*****Massachusetts Department of***

***Elementary and Secondary Education***

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| Jeffrey C. Riley  *Commissioner* |  |

# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:** | Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner |
| **Date:** | June 19, 2020 |
| **Subject:** | Annual Evaluation Reports on Chronically Underperforming Schools |

In the fall of 2013, four schools were designated as “chronically underperforming” in response to their low performance and lack of improvement while in underperforming status. These schools were: John P. Holland Elementary School (UP Academy Holland) and Paul A. Dever Elementary School (the Dever) in Boston, Morgan Full Service Community School (Morgan) in Holyoke, and John Avery Parker Elementary School (Parker) in New Bedford.

The following is the 2020-2021 annual evaluation report on these four chronically underperforming schools, as well as an update on remote learning from each school. The narrative for this report has been provided by the School Empowerment Network (SEN), based on classroom observations led by that group in October 2019 and January 2020.

Due to school building closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic this spring, SEN was unable to complete a third set of scheduled observations. Instead, SEN will be leading individualized strategic planning sessions with each school leader and receiver. In these sessions, SEN will support school leaders with school year 2020-2021 planning aligned to the classroom observations data and each school’s turnaround plan.

**Paul A. Dever Elementary School (Boston, MA)**

The Dever opened the 2019-2020 school year with Michael Contompasis returning as receiver for his second year, and Dr. Todd Fishburn returning for his fifth and final year as principal. During the school year, after Mr. Contompasis announced he would retire at the end of the 2019-2020 school year, Commissioner Riley appointed School & Main Institute as the next receiver for the Dever, effective July 1, 2020. Similarly, Dr. Fishburn announced this spring that he would step down as principal at the end of the 2019-2020 school year. After seeking input from the Dever staff, Mr. Contompasis and School & Main Institute announced the Dever’s current assistant principal, Ms. Margaret Reardon, would be promoted to principal, effective July 1, 2020.

Observations and evidence collected by SEN suggest that creating and sustaining a positive learning environment was the Dever’s relative area of strength this year. School leaders and teachers prioritized building relationships with students. Students reported that adults in their school treated them with respect and that they felt safe in school. In most classrooms, there was evidence of clear routines, procedures, and expectations for classroom behavior. Most classes were reported as being safe, supportive learning spaces.

Major areas of focus for the Dever include pedagogy and high expectations of student achievement. SEN noted an urgent need for school leaders to further develop an instructional vision, communicate clear expectations for the use of teaching practices aligned to the vision, and support and monitor schoolwide implementation of those practices.

*Remote* *Learning:*

The Dever continues to make strides for scholars around equity and access during remote learning. At the time of this report, 91 percent of Dever scholars had logged onto their Clever accounts[[1]](#footnote-1) at least once, compared with 72 percent of students attending other schools within Boston Public Schools. The Dever daily average student attendance during remote learning was 83 percent.

The Dever’s staff has created a three-tiered model for scholars based on access, attendance, learning levels, and need: Tier 1 = on target; Tier 2 = some concerns; Tier 3 = in need of intense support. At the time of this report, 52 percent of students at the Dever were categorized in Tier 1, 41 percent in Tier 2, and 7 percent in Tier 3. Based on these data, the school's Student Support Team (SST) created individual plans for students in Tier 3. Throughout the period of remote learning, the Dever’s teachers continued to hold weekly common planning time (CPTs) to collaborate on improving equity, access to learning, and differentiated instruction in the remote learning environment. The Dever's Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) has also been rigorously planning for the upcoming receiver transition to School & Main Institute and putting together summer professional development for school year 2020-2021.

**UP Academy Holland (Boston, MA)**

Victoria Thompson is in her second year as principal at UP Academy Holland. UP Education Network continues as receiver for the school.

Observations and evidence collected by SEN suggest a key area of strength for UP Academy Holland was in its teacher teams and distributed leadership. All teachers at UP Academy Holland were engaged in data-based professional learning collaborations that resulted in adjustments to instructional planning. The principal led a weekly meeting to review progress toward meeting schoolwide goals. As a result, from classroom to classroom, students received consistent content instruction and experienced consistent classroom cultures. Leadership was distributed, with Deans of Curriculum and Instruction, teacher coaches, and teacher content facilitators each owning the planning and facilitation of collaborative activities. Formal systems for feedback promoting the staff voice were established.

