# 2017–18 Level 5 School End-of-Year Report John Avery Parker Elementary School, New Bedford, Massachusetts

### Receiver: Superintendent Pia Durkin[[1]](#footnote-1)

## Introduction

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) contracted with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to collect evidence from each Level 5 school on the progress toward implementation of the turnaround plan in Year 4 of Level 5 status. DESE facilitated the collection of information from the receiver throughout the year for the quarterly reports, detailing highlights and challenges during the previous quarter and progress toward benchmarks. In addition, in December 2017, AIR staff collected data through instructional observations using Teachstone’s Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS),[[2]](#footnote-2) and in February 2018 conducted a monitoring site visit that included key stakeholder interviews and focus groups, an instructional staff survey, and a review of extant documentation (e.g., turnaround plan, quarterly reports, and other documents). In spring 2018, subsequent data were collected by conducting follow-up instructional observations and interviews with the school principal. The data collection and analysis processes were developed purposely to ensure that the data were reliable and valid, and that the findings were informed by the appropriate key informants. For Level 5 schools, data were collected during the monitoring site visit and follow-up activities to inform DESE’s statutory requirement to annually evaluate each Level 5 school’s progress toward implementing the turnaround plan. AIR’s Level 5 school review process focused on work at each school related to each of the specific turnaround practice areas.

## Highlights of Turnaround Plan Implementation at John Avery Parker Elementary

Overall throughout the 2017–18 school year, John Avery Parker Elementary (Parker) staff focused on planning for learning, cultural competency for learning, and relationships for learning. All instances of professional development and teacher collaboration time (TCT) were aligned with at least one of these initiatives. Teachers have time for collaboration with colleagues, including biweekly TCT, weekly grade-level planning time, and weekly subject-specific planning time. Staff also participated in monthly half-day professional development led by the district.

The school continued to emphasize the importance of data-driven instruction, with teachers preparing “data defense” plans every six weeks. This process entailed teachers using data to determine standards that had been met and standards that needed to be targeted further. Teachers created plans with school leaders to address these needs over the following six-week period. This process is related to the school’s data-defense model, which is used to monitor schoolwide performance data and progress toward district and schoolwide goals.

In addition, Parker has made great progress with refining the PRIDE time intervention model. PRIDE continues to be a powerful driver for targeting academic supports for students, using data to identify and then address specific standards where students need support. Because all educators in the building are assigned a group of students to work with during PRIDE time, and because students are regrouped throughout the year, PRIDE also has been instrumental in building a school culture in which all staff share responsibility for the success of all students.

Family and community engagement continued to be a focus at Parker, with the family engagement professional learning community (PLC) being responsible for planning regular social events. Events were held at varying times of the day (e.g., both during and after school) so that families had opportunities to participate in their child’s academic success. In addition, Parker has focused on developing a School Council, with five parents regularly attending. Parker continued to have a family resource manager who was responsible for identifying families in need of targeted supports and connecting them to wraparound services as needed.

Lastly, the school continued to leverage autonomies strategically and as needed to refine the school schedule, staff assignments, and student supports in response to ongoing analysis of data. One of the most significant uses of the school’s autonomy was in reshaping the professional development schedule to embed opportunities for professional growth throughout the school year rather than frontload them over the summer, as in previous years. Staff also had input into professional development topics to ensure the content was relevant to their teaching.

## End-of-Year Findings

### Turnaround Practice 1: Leadership, Shared Responsibility, and Professional Collaboration

The schoolwide monitoring process at Parker continues to be a critical lever for improving core instruction. The school instructional leadership team (SILT), composed of school leaders, grade-level lead teachers, the interventionist, and other staff, meets monthly for two hours to examine academic and behavioral data. This year, the school used the STAR assessment as one of its primary data sources. To monitor the quality of instruction, the principal, manager of educator quality (MEQ), and district staff conducted regular walkthroughs. In addition, school leaders had data defense meetings with the receiver and deputy superintendent every six to eight weeks. Following each data defense meeting, an action plan was developed that detailed what school leaders will work on with staff and how. In Quarter 3, as a result of monitoring efforts, the school identified mathematics instruction as a priority area. Specifically, the principal and MEQ conducted audits of mathematics lessons during the PRIDE intervention block to see how teachers were using that classroom time to target specific standards. School leaders also used TCT to focus on how to plan purposefully for the PRIDE intervention block. In the spring follow-up interview, the principal continued to identify mathematics instruction as an area for improvement.

