

# 2015–16 Level 5 School End-of-Year Report John Avery Parker Elementary School, New Bedford, Massachusetts

**Receiver: Superintendent Pia Durkin**

## 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 John Avery Parker Elementary

Overall, John Avery Parker Elementary (Parker) staff increased their skills throughout the school year by participating in professional learning communities and teacher collaboration time, and through support from coaches and administrators. Teachers at Parker embraced the opportunity this year to plan both horizontally, with grade-level teams, and vertically, working with teachers in other grades who teach the same content. In addition, teachers at Parker adopted more leadership roles, such as leading professional development sessions for their colleagues throughout the year. Leaders at Parker also changed the schedule to integrate daily intervention blocks (“PRIDE time”) for all students. Parker also leveraged staffing and scheduling autonomy

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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)

to adjust the school day schedule and staff assignments to best use this PRIDE time for targeted student interventions. During these intervention blocks, students were grouped by ability and were served by teachers tailoring instruction to their specific level and needs. Through assistance from the instructional coaches and principal, staff at Parker also expanded their ability to use student data, and now track data weekly through a teacher-populated database. Beyond academic instruction, Parker staff also focused on elevating the overall school culture and enhancing behavior management. Both the external progress-monitoring classroom observation data and staff survey data collected by AIR demonstrated high levels of implementation of the school's behavior management system. Finally, Parker's work with families was led by the Family Resource Center manager, who facilitated conversations, coordinated and designed out-of-school time programming, and provided family outreach. The school also focused family engagement efforts on attendance and tardiness, and saw increased numbers of students attending school daily by the spring.

## End-of-Year Findings

### **Priority Area 1: Increase the rigor of Tier I (universal for all students), Tier II (targeted for struggling students), and Tier III (intensive for highest need students) instruction.**

Parker integrated interventions for all students into the daily schedule this school year. The intervention blocks, called PRIDE time, are small group intervention periods providing 60 additional minutes of English language arts (ELA) and 45 additional minutes of mathematics instruction each day. During PRIDE time, students are grouped by ability and rotate through different teachers, while staff focus on reviewing, reinforcing, or enrichment (RRE), depending on student need. Across groups, students generally work on the same concepts, but instruction is tailored toward each group's level, as determined by the data used to create the groups. Students are re-grouped for PRIDE time every six weeks. Classroom teachers, English learner (EL) and special education specialist teachers, and enrichment teachers all teach groups of students during PRIDE time. Students are tested using unit pre- and post-tests created by the principal and teachers to measure skill development during each cycle.

Staff developed their skills in serving all students by receiving regular coaching from Teaching and Learning Specialists (instructional coaches), and participating in professional learning communities (PLCs) and professional development trainings. Parker's instructional coaches provided differentiated tiers of support based on teachers' needs identified during classroom observations. Support included routine (more frequent if needed) observations, co-teaching, co-planning, support during teacher collaboration time (TCT), and formal and informal feedback. The work was guided by the coaching cycle work plan, which included detailed plans for each teacher participating in a coaching cycle. For each teacher, the plan outlined the focus of his or her coaching, practices that need improvement, amount of time to be spent on the coaching, strategies implemented, and expected outcomes to be observed by the principal and coach for the teacher to show necessary improvement.

This year, PLC meetings afforded staff the opportunity to plan by grade level and to align across grade levels. They also served as a mechanism for teachers to provide input into school

decisions. Staff had the opportunity to take on leadership roles by participating in PLCs and leading professional development sessions. Professional development was centered on curriculum, instruction, and climate and culture. Topics included project-based learning, literacy, data use, response to intervention strategies, strategies to increase student engagement, and behavior management. Following each professional development session, school leaders collected exit tickets to learn what teachers still need to know, met with teachers individually, and worked with coaches to ensure that follow-up and looping of professional development occurred during the next session.

## **Priority Area 2: Create school structures and systems that support instruction and maximize time on task.**

Structures, including the PLCs and TCT in both grade-level and subject-area groups, supported instructional improvement at Parker. Leaders also used their autonomy to add the PRIDE time intervention block into the schedule and to ensure that staff were assigned who would best be able to meet student needs. In 2015–16, Parker expanded its full-time staff to include two interventionists, a second instructional coach, and a special education teacher for second and third grade. Parker’s use of staffing autonomy included adding a full-time, in-building substitute teacher who served as a third interventionist in the morning, and then offered technology support in the afternoon in place of a separate technology support staff member. In addition, next year Parker will be leveraging its career ladder to add one master teacher and three career teachers to take on mentoring and leadership roles. This will increase Parker’s capacity for teacher-led collaboration and professional development. No educator vacancies are currently predicted at Parker for the 2016–17 school year.

