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Commissioner

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.