# 2016–17 Level 5 School Annual Evaluation Report UP Academy Holland, Boston, Massachusetts

### Receiver: UP Education 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 findings were informed by the appropriate key informants. For Level 5 schools, data were collected during the Monitoring Site Visit process 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 UP Academy Holland

School leaders at UP Academy Holland (UAH) prioritized a safe, warm, and positive culture throughout the building, and rigorous and clear instruction. Throughout the year, professional development focused on a celebration of student and adult learning, with a focus on social-emotional learning and nonacademic supports. The school hired a Board Certified Behavior Analyst this year and restructured the school culture team to better support staff and students in building school culture.

The school continued to focus on clear instruction and the use of data-informed decision making and action planning. Staff analyzed data from multiple sources, including Fountas & Pinnell (F&P), Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress (STEP), interim benchmark assessments, and classwork. 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. Data were examined on an individual basis, with teacher teams across grades, and in meetings with the deans of curriculum and instruction (DCIs) and the principal. Throughout the school year, there was an increased focus on incorporating supports for students who are English learners into initial lesson development and providing special education teachers opportunities to take part in intellectual prep.

Going into the 2017–18 school year, the leadership team is fully staffed, with the majority of leadership staff returning and no changes to the leadership model. The UP Teaching Fellows program had four fellows at UAH for the 2016–17 school year. UAH hired one fellow as a second-grade teacher and one fellow as a paraprofessional for the 2017–18 school year. The UP Teaching Follows program will have three fellows at UAH for the 2017–18 school year.

Finally, UAH continued to make family engagement a priority with supports from the coordinator of family and community relations and through the use of the Dean’s List phone application and online tracking system tool.

## End-of-Year Findings

### Priority Area 1: Transform the culture of the school into a culture of urgency, high expectations, accountability, excellence, and achievement.

UAH continued to focus on creating a culture of urgency, high expectations, accountability, excellence, and achievement. During the 2016–17 school year, UAH professional development and teacher coaching focused on establishing a stable culture in the classrooms and throughout the school. Based on the Teacher Pathways Rubric assessed this spring, 85% of teachers have safe, warm, and positive classroom environments that are focused on learning. For the small percentage of teachers who are still working on this component of the pathways rubric, DCIs worked directly with the teachers to provide strategies for improvement. UAH also has shifted towards a culture of celebration of student and adult learning. For example, during morning meetings, teachers and students do “shout outs,” which are an opportunity to highlight positive things that students are doing. For example, a teacher might say, “I have a grit shout out for [Student name] because I noticed that after he solved his problem-solving task one way, he tried to solve it using two more strategies.” Staff also have “shout outs” for one another. This shift to a more proactive approach has led to a more positive school culture. Responses to AIR’s instructional staff survey indicated that, on average, instructional staff agreed that school leadership and the majority of staff make high expectations and positive regard a priority. In addition, UAH saw a significant decline in year-to-date suspensions compared with the 2015–16 school year. In spring 2017, 6.3% of students had been suspended compared with 11% of students who were suspended at the same point during the last school year, a reduction of more than 40%.

School leaders at UAH prioritized social-emotional learning during the 2016–17 school year. The culture team was revamped to include one dean of students, four school culture specialists, and a newly hired Board Certified Behavior Analyst. This team provided social-emotional supports to struggling students. The Board Certified Behavior Analyst wrote functional behavioral assessments and behavior intervention plans, focusing in particular on Tier III students. During the 2016–17 school year, UAH also continued to focus on responsive classroom and used the Dovetail curriculum to support social-emotional learning. Social and emotional support strategies were woven into instruction most commonly through “morning motivation” in kindergarten and first grade, as well as in morning meeting in all other grades. This work supported students by giving them an opportunity to share and reflect on their feelings and emotions as well as the feelings and emotions of their peers. This structure will be expanded to Grades 2 and 3 for the 2017–18 school year. In addition, students had opportunities each day during morning meeting and closing circle to greet one other, share learning, and reflect and prepare for upcoming lessons. For the 2017–18 school year, UAH plans to provide monthly coaching from Dovetail staff and to send a group of staff to responsive classroom training.

