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Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner

To: Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
From: Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D., Commissioner
Date: May 14, 2014
Subject: Parker Elementary School Level 5 Turnaround Plan Appeal

On Friday, May 9, 2014, the New Bedford Educators Association (NBEA) filed an appeal to the Level 5 Turnaround Plan for the Parker Elementary School (Parker). For the reasons provided in detail below, the modifications requested by the NBEA will not improve the Plan and I recommend that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) decline to adopt them. I have developed a comprehensive, focused turnaround plan designed to promote the rapid academic achievement of students at the Parker School. This plan invests in the Parker School staff and focuses on the needs of the Parker School students.

Background

G.L. c. 69, § 1J, as amended by St. 2010, c. 12, § 3, An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap, provides for sweeping changes to the operations and structure of a “chronically underperforming” or Level 5 school in the Commonwealth.¹ The law requires that I take decisive action by creating a turnaround plan for a Level 5 school, and provides the authority for necessary changes to be implemented at the school. Throughout the Achievement Gap Act, the Legislature repeatedly emphasized the necessity to act quickly in order to “maximize the rapid academic achievement of students” in the school. Timely action is essential to ensure that all students, including current students, are afforded the opportunity and advantage to improve academically. Further, the Legislature recognized that significant change would be essential in order to create schools where student achievement could be maximized, as the status quo in these

¹ “Level 5” refers to the placement of the school in the state’s Framework for School Accountability and Assistance.

lowest performing and least improving schools is perpetuating the achievement gap that the Act was designed to address.

It is important to remember that before a school is designated chronically underperforming, a school must be designated underperforming (Level 4), implement a Level 4 turnaround plan, and fail to improve significantly. I decided to place the Parker into Level 5 status due to its low achievement rates and failure to meet measurable annual achievement goals, despite its status as a Level 4 turnaround school since 2010. Parker has been providing an insufficient instructional program, the result of which is unacceptably low student academic performance.

For example, the percentage of students who were Proficient or Advanced on the 2013 MCAS was at or below 50% in every subject in grades 3-5. The number is lower for students with disabilities, who make up 25% of the school's population. In addition, while performance in all subjects is below the state average, MCAS results in reading and ELA have remained largely flat over the past three years. Students often begin the school year without the requisite skills from the year before: in fall 2013, only 30% of second graders started the year proficient on the Grade 1 Reading for Literature Standards, as measured by the beginning-of-year Galileo assessment; and only 15% of second graders met the standard regarding phonics and word recognition. Based on the Spring 2013 MCAS, only one-third (33%) of Parker students are proficient readers.

The school and district had significant authorities and opportunities to improve during the three years that Parker was designated as Level 4. Yet, after it was designated Level 4, Parker failed to implement the comprehensive, rapid changes needed to create substantial turnaround. Parker, which was the smallest elementary school in the first cohort of Level 4 schools, was the only one of the 35 schools that had to submit its turnaround plan three times. Even then, I accepted the plan for only one year, as I was not confident that the plan would sufficiently focus the district and school on the strategies that would deliver a high quality program of instruction for students. (In contrast, all other Level 4 school turnaround plans accepted to date have been accepted for the full three year period.)

In addition, the school failed to maximize additional learning time for its students. For example, although the teachers were paid an additional \$7000 per year for working 140 additional hours as part of the turnaround plan strategy, that additional time was not spent with

students.² Further, the school failed to implement a coherent and well-aligned curriculum that is necessary to accelerate learning and significantly raise achievement for all students. Despite the efforts of the past three years, students are still achieving below grade level expectations.³ Moreover, Parker is among the bottom eight of the initial cohort of 35 Level 4 schools in terms of meeting the measurable annual goals included in its turnaround plan.⁴

As a consequence, in October 2013, I designated Parker Elementary School a Level 5 school and working with Superintendent Durkin, who arrived in the district in July 2013, developed a turnaround plan for the school that is designed to maximize and accelerate student achievement. With Superintendent Durkin, I considered recommendations from the local stakeholder group (LSG). I also considered modifications to the preliminary Level 5 turnaround plan proposed by the LSG and the local teachers' union (NBEA). I incorporated suggestions and modifications consistent with swift improvement in student performance, but rejected language that maintained current practices and policies which have led to the school's unacceptably low performance.⁵ The turnaround work at Parker will be realized only through substantial, school-wide reform.

The Parker Level 5 Turnaround Plan includes the decisive measures that are required to deliver an educational experience that prepares all Parker students to succeed. Our first job, as this school enters receivership, is to secure the basics of a sound academic program and a well-functioning school. We need to establish an effective instructional program and quickly move it to higher levels of functioning. Strong, focused implementation of the strategies contained in Parker's Turnaround Plan will provide the best opportunity to address the school's underperformance through innovation, a renewed sense of urgency, and drive for excellence to ensure *all* of Parker's students receive the high quality education they deserve.

2 This past September, Superintendent Durkin made changes to the prior agreement by using some of the paid time to increase the student instructional day.

3 There is a suggestion in the NBEA's appeal that the Parker Turnaround Plan places the blame for the lack of results on the teachers. That is not the case. In my introduction to the turnaround plan, I stated that "I know this work is challenging, and I do not assume that the Parker's status as a Level 5 school is due to a lack of effort or concern by the adults working there." The important point, however, is that the students at Parker need and deserve a stronger education, and I am confident that we can do better than the progress made in the past several years.

4 The other seven schools either engaged an experienced turnaround partner or closed.

5 I have included my response to the LSG as Exhibit 1 to this memorandum.

NBEA's appeal to the Parker Elementary School Turnaround Plan

Working with my staff and in consultation with Superintendent Durkin, I have reviewed the modifications to the Turnaround Plan proposed by NBEA and have determined that none of the modifications should be adopted. In this memorandum, I respond to each requested modification to the Turnaround Plan to explain my rationale for this determination.

To begin, however, there are several general principles that are important to bear in mind. First, many of the modifications requested by the NBEA would result in unacceptable delay. Numerous proposed modifications would require redrafting sections of the plan and those sections back to the local stakeholder group for consideration of further modification.⁶ These proposed modifications should be rejected because (1) they are not consistent with the statutory process which requires finality following an appeal to the Board; and (2) they would prevent Superintendent Durkin from acting quickly to implement the turnaround plan so as to maximize the rapid academic improvement of all Parker students.

Second, the NBEA's requested modifications to the Turnaround Plan fail to take into account that the Turnaround Plan must be financially sustainable. The NBEA's appeal seems to be based on the premise that Level 5 status comes with a blank check, as the NBEA requests that the turnaround plan be modified to include a fully staffed co-teaching model; an additional literacy coach; additional pre-K enrollment; additional staff to cap class size; specialists in intervention and gifted and talented teaching; high speed internet and additional computers for students; additional wraparound services; and additional compensation for staff. A conservative estimate is that the modifications requested by the NBEA would result in 14 new classroom teachers and specialists, at an additional cost of more than \$1,200,000 annually. In contrast, in creating the Turnaround Plan, I was deliberate about making the most effective use of existing resources, and providing additional resources where "start-up" costs were necessary. I do not believe it is appropriate to put in place a turnaround plan requiring strategies or staff that the district would not be able to afford in the future.

⁶ See, for example, NBEA appeal at p. 17 ("The Commissioner shall submit the amended plan to the local stakeholder group for proposed modifications consistent with G.L. c. 69, § 1J(p)."); NBEA appeal at p. 25 ("The Commissioner shall submit the amended section of the local stakeholders group for proposed modifications consistent with G.L. c. 69, § 1J(p); and NBEA appeal at p. 41 ("The school committee, the Commissioner, and the NBEA will jointly study all forms of salary constructs to determine which will be most effective in attracting and retaining high quality teachers at the Parker School.")

Finally, the NBEA's requested modifications are based on a premise that simply adding more resources is better. However, it has been our experience in working with Level 4 schools that resources alone do not ensure success. What is successful is when the turnaround plan focuses intensively on a number of effective strategies. That is the approach we have adopted in the Parker Turnaround Plan.

1. The NBEA has proposed a number of modifications which are not consistent with the coherent, human capital focused plan designed for the Parker Elementary School.

In designing a turnaround plan for the Parker School, my primary goal was to design a coherent plan which could maximize the rapid academic achievement of students at Parker Elementary School. It was also important that the plan be sustainable. Sustainability will be achieved through efficient use of available resources and investing in the "human capital" (staff), at the school. This investment is evidenced in the professional compensation system with career ladder (Turnaround Plan p 37-40). It is also reflected in the significant emphasis on professional development for staff. Parker staff will receive meaningful professional development on such topics as tiered systems of instruction and support, data use, and English language learner supports -- rather than relying on specialists to provide this expertise (Turnaround Plan strategies 1.1, 1.2, 1.5, 2.2, 3.3). A number of the NBEA's proposed modifications have potential merit, but are not consistent with my priorities in designing the Parker Turnaround Plan. This plan is more than the sum of its parts. Each element of the plan was thoughtfully included as part of a coherent whole with the goals of academic achievement and sustainability.

