# 2016–17 Level 5 School Annual Evaluation Report Paul A. Dever Elementary School, Boston, Massachusetts

### Receiver: Blueprint Schools Network

## Introduction

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) contracted with American Institutes for Research (AIR) to collect evidence from each Level 5 school on the progress toward implementation of the turnaround plan in Year 3 of Level 5 status. AIR facilitated the collection of information from the receiver throughout the year for the quarterly reports, detailing highlights and challenges in each priority area during the previous quarter and progress toward benchmarks. In addition, during a 2-day monitoring site visit, AIR staff collected data through instructional observations using Teachstone’s Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS),[[1]](#footnote-1) 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 November 2016. In spring 2017, subsequent data were collected by reviewing extant documents and conducting follow-up instructional observations and interviews with the school principal and the receiver. The data collection and analysis processes were purposely developed 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 ESE’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 the specific turnaround priorities and subpriorities from each school’s turnaround plan.

## Highlights of Turnaround Plan Implementation at Paul A. Dever Elementary School

* **Leadership.** The Blueprint Schools Network conducted a national search and selected Dr. Todd Fishburn to lead Dever for the 2016–17 academic year. Dr. Fishburn intends to return for the 2017–18 school year after Superintendent Tommy Chang, the incoming Dever receiver, offered him the position. In 2016–17, the leadership structure consisted of two Assistant Principals (one focused on School Culture and one focused on Operations); two Instructional Deans; a Therapeutic Learning Community Coordinator; a Math Fellow/Assessment Coordinator; and a Dean of School Culture. Throughout its 3-year tenure as receiver, the Blueprint Schools Network employed a full-time Human Capital and Recruiting Coordinator to provide recruiting, selection, and retention services to Dever leadership teams. Blueprint’s Human Capital team streamlined the recruiting, vetting, and selection supports so that the principal could focus on teaching and learning responsibilities and participate in the final selection activities for staff. In addition, for the last 2 years, Blueprint hired an experienced former Boston Public Schools (BPS) administrator to manage the logistics required to work effectively with BPS, including operations, facilities, transportation, English language learner (ELL) compliance, and the budget.
* **Family Engagement and Support.** A full-time City Connects coordinator supported family engagement at Dever, with a specific focus on providing support to families to engage them in students’ academic success. The coordinator completed a review of every student in the school in collaboration with each student’s teacher; based on this review, the coordinator created individualized plans for students identified as in need of additional support. These additional supports included connecting families with partner organizations to assist with material needs and social skills. The partnership with City Connects is expected to continue during the 2017–18 school year.
* **Data Use.** The school used several data sources to identify needs and determine supports for students who were struggling. Blueprint’s National Data Analyst was embedded at the school 3–4 days each week, working directly with teachers and administrators and creating templates to track data across a variety of sources. Reviewed data included assessment data from the Achievement Network (ANet), Fountas and Pinnell, DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills), STAR Math, discipline data, and attendance data. Dever staff used the data to assign students to needs-based groups, determine necessary supports, and monitor their progress. Dever staff engaged in four formal data meetings per month: two mathematics data meetings, one English language arts (ELA) data meeting, and one response to intervention (RtI) data meeting.
* **Student Behavior.** Dever’s daily schedule was restructured during the 2016–17 school year to add a period focused on positive behavioral intervention and supports (PBIS), the Second Step social-emotional curriculum, and instruction related to self-regulation strategies. The school also tracked discipline data, including merits, reminders, and the number of minutes that specific students were out of class, to identify those students in need of additional support. Staff created contracts and individualized supports for various Tier 2 and Tier 3 students.

## End-of-Year Findings

### Priority Area 1: Rapidly accelerate all students’ language development in English and provide families with the opportunity for content-rich Spanish language development for their students.

