

By responding to the Movement for Black Lives, the district helped open up deeper conversations about racial equity.

The summer of 2020 brought with it weeks of protest following the killing of three Black Americans: George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor. In June, Superintendent Carter released a [statement](#) that demonstrated how the greater reckoning with racial injustice is reflective of the work being carried out at BCPS. “In this time, many people are wishing and hoping for things to go back to normal. I don't want to go back to a normal where not all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential. At BCPS, we are committed to creating a new normal,” she said.

“Lifting racial equity and healing is a cornerstone of our work at WKKF, and with the movement that is happening, we are rethinking what education should look like,” said Arelis Diaz, director of the office of the president at WKKF. “Just as we're considering COVID-19's implications for the school system, we will be partnering with the district to ensure that racial equity and social justice are at the forefront in the classroom and in the curriculum.”



BCPS distributed
491,128 meals
to families in
the community



III. LESSONS LEARNED #3: NEW PROGRAMS AND PARTNERSHIPS

New programs drive growth and build trust.



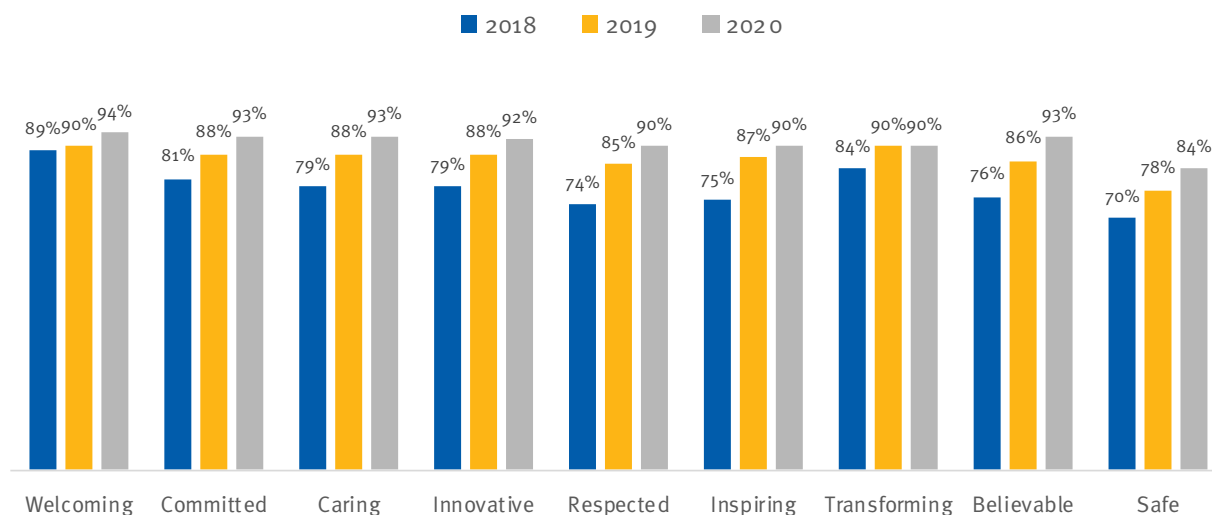
I wouldn't send my kids anywhere else. Both of my kids are excelling.

— Regina Beattie,
Fremont/BC STEM parent

The launch of new programs and partnerships marked visible, tangible progress in the transformation.

Proactive and intensive communications efforts were helpful to build faith in the transformation process during the early stages of the process, but the biggest shifts in public perception were achieved thanks to the launches of three highly visible and easily explained programs: two completely new schools (Fremont and BC STEM) and a redesigned BCCHS academic experience (career academies). According to Burrell brand tracker data, survey respondents were 17 percentage points more likely in 2020 than in 2018 to call the BCPS transformation and communications “believable,” and 23 percentage points more likely to describe BCPS as “exactly” or “very close” to what they ideally want for their children, based on improvements they have seen or heard about.

WHAT DO BATTLE CREEK PARENTS THINK OF BCPS?*



*based on Burrell brand tracker survey of parents in Battle Creek.

BC STEM has been a standout addition to the district because of its project-based learning curriculum and investment in top technology.

