# ­Level 5 Schools 2016–17 Quarter 2 Report: Paul A. Dever Elementary School

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| **School Information** | | **Student Enrollment and Demographics** | | |
| **Location** | Boston, Massachusetts | **Total SY 2016–17 Enrollment** | 415 |
| **Current Status** | Level 5 | **Percentage SWDs** | 14% |
| **Receiver Name** | Blueprint Schools Network | **Percentage ELLs** | 54% |
| **Year Designated Level 5** | 2013 | **Percentage Black** | 23% |
| **Year Designated Level 4** | 2010 | **Percentage Latino/Hispanic** | 64% |
| **Grade Span** | PK–5 | **Percentage Asian** | 6% |
| **Number of Full-Time Staff in SY 2016–17** | 71 | **Percentage White** | 4% |
| **Percentage Multirace** | 2% |
| **Priority Areas** | | | | |
| **Priority Area 1:** Rapidly accelerate all students’ language development in English and provide families with the opportunity for content-rich Spanish language development for their students.  **Priority Area 2:** Improve instructional quality and maximize time for core instruction.  **Priority Area 3:** Use data to drive instruction.  **Priority Area 4:** Establish a culture of high expectations and college and career readiness.  **Priority Area 5:** Hire and cultivate high-performing and high-potential staff. | | | | |

*Source.* Content provided by Blueprint Schools Network.

## Executive Summary

Blueprint Schools Network (Blueprint) and the Paul A. Dever Elementary School (Dever) continue efforts to accelerate student achievement and provide a safe, nurturing, high-quality school for students and families in Dorchester.

Blueprint and Dever leadership are strategically building strong connections with families and community partners. Many of our families walk across Mount Vernon Street to get to Dever from the Harbor Point on the Bay community. On October 19, Dever hosted a table at Harbor Point’s Fall Festival & Service Expo and engaged with local community organizations as well as with current and prospective Dever students and families. Dr. Fishburn meets monthly with the Harbor Point Association and with the Residents’ Association. Dever also partnered with local businesses on the peninsula (Corcoran Jennison Management LLC and Harbor Health Services Inc.) for clothing and book drives.

Given that many Dever families reside beyond walking distance of the school, the school is continuing to implement communication systems and events that are designed to ensure that all of its families feel connected to the school. For example, families receive monthly newsletters in English and Spanish, Blueprint manages an independent Dever website, and students routinely receive Dever postcards mailed to their homes with handwritten, individual comments from teachers. Events in the second quarter included Dever’s annual Fall Festival and a Holiday Movie. Dever also proactively connects its students and families with the greater Boston community through its programmatic partnerships with the Boston Pops, Boston Ballet, Boston Children’s Hospital, and Big Brothers Big Sisters organizations.

School climate and culture are greatly improved, as Blueprint and Dever leadership teams have invested in structures and supports to promote positive student behavior and school culture. For example, each day, teachers deliver Second Step lessons to foster social and emotional awareness and use the Response to Intervention (RTI) process for struggling students (Tiers 2 and 3 students). The school also emphasizes positive incentives for students, which are supported by the use of Kickboard, an online, schoolwide data tracking platform for behavior management. All classroom teachers collect, track, and communicate merits, reminders, and core values to students throughout the day and provide timely information to parents using the system. Every Friday, students who have demonstrated positive contributions to classroom and community culture based on Kickboard data and other feedback are invited to participate in a fun, elective activity block based on Dever’s core values.

Every Monday, representatives from Blueprint, Dever, and the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) meet as an Attendance Team (the A-Team) to strategize how to best support and maintain grade-level and schoolwide attendance.

## Updates on Priority Areas

**Priority Area 1:** Rapidly accelerate all students’ language development in English and provide families with the opportunity for content-rich Spanish language development for their students.

* **Highlight:** Dever continues to focus on its literacy instructional priority, which is to ensure rigorous instruction during the ELA core through the use of the Reading Workshop model and implementation of the Units of Study for teaching reading. Professional development, training, and feedback for the Readers’ Workshop model has continued during the second quarter. Teachers also receive feedback on lesson plans every week from instructional deans, as well as frequent feedback on data gathered during learning walks from instructional deans.
* **Highlight:** A 12-person Language Assessment Team composed of Dever staff, administration, and a Blueprint representative meet biweekly to focus on the following duties: preparing for and administering the ACCESS for ELLs assessment in January 2017; providing guidance to school leadership and staff regarding English as a second language (ESL)/sheltered English instruction (SEI) scheduling; collaborating with Blueprint’s National Data Analyst and school staff to examine interim assessment data to inform ELL instruction; and assisting in implementing and refining Dever’s English Language plan.
* **Highlight:** The Spanish Language program is continuing for all Dever students in   
  Grades K–5. The program is anchored by the lead Spanish language teacher, who is in her third year at Dever.
* **Challenge:** Some SEI classrooms have a wide range of levels of language proficiency. Thus, instructional deans are working closely with these teachers to focus on how to differentiate instruction, resources, and activities for the students’ varying needs.