Curriculum and pedagogy are two areas of focus moving forward. The chosen curriculum in several grades and subjects did not align well with the school leaders’ vision for instruction or with their beliefs about how students learn best. In most core content classrooms, observed teachers did not adjust instruction based on checks for understanding and did not scaffold content when it was clear that students were unable to access it. In the area of pedagogy, during the January visit, reviewers observed that students were being provided rigorous tasks and independent work time in more classrooms than they had observed in October. However, teacher instructional choices in a number of visited classrooms either reduced the rigor of tasks or shifted the learning focus from a high-level thinking task to a series of lower-level sub-tasks.

*Remote Learning:*

UP Academy Holland has prioritized strengthening its community by focusing on promoting regular communication between students and teachers and engaging academic content in all grade levels during the period of remote learning this year. The school has utilized the Google Classroom platform and provided synchronous and asynchronous assignments to students. Teachers have also established office hours. Instructional and other support staff provided community-building opportunities for students to continue to connect with peers and teachers. This was reinforced by a strategic focus on positive communication through reinforcement given to students during virtual meetings and sending individual notes and short, positive texts to families. The school also shared positive messages via ClassDOJO[[2]](#footnote-2) in an effort to build community, engage in two-way communication, and amplify, encourage, and foster positive action.

At the start of remote learning, 424 Chromebooks were distributed and delivered to students. Seventy-six were personally delivered to families. As a result, an average of 64 percent of students engaged in asynchronous assignments, and 66 percent of students engaged in synchronous sessions. Notably, at the time of this report, an average of 85 percent of students with disabilities were engaging in synchronous sessions with their special education teacher.

UP Academy Holland has established a remote learning Student Support Team (SST) to discuss students who did not engage with assignments or with their teachers. The SST was a compilation of administrators, related service providers, specialists, school culture team members, and cluster substitutes. For these situations, the SST identified a point-person and created plans to increase participation. At the time of this report, the SST identified, discussed, and supported 26 students.

**John Avery Parker Elementary School (New Bedford, MA)**

The John Avery Parker Elementary (Parker) opened school this year with Jennifer Mainelli returning as principal. The receiver, School and Main Institute (SMI), returned for a second year, with Dr. Fran Roy as the point-person on the ground.

Observations and evidence collected by SEN suggest an area of strength for Parker was in supporting a positive learning environment. The leadership team’s approach to culture building has been rooted in beliefs about how students learn best and was informed by theories of social-emotional learning and child development. Most classrooms featured practices aligned to those theories and beliefs. Examples include: responsive language; student corrections that are private rather than public; opportunities for students to make use of the "calm down corner;" and responses to off-culture behaviors that give students time and space to self-regulate. As a result, all classrooms were found to be safe, supportive, and conducive to student learning. Pedagogy in mathematics instruction was also an emerging area of strength. Every math lesson observed during the classroom observations in January included use of strategies to facilitate student thinking and learning (as opposed to simple delivery of information) and/or opportunities for student discourse.

One key area of focus for the Parker team was assessment. During the classroom observations conducted in October, daily classroom assessment - in the form of rubrics, shared definitions of quality work, criteria-aligned feedback to students, and checks for understanding - was not yet being utilized to drive student achievement. As a result, students and parents were not able to articulate either specific learning targets or concrete next steps for individual students. Although school leaders took steps to address this indicator, and rubrics and student self-assessment were evident in January, there remains work to be done in this area. In addition, instructional improvement at Parker could be greatly accelerated through the development of a more robust teacher support and supervision system.

*Remote Learning:*

The primary goal of remote learning at Parker was to mirror the teaching and learning and climate and culture that occurred within the school building. Similar to on-site learning, the Parker team worked to design structures and systems in support of the integration of academics and social emotional learning in the remote learning environment. The school released the Parker Remote Learning Action Plan which outlined two major areas of focus: providing engaging instruction via Google Classroom and school-to-home communication via weekly phone calls to every student. All teachers at the Pre-K-5 level utilized Google Classroom as the online portal to implement remote learning activities. Remote learning activities included previously-recorded mini-lessons with an application activity for students to complete, real-world context math investigations paired with opportunities for students to provide feedback on each other’s work, text-based prompts that required students to record themselves prior to responding in writing, opportunities to revise work completed based on feedback given from classroom teachers, and optional Morning Meetings for students to join live. While the school had 100 percent of families online, the team actively focused on increasing student engagement and work completion.