“There is no curriculum like ours being taught in any middle school, anywhere. I can guarantee that,” said BC STEM teacher Jamesia Nordman. BC STEM teachers partnered with three GVSU staff workers to develop an advanced, integrated PBL

“

**The kids love BC STEM.
Students with special
learning or language
needs who can feel left
out of traditional settings
particularly shine.**

— *Jamesia Nordman,
BC STEM teacher*

**NUMBER OF STUDENTS
SUPPORTED BY COMMUNITIES IN
SCHOOLS IN 2019–20 (THE FIRST
YEAR OF THE PROGRAM)**

Attendance

145



Behavior

44



Course
Progression

57



curriculum for the school. The curriculum marries learning with interactive projects. For example, in the unit on bridges, in English, students looked at how writers built bridges between people, and focused on building empathy for each other and for people of different races. In science, students looked at the force and motion of bridges, and modeled bridges as structures, which they pitched to “Shark Tank”-style judges from the community.

Partnerships with experts helped BCPS leaders avoid “reinventing the wheel.”

Partnerships with CIS, GVSU and Ford NGL enabled BCPS to use proven, evidence-based programming rather than creating something new from scratch, and freed up BCPS leaders to focus on academic achievement and classroom rigor. In 2019–20, the family advocates model that was used in years one and two to build family involvement in schools transitioned to the more rigorous CIS model, which requires less oversight and co-designing from BCPS leaders. Highly-trained CIS site coordinators supported 246 K–12 students in the 2019–20 school year.

BCPS also built a deep partnership with GVSU across an extremely broad range of initiatives, with GVSU becoming fully-entrenched in the Battle Creek community. In addition to its two summer camps and teacher mentorship programs, GVSU also opened a Regional Outreach Center in the city to provide college counseling services to BCPS students as well as to the wider Battle Creek community. The outreach center has four staff members who provide support both to students and community members by offering classes and one-on-one advising in areas including support with the college admission process, essay writing, financial aid, interviewing and career exploration. In the 2019–20 school year, the outreach center supported 398 BCPS students.

The district also leveraged GVSU and its expertise to apply for a state of Michigan MPT grant to help students explore in-demand careers and address the skills gap in Michigan. GVSU and BCPS pulled together a consortium of more than 25 community leaders for the application. Out of 30 applications, BCPS was one of 13 groups to be awarded the competitive \$842,858 grant in June 2019.

The MPT grant helped fund the construction of a new health care simulation lab at BCPS, the only one of its kind in the region, scheduled to open in the 2020–21 school year. BCPS and GVSU, with WKKF and Kellogg Community College, produced plans for a state-approved training site for both the CNA and EMT program, with cutting-edge equipment, technology, and supplies such as hospital beds, stretchers, tables, lifts and “practice patients” in the form of fully-articulated, high-fidelity medical dummies. BCPS students above the age of 18 can be fully certified through the lab — a “phenomenal opportunity” that allows them to get certified in their own high school and apply for jobs when they graduate, according to GVSU Vice Provost for Health Jean Nagelkerk.

“

**I noticed first off our
improved ability to
community with families.**

— *Freddie McGee,
Family & Community
Engagement Coordinator*



Key Programs & Partnerships



Fremont International Academy: An academically rigorous magnet school for students (currently pre-K–3, with a grade to be added per year up to grade five). The school’s curriculum and design are based on the International Baccalaureate model. All students receive Spanish language instruction and the student experience is focused on experiential learning, problem-solving skills and global ideas that help students build curiosity and expand their horizons.

Battle Creek STEM Innovation Center: A science, technology, engineering and math-focused middle school where students experience hands-on, project-based learning to help them develop engineering mindsets, design thinking and research skills. Students make weekly visits to the Outdoor Education Center, gaining experience in research, collaboration and teamwork and spending time outdoors and exploring new settings.

Communities In Schools: A model that utilizes school-based site coordinators and service referrals to align and deliver needed resources so students can focus on learning. CIS brings community resources like food assistance and mental health and medical services into schools to help remove barriers for vulnerable students, improving attendance and academic achievement.



Battle Creek Central High School Career Academies: A model of small learning communities within the high school where all students are part of an academy and receive instruction that is tailored to their interests while developing the skills they need to excel in school, the workforce and beyond. After Freshman Academy in ninth grade, students declare a career-focused pathway and begin interest-based and experiential learning in that pathway.

Battle Creek Career Outreach Center: A hub for walk-in and virtual advising appointments, information and resources on higher education, including college advising, career exploration, financial aid information and help filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

GVSU Curriculum Design Partnership: A partnership where the GVSU College of Liberal Arts and Sciences’ Regional Math and Science Center and the College of Education helped co-design a curriculum for BC STEM to help encourage middle schoolers to pursue careers in science and engineering.