Parker has focused on developing a culture of learning among staff through intentional and collaborative planning to address students’ needs. Specifically, teachers conducted lesson studies where they coplanned a lesson together, observed a colleague teaching the lesson, completed a protocol with observation notes, and debriefed together. During the debriefing, the observers provided feedback and determined best practices and recommendations for improving the lesson. The remainder of the teachers then used these takeaways to modify the lesson for their own classrooms. In addition, teachers with the greatest student growth shared their best practices with colleagues during TCT. These formal structures resulted in strong teacher collaboration across the school.

Parker also focused on developing a culture of learning for students, and established structures to celebrate student successes. For example, Parker celebrated students’ academic successes with a STAR ceremony complete with a royal court (e.g., STAR king, STAR queen) where students wore crowns and sashes and had their photos taken. In addition, students who received the “student of the month” and “citizen of the month” awards were celebrated in the Parker Café with their families, where they were served a themed three-course meal. The Parker Café was decorated with tablecloths and candles to make a special event.

As a result of changes in school leadership in fall 2017, the teaching and learning specialist (TLS) position remained vacant throughout the majority of the school year. Finding qualified applicants for this position in October, when the position was vacated, was challenging. Therefore, the principal is in the process of hiring for several critical positions for the 2018–19 school year, including a fifth-grade teacher, the TLS, interventionist, and the MEQ. The principal continued to report that hiring qualified staff is a challenge, since most applicants were interviewing at multiple schools throughout the district.

### Turnaround Practice 2: Intentional Practices for Improving Instruction

As part of Parker’s emphasis on planning, cultural competency, and relationships for learning, school staff had several priorities. Improving writing standards, increasing the rigor of instruction, differentiating instruction, and developing teachers’ content knowledge were all focuses this year. Teachers received frequent professional development and feedback following classroom observations and learning walks to support them in implementing these priorities.

Parker continued its emphasis on data-driven instruction and focused on analyzing data to personalize student supports. Parker continued structures for teachers and leadership to review student data multiple times a week during TCT, teacher planning time, PLCs, and SILT meetings. Teachers continued to maintain data binders to track the progress of each student in his or her class. Data sources included state assessment data, benchmark assessment data, writing samples and other classwork, PRIDE data, STAR, DIBELS, and ACCESS (for English language learners [ELLs]), as well as attendance, student discipline referrals, and parent engagements. The data binders were used to inform lesson planning and student supports. In addition, teachers continued to have students engage in monitoring their own data. Each student had a goal tracker document that he or she completed to reflect on their progress and had one-on-one meetings with their teacher to discuss progress. Each classroom also had a data wall that was updated continually. For example, Grades K–2 tracked DIBELS data, whereas other grades tracked STAR assessment results. Teachers used a color-coding system to display the results and reported that students were familiar with the coding system.

As mentioned in Turnaround Practice 1, the TLS position was vacant for the majority of the school year. In order to continue developing teachers, the MEQ (previously the TLS) and the school’s interventionist worked together to support teachers’ professional growth. Similar to last year, teachers were tiered by need in order to better target supports. The MEQ provided intensive supports to a caseload of four struggling teachers which included modeling instructional strategies, providing more frequent feedback, suggesting resources to try, and other individualized supports. School leaders are in the process of hiring for the TLS position, as it is considered a critical support for teacher growth.