- a. NBEA's requested second literacy coach is unnecessary.
(NBEA Requested Modification #4⁷ and pp. 26-27 of NBEA appeal)

The NBEA has proposed a modification to require a second full-time literacy coach for the school. I do not believe this staffing level is necessary. The Department has reviewed the staffing patterns in Level 4 schools that successfully exited Level 4 status and achieved significant improvement in student performance. In no case did an elementary school with Parker's enrollment and staff size employ more than one literacy specialist.

Further, as the NBEA describes, Parker made some progress over time with a part-time literacy coach providing support to teachers; the full-time coach already called for in the

⁷ The NBEA Requested Modification numbering system follows the NBEA's "Summary of Requested Modifications" at pp. 44-46 of the appeal. I have included as Exhibit 2 a copy of the Summary of Requested Modifications where each modification has been provided a number.

Turnaround Plan will significantly and more rapidly improve teacher access to coaching support. In addition, the Turnaround Plan calls for the identification of “two teacher-leaders to model implementation of reading, writing, math and science curricula in ‘best-practice’ classrooms during core instruction and to coach peers.” (Turnaround Plan, page 10) This strategy adds to Parker educators’ access to embedded professional development and support to build their repertoire of effective instructional practices. In light of these strategies already in place, I believe it would not be the best use of resources to add a second literacy coach.

- b. The NBEA’s request to limit classroom size is not the best use of resources.
(NBEA Requested Modification #6 and pp. 27-28 of NBEA appeal)

The NBEA has proposed a new strategy for the turnaround plan to ensure very small class sizes for students at Parker Elementary School.⁸ I do not support this modification. The staffing level in the Plan, along with other strategies set forth in the Plan, are designed to bring about rapid advances in student academic performance.

The research on reduced class size provides a mixed assessment of impact and is definitive that in light of the cost of class size reduction, there are more cost-effective means of improving student achievement. A full review of the literature on class size reduction shows a number of rigorous studies (most notably in Connecticut⁹ and Florida¹⁰) that have found class size reduction had no impact on positive student outcomes. Such studies, and others like them that have shown insignificant positive and/or negative outcomes, demonstrate the mixed nature of research on class size reduction.

Moreover, even if the research literature were conclusive that class size reduction always led to significant positive student outcomes, the question would then be: *Given that the goal is to improve student outcomes, and that there are many proven methods to improve student outcomes, is class size reduction the most cost-effective means by which we can accomplish that goal?* The research base on that question is limited, but what does exist is clear: among a broad range of possible reforms, class-size reduction is the least cost-effective way¹¹ to improve

⁸ NBEA’s class size proposal would lead to the addition of 7 classroom teachers in a small school with only 19 teachers. This would require estimated additional funding of \$490,000-\$612,000.

⁹ Hoxby, Caroline M. “The Effects of Class Size on Student Achievement: New Evidence from Population Variation,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 115(4): 1239–1285 (2000).

¹⁰ Chingos, Matthew M. “The False Promise of Class-Size Reduction,” Center for American Progress (2011).

¹¹ Harris, Douglas N. “Toward Policy-Relevant Benchmarks for Interpreting Effect Sizes: Combining Effects With Costs,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 31(1): 3–29 (2009).

student achievement.

Therefore, I decided that the turnaround plan for the Parker School would focus on a broad range of programming, such as ensuring highly effective instruction, the pre-K program, increases in instructional time, and differentiated interventions for students, that are designed to be both effective, and cost-effective in improving student outcomes.

- c. The NBEA’s requested modification to add intervention specialists and gifted and talented specialists is unnecessary.
(NBEA Requested Modification #9 and pp. 29-30 of NBEA appeal)

The NBEA requests that the Turnaround Plan be modified to require adding specialists in intervention and gifted and talented teaching. This proposed modification is not necessary and would not provide the best use of limited resources.

A key focus throughout the plan is on improving all tiers of instruction. The plan reinforces the expectation that all teachers must routinely differentiate their instruction based on data about student needs. Parker teachers have received professional development this year and will continue to participate in an extensive series of professional development opportunities this summer and next year to strengthen their capacity to deliver differentiated instruction that is responsive to student needs. In researching how successful schools met the range of student needs in their schools, the ESE’s *Emerging and Sustaining Practices for School Turnaround* (June 2013) shows that in schools that made significant achievement gains, teachers are taking the lead in responding to student needs.¹²

As noted earlier, in conjunction with expanded instructional time, differentiated staffing roles provide substantial opportunities for Parker to customize student supports and interventions. We expect this differentiation will provide opportunities for student acceleration, enrichment, and intervention.

2. Priority Area One of the Turnaround Plan appropriately addresses issues relating to classroom instruction.

The NBEA requests several modifications to Priority Area One of the Turnaround Plan. Priority Area One is designed to increase the rigor of instruction in the school. To accomplish

¹² “Teachers are taking on more leadership roles, and collaboratively identifying areas of student need and plans to meet those needs, whether it be revising student groups, identifying new strategies, or juggling interventions for students.” <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/turnaround/default.html>
(page 8)

this, the school will focus heavily on professional development and coaching for teachers to ensure that they use evidence-based best practices to consistently provide instruction to students that promotes higher-order thinking and pushes students to improve toward and beyond grade level standards. See, Parker Final Turnaround Plan at pp 6-13. For the reasons below, the NBEA’s requested modifications to Priority Area One would not further promote the rapid academic achievement of the Parker students.

- a. The Turnaround Plan implements best practices for students with disabilities.
(NBEA Requested Modification #2 and pp. 18-19 of NBEA appeal)

The NBEA requests that the Board modify Priority Area One in the Turnaround Plan to “[e]stablish a co-teaching model at Parker, staffed and resourced adequately with appropriate professional development for general classroom teachers, so that it is available as a delivery model option for students with disabilities.” NBEA appeal at p. 19. I recommend that the Board decline this requested modification because it would not be appropriate to mandate a single model for the delivery of services to students with disabilities. To successfully educate a variety of students who may have considerably different needs, multiple models may be required school-wide. Elimination of substantially separate classrooms and pull-out support services would require consideration of the individual needs of each of the students currently receiving such services in those settings, as identified within each student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Any change in placement or service delivery would require input from the student’s IEP team which includes the student’s parents and may result in an amendment or modification to each student’s IEP.

Further, the Turnaround Plan already provides that the school will ensure the needs of students with disabilities are met through the most appropriate service/program delivery model, including using a co-teaching model.¹³ In addition, the Turnaround Plan includes that the school will provide targeted professional development to teachers to ensure access to quality instruction for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment possible.¹⁴

13 The Parker Final Turnaround Plan provides: “Regularly assess programs and services for Parker’s students with disabilities. Ensure students’ needs are met through the most appropriate program/service delivery model (e.g., co-teaching, substantially separate classrooms and/or other models), in order for all students to receive rigorous core instruction.” Final Turnaround Plan at p. 8.

14 The Parker Final Turnaround Plan provides: “Present targeted professional development to teachers with a focus on providing appropriate accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities in both general education

- b. The Turnaround Plan provides for common planning time for teachers.
(NBEA Requested Modification #3 and pp. 25-26 of NBEA appeal)

The NBEA asserts that Priority Area One of the Turnaround Plan is deficient because it does not “embed common planning time as a strategy.” NBEA appeal at p. 25. The Turnaround Plan, however, recognizes the value of common planning time by calling for up to 90 minutes of common planning time per five-day week. The NBEA requests that the turnaround plan be modified to mandate that “teachers shall receive 90 minutes of dedicated planning time” and to narrow the description of how common planning time might be used. The NBEA’s requested modification should be rejected because it is unduly rigid. For example, the requested modification would require all teachers to engage in 90 minutes of common planning time every week, whether or not that entire 90 minutes would be an effective use of time in a particular week for a particular teacher. Further, the Turnaround Plan appropriately provides a broad definition of common planning time. For example, teachers might occasionally use common planning time to work with students to demonstrate an instructional model to colleagues and to receive feedback on the demonstration to help inform the group’s practice. It is not unusual in high performing schools to find that teachers use their planning time both for common planning and for interaction with students if that would help to improve teachers’ instructional practice. Superintendent Durkin has committed that teachers will receive at least 60 minutes of common planning time each week. The proposed NBEA modification would unnecessarily restrict the use of common planning time.

