



## Our Journey Together

Superintendent/Receiver's Entry Plan

September 2021

Anthony Soto

# Letter to the Community

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## Dear Holyoke Community,

I am honored to be the Superintendent/Receiver of Holyoke Public Schools. As many of you know, I began my journey with Holyoke Public Schools as a kindergarten student at Kirkland, moving onto Lawrence, Peck and Dean Technical as I grew. As the Dean Technical salutatorian of the Class of 1999, I would never have imagined that I would come back to HPS as the Chief of Finance and Operations in 2016 and now the Superintendent. I am a testament to the excellent educational foundation that HPS provides our students. My educational and professional journey has taken me further than I ever would have expected. I am humbled and excited to work together with all of you so that every single one of our students has the opportunity to achieve beyond their wildest dreams.

This document outlines my entry plan. **The ultimate purpose of the entry plan is for me to build a deeper understanding of our district in order to set a clear path forward for our community that is inclusive of input from all stakeholders.** Although I have had the benefit of experiencing HPS as a student, athlete, parent, and employee, I recognize that my own perspective is limited. I am eager to assume the stance of a learner once again - with our students, educators, staff, families, and community members as my teachers. This entry plan serves as my syllabus for the next seven months. Through talking to many stakeholders, visiting schools and analyzing data, I will develop awareness about the current state of our district, recognize strengths to build upon, and identify areas for further development and growth. These insights will help drive the next phase of our strategic plan. I am also hopeful that, through this process, you all get a chance to know me in a different capacity as well.



Thank you for partnering with me in this entry process. That being said, I recognize that we have a lot of important work to do now to welcome our students and staff back to school after a tumultuous 18 months due to the pandemic. For the time being, our district and school-based teams will continue with the important work that has already been well thought out and planned.

I look forward to this new school year - it will be fantastic to have our buildings full of students and staff again! Please reach out to me with questions. I hope to see you or talk to you soon.

Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Anthony Soto".

Anthony Soto

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## Superintendent Goal-Setting

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My primary goals as your Superintendent/Receiver for this upcoming year are:

1. Ensure **a strong, safe, positive, and productive School Year 2021-22** following and revising (as necessary) our return to school plan.
2. Engage in a **collaborative and rigorous entry plan** process to build a deeper understanding of our district in order to set a clear path forward for our community.
3. **Continue Holyoke's momentum** aligned to the SY21-22 Strategic Plan.
4. Be a **champion and fierce advocate** for our students and graduates.
5. Participate in the **New Superintendent Induction Program**.

## Equity Commitments

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HPS has made these commitments to equity, which I helped to develop and stand by.

- We ensure that the students, families, and staff **who need the most get the most**.
- We **incorporate the voices of those impacted**, especially those who have not been heard historically.
- We **promote access and inclusion for all** students, families, staff, and especially for those who are not being heard.
- We reflect and **embrace the greater diversity** of our students and families.
- We work to be an **anti-racist, inclusive, and culturally-responsive** community.

# My Core Beliefs

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In the interest of transparency, I believe it's important that you understand and know my belief system. This belief system drives my decision-making and is core to who I am.

## **1. Students are first and foremost.**

Holyoke Public Schools exists to provide an excellent education to every student. Our decisions put students at the center. Please understand that every decision I make is led with the question: "How is this decision going to impact our students?" I also recognize that in order to serve our students well, I also need to ensure that staff and other adults have the resources and support they need.

## **2. Every child can and will learn.**

Although there are many factors that influence a child's readiness and success in school, it is the responsibility of our school system to meet every child's unique needs so that they can be successful in school and in life. One of the worst things we can do is think, "hay bendito pobrecito, lo tienen tan malo en casa," or "ahh, poor kiddos. They have it so hard at home." Although we have to be understanding of factors outside of the classroom, we must believe that our students are smart and deserve to be pushed to learn at a high level. We can't blame parents or conditions at home for being the reason that our students "can't learn." That is a way for us to not take accountability for what we can do and what our role is as educators in the Holyoke Public Schools. If we truly believe in our students, create trust, and create an environment that makes them feel valued, they will be ready to learn.

## **3. School is about more than academics.**

Of course, we want what is taught in the classroom to be exciting and engaging. Yet, so often students want to come to school for much more than reading and math. They come to school to be with their peers, to play in a game, to join a club, to get a good meal, to feel safe, and to be exposed to new worlds.

## **4. It takes a village (to raise a child).**

Families matter. Teachers matter. Coaches matter. Mentors matter. Community organizations matter. Peers matter. We each play an important role in supporting our students through school and beyond graduation. None of us can do it alone, so let's work together.

## Sources of Data

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We ask our teachers to make informed decisions about what and how they teach students by looking at multiple sources of data - standardized tests, daily exit tickets, small group instruction, classroom participation, etc. Similarly, I promise to look at multiple sources of data, too.