UAH also continued to implement strategies to improve the supports for students with behavioral challenges. School leaders focused on developing alternative behavior plans for struggling students, including adjusting student schedules (e.g., schedule nap time), working with families (e.g., connected families with wraparound supports), and providing additional supports to students at certain times of the day (e.g., provided more proactive supports first thing in the morning). UAH conducted a professional development session for staff that included scenarios and strategies for staff to implement to address behavior before it escalated. UAH plans to continue training staff to build a greater understanding of trauma sensitivity and to be more proactive in addressing behavior in the classroom.

### Priority Area 2: Enhance the rigor of the curricula, improve the effectiveness of instruction, and strengthen the utilization of assessment data.

UAH worked to improve instructional effectiveness and the rigor of curricula during the 2016–17 school year. UAH had a whole-school focus on clear instruction, improving teachers’ development of content knowledge, their ability to deliver mistake-free content, and their skills in moving through lesson components purposefully to lead to student mastery. During the 2016–17 school year, UAH implemented Drop Everything and Prep (DEAP). This was an intellectual prep period for teacher teams to come together and review lessons for the next day, provide content support, identify the key teaching points, identify questions to put the thinking on the students, identify common misconceptions, and develop strategies for how they will respond to those misconceptions. As a follow-up to DEAP, DCIs went into the classroom during the lesson to provide live coaching. DEAP also incorporated special education and English as a second language (ESL) teachers. UAH plans to continue to use this model next year and to build on it by developing look-fors to solidify the process of DEAP and more systematically monitor implementation. In interviews, school leaders reported that teachers are invested in this model and that it has led to improvements in teacher practice.

UAH also continued to emphasize the importance of data-informed decision making and action planning. Teachers tracked data from a variety of sources to inform classroom planning and submitted data-based action plans to their DCIs. Teachers regularly reviewed F&P and STEP data, classwork, and data from benchmark assessments, the summative exams developed by the UP Education Network, to measure progress in English language arts and mathematics. The UP Education Network data team developed dashboards that allow teachers to compare their data to other teachers at UAH and across the UP Network. After every interim assessment window, UAH staff come together for a “Data Day” where they dive into the data, collaborate within and across teams, and every classroom and grade develop their own action plans.

During weekly DCI-led meetings and collaborative planning time, data were reviewed and action steps were identified, such as assigning students to targeted groups. Teams also may create grade-level action plans based on trends. For example, Grade 2 teachers noticed that students in an individual classroom had a wide range of mathematics skills, so they created homogenous groups across classrooms, and students moved to the classroom with other students at their skill level during the mathematics intervention block. School leaders monitored the implementation of these action plans through weekly classroom observations conducted by the DCIs and other administrators. During weekly academic administration team meetings, school leaders looked at data to develop schoolwide action steps.

### Priority Area 3: Expand the school day and school year, build in time, deploy resources, develop programs, and create identification and tracking systems to ensure that all students, especially students with disabilities and English language learners, receive the academic and other supports they require to learn and succeed.

UAH worked to ensure that all students received appropriate supports for their learning and success—particularly students with disabilities and English language learner (ELLs). UAH leaders and staff conducted walk-throughs for special education and ESL classrooms, with the goal to strengthen instruction for students with disabilities and ELLs. The dean of student supports conducted these walk-throughs for special education staff on a daily basis, and a substantially separate teacher co-led three walk-throughs during the year. The ESL walk-throughs were done on a biweekly basis and have led to the identification of teams with strong planning practices for ELLs, such as standardizing planning agendas with questions about ELLs and access. Professional development sessions focused on the collaboration among teachers of ELLs, special education teachers, and content teachers, and moving forward school leaders will continue to emphasize the importance of developing lessons with ELL supports in mind.