- c. The Turnaround Plan has an appropriate pre-kindergarten strategy.
(NBEA Requested Modification #5 and pp. 19-21 of NBEA appeal)

The NBEA has proposed adding a timeframe and changing milestones in Priority Area One of the Turnaround Plan regarding the Parker pre-kindergarten (pre-K) program. These modifications are not necessary because, as described in the Turnaround Plan, the Superintendent is fully committed to determining why more Parker families are not participating in the Parker pre-K program and working to modify the program to better meet family needs. The Parker Turnaround Plan requires the Superintendent to “study, develop, and expand the current pre-K

and substantially separate classrooms to ensure access to quality instruction in the least restrictive environment possible in all three tiers.” Final Turnaround Plan at p. 9.

program to better serve all students in a more cohesive program with a focus on literacy.”
(Turnaround Plan Strategy 1.4, page 11)

Most current Parker kindergarteners (70% or 36 of 52) attended a publicly- funded preschool program, either through a New Bedford public school or in a community-based program. The remaining 16 students either attended a privately-funded program or did not attend a preschool program. This gap cannot be attributed to a lack of space in the Parker Pre-K program. In the current year, the Parker pre-K program has a total of 24 spaces available for “peer partners.” There were no eligibility restrictions on New Bedford students for these spaces. Only 10 of the slots were filled, and 9 of the 10 students will be attending Parker as kindergarteners. This means that 14 available spaces went unfilled. The Turnaround Plan appropriately focuses on determining why more families of Parker students do not take advantage of the pre-K program, modifying the program to better meet family needs, and executing a strategy for attracting more students to the program. (Turnaround Plan Strategy 1.4, page 11.) The Turnaround Plan also indicates that the Superintendent will “study the feasibility of expanding the program to add classrooms and instructional time (e.g. possibly full days, full week). (Turnaround Plan Strategy 1.4, page 11)

ESE has been working with the Department of Early Education and Care and the Legislature to secure resources to support this cost-effective strategy in Level 5 schools and districts. The State Senate Ways and Means Committee has just released a proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2015 which includes \$1,000,000 for a grant program to fund pre-K classrooms in the Commonwealth. The legislation would allow Level 5 schools and districts to receive preference in a grant competition for these funds. These critical funds would help provide the Commonwealth’s neediest students with key building blocks for school readiness.

- d. The Turnaround Plan does not need to include a requirement for specific professional development at the administrative level.
NBEA Requested Modification #7 and pp. 28-29 of NBEA appeal)

The NBEA has requested that the turnaround plan be modified to require professional development for administrators at the school. These proposed modifications are not necessary because the current school leadership is capable, and the robust professional development strategy already meets these expectations.

For example, the NBEA proposed an additional strategy (1.7) to require that the Parker principal receive professional development in a variety of topics, including: leadership skills; distributive leadership; educator evaluation; curriculum alignment; effective reading and math instruction in Tiers I, II, and III; English language learner supports; improving core instruction and maximizing the effectiveness of instructional time; the data inquiry cycle and data-driven decision making; and communication and relationship-building between teachers and families. The Parker Elementary School principal has been at the school since the beginning of the 2013-14 school year. Prior to taking on this leadership position, she was a successful principal at a Level 1 school in New Bedford. She was asked to take on the Parker assignment to meet the urgent needs in the school. Parker's leadership has received and will continue to receive support to address the effective implementation of the plan. Examples of the training and support the principal has already received include:

- The principal has completed the required training in educator evaluation.
- A consultant with a long history of success with teacher evaluation was assigned to work with the schools' leadership on the teacher evaluation process. The consultant provided training and coaching for evaluators and supported the development of "growth producing" feedback. This consultant support was funded through an ESE grant to the district in school year 2013-2014.

The Parker School Principal will be able to get the benefit of district-wide leadership training in school year 2014-2015, including:

- Intensive support to all administrators next year will continue for evaluating educators.
- There will be a five day August leadership institute for all school leaders and central office administrators that will include strategies for instructional leadership, educator evaluation and support, and related topics.
- Ongoing training and professional development will be provided throughout the year for leaders.
- Principals will meet every two weeks with the Superintendent and members of her leadership team to address essential topics for school leadership, including school and district goals, strategies for improving instructional practice and rigor, and ongoing professional development needs.

While it is good practice for leaders to participate in professional development activities with faculty, the Turnaround Plan is not designed to nor should it be used to prescribe in detail how the leader will allocate her time.

- e. The NBEA's requested modification regarding schedules is unnecessary.
(NBEA Requested Modification #8 and p. 29 of NBEA appeal)

The NBEA suggests an additional strategy (1.8, for Priority area 1) regarding the development of student and teacher schedules. This new strategy is not necessary as a general schedule has already been made available.¹⁵ A school year calendar has been made available to anyone applying to work in the school and to families, and all students and staff will receive a daily schedule before the start of the school year. Further, as explained in the legal memorandum prepared by members of my legal staff, the process proposed by the NBEA, which would require resubmitting elements of the plan to the LSG, is inconsistent with the requirements of the Achievement Gap Act.

3. Priority Area Two of the Turnaround Plan appropriately addresses the creation of structures and systems that support instruction and maximize instructional time.

The Turnaround Plan's second Priority Area is designed to create school structures and systems that support instruction, maximize time on task, and ensure that students receive instruction from teachers who can support and challenge them to improve toward grade level standards. These structures and systems include the following:

- Retaining, hiring, and developing teachers who are committed to rapidly improving student performance through a cycle of continuous improvement and who have a track record of success in improving student achievement
- Revising the school schedule to maximize time in core instruction by extending the school day and year and restructuring the schedule for arts, interventions, and support services
- Creating incentives to reward teachers for improving student achievement through a new career ladder

(See, Parker Final Turnaround Plan at pp.14-19.) For the reasons below, the NBEA's requested modifications to Priority Area Two are either unnecessary or are unduly prescriptive. The NBEA's requested modifications to the compensation system also falls under Priority Area Two. My reasons for recommending that the Board decline to adopt these proposed modifications are set out in detail in section b.

- a. The Parker's technology resources are being addressed.
(NBEA Requested Modification #10 and pp. 21-23 of NBEA appeal)

The NBEA has requested modifications to Priority Area Two in the Turnaround Plan

¹⁵ School day for students is 8:30-4 M-F and 8:15-4:15 for staff.

relating to technology issues, including committing additional resources to upgrading and increasing access to technology. These modifications are unnecessary because technology resources are address in the Turnaround Plan.

The Turnaround Plan commits the district to reviewing Parker’s existing technology resources. The district review is currently underway. The district is working with the University of San Diego to develop a technology plan to respond to the needs identified in the review. The Superintendent expects that the technology review and plan will be completed in accordance with the timeline proposed by the NBEA.¹⁶ The timeframe for upgrades required to implement the technology plan will depend on the results of the review, but as demonstrated by the Turnaround Plan, both the Commissioner and the Superintendent are committed to this important goal.

As part of early implementation of the Level 5 turnaround plan, Superintendent Durkin has made progress in upgrading the technology at Parker Elementary School. The Department provided New Bedford with early implementation funding for Parker in spring 2014. Nearly \$40,000 of these funds were designated for technology and software to support instruction, such as a document camera (also known as a digital overhead projector), and portable SMART response systems that will connect to the school’s data management system and to Galileo; these tools will facilitate teachers’ regular use of quick, embedded formative assessments to check for student understanding as part of daily instruction. New desktop computers will be purchased for each classroom as part of the SMART system.

Parker is ahead of many other elementary schools in helping teachers effectively incorporate technology in the classroom. For example, Parker has a teacher dedicated to instructional technology who works with teachers to embed technology into a variety of core curricular areas. Among other things, she is helping teachers use technology to support writing instruction. The position will continue into the 2014-2015 school year.

As described above, the work on addressing technology issues at Parker is well underway, and there is no need to modify the Turnaround Plan as requested by the NBEA.

- b. The performance based compensation system promotes teacher performance.
(NBEA Requested Modification #12 and pp. 31-41 of NBEA appeal)

The NBEA asserts that the performance based compensation system set out in the

¹⁶ By the end of the 2014-15 school year.

Turnaround Plan should be modified to require teachers to be paid at the current hourly rate for the increase in hours, and to require that I direct the school committee and the NBEA to jointly study salary constructs to determine what should be used at the Parker. NBEA appeal at pp. 40-41. I recommend that the Board decline to adopt NBEA's proposed modifications because (1) the current salary system does not adequately reward performance or serve as an incentive; (2) delaying a change to a new performance based system in favor of further study and bargaining will not promote rapid improvement; (3) the Achievement Gap Act provides the flexibility and authority to change terms of collective bargaining agreements without further bargaining; and (4) the implementation of the performance based compensation system at Parker Elementary School is an essential strategy for attracting and retaining strong teachers and for maximizing the rapid academic achievement for students.