English language development for all students remained a key focus, and the school took a multipronged approach to addressing students’ needs. Dever’s Language Acquisition Team (LAT) led the implementation of Dever’s English language plan, which included ensuring that appropriate accommodation plans were in place for each student while taking the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) 2.0. The LAT also led capacity building among Dever staff, providing training on topics related to language development, such as administering the ACCESS for ELLs assessment and working with administrators on English as a second language (ESL) and sheltered English instruction (SEI) scheduling. In addition, all ESL and SEI teachers received training in the Reach curriculum, which focused on vocabulary development, building students’ background knowledge, and helping students learn in a social context. Dever also offered an Acceleration Academy for all ELLs in Grades 3–5 during the April school vacation week, which was focused on preparing for the MCAS mathematics assessment.

### Turnaround Priority Area 2: Improve instructional quality and maximize time for core instruction.

During 2016–17, Dever continued to focus on improving the quality and rigor of classroom instruction. Blueprint requested an amendment to the turnaround plan that was approved by Commissioner Mitchell Chester for the current school year. The amendment allowed for a change in the weekly schedule to accommodate professional development time for all staff from 1:15 p.m. to 4:15 p.m. once per week. The Dever leadership team used this time to provide strategic professional development and critical data analysis opportunities for staff to collaborate across grades and teams. The agendas for these meetings were driven by information obtained during learning walks and partner feedback, including ANet data, the monitoring site visit reports, and the Blueprint site visits. Frequent professional development helped staff continue to learn and allowed leaders to narrow the focus of the professional development sessions as needed throughout the school year. This schedule change also built in time for staff to conduct monthly RtI data reviews.

In addition to using the teacher evaluation system to hold staff accountable, administrators established learning walk rubrics and protocols to help develop a culture of consistent observation and feedback as a key lever for improving instructional quality. After a midyear review of data, Dever’s administrative teams and instructional leadership team (ILT) launched a schoolwide initiative for the second semester that focused on three strategies to increase student learning: (a) high-quality feedback, (b) accountable talk, and (c) higher level questioning and thinking. This effort was evident in increases in scores in the instructional support dimensions of the spring schoolwide instructional observation report based on a visit conducted by AIR observers in late March 2017.

Dever staff also adopted the Reader’s Workshop model, training all teachers in this system during August professional development and continuing to refine it throughout the school year. This model provided a common language and approach to literacy development across the school and helped Dever staff ensure that the rigor of instruction was aligned to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. This included teachers regularly using exit tickets and assessments to determine students’ level of mastery and areas of need. Administrators felt that this instructional coherence across grades was beneficial and contributed to the growth in ANet scores that Dever saw throughout the current school year and in previous school years.

### Turnaround Priority Area 3: Use data to drive instruction.

Using data to drive instruction and target support for students remained a major focus for both Blueprint and Dever in 2016–17. The receiver continued to design and develop customized data collection systems and structures for school leaders and staff. Blueprint’s National Data Analyst was on campus at least 3 full days each week, collaborating with teachers and school leadership to create templates, build capacity, and track and analyze data across a variety of sources. The school continued to implement Kickboard, a platform for collecting, tracking, and reporting student academic and behavioral data on a real-time basis. In addition, Dever staff used several academic data sources to identify needs and determine supports for students who were struggling, including exit tickets, and assessment data from the 2016 Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), ANet, Fountas and Pinnell, and benchmark assessments. With assistance from Blueprint’s data analyst and Dever administrators, staff members continued to gain skills in analyzing and using data throughout the school year. The first three ANet assessments showed positive and steadily increasing results throughout the school year, including percent correct scores in the third assessment (A3) exceeding prior-year scores in the same period by 20 percentage points in mathematics and 11 percentage points in ELA. The fourth ANet assessment is scheduled to take place in June, following MCAS testing.

