

# 2015–16 Level 5 School End-of-Year Report Morgan Full Service Community School, Holyoke, Massachusetts

**Receiver: Superintendent Stephen Zrike**

## Introduction

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) contracted with American Institutes for Research (AIR) to collect evidence from each Level 5 school on the progress toward implementation of the turnaround plan in Year 2 of Level 5 status. AIR facilitated the collection of information from the receiver throughout the year for the quarterly reports detailing highlights and challenges in each priority area over the previous quarter and progress toward benchmarks. In addition, during a two-day Monitoring Site Visit, AIR staff collected data through instructional observations using Teachstone’s Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS),<sup>1</sup> key stakeholder interviews and focus groups, an instructional staff survey, and a review of documentation (e.g., turnaround plan, quarterly reports, other documents) in December 2015. In spring 2016, subsequent data were collected through a review of documents and through follow-up instructional observations and interviews with the school principal and receiver. The data collection and analysis processes were purposely developed to ensure that the data are reliable and valid and that findings are informed by the appropriate key staff. For Level 5 schools, data were collected during the Monitoring Site Visit process and follow-up activities to inform ESE’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 the specific turnaround priorities and subpriorities from each school’s turnaround plan.

## Highlights of Turnaround Plan Implementation at Morgan Full Service Community School

Overall, the Holyoke district instructional directors and Morgan Full Service Community School (Morgan) leaders have focused on developing the skills and knowledge of their teachers to plan for rigorous student tasks aligned to grade-level standards. Instructional directors worked with teacher teams twice a week during their collaboration meetings to assist them in developing lesson plans consistently using Common Core aligned resources, mapping the curriculum, analyzing student data, and examining student work. As the year progressed, instructional directors supported the work of the instructional leadership team to set up systems and worked with individual teachers in coaching cycles. The school also created an intervention schedule that

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<sup>1</sup> See Teachstone’s website for more information: [http://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/336169/What-is-CLASS\\_Info\\_Sheet.pdf?t=1432824252621](http://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/336169/What-is-CLASS_Info_Sheet.pdf?t=1432824252621)

involved all staff and was focused on meeting the needs of the students. Since adopting a new intervention program mid-year, data are showing gains in reading and increased numbers of students on track to meet benchmarks. Morgan staff also integrated innovative Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) challenges aligned to the Next Generation Science Standards into each science unit; these give students creative, hands-on opportunities to engage with the material. While Morgan struggled to staff positions serving English learners (ELs), school leaders enlisted district staff to support teachers serving EL students and offered monthly professional development sessions to teachers of EL students to build staff capacity during the school year. In addition, all staff received training on using Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) strategies to teach EL students, and received feedback on their implementation of these strategies during classroom observations. Finally, Morgan prioritized staff engagement with families, and teachers routinely reached out to their students' parents through phone calls and home visits. Morgan also began the Parent Volunteer Program, which brought many parents into the classrooms to work with the students and teachers.

## End-of-Year Findings

### **Priority Area 1: Recruitment and development of professional talent.**

School leaders at Morgan understand the importance of high expectations and positive regard among leaders, staff, and students, and leaders have implemented strategies to ensure that these elements are in place. Morgan increased its instructional support staff this year, moving to two full-time coaches, one in ELA and one in mathematics, and adding two reading interventionist positions that are staffed by teachers licensed both as reading specialists and in elementary education. Looking toward next year, staff turnover is expected to be lower than in the past, with six staff members expected not to return; this includes three staff members whose contracts will not be renewed, two long-term substitutes, and one retiring staff member. Six teachers are currently on waivers awaiting decision on possible rehire.

While recruiting to fill all open positions at Morgan presented a challenge at times during the school year, leaders used creative staffing solutions to serve their students with school staff and partners. For example, when a science teacher left after the school year began, school leaders moved a dual-certified social studies teacher to support fourth-grade EL students and restructured the middle school schedule to have one teacher dedicated to science and one to social studies. This ensured students continued to receive both content instruction and additional support from the school staff. In addition, when unable to staff a part-time specialty teacher role, Morgan partnered with Enchanted Circle Theater to integrate theater arts across content areas and grades. Morgan also partnered with SchoolWorks to provide coaching on, and support in, instructional improvement to all staff when the school was unable to find a candidate with the appropriate background to replace the Dean of Instruction, who resigned unexpectedly at the start of the school year.

