Level 5 Schools 2016–17 Quarter 3 Report: Paul A. Dever Elementary School

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| School Information | | **Student Enrollment and Demographics** | |
| Location | Boston, Massachusetts | **Total SY 2016–17 Enrollment** | 413 |
| Current Status | Level 5 | **Percentage Economically Disadvantaged** | 89.1% |
| Receiver Name | Blueprint Schools Network | **Percentage High Needs** | 94.7% |
| **Percentage SWDs** | 15.0% |
| Year Designated Level 5 | 2013 | **Percentage ELLs** | 54.5% |
| **Percentage Black** | 23.7% |
| Year Designated Level 4 | 2010 | **Percentage Latino/Hispanic** | 64.4% |
| Grade Span | PK–5 | **Percentage Asian** | 6.1% |
| Number of Full-Time Staff in SY 2016–17 | 75 | **Percentage White** | 4.3% |
| **Percentage Multirace** | 0.7% |
| **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. | | | |

# Content provided by Blueprint Schools Network.

# Executive Summary

On February 8, 2017, it was announced that Dr. Tommy Chang, Superintendent of Boston Public Schools (BPS), is being granted the authority of the receiver for Paul A. Dever Elementary School (Dever) beginning on July 1, 2017. Superintendent Chang will report to the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education with regards to the Dever, rather than to the Boston School Committee. Blueprint Schools Network (Blueprint) will continue to support the students, staff, and leadership team as receiver through June 30, 2017, fulfilling its 3-year agreement. .

Since the announcement, Blueprint, BPS, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), and Dever leadership teams have been working in close coordination to ensure a smooth transition, while placing top priority on supporting students to finish the year strong. BPS teams have conducted a thorough review of the school during multiple site visits, including classroom observations of all instructional staff members and a review of the systems, structures, and materials that are currently being implemented at Dever. Superintendent Chang has decided to retain the principal, Dr. Todd Fishburn, as leader of Dever next year. We have every confidence that this decision will have a positive effect for retaining high-quality teachers at the school and continuing the robust academic gains evidenced by winter Achievement Network (ANet) assessment results, which show that Dever students are outperforming students at many comparison schools (predominantly Level 1, 2, and 3 schools).

For the third quarter, this report focuses on Dever’s teaching and learning and professional development initiatives from December 2016 through February 2017. Blueprint and Dever leadership have worked to build coherence across our teaching and learning initiatives and systems. Wednesday professional development sessions, common planning time (CPT) sessions, lesson plan development, and observation and feedback provided by instructional coaches are aligned to support Dever’s instructional program and consistently focus on increasing the rigor of work and level of engagement we are asking of our students.

# 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:** Based on an anlysis of student data, Blueprint’s managing director at Dever is leading the design and implementation of a math Acceleration Academy that will be held during the week of April vacation (April 18–21). This Academy is being offered to Dever English language learner (ELL) students in third through fifth grades, and 60 students are registered. In addition, as an incentive to promote attendance during vacation week, English as a second language (ESL) classes are being offered at Dever free of charge to parents of students who attend the academy.
* **Highlight:** Dever’s Language Assessment Team (LAT) continues to work on the rigorous implementation of Dever’s English language plan. The team is currently discussing student accommodations for the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) 2.0 and working to ensure that appropriate accommodation plans are in place for each ELL student. The work of the LAT is a standing agenda item for all instructional leadership team (ILT) and Dever leadership team meetings.
* **Highlight:** The LAT led a training for Dever instructional staff on the administration of the ACCESS for ELLs assessment. Results from this assessment will be available in April 2017 to help Dever make determinations for students’ 2017–18 English Language Development (ELD) levels.
* **Challenge:** The coordination, planning, and implementation tasks for the transition to Superintendent Chang has the potential to be a distraction. To address this challenge, there has been thoughtful, detailed, and consistent coordination among the parties, with a shared objective to minimize the impact on classroom instruction and professional development opportunities.

