# 2017–18 Level 5 School End-of-Year ReportUP Academy Holland, Boston, Massachusetts

### Receiver: UP Education Network

## 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 November 2017, AIR staff collected data through instructional observations using Teachstone’s Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS),[[1]](#footnote-1) 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 UP Academy Holland

Overall throughout the 2017–18 school year, UP Academy Holland (UAH) staff focused on “brains on,” or the expectation that students are engaged throughout the lesson, engage with rigorous content, and have frequent opportunities for student discourse. Teachers worked on these priorities collaboratively during daily “drop everything and prep” (DEAP) time and weekly grade-level common planning time. Teachers received weekly professional development aligned to these priorities, and a portion of this time was dedicated to teachers reflecting and planning how to implement their new learning into their practice.

UAH continued to strategically leverage autonomies as needed to refine the school schedule, staff assignments, budget allocations, curriculum, and coaching in response to ongoing analysis of data. This year, the principal used her autonomy to hire a reading specialist to support struggling students. School leaders also conducted a pilot of positive behavioral intervention and supports (PBIS) in second and third grade in response to an increase in behavioral incidents in these grades. In addition, school leaders refined the structure of their weekly afterschool professional development so that staff participated in one more in-depth session instead of two less detailed sessions, in response to staff feedback.

The school continued to focus on the use of data to inform decision making and action planning. Staff analyzed data from multiple sources, including Fountas & Pinnell, Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress (STEP) literacy assessments, interim benchmark assessments, and classwork. School leaders examined data schoolwide during monthly meetings, alternating between academic and cultural data. During “Data Days” following benchmark assessments, staff came together for full-day data sessions to measure student progress and develop action plans on a classroom, grade, and schoolwide level. Teachers were aware of the expectations that they use data to inform classroom instruction and reviewed data, such as exit tickets, during department meetings and individually.

UAH continued to have strong evidence of an effective distributed leadership model. The four deans of curriculum and instruction (DCIs) served as instructional leaders in the building. All teachers were tiered based on their individual needs and received support led by the DCI focused on specific instructional priorities aligned with their tier. DCIs also worked intensively with their caseload of teachers to improve their classroom practice and use of data. UP Education Network’s (UPEN) Deans and Principal Fellows programs continued to develop teachers interested in more formal leadership opportunities, with increasing enrollment each year. According to a survey administered by UPEN, 90% of Dean Fellows agreed that their leadership and coaching skills have improved as a result of their participation in the program. Lastly, teachers who demonstrated exceptional skill were selected to provide additional supports to other teachers in the building.

Finally, UAH continued to make family engagement a priority with supports from the family and community coordinator. The coordinator was responsible for planning school events and overseeing the school site and parent councils. Although parent participation on these councils was a challenge, the school reported strong parent turnout at events. This year, the school hosted cookouts, monthly potlucks, curriculum nights, and monthly spirit days. Family feedback was solicited regularly throughout the school year through surveys. School leaders shared that these efforts have helped make parents feel welcomed and involved in their child’s education.

## End-of-Year Findings

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

UAH continued to focus on creating a culture of urgency, high expectations, accountability, excellence, and achievement. During the 2017–18 school year, UAH staff focused on the school’s priorities of “brains on” and Responsive Classroom. “Brains on” was the expectation that students are actively engaged throughout the lesson, engage with rigorous content, and have frequent opportunities for student discourse. Responsive Classroom is a formal program that reinforces the expectations that teachers develop strong relationships and provide social-emotional support to students. Professional development was a primary lever used by school leaders to improve the quality of instruction, and all professional development was aligned with one of the two instructional priorities. Teachers received professional development weekly; as mentioned in the Highlights section, the school transitioned from providing two sessions per week to one session per week to focus on quality implementation without overloading the faculty. Further, school leaders monitored teacher’s implementation of what they learned in professional development to ensure students received high-quality instruction utilizing these skills and strategies.

UAH has continued its commitment to common planning time for teachers. Teachers have DEAP, or collaborative planning, afterschool every Monday through Thursday. During this time, general education teachers work with special education and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers to prepare for the next day’s lesson. Teachers also have weekly grade-level common planning time, focused on a specific priority or upcoming action step. Teams used the time to work toward a specific goal related to the school’s priorities, monitor progress, or complete a project collaboratively. School leaders reported that this time is used more effectively compared to last year.