By the end of May, Parker’s engagement data demonstrated:

* 60 percent of students (15 percent increase from April) “Meeting/Exceeding Expectations”, by showing active participation and engagement on Google Classroom.
* 35 percent of students (3 percent decrease from April) “Partially Meeting Expectations”, by showing some engagement on Google Classroom.
* 5 percent of students (12 percent decrease from April) “Not Meeting Expectations”, by disenrollment on Google Classroom.

Students falling within the “Partially Meeting Expectations” and “Not Meeting Expectations” categories were identified for re-engagement through an Engagement Protocol, designed by the Parker Instructional Leadership Team.

In an effort to ensure all Parker students were provided with quality remote learning opportunities, the school continued to support teachers throughout the school closure. Leadership teams met monthly to review and update protocols. Weekly professional development sessions were conducted virtually to deepen teacher capacity around remote learning and working with families. Weekly teacher collaboration time was facilitated by Teacher Leaders with grade-level teams to plan specific and targeted lessons that followed the Parker Remote Learning scope and sequence. Teachers were provided with bi-weekly feedback on their lesson plans and Google Classroom materials.

**Morgan Full Service Community School (Holyoke, MA)**

The Morgan Full Service Community School (Morgan) opened the school year with Steve Moguel as the returning principal. Dr. Stephen Zrike returned for his fifth year in the district, as receiver for both Holyoke Public Schools and the Morgan School. In December 2019, Dr. Zrike announced he would step down as receiver at the end of the school year. Commissioner Riley has appointed Dr. Alberto Vázquez Matos as the next receiver for the district and the school, effective July 1, 2020.

Observations and evidence collected by SEN suggest an area of strength for Morgan was its positive learning environment. In an effort to reduce office referrals, school leaders provided teachers with professional development on teaching social skills and building relationships in the classroom. Classrooms visited were safe learning environments. Family members reported that their children were both known and cared for by school staff and that the school principal was responsive to their feedback.

The Morgan team’s ongoing areas of focus included pedagogy and assessment. At the time of the January observations, a clear instructional vision had not yet been established. As a result, a high degree of variation was observed in teaching practices across classrooms. Continued work on the instructional vision, instructional guidelines, and expectations for the use of assessment data in planning were recommended.

*Remote Learning:*

Following the school building’s closure in March, the Morgan School went through four phases to develop and enhance systems for remote learning with the goal of supporting students and families at home and providing professional learning for teachers. During Phase 1, the Morgan aligned and calibrated its virtual platforms (ClassDOJO in grades Pre-K-2 and Google Classroom in grades 3 and 4); its expectations for frequency of posting work (a minimum of three times per week); and its expectations for scheduling. In Phase 2, the school shifted to project-based learning to increase student engagement and streamline support for parents. The school included English as a Second Language strategies and special education teachers so that all students would have access to content-rich work and tasks. In Phase 3, teachers engaged in professional learning to practice giving students feedback remotely and then incorporated that into their work with students and families to engage them more actively. Teachers added asynchronous learning opportunities to their delivery repertoires (e.g., “read alouds”, office hours, live lessons, etc.). Approximately 30 percent of all Morgan students were consistently engaged in the work provided.

Morgan leaders developed a tiered system of communication and outreach to families to ensure that all families were in touch with the school and to troubleshoot obstacles and issues during the school building closure. Teachers reached out in the first tier. In Tier 2, and after three unsuccessful attempts by teachers, the Morgan “Jag Team” made up of the assistant principal, school adjustment counselor, and family liaison, reached out. If no connection was made after the first two tiers, then in Tier 3, Holyoke Public Schools district staff reached out. As a result of these efforts, nearly all Morgan students and families had a bi-weekly check-in with school staff during the school building closure. A consistent obstacle was access to Chromebooks and the internet. In response, Morgan distributed Chromebooks to approximately 40 percent of their students and assisted families in obtaining free internet service from Comcast as part of special agreement with the City of Holyoke.

1. Clever is a single sign-on platform connecting students and teachers to resources they need for school in one central place. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ClassDOJO is an online school communication platform which is used by teachers, students, and families.  [↑](#footnote-ref-2)