Morgan supports the development of current staff primarily through classroom observations, feedback, and coaching. Teachers conduct peer observations to share instructional strategies, administrators conduct formal observations to provide teachers with ongoing feedback, and district instructional directors work with cohorts of teachers to provide targeted coaching in six-

week cycles. School and district leaders also conduct monthly learning walks to identify schoolwide trends and determine next steps for data analysis, professional development, and coaching. In addition, the district instructional directors for English language arts (ELA) and English as a Second Language (ESL) worked closely with teachers on lesson planning, aligning curriculum resources, and analyzing student data and student work during team meetings twice a week throughout most of the school year.

## **Priority Area 2: Systems to support professional learning and responsiveness in practice.**

Morgan staff began the year focused on aligning instructional resources, including curriculum maps and assessments, along with professional development tied to specific curriculum. Teachers who were new to the profession and to Morgan received coaching early in the school year. The school also focused on creating an intervention schedule that engaged all staff and focused on the needs of the students, building the skills of general education teachers (in addition to interventionists, special education teachers, and English language development teachers) to work with small intervention groups. Teachers received 45 minutes of daily professional development focused on standards-based instructional planning. This included meeting with coaches once per week to determine the standard and objective for the following week, followed by meeting in small content-area teams twice per week with instructional leadership team (ILT) members (coaches, administrators, and district instructional directors) to receive lesson planning support, including scripting questions to ask during the lesson and reviewing student work related to the standard.

Throughout the school year, teachers began to develop skills in analyzing data and planning interventions to meet students' needs. During an AIR site visit in December, training to identify academic and nonacademic student needs was found to be limited and inconsistent across school staff, though a plan for remediation of deficits was beginning to be implemented. During the second half of the school year, with support from district instructional directors, teachers analyzed formative assessment data and created reteaching plans based on the results. Morgan began using Lexia to assess student progress in the winter, and developed an intentional tracking tool to ensure consistent use of the program schoolwide. Data from this program show fewer students reading below grade level, a decrease in the percentage of students at high risk for failure, and an increase in the percentage of students that will meet the end-of-the-year benchmark. In middle school grades, six-week cycles of teacher-developed interventions have targeted students' needs in ELA, mathematics, and science. Morgan also partnered with Blueprint in the spring to support mathematics instruction. This partnership brought in trained tutors to work with students in the grades performing the lowest in mathematics, allowing teachers to target mathematics interventions to small groups of their most struggling students.

## **Priority Area 3: Creating a Center of Excellence for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).**

To increase students' engagement with STEM, the Morgan STEM director created STEM challenges aligned to the Next Generation Science Standards. The director provided introductory training for staff during summer professional development that was reinforced and built upon

throughout the year. During the course of the school year, each student in kindergarten through Grade 8 completed at least eight of these STEM challenges, which were built into each science unit. Some examples of these STEM challenges include building and designing skyscrapers, critter cars, parachutes, and water purification systems. Morgan also hosted a UMASS STEM Ambassador afterschool program targeting students in Grades 4 through 7 who were struggling socially, emotionally, and academically, and who demonstrated an interest in science. The college students serving as ambassadors came to Morgan two days per week and provided science enrichment opportunities to participating students. Finally, the STEM fair took place on June 1, with every classroom in kindergarten through Grade 8 participating. Students chose a real world problem in one of four science domains—earth sciences, life sciences, physical sciences, or technology/engineering—for their project topic. Students in Grades 4 through 8 created individual or pair projects, while classrooms in kindergarten through Grade 3 created whole class projects.

Providing high-quality STEM education remains a focus for Morgan staff, and the school leaders and staff increased both core day and enrichment opportunities related to STEM this school year. However, recruiting and retaining highly qualified science teachers with both the content knowledge and skills to teach the Next Generation Science Standards remains a challenge. The school used creative staffing and scheduling this year to leverage a single middle school science teacher to teach all students in Grades 6–8.