UAH has continued to create a culture of celebration of student and adult learning. This year, the school established a Culture of We Committee that was responsible for planning celebrations for staff birthdays and other life milestones. School staff also nominated a colleague for the weekly “Eye of the Tiger” award to recognize his or her hard work. For students, there were regular “shout outs” to highlight positive things that students are doing, students are able to earn “Tiger of the Day” in their classroom, and have the opportunity to earn a community incentive for being a leader within the school. Leaders reported that these shifts have resulted in a more positive school culture.

School leaders also have emphasized a culture of open, two-way communication with staff. The principal hosted staff during a “Chat and Chew,” an open forum where staff could give feedback and ask the principal questions five times throughout the school year. School leaders also surveyed staff weekly using targeted questions to gather staff input on specific areas of the school or initiatives.

In order to provide students with high-quality instruction, significant staffing changes were made midyear. To continue developing teachers, the dean continued to work with fourth grade, a strong teacher was identified to support Encore (e.g., music, art, theater) teachers, and the principal worked directly with fifth-grade teachers. It is expected that approximately 82% of the teaching staff will return to UAH next year, an increase from 76% this year. In planning for next year, school leaders have increased the rigor of the application process to identify high-quality teachers and paraprofessionals so that they will continue to be able to respond flexibly to any unanticipated staffing changes midyear.

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

UAH continued to emphasize the importance of data-informed decision making, and has refined this process to further support student growth. Similar to last year, teachers tracked data from a variety of sources (e.g., Fountas and Pinnell results, STEP literacy data, classwork, and summative benchmark assessments developed by UPEN). This year, staff have focused increasingly on analyzing formative data sources. A significant development in this process is the explicitness of data analysis expectations by DCIs in order to build staff’s capacity. Teachers collected student work weekly, and were responsible for analyzing it prior to meeting with their DCI. The DCIs then analyzed the work relative to the mastery criteria from the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and the UPEN benchmark assessments. The DCI and teacher met to discuss any misalignments and identified action steps for the upcoming week to improve student outcomes. The following week, new data was analyzed to monitor student growth.

A second significant development in the school’s use of data was the creation of a progress monitoring reading tool. Since much of the evidence of reading growth is oral, it has historically been a challenge to monitor students’ progress at UAH. Teachers updated this new tool weekly to monitor students’ progress toward reaching their reading goals. Next year, there will be additional changes to data sources. Specifically, UP Education Network is transitioning all schools away from using network-created Benchmark Assessments, and, instead, all students will take the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments. There also will be additional unit tests. School leaders are hoping that the MAP and unit tests will provide more frequent data to inform instruction, compared to the current schedule of UPEN assessments. Other current data sources will continue to be administered next year.

One of the primary levers UAH used to improve the quality of instruction and develop teachers as instructional leaders were the DCIs. The DCIs worked with every teacher on their caseload frequently. All teachers were tiered based on their progress and needs, although movement between tiers was very fluid. Teachers worked on specific instructional priorities based on their tier; priorities included creating a stable culture with clear instruction, checking for student understanding, responsive teaching, and student-led classrooms. UAH school leaders reported that 100% of teachers had received coaching twice per month, and many teachers received coaching weekly. Further, by spring 2018, 70% of teachers had advanced to the Group 2 outcomes on the Teacher Pathway System, including having classrooms with an engaged culture, conducting checks for understanding, and giving students access to rigor. This level of advancement on the Teacher Pathway System indicates that teachers were understanding student thinking and student learning was occurring consistently. School leaders consider the DCI position critical for improving teachers’ instruction and data use across the school, and it will continue next year.

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

UAH continued to work to ensure that all students received appropriate supports for their learning and success. Teachers regularly reviewed data, at minimum twice per month with their DCI, and identified students struggling academically. Once a student was identified as struggling, the teacher worked with their DCI to develop a Tier 2 intervention plan. The intervention was implemented and monitored for 8 weeks, and if the student did not make adequate progress, a referral was made to the Tier 3 team. The Tier 3 team was composed of clinical workers, the social worker, service providers, the nurse, the student’s teacher, and the grade-level special education teacher. The Tier 3 team examined the data to determine if a Tier 3 intervention would be appropriate for the student. If so, the student’s progress would be monitored for effectiveness in 6- to 8-week intervals.