We must be confident that we are using existing resources in a manner that most benefits students. No other expenditure comes close to that which is devoted to personnel: often as much as 85 percent of the budget is dedicated to educator salaries and benefits.¹⁷ Yet, in a typical school district, compensation has little alignment with performance. For example, the salary system that is currently in place in New Bedford primarily rewards longevity and credit accumulation, even though the evidence demonstrates that these factors have little relationship to educator performance. The research includes the following:

- Generally, teachers with master's degrees have little or no additional positive effect on student achievement compared to teachers who do not have advanced degrees.¹⁸ The exception to this statement is in a few specific content areas--math and science – where researchers found student achievement to be slightly higher for high school students whose math and science teachers held advanced degrees.¹⁹ Approximately 90 percent of the master's degrees held by teachers are degrees attained from education programs that tend to be unrelated to or unconcerned with instructional impact.²⁰
- The traditional structure is built on the assumption that teachers get better with experience. While it is true that novice teachers, particularly in their first year, experience a steep learning curve, teacher performance tends to plateau after 6 to 10 years.²¹
- “Although teachers with master's degrees generally earn additional salary or stipends – the so-called ‘master's bump’ – they are no more effective, on average, than their counterparts without master's degrees.”²²

¹⁷<http://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/stateRole.pdf>

¹⁸Raegen Miller and Marguerite Roza, 2012. “The sheepskin effect and student achievement: De-emphasizing the role of master's degrees in teacher compensation.” Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. Available: http://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012/07/pdf/miller_masters.pdf

¹⁹ Dan Goldhaber and Dominic Brewer, 1998. “When should we reward degrees for teachers?” *The Phi Delta Kappan* 80(2): 134-138.

²⁰ National Center for Education Statistics, “2003-2004 Schools and Staffing Survey” as cited by Miller and Roza, 2012.

²¹ Eric A Hanushek, John F. Kain and Stephen G. Rivkin, “Teachers, Schools and Academic Achievement.” Working Paper 6691 (National Bureau of Economic Research, 1998).

Indeed, for some teachers, the current salary schedule, which bases pay raises solely on time served in the district and credits earned, is increasingly cited as a disincentive for high performing teachers to stay in teaching and threatens to undermine morale. Critics of the status quo salary schedule argue that in fact, misaligned compensation systems are “thought to be especially acute in difficult-to-staff schools where the working conditions are more difficult, yet the compensation, due to the single salary schedule, is often similar to schools with better working conditions.”²³ Thus, using the district-wide salary schedule in New Bedford as the salary schedule at the Parker ignores the working conditions and challenges of teaching at the Parker.

The performance based compensation system included in the Parker Elementary School Level 5 Turnaround Plan takes a different approach. The system is expressly modeled on the performance based compensation system that is in place in the Lawrence Public Schools. Contrary to the NBEA’s characterization, the Parker compensation system is not a “pay for performance” system, wherein increases in teacher compensation are tied directly or solely to increases in student achievement. Instead, the Turnaround Plan includes a compensation system that differentiates among teachers and pays them based on several factors, including:

- A career ladder that includes five tiers – Novice, Developing, Career, Advanced, and Master – that compensates teachers commensurate with two critical factors: teacher development and impact on students.
- Taking on differentiated roles that are expected to have impact school-wide and to have an impact on student growth and learning. Such roles might include, for example, serving as a data specialist to lead common planning time discussions about Parker data. These roles will be embedded in the career ladder tiers described above.
- Increased pay for taking on a teaching position at Parker Elementary School and meeting school-wide annual goals as described in Appendix A of the Parker turn-around plan.
- Individual effectiveness as measured by the educator evaluation system.
- Professional growth.
- Student academic growth.

In sum, this compensation system provides a career ladder where advancement is based on a holistic measure of teacher effectiveness. This sophisticated differentiated compensation

²² Miller and Roza, 2012, p.1.

²³ Thomas Dee and James Wyckoff, 2013. “*Incentives, Selection, and Teacher Performance: Evidence from IMPACT*.” NBER Working Paper No. 19529).

system holds promise for improving student outcomes and is supported by the research. For example, recent research by Thomas Dee and James Wyckoff on Washington, D.C.'s IMPACT program found that financial incentives linked to multiple measures of teacher performance (i.e., observational measures as well as student achievement data) improved the performance of high-performing teachers (effect size = 0.24).²⁴ Dee and Wyckoff maintain that their results provide “reasonably credible evidence” on the effects of these performance based compensation systems such as the IMPACT system in DC and the structures described in the Parker’s proposed compensation plan.²⁵ They conclude that “overall, the evidence presented in this study indicates high-powered incentives linked to multiple indicators of teacher performance can substantially improve the measured performance of the teaching workforce.”²⁶

Moreover, the existence of a performance based compensation system will attract strong teachers to apply to work at the Parker and reward them for their efforts in ways that the current “step-and-lane” salary schedule does not. Effective teachers will advance at a faster pace and thus earn more in their initial years on the job than they would under the existing City of New Bedford teacher contract. In fact, as of May 13, 2014, New Bedford had received 714 applications from 370 applicants for openings at the Parker Elementary School.²⁷

The information available to date from the Parker is consistent with the research. Ballou and Podgursky (1993) analyzed the Schools and Staffing Survey, which is the only existing national survey of teachers. Ballou and Podgursky’s research challenged traditional notions that suggested teachers would oppose performance-based pay: “Counter to the common belief in the profession that performance pay would demoralize teachers who did not receive financial awards, non-recipients in districts that used performance pay were not hostile toward it. In fact, they were generally more supportive of performance pay than teachers in districts that did not use it. And although there is a widely held belief that teachers of low-performing students would oppose performance pay as unfair, the researchers found that teachers of disadvantaged and low-achieving students were more supportive of performance pay than other teachers.”^{28,29}

24 Dee and Wyckoff, 2013.

25 Dee and Wyckoff, 2013, p.1.

26 Dee and Wyckoff, 2013, p.28.

27 See May 13, 2014 letter from Superintendent Durkin, included as Exhibit 3.

28 Source: Ballou, D., & Podgursky, M. (1993). Teachers’ attitudes toward merit pay: Examining conventional wisdom. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 47(1), 50–61, as cited by the Center for Educator Compensation Reform, “Building Teacher and Community Support for New Compensation Systems.” Available: http://www.cecr.ed.gov/researchSyntheses/Research%20Synthesis_Q%20F21.pdf

Likewise, in a poll conducted for The Teaching Commission, Public Agenda found that 85 percent of teachers and 72 percent of principals said that providing financial incentives would help to attract and retain high-quality teachers. (The Teaching Commission, 2004. *Teaching at risk: A call to action*. New York).

The NBEA also asserts that the performance based compensation system should be modified because it relies on student growth. Yet, the Parker compensation system will not use student growth as the sole determinant of compensation or career advancement. Student growth will be only one factor in a multiple measure system that includes summative performance ratings in the educator evaluation system (which is based on professional practice judgments, including observation and artifacts teachers collect themselves).

The NBEA criticizes the compensation plan because it alleges that student growth scores are “unreliable.” (NBEA appeal, p. 38). ESE’s analysis demonstrates alignment between the summative performance ratings and student growth percentiles (SGP): where educators had been rated as “Exemplary” or “Proficient” in the summative performance rating, their students were more likely to have high or moderate learning gains as measured by SGP. The students of educators who had been rated as “Unsatisfactory” or “Needs Improvement” generally had lower growth percentiles. This analysis indicates that the summative performance rating is related to improved student outcomes.

Taken together, the findings related to student growth percentiles provide early evidence that the educator evaluation system is working as one would hope – the educators who have been rated the strongest on the basis of professional judgment are also, on average, those who have the strongest impact on student learning. For these reasons, the NBEA’s insistence that student growth be eliminated entirely from the compensation system is unwarranted.

Further, the NBEA argues that the compensation system should be modified because the pay does not adequately compensate teachers for the number of hours they will be working. In fact, teacher compensation for the upcoming school year will increase from 2013-2014. During

29 For additional research on this issue see: Milanowski, A. (2006). *Performance pay system preferences of students preparing to be teachers* (WCER Working Paper No. 2006-8). Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin–Madison, Wisconsin Center for Education Research. Retrieved January 11, 2011, from http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/publications/workingpapers/Working_Paper_No_2006_08.pdf) In that study, Milanowski conducted a survey of young adults who were preparing to teach. Milanowski found that these students who planned to enter classrooms said they preferred some form of performance pay.

the 2014-2015 school years, teachers who had been at the Parker School and remain at the Parker School will receive at least \$1,500 and as much as \$4,600 in addition to the \$7,000 stipend they have been receiving as part of the Level 4 agreement which had been in place for the prior year. In addition, teachers who had been at the Parker School and remain at the Parker School will earn more pay under the compensation system set out in the Turnaround Plan than they would receive under the system set out in the district collective bargaining agreement.

Additionally, the NBEA's proposed modification should not be accepted because it is neither affordable nor sustainable, two requirements I placed on the new compensation model. The NBEA's proposed modification would result in teachers continuing to receive the \$7,000 stipend as well as an additional \$14,000 per teacher for the proposed teacher work year outlined in the turnaround plan.