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

* **Highlight:** Blueprint leveraged Level 5 budget and human capital autonomies to provide additional support in Grades 1, 4, and 5 and the Therapeutic Learning Community (TLC) this winter. Blueprint’s human capital team recruited, vetted, and worked with Dever’s leadership team to select five new instructional paraprofessionals to join Dever. Dever’s leadership team held a weeklong Paraprofessional Institute from February 27 to March 3 to orient new members of the team. The intensive, 5-day institute covered Dever’s core values, expectations, routines, and tiered behavior system to ensure a smooth integration into the school environment. In addition, the paraprofessionals were given professional development on Reading Workshop and Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) curricula so that they would be adequately equipped with knowledge of Dever’s instructional initiatives to effectively support students for the second semester.
* **Highlight:** The Dever leadership team gathers feedback from multiple data sources to implement its plan to improve instructional rigor. These sources include reports from Blueprint’s quarterly internal site visits, feedback from ESE visits, American Institutes for Research’s (AIR’s) Monitoring Site Visit report, internal focus groups, and ANet assessments. After a midyear review of data and information from these and other sources, Dever’s administrative and instructional leadership teams launched a schoolwide initiative for the second semester that focuses on three strategies to increase student learning: (1) high-quality feedback to teachers, (2) accountable talk, and (3) higher-level questioning and thinking. Grade-level teams and specialist groups are expected to refine the implementation of their selected strategies, conduct research, and take advantage of resources provided by their instructional coach. Instructional staff will share successes and challenges of implementing these strategies with the intent to scale up successful practices. Administrators have shifted the teacher evaluation instructional focus to these three heavy lifting areas of the teacher evaluation system for accountability measures.
* **Highlight:** Dever’s leadership team continues to strategically design differentiated professional development sessions based on feedback from instructional staff and student data. Kindergarten teams collaborate and create plans using the Focus on K2 curriculum. The TLC team has received targeted professional development regarding behavior and academic data analysis, and student goal tracking. All grade levels are engaged in monthly response to intervention (RtI) meetings and biweekly student support team (SST) meetings to identify students in need of more intensive academic support, review concerns, and monitor and modify interventions as needed to accelerate students’ meeting grade-level standards.
* **Challenge:** Dever has had to navigate multiple timelines and systems in coordination with BPS to add paraprofessionals to the staff roster midyear.

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

* **Highlight:** Dever students are outperforming students in a statewide cohort of mostly Level 1, 2, and 3 schools that administered the winter 2017 ANet assessment (A3 in February 2017). Dever tied for fourth out of 32 Massachusetts comparison schools (91% Level 1, 2, or 3) in math and 11th out of 37 Massachusetts comparison schools (86% Level 1, 2, or 3) in English language arts (ELA). Dever’s percent correct scores exceeded prior-year scores in the same period by 20 percentage points in math and 11 percentage points in ELA. Every participating grade (2–5) in math and three of four grades in ELA increased over the same period last year. Overall, Dever’s percent correct scores exceeded the October 2016 (A1) period by 9 percentage points in math and 6 percentage points in ELA. A steady increase in standards mastery is shown across the school, with all grades exceeding October (A1) and December (A2) scores in math, and Grades 2, 3, and 5 exceeding October scores in ELA.
* **Highlight:** We are proud to report that 27 Dever students in Grades 3–5 qualified for BPS’ Advanced Work Classes after their performance on the TerraNova assessment, as compared to 5 who qualified last year. In addition, one out of every five fifth-grade Dever student qualified for BPS’ Exam School Initiative when they matriculate to sixth grade next year.
* **Highlight:** On Wednesday, March 1, 2017, professional development focused on diving into ANet 3 data and planning for writing. In preparation for the MCAS 2.0 assessment, teachers navigated sample writing prompts, much like their students would encounter on the MCAS, and responded using sample templates. Instructional staff are expected to implement this same structure with their students using informational and narrative texts. Strategies to do this will be embedded in grade-level lesson plans for subsequent weeks.
* **Highlight:** Dever’s ILT has been working to place students into strategically scheduled need-based groups by grade level, in addition to the ELA core block. This includes cross-classroom grouping according to assessment data and observational knowledge about students. The triangulation of data from the 2016 Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment, ANet scores, and Fountas & Pinnell reading levels has informed the creation of the need-based groups to ensure that instructional staff are able to meet the needs of their students. Addional paraprofessionals have been hired for targeted support to close achievement gaps.
* **Challenge:** We anticipate facing an implementation learning curve when administering MCAS this spring. There are technical differences in administering the MCAS 2.0 assessment that Dever is working through as instructional staff must be introduced to the look and feel of the assessment, while students require time to adjust to and practice for a new computer-based assessment. In addition to introducing staff to sample MCAS 2.0 writing prompts, students will be taking sample practice tests. Dever’s techology specialist also supports teachers in overcoming technical challenges and helps them prepare their students for success.