UAH worked to ensure that their English language learner (ELL) students received the supports they needed to develop their English language skills and be successful. UPEN developed a newcomer curriculum to be implemented networkwide to support ELL students at English language development (ELD) Levels 1 and 2, as determined by ACCESS testing. UAH used a model where students were not always grouped by ELD level, but also had the opportunity to learn from and interact with students who were at higher language levels or non-ELL students. In classrooms where there were large numbers of ELL students at lower levels, the general education and ESL teachers co-taught. To facilitate this, ESL and general education teachers planned lessons collaboratively. Regardless of setting, ELL students received supports aligned with ESE’s guidance.

UAH also worked to ensure that their students with individual education plans received appropriate supports for their learning, with a strong focus on the inclusion model. One of the Social and Academic Remediation (SAR) subseparate classrooms was transitioned into inclusion for the 2017–18 school year. In addition, more students were identified to participate in general education classrooms for the majority of the day (defined as a minimum of 4 hours). These shifts resulted in the need for more co-taught classrooms compared to previous years. To facilitate this, special education teachers actively participated in DEAP daily, so that everyone was prepared for the upcoming lesson. This switch to inclusion has been beneficial to all students at UAH.

### Turnaround Practice 4: School Climate and Culture

School leaders at UAH continued to prioritize social-emotional learning during the 2017–18 school year. As mentioned in Turnaround Practice 1, UAH continued to focus on Responsive Classroom this year. Social-emotional support strategies were woven into instruction most commonly through morning meetings and closing circles. New this year, the school implemented Toolbox, a Tier 1 social-emotional learning program, to help students manage their behaviors. For next year, school leaders and staff are reviewing various Tier 1 social-emotional program options. The principal contacted stakeholders throughout the building to nominate potential programs and is involving them in the research and selection process.

At the beginning of the school year, school leaders noticed an increase in behavioral incidents among students in second and third grades. As a result, the school piloted PBIS in these grades. This pilot allowed second and third grade students to earn “Tiger Paws” that were totaled across all students in the classroom to earn a whole class incentive such as a dance party. The remainder of the grades stayed with the previous behavior management strategies: color sticks (for kindergarten and first grade) and the merit and demerit system (in fourth and fifth grade). School leaders closely monitored behavioral data and made adjustments as needed. One of the most significant improvements in this area was the enhanced behavioral data tracking system. These refinements allowed for school leaders to identify certain challenging times of day for students, so that supports could be better targeted (e.g., recess). School leaders also focused on logical consequences to behavioral infractions, resulting in more clarity regarding when it was appropriate to send a student out of the classroom. When needed, school leaders facilitated restorative conversations between the teacher and student. School leaders reported that the data showed mixed results of the PBIS implementation, but that students had bought into this approach and found it motivating to receive tickets. Next year, the school will continue to improve implementation and expand PBIS into first grade as well.

UAH continued to make family engagement a priority by implementing a variety of initiatives to promote family involvement in the school. The family and community coordinator at UAH was responsible for coordinating family events and overseeing the two family leadership groups—the school site council and parent council—at the school. Some of the family and community engagement activities that UAH hosted throughout the year included cookouts, monthly potlucks, curriculum nights, and a middle school fair. In the fourth quarter, the school hosted a bake sale, field day, report card conferences, K1 moving-up ceremony, fifth-grade graduation, K1 orientation, and several other grade-specific events (e.g., fifth-grade prom). Further, teachers were expected to communicate with families regularly, at minimum once per month. School leaders placed an increased emphasis on tracking parent outreach, and dedicated time during Wednesday professional development for teachers to “drop everything and call” parents. As a result of these efforts, calls to parents increased from 100 per week before winter break to 300–400 per week, starting in February 2018, when this initiative began. School leaders also reported an increase in parent engagement compared to last year. This was reinforced by the results of the first family survey administered by UAH, which indicated that 90% of families believed that the school valued them as a partner in their child’s education.

1. See Teachstone’s website for more information: <http://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/336169/What-is-CLASS_Info_Sheet.pdf?t=1432824252621>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)