Finally, the NBEA asserts that the performance based compensation system set out in the Turnaround Plan should be modified because it violates the Achievement Gap Act by increasing the number of hours teachers will work without increasing teachers' pay proportionately. The NBEA's argument unreasonably constrains the authority provided by the Achievement Gap Act to extend the school year and the school day in a chronically underperforming school. Indeed, the NBEA concedes that "[u]nder normal circumstances, if a public school district proposes to add hours to a teacher's schedule, the parties are free to negotiate any pay arrangement in return for the expanded schedule, be it a higher, lower, or same rate or some other consideration such as a stipend." NBEA appeal at p. 33. It defies common sense to conclude that the Legislature would provide less flexibility in the context of addressing the needs of students in a Level 5 school than would otherwise be available.³⁰

4. Priority Area Four of the Turnaround Plan appropriately addresses school culture

The Turnaround Plan's fourth priority area is designed to establish a school culture focused on achievement and to engage families as partners in their children's learning. To accomplish this, school leaders and teachers will be responsible for promoting a school culture that focuses on learning, and for engaging families in the school's efforts to improve student performance. See, Parker Final Turnaround Plan at pp. 24-30. For the reasons provided below, the NBEA's requested modifications to Priority Area Four would not further promote the rapid

³⁰ The NBEA's appeal includes legal arguments regarding the compensation system. I have asked members of my legal staff to address those arguments in a separate memorandum to the Board.

academic achievement of the Parker students.

- a. The Turnaround Plan includes wraparound services.
(NBEA Requested Modification #11 and pp. 23-35 of NBEA appeal)

The NBEA requests three modifications related to Strategy 4.4 of the Turnaround Plan and specifically regarding the provision of wraparound services to Parker students and families. First, the NBEA requests additional detail about the specific wraparound service needs of Parker students and families as well as the steps that will be taken to provide for and/or refer those students and families. Superintendent Durkin already plans to complete a robust assessment that examines both the strengths and needs of students and families, as well as available supports and community resources. This process will be spearheaded by the Family Resource Center coordinator and will include the analysis of data received through a variety of sources this summer and fall, including assessments of students' social-emotional skills, input from students and families, and information from other agencies and partners.

Secondly, the NBEA requests that the financial plan specify how these services will be funded. It is important to note that while the school will play a significant role in identifying student and family needs and better coordinating the appropriate services and referrals, it will not serve as the primary provider of wraparound services. To the extent the assessment reveals needs that can and should appropriately be met at the school level, the Department will work with Superintendent Durkin to identify funding sources. As described in the Turnaround Plan, services coordination will be overseen by the Family Resource Center coordinator. This position, as well as that of a new district-level wraparound manager, is fully funded.

While I do not believe that these specific modification requests are appropriate, both the Superintendent and I share NBEA's belief that meeting the "whole-child" needs of Parker students is critically important. In support of this priority, New Bedford Public Schools has created a new, district-level wraparound manager position to develop a core menu of programs and that proactively address students' needs. In addition to partnering with relevant community agencies, this manager will work directly with Parker's Family Resource Center coordinator to ensure that Parker's students and families have available to them the supports they need to succeed. These efforts will also be informed by the experiences and successes of the district's newly appointed Chief Academic Officer, who has served as a principal of a Wraparound Zone school in Worcester for the past three years.

Finally, the NBEA requests that amendments to this section be submitted to the local stakeholder group for further review. As explained in the legal memo prepared by members of my legal staff, the process the NBEA proposes for resubmitting elements of the plan to the LSG is inconsistent with the requirements of the Achievement Gap Act.

5. Other issues raised by the NBEA's appeal

In its appeal, the NBEA also raised issues relating to the performance of the Local Stakeholder Group, as well as the Financial Plan and the dispute resolution process that were included in the Turnaround Plan. For the reasons provided below, those concerns are unfounded.

- a. The statutory requirements relating to the Local Stakeholder Group were fully satisfied. (NBEA Requested Modification #1 and pp. 12-17 of NBEA appeal)

The NBEA asserts that the LSG did not have the opportunity to fully participate in the development of the turnaround plan. This claim is simply incorrect.

Following the Parker's designation as a Level 5 school, I convened a local stakeholder group. The LSG met 4 times, and provided recommendations for the Turnaround Plan within the statutorily required timeframe. The recommendations were included as Appendix D to the Preliminary Turnaround Plan. I considered the recommendations, and as noted in the Preliminary Turnaround Plan, incorporated many of the recommendations into the plan.³¹ After I issued the Preliminary Turnaround Plan, consistent with the statute, I invited the LSG to propose modifications to the plan. The LSG met and proposed modifications to the Turnaround Plan in a timely manner. I appreciated the thoughtful input of the LSG, and considered the modifications it proposed. I sent a written response to the LSG indicating which modifications I adopted and where they were incorporated into the Final Turnaround Plan.³² In each instance where I declined to adopt a modification, I provided my reasoning. We worked hard to make the process transparent, both by providing the reasoning behind decisions, and by posting the documents received from the local stakeholder group and my response on the Department's website.

The NBEA also submitted proposed modifications to the Preliminary Turnaround Plan. Although the statute does not provide the opportunity for the local union to participate at this stage, I nevertheless considered the NBEA's proposed modifications, adopting some proposals and rejecting others. I also provided my response in writing and included the reasoning for my

31 The Parker School Preliminary Turnaround Plan contains 16 strategies (1.2, 3.4, etc.) Of those 16 strategies, 12 of them were informed by at least one (and sometimes multiple) LSG recommendations.

32 My response to the LSG is included as Exhibit 1.

decisions.

At each step, the statutory process (including all timelines) was fully met. The LSG participated in the creation of the Turnaround Plan in the manner outlined in the law. I considered its recommendations and proposed modifications, and included some of its proposals in the Turnaround Plan.

Both Superintendent Durkin and I are committed to engaging with Parker's stakeholders throughout the turnaround process. In addition, the Superintendent has launched the district's first citywide survey of parents, staff, and residents to solicit input about the district's improvement efforts, including at Parker.³³ Parker's many stakeholders are essential to the work ahead.

- b. The Turnaround Plan includes a Financial Plan that meets all statutory requirements. (NBEA Requested Modification #1 and pp. 12-17 of NBEA appeal)

ESE has developed a financial plan to support the operation of Parker Elementary School for the upcoming 2014-2015 school year. The plan was developed mutually between the New Bedford Public School (NBPS) system and ESE. NBPS has proposed a budget that recognizes the needs of Parker Elementary School as it enters Level 5 status. The Department made additional resources available to support costs related to "start-up." Both NBPS and ESE officials believe the funding identified in the plan is sufficient to implement the components of the turnaround.

The Department's approach with respect to the financial plan was to first identify all the existing financial resources made available to the school from local, state and federal sources this current school year, and then ensure that at a minimum an equivalent funding amount is available for the upcoming year. It is important to note that at the time both of filing the preliminary plan in March and the final plan the following month, the City of New Bedford had yet to finalize a school budget for 2014-2015 and the exact amount of federal grant funds had not been finalized.³⁴

Rather than merely providing level funding, Superintendent Durkin, with the support of

33 Exhibit 4 contains the Superintendent's editorial. Pia Durkin, 2014. "Stay the Course in New Bedford Public Schools." *New Bedford Standard Times*. May 14, 2014.

34 On May 5, 2014 the New Bedford School Committee passed the budget, the budget will go to the City Council on June 18, 2014.

the Mayor and the New Bedford School Committee, proposed a \$2,008,097 budget that reflects a total increase of \$512,265 (34.2%), in funds allocated to the Parker School over the fiscal year 2014 Parker school budget of \$1,495,832. This increase reflects a strong commitment from the Superintendent and the Mayor to support the educational strategies detailed in the turnaround plan. In partnership with the District, ESE worked with NBPS to identify 2014-2015 school costs that could be viewed as transitional, where state funds could help accelerate the turnaround work in the school. As a result, ESE is providing \$150,000 in state funds to support the Parker School.³⁵ ESE and the Superintendent believe this amount of funding, in addition to federal funds, will appropriately support the implementation of the Turnaround Plan and the operation of the school in 2014-2015.

ESE and NBPS will closely monitor funding utilization and make adjustments as necessary during the upcoming and future school years. Paramount to the financial plan is the ability for it both to support the work of the turnaround plan and to be sustainable in future years.

- c. The parties agreed to the Turnaround Plan's alternative dispute resolution process.
(NBEA Requested Modification #13 and pp. 41-43 of NBEA appeal)

Although the NBEA now requests that the alternative dispute resolution process be removed from the plan, the union previously agreed to this process. Pursuant to the Achievement Gap Act, in connection with the creation of the Turnaround Plan, I required the School Committee and the NBEA to negotiate in good faith for 30 days regarding changes to the school's working conditions. See Parker School Turnaround Plan at pp. 43-44. During this bargaining period, the NBEA and the School Committee agreed to the dispute resolution process that is part of the Turnaround Plan. The Board should decline the NBEA's requested modification for the additional reason that the agreed-upon dispute resolution process will lead to the fair and expeditious resolution of disputes that arise at the Parker School.³⁶

As the final step in the dispute resolution process, I am committed to remaining fair and impartial. I do note that those decisions with the most significant impact on individual educators (suspension or discharge of a teacher with professional teacher status) are exempted from this new grievance procedure. These individuals would continue to be entitled to statutory arbitration rights under G.L. c. 69, § 1J, section (o).

³⁵ ESE also provided nearly \$200,000 to the Parker for targeted assistance in spring 2014, to be spent by June 30th.