GVSU Teacher Training and Mentorship: Professional development to enhance teaching and classroom management techniques that boost students’ critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. GVSU College of Education students are placed at BCPS to complete their student teaching semester to help young educators get a strong start in the district and provide intensive, customized support for first-year teachers to help them thrive and stay with the district.

GVSU Summer Programs for Students: Teaching education camps for GVSU students to work with BCPS students, explore the teaching career path and make an impact. The camps include SHAPE, where middle school students receive engaging, hands-on exposure to health professions like physical therapy, lab science and sports medicine, and STEPS, a hands-on and high-tech engineering camp where seventh grade girls build and fly radio-controlled model airplanes.

GVSU Full Scholarship Program: Scholarship opportunity for high school seniors interested in pursuing education, nursing or health professions at GVSU. The scholarship program is part of a \$15.5 million grant awarded in 2019 to GVSU by WKCF to partner with BCPS.



“

The principal has really been going through a trial and error process to try to find what works. — Jaime Fales, Fremont parent

After launching new programs, BCPS is undertaking efforts to ensure they are implemented in an equitable manner that delivers long-term success.

BCPS is participating in ongoing evaluation of its new programs, understanding that examination and iteration are essential to the process of successfully refining these programs to meet the needs of BCPS students and the community.

Some challenges have been logistical. For example, the district identified that, due to Fremont's location, the lack of school transportation was causing financial inequities in terms of which families could take advantage of the school. Busing was added as a service during the 2019–20 school year.

In the process of transitioning to the career academies system, BCCHS administrators also discovered some equity concerns around the self-selection process based on the way that race, gender and ability socialization and unconscious biases can impact the career paths that seem attainable or are encouraged for students.

“One of our big focal points this year was looking at how we ourselves are encouraging kids to choose pathways based on our own internal biases. We are looking and re-examining our biases about which students belong in which careers to ensure we don't cause inequity in outcomes for students,” said Freshman Academy Principal Tyler Gilland.

All of these challenges and more are in active consideration by BCPS, as district leaders and educators continue to view the transformation as an interactive equity-driven process.



III. LESSONS LEARNED #4: INVESTMENT IN EARLY EDUCATION

Early education is pivotal to transformation.



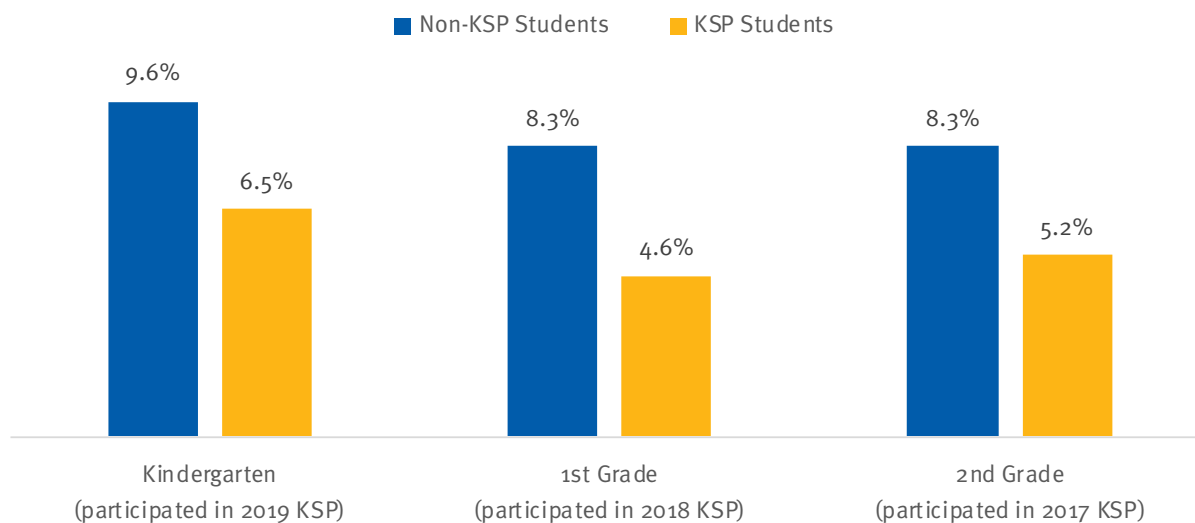
Kindergarten readiness
has increased from about 15%
in 2013–14 to almost
40%
in 2019–20

The transformation of BCPS has made a significant difference in the lives of its youngest students, who have experienced new programming, curriculum, supports and resources as part of their educational foundation from day one.