I am going to meet with a variety of stakeholders individually, in small groups and in large groups. These meetings will happen in our schools, in our community, over the phone, and virtually. I will meet with students of all ages, family members, family leadership groups, HPS alumni, teachers, school-based staff, district-wide staff, school committee leadership, city leadership, community members, and partners. In particular, I want to encourage everyone to join [one of our public forums](#):

- **Virtual Community Meeting:** Wednesday, September 22, 2021, 9:30-10:45 a.m.
- **Open to All:** In-person Tuesday, October 12, 2021, 5:00-6:15 p.m. (Rain date: Tuesday, October 19, 2021, 5:00 - 6:15 p.m.)
- **Virtual Staff Meeting:** Tuesday, November 2, 3:30-4:30 p.m.
- **Virtual Family Meeting:** Wednesday, October 20, 5:30-6:45 p.m.
- **Virtual Family Leadership Groups (DPAG/ELPAC/SEPAC) meeting:** TBD

I am also spending a lot of time in our schools. I visited every school before the start of the school year as a facility walk through. I am visiting at least one school a week to conduct classroom observations, along with our academic and school leadership staff.

I have also begun reviewing a variety of documents. Select documents include:

- **Overall:** HPS Turnaround Plan, Turnaround Plan Renewal, Quarterly reports to DESE/School Committee, District Strategic Plan, Accomplishments, School improvement plans and school operational plans (found on each school's webpage), Return to school survey (August 2021), Panorama Culture and Climate survey, Equity plan and progress, and more.
- **Academic:** Past and current Holyoke accountability data on DESE's website (both district and school), interim student data, school reports, curriculum documents, PLESH settlement report, tiered focus monitoring visit report, Middle school planning survey (ongoing - August/September 2021).
- **Staff:** [Collective bargaining agreements](#), Job Descriptions and Organizational Charts, Staff Handbook, Staff diversity and retention

- **Finance/Operations:** Budget Priorities survey (Spring 2021), [FY2021 Budget](#), [Other Documents and Policies](#) (including family handbook, bullying prevention, code of conduct, etc.), [Health, Wellness and COVID-response policies and protocols](#), School Safety Plans and Emergency Response Protocols. Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) documents related to accelerated repair and new building projects, Enrollment policies and data

Importantly, I will also release a **districtwide feedback survey for students, families and community members** in October.

## Interview Questions

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- What are the **strengths and successes** of our school district?
- What are the **challenges and areas for growth** within our district?
- How do we **ensure that every student is prepared for success** after they graduate from HPS?
- Aligned to my belief that “it takes a village,” **how can we work better together** in support of student success?
- What would you like to **see from me as your Superintendent?**
- What else do you think is **important for me to know?**

When I meet with people, I am also going to bring some helpful reference documents that capture where we have been and our plan for this year. This includes:

- Holyoke Snapshot
- SY21-22 Strategic Plan



## Phases, Tasks and Timeline

Phase	Tasks	Timeline
<b>Planning and Preparation</b>	Write Draft Entry Plan	July - Aug.
	Share Draft Plan for Feedback from School Committee	Aug. - Sept.
	Present Plan at School Committee meeting	Sept.
	Schedule Interviews and Forums	Aug. - Dec.
	Create Survey Questions for Stakeholders	Aug.
<b>Data Gathering and Processing</b>	Document Review	July - Nov.
	Conduct Interviews, Hold Forums, and Attend Meetings	Aug. - Dec.
	School Site Visits	Sept. - Dec.
	Publicize and promote survey	Oct.
	Synthesize information and process	Aug. - Dec.
<b>Next Steps and Action Plan</b>	Write Draft of <i>Report of Entry Findings</i> to Share with Administrative Team and School Committee	Dec. - Jan.
	Complete and present a <i>Report of Entry Findings</i>	Feb.
<b>Development of District Strategy</b>	Working with the Leadership Team to develop the District Strategy.	Feb. - July



## Conclusion

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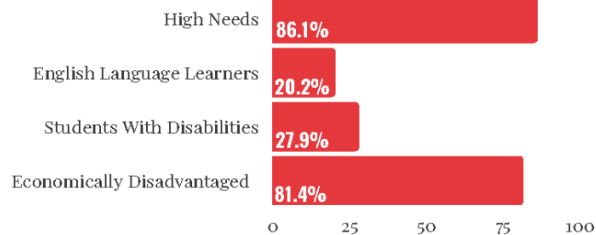
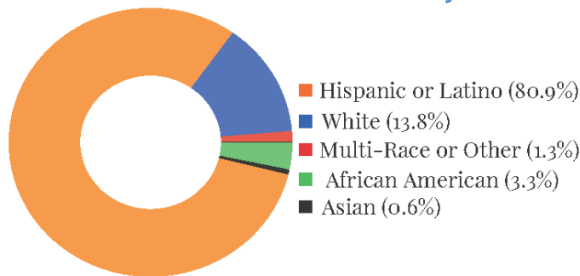
I look forward to seeing you in our schools and community. I encourage you to take advantage of the opportunities to share your unique insight and perspective about our school community. I like this quote from Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, "The dynamism of any diverse community depends not only on the diversity itself but on promoting a sense of belonging among those who formerly would have been considered and felt themselves outsiders." I strive to ensure that HPS is a place where all voices are welcome. I hope you agree with me that it's our collective responsibility to participate in whatever way we can in order to ensure an excellent education for every student.