³⁶ The 39 point grievance attached by the NBEA to its filing as attachment F is an example of how the contractual grievance and arbitration system can become unwieldy.

Conclusion

In short, I believe that the Level 5 Turnaround Plan is sound, well-reasoned, and designed to maximize the rapid academic achievement of students at the Parker Elementary School. At multiple stages of the receivership process – when developing the Preliminary Turnaround Plan; when developing the Final Turnaround Plan; and in considering the appeal of the Final Plan – I have given considered thought to the input of the LSG and the NBEA.

The challenge at Parker is not a matter of transforming an adequate school program to good or great levels. Our first job, as this school enters receivership, is to secure the basics of a sound literacy program, a sound mathematics program, and a well-functioning academic curriculum. We need to establish an effective instructional program and quickly move to higher levels of functioning.

The turnaround work at Parker will be realized only through substantial reform that will require strategic effort. I know this work is challenging. I do not assume that Parker's status as a Level 5 school is due to a lack of effort or concern by the adults working there. I also know, however, that Parker students need and deserve a much stronger education than they have received over the past several years. I have every conviction we can do better. I am confident that the turnaround plan I have developed provides the opportunity to realize this aspiration.

EXHIBITS

EXHIBIT 1

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education



Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner

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Proposed Modifications to the Parker Preliminary Turnaround Plan: Information regarding adopted modifications

To: Superintendent Pia Durkin
Mayor Jon Mitchell, Chair, New Bedford School Committee
Parker Elementary School Local Stakeholder Group
CC: Louis St. John, President, New Bedford Educators Association
From: Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D., Commissioner
Date: April 9, 2014

Today, I have released my final Level 5 school turnaround plan for Parker Elementary School.

Pursuant to M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J(p), the Superintendent, the New Bedford School Committee, and the Parker Local Stakeholder Group had the opportunity to propose modifications to the plan. (Proposing modifications was not required.) Superintendent Durkin and the School Committee did not propose any modifications to the Parker preliminary turnaround plan; the Local Stakeholder Group submitted its proposal on March 28, 2014.

I appreciate the thoughtful input of the Local Stakeholder Group and have considered the modifications it proposed. Below, I have provided information about the modifications I have chosen to adopt and those I have declined to adopt. For those I have adopted, I have provided information about where they are incorporated into the final turnaround plan. I have also noted one modification that I have included based on a review of the preliminary turnaround plan and discussions with Superintendent Durkin.

Modifications I have adopted in the final Parker turnaround plan

Priority Area 1:

- *Review (and revise as needed) the science curriculum to ensure sufficient materials and supports, and professional development for teachers to implement this curriculum effectively.*
 - This has been incorporated into Strategy 1.1.
- *Include review of special education programs and services for all Parker students with disabilities to ensure students' needs are met in most appropriate program/service delivery model.*
 - This has been incorporated into Strategy 1.1.

- *Replace “K-5” with “pre-K-5” throughout the plan to be more inclusive of the whole Parker program.*
 - This has been incorporated in multiple locations throughout the plan as needed.

Priority Area 2:

- *Include an overarching recommendation that there is a “Comprehensive review of existing technology in the building to determine needs and that technology upgrades are made to ensure technology is a reliable and viable teaching and learning tool.”*
 - The review of technology has been incorporated into Strategy 2.2.

Priority Area 3:

No modifications were proposed for this Priority Area.

Priority Area 4:

- *Include “Parker will identify a consistent, evidence-based behavior management system and protocol for handling student behavioral issues.”*
 - This has been incorporated into Strategy 4.1.
- *Add a sub-bullet to 4.4 to state “Educate families on school-wide behavioral expectations.”*
 - This has been incorporated into Strategy 4.4.

Modifications I have declined to adopt in the final Parker turnaround plan

Priority Area 1:

- *Add a second literacy coach for a total of two literacy coaches; one allotted to grades K-2 and one allotted to grades 3-5.*
 - I have declined to adopt this modification because I am not convinced that one literacy coach is insufficient.

Priority Area 2:

- *Eliminate sentence containing “devote whatever time is required...”*
 - I have declined to adopt this modification. It is helpful to place this phrase in context. The full sentence the phrase is taken from states: “Teachers and other professional staff will devote whatever time is required to achieve and maintain high quality education.” (Strategy 2.1) This is an appropriate recognition that teachers are professionals. The specific working conditions for teachers are set out in Appendix A.
- *Implement co-teach model, eliminate substantially separate/pull-out program*
 - I have declined to adopt this modification because to successfully educate a variety of students who may have considerably different needs, multiple models may be required school-wide. Elimination of substantially separate classrooms and pull-out support services would require consideration of the individual needs of each of the students currently receiving such services in those settings, as identified on each student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Any change in placement or service delivery would require input from the families of the students and an amendment to each individual student’s IEP.

Priority Area 3:

- No modifications were proposed for this Priority Area.

Priority Area 4:

- All modifications proposed for this Priority Area were incorporated.

Letter from New Bedford Educators Association

The LSG voted unanimously to forward to me a letter from the New Bedford Educators Association (“NBEA”). Although the statute does not provide an opportunity for the union to independently propose modifications to the preliminary turnaround plan, I thought it would be helpful nonetheless to address the issues the NBEA has raised.

The NBEA letter proposes two categories of modifications to the preliminary plan: “educational practice and policy issues” and “teaching conditions issues.” Below, I indicate which educational practice and policy issue related modifications I have adopted or declined to adopt.

Modifications I have adopted in the final Parker turnaround plan

Priority Area 1:

- *Solicit teacher input in the selection of the new math curriculum.*
 - This has been incorporated into Strategy 1.1.
- *Identify a science curriculum, with teacher input, and implement with necessary professional development (PD) and materials.*
 - This has been incorporated into Strategy 1.1.
- *Solicit teacher input in identifying PD needs and providing feedback on PD quality.*
 - This has been incorporated into Strategy 1.2.
- *Align the pre-K program with Parker’s K-5 programs.*
 - This has been incorporated into Strategy 1.4.

Priority Area 2:

- *The Parker faculty has many ideas about how to adjust the schedule to avoid unnecessary interruptions and provide students with a consistent routine. The schedule should be developed with their input.*
 - This has been incorporated into Strategy 2.2.
- *The Parker School technology and infrastructure and hardware need a significant upgrade.*
 - A review of technology (software, hardware, and infrastructure) has been incorporated into Strategy 2.2.

Priority Area 3:

- *Provide professional development in data analysis and use so that capacity is built in-house and reliance on external consultants is unnecessary.*
 - The professional development in data analysis and use has been incorporated into Strategy 3.1.
- *Ensure that the school day includes time and a structure for data analysis. If the current TCT model is to continue to be used, there must be commitment to making sure the meetings are focused, efficient, and scheduled at a time when all can attend.*
 - This has been incorporated into Strategy 3.3.

Priority Area 4:

- *The Parker School needs to identify and implement a consistent behavior management system and protocols for handling student behavior issues.*
 - This has been incorporated into Strategy 4.1.
- *[The behavior system] must be made collaboratively to ensure that school and student needs are met and that all staff members have ownership of the program.*
 - This has been incorporated into Strategy 4.1.
- *While the turnaround plan mentions partnering with community agencies/organizations to provide wraparound services, the priority and scope of this strategy needs to be expanded substantially.*
 - This has been incorporated into Strategy 4.4.

Modifications I have declined to adopt in the final Parker turnaround plan

Priority Area 1:

- *The Reading Street program's writing component should be used rather than the suggested Empowering Writers program.*
 - I have declined to adopt this modification because Empowering Writers may help students develop key foundational writing skills. (The use of Reading Street is already included in the plan.)
- *The Lively Letters program should be used in the pre-K program only; it is not an appropriate program for kindergarten students.*
 - I have declined to adopt this modification because Lively Letters may help both pre-K and kindergarten students develop phonemic awareness and other pre-reading skills.
- *Using an external consultant to identify professional development areas will not lead to internal capacity to sustain an effective professional development program over time.*
 - I have declined to adopt this modification because I believe that bringing in outside expertise to help identify areas for professional development can improve the practice of the entire Parker instructional team.
- *The pre-K proposal in the draft plan does not address the needs of Parker School students; it needs to be much more ambitious, including a coordinated outreach to enroll all children in the Parker School district.*
 - I have declined to adopt this modification because I believe the preliminary plan already indicates a strategy to examine the current pre-K program's enrollment, explore the possibility of expanding the program, and develop and execute a strategy for attracting more students. The Parker pre-K strategy will be developed and executed in conjunction with a district-wide effort around pre-K.
- *The literacy coach and teacher leader roles are inadequately defined; there is no description of qualifications, schedule, or assignments.*
 - I have declined to adopt this modification because the roles are new ones that are under development; the plan provides adequate overviews of the positions in Strategy 1.2 (literacy coach; includes division of time) and Appendix A (teacher leader).
- *Parker needs to commit to smaller kindergarten class sizes and additional staffing.*
 - I have declined to adopt this modification because I am not convinced that the current kindergarten staffing is insufficient.

