# 2019 Chronically Underperforming School End-of-Year Report: John Avery Parker Elementary School, New Bedford, Massachusetts

**Receiver: School & Main Institute and Dr. Fran Roy**

## 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 John Avery Parker Elementary School

John Avery Parker Elementary School (hereafter, Parker) underwent a change in receiver during the 2019 school year (from New Bedford Public Schools [NBPS] Superintendent Dr. Pia Durkin to School & Main Institute). Further, the principal was in her first year at Parker.

Throughout the 2019 school year, Parker staff focused on creating a safe and supportive school environment, supporting students who were emotionally fragile through the provision of targeted supports, and increasing the rigor of instruction and student discourse in the classroom. All instances of professional development and teacher collaboration time (TCT) were aligned with at least one of these initiatives. Teachers had time for collaboration with colleagues during daily TCT. Staff also participated in monthly half-day professional development sessions.

The school continued to emphasize the importance of data-driven instruction, and teachers used a variety of data sources to inform their instruction (e.g., Reading Street, DIBELS [Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills], Two Pen Test, mock MCAS [Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System] tests, student work samples). Formal data analysis occurred during grade-level TCT facilitated by the teaching and learning specialist (TLS). Through this process, teachers made reteaching plans, established PRIDE (be Positive, be Responsible, show Integrity, be Determined, and Enjoy learning) groupings, and determined Tier 2 instructional groupings. In addition, Parker made great progress in refining the PRIDE time intervention model. PRIDE continued to be a powerful driver for targeting academic supports for students, using data to identify and then address specific gaps where students needed support.

Family and community engagement continued to be a focus at Parker, with the family engagement leadership team responsible for planning monthly events. Examples of events included family academic game nights, potlucks, school dances, and many others. In addition, Parker partnered with the NorthStar Learning Center to launch a parent academy. The first round of sessions focused on children’s social-emotional development and graduates then became Parker ambassadors. Parker modified the manager of family and student support role to improve the wraparound model of support in place at the school. By modifying this role, the school was better equipped to connect students with supports both during and outside the school day.

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 data analysis. One of the most significant uses of the school’s autonomy was in revising the instructional schedule. Most notably, all students participated in a 30-minute enrichment period weekly, teachers had a 90-minute block for collaboration (TCT) weekly, and PRIDE time for English language arts (ELA) and mathematics was decreased from 60 minutes to 30 minutes each to allow for more efficient use of time.

## End-of-Year Findings

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

The schoolwide monitoring process at Parker continued to be a critical lever for improving schoolwide instruction. In alignment with the school’s first and second priorities on creating a safe and supportive school environment and supporting students who are emotionally fragile, school leaders conducted six social-emotional learning walkthroughs each day. During this time, school leaders monitored teachers’ implementation of Responsive Classroom, examined the classroom culture, and checked in on students who had been identified as needing Tier 3 behavioral supports. In alignment with the school’s third priority on increasing academic rigor and student discourse, school leaders conducted regular classroom observation and monitored students’ academic data.

TCT continued to be the primary formal structure for teacher collaboration at Parker. Each grade had one block of TCT daily for 45 minutes, with a double block for 90 minutes once per week. Teachers were expected to use two TCT blocks per week for individual planning, two blocks for collaborating with grade-level partners, and the double block with grade-level partners facilitated by the TLS. Special education teachers and English as a second language teachers each had their own TCT with the TLS. This year, Parker continued to have monthly professional development sessions when students had early release. Next year, professional development will be weekly for 90 minutes, a significant increase in the amount of professional development for teachers.

School leaders are committed to building teacher capacity at Parker. To do so, school leaders established four distributed leadership teams, including the mentor teacher leadership team (supported teachers new to the profession), the family and community engagement leadership team (planned monthly engagement events), the social-emotional learning leadership team (supported Responsive Classroom implementation and provided some professional development), and the instructional leadership team (ILT; conducted schoolwide data analysis and planned professional development). Each distributed leadership team met monthly for 60 minutes. Next year, school leaders plan for each team to have co-facilitators, at least one of whom will be a teacher to continue building staff capacity.