### Turnaround Practice 3: Student-Specific Supports and Instruction to All Students

In 2015–16, Parker began intervention blocks called PRIDE and continued with this practice during the 2017–18 school year. These daily small-group intervention blocks provided   
60 additional minutes of English language arts (ELA) and 30–45 minutes of mathematics instruction to advance core instruction and provide Tier II and III supports as needed. All educators had a PRIDE group. Students were regrouped regularly every five to six weeks during TCT using the most recently available assessment data and consideration of nonacademic or behavioral needs. This year, students were assigned to one of four groups based on their mastery of the specific standard being taught: struggling students, students performing below grade level, students at grade level, and students identified as advanced. Based on their need, students rotated to different teachers. For example, ELL students below grade level worked with an English as a Second Language teacher during PRIDE time. PRIDE groups focused on strengthening specific skills (e.g., phonics, sight words) or building on the core curriculum with extensions for deeper thinking. School leaders reported that the PRIDE time model had a positive effect on student learning, and they expect the intervention block to continue next year.

Parker has refined the Building Based Support Team (BBST) process, originally developed in the 2016–17 school year. This year, the team served as a system to support the needs of struggling students by removing barriers (nonacademic or academic) that were hindering student success. The BBST process was initiated through a teacher’s completion of a referral form when a student was not making progress. School leaders then met to examine and prioritize the referrals, and additional data were collected from the teacher. A multidisciplinary team convened to discuss the student and identify supports and strategies for the classroom teacher to implement. Suggested supports could include academic supports, social-emotional supports, referral to an outside agency, or other behavioral supports as needed. The BBST reconvened to monitor the student’s progress every six weeks or so. In Quarter 3, five students were identified as in need of Tier II supports, and three students were identified as in need of Tier III supports.

### Turnaround Practice 4: School Climate and Culture

Parker is in the third year of implementing positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), which helped to establish a defined set of behavioral expectations and promoted a positive school culture. Students received positive reinforcement through Proof of Pride (POP) cards for demonstrating Parker’s core values, which could be redeemed for prizes. Any staff member could distribute POP cards, contributing to a collective sense of ownership for student success. The student behavior committee, one of the schoolwide PLCs, was responsible for monitoring PBIS implementation through the review of behavioral and social-emotional data. For example, in October, significant student behaviors escalated, resulting in three times the suspensions compared to September. To address this, staff participated in two professional development sessions focused on social-emotional learning topics such as PBIS, zones of regulation, tiered behavior guidelines, and data use. The School Adjustment Council and clinical coordinator created a behavior and consequence reference guide to establish consistency in behavior management across the school. For example, students could access “recovery spaces” when they needed to de-escalate, and mindfulness practices were implemented in Grades 3–5. These structures greatly improved the school culture by reducing incidences of significant behaviors since October.

Before the school year began, Parker partnered with BELL (Building Educated Leaders for Life) to provide a five-week summer program at Power Scholars Academy. Approximately 50 Parker students in Grades 2–5 participated in this program in summer 2017. Students’ progress was monitored using STAR data to measure their growth during the program. Whereas the anticipated score increase was 15 points, participating students averaged an increase of 67 points in ELA and 72 points in mathematics, according to the STAR Beginning of the Year assessment. Due to the success of this program, Parker will offer it again during summer 2018. The program once again will serve approximately 50 students in Grades 2–5. During the program, students receive academic instruction in the morning taught by New Bedford Public School staff with enrichments and field trips in the afternoon. Many local organizations are brought in to support the afternoon programming.

Family and community engagement continued to be a focus at Parker. Regular social events were planned through the family engagement PLC to bring the community into the building. Some of the events that Parker offered during the 2017–18 school year included Coffee with the Principal, STAR data assemblies, a research fair, a parent academic workshop, and Bingo for Books. Staff at Parker also were expected to develop family engagement plans. These plans included strategies to encourage volunteering at the school or helping in the classroom and promoted more family involvement with students’ academics.

This year, Parker continued to focus on student attendance. Students with frequent absences (defined as 10 or more) received home visits from the family resource manager. To encourage attendance, each month the classrooms with the highest rates won a “best attendance” award with a trophy. Students with perfect attendance received tickets to New Bedford High School sporting events. There also were assemblies to celebrate student attendance and other successes (e.g., citizenship, STAR data) regularly throughout the school year. These events contributed to a positive school culture.

1. John Avery Parker Elementary will be transitioning to a new receiver in the 2018–19 school year. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Teachstone’s website for more information: <http://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/336169/What-is-CLASS_Info_Sheet.pdf?t=1432824252621>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)