# 2017–18 Level 5 School Annual Evaluation Report Paul A. Dever Elementary School, Boston, Massachusetts

### Receiver: Superintendent Tommy Chang

## Introduction

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) contracted with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to collect evidence from each Level 5 school on the progress toward implementation of the turnaround plan in Year 4 of Level 5 status. DESE facilitated the collection of information from the receiver throughout the year for the quarterly reports, detailing highlights and challenges during the previous quarter and progress toward benchmarks. In addition, in November 2017, AIR staff collected data through instructional observations using Teachstone’s Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS),[[1]](#footnote-1) and in February 2018 conducted a monitoring site visit that included key stakeholder interviews and focus groups, an instructional staff survey, and a review of extant documentation (e.g., turnaround plan, quarterly reports, and other documents). In spring 2018, subsequent data were collected by conducting follow-up instructional observations and interviews with the school principal. The data collection and analysis processes were developed purposely to ensure that the data were reliable and valid, and that the findings were informed by the appropriate key informants. For Level 5 schools, data were collected during the monitoring site visit and follow-up activities to inform DESE’s statutory requirement to annually evaluate each Level 5 school’s progress toward implementing the turnaround plan. AIR’s Level 5 school review process focused on work at each school related to each of the specific turnaround practice areas.

## Highlights of Turnaround Plan Implementation at Paul A. Dever Elementary School

* **Rigor, Relationships, and Reflection.** Paul A. Dever Elementary School (Dever) leaders focused on the three priorities in the turnaround plan: (1) increasing rigor, (2) developing relationships, and (3) incorporating reflective practices. These priorities were chosen based upon a review of data from the 2016–17 school year, including Dever students’ Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) scores, the instructional staff survey, and the Schoolwide Instructional Observation Report (SIOR), and were monitored using classroom observation data and interim Achievement Network (ANet) assessment data. Dever’s leaders and staff members understood the theory of action driving these priorities and were familiar with the goals and interim benchmarks used to consistently monitor progress (e.g., weekly instructional coaching and feedback team meetings). To ensure that educators focused on these three priorities, the instructional leadership team (ILT) aligned the teacher evaluation rubric with the priorities. Further, all professional development this year was aligned with one of the three priorities.
* **Leadership.** Although Dever underwent a change in receivers at the end of the 2016-2017 school year (from The Blueprint Schools Network to Superintendent Chang, the leadership at the school remained constant. Dr. Todd Fishburn returned as principal to lead Dever for the second year. In addition, the rest of the administrative team returned, and BPS funded a new position of director of instruction that is based full time at Dever and supports staff through conducting classroom observations and providing feedback and coaching to teachers. A human capital and strategy manager from BPS also supported Dever’s leaders to make personnel decisions, including the recruitment and retention of qualified staff members and the development of a more robust ILT that helps build the leadership capacity of staff throughout the building.
* **Data Use.** The school used several data sources to identify needs and determine supports for students who were struggling. Staff reviewed assessment data from ANet, Fountas and Pinnell, DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills), discipline data, and attendance data. Dever staff used the data to assign students to needs-based groups, determine the standards to focus on during reteaching, identify where the curriculum needs to be supplemented with external materials, and monitor their students’ progress. Dever staff reviewed data weekly during common planning time and professional development sessions.
* **Student Behavior.** Dever continued to implement positive behavioral intervention and supports (PBIS) and tracked discipline data, including merits, reminders, and the number of minutes that specific students were out of class, to identify those students in need of additional support. Dever leaders partnered with the district’s social-emotional well-being department around Tier 1, 2, and 3 strategies and conducted professional development for staff regarding various strategies, while staff created contracts and individualized supports for some Tier 2 and Tier 3 students.

## End-of-Year Findings

### Turnaround Practice Area 1: Leadership, Shared Responsibility, and Professional Collaboration

During 2017–18, Dever leaders focused on creating structures, routines, and rituals to ensure the improvement work has become embedded in the school. The entire administrative team is returning to Dever for the 2018–19 school year, and the new position of Upper Elementary Literacy Specialist will be filled by a current fifth-grade teacher at the school. The administrative team has done substantial work this year on team building and reducing turnover.