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

Leadership and staff at Parker strove to create more student-led classrooms with the teacher as the facilitator of learning. As part of this work, Parker staff implemented a new mathematics curriculum, Contexts for Learning, which required teachers to facilitate mathematics congresses where students conferred with one another and shared their strategies. Although no schoolwide change in the literacy curriculum occurred this school year,[[2]](#footnote-2) school leaders encouraged the same level of academic discourse in ELA classes. Because this was a significant change in expectations compared with previous years, the manager of educator quality and the TLS both had important roles in supporting teachers’ professional growth. Moving forward, school leaders are planning to continue implementing the Contexts for Learning curriculum and pilot components of the EngageNY curriculum for ELA in fourth and fifth grade.

Parker continued to emphasize data-driven instruction. Parker had formal structures for teachers and leadership to review student data, primarily during grade-level TCT facilitated by the TLS. Data sources included state assessment data, unit formative and summative assessments, DIBELS, mock MCAS, classroom assessments (e.g., Reading Street, Advantage Early Number Fluency Test, Two Pen test), and student work. Teachers were expected to use these data sources to drive their instruction, including the creation of PRIDE and Tier 2 instructional groupings, topics for reteaching, and identifying student misconceptions. The ILT also analyzed student data after each benchmark assessment, and results were displayed in the school’s professional development/data room for all staff to see individual student growth across time. In addition, all assessment data were recorded to either Parker’s Data Dashboard (for formative assessments) or the SchoolCity Platform (for end-of-unit assessments), and the TLS prepared a weekly grade-level report. The ILT used these data to inform schoolwide initiatives, such as professional development topics.

The TLS was primarily responsible for providing coaching supports to teachers to improve the quality of instruction. Teachers were identified for coaching supports by school leadership using classroom observation data or teachers could self-identify for supports. The length of the coaching cycle varied depending on the individual needs of the teacher and generally included coplanning, modeling by the TLS, coteaching, and observations and feedback. By the end of the third quarter, the TLS had provided coaching to seven teachers.

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

During the 2016 school year, Parker began intervention blocks called PRIDE and continued with this practice through the subsequent school years. These daily small-group intervention blocks provided 30 additional minutes of ELA and 30 minutes of mathematics instruction to advance core instruction and provide Tier 2 and 3 supports as needed. During PRIDE, students who need Tier 2 supports participated in targeted small-group instruction with their classroom teacher, students who need Tier 3 supports worked with an interventionist or special education teacher, and students who were at or above grade level received advanced learning opportunities. Students were placed into tiers using a variety of data sources (e.g., DIBELS, formative, summative, and benchmark assessments) that were reexamined every six weeks. School leaders reported that the PRIDE time model had a positive effect on student learning, and they expect to dive deeper into supporting students who are academically struggling next year.

New this year, Parker implemented a multifaceted intervention program called Captain’s Club to support 10 students who scored in the bottom 25th percentile on the 2018 MCAS. The program included in-school, afterschool, and at-home components. Specifically, students participated in four 30-minute sessions of targeted interventions from the TLS each week, with two sessions focused on ELA and two sessions focused on mathematics. In addition, each student worked with an afterschool tutor from the University of Massachusetts–Dartmouth once per week for two hours to receive academic supports as well as mentorship. Lastly, families participated in one-on-one biweekly meetings throughout the program to discuss their child’s progress and receive assignments for their child to complete at home. School leaders report success with this program, as evidenced by students’ high attendance rates.[[3]](#footnote-3) For next year, the Captain’s Club will continue, although school leaders are considering having a teacher lead this work rather than the TLS to further build teacher capacity.

Parker further refined the building-based support team (BBST) process, originally developed during the 2017 school year. This year, a multidisciplinary team composed of various stakeholders (e.g., principal, the manager of educator quality, the family engagement manager, the behavior specialist, special education teachers, the referring classroom teachers) convened to discuss students for whom a teacher or staff member had significant academic, behavioral, or social-emotional concerns. The team met to identify supports and strategies for the classroom teacher to implement as well as additional interventions or outside supports the student may need. To initiate the process, the referring teacher completed a form on Google Drive, and the student was immediately scheduled for the next available timeslot. In the third quarter, the BBST protocol was revised to include a checklist of the student’s lagging, or underdeveloped skills, in accordance with the collaborative problem-solving approach from Dr. Ablon at Massachusetts General Hospital (see Turnaround Practice 4: School Climate and Culture). In October 2018, Parker identified 18 students as in need of Tier 2 supports; that number decreased to a low of six students in March 2019.