Staff used these data sources as well as observational knowledge about students to assign students from across classes to needs-based groups, determine necessary supports, and monitor their progress. After receiving BPS’s salary reconciliation confirmation in the winter, Blueprint’s human capital team and the Dever leadership team recruited, vetted, selected, and trained five additional paraprofessionals midyear to have a larger number of staff able and available to work with students in the Reader’s Workshop and on Leveled Literacy Intervention curricula during the needs-based groups. Based on an analysis of student performance data, these additional staff were assigned to support students in Grades 4 and 5 and the therapeutic learning classrooms. In addition to the classroom teachers and the paraprofessionals, a reading specialist worked each day with students and staff during the needs-based groups. The reading specialist provided direct support to students 4 days per week and coaching feedback to teachers once per week to continue to develop teachers’ skills in delivering interventions.

### Turnaround Priority Area 4: Establish a culture of high expectations and college and career readiness.

The receiver and the Dever leadership team continued to implement a set of comprehensive strategies that were intended to foster a culture of high expectations. These strategies included accountability for consistently enforcing student behavior expectations and increased family engagement. As a whole, they were designed to promote positive student behavior and a positive culture and climate in the school for both students and adults. In support of this goal, Blueprint worked with Dr. Fishburn to change the administrative team structure and add a Dean of School Culture. Additional supports and strategies for establishing a culture of high expectations and college readiness included having a full-time, on campus, City Connects coordinator and changing the daily schedule to include a period focused on social-emotional learning and PBIS. The City Connects coordinator created individualized plans for students identified during the whole-school review as needing additional support, including connecting families with partner organizations to assist with material needs such as clothing and school supplies or providing resources such as food delivery assistance, tutoring services, and social skill supports.

Dever implemented systems to promote whole-class positive behaviors. Blue recognition cards were given to classes in which all students were displaying “Dever Style” and demonstrating leadership in common areas (e.g., hallways, the main lobby, and the cafeteria). Dever held monthly celebrations for classes that received the most cards. The school also tracked discipline data, including merits and reminders, and this year started monitoring student behavior on buses. Dever collected real-time data and identified specific students and buses that may need additional support and interventions. This resulted in a significant increase in parental involvement and a decrease in the number of bus incident referrals.

Attendance at family engagement events continued to improve during the 2016–17 school year. The principal used his background in communications and marketing to reach more families by using technology (including a Blueprint-managed website and a personal Twitter feed), regular newsletters, and outreach to Harbor Point housing across from the school and other local community organizations. In addition, teachers were held accountable for contacting every parent (or guardian/caregiver) of their students. As a result of this strategic, multi-pronged approach, attendance and participation at Dever family engagement events were the strongest in 3 years.

### Turnaround Priority Area 5: Hire and cultivate high-performing and high-potential staff.

Dr. Fishburn, Dever’s current principal, is slated to return in the 2017–18 school year. This continuity in leadership, during a change in receiver from Blueprint to Superintendent Chang, is considered a positive step forward for the school. Eleven founding staff members are returning for their fourth year at Dever, and seven additional staff members are returning for their third year at the school. In general, staff retention was stronger for prekindergarten, kindergarten, and Grades 1–3; teacher teams in Grades 4 and 5 typically experienced higher levels of turnover. At the leadership level, the majority of staff are planning to return for the 2017–18 school year.

During each year of the receivership, Blueprint’s human capital team used a variety of recruitment strategies to identify and select high-quality school leaders, teachers, and staff for Dever. This team conducted direct outreach, attended diversity-focused national and regional career fairs, collaborated with BPS to screen candidates within district hiring pools, and conducted regular informational interviews with referrals from across its networks. BPS agreed to assume responsibility for recruiting and selecting staff for the 2017–18 school year.

Strategies used to retain teachers for next year included holding teacher focus groups, assigning mentors to new teachers through BPS’s New Teacher Development Program, and strategically assigning teachers to instructional deans for support. Dever also provided frequent and actionable feedback as a research-based strategy, which resulted in the retention of high-performing teachers. In addition, Dever’s ILT continued to meet biweekly to ensure that staff members were supported in their goals and delivering high-quality instruction. The ILT’s main priorities included building instructional leadership capacity, evaluating and refining instructional initiatives, and communicating actionable data to grade-level teams.

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)