**Priority Area 2:** Improve instructional quality and maximize time for core instruction.

* **Highlight:** Classroom teachers at Dever attend two Common Planning Time (CPT) sessions per week with their grade-level teams led by their instructional dean. Additional staff, including the ESL team, technology teacher, and Math Fellows coach also participate to emphasize consistency across content areas. During these sessions, lesson plans are examined for the upcoming week to ensure rigorous, standards-aligned instruction in all classrooms within a given grade. CPT protocols also help to build a strong shared understanding of the content being taught.
* **Highlight:** Dever’s weekly professional development sessions on Wednesday afternoons provide strategic professional development and critical data analysis opportunities for staff to collaborate across grades and teams. Agendas for these sessions are being driven by Dever’s areas of instructional need as determined from the learning walks and feedback received from partners, including ANet, Blueprint, and DESE. For example, in the first quarter, independent practice was identified as an area of growth based on feedback. In response, Dever developed and delivered a professional development session on the purpose of and expectations for independent practice during core content instruction. This interactive presentation was followed by teacher work time. Implementation was monitored using observation and feedback aligned to the independent practice expectations in order to refine teachers’ capacity to leverage this time during their lesson.
* **Highlight:** The principal and instructional deans are building and executing on a culture of consistent observation and feedback as a key lever to improve instructional quality.   
  Dr. Fishburn has led and promoted activities (teacher focus groups, all-staff feedback protocols, and research-based readings) to establish a common understanding of why feedback is essential for continuous improvement and to determine how teachers prefer to receive feedback. Established learning walk rubrics and protocols for instructional priority areas exist, as does an additional learning walk tool for safe learning environments and high expectations. Dr. Fishburn and Dever’s instructional deans have created a database to track feedback and assess the degree to which specific feedback has been implemented to improve instructional practices.
* **Challenge:** During teacher focus groups conducted by Dr. Fishburn and independently by Blueprint during its second quarter monitoring site visit, teachers reported a need to streamline the feedback process. The Dever leadership team is now making adjustments to observation and feedback protocols to increase the utility of and efficiency for giving and receiving instructional feedback to teachers.

**Priority Area 3:** Use data to drive instruction.

* **Highlight:** Every Monday, representatives from Blueprint, Dever, and BPHC meet as an A-Team. Students who have four absences within a quarter are immediately referred to the BPHC representative, who reaches out to the family to problem-solve and connect them with other resources in Boston so that their child is able to attend school regularly. The A-Team reviews weekly attendance data prepared by Blueprint’s National Data Analyst and coordinates communication with families (letters, phone calls, etc.) and home visits when needed. In school, the A-Team promotes positive attendance for students by managing an updated attendance tracker and posting research-based materials regarding the short- and long-term benefits of consistent school attendance.
* **Highlight:** When compared with October 2015 ANet assessment scores, results from the October 2016 ANet assessment indicated that Dever students in Grades 2, 3, and 5 experienced increased scores in mathematics. Specifically, Grade 3 increased   
  17 percentage points to 67% proficient, and students in Grades 2, 3, and 5 outperformed the network average for comparison schools in Boston Public Schools, Massachusetts, and national networks. In English language arts (ELA), Grades 2, 3, and 5 ANet scores also increased over October of the prior year. In ELA, Dever students in Grades 2 and 3 outperformed the network average for comparison schools in Boston Public Schools and Massachusetts networks.
* **Highlight:** Dever also has taken action on data received from recent site visits to deliver professional development, as indicated in Priority Area 2. The Instructional Leadership Team is using this data to make decisions to adjust current practices and further refine focus areas, including shifting the role of Dever’s Assessment Coordinator to allow for more targeted support in fourth- and fifth-grade mathematics.
* **Highlight:** Dever students are taking reading-level assessments using Fountas and Pinnell’s Benchmark Assessment System. Data are collected from those reading assessments, and then student results are used for a Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) and to inform instruction during Readers Workshop; LLI is a schoolwide guided reading initiative that happens during ELA blocks.
* **Challenge:** Although Dever is collecting a lot of data, teachers are still working on using that data efficiently to plan for instruction. Administrators are working to create built-in planning time with instructional leaders to analyze data and use them to inform lesson planning. For example, administrators first worked with teachers to create standards-aligned exit tickets and to ensure that their instruction and practice in class was aligned to these exit tickets. Now, administrators are working to help instructors use that exit ticket data to inform their lessons for the next day.