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

* **Highlight:** Dever prioritizes holding students accountable for behavioral and academic success. Staff have conversations with their students regarding the importance of time spent in the classroom learning and staying on task, while at the same time avoiding distractions. Students are invested in Dever’s PBIS (positive behavioral interventions and supports) model. Dever has also designed and implemented a data tracking system to monitor student behaviors on buses. Dever is now able to collect real-time data and identify specific students and buses that may need additional supports and interventions. This has resulted in a significant increase in parental involvement and a decrease in the amount of bus incident referrals.
* **Highlight:** Dever is implementing systems to promote whole-class positive behaviors. Blue recognition cards are given to classes in which all students are displaying “Dever Style” and demonstrating leadership in common areas (e.g., hallways, main lobby, cafeteria). Dever holds monthly celebrations for classes who receive the most cards. In January, the class in each grade level that received the most recognition cards earned the privilege to partake in classroom-based pizza parties. In February, the class in each grade level that received the most recognition cards participated in a cookie decorating party in Dever’s cafeteria.
* **Highlight:** The Dever-Boston College High School Mentorship Program is a new program established between Boston College High School (BC High) and Dever. Sixteen juniors from BC High mentor 64 fourth-grade students at Dever every Thursday for a 60-minute block, from 2:45 p.m.to 3:45 p.m. During this mentorship period, BC High students work with Dever students by providing classwork and homework support, facilitating social-emotional support activities, and holding formal and informal socially and academically conscious conversations. Since the implementation of this program, fourth-grade teachers have reported increased student interest in their education as they reach the middle and high school grades; students also have developed a greater understanding of citizenship and community.
* **Challenge:** Due to the changing leadership over 3 years, a grading system has been inconsistently implemented. Dever is exploring the creation and implementation of a standards-based grading system to monitor student progress.

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

* **Highlight:** Dever’s ILT continues to meet biweekly on Tuesdays. The purpose of this team is to ensure that staff are supported in their goals and are delivering high-quality instruction. The ILT’s main priorities include building instructional leadership capacity, evaluating and refining instructional initiatives, and communicating actionable data to grade-level teams. Dr. Fishburn has led professional development in building the instructional capacity of the team, which has enabled the team to coordinate the creation of the aforementioned needs-based group initiative.
* **Highlight:** Blueprint, ESE, and BPS have been working hand-in-hand to support the transition of Dever for next year. Weekly transition meetings on Thursdays address hiring, staffing, and operational decisions for the upcoming year.
* **Highlight:** Dever’s recruiting efforts for the 2017–18 academic year are focused on recruiting and retaining highly effective instructional and support staff. As such, Dever’s leadership team monitors applicant traffic to open positions on BPS’ TalentEd site and has adjusted job descriptions to be reflective of desired candidate qualities. In addition, Dever’s executive principal and instructional dean attended the BPS Turnaround Showcase and Interview Day on Saturday, March 19,2016. Blueprint and BPS Office of Human Capital teams have been working in close coordination to effectively transition recruiting responsibilities, applicants, and institutional knowledge to achieve the common goal of building a high-quality instructional team for students next year.
* **Challenge:** Due to the receiver transition, adjustments outside of the regular BPS timelines have raised questions about staffing and hiring decisions. All entities are working to address these questions raised by current and prospective staff in a timely manner to retain high-performing staff. Information is communicated in- person and through electronic correspondence weekly. We believe that the decision to retain our current principal, Dr. Todd Fishburn, will yield positive results for staff retention and student achievement in the years ahead.