# 2019 Chronically Underperforming School Annual Evaluation Report: Morgan Full Service Community School, Holyoke, Massachusetts

**Receiver: Superintendent/District Receiver Stephen Zrike**

## Introduction

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) contracted with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to collect evidence from each chronically underperforming school on the progress toward implementation of the turnaround plan in Year 5 of chronically underperforming status. ESE 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 2018, AIR staff collected data through instructional observations, using Teachstone’s Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS),[[1]](#footnote-1) and in February 2019 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 2019 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 chronically underperforming schools, data were collected during the Monitoring Site Visit and follow-up activities to inform ESE’s statutory requirement to annually evaluate each chronically underperforming school’s progress toward implementing the turnaround plan. AIR’s chronically underperforming school review process focused on work at each school related to each of the specific turnaround practice areas.

## Highlights of Turnaround Plan Implementation at Morgan Full Service Community School

Morgan Full Service Community School (hereafter, Morgan) underwent several significant changes this school year. Because of the middle school redesign initiative in Holyoke Public Schools (HPS), Morgan went from servicing pre-kindergarten through eighth grade during the 2018 school year to servicing students in pre-kindergarten through fourth grade in the 2019 school year. Further, the principal was in his first year at Morgan. The principal was closely supported by his district-level school supervisor, who was the previous principal at Morgan for four years.

Throughout the 2019 school year, Morgan leaders focused on improving instruction, social-emotional learning, and family and community engagement and aligning professional development to support teachers. Specific to instruction, school leaders expected teachers to use data cycles, guided reading strategies, purposing, differentiation, scaffolding, pacing, and higher level questioning. Teachers received support on implementing these expectations through professional development, common planning times, and coaching supports from the two instructional learning specialists (ILSs).

The school continued to emphasize the importance of using data to inform schoolwide decisions and classroom instruction. Staff continued to use data from the Achievement Network (ANet) and STAR assessments to assign students to appropriate interventions and inform next steps to accelerate student growth toward grade-level standards. During biweekly data meetings, teachers and leaders analyzed the results from formative and summative assessments throughout the school year.

Supporting students’ social-emotional learning was a priority at Morgan this year. To do so, school leaders dedicated a 30-minute block each morning to building positive adult–student relationships. During this time, students ate breakfast in the classroom and participated in “community circles,” where teachers implemented lessons developed by the school counselor. New this year, school leaders launched a one-on-one mentoring program that targeted high-need students. Twelve students were identified to participate, and each was matched with an HPS staff member. Students were chosen based on following criteria: personality traits (e.g., students who were shy or reserved), behavior (e.g., students who were not identified as having Tier 2 or 3 behavioral needs), and academic performance (e.g., students who were not academically failing). Next year, school leaders are looking to expand this program. The Jaguar team, the school team responsible for supporting students’ behavioral and social-emotional needs, struggled with long-term staff absences this year. These staff absences impacted the school’s ability to provide individualized behavioral and social-emotional supports this year.

Family and community engagement also continued to be a focus at Morgan, with every teacher expected to conduct a minimum of three home visits per year. At each grade level, Morgan teachers planned two events so that families had opportunities to participate in their child’s academic success. There also were schoolwide events to develop the Morgan community.

Morgan continued to struggle to fill instructional positions, particularly for midyear vacancies. During this school year, Morgan had eight instructional positions vacant, including six teachers, one English as a second language (ESL) teacher, and three paraprofessionals. The school was able to hire one paraprofessional and added a long-term substitute to fill the role in another classroom. The English language arts (ELA) ILS will be transitioning to fill the open ESL position for next year and has already begun to pull small groups to service English language learner students (ELL). Next year, one ILS will provide coaching support across both content areas.