**Priority Area 4:** Establish a culture of high expectations and college and career readiness.

* **Highlight:** Dever is focused this year on increasing engagement with families and the community. Various events have been planned throughout the year to connect the school with students and their families, as well as with the larger community. On October 28, Dever hosted a Fall Festival for students and families, with more than 100 families in attendance. Students participated in interactive fall-themed activities, including pumpkin painting, dancing, face painting, and pumpkin bowling. Dever’s Holiday Movie Night on Friday, December 9 engaged families in a fun-filled evening of holiday-themed movie viewing; families also picked out books and novels to add to their home libraries. Dever’s parent-teacher conferences, beginning the week of December 12, allowed for instructional staff to directly connect with parents and families, share celebrations, and provide updates on student strengths and areas of growth. These parent-teacher conferences are non-negotiable and must be conducted with each family. For families that are more difficult to engage, teachers communicate that parent-teacher conferences can be conducted by telephone if needed and that holding a meeting is essential to obtaining their child’s report card and artifacts demonstrating their year-to-date growth. In addition, Dever administration and teacher teams have conducted home visits to families that are challenging to reach.
* **Highlight:** Dr. Fishburn has increased the number of ways in which he and the school community can connect with families, including an updated website for parent feedback and sending Dever postcards routinely to students and their families with handwritten, individual comments and notes from teachers.
* **Highlight:** Dever Core Values posters and Dever creed posters are displayed in all common areas. In addition, students recite the Dever creed each morning during announcements. Schoolwide routines and expectations, such as walking on blue and yellow lines in the hallway, are helping to streamline transitions and ensure students are held to consistent, predictable high expectations and have a safe learning environment.
* **Highlight:** During professional development sessions, Dever leadership is training staff on Positive Behavioral Intervention Strategies (PBIS) and Response to Intervention (RTI). All students participate in PBIS programming throughout the year. Interventions are used for specific students as needed and are implemented using evidence-based strategies that are specific to each student’s needs. Students are targeted for interventions after data that are collected and analyzed by instructional staff indicate that Tier 1 supports are not sufficient to meet a student’s need. Grade-level teams, along with other specialists such as ESL teachers, special education teachers, and interventionists, brainstorm causes and an intervention plan using the SMART model. The goal of RTI is to have students make adequate progress toward an individualized goal after the intervention has been implemented.
* **Challenge:** Dever is always looking for ways to increase family involvement. As such, administrators are examining ways to offer informational sessions to families that will provide them with resources to help their students at home with their schoolwork, as well as offering professional development to staff on helping families support their students at home with schoolwork.

**Priority Area 5:** Hire and cultivate high-performing and high-potential staff.

* **Highlight:** Dever has a Sunshine Determined team, which is a group of Dever employees who look for ways to intentionally build staff morale. The Sunshine Determined team plans events, such as the annual holiday party, and other initiatives that are aimed at increasing staff morale.
* **Highlight:** Dever has used Boston Public Schools’ (BPS’s) New Teacher Development Program to provide mentors to all first-year teachers at the school. The program pairs each new teacher with a veteran teacher to receive additional intensive, classroom-based support. Teachers in this program also have the opportunity to attend a wide range of workshops and seminars that encourage professional growth.
* **Highlight:** Dever has an instructional leadership team (ILT) that meets biweekly on Tuesdays. All of the leaders on the ILT are in either their second or third year at Dever and work to ensure staff are supported in their goals and are delivering high-quality instruction.
* **Challenge:** Level 5 schools, like many schools across the Commonwealth, face the ongoing challenge of finding educators with the competencies and perseverance to serve students for the long haul. Recruiting, selecting, and retaining high-quality teachers and support staff remains one of Blueprint and Dever’s top priorities.

Blueprint’s Human Capital Team uses a variety of recruitment strategies to identify and select high-quality school leaders, teachers, and staff for Dever. Blueprint has built and actively maintains strong partnerships with national and regional teacher recruitment programs and organizations that include, but are not limited to, Teach For America (both Corps Member and Alumni networks), Boston Teacher Residency, the BPS Teaching Fellowship program, Institute for Recruitment of Teachers, City Year, and AmeriCorps. For additional exposure, Blueprint subscribes and externally posts to regional and national job boards, with a focus on diversity recruitment. The Human Capital team conducts direct outreach at diversity-focused national and regional career fairs in fall, winter, and spring semesters. The Human Capital Team also partners with BPS to screen candidates within district hiring pools and regularly conducts informational interviews with referrals from across its networks.

To support recruitment and selection for the upcoming school year, the Human Capital Team builds teacher pipelines by early February and launches full-scale recruitment efforts on March 1, in alignment with district early hiring and posting timelines. In addition, Blueprint conducts a Spring Interview Training for all school-based participants in the selection process to provide shared selection goals, timelines, and competencies. All interview templates and tools are developed and enhanced with the needs of a Level 5 School in mind and align with competencies of a high-performing turnaround teacher.

Strategies used to retain teachers include establishing a “Sunshine Committee” to build staff morale, holding teacher focus groups, assigning mentors to new teachers through BPS’s New Teacher Development Program, and strategically assigning teachers to instructional deans for support. Dever also provides frequent and actionable feedback as a research-based strategy that results in the retention of high-performing teachers.