### Turnaround Practice 4: School Climate and Culture

This year, Parker focused on creating a safe and supportive school environment through the implementation of Responsive Classroom schoolwide. A group of school staff was trained on implementing Responsive Classroom during summer 2018; these teachers then brought this knowledge back to the rest of Parker staff. All teachers implemented both morning circles and closing meetings throughout the school year. Parker will be offering another round of training from Responsive Classroom during summer 2019, so all staff will receive the official training.

Parker implemented clear behavioral expectations this year, which were for students to be responsible, respectful, and safe and ready to learn. School leaders also instilled the motto of Parker PRIDE. To positively reinforce these expectations, students received a paper link that contributed to the school’s “Chain of PRIDE” when they exemplified these values. These paper chains were displayed around the school and contributed to a collective sense of ownership. When individual classrooms received a certain number of links, they received a whole-class prize, such as a pizza party.

As part of the school’s focus on students who are emotionally fragile, school leaders closely monitored the number of student office referrals. Students with four or more office referrals per week received individualized student support plans through the BBST. This year, school leaders began implementing the collaborative problem-solving approach from Dr. Ablon at Massachusetts General Hospital. This approach views behavioral challenges as a byproduct of underdeveloped, or lagging, thinking skills. Therefore, each student who was identified as emotionally fragile at Parker had his or her thinking skills assessed (e.g., executive functioning, language processing, emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, and social skills). The BBST used the results of this assessment to create an individualized student support plan that covered four domains: inside the classroom, outside the classroom, family support, and positive youth development (i.e., afterschool). The plan was disseminated to all relevant staff who interacted with the student, and the BBST reviewed the student’s progress after six weeks of implementation. School leaders reported significant success this approach. In October 2018, 18 students were identified as emotionally fragile, whereas in March 2019, five students were identified. The school will continue to implement the collaborative problem-solving approach next year.

This year, Parker continued to focus on student attendance. The school had three tiers of attendance initiatives. At the schoolwide level were daily morning announcements, regular assemblies that were fun and exciting, and “perfectly punctual score cards” that each student received. For the score card, students tracked their punctuality daily and if they were on-time each day that week, they would enter their scorecard into a schoolwide raffle for monthly prizes (e.g., homework passes, ice cream parties). For students identified as struggling with attendance, the attendance team would get involved. The attendance team was composed of the principal, the school nurse, the manager of family and student support, and the attendance officer. The school nurse tracked attendance daily and made calls home to all absent students. The nurse also tracked attendance data to identify students who are struggling with getting to school. If a student missed three or more days of school, a letter of concern was sent to the family; for five or more days absent, the family was contacted to set up a meeting with the attendance team to discuss and remove barriers the family was experiencing; for more than seven or eight days absent, the attendance officer contacted the family to proactively schedule an additional meeting, to add a level of accountability to the issue before the student became chronically absent. Through this series of supports, Parker’s chronically absent rate went from 17.5 percent in the second quarter to 11.2 percent in the third quarter.

Family and community engagement also continued to be a focus at Parker. New this year, Parker launched a parent academy in collaboration with Northstar Learning Center. Parents received a survey to gather their input on potential topics of the parent academy. Informed by the results of this survey, the first parent academy focused on children’s social-emotional development. Approximately 15 parents/guardians enrolled at the start of the parent academy, and six of them graduated. These individuals became parent ambassadors and worked closely with the school’s community engagement leadership team to plan monthly family engagement events. Examples of events hosted during the 2019 school year included a schoolwide cultural fair, Bingo for Books game night, academic mathematics carnival, a school dance, and holiday events, among others. Next year, school leaders would like to establish a parent-teacher organization led by the parent ambassadors. School leaders are planning on hosting parent academy again next year, focused on how parents can support their child academically.

For summer 2019, Parker students will have various district programming options available. First, students will continue to participate in the district’s Power Scholars Academy program, which targets students going into third through fifth grade who are slightly below grade level. During the program, students will receive academic instruction in the morning taught by New Bedford Public School staff and participate in enrichments and field trips in the afternoon. In previous years, Parker was able to send approximately 50 students; the district has increased the number of spots available to Parker students for summer 2019. Second, specific programming options are available for both students with individualized education programs and English language learners so that their specific learning needs are addressed. Lastly, a summer program is available for middle school students that will be available for Parker students transitioning from fifth to sixth grade. Daily transportation will be offered from Parker to the various programs across the district.

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)
2. In fifth grade, Parker teachers embedded novel study units from EngageNY and Massachusetts model curriculum units, a change from last year. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For all but two days of the program, students participating in Captain’s Club had 100 percent attendance. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)