Superintendent Durkin Concludes Recent New Bedford High School Investigation

Statement from New Bedford Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Pia Durkin On the Conclusion of the Investigation into the Incident at New Bedford High School

Thursday, April 17, 2014

Building a positive learning environment at New Bedford High School is critical to our success in raising academic performance for all our students and implementing a state-mandated turnaround plan. That is why the incident that occurred at New Bedford High School recently has been taken so seriously by my administration.

Situations that lead to violent reactions of any kind in our schools are always and everywhere unacceptable. Keep in mind that the vast majority of New Bedford students strive every day to do the right thing. It is precisely because appropriate student behavior at New Bedford High School is the norm that we must respond swiftly and with clear consequences when students make the wrong choices. There is no place in New Bedford Public Schools for the behavior displayed in this incident toward any staff member. No teacher deserves the disrespectful treatment that was exhibited in this incident and the student involved is facing serious consequences.

With every instance of misconduct in New Bedford Public Schools, we also have an obligation and a responsibility to conduct a full investigation. This investigation includes speaking with all parties involved, and taking appropriate action so that we stay on the path toward the positive learning environment everyone is working so hard to ensure.

With this incident, that investigation began with the students directly involved, followed by the students who were bystanders, and has concluded with the teacher who was questioned today. That meeting was held and based upon the review of the facts, except for the fact that the incident should have been reported in a more timely manner, the matter was handled reasonably under the circumstances and no disciplinary action was applied to the teacher. However, this incident has led to the conclusion that increased communication and High School policies, practices, and procedures need to be reviewed with all staff as well as additional support be provided in dealing with such situations.

New Bedford Public Schools responds to all reports of misconduct of any kind, thoroughly investigates these reports, and takes appropriate disciplinary action where warranted. State and federal laws prohibit us from disclosing confidential information regarding student records including the discipline records of students. Students and families are informed about the requirements for conduct and our disciplinary procedures in our Student & Family Handbook. All educators – administrators and teachers – understand that they are required to comply with the Student & Family Handbook and school procedures in reporting misconduct and disciplining students.

As a community and as a school, we must use this incident as a "learning moment" when all of us—students, parents, teachers, administrators—all collectively step forward to reaffirm our goals and our vision for New Bedford High School. We must work together to build a place for our children where learning is the number one priority and anything that distracts us from that objective has no place.

We hold our administrators and educators to high standards and expect them to utilize appropriate techniques to de-escalate situations and to help students, when necessary, to conduct

themselves appropriately in our school community. We are proud of our students, educators, and administrators who make our school community a place where students grow, learn and succeed. We value each member of our school community who works every day in our schools to create a positive and productive learning environment.

In the coming weeks, we will be hosting a forum that will include the incoming New Bedford High School leadership staff who will specifically address the issues at the high school and the plan to address the school’s climate and culture next year.