A primary focus at Dever has been the staff hiring process. Before beginning hiring at the end of the 2016–17 school year, the administrative team brainstormed about what it takes to be successful at Dever. They developed a list of five competencies: a growth mindset, passion for doing urban Level 5 work, instructional skills, being good relationship builders, and purposefulness and mindfulness. Using this list, they screened applicants for these qualities. To ease the anxiety of incoming staff, Dever added a strategic onboarding process during which new hires visited the school at the end of the school year to see the students and meet their new colleagues. Once the school year began, coaches offered tiered support to all staff, giving more support to first-year teachers before they demonstrated any struggles in the classroom since, as the principal said, “If it’s predictable, it’s preventable.” Finally, new teachers were given a new teacher developer (NTD) mentor as part of a BPS program pairing new and veteran teachers across the district. In previous years, the NTDs came from other Boston schools, but this year Dever was able to assign only NTDs who also were teaching at Dever, allowing them to offer more “just-in-time” support and more knowledge about the specific context and experience of teaching at Dever to their mentees.

Dever leaders worked this year on making the ILT more effective. Dever’s ILT comprised a cross-section of classroom teachers, coaches, specialists, English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, and administrators. Acknowledging that money and other resources will fade as the school exits turnaround, Dever leaders elected to work with Teachers 21 to focus on building the leadership capacity of school staff through the ILT. This work began with learning about and building trust in one another. School leaders then targeted building facilitation skills and elected to have ILT members run common planning time meetings and professional development sessions during the second half of the school year. To prepare for next school year, each ILT member completed a self-assessment of his or her own strengths and areas of growth, which Dever leaders will consider when determining roles and supports for each person in the coming year. Finally, school leaders will continue growing ILT members’ skills as instructional leaders through the identification of instructional best practices to grow at Dever based upon learning walks at other schools and within their own building.

### Turnaround Practice Area 2: Intentional Practices for Improving Instruction

During 2017–18, Dever continued to focus on improving the quality and rigor of classroom instruction. Dever continued professional development time for all staff one afternoon per week from 1:15 p.m. to 4:15 p.m. The Dever leadership team used this time to provide strategic professional development, including trainings related to implementing culturally and linguistically sustaining practices, and critical data analysis opportunities for staff to collaborate across grades and teams. The primary data source used for monitoring student growth throughout the year continued to be ANet, and coaches from ANet facilitated quarterly “data deep dives” again this year, in which all teachers and instructional leaders participated. However, their work with Dever staff shifted to helping build the capacity of the school’s coaches to facilitate these intensive data reviews in house during the 2018–19 school year. During the upcoming school year, ANet coaches will provide feedback to Dever’s coaches regarding their leadership of the data deep dives. In addition, ILT members also will be developing their data analysis skills to be able to lead their grade-level teams in these reviews; the second and third grades began these reviews during the current school year, and other grades will follow this model in the upcoming school year.

This year, Dever leaders also pivoted to provide targeted, tiered coaching and feedback to teachers. This meant that teachers identified as struggling a bit more than others received more direct support, and a handful of teachers received more intensive direct support. This tiering was based on student data, including ANet scores, DIBELS scores, and behavior data such as calls to the office and discipline referrals, as well as feedback from teachers’ formal evaluation observations and weekly coaching cycles. In addition, the role of the reading coach shifted in the 2017–18 school year. Since a reading interventionist position was not filled this year, the reading coach also provided direct literacy support to students. This dual role enabled the coach to both support students directly and to provide professional development for teachers (e.g., on implementing Leveled Literacy Intervention) to enable them to pull small groups themselves during needs-based group time. Since school leaders found this model worked well, they are using their autonomy to change the reading interventionist and reading coach positions for the upcoming school year. During the 2018–19 school year, there will be two full-time positions for a reading coach/interventionist role, with one person working as coach/interventionist in Grades K–2 and the second in Grades 3–5. By making these reading support positions targeted to grade bands, the individuals will be able to be experts in the English language arts curriculum for those specific grades and offer related support to both teachers and students.

