

October 8, 2021

Dear Mission Hill K-8 School Community,

Thank you for your ongoing partnership and patience as we launched this new school year. I know there have been a lot of questions and that staff and families are requesting more information from the district. I write this letter to provide additional context for recent decisions related to placing Mission Hill K-8 teacher leaders and educators on paid administrative leave pending investigations.

In February, 2021, I first learned of alarming concerns from a set of Mission Hill K-8 parents. These allegations included a serious complaint that their child experienced persistent bullying and harassment that resulted in mental and physical harm. The parents further alleged that they consistently reported the persistent bullying to educators and school leaders and that those complaints went unaddressed.

I commissioned an investigation into this incident and learned through this investigation about a series of other complaints, settlement agreements, and past investigations about the school, under former administrations, including some that have been reported about in the media. Once we announced the decision to place these educators on leave, more parents came forward. We received a number of new parent complaints which are consistent with complaints already deemed credible and these, too, need to be reviewed. We have placed two additional educators on leave based on the seriousness of multiple complaints.

I have secured the services of the law firm Hinckley Allen to do a top-to-bottom investigation into the additional complaints, management, and practices at Mission Hill Pilot School. That investigation has now started and I expect it will continue into the winter, though we've asked them to be thorough and deliberate and not to compromise quality for speed.

In addition, I have commissioned an Emergency School Review for the Mission Hill school. The Emergency School Review will be a more focused and quickened version of a traditional School Quality Review (SQR).

I will review the findings from Hinckley Allen and the emergency school review to inform any decisions about any potential corrective action or additional personnel moves. In the meantime, I have asked for professional development and significant resources be redeployed to Mission Hill, as follows. The district has provided additional training in:

- Bullying Prevention/Intervention from Succeed Boston
- Discipline of Students with Disabilities
- State policy/requirements for deescalation/physical restraint
- Responding to records requests

Additional training planned in the next few weeks:

- Code of Conduct
- Office of Equity on addressing bias-based Incidents

In the short term, the district office is deploying the following staff to the school while qualified long term substitutes are hired:

- Inclusion Specialist
- Community Field Coordinator
- Assistant Director for Special Education is reviewing all IEPs with the school's Coordinator of Special Education

I understand these circumstances are difficult, but I and the team at BPS continue to pursue the best interests of our students, staff, and overall community. We are very pleased to have an experienced leader such as Ms. Valeria Lowe lead at Mission Hill, and the school community will continue to have the full support of all of us at BPS as we continue working towards a successful school year.

In partnership,

Dr. Brenda Cassellius  
Superintendent