*****Massachusetts Department of***

***Elementary and Secondary Education***

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| Jeffrey C. Riley  *Commissioner* |  |

# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Mayor Jonathan F. Mitchell, Chair, New Bedford School Committee |
| **From:** | Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner |
| **Date:** | April 3, 2020 |
| **Subject:** | Quarter 3 Update on Chronically Underperforming Schools |

The following is the third of four quarterly progress updates to be produced this year on John Avery Parker Elementary School, as one of the four chronically underperforming schools, and that school’s implementation of its turnaround plan. The update in this report is focused on activities from January and February 2020. The narrative for this progress update has been provided by the School Empowerment Network, based on classroom observations (the second in the series of three) led by that group during January and describes progress made since the first set of observations in late October. The focus of this update is the instructional core (curriculum, pedagogy and assessments). A final annual review is due in June 2020, pending status of COVID-19.

Please share this report with the other members of the New Bedford School Committee.

**Chronically Underperforming Schools**

In the fall of 2013, four schools were designated as chronically underperforming schools in response to their low performance and lack of improvement while in underperforming status: John P. Holland Elementary School (UP Academy Holland) and Paul A. Dever Elementary School (Dever) in Boston, Morgan Full Service Community School (Morgan) in Holyoke, and John Avery Parker Elementary School (Parker) in New Bedford.

**John Avery Parker Elementary School, New Bedford, MA**

Narrative Prepared by School Empowerment Network

**School Strength**

Area of Strength

Curriculum

*Description:*

Parker School leaders have selected and implemented standards-aligned curriculum for core math and core ELA instruction. Revised curriculum maps for science are being developed this year. Teachers are supported by Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) members in weekly 90-minute Teacher Collaboration Time (TCT) meetings to prepare and internalize lessons. During TCT meetings, teachers review texts and standards for the week, complete sample tasks, prepare to support students with anticipated misconceptions, occasionally make collaborative decisions to modify tasks and/or questions and develop daily lesson plans. As a result, lessons are aligned across grade-level classrooms and students engage with grade-level content and texts across classrooms.

The math curriculum is Heinemann’s *Contexts for Learning Mathematics* which provides “units designed to foster deep understanding in a math workshop environment.” This curriculum emphasizes higher-order thinking skills and is closely aligned to both the school community’s beliefs about how students learn best and school leaders’ instructional priorities. Instruction in most core math lessons, therefore, reflects these beliefs and priorities. The ELA curriculum is Pearson’s *Reading Street Common Core*, which school leaders believe provides fewer opportunities for exploratory learning, student collaboration, and higher-level thinking. In order to address this gap, Parker leaders and staff have built supplemental ELA curriculum maps and lessons to use for the remainder of this year. Moving forward, school leaders should elicit input from the ILT and teaching staff and then select and/or plan an ELA curriculum that will more consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills while also providing access for all learners.

**Area of Focus**

Area of Focus

Pedagogy

*Description:*

Since October, instructional practices aligned to school leaders’ expectation that teachers should be “facilitators” of learning are more consistent across classrooms. Every math lesson observed included teacher facilitation strategies and/or opportunities for student discourse. In many groups, students engaged in organic, problem-solving conversations using mathematical language and the lesson included support, as well as productive struggle, for most students.

Parker leaders and teachers have made progress by increasing the consistency and alignment of pedagogy to the school’s beliefs about how students learn best. Students now have more frequent opportunities to address questions which require higher-level thinking, engage in discourse, and explain their thinking. However, teachers do not yet possess a shared understanding of higher-level thinking or a common vocabulary for assessing the rigor of tasks.