

**Parker Elementary School Local Stakeholder Group
Recommendations to the Commissioner
Submitted January 6, 2014**

John Avery Parker Elementary School was designated by Commissioner Chester as chronically underperforming (“Level 5”) on October 30, 2013. Massachusetts law indicates that within 30 days of a school being designated as chronically underperforming, the Commissioner shall convene a local stakeholder group to solicit the group’s recommendations for the Commissioner’s Level 5 School Turnaround Plan.

The Parker Elementary School Local Stakeholder Group was convened on Thursday, November 21, 2013. The statute allowed 45 days for the local stakeholder group to complete its work. The Local Stakeholder Group met four times during this period, on the following dates and times:

- Meeting #1: Thursday, November 21st, 5:00-7:00 pm
- Meeting #2: Tuesday, December 3rd, 5:00-7:00 pm
- Meeting #3: Wednesday, December 11th, 5:00-7:00 pm
- Meeting #4: Wednesday, December 18th, 5:00-7:00 pm

All of the meetings were held at the school. All of the meetings were open to the public. All meetings were facilitated by an ESE staff member or a consultant hired for this purpose. All meetings were also observed by at least one ESE staff member.

The membership of the Parker Elementary School Local Stakeholder Group is listed below. The committee’s membership meets the requirements of the statute as outlined in M.G.L. Chapter 69, Section 1J, subsection m.

Position, per statute	Designee
The superintendent or designee	Pia Durkin
School committee chair or designee	Jack Livramento
Local teachers’ union president or designee	Marcia Guy
Administrator from the school, who may be the principal, chosen by the superintendent	Deb Letendre
Teacher from the school, chosen by the faculty of the school	Michael Irving
Parent from the school, chosen by the local parent organization. (Note: If school or district doesn’t have a parent organization, the Commissioner shall select a volunteer parent of a student at the school.)	Kerri De Pina
Representatives of applicable state and local social service, health and child welfare agencies, chosen by the Commissioner	Jenny DiBlasi, Vice President of Community, Child and Family Services; SMILES (SouthCoast Mentoring Initiative for Learning, Education and Service).

Representatives of applicable state and local social service, health and child welfare agencies, chosen by the Commissioner	Darlene Spencer, Executive Director, New Bedford Community Connection Coalition
As appropriate, representatives of state and local workforce development agencies, chosen by the Commissioner	Helena Hughes, Executive Director, New Bedford Immigrants Assistance Center
For elementary schools, a representative of an early education and care provider, chosen by the Commissioner of the Department of Early Education and Care	Martha Kay
Community member, chosen by the chief executive of the city or town	Chris Cotter
Total number of members allowed by statute: Not more than 13 individuals	Total number of members on the Local Stakeholder Group: 10

The Parker Elementary School Local Stakeholder Group worked diligently to execute its charge to provide recommendations to the Commissioner as he creates his turnaround plan for the school; these recommendations are designed to maximize the rapid academic achievement of students.

The Local Stakeholder Group offers the following recommendations for the Commissioner’s consideration.

A. Recommendations: Data and Use of Data

Except where noted, LSG members unanimously wanted to forward the recommendations in this section.

- 1) Build in more teacher teaming and planning time (four times per week), in order to provide more time to review student data (e.g., extend the day longer, have a half-day early release day per month). Hold weekly data team meetings.
- 2) Identify a strong student data “dashboard” system that can provide a better, more streamlined view of a student’s profile, and generate bi-weekly reports with targeted data.
- 3) Use “Student Success Plan” or portfolio tool to track student goals, progress, academic and non-academic needs, trends and support strategies. Some LSG members felt the ideal tool should be something that could also be used with parents and students.
- 4) Identify better, more targeted diagnostic tools:
 - a) Academic: for groups of students not making progress (not sure if current tools such as Galileo can do this)
 - b) Non-academic: better methods for assessing and understanding students and possible barriers to learning (learning readiness, non-academic barriers)

B. Recommendations: Supporting All Students to Learn at the Highest Levels

Except where noted, LSG members unanimously wanted to forward the recommendations in this section.