For the third consecutive year, students who attended KSP — a free BCPS summer program for students entering kindergarten — tested higher than students who did not attend and had higher attendance rates in kindergarten, first and second grade. As evidence of the longer-term impact, second-graders who attended the summer program in 2017 scored a DIBELS composite score of 176.2, compared with the 115.2 score for students who did not attend. (The DIBELS composite score provides an estimate for reading proficiency, with the benchmark goal for second-graders as 141 at the beginning of the year.) The same second-graders had an absenteeism rate of 5.2% compared to the 8.3% for children who did not attend.

One of the reasons KSP is successful is that it provides the district six weeks to identify children who are not kindergarten-ready and provide resources for them. This six-week head start can prove critical for children and is more effective than identifying any special needs on the first day of school. Battle Creek is one of the few communities nationwide to have shown a steady increase in child readiness for school over the past seven years.

ABSENTEEISM RATES AMONG KSP AND NON-KSP STUDENTS, FALL 2019



“

Having worked KSP all three summers, seeing the kids as they enter kindergarten shows how well it bridges the gap. It's a great program.

— Ashley Childs,
Fremont teacher

“

Now when parents come in, they tell me that they are hearing great things about Ann J. Kellogg. — Crescenda Jones, Ann J. Kellogg principal

Overall, the district realizes the strongest gains from students who have had the benefit of the new resources from the beginning of their education. Chandra Youngblood, Director of Elementary Education, described how students in third, fourth and fifth grade — who did not have the benefit of the transformation resources from kindergarten — are realizing gains more slowly. “I see the biggest gains in K–2,” she said. “What we put in place from KSP up to second grade is just now being realized because those kids who started that first year of KSP have moved through and we’re starting to see more grade-level proficiency. As those students get to third, fourth and fifth grade, we’ll start to see that progress move throughout the district.”

Elementary school Ann J. Kellogg Elementary’s transformation is due to a focus on school climate, engagement and academics.

In 2014, Ann J. Kellogg was added to the state of Michigan’s list of priority schools, signifying that it ranked in the bottom of all schools in Michigan. But in year three, Ann J. Kellogg was identified by the state as a Comprehension Support and Improvement School, signifying important improvement. Carter recalled that the school was described as a “role model” by state representatives when the announcement was made.

Crescenda Jones, Ann J. Kellogg’s principal, explained the extraordinary change that has taken place at the school since the beginning of the transformation. Jones noted that her priorities at Ann J. Kellogg included changing the culture and climate, and the school has since seen a dramatic change in discipline referrals. Part of this process involved bringing in the voices of parents and students in a meaningful way. Once a month, parents are invited to a “Conversations with the Principal” event. Moreover, the Ann J. Kellogg student council, which largely includes third through fifth graders, is now 45 students strong. The school also focused significantly on academics. After hiring a literacy specialist, Ann J. Kellogg is now leading the district in terms of literacy. Jones also hired math instructional coaches, and implemented “Dream Box,” a math program that provides additional support to students.



III. LESSONS LEARNED #5: CHANGING SCHOOL CLIMATE

Building awareness of restorative practices is the first step to changing school climate.

“

BCCHS doesn't just automatically go to punishment. It tries to break down the problem and see what it can do to help you be the best person you could possibly be. — Shyann Gatu, BCCHS '22

While the district continues to seek growth in all measures of school climate and student behavior, student discipline incidents and numbers have risen and fallen as there have been some setbacks and some successes since the start of the grant. Nonetheless, school administrators point to some positive trends that show how trauma-informed practices are changing the culture of the district.

The district has retrained staff, made key hires and introduced new practices aimed at restorative justice.

Over the past three years, the district hired new staff, including Bearcat coaches, CIS site coordinators, student success specialists and, in year three, a family and community engagement coordinator, who plays a significant role advocating for families and for students with special needs, especially in disciplinary procedures regarding long-term suspensions.

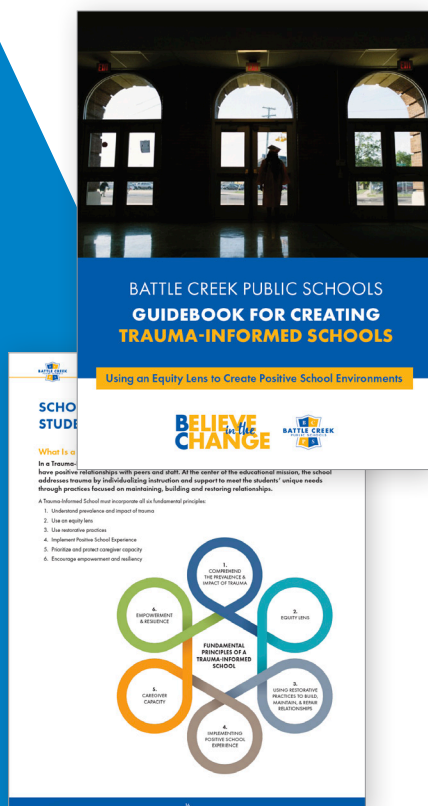
The BCPS team has also focused their attention on changing the process for suspensions, with the goal of not having anyone suspended long-term. If a long-term suspension must happen, BCPS coordinates with counseling services at a health meeting each month to ensure the student is receiving the support they need. Since starting this process, only two students have come back to another disciplinary hearing.