## End-of-Year Findings

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

Morgan staff spent the year focused on using data cycles to inform instruction, implementing guided reading strategies, purposing, differentiation, scaffolding, pacing, and higher level questioning. These instructional expectations were determined by analyzing data collected during the previous school year. For example, assessment and STAR data led to the ELA focus on guided reading, and Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System data led to the focus on mathematics. Professional development was aligned to these priority areas, and school leaders actively monitored progress through regular classroom observations conducted by the principal, ILSs, and the school supervisor as well as larger district-level observations.

Dedicating time for professional collaboration continued to be a priority for school leaders at Morgan this year, and staff had multiple opportunities each week to collaborate. Time was used to provide professional development, grade-level collaboration, weekly data meetings (alternating between ELA and mathematics focus), weekly “mini student support teams (SSTs)” to discuss students who are struggling, and conducting home visits. Some of these meetings were facilitated by one of the two ILSs or school leaders. The school’s instructional leadership team was responsible for planning professional development sessions.

Moving forward, an increasing emphasis will be placed on pre-kindergarten classrooms. In April 2019, Morgan added two additional pre-kindergarten classrooms; one is operated by HPS, and the other is operated by Valley Opportunity Council. The latter classroom serviced students with autism in the mornings and offered an inclusion setting in the afternoons. To better support pre-kindergarten teachers, school leaders brought in the district’s director of early childhood education to provide some differentiated professional development. Next year, two additional pre-kindergarten classrooms will be added. As a result, the principal will be placing an increasing emphasis on instructional supports at the early elementary level.

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

Morgan continued to focus on using data to drive instruction. All teachers engaged in biweekly data cycle meetings, where they met in grade-level teams to identify and target the needs of students in their classrooms. One week would be focused on ELA facilitated by the ELA ILS, and the next week would be focused on mathematics facilitated by the mathematics ILS. During these meetings, teachers primarily examined the results of common assessments, developed by the ILSs, STAR, ANet, and examples of student work to assess student mastery of standards.

New this year, Morgan implemented a mini SST process to identify and support students struggling with core instruction. All teachers engaged in the mini SST process, meeting in grade-level teams weekly to discuss students who are struggling. During these meetings, teachers would present a student about whom they had concerns, and the team would brainstorm strategies and supports that the teacher could implement within the classroom. The teacher would implement these recommendations for six weeks, and the team would then reconvene to monitor the student’s progress. Examples of supports that could be put into effect included seating changes, an additional guided reading session, more frequent breaks, Check-In/Check-Out, a break system, and many others. School leaders expected this process to reduce the number of students referred to SST and streamline the SST process because data and strategies would have already been implemented. Next year, school leaders anticipate continuing this process.

Morgan continued to have two ILSs at the school—one focused on ELA and the other focused on mathematics—to support teachers and students who are struggling. Because fewer grades were serviced at Morgan this year, the ILSs were able to offer coaching supports to more teachers this year compared with previous years. All new teachers at Morgan were offered coaching supports, and returning teachers were targeted based on classroom observations; teachers also could self-identify for coaching supports. Coaching supports were individualized based on teacher need but could include coplanning, modeling, coteaching, observing, and providing frequent feedback. In addition, the coaches targeted students who scored in the bottom 20th percentile based on STAR assessments for small-group instruction. Next year, the school will be transitioning to one ILS who will support both subject areas. The second ILS will be transitioning to fill the vacant ESL position.

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

Morgan modified the schedule from last year by removing the targeted intervention block and incorporating intervention time into core instruction. Although no longer a formal block of time, approximately 30–45 minutes of each day were dedicated to providing students with interventions this year. Teachers were expected to pull small groups of students for targeted instruction while other students worked independently as part of classroom-based centers, and students in need of more intensive supports were pulled out by one of the ILSs.

HPS placed a greater emphasis on the implementation of research-based interventions this year. At Morgan, literacy interventions included Lexia, Leveled Literacy Intervention, and Fundations; mathematics interventions included ST Math. HPS provided Morgan with a part-time reading interventionist, who was at the school between 90 minutes and two hours each day. Students were assigned to interventions primarily using STAR data, and student assignments were assessed every six to eight weeks. Next year, the mathematics ILS has already been trained in Math Recovery and Do Math to expand the available interventions to support students struggling in mathematics. The principal also would like to incorporate research-based interventions targeted to students in kindergarten and first grade.

