

Level 5 Schools 2015–16 Quarter 3 Report: UP Academy Holland

School Information		Student Enrollment and Demographics	
Location	Boston, Massachusetts	Total SY 2015–16 Enrollment	753
Current Status	Level 5	Percentage SWDs	15%
Receiver Name	UP Education Network	Percentage ELLs	37%
Year Designated Level 5	2013	Percentage Black	42%
Year Designated Level 4	2010	Percentage Latino/Hispanic	41%
Grade Span	PK–5	Percentage Asian	4%
Number of Full-Time Staff in SY 2015–16	88	Percentage White	4%
		Percentage Multirace	9%
Priority Areas			
<p>Priority Area 1: Transform the culture of the school into a culture of urgency, high expectations, accountability, excellence, and achievement.</p> <p>Priority Area 2: Enhance the rigor of the curricula, improve the effectiveness of instruction, and strengthen the utilization of assessment data.</p> <p>Priority Area 3: Expand the school day and school year, build in time, deploy resources, develop programs, and create identification and tracking systems to ensure that all students, especially students with disabilities and English language learners, receive the academic and other supports they require to learn and succeed.</p> <p>Priority Area 4: Recruit and hire extraordinary leaders, teachers, and support staff, and build and utilize systems to evaluate, develop, promote, reward, and retain this staff over the long term.</p> <p>Priority Area 5: Fully engage all of the school’s families in the learning of their children.</p>			

Content provided by UP Education Network.

Executive Summary

A brief summary of the turnaround efforts that have taken place in the third quarter, from January 2016 through March 2016.

UP Academy Holland continues to reflect and improve on its practice in its efforts to ensure that “all students acquire the knowledge, skills, and strength of character necessary to succeed on the path to college and to achieve their full potential.” The school leadership team identified four top priorities to improve student learning for this school year: (1) take pride in the physical space of the school, (2) execute well-designed systems and procedures for all student movement (transitions), (3) manage students skillfully and with consistency, and (4) deeply understand reading, writing, and mathematics standards and effectively execute prioritized lesson structures. These strategic priorities continue to guide the school leadership team’s approach to supporting its staff, students, and families. For instance, the school has prioritized supporting teachers in their intellectual preparation of lessons according to strategic priority 4. As a result, the school

launched a comprehensive five-week professional development cycle focused on intellectual preparation. The school also has redesigned its approach to instructional rounds to better support teacher and staff needs.

UP Education Network continues to examine the challenges associated with school restart and reflect on its practice. This quarter, the network surveyed its approach to behavior management and supports, engaging with the UP Academy Holland leadership team, key staff members, and the receiver, to ensure that the school is providing supportive behavioral structures while also maintaining a safe learning environment for all. The network is encouraged by the school's progress as the result of its decision to not issue suspensions in Grades K1 and K2. In recent weeks, after the change in policy, UP Academy Holland has experienced a sharp decline in suspensions across grade levels. UP Education Network and the school continue to seek new ways of working together to rapidly and systematically improve curriculum design, instructional delivery, classroom management, data usage, and school operations to help the school achieve its mission outlined in the Turnaround Plan.

Updates on Priority Areas

Priority Area 1: Transform the culture of the school into a culture of urgency, high expectations, accountability, excellence, and achievement.

- **Highlight:** In January 2016, the UP Academy Holland leadership team launched a new professional development cycle focused on maintaining the school's vision for physical engagement (posture, tracking, voice, and participation). During this cycle, staff members studied and solved problems related to challenges to the vision. The cycle spanned four weeks, and topics included supporting students in posture, tracking, voice, and participation. The sessions are structured to allow teachers the opportunity to share practice and to collaborate using a problem-solving protocol to support students with identified challenges with physical engagement. Teachers share a challenge for a specific student with a group of school instructional staff members. The group then shares reflections, resources, and possible interventions for the student.
- **Highlight:** In February 2016, the UP Academy Holland leadership team kicked off a renewed focus on the school's social and emotional learning curriculum, Dovetail Learning. The school dedicates standing time during its weekly professional development sessions to focus on Dovetail strategies. For example, one strategy teachers use with students is "the breathing tool." When students are feeling impatient or frustrated, they are able to describe that to the teacher. Then, either on their own or with some prompting, they are able to use the breathing tool and take deep breaths, calm down, and self-regulate. The school's deans of curriculum and instruction are conducting weekly classroom walkthroughs to assess the use of Dovetail strategies and to provide live coaching to teachers in using the strategies.
- **Highlight:** In February 2016, the UP Academy Holland leadership team rolled out schoolwide adult facing values (e.g., resilience, teamwork, urgency). These values were rolled out in concert with a number of professional development conversations focused on teambuilding and adult culture.

