

STABILIZE, HEAL, TRANSFORM

Dr. Patrick Tutwiler, PhD | Great Expectations 2023

Let's start this evening with beliefs. I'm a big believer in the notion that you can't separate ideas from the beliefs of the person. So, before I offer a few ideas, I want to first share little about beliefs...my beliefs. Folks who know me well know that I absolutely adore my mother - so much love and respect for her. She raised my brother and me by herself and managed to earn a doctorate during our adolescent years. Anyone who has adolescent children as I do knows exactly how doggone challenging that must be.

My brother and I watched our mother very closely. We saw the determination with which she pursued her own education, often in spite of barriers. With the fierce love of a mother, I saw her fight for my brother and me to ensure that we received the best possible education, no matter what.

These experiences and observations inform who I am as an educator in so many ways. An educator who operates from a firm set of values, the core of which is LOVE for students – that matters. An educator who seeks to listen to and understand the stories and experience of students and families because I know having that understanding, validating those experiences are key to a successful partnership. An educator who feels strongly that the mark of a thriving and healthy school is its ability to reach and elevate its most underserved student population. I'll leave it there, but I thought it important to share that first because this matters.

Now that you know a little about me and what and what I believe – allow me to share ideas that anchor and reflect the current priorities of the Executive Office of Ed and my current role.

Stabilize, heal and transform.

In my final year as Superintendent in Lynn, as we began the first steps of emerging from the pandemic, “stabilize, heal and transform” became the theme that captured the work we needed to do in partnership with our families and the broader community. In my experience, particularly when leading through challenging issues and times, when big ideas and strategy are winnowed down to simple concepts, a theme, they become giant puzzle pieces that folks can easily see fitting together.

This theme now serves as our framework for the path forward beyond the Lynn city limits – in fact for our entire state. **Stabilize, Heal, Transform.**

The use of the words stabilize and heal are deeply intentional and designed to convey that we are still in a recovery period. We are not “back”. There are of course many areas of challenge in the present day. Allow me to focus on one we must address if we are to stabilize and heal: mental health.

The past 2.5 years have underscored close relationships between well-being and learning, and perhaps most importantly, the need for a mindset shift to understanding dysregulated behavior as manifestation of an unmet need. The last 2.5 years have also underscored the need for partnership, for a throughline and continuity of support that extends past the end of a student's academic day. Students are in school 7.5 hours/day. And - newsflash - their needs do not end with the dismissal bell. The other 16.5 hrs are no less important. Districts need strong partnerships to provide students with direct supports that they need - to create that throughline of support - and to provide families with connections to resources critical to keep moving. We have to create the conditions that allow us to

keep students' mental health in the forefront. Mental Health is an enabling condition and foundational not only to improved learning outcomes, but also sustained transformation.

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By “transform”, I refer in part to the evolution that has been happening in profound ways on all levels over the past 2.5 years – be it with technology or systems, or procedure. This growth and change reflect the early markers of transformation and I sense that we are at the beginning of something special – but we have to task ourselves – have we transformed our students' educational experiences to be everything we can imagine for them and everything they deserve.

What does that transformation look like? I'll offer a quick - but important - example. Reimagining the high school experience in the state of Massachusetts. We need to rethink and subsequently redesign the learning experience in high school, putting students at the center and design from there. Right now, we're forging a path to support communities across the Commonwealth with this effort: With equity at the core, we see and honor the diverse needs, interests, perspectives and life experiences of all students. With this foundational perspective, redesigned learning experiences can and should include:

- embracing innovative opportunities for student engagement,
- increasing class relevancy with deeper hands-on instruction,
- and creating deeper advising to empower students to make informed career and college choices...to name a few.

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We gather tonight around a theme of Great Expectations. Each piece of the framework I have spoken to is important in its own right, and each is a piece to the giant puzzle of addressing our duty to serve the educational needs of all students and to ensure their right to the best education. Each piece individually and in combination, reflects the high expectations we must have for ourselves as educators and community leaders, in order meet our sacred duty to create the conditions to allow all learners to set and meet high expectations for themselves and their educational path.

This is how we're thinking about the path forward and I can't imagine a more aligned effort with this theme -- stabilize, heal, transform – than that engaged by LEAP. Through the deep relationships between staff and students and focused mentoring, students have that critical opportunity to connect, plan, thought partner, and problem solve with a positive role model. This is support and affirmation in a pure form (Stabilize, Heal). What is more, through its project-based learning model, students enjoy hands-on experiences in STEM, the arts, and social sciences. Students engage deeply in their learning and make those critical connections not only to what they are learning during the school day, but also to potential career paths. (Transform).