This year, HPS revised the SST process to focus on students who have significant foundational gaps, rather than those who are struggling with core instruction. To learn the new SST process, Morgan staff started slowly this year, with each grade identifying one student as a case study. Once the grade-level team identified a student, the SST convened and created an intervention plan that was reassessed after six weeks. Students who were struggling but not identified as the case study student still received supports during targeted small groups.

Morgan staff continued to focus on student attendance; attendance rates were lower this year compared with last year during the fall and winter months. School leaders created an attendance team to address this challenge, and this team monitored daily attendance data to identify students with five or more absences. The team then met to discuss these students, ensuring that the family has been contacted. Depending on the family’s need, this may have included connecting to community wraparound supports. As a result of this process, the year-to-date schoolwide attendance by the third quarter was 90.7 percent, exceeding the year-to-date schoolwide attendance for last year of 90.4 percent in the same time period. Further, pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, second grade, and third grade have all seen improvements since December 2018.

### Turnaround Practice 4: School Climate and Culture

Morgan staff continued to focus on behavior management, which was one of the school’s priorities this year. The expectations of the “Jaguar Way” continued to be implemented, defined as being respectful, responsible, and safe. Teachers had flexibility in how to implement positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) within their classrooms, although all teachers had to have a system (e.g., tokens, tickets). Next year, the principal will be establishing whole-building expectations to build consistency. Schoolwide, there was a monthly PBIS reward, and teachers nominated students to participate. Examples of schoolwide rewards included dress down day or pajama day. The Jaguar Team, consisting of the principal, the school adjustment counselor, and the dean of students, continued to support students’ behavioral and social-emotional needs. The team was significantly impacted by long-term staff absences throughout the school year; to address this, the principal hired a retired dean of students at Morgan from last year as a long-term substitute. When some of the absent employees returned, the principal was able to allocate funds to keep the long-term substitute on-staff, part-time, for the remainder of this school year and the beginning of next year to provide additional support.

New this year, school leaders built a dedicated 30-minute morning block into the instructional schedule to build strong relationships between students and teachers. The first 15 minutes were dedicated to eating breakfast in the classroom, with the second 15 minutes being used for “community circles.” During community circles, teachers implemented a curriculum developed by the school counselor, focused on topics such as manners, communication, and relationship skills. Teachers had flexibility in how they implemented these lessons in their individual classrooms. Next year, school leaders would like to collaborate with external consultant Jill Grayson on leveraging existing resources to revise this curriculum.

Morgan staff continued to improve outreach to families and build momentum in this area. Specifically, all teachers were expected to conduct home visits; 91 percent of teachers had conducted at least three home visits by the end of the third quarter, with 52 percent of teachers conducting more than three. Teachers were provided with time at the end of the school day to conduct home visits. New this year, teachers were expected to incorporate discussions of student academic progress into these visits, particularly focused on mathematics and guided reading (aligned with the school’s instructional priorities). By the end of the third quarter, 47 percent of all home visits had focused on a student’s academic progress/teacher concerns, and 38 percent of all home visits focused specifically on mathematics. In addition, Morgan continued to host regular school events to engage families and community members at the school. Specifically, bimonthly family fun nights continued with events including Discover Puerto Rico, Literacy Night, a spelling bee, and holiday events. Because these events are well attended, school leaders began to incorporate academic discussions, such as quick presentations about the importance of attendance. Staff hosted booths during family fun nights, where parents could learn about community resources, get their child’s attendance record, and make appointments with school leaders to discuss any areas of concern. More frequently, the principal hosted monthly Mondays with Moguel meetings, where parents could come and informally speak with the principal about concerns or ideas they had. School leaders reported that approximately 15 percent of the families attended these events.

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)