- **Challenge:** This quarter, a local news station aired two stories about UP Academy Holland and its approach to behavior management and support practices. Although the UP network does not believe that the stories were a fair portrayal of the school’s successes and challenges, the network did determine that it needed to adjust its approach to lower elementary suspensions. This quarter, the network reviewed its approach to behavior management and supports, engaging with the UP Academy Holland leadership team and key staff members to ensure that the school is providing supportive behavioral structures while also maintaining a safe learning environment for all. The network is no longer issuing suspensions for K1 and K2 students. In addition, UP Academy Holland, in partnership with the network, has engaged numerous strategies to help further decrease suspensions, support students with the greatest needs, and ensure a safe learning environment for all. This has resulted in a dramatic reduction in suspensions across all grade levels at the school since February 3, including no K1 and K2 suspensions (per UP Education’s policy change), and a total of four suspensions across all grade levels.

The school and network have implemented a variety of strategies to improve support for UP Academy Holland students and staff. As noted earlier, the school has provided additional training opportunities for staff to engage with Dovetail Learning strategies. The school also is working to contract with a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) for the remainder of the school year. Moreover, the school is looking to hire either a full-time BCBA or an Applied Behavior Analyst for the 2016–17 school year. This individual will serve as a behavior specialist in the building, conducting assessments and providing direct intervention to students who need the most intensive supports. In collaboration with UP Academy Holland, the network has created an extended guide for supporting escalated students. This guide provides creative tools and resources that teachers and administrators can turn to in order to help deescalate extreme student behaviors. The network also has refined its use of behavior intervention rounds to improve the creation of behavior intervention plans for the school’s most struggling students. In addition, the network has refined the school’s internal criteria for suspensions and implemented a new system of increased checks and balances for school suspensions.

The school also is encouraged by the results of its recently administered internal family survey. More than 95 percent of families report that they believe UP Academy Holland keeps their students safe, will not let their students give up even when the work gets hard, and is an inclusive community that values their perspectives and backgrounds. All responding families also believe that there is someone at the school whom they can go to with questions or concerns, and 84 percent of families would recommend that friends send their students to UP Academy Holland. In March, the school will convene a parent roundtable meeting. The school’s recent policy change and the strategies described here earlier will be presented at the meeting, and families will have the chance to discuss them. The meeting will be open to all UP Academy Holland families and appropriately translated flyers will be sent home with all students.

Priority Area 2: Enhance the rigor of the curricula, improve the effectiveness of instruction, and strengthen the utilization of assessment data.

- **Highlight:** In January 2016, the UP Academy Holland leadership team launched a new professional development cycle focused on intellectual preparation. During the five-week cycle, the staff focused on anticipating student misconceptions, engaging students in deeper cognitive discussions, and executing aligned lessons. The staff engaged with intellectual preparation professional development in both whole-school and content-specific settings.
- **Highlight:** In January 2016, the UP Academy Holland leadership team led two data days by content area. During these data days, teachers dissected data from the UP network-developed benchmark assessments and developed action plans for adjusting instruction. Content specialists from the UP Education Network Academic team were on hand to support the school’s deans of curriculum and instruction in delivering a variety of professional development sessions aligned with the benchmark assessment data trends. In addition, the UP network identified teachers with the strongest results on benchmark assessments, including teachers at UP Academy Holland, and created videos of the teachers modeling examples of intellectual preparation in planning meetings and grade-level teams. The videos of all these UP teachers are available on OneUP, the internal network, for all UP teachers to use.
- **Highlight:** The UP Academy Holland leadership team, in partnership with the UP Education Network Academic team, has updated its approach to instructional rounds. According to teacher and dean feedback, the instructional rounds process has been revised to allow more focused school team and network team attention on a defined problem statement. This process promotes concentrating on the most acute challenges at the classroom level. Each round focuses on one problem statement. Prior to each round, the school’s deans of curriculum and instruction identify teachers and classrooms that would benefit from additional support in the designated problem area. At its next instructional round, the UP Academy Holland team will focus on English language arts in Grades 3–5. More specifically, the team will focus on the following problem statement related to gradual release of responsibility and student independence: “Activities that are designed for students to approach independently are being completed with varying levels of teacher assistance.”
- **Challenge:** The school continues to identify intellectual preparation as an area of needed growth for teachers. The school will continue its professional development focus on intellectual preparation and shift academic team resources to better support teachers in this area. For instance, the network’s English language arts and mathematics curriculum specialists have taken a more active role in delivering targeted intellectual preparation professional development sessions for teachers. During these sessions, as well as through the instructional rounds process, the curriculum specialists are able to share best practices from their work across the network. UP Education also leverages its intranet, OneUP, to share resources from across the network. For instance, the curriculum specialists send out regular newsletter blasts via OneUP with resources and professional development opportunities. A recent “math blast” focused on having students engage with other students’ work. A third-grade UP Academy Holland teacher was highlighted as an exemplar. The specialist shared the teacher’s visual model and approach to the lesson. In that same blast, the specialist shared a video of an UP Academy Boston classroom in which students were engaging with each other’s work.