We're all here for a reason. Everyone in this room cares about young people. At a loss for what you can do to support? Let me help you. Serve as career mentor to a scholar during the summer or make a donation to make this work possible. We're all here for a reason. We all care about young people, but I think more importantly, we all care about creating or safeguarding the conditions that allow young people to realize their dreams. LEAP moves the needle. Support for their work is just that - safeguarding the conditions that allow young people to realize their dreams. I look forward to our continued partnership and I'm thankful to spend the evening with you all tonight.

CLOSING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP

Linda Saris | Great Expectations Expectations 2023

A few years ago, I was connected to a local therapist, Dr. Stephen Gaddis, who passed away last year at much too young of age. Dr. Gaddis worked with LEAP staff and trained us in a therapeutic practice called Narrative Therapy. This practice teaches youth to weave their own stories rather than accept the ones that others develop about them. Youth will then carry these self-created stories through life; stories that they will continue to refine as they experience new events and new interactions with people, places and ideas. And these stories, in turn, will influence how they see themselves and their place in the world. **Our youth will become experts in their own lives and drivers of their own futures.**

To continue to drive this point home, think about your own life as a child, the opportunities you had - the interesting people many of you met through your parents, the places you traveled to, the camps, summer academies, ski trips, museums, concerts, college campuses you experienced – all helping you discover who you are and what you might become.

Think of the doors opened to you and connections made as you found summer jobs and high school and college internships all helping to form a picture of your future. For now, let's call this your opportunity highway. Just hold that thought for a minute while I digress a bit.

In education parlance, we often hear the phrase achievement gap. This is usually defined through easily quantifiable data such as MCAS scores, high school graduation rates, and college enrollment, persistence and graduation rates. This data is often displayed by comparing groups of students by gender, race and income. Girls outperforming boys, whites and Asians outperforming blacks and latinos, rich kids outperforming low-income kids. But what this data does not explain is the root cause of this gap. In fact, the term achievement gap plants the blame on the children themselves rather than recognizing the large part that system inequities contribute to underachievement that are very much outside a student's control.

Now let's get back to the opportunity highway that many of us, including myself, experienced growing up. Many children from underserved communities don't have equal access to the opportunity highway through no fault of their own. It could be lack of resources, parents with fewer social connections or limited education, racial bias, language barriers, lack of mentors and/or role models. Think how much harder it is for them to feel personal agency to take charge of their future hopes and dreams, to find the relevance in their learning, and to find out what they are really good at. Yet, each of these under-resourced students have tremendous talents, skills, and character. We see that here at LEAP every day. For those of you who come to this event each year, or work with our youth, you see it in our students and alumni. **We all know it isn't talent they lack, but what they do lack is fair access to opportunities and experiences that can shape their goals and fuel their ability to reach them. This is what is called the opportunity gap.**

If you can understand this, you understand what LEAP is all about. Societal change takes a long time, but nonprofits and communities of people like everyone here tonight can play a part in filling this gap.

LEAP is not just another homework center or mental health provider or college access service. Yes, we make sure our students get the academic, college access and social-emotional support that they need but our real superpower, our differentiator, is our commitment to find and develop a student's native talent and to expose them to new opportunities, events, ideas so they too can create their own stories and take control of their own futures.

Empowering and enabling our youth is not a zero sum game. There are no losers in this. If we can help support all of our kids in finding a family-sustaining wage career that utilizes their talents, not only do our under-resourced kids and their families gain economic and social mobility, but the entire pie gets bigger and our economy is enlarged and our community is enriched. Today our students, a small number of whom you have seen in the video tonight and at past events, are creating beautiful murals that bring us joy, are doing cancer research, going into healthcare or public safety jobs that will heal or save lives. They are working on defense systems, novel new technology, and enacting more equitable public policy. They are solving problems for all of us. They are buying homes and helping out their parents, influencing younger siblings to go to college, and having families which will foster a new generation of youth who will, like their parents, continue to contribute to the economy and community .

The immigration story is one about search for opportunity after all, isn't it? It is the story of our country. **If we can close the opportunity gap, then we all benefit.** We believe in our collective ability to close the opportunity gap, so please consider donating tonight or go home and donate in the privacy of your home. We ask that you also consider donating your time as a career mentor this summer. We trust in your generosity and we thank you.