# 2016–17 Level 5 School Annual Evaluation Report Morgan Full Service Community School, Holyoke, Massachusetts

### Receiver: Superintendent/District Receiver 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 3 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 during the previous quarter and progress toward benchmarks. In addition, during a 2-day monitoring site visit, AIR staff collected data through instructional observations using Teachstone’s Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS),[[1]](#footnote-1) 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 November 2016. In spring 2017, subsequent data were collected by reviewing extant documents and conducting follow-up instructional observations and interviews with the school principal and the receiver. The data collection and analysis processes were purposely developed 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 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, Morgan Full Service Community School (Morgan) leaders continued to focus on developing the skills of their teachers to plan high-quality, standards-based core instruction. Staff focused instructionally on having students analyze complex texts, cite evidence, and use common protocols. To measure success, teachers and leaders analyzed the results from formative and summative assessments throughout the school year. In addition, the school offered targeted intervention groups and other differentiated instruction to close learning gaps schoolwide. Morgan staff continued to integrate innovative science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) challenges aligned to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) into each science unit; these challenges gave students creative, hands-on opportunities to engage with the material. Staff continued to use data from the Achievement Network (ANet) and began learning to use STAR assessment data to assign students to appropriate interventions and inform next instructional steps to accelerate growth toward grade-level standards. To engage with families, staff members routinely reached out to families to communicate positive news and updates on students’ progress and needs, and teachers conducted multiple home visits each quarter. Morgan also continued its parent volunteer program, which brought many parents into the classrooms to work with both students and teachers. Although Morgan continued to struggle to fill middle school positions, overall the school began to find increased stability in staffing and became a school of choice for some staff in other schools across the district.

## End-of-Year Findings

### Priority Area 1: Recruitment and developme**n**t of professional talent

School leaders at Morgan understand the importance of high expectations and positive regard among leaders, staff, and students, and leaders continued to implement strategies to ensure that these elements were evident. Morgan leadership supported the development of current staff primarily through classroom observations, feedback, and coaching. School leaders, including the principal and the instructional learning specialists (ILSs) for mathematics and English language arts (ELA), focused on developing teachers’ skills through frequent face-to-face feedback using the district’s feedback tool, Praise, Question, Suggestion(PQS). Morgan leaders also created a tool to track their observations and interactions with teachers about teaching and learning. This tool allowed leaders to record and track recommended action steps so that ongoing feedback was consistent, was sequential, and moved teacher practice to deeper levels.

Morgan staff spent the year centered on their instructional focus:

All Morgan students will analyze complex texts and problems and cite text evidence to explain their thinking and reasoning both orally and in writing. To ensure student success, instructors will implement common protocols, such as two column notes and top-down topic webs, in all content areas. Success will be measured by student performance on district- and school-based formative and summative assessments throughout the academic year.

They also focused on the powerful practice of “purposing lessons”; that is, staff ensured that a specific and standards-based purpose was in every lesson plan and posted in classrooms and referred back to during lessons. Professional learning was developed for these priorities and was intentionally differentiated for regular classroom teachers and specialty or intervention teachers to address the different time constraints and nature of their teaching. Teachers also engaged in peer observations to learn from one another how they implemented purposing lessons in their classrooms and receive feedback from their peers.

Looking toward next year, staff turnover is expected to be lower than in the past. Openings include a middle school science teacher, a middle school ELA teacher, two special education teachers, and multiple English as a second language (ESL) teachers (including two ESL positions that are being added to the school). The core elementary school teacher team has stabilized, and nearly all instructors in Grades K–5 are returning to Morgan.

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

Morgan staff began the year focused on learning and using data from the new STAR assessment in conjunction with their continued use of ANet assessment data. Morgan teachers learned how to navigate the various data points of STAR and use the platform to locate re-teaching resources, which enabled teachers to focus on and plan for the specific instructional needs of students relative to the standards to continue growth toward proficiency. As teachers grew more comfortable using the STAR data, they expressed excitement over receiving the reports. The STAR data were especially useful because they enabled teachers to see growth for individual students and the correlation between re-teaching to fill in specific gaps and students’ movement toward proficiency. In addition to using ANet to identify the extent to which students were meeting specific standards in Grades 3–8, teachers also relied on the ANet platform and resources to use and teach computer enhancements (e.g., drag-and-drop answers) aligned to the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) 2.0.

A significant development this year was an expanded role for the ILSs, who not only delivered coaching to staff, conducted observations, and delivered PQS feedback to teachers but also planned and presented professional development to staff. By developing internal staff’s capacity to deliver professional learning, the school decreased its reliance on district staff to support them in this capacity. The PQS feedback was especially powerful for staff, and school leaders saw previous action steps (“suggestions”) being implemented in the classrooms when they made return observations. Teachers voiced that they appreciated getting one piece of feedback that could be immediately implemented.

Morgan also continued its partnership with the Blueprint Schools Network to support mathematics instruction. This partnership brought in trained tutors to work with students in those grades performing the lowest in mathematics to compliment targeted mathematics interventions by teachers to small groups of their students who struggled the most in learning mathematics.