### Turnaround Practice Area 3: Student-Specific Supports and Instruction to All Students

Using data to drive instruction and target support for students remained a major focus for Dever in 2017–18. The school continued to implement Kickboard, a platform for collecting, tracking, and reporting student academic and behavioral data on a real-time basis. In addition, Dever staff used several academic data sources to identify needs and determine supports for students who were struggling, including exit tickets, MCAS, ANet, Fountas and Pinnell, DIBELS, and benchmark assessments. Staff used these data sources as well as observational knowledge about students to assign students from across classes to needs-based groups, determine necessary supports, and monitor their progress. Dever leaders have been happy with the progress made during these needs-based groups, especially in literacy, and plan to continue these next year. They plan to focus on growing their practice in mathematics supports during these groups, and the mathematics coach is working with the fourth-grade team to be a model for others regarding how to go deep into targeted mathematics instruction from the start of the school year.

Dever leaders brought in a new clinical coordinator and emotional impairment strand specialist to work with the Therapeutic Learning Community (TLC) population this school year, changing the format of how they serve these students by moving to an applied behavior analysis (ABA) approach. This included using data to determine what students need and then offering wraparound services set up by the coordinator to the students both in and out of school. An assistant principal was repositioned to work directly with the TLC program during the start of the school year to stabilize the program as it established structures, routines, and processes, and ensured these were being implemented with fidelity. Dever leaders also used their autonomy to change their intake procedures for the TLC program. This was done to ensure that new TLC students understand and like the program by taking a tour and making the choice to enroll, rather than just being placed at Dever. In addition, intake procedures were established to make sure the school receives any new TLC student’s individual education plan (IEP) and medications in advance of their arrival so that supports will be in place on the student’s first day. A challenge has remained in getting others in the district to abide by these intake and onboarding procedures, but they plan to continue to work on this in the coming year.

### Turnaround Practice Area 4: School Climate and Culture

Dever staff continued to grow their PBIS implementation during the 2017–18 school year. School leaders shared, “The best PBIS happens behind the scenes—it’s not in your face, it’s just the culture. Kids are understanding that this is our culture, this is what we do at the Dever.” Expectations are governed by the school’s five values: grit, self-regulation, respect, positive attitude, and citizenship. Students going above and beyond with respect to these values earn Value Vouchers and are entered in a weekly prize drawing. All staff also use Kickboard to enter merits and reminders and monitor the extent to which students are meeting the values. Spring schoolwide classroom observations saw an increase in scores in behavior management compared to observations in the fall, and average scores were in the high range for this dimension across all grades. To address behavior on bus rides, Dever added school bus monitors, and teachers facilitated in-school discussions regarding what the school values look like on the bus. Together, school leaders reported that these supports helped contribute to a reduction in documented incidents occurring on the buses. Suspensions were also reduced from last year as the school focused on alternatives to suspension and approached discipline from a problem-solving rather than consequences-based perspective—that is, focusing on getting at and fixing the root of the issue.

Dever also has focused on increasing family outreach through both hosting events and partnering with organizations such as Catie’s Closet and Cradles to Crayons. At the end of the year, Dever hosts a literacy barbecue potluck, inviting parents to share their cultures through food. Hundreds attend and not only participate in literacy activities but also build relationships with the school staff. In addition, this year’s event also will be used for gathering feedback by encouraging on-site parent completion of the BPS school climate survey. Catie’s Closet is a partnership that brings families into the school by offering clothing and other items to families in need. This partnership began in the winter, and the closet opened in January. By May, there had been more than 160 visits. More than 55 students were served; the organization gave out 560 items of clothing or other supplies and fulfilled 18 special requests. Cradles to Crayons gives bags and school supplies to students and families; it provided 200 bags in the 2016–17 school year and 338 bags by May of the 2017–18 school year. In addition, Dever continued to partner with City Connects to have a point person screening all students and making connections to wraparound supports for families as needed. School leaders shared that this partnership “absolutely” will continue next year.

1. See Teachstone’s website for more information: <http://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/336169/What-is-CLASS_Info_Sheet.pdf?t=1432824252621>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)