Priority Area 2:

- *The plan assumes the same schedule is appropriate for all grade levels. Students in grades K-2 may well benefit from consolidated core instruction at the beginning of the day; however, a different approach may be more appropriate for grades 3-5.*
 - I have declined to adopt this modification suggesting two different schedules based on grade level; the schedule concepts contained in the plan are appropriate for all grades, and running two different schedules would be confusing for both students and staff.
- *Implement co-teach model, eliminate sub separate/pull-out*
 - I have declined to adopt this modification because to successfully educate a variety of students who may have considerably different needs, multiple models may be required school-wide. Elimination of substantially separate classrooms and pull-out support services would require consideration of the individual needs of each of the students currently receiving such services in those settings, as identified on each student's IEP. Any change in placement or service delivery would require input from the families of the students and an amendment to each individual student's IEP.
- *The final plan should ensure a sufficient increase in staffing [to implement small intervention groups.]*
 - I have declined to adopt this modification because I am not convinced that current staffing is insufficient to implement small intervention groups.

Priority Area 3:

- All proposed modifications to this Priority Area were incorporated.

Priority Area 4:

- All proposed modifications to this Priority Area were incorporated.

NBEA also recommends three modifications relating to “teaching conditions issues.” I have declined to adopt all three of these proposed modifications.

- First, NBEA recommends that I “direct the Association and the School Committee to negotiate fair compensation for specific additional time devoted to the Parker School” and that the final turnaround plan should adopt this compensation. I decline to adopt the requested modification because:
 - The School Committee and the NBEA already have bargained over compensation. Pursuant to the statute, I required the School Committee and the NBEA to bargain in good faith for 30 days. The parties engaged in bargaining, and were not able to reach an agreement. I do not believe additional time spent bargaining would help maximize the rapid academic achievement of students at the Parker School.
 - Contrary to the position asserted by the NBEA, the performance-based compensation system in the turnaround plan reflects the importance of good teaching. The new system will compensate teachers based on responsibilities and leadership roles, individual effectiveness, professional growth, and student academic growth. It will help to improve student learning by attracting new high potential teachers and allowing the school to retain its most committed and effective leaders and teachers.
 - Additional compensation is provided under the new performance-based compensation system.
 - I disagree with NBEA’s assertion that the statute prohibits me from increasing a teacher’s hours without proportionally increasing her pay. Under the compensation plan, teachers will receive an increase in pay in return for the increased work year.
- Second, the NBEA recommends that the “final turnaround plan should not include a compensation system in 2014-2015 based upon student and teacher performance.” Instead, NBEA recommends that the parties study “all forms of salary schedule constructs” to determine which will be the most effective at the Parker School.
 - I decline to adopt the requested modification. For the reasons spelled out in Appendix C of the preliminary turnaround plan, the development of a performance-based compensation system is an essential strategy for maximizing the rapid academic achievement of students at Parker Elementary School. Further, early results from the Lawrence Public Schools, where a similar compensation plan is in place, are demonstrating the efficacy of compensation based on performance that is tied to opportunities for teacher leadership and expanded responsibility.
- Third, the NBEA recommends that the dispute resolution procedure should be replaced with “an accelerated arbitration process of the type approved by the Legislature in Chapter 69, § 1J(o) governing the termination of professional teacher status.”
 - I decline to adopt the requested modification because the Association and the School Committee bargained over and agreed to the dispute resolution process provided in the preliminary turnaround plan. In addition, the agreed-upon dispute resolution process will lead to fair and expeditious resolution of any disputes that arise at the Parker School.

Additional Working Conditions and Compensation Modifications Based on Additional Review of Preliminary Turnaround Plan

Working with Superintendent Durkin, I have modified the text of the plan to reflect that under the plan, educators may be required to work up to 25 days for professional development, planning time, Saturday Academies (not to exceed two per teacher per work year), and Summer Academies. The preliminary plan indicated that these days would total up to 20 per year. Superintendent Durkin has indicated that in order for educators to engage in the professional development, planning time, and Summer and Saturday Academies required by the plan, educators would be required to work up to 25 days beyond the 185 instructional days included in the plan. These changes can be found in Priority Area 2, Key Strategy 2.2 and Working Conditions – Expectations for Staff Members. In recognition of these additional working days, I have also made changes to the Professional Compensation System, specifically to the Career Ladder 2014-15 Salary. The compensation associated with the relevant career ladder placements for returning teachers has been increased to reflect the additional days required to fully implement the turnaround plan.

EXHIBIT 2

SUMMARY OF REQUESTED MODIFICATIONS

1. **Requested Modification for Financial Plan & Opportunity for LSG Recommendations:** The Commissioner shall provide an amended financial plan, including a line-item budget, no later than June 15, 2014. The Commissioner shall submit the amended plan to the local stakeholders group for proposed modifications consistent with G.L. c. 69, § 1J(p). The Commissioner shall take into consideration and incorporate the local stakeholder's modifications if they would further promote the rapid academic achievement of students.
2. **Requested Modification for Strategy 1.1:** "Establish a co-teaching model at Parker, staffed and resourced adequately with appropriate professional development for general classroom teachers, so that it is available as a delivery model option for students with disabilities. Reassess all Parker students with disabilities to determine appropriate program/service delivery for each student under current best practices to ensure that all students receive rigorous core instruction in the least restrictive environment given their needs. IEPs will be modified as appropriate. Regularly reassess programs and services to ensure that students' needs are met in compliance with state and federal law."
3. **Requested Additional Modifications for 1.1:** (a) Add new bullet to state: "Teachers shall receive 90 minutes of dedicated common planning and collaboration time per week." (b) Revise the first full paragraph on p. 36 to provide 90 minutes of common planning time per week (eliminate "up to") and revise the last sentence of that paragraph to read: "Common planning time activities may include but are not limited to, planning lessons, analyzing student data, strategizing effective instructional practices, working with colleagues, and coaching. Common planning time will not be used for delivery of student services, supervising students, or performing non-instructional related administrative tasks."
4. **Requested Modification for Strategy 1.2:** Add sub-bullet on p. 9 to state, "There will be one literacy coach for grades K-2 and one literacy coach for grades 3-5."
5. **Requested Modifications for Strategy 1.4:** (a) Add timeframes to p. 11 so that the data analysis and development a strategy for attracting more Parker neighborhood students to the pre-K program will be completed by December 31, 2014 with execution of the strategy to take place spring 2015. (b) Modify implementation milestone on p. 13 so that by September 2016, all potential kindergarten students in the Parker catchment have the ability to attend Parker's pre-kindergarten program with a goal of 90% of those not receiving high-quality preschool services elsewhere enrolling at Parker.
6. **Requested Additional Priority Area 1 Modification (A):** Add Strategy 1.6 "Additional staff will be hired to ensure that classes at grades K through 3 have no more than fifteen students and grades 4 through 5 have no more than twenty students."
7. **Requested Additional Priority Area 1 Modifications (B):** Add Strategy 1.7 "Use Level 5 authorities to increase the amount of focused professional development for Parker administration to ensure that the Parker staff receive the leadership, guidance, and support they need to successfully provide rigorous instruction." Bullets for Strategy 1.7: (1) all members of the Parker administration will receive professional development with an emphasis on strategies that develop leadership skills and use the principles of distributive leadership; (2) all administrators conducting evaluations will receive training/professional development on educator evaluation; (3) the Parker principal shall participate in all professional development in areas over which she is listed as an "owner" of a key strategy (e.g., 1.1, 1.2, 1.5, 2.2, 3.3, 4.3).

