

## Superintendent announces priorities to shift the educational experience at MPS

Written by  
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Dr. Bernadeia Johnson, superintendent of Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS), announced priorities Monday to reshape the educational experience for all students in the state's third largest school district. The announcement included developing a partnership zone for achievement, autonomy and accountability and several key labor negotiation priorities.

Johnson, who made the announcement Monday before about 250 education stakeholders, parent leaders, MPS employees and members of the media at the Hennepin County Central Library, said MPS must intensify its efforts in preparing all students to meet the challenges of today and the rapidly changing future.

"It's time to get off the dime, to stop protecting the status quo, to stop being satisfied with poor performance, to stop blaming others and get focused -- with partnership and innovation -- to finally solve the riddle of Minneapolis Public Schools," Johnson said. "Why aren't all children learning?"

The announcement emphasized the establishment of a new partnership zone where school teams will exchange autonomy for accountability, governed by performance contracts with clear standards of effective school performance. MPS will establish the partnership zone in which 20-30 percent of schools, including high priority and struggling schools, will have the opportunity to shift into a new relationship with the school district based on partnership, achievement, autonomy and accountability. The approach will require partnership at every level of the school district and community: board and administration, district and union, teachers and principals, schools and families, businesses and partners, Johnson said.

"We are committing to a fundamental change in MPS culture, programs, preferences and practices," Johnson said.

In the partnership zone, schools will have ownership over critical decisions, such as hiring the

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people that best match the needs of students and ensuring that students and staff members have the time they need in the school day and school year to support improved academic outcomes for students. There also will be clear and transparent accountability for these choices and consequences.

Furthermore, Johnson said the school district is committed to partnering with local businesses and communities for extended and wrap-around services. The school district will commit its own funds to invest in this shift in its strategic plan.

Johnson said the school district will collaborate with principals, teachers, other MPS staff members and their unions to establish schools in the partnership zone that will use 2013-14 for identifying schools and building capacity, 2014-15 to begin performance contract implementation and 2015-16 to begin scaling up the opportunity across the school district. Labor negotiations will be critical in successfully implementing shifts in the strategic direction of the district. Labor negotiation priorities include increasing instructional time, flexibility in hiring decisions, fiscal responsibility and the building of career ladders to promote teacher leadership.

Johnson said the school district is working toward adding time to the school day for student instruction and teacher collaboration. In addition, Johnson said changes to the current contract provisions are needed to allow schools to make offers to the best candidates sooner; align processes that support teachers to improve; create incentives for staff to gain skills in “hard to fill” license areas and schools; and begin collaboration with the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers on a “grow your own” program for staffing areas of critical need.

“This shift begins now with this partnership approach to our work,” Johnson said. “The heavy lifting begins at the top, with me and my committed leadership team, a focusing of resources on teaching and learning and ownership of decision-making and responsibility at the school level.”