In the second year of the transformation, there was a fairly substantial decrease in both office discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions. Unfortunately, school data from the first part of the 2019–20 year shows a resurgence in disciplinary incidents in middle schools and high school: In fall 2019, there were 815 out-of-school suspensions compared to 468 suspensions in fall 2018, and 3,741 total disciplinary incidents in the same period compared to 3,125 in fall 2018.

However, district leadership points to some positive signs. In year three, the district sought to achieve consistent implementation of restorative justice practices and provide further clarity by releasing the [Guidebook for Creating Trauma-Informed Schools](#). Overall, in 2019–20, the percentage of teachers who feel prepared to deal with trauma rose slightly this past year from 62% to 64%. Restorative conversations, an alternative to suspension that was introduced in year two, were also used 1,163 times in year three, and contributed to a decrease in detentions (from 1,091 detentions in 2018 to 370 in 2019). While the guidebook has led to several positive improvements, Carter noted that, “We need to provide more support around the implementation of those philosophies and understandings in a way that has practical application on the ground.”

Leadership impacts a school's success.

Northwestern has faced challenges with school climate and low student achievement for several years. The school serves a higher-need population of students, and, due to in-district transfers and migration out of the district through



“

Northwestern is one of those schools that needs a total overhaul and transformation.

— Anita Harvey, Director of District Transformation

schools of choice, has experienced an ever greater concentration of need within the building. In 2017, the state of Michigan placed the school on the state's list of priority schools for low academic achievement, triggering a forced “turnaround” (i.e., firing or reassigning of 50% of the school's staff). Data shows that students at Northwestern consistently perform lower than students in any other district school.

Northwestern has tried a variety of different interventions since the start of the transformation. In 2018, the school adopted a “positive behavior system” called the “Northwestern Way,” an approach that includes a “Bearcat Bucks” system to reward students for showing up ready to learn and for meeting behavior expectations; a behavior management system to appropriately intervene when students are struggling; and academic interventions. In year three, the school continued to add behavioral supports, additional Bearcat coaches and a new dean of culture and climate.

However, the school struggled to implement these programs with fidelity, and at the end of the 2019–20 school year, the district reassigned the principal because the school was failing to make clear improvements. To give Northwestern a fresh start with strong leadership, the district has just hired a new principal, Dave Fooy, a former administrator for Kalamazoo Public Schools who previously taught classes on learning and behavioral disorders.

Looking into year four, the future of Northwestern is open. School leadership has discussed a range of options, from increasing the focus on school climate and academics to transitioning the school into a fine arts magnet academy or pursuing a different vision altogether.



III. LESSONS LEARNED #6: STAFF AND STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships and retention create school environments that fuel achievement.

“

Something I've noticed that has improved definitely are the teachers in general. I noticed the teachers were very different and I could have a relationship with them.
— Shayla Artis, BCCHS '22

“

When teachers leave it messes with a lot of students' relationships. It feels good to have teachers that you're connected to and that you can go talk to. — Gabe Williams, BCCHS '19

The district's new focus on individualized education aims to “see every student by name, need and strength.” This effort is rooted in culturally-responsive teaching practices and the understanding that every student arrives at school with different experiences and needs — which means that methods of teaching will impact each child differently. Superintendent Carter is championing this approach in earnest through year three and into year four.