8. **Requested Additional Priority Area 1 Modifications (C):** Add Strategy 1.8 “To ensure that all elements of the Plan are accommodated in the students’ and teachers’ daily and weekly schedules, the Commissioner and superintendent shall develop student and teacher schedules by June 15, 2014. These schedules will go back to the local stakeholders group for recommendations for modifications consistent with G.L. c. 69, § 1J(p). In addition, the schedules will be provided to the local union and the Commissioner will provide the union with the opportunity to negotiate regarding impacts on the collective bargaining agreement consistent with G.L. c. 69, § 1J(o).”
9. **Requested Modification for Strategy 2.2:** Modify the next to last bullet on p. 16 by adding the following: “Specialists in intervention and gifted and talented teaching will be hired to ensure qualified staff are providing this service to maximize the rapid academic achievement of these students.”
10. **Requested Modifications for Strategy 2.2:** (a) Replace last bullet on p. 16 with: “By December 2014, complete review of Parker’s technology needs to ensure it has the resources (financial and otherwise) necessary to maximize rapid academic achievement of its students. By June 2014, have a written plan in place to upgrade all technology (software, hardware, and infrastructure). The plan shall ensure that all classrooms have high-speed internet access and a sufficient number of age-appropriate devices (e.g., tablets or laptop computers) to allow for regular use in preparation for 21st century instructional and assessment activities. The plan shall be implemented SY2015-16.” (b) Add sub-bullet: “Professional development shall be provided for teachers and the principal regarding effective incorporation of technology in their instructional practice.” (c) Add sub-bullet: “TCTs and other collaboration efforts shall consider the teaching of technology literacy as part of curriculum development.” (d) Add to Priority Area 2 “Final Outcomes” to address the acquisition of necessary technology and for incorporating technology literacy in the curriculum.
11. **Requested Modification for Strategy 4.4:** The Commissioner shall provide an amended Strategy 4.4, which identifies the wrap-around service needs of Parker students and families and specific steps in a written plan for providing for and/or referring students and their families to such services and how those services will be funded shall be identified in the financial plan. The Commissioner shall submit the amended section to the local stakeholders group for proposed modifications consistent with G.L. c. 69, § 1J(p). The Commissioner shall take into consideration and incorporate the local stakeholder’s modifications if they would further promote the rapid academic achievement of students.
12. **Requested Modifications for Compensation System:** (a) The financial plan at Appendix C will commit available RTTT or other state resources to a compensation plan that will not result in a reduction in the hourly rate of pay for educators at the Parker School. This can be accomplished by increasing pay for available staff, or by hiring an expanded, licensed educators to staff a staggered work schedule that will result in a reasonable number of hours for each Parker teacher. (b) The Final Plan shall not include a compensation system that is based upon student growth scores and teacher performance ratings and all references to the use of student growth in any way except to inform instruction shall be deleted. (c) The school committee, the Commissioner, and the NBEA will jointly study all forms of salary schedule constructs to determine which will be most effective in attracting and retaining high- quality teachers at the Parker School.
13. **Requested Modifications for Dispute Resolution Process:** (a) Amend the “Collective Bargaining Agreement” section on pp. 31-33 for members of the NBEA and insert “The grievance and arbitration procedures contained in the NBEA collective bargaining agreement shall be in effect, except as provided for in G.L. c. 69, § 1J related to teacher dismissals.” (b) Delete the second sentence of Appendix A (p. 32).

EXHIBIT 3



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"We are committed to developing a community of learners who are academically proficient, demonstrate strong character and exhibit self-confidence."

May 13, 2014

Commissioner Mitchell D. Chester
 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
 75 Pleasant Street
 Malden, MA 02148-5023

Dear Commissioner Chester:

The John Avery Parker School is in the midst of a very active hiring process. Following staff reapplication and our determination of staffing needs, the district posted available positions to *SchoolSpring* and our district website and began actively recruiting prospective candidates. We leveraged some of our networks and partnerships, including *Teach For America*, the ***Massachusetts Educational Recruiting Consortium (MERC)***, ***Alma del Mar Charter School***, and ***Roger Williams University***—among others—to **proactively identify prospective candidates and conduct targeted outreach**. For the first time ever, New Bedford Public Schools hosted its own job fair on March 29, 2014, which was attended by 200 educators interested in working in New Bedford. We've also attended numerous external job fairs and summits including those hosted by *Lesley University*, *Boston College*, *UMass Dartmouth*, *MERC*, *the Massachusetts Partnership for Diversity in Education*, and *Teach For America-Massachusetts*.

In addition to our ongoing recruitment, we are actively interviewing candidates and expect all grade level and Special Education teaching positions to be filled by June 1. All other positions will be filled shortly after that date. All Parker job postings have received multiple applications—some as many as 94—and new ones come in each day (see attached table). Candidates represent a range of teaching experiences (from new teachers to 20-year veterans) with most from coming from the eastern Massachusetts/ northern Rhode Island regions, but others from across the country—some from as far as South Dakota and Arizona. The preliminary interview team includes Parker School Principal Debra Letendre, NBPS Implementation Manager for Quality Services for English Language Learners Sonia Walmsley, and Turnaround Manager Ashley Hebert. Finalist interviews are being conducted by incoming Chief Academic Officer Jason DeFalco.

(continued)

The New Bedford Public Schools do not discriminate on the basis of age, gender, race, color, religion, ethnicity, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, ancestry, homelessness, gender identity or gender expression.

Parker Applicant Snapshot:

Active Teacher Postings:	Number of Applicants (as of 5/13/14)
Grade Pre-K (1)	31
Kindergarten (1)	42
Grade 1 (up to 3)	92
Grade 2 (2)	94
Grade 3 (2)	79
Grade 4 (up to 2)	68
Grade 5 (2)	68
Sub Sep (K-2) (1)	9
Sub Sep (3-5) (1)	14
Sped Teacher (pullout) K-2 (1)	33
Sped Teacher (pullout) 3-5 (1)	26
FTE Art Teacher (dedicated to Parker) (1)	57
FTE PE Teacher (dedicated to Parker) (1)	57
FTE Music Teacher (dedicated to Parker) (1)	44

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Signed by Superintendent Durkin

Pia Durkin,
Superintendent
New Bedford Public Schools

EXHIBIT 4

Dr. Pia Durkin, Superintendent

Guest op-ed, New Bedford Standard Times

May 14, 2014

<http://www.southcoasttoday.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20140514/OPINION/405140329>

Stay the course in New Bedford Public Schools

When the search for a new Superintendent began last spring, the people of New Bedford declared that they would no longer settle for a mediocre school system. Parents and community leaders joined Mayor Mitchell and the School Committee to demand a new beginning, one that would ensure excellence for every child in every school.

It was that outcry for dramatic change that drew me to New Bedford. I was eager to work in a community ready to challenge the *status quo*, a community seeking a Superintendent who would not simply tinker around the edges but who would take bold steps to provide an outstanding education in every school across the district.

Nearly one year later, I believe that collective voice is just as strong – if not stronger. Since I took office last July, I've spoken to countless parents, teachers, students, and leaders from business, non-profit, and higher education who know that we can do better, and who stand ready to do whatever it takes to achieve educational excellence.

This has been an important year for the New Bedford Public Schools. State officials have given us a rare opportunity to lead our own reform rather than delegating that responsibility to an outside party. Together, we have taken important steps in the right direction, including:

- We developed an ambitious District Accelerated Improvement Plan, which was readily approved by the state. We've set clear improvement targets for student performance in English Language Arts and mathematics, and they are part of everyone's goals – mine, as superintendent, the principals, and our teachers.
- A bright future is in store for New Bedford High School, guided by a strong turnaround plan. Led by a dynamic administrative team and a committed group of teachers on the redesign team, the work has begun with a restructuring of the school to emphasize a safe, positive school culture. Students will graduate college and career-ready, with a choice of five academic "majors," and teachers will receive extensive professional development to deliver quality instruction.
- Parker Elementary School also will get a fresh start, with a turnaround plan that emphasizes strong core instruction delivered during a longer school day and bolstered by an exciting summer program. New curriculum resources will include teacher training and support. A Family Resource Center will support Parker families in serving as partners in their children's learning and provide access to help from our community partner agencies.
- Last week, the School Committee approved a \$116.4 million budget for next year, the largest and more student-focused ever. The budget submitted to the City Council maintains existing services and includes new investments, such as a district-wide elementary literacy program, a longer instructional day at the high school, and targeted improvements at state-identified "Level 3" schools to jumpstart their acceleration toward achievement gains.

This is just the beginning. The fine work underway today is setting the stage for great things ahead. If we

stay the course and refuse to be discouraged by setbacks and skeptics, we will achieve our shared goals.

As we institute significant reforms, we always must inform and engage those who are most involved and affected. Over the past year, we have worked hard to involve the school communities and ensure that the voices of parents and staff are heard in dozens of meetings and public hearings. Last week, we launched the district's first citywide survey of parents, staff, and residents to measure perceptions and satisfaction with improvement efforts. Please share your perspectives at www.newbedfordschools.org.

It is particularly important to engage the teachers who work with students every day. In order to amplify their voices, I will create a Teacher Advisory Group, comprised of a diverse cohort of teachers. I will meet with them regularly to discuss initiatives, receive feedback, and hear their concerns and ideas about our work together. When I arrived, I set a goal of being in the schools regularly. My team and I will continue to work side-by-side with principals and teachers and provide the supports they need.

With a clear mandate for dramatic improvement, it is easy to focus only on what is broken. Too often, the conversations about education reform emphasize what is not working and overlook tremendous achievements and signs of promise. The School Committee and I recognize that as a community, we can do more to identify, celebrate, and replicate examples of top-notch teaching and learning.

To that end, we will begin by declaring June as "Celebrating Success Month." We want to hear from parents, teachers, students, and community partners about the good news that too often goes unnoticed. Visit www.newbedfordschools.org to submit your "points of pride" from this school year, including stories about individual student achievements, young people who have overcome obstacles to achieve success, staff accomplishments, innovative instructional practices, and other examples of great things happening in our schools.

Change is difficult. Change can be frustrating, unsettling, even terrifying. As we embark on these reforms, all of us will feel our lives disrupted and our comfort levels challenged. But we cannot lose sight of the ultimate goal: to give all of our children a first-rate public education that prepares them to achieve excellence. And in doing so, we will build a stronger New Bedford, a city built on a long tradition of pride, resilience, and determination – a city that has made history before and will make history again.