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

Overall, the amount of time spent on science instruction at Morgan was higher than ever before and surpassed that in many other elementary and middle schools in the district. During the 2015–16 school year, the Morgan STEM director created STEM challenges aligned to the NGSS to increase students’ engagement with STEM. These STEM challenges continued through the current school year, with each student in kindergarten through Grade 8 completing at least eight of these challenges, which were built into each science unit. This year, evidence showed increased teacher ownership and understanding of the concepts so that they could use the results and student responses to make informed instructional decisions. In addition, teachers began to see the instructional value of this work and develop additional challenges related to their science topics beyond the required ones. Some examples of STEM challenges included designing and building skyscrapers, critter cars, parachutes, and water purification systems. Following STEM challenges, students completed open-response items that required the use of claim, evidence, and reasoning. Students’ scores improved on assessments, and teachers began noticing that students better understood how to revisit their thinking and make changes if something did not work. In addition, the annual Morgan STEM fair took place on June 1, with every classroom in kindergarten through Grade 8 participating. Students chose a real-world problem for their project topic; topics were approved by the STEM director to ensure that the problems were realistic and relevant. Students in Grades 3–8 created individual or paired projects, whereas students in Grades K–2 created whole-class projects.

### Recruiting and retaining highly qualified science teachers with both the content knowledge and skills to teach the NGSS remained a challenge. Morgan has struggled to find a middle school science teacher to teach all students in Grades 6–8. Because school leaders believe that three grades of science may be daunting for applicants, Morgan is planning to change the position for the 2017–18 school year to have one science teacher for Grades 5 and 6 and a second science teacher covering only Grades 7 and 8. Throughout this school year, a paraprofessional served as a long-term substitute in the middle school science teacher role, supported by the STEM director, who provided assistance in lesson planning and met weekly with the substitute to discuss content presentation.

### Priority Area 4: Targeted and aligned resources

Morgan created a targeted intervention block to serve the specific needs of all students. Throughout the year, school leaders reviewed student data multiple times to create groups based on emerging data and instructional need. As the year progressed, teachers began to take more ownership in this task, entering into discussions with school leaders about student grouping prepared with analyzed data and draft lists and suggestions for next steps. Teachers in Grades 6–8 also brought work samples and shared why a student should remain in the same intervention or be moved to a different group. For the next school year, teachers will be using student work and ACCESS for ELLs (English language learners) assessment results to include English language development levels in informing next steps. To provide expanded opportunities for all students, all Morgan teachers also offered “Enrichment Fridays” in place of the intervention block. Activities were led by Morgan teachers and included filmmaking, crochet, American Sign Language, storytelling, and recycled art projects. These enrichment activities began at the end of the previous school year, and both staff and students embraced them.

For the first time this year, special education (SPED) and ESL teachers co-planned with all the grade-level teachers they work with, allowing them to plan and align content instruction, support, and modifications. During a spring professional learning community meeting, the expectations for this planning were reinforced, including the mind-set that these services should be fluidly integrated into instruction. School leaders are considering revisiting the SPED schedule for next school year to ensure that services are delivered as a Tier 3 intervention to support the core instruction as much as possible. This school year, Morgan leaders also developed an ESL schedule that was tighter and strategic. All ESL teachers taught the ESL curriculum and content in their own classrooms for students requiring ESL support and developed a student-specific combination plan of push-in and pullout models for strategic groups.

The midyear survey of Morgan’s instructional staff conducted by AIR found that instructional staff had mixed opinions about whether adequate resources and time were available to support ELLs and students requiring SPED services. Finding qualified staff to serve the large number of ELLs and students requiring special education also continued to be a challenge. An early fall resignation of a special education teacher and the medical leave of an ESL teacher both required Morgan leadership to make shifts and use creative staffing to cover instruction for these students while replacements were hired. Among the staff members being recruited for next year are four ESL teachers (including two new ESL positions being added) and two SPED teachers.

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

Morgan staff continued to improve outreach to families and build momentum in this area. Throughout the school year, staff members routinely reached out to families to communicate positive news and information about their children’s progress and needs. Morgan teachers conducted multiple home visits each quarter, and more than half exceeded the minimum of three visits per quarter at least once. The number of families participating in school-sponsored events also increased throughout the school year. Many Morgan teachers planned grade-level events during the school day so that families could observe school in action and see authentic student work and grade-level demand. These events included “100 days of school,” holiday celebrations, author celebrations where students shared a specific writing assignment, and demonstrations for helping students at home. Some afterschool events were also held to engage parents who were unable to attend during the school day, such as a Grade 1 mathematics night, a Grade 2 reading night, and a Grade 3 fable night. School leadership hopes to expand these teacher-planned and academically focused events next year.

Morgan also continued its parent volunteer program, which brought many parents into the classrooms to work with students and teachers. One volunteer was promoted to the role of school promoter in the Family and Community Engagement Department, supporting families to build and strengthen their relationship with Morgan, access information and resources, and develop their leadership and voice as parents.

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)