- 1) Continue to use an extended school model. Most LSG members recommend extending Parker's day by an additional 60 minutes beyond the current schedule, for a total of 90 minutes. (Parker is one of two schools in the district that already extends the day by 30 minutes). LSG members felt that further extending the day would provide several key benefits:
 - Additional academic learning through a richer variety of methods including integration with arts, music, etc.
 - Time for tutoring and other remediation and acceleration support
 - Additional time for teachers to use data and plan more targeted instructional support
 - Additional time to understand and address student needs (student success plans)
- 2) Review afterschool programs and how programming can better support both student learning and Parker improvement priorities (currently delivered by three providers: New Bedford Parks, Recreation & Beaches Department; YWCA; and New Bedford Art Museum).
- 3) Create summer learning experiences/summer academies that help:
 - a) Incoming preschool and kindergarten students (3-5 year olds) prepare to come to Parker
 - b) Current students access high quality summer learning opportunities
- 4) Expand Parker's preschool program: Parker currently runs a small program focused on students with special needs. LSG members feel that more could be done to support learning and build relationships with families and younger siblings earlier – and that, in particular, this could help address the literacy development lags seen with many incoming Parker students.
- 5) Develop a stronger student support strategy:
 - a) Possibly reactivate Parker's "Family & Children Learning Together" (FACT) team: this multidisciplinary team of community agency and school staff representatives, facilitated by Parker's student adjustment counselor, could serve as a mechanism for aligning school and community support with student and family needs (intervention and wraparound support). LSG members recommended reviewing the purpose and role of the team, as well as the role of parents on the team.
 - b) Develop school-wide use of a consistent, coherent set of practices to support positive behavior and mitigate non-academic barriers, e.g., trauma-sensitive practices, positive behavior systems/PBIS.
- 6) Continue implementation of the Reading Street program in Grades 3-5 (new reading program rolled out by the district in summer/fall 2013). While still early in the process, LSG members feel implementation of the new program is going well and that staff and parents are seeing positive signs, e.g., more engaging instruction, wider variety of assignments that better engage students. Several LSG members also recommended continuing the Empowering Writers program, which they view as a strong complement to Reading Street.
- 7) Identify a strong early grades literacy acceleration strategy:
 - a) Start implementation of Reading Street at lower grades.

- b) Look at WIDA (ELL/language development) as an approach that could benefit all students as a literacy accelerator.¹
 - c) Consider starting a literacy volunteers training program similar to an initiative currently being launched at another district school (parents are trained to do classroom read-alouds, reading help).
- 8) Add an Assistant Principal position that would focus more on behavior and behavioral interventions. This role could also include management of family and community engagement initiatives. Several LSG members underscored the demands of turnaround on leadership, the need to balance the load on the principal, and the importance of the instructional leadership role teachers need the principal to play.
- 9) Special Education
- a) Consider an integrated co-teaching model, with one SPED teacher at each grade level serving as co-teacher.
 - b) Review process of identifying and referring students to substantially separate classrooms; strengthen referral process.
- 10) Math
- a) The district's math lead is currently evaluating math programs (district math curriculum decision). The LSG group recommends that Parker use the program selected by the district and be in the first wave of schools to begin implementation (following the same strategy used with the district's Reading Street implementation process).
- 11) Science
- a) Identify and implement a consistent science curriculum, with materials that are fully aligned with grade level learning standards (current materials are not well aligned).
 - b) Designate a room as a science center or lab.
 - c) Provide more professional development to help teachers maximize science kits.
- 12) Upgrade Parker's technology infrastructure (smart boards; hardware and internet access). Hardware in classrooms and in the school's computer lab are out-of-date and internet access is unreliable.

C. Use Talents and Assets of Partners to Improve Students' Learning

LSG members unanimously wanted to forward the recommendations in this section.

- 1) Identify a person who can coordinate partner involvement.

Currently the principal and other staff (student adjustment counselor) work to maintain relationships, field requests, and develop new partnership and support opportunities. LSG members feel this work merits a more structured staffing model given the role partners and assets could play in supporting Parker turnaround priorities, particularly related to family

¹ One member noted that this approach would require professional development to ensure that all staff are appropriately trained.

engagement, support for non-academic barriers, and summer, extended day and afterschool learning activities. LSG members outlined several possible staffing options:

- Having a dedicated school staff position
 - Folding responsibility for family and community engagement into a new assistant principal position
 - Partnering with a community agency who could provide onsite partnership development support
 - Activating the “Community Resource Specialist” position recommended by the Child & Youth Readiness Cabinet
- 2) Partner with a community-based multiservice agency or organization that could operate from the school and provide multiple forms of support (wraparound services and referrals, afterschool programming, parent engagement support, e.g., home visits, adult workforce development).
 - 3) Partner with organization(s) that can provide literacy support, e.g., mentoring, readers, training for parents as volunteers, home literacy development support, interpretation and translation support.
 - 4) Partner with an organization that can help build strong connections with parents/families who do not speak English, and those from the New Bedford immigrant community. LSG members feel an important factor that may be contributing to low parent engagement is the number of families for whom English is not a first language (school data shows that the percentage of FLNE families has increased from 14% to 20% since 2011). LSG members recommend that Parker staff learn more from these families in order target parent engagement and student support efforts.