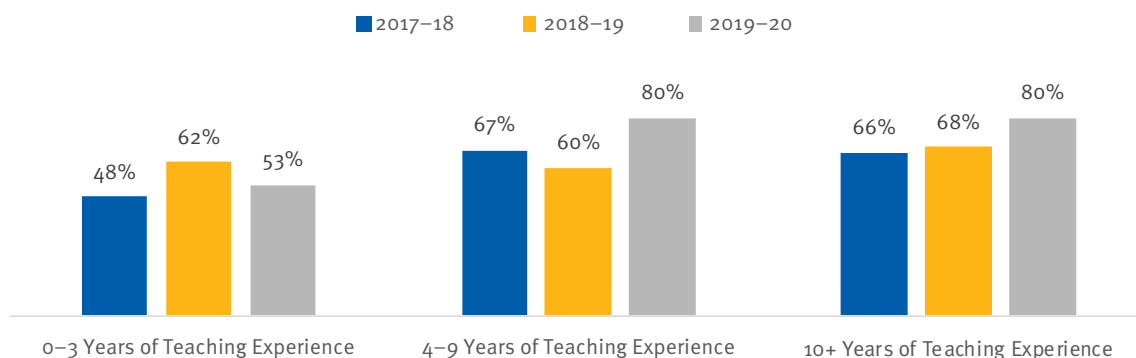
Personalized, caring relationships with teachers are healing and motivating for many students.

As additional professional development programming focused on individualized education and culturally-responsive teaching practices is rolled out, the district has set a goal to reinforce the value of relationship building with all teachers. There are already several standout teachers who often are praised by students and school leaders for succeeding in this relationship building. These beloved teachers naturally embrace personal relationship building as a part of their individual approach to being an educator, a philosophy which the district hopes to institutionalize across every grade and classroom.

With relationship-building work clearly helping many students succeed in school, teacher turnover threatens that impact and also can be a setback to implementation of new programming.

Students report feeling less secure at school when teachers leave. In interviews, students said that having substitute teachers hurts their morale and motivation to participate in class, and is disruptive to subjects like math, where cumulative and continuing learning are essential.

PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS WHO SEE THEMSELVES WORKING IN BCPS IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS





In the AIR survey,
83%
of teachers reported
that financial incentives
were a contributing
factor to their decisions to
stay in the district

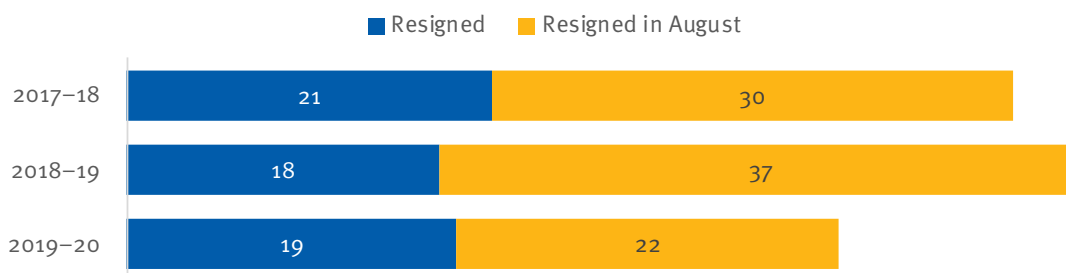
The district's retention and intentional hiring efforts have moved the needle on turnover.

The overall teacher turnover rate in Michigan is 19%, and turnover in urban Michigan districts is 24%. In the 2018–19 school year, turnover in BCPS was approximately 21%. But fewer teachers have resigned this year (41) than in the 2018–19 school year (55). In 2019–20, the overall percentage of teachers who intend to stay in BCPS increased to 75% — an increase of 10 percentage points since the 2018–19 school year.

Turnover is improving in part due to increased faith in the transformation efforts, as well as financial incentives. Salary increases in steps, lump sum bonuses and retention incentives have helped stem teacher loss and repair teacher trust in the district as well as faith in the transformation.

At the beginning of the transformation, many teachers had experienced salary freezes and were drawn to neighboring school districts where they could earn more. The historic three-year Battle Creek Education Association contract and salary increases for teachers approved in June 2019 helped shift this dynamic. Housing incentives and tuition reimbursement incentives also have boosted teacher compensation, which has helped improve retention.

NUMBER OF TEACHERS WHO HAVE RESIGNED FROM BCPS FROM 2017–20



All of the financial incentives
have motivated me to stay.
Money isn't everything,
but I have to support my
daughter. If all of these little
incentives weren't there,
I can't guarantee that I would
have left my previous job to
come to BCPS. — Lena Oliver,
Fremont teacher

Intensive efforts to develop a stronger hiring pipeline have also helped the district fill vacancies more quickly, and with stronger candidates who BCPS leaders hope will want to grow their career with the district. A new district human resources manager was hired in July 2019 and has helped create and manage a pipeline of teacher and administrator applicants, enabling BCPS to fill positions more quickly and reduce reliance on long-term substitutes. Strong new hires have been credited with helping improve school environments and student experience. “I’m one of the older teachers, but we’re getting younger teachers who bring so much life and excitement to the job,” said Springfield Band Director Marilyn Steward. “We’re getting great teachers, and I’m noticing more staying, so that’s good news.”