#### **Priority Area 4: Targeted and aligned resources.**

Morgan targeted specific resources to both support teachers of students with disabilities and ELs and to effectively serve all students. The schedule was constructed to support cohort planning for ESL and special education teachers, and included opportunities for these teachers to collaborate with the principal and district instructional directors. The district made specialized professional development opportunities available, such as training special education teachers in using the Sonday System to support writing and reading instruction and intervention for EL and special education students in Grades 6 and 7. School and district leaders monitored the use of Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) strategies in classrooms schoolwide through focused weekly classroom observations and feedback sessions with teachers. At the beginning of the school year, all staff received ACCESS data for all EL students. In addition, school leaders and special education teachers reviewed all individualized education programs (IEPs) and goals and created student schedules tied to those goals.

Beyond EL and special education students, Morgan also focused on supporting pre-K students. In addition to the established traditional pre-K classroom, which was filled to capacity and had a waiting list, Morgan added a new Valley Opportunity Council (VOC) full-day pre-K program targeting four-year-old students who have not completed a full year of any type of official preschool experience and whose family meets the income requirements. Teachers in this new VOC classroom participated in a week of training, including sessions with the existing pre-K and kindergarten teachers. Finally, to provide expanded opportunities to all students, all Morgan intervention teachers began offering “Enrichment Fridays” in the second half of the year. Activities were led by Morgan teachers, and included filmmaking, crochet, American Sign Language, storytelling, and making recycled art projects. This has been embraced by staff and students alike, and the school is planning to continue offering Enrichment Fridays next year with more options and student choice in which activity they participate.

The mid-year survey of Morgan’s instructional staff conducted by AIR found they had mixed opinions about whether there were adequate resources and time to support English learners and special education students. During AIR’s visit to the school, one staff member said “the school’s current academic referral process is focused on referring students for special education services, and misses an opportunity to identify students who are struggling and may need additional support, but not special education services.” With regards to human resources, finding qualified staff to serve the large number of EL and special education students at Morgan has also been a challenge. The school used general education staff who were SEI endorsed to fill empty positions in the fall while interviews for ELD teachers continued into the school year. The resignation of the Dean of Instruction in the fall reduced school leaders’ capacity to support general education teachers in the use of SEI strategies. To compensate, Morgan enlisted district staff to support teachers serving EL students and offered monthly professional development sessions to EL teachers to build school staff capacity during the school year. Though no Morgan staff are involved in the current cohort, the district is encouraging general education teachers to obtain special education certification through a partnership with Mount Holyoke College. Building staff knowledge to better support EL and special education students and close the learning gaps between these students and other students will be part of the district’s professional development planning process for the next school year.

## **Priority Area 5: Enhancing and sustaining family and community engagement.**

Morgan prioritized staff engagement with families during the current school year. In the fall, grade-level teacher ambassadors met newly enrolled students, and all families that were new to the school met the family engagement coordinator. Throughout the school year, staff members routinely reached out to families to communicate positive news, and to communicate information about their children’s progress and needs. During a visit to the school in December, teachers explained that school leaders expect that the teachers will “have a certain amount of home visits and phone calls made home and conferences with families” to meet established goals aimed at “really building that trust and incorporating [the student’s] family.” Throughout the school year, teachers visited with student families at their homes or in agreed-upon community venues. Each teacher was required to do at least three home visits, and many went beyond this number. Morgan also began the Parent Volunteer Program, which brought many parents into the classrooms to work with the students and teachers. In addition, the Parent-Child Home Program (PCHP) worked with 10 families throughout the school year, offering parents early support in building their children’s academic readiness skills.

Morgan hosted events for families throughout the school year, including back-to-school activities in the fall, South Holyoke Safe Neighborhood Initiative (SHSNI) Family Fun Nights, and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes that were available to all Morgan families. Engaging parents in academically focused events at the school has remained a challenge, and events such as PTO meetings or information nights focused on PARCC continued to have small attendance numbers, usually drawing the same few families. Morgan staff members have tracked participation and engagement strategies used for various academic events. However, they have been unable to draw any conclusions about why some events have substantial attendance (for example, a kindergarten literacy afternoon that nearly all families attended) and others still struggle (for example, a first grade literacy afternoon two weeks earlier with low attendance).