LSG members also provided the following information about **current and potential** partnerships and community resources that could be leveraged to support turnaround:

Current Parker partners

- UMass Dartmouth: three work study students onsite certain days/hours to coordinate volunteers
- Child and Family Services: school-based counseling, Caring Network starting in January (groups and afterschool support)
- Gifts to Give: new initiative focused on parent read-aloud, training for in-school classroom reading support
- New Bedford Community Connections Coalition Family Resource and Development Center: family support worker at the school 2 hours/week (2nd year of this) who currently supports 10-12 families (wraparound referrals, some parent activities); offered parent survey
- Police Resource Support: resource officer based at Keith Middle School also provides some support at Parker
- St. Mary’s Church (Dartmouth): food and gift support around the holidays
- PTO
- FACT committee: meet every other month, district-wide model, support for at-risk students, wraparound support (see B.5)

Other possible community assets not currently partnering with Parker

- AMIGOS Project: language support, support connecting parents to the school
- Sea Lab: summer program
- Buzzard's Bay Coalition: environmental program
- Lloyd Center for the Environment
- Whaling Museum
- Ocean Exploratorium
- Free Fun Fridays (Highland Street Foundation)
- Parker had a robotics program but teacher who ran it is no longer at the school

D. Maximize Engagement & Support of Family and Community Members

Except where noted, LSG members unanimously wanted to forward the recommendations in this section.

LSG members recommend a multifaceted strategy to engage parents including:

- 1) Continue the current shift in making Parker feel more welcoming to parents. LSG members attribute the current shift to several factors including:
 - Hiring choices (hiring staff who want to be at Parker; the addition of bilingual and bicultural staff – including interns and mentors from area colleges -- might be more welcoming to parents)
 - Principal and staff practices related to visibility, communication, and access -- aided by the work both veteran and new-to-Parker teachers are doing as part of the new Massachusetts educator evaluation system, particularly on two MEES components: making the school more welcoming and two-way parent/teacher communication
- 2) Start home visits: LSG members unanimously recommend that Parker initiate a home visit program modeled after the "Parent Teacher Home Visit Project" (<http://www.pthvp.org/>), a national model which is currently being implemented at Carney Elementary in New Bedford, and also in Springfield.

Program features recommended by LSG members:

- The program should be voluntary for both teachers and families (families would not be targeted based on perceived need, etc.)
 - Visits can take place where families are most comfortable (may not always be in the home).
 - Teachers should receive stipends for their involvement.
 - Some LSG members also felt it might be beneficial to have an initial focus for the program; for example, PK/K students and their families who would benefit from establishing a strong parent-school relationship in their first years at the school that would carry forward through Grade 5.
- 3) Parent learning opportunities: LSG members recommend offering parent workshops (or a parent academy) –with initial instructional support and “parents as partners” focal points but that could expand later to include other parent education and capacity building opportunities,

including parent leadership development, adult learning/workforce development opportunities. LSG members highlighted examples of similar approaches in Springfield and Boston.

- 4) Create a parent center at the school: LSG members recommend creating a physical space at the school that would serve as a welcome center and hub for coordinating family and community engagement activities (e.g., home visits, parent workshops/parent academy, etc.). Members also recommended having a bilingual/bicultural staff person to coordinate activities (see also recommendations B.8 and C.1. related to staff support for family and community engagement).

A majority of LSG members felt that creating the parent center should be the first of the parent engagement recommendations implemented – it represents a physical sign of the school’s priority on parent engagement and a natural starting point for organizing a robust parent engagement effort.

- 5) Involve community partners who can help facilitate connections with parents and provide parent support (see also recommendations C.1-4, D.3-4 on areas where LSG members feel partners could be leveraged to support turnaround).

E. Other Recommendations

- 1) Playground: LSG members strongly and unanimously recommended that a playground be built for the school. Currently the school has a paved lot and sand area (no play structures, equipment, etc.)
- 2) Leadership Continuity: A majority of LSG members recommended keeping the current principal. They highlighted the current progress and the importance of leadership continuity as Parker moves forward and begins to implement the Level 5 turnaround plan. LSG members feel that Parkers students and families have experienced a large amount of staff turnover and change. Several group members also highlighted the investment in staff training, in particular with the new Reading Street program, and the positive shift in teacher-parent relationships.
- 3) Professional Development: LSG members recommend a strong program of professional development so that staff have the appropriate training and coaching support to implement turnaround plan strategies. As part of this support, LSG members recommend adding a math instructional specialist/coach at the school. Currently Parker has a .40 FTE Reading Specialist focused on Grades 3-5 Reading Street implementation.
- 4) One LSG member suggested the need for a Turnaround Manager to assist the principal.

Appendix: Purpose, Intended Outcomes, and Discussion Topics for Parker LSG Meetings

Upon designation as a Level 5 school, state law requires that the Commissioner develop a Turnaround Plan for accelerated improvement and outlines a timeline and process accordingly. The first step in this process is for the Commissioner to convene a local stakeholder group. The guidance below is designed to help Local Stakeholder Group members understand that process.