Throughout the school year, Parker staff focused on ways to increase time on instruction. Consistent implementation of the behavior management system was one area of focus. Classroom observations in the winter and spring conducted by AIR showed high levels of classroom organization overall and behavior management in particular. In addition, AIR survey data indicated that, on average, instructional staff believe that the schoolwide behavior plan is consistently implemented and monitored to provide clear expectations and positive behavioral supports. Parker also offered Summer Academy classes for students for four weeks in July from 7:45 am to 1:45 pm. Each day had four blocks of small group, targeted instruction. These instructional blocks provided both increased instruction time for students and peer modeling and observation opportunities for teachers. Teachers also used Summer Academy afternoons to identify priority standards based on the end-of-year data and create curriculum maps for the upcoming school year. A similar schedule is planned for the 2016 Summer Academy. Parker leaders also used creative scheduling during the school year to serve the large number of ELs with a single English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher. Students received direct language acquisition instruction based on their English language development (ELD) level by the ELL teacher, as well as instruction using SEI with their general education teachers in their core classes. The planned 2016–17 budget includes an increase in the number of ESL teachers at Parker.

### **Priority Area 3: Increase the use of data to drive instruction.**

Structures for tracking data at Parker included a database of student-level formative assessment data and grade-level TCT meetings dedicated to student data analysis. The database was updated by teachers weekly and then used during the teacher collaboration time to make data-informed decisions about student needs and to monitor student progress. Teachers also met individually with both the ELA and mathematics instructional coaches and the principal to examine their students' data from benchmark assessments. Teachers received training over the summer on how to use data to identify student needs and then used these skills throughout the school year in TCT meetings.

Parker staff also developed and used individual student data folders, which are maintained by PRIDE time teachers to document students' activities and progress. These folders were used, along with other data, to identify individual student needs and to build on the work of other PRIDE time teachers to develop a plan and provide students with continuous support. The principal and instructional coaches also examined data across grade levels to identify trends in student learning needs that could inform schoolwide instructional practices. In addition, school leaders used data to determine what types of instructional supports would be most useful for staff to ensure the proper implementation of desired practices. This included using both classroom observation and student assessment data to target specific teachers for six-week coaching cycles. School leaders also used data and staff feedback to revise the PRIDE time schedule during the school year to ensure all students, including ELs, were included.

Many teachers were lacking data use skills at the start of the school year and struggled to handle the volume of data available. Leaders and coaches built teachers' skills in using data throughout the school year through professional development and working with data daily in TCT. By March, entering student data into the database became "a seamless and integrated process to which teachers are accustomed." Staff are now working to understand how best to integrate academic and social-emotional and behavioral data to gain a holistic perspective on each student.

### **Priority Area 4: Establish a school culture focused on achievement and engage families as partners in their children's learning.**

The main source of support at Parker was the Family Resource Center manager, who facilitated the Student and Family Support Service Team along with the principal and behavior specialist. The manager facilitated conversations, coordinated and designed out-of-school time programming, and provided family outreach. In addition, the manager participated in one-on-one interactions with families, bringing knowledge of the wraparound approach and principles, positive youth development practices, family best practices, cultural responsiveness, and a family and community engagement framework. The manager also coordinated family and community activities, including literacy nights, mathematics nights, and student celebrations.

Parker staff also connected families to resources and programs in response to their diverse needs. This included providing individualized supports to stabilize families in the areas of food, shelter, medical needs, and employment, and connecting at-risk families with school-based counseling. To address the challenge of keeping families informed about school activities, teachers took advantage of multiple opportunities for ongoing communication with parents, including informal communication at "drop off" and "pick up," communication folders or notebooks in which

teachers and parents wrote notes back and forth, and agendas or informal letters sent home to let parents know what students were working on during school. The school sent regular reminders to parents about school events, and a school newsletter and the school website further facilitated school–family communication. In addition, Parker staff familiarized families with Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS) terms and hand signals to encourage more consistent expectations of student behavior outside of school and to continue to build on the positive culture established at the school. The school also addressed attendance and tardiness as key elements of family engagement. School leaders directed support to specific families to help them get their children to school on time every day. These efforts resulted in increased attendance by the spring. Staff are planning to advertise the project-based learning that will occur during Summer Academy to encourage continued high attendance.