# HOLYOKE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## A PATHWAY FOR EVERY STUDENT



### 5,153 STUDENTS



## COMMUNITY

**40,117**  
Residents



**78%** of school-age residents attend HPS

### Racial breakdown

Hispanic or Latino - **53.9%**  
White - **41.3%**  
African American - **4.5%**  
Other/Multi Race - **0.3%**

**40%**  
Home ownership rate

## SCHOOLS

Grades Pre K-12



**12 schools**

**4**

Schools met state targets\*

**52%**

Substantial progress toward targets\*

### Pathways

**3** schools with dual language  
**3** high school academies  
**9** career technical education programs

**\$17 Million** invested in school infrastructure



## OUTCOMES

**72.2%**  
Graduation rate

**3.4%**  
Dropout rate

**24%**  
Grade 3 students reading at/above grade level\*

**45.6%**  
Students completing MassCore\*

**45%**  
Students in advanced coursework\*

**23.7%**  
Chronic absenteeism\*

**92.3%**  
Attendance rate\*

**26%**  
Teachers of color

For more information scan the QR code to access our website



NOTE: \*Some data is from 2019 due to limited 2020-21 data and opportunities during the COVID-19 Pandemic



**HOLYOKE PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
A PATHWAY FOR EVERY STUDENT



### OUR MISSION:

To be the first educational choice for Holyoke families by designing multiple pathways where all students graduate prepared to excel in college, career, and community leadership.

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

- Use district-approved core curriculum to ensure all students receive strong core instruction
- Ensure all grades K-8 students placed in Tier 2/3 support receive targeted intervention and make 1.5 year's growth on STAR
- Analyze data from the assessment plan through data team cycles to accelerate student learning

### OUR 2021-22 PRIORITIES:



#### Teaching & Learning

**GOAL:** Dramatically increase reading, math and science proficiency for all students.

**STRATEGY:** Strengthen teaching and learning so that all students experience a strong curriculum and opportunities to practice.



#### Supporting the Whole Child

**GOAL:** Meet the academic, social emotional, and behavioral needs of students.

**STRATEGY:** Use a system of supports to meet the needs of all students.



#### Family & Community Engagement

**GOAL:** Empower families to work with schools to meet their children's needs.

**STRATEGY:** Strengthen two-way communication to build trust with families to develop their child's progress.



#### Shared Learning & Leadership

**GOAL:** Staff grow and learn to achieve exceptional results for all students.

**STRATEGY:** Develop and distribute leadership to ensure the learning and growth of our students.

### OUR EQUITY COMMITMENTS:

- We ensure that the students, families, and staff who need the most get the most
- We incorporate the voices of those impacted
- We promote access and inclusion for all students, families, and staff
- We reflect and embrace the greater diversity of our students and families
- We work to be an anti-racist, inclusive, and culturally-responsive community



## 2021-22 Strategic Priorities

### TEACHING & LEARNING

**Measures:** Reading, math and science achievement; graduation, advanced coursework completion, work-based learning, progress towards English proficiency.

**Select Actions:**

- Strengthen the implementation of instructional strategies to support multilingual learners.
- Complete a Literacy audit to inform the creation of a three-year Literacy improvement plan
- Plan and support the implementation of PK-2 literacy-based Science curriculum.
- Increase the number of PK-8 schools that have access to and implement STMath.
- Provide and administer interim assessments aligned to core curriculum.
- Develop a process and support school leaders to monitor core and intervention curriculum implementation.

### SUPPORTING THE WHOLE CHILD

**Measures:** Safe learning environment, culture and native language respected, individualized pathways, attendance, reduced absenteeism

**Select Actions:**

- Support principals in the implementation of student supports, including the new social-emotional curriculum.
- Train and support implementation of a systematic process for IEP (individual education plan) development.
- Continue the plan to move towards distinct elementary and middle schools.
- Create a technology-rich environment and recover from the loss of district technology from last school year.
- Ensure schools and departments have real-time access to budgets.
- Re-bid a new 5-year food services contract to focus on higher quality, culturally relevant, tasty food.

### FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

**Measures:** Culturally-proficient communication, support students' learning at home

**Select Actions:**

- Strengthen School Councils to engage families as active partners in their child's learning.
- Continue to strengthen translation and interpretation services.
- Improve the family and school transportation experience by improving the bus routing system.

### SHARED LEARNING & LEADERSHIP

**Measures:** Culturally-proficient communication, support students' learning at home

**Select Actions:**

- Develop school leaders to implement systems for observation and feedback and weekly data meetings with classroom teachers.
- Plan and implement an inclusive hiring process.
- Support educators to earn and maintain appropriate licensure/endorsement.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of all teacher pipeline programs.
- Strengthen the professional learning of special education teachers and staff.

*Holyoke's strategic plan will be revised following the Superintendent's Entry Plan process, which includes input and feedback from many stakeholders.*