Purpose of the Level 5 School LSG

- To engage in an evidence-based conversation regarding the core issues and challenges facing John Avery Parker Elementary School and identify what the school community believes are the key challenges creating barriers to its students' academic progress.
- To make recommendations to the Commissioner about the key components of his turnaround plan for Parker, "in order to maximize the rapid academic achievement of students."

The Commissioner has chosen to increase the intensity to a Level 5 intervention for Parker because he believes that despite the efforts taken during the first three years of turnaround, a different mix of interventions and practices are required to put the conditions in place for an educational experience that prepares all of Parker's students to succeed. He looks forward to the LSG's ideas for how to create substantial change at the school – change that will secure rapid improvement in the academic achievement of students.

Intended Outcomes

Through the LSG's discussion and exploration of the data, to generate a set of rigorous, evidence-based recommendations that will provide the Commissioner with input directly from the Parker community and advise him as he creates his Level 5 Turnaround Plan.

The Local Stakeholder Group will consider

- The key *issues and challenges* facing the school, and the district's support of the school;
- The impact and sufficiency of the *strategies and supports* employed by the school to date – what has worked, what has not worked;
- The *school's and district's capacity*—including its systems, polices, and use of resources—to fully implement proposed strategies; and
- The *interventions and practices* that are most likely to promote rapid improvement of student achievement.

Within 45 days of its initial meeting, the stakeholder group shall make its recommendations to the Commissioner. Meetings of the local stakeholder group shall be open to the public and the recommendations submitted to the Commissioner shall be publicly available upon submission.

Meeting focus areas and discussion questions are described below.

Meeting #1: What does the evidence tell us about the key issues and challenges facing Parker?

Data will be presented regarding the school and its performance.

Questions for discussion:

- What do the data tell us about where the school is now? What do we know about changes to the data over the past three years?
- What do the data tell us about the school's core assets and strengths?
- What do the data tell us about the school's core challenge areas?
- How is Parker using data now to inform instruction? How does the school select the most relevant data to use? What are Parker's greatest strengths in using data? Greatest challenges?
- What data tools, skills would the school need to push the school to the next level?
- What does the LSG recommend to the Commissioner about how the school can better use data tools, skills, and resources to improve instruction?

Meeting #2: How can Parker support all students to learn at the highest levels?

Information will be presented regarding the school's existing structures and supports that facilitate all students' learning.

Questions for discussion:

- What do LSG members believe to be the most significant academic challenges at the school?
- What strategies has the school already tried to overcome these academic challenges? What worked? What didn't work?
- What strategies can the school try to improve literacy in the early grades (grade 3 and below)?
- What specific supports has the school tried to facilitate English Language Learners' (ELLs') learning? Are they working? How do you know?
- What specific supports has the school tried to facilitate the learning of students with special needs? Are they working? How do you know?
- Is the school currently challenging all students to work to their highest potential? If not, what specific actions can be taken to increase the level of rigor in Parker's instruction?
- What does the LSG recommend to the Commissioner about how the school can support all students to learn at the highest levels?

Meeting #3: How can Parker maximize the assets and talents of partners to improve students' learning?

Information will be presented regarding existing partnerships with the school.

Questions for discussion:

- What partners currently work at the school? In what academic and non-academic areas do they provide support?
- What areas do you believe need partner support?
- What structures are in place to align partner efforts with school goals?
- What structures are in place to coordinate efforts between partners?
- If you had to pick just three of the school's current partner initiatives to continue, which would you select? Why? Is there evidence to show how these partners are being effective in the school?
- Does the school have an unaddressed (or under-addressed) challenge area that you believe could benefit by a partner's support? Which one, and why?

- What does the LSG recommend to the Commissioner about how the school can maximize the assets and talents of partners to improve students' learning?

Meeting #4: How can Parker maximize the engagement and support of family and community members for students' learning?

Information will be presented regarding existing family (family members of students at the school) and community (other community members or organizations unrelated to students at the school) engagement efforts at the school.

Questions for discussion:

- While engagement varies by individual, how would you rate the overall level of family member engagement at the school (low/medium/high)? What evidence supports this rating?
- While engagement varies by individual, how would you rate the overall level of community engagement at the school (low/medium/high)? What evidence supports this rating?
- What structures are in place to encourage family member and community engagement at the school? (e.g. regular, frequent schedule of calls to students' families; annual community open house, etc.) Are they working? How do you know?
Note: Please identify school-wide efforts, not unique efforts by individual teachers or staff members.
- How do school leaders and/or the school's partners bolster the school's structures to encourage family member and community engagement? What has worked? What else could school leadership and/or partners do to facilitate engagement?
- How can family and community members' talents be incorporated into the strategy to improve the school's academic performance?
- What does the LSG recommend to the Commissioner about how the school can maximize family and community members' support to maximize students' learning?

Note: A portion of this meeting will be used to finalize the recommendations made across all meetings.