Priority Area 3: Expand the school day and school year, build in time, deploy resources, develop programs, and create identification and tracking systems to ensure that all students, especially students with disabilities and ELLs, receive the academic and other supports they require to learn and succeed.

- **Highlight:** This quarter, the school’s English as a second language (ESL) team partnered with grade-level teams to conduct an audit of their daily schedule. The team then adjusted their schedules to allow for more collaboration time with their general education coteachers.
- **Highlight:** The UP Academy Holland ESL lead teacher has partnered with the UP Education Network director of English language to deliver weekly professional development sessions. These sessions, open to ESL teachers, have been used to support UP Academy Holland teachers as well as ESL teachers across the UP network. Session topics include best practices in collaboration and coplanning with classroom teachers, interim assessment data analysis with an ELL lens, ESL advocacy and leadership with diverse teams and various strategies for working with ELLs at English language development levels 1 and 2 (with one strategy discussed at each planning meeting).
- **Highlight:** Two additional UP Academy Holland general education teachers are pursuing ESL certification through the network’s ESL Internship Program. This program is designed to ensure that each school is providing support of the highest quality to its ELL population as well as to maximize the network’s pipeline of ESL teachers.
- **Challenge:** The UP Academy Holland ESL director continues to be on maternity leave. The school’s ESL team has divided up the director’s responsibilities and absorbed additional teaching responsibilities. UP Academy Holland ESL teachers also coplan with their general education classroom teachers every week. This planning is often led by the school’s deans of curriculum and instruction.

Priority Area 4: Recruit and hire extraordinary leaders, teachers, and support staff, and build and utilize systems to evaluate, develop, promote, reward, and retain this staff over the long term.

- **Highlight:** In accordance with the school’s turnaround plan deadline of March 1, the school leadership team was able to share recommitment letters with all staff members invited back for the 2016–17 school year. Ninety-one percent of staff received some form of recommitment letter, with a percentage of these offers conditional upon obtaining appropriate certification or licensure.
- **Highlight:** In January 2016, the school was fully staffed in all its student-facing positions. The school has since experienced staff transitions and is working in close partnership with the UP Education Network recruitment team to fill its open paraprofessional position.
- **Highlight:** In January 2016, the UP Academy Holland school social worker left the school. The school was able to hire a new social worker within days of the transition so that students did not experience an interruption of services.

- **Challenge:** Although the school has been able to fill midyear vacancies with relative speed, the school currently has one paraprofessional position open. Two briefly vacant lower elementary teacher positions were filled quickly.

Priority Area 5: Fully engage all of the school’s families in the learning of their children.

- **Highlight:** In February 2016, UP Academy Holland hosted a schoolwide Black History Month celebration. This event brought together schools from across the UP Education Network with performances from each of the network’s Boston schools. More than 150 UP Academy Holland parents showed their support for the event through volunteering or attending.
- **Highlight:** The UP Academy Holland leadership team has continued its schoolwide attendance initiative. In February 2016, the school again reached its highest monthly attendance average (more than 94%). Students with the fewest absences were invited to attend a special celebration and received prizes. Classes with the highest rates of attendance also were recognized.
- **Highlight:** In February 2016, UP Academy Holland’s successful partnership with Union Capital has expanded to a second UP Education Network school (UP Academy Dorchester). This partnership, as discussed in the Quarter 2 report, includes an iOS application that incentivizes and tracks parent engagement at the school. As a result of the success of the partnership at UP Academy Holland, Union Capital created a full-time liaison role (and hired a UP Academy Holland parent to fill the role) to support its parent engagement work in Dorchester. The parents at UP Academy Holland and UP Academy Dorchester will collaborate in planning various family events.
- **Challenge:** Although attendance continues to improve at UP Academy Holland, the school reports that about 20 students continue to struggle with chronic absenteeism and tardiness. To address this, the school has partnered with Connecting Families to Schools, a Boston-based program dedicated to supporting families struggling with chronic absenteeism, to conduct attendance meetings with parents. These meetings, which often take place at a location most convenient for the parent, focus on a review of the student’s attendance data and strategies to increase attendance and punctuality.