Administrator training and turnover remain an area of increased focus and growth.

While teacher turnover is beginning to show signs of improvement, administrator turnover remains a challenge. In response to administrator turnover in the district, BCPS began offering a suite of principal supports in 2019–20, including monthly learning sessions with the superintendent, peer collaboration opportunities through the principal network, district transformation coaches, GVSU mentors, meetings with directors and conference attendance. Focusing on additional investment and support is a priority for the 2020–21 school year.



IV. LOOKING AHEAD



“

This pandemic felt like a reset. I'm anticipating declines in achievement and elevated levels of trauma that will show in discipline and attendance data. I understand that things are not great in the lives of the children and the families that I serve right now, and that we have to refocus our resources. But transformation is still taking place every day and we are still going to deliver excellence for our kids.

— Anita Harvey, Director of District Transformation

In year three, the district celebrated a number of new and ongoing programs and partnerships, the launch of two schools, a more positive public image and a deep connection with the community. The district also focused on examining and refining its efforts, working to ensure that each program and achievement can be implemented in a way that is equitable, sustainable and successful.

At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic, school closure and the resulting social, economic and health consequences have brought a number of uncertainties. The district, like schools across the country, is grappling with questions and concerns about budgets, health risks to students and teachers, the impact of continued remote learning, and whether and how it will be able to re-open.

At the beginning of August, the BCPS Board of Education approved a comprehensive plan for school re-opening, based on guidelines from the state and input from nearly 300 families and more than 250 staff members. **The school's plan**, which is subject to change depending on state guidelines, allows for BCPS students to return safely to learning in a way that minimizes the risk of the spread of COVID-19 to the greatest extent possible.

In keeping with the district's other endeavors, the plan is comprehensive, trauma-informed, seeks equitable solutions, centers family and community engagement, and works to provide excellence for each and every student. Its 100+ pages contemplate seven different scenarios based on the trajectory of the pandemic, and each scenario includes protocols for health and safety, classroom activities, athletics, transportation, food services, technology, communication, mental health support services and more.

“We're hoping and planning around how and when we can create a new normal school experience for our students, a new way of engaging with instruction, and a new way of empowering their voices,” said Anita Harvey, Director of District Transformation. “I know that we have a short window to adjust and change, but we're situated to do just that. That's why I'm looking forward to the next leg of the transformation.”

IV. LOOKING AHEAD

PRIORITIES AND INITIATIVES FOR YEAR FOUR INCLUDE:

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Remote learning and outreach for all students.

BCPS has a 1:1 technology distribution plan that ensures all students have access to online learning in the event schools cannot reopen. If Michigan remains in Phase 4 of the virus, schools will be able to reopen for in-person instruction for certain grade levels with additional safety precautions in place, and if it worsens and returns to Phase 3, school will need to take place remotely. The district has decided to offer an all-virtual schooling option for families who prefer remote learning no matter how the virus progresses. BCPS also is exploring ways to ensure elements of programs can take place online, such as virtual job shadowing for the career academies.

A renewed focus on racial equity.

After identifying continuing unequal outcomes for Black students, the district intends to refocus on equity in a number of ways, including re-examining curriculum and teaching practices, opening up conversations in schools, and focusing on individualized, culturally responsive plans that enable each student to succeed. Over the last several years, BCPS teachers have received unconscious bias training from the National Equity Project, studied and implemented culturally-relevant teaching practices, and learned to make stronger connections with all students based on their individual backgrounds and experiences. The district will continue this work going forward.

Preparing for a return to in-person classes and new student needs.

In the event schools reopen, BCPS, like school districts around the country, will face a host of challenges in ensuring students' health and safety. Some of the district's particular priorities will come to the forefront, such as building in trauma-informed practices and equipping teachers and staff with the tools they need to support each student, many of whom may have been in traumatic environments, and all of whom will need to re-adjust to school structure. The district also is working on creating a framework for addressing the gaps of missed time of instruction, specifically literacy. In some early conversations, the district indicated that it was exploring a number of additional instruction possibilities to bridge the gap, including in-school, out-of-school or extension activities online.

Mapping Northwestern's future.

Having hired a new principal for Northwestern, the district also is in early, broader conversations about Northwestern's future. School leadership has discussed a range of options, from increasing the focus on school climate and academics to transitioning the school into a fine arts magnet academy, or pursuing a different vision altogether.