UAH has worked to renew their commitment to co-planning among general educators, special educators, and ESL teachers. The DCIs delivered professional development sessions focused on collaboration among ELL, special education, and content teachers. In addition, ELL and special education teachers joined DEAP sessions. The social and academic remediation (SAR) team worked to draw on materials from their general education colleagues so they are not creating all materials from scratch and to free up time for intellectual preparation. Next year, school leaders plan to offer professional development around modifying curriculum and helping staff understand what the major work of each grade is and what that means for what lessons should look like. In addition, UAH partnered with Ramapo for Children to receive additional coaching related to best practices for supporting students with acute social and emotional learning needs.

UAH has been preparing for the transition of one of the SAR classes into inclusion for the   
2017–18 school year. UAH has been prepared for this change through a high level of parent communication and engagement, exposing students to more time in inclusion, and extensive data collection to confirm that this is the best fit for the students. This switch to inclusion will allow students with disabilities to learn from and engage with their nondisabled peers.

### Priority Area 4: Recruit and hire extraordinary leaders, teachers, and support staff, and build and utilize systems to evaluate, develop, promote, reward, and retain these staff over the long term.

UAH focused on hiring extraordinary leaders, teachers, and support staff and retaining these staff over the long term. Going into the 2016–17 school year, 62% of the staff returned from the   
2015–16 school year, with 38 instructional staff members new to UAH. UAH filled nine vacancies during the school year. All midyear vacancies were filled within 6 weeks, with an average time to fill a vacancy of 19 calendar days. The school was able to use the deans of curriculum and instruction for short-term coverage.

Following their first year of participation during this school year, UAH will continue to take part in the UP Teaching Fellows program again during the 2017–18 school year. This is a teacher preparation program, run in partnership with the Sposato Graduate School of Education, aimed at the development of extraordinary teachers with the goal of retaining these staff. These fellows were paired with a host teacher and received coaching from the DCIs. UAH hired one fellow as a second-grade teacher and one fellow as a paraprofessional for the 2017–18 school year. The UP Teaching Follows program will have three fellows at UAH for the 2017–18 school year.

The leadership team is fully staffed for the 2017–18 school year. There will be no changes to the leadership model. Most leadership team members are returning, with the exception of the director of operations and the DCI for fourth and fifth grade. Eighty-four percent of the overall staff have been hired as of the beginning of May. There is one K1 and two Grade 4 positions open that UAH is activity recruiting. The diversity goal for the network also has been met.

### Priority Area 5: Fully engage all of the school’s families in the learning of their children.

UAH made family engagement a priority by implementing a variety of initiatives to promote family involvement in the school. The coordinator of family and community relations continued to review attendance data, track communication, plan events, and handle communication schoolwide, including reaching out to families weekly. Some of the family and community engagement activities that UAH hosted this year included a Back to School BBQ, a middle school fair for fifth graders to explore their options and submit enrollment applications, a report card conference day, and a winter performance that showcased students’ work in art classes.

Teachers were expected to communicate with families every 2 weeks. UAH continued to use the Dean’s List data system for staff to log their family communication. Dean’s List is a phone application and online data tracker that allows staff to have family contact information through an application on their phone. This application allowed teachers to easily access all students’ contact information without the need to save contacts on their personal phone. The principal also used this information to send weekly “shout out” e-mails to staff who have made the most calls home to encourage others to foster family relationships. DCIs also have access to the Dean’s List information, and they monitor and follow up with teachers regarding their family communication.

UAH continued to struggle with tardiness and chronic absenteeism, with approximately 30% of students showing up late to school 15 or more times or missing 10% of the school year. The coordinator of family and community relations continued to follow up with the families of these students and has been focused on developing structures to get these students into the school building on time. UAH had an incentive in place for classrooms that have 100% attendance. This will continue to be a priority area of UAH in the coming school year.

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)