Ensuring continued success of new programs.

A major focus in year four will be ensuring that the new programs launched in the past year (career academies, Fremont and BC STEM, and the partnership with GVSU, among others) are successful and equitable.

Additional supports for teachers, students and the district.

GVSU will be furthering its investment and support of students, teachers and the district in 2020–21, and planning ahead to ensure that they can continue to engage BCPS students and staff either virtually or in person, in accordance with state guidelines. For the 2020–2021 school year, GVSU will launch a new high-leverage teaching practices professional development program for BCPS teachers to implement emerging best practices to improve student outcomes (including project-based learning, active learning strategies, etc.). GVSU and BCPS are also looking to roll out a second-year cohort of the teacher mentoring program, enabling teachers who participated in and benefitted from the program last year to continue growing as educators. To support BCPS student achievement more directly, GVSU will expand new opportunities for BCCHS students to earn college credit through the dual enrollment program, introducing new courses in the College of Education and the College of Allied Health Sciences.

New health care simulation lab at BCCHS.

In 2020–21, the district will move forward with a new health care simulation lab at BCCHS, which will be a state-approved training site for both the CNA and EMT programs and will include cutting edge equipment and technology.

Launching Springfield as a “service learning” academy.

In partnership with Learning to Give, Springfield will launch as a service-learning academy, with a focus on civic engagement and public service. Service-learning programs are demonstrated to decrease the number of students who are chronically absent, deepen students’ connection to the community, increase preparation for college and careers and increase self-efficacy for students.



IV. LOOKING AHEAD

YEAR THREE PROGRESS IN BCPS

More than

100 educators
traveled 200 miles

throughout the city during the senior celebration car parade (*following social distancing guidelines*)



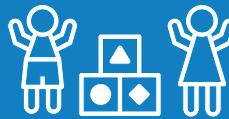
\$1.5
million

investment was made to improve technology and help **close the digital divide**



2,000 Chromebooks

were distributed to students for remote learning



107
students participated in the
Kindergarten Success Program

398

students received
college counseling services
at GVSU's Battle Creek Regional Outreach Center



491,128
meals

were distributed between
March 17 and June 30

132 new students

enrolled in BCPS to join the new
Fremont International Academy
and **BC STEM Innovation Center** magnet schools



\$54,850

worth of basic needs items
were provided to support families



APPENDIX

YEAR THREE REPORT METHODOLOGY



Fenton conducted interviews with 35 community stakeholders — parents, students, teachers, district leaders and foundation leaders

Fenton, a strategic communications firm committed to social impact, has supported the district since 2017 in its effort to leverage communications as a key component of the transformation effort. During years one and two of the transformation, Fenton was tasked with creating a yearly report that chronicled the district's lessons learned, progress, challenges and opportunities. For the third year of this reporting process, Fenton conducted interviews with more than 30 community stakeholders — parents, students, teachers, district leaders and foundation leaders — to glean critical insights and context on the state of change at BCPS. Year three's report is based on findings from these interviews as well as research from a combination of qualitative and quantitative sources, including:

- Data and analysis from the AIR, which specializes in measuring education reform efforts at school districts across the country. For the third consecutive year, AIR conducted an annual teacher survey, administered parent focus groups, conducted school site visits, and interviewed administrators, teachers and staff. AIR also analyzed BCPS student achievement and discipline data.
- Results from a brand tracker survey, conducted by Burrell Communications, that measures public perceptions of BCPS and how communications and messaging are resonating with the Battle Creek community.
- Interview and survey data provided by BCPS partner GVSU that evaluates student and teacher summer camps, programming for career academies at BCCHS, and teacher education and mentorship programs.
- Data and analysis by various educational researchers, including research from Dr. Jianping Shen who conducted a mathematics pilot program called PREP for third grade students at Ann J. Kellogg.
- A review of the district's strategic documents, communications materials and media coverage.

The research process for year three report was significantly different from the previous two years because of the unforeseen COVID-19 crisis. The collection of academic, attendance and discipline data, for example, was impacted significantly by school closure. The inability to travel to Battle Creek and social distancing requirements meant that many of the standard data collection processes that previous year reporting has relied on could not be completed as planned. Fenton conducted 35 interviews via phone and video conference, a smaller number than in years past, in order to give district staff time to respond to the crisis. AIR's data collection was also impacted; it was unable to conduct planned parent focus groups in Spanish or Burmese due to the lockdown. The gaps in the data highlighted here reflect some of the local impact of COVID-19.



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