*****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:** | November 13, 2020 |
| **Subject:** | Chronically Underperforming Schools Quarter 1 Report FY2021 |

This month, I am presenting the first of four FY2021 quarterly progress updates to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) on the four chronically underperforming schools’ implementation of their school turnaround plans, focusing on activities from July-November 2020. The report from each school outlines the reopening model, information about access to technology and the professional development teachers received over the summer.

In August 2020, the turnaround plans for the four chronically underperforming schools expired. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) requested and received a waiver from the federal requirement for the annual statewide student assessment. In addition, legislation enacted in Massachusetts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (St. 2020, c.56, §7) waived the requirement in state law to administer the MCAS assessments to students for the 2020-21 school year. As a result, I cancelled the SY2019-2020 regular administration of grade-level MCAS tests for all students. Without this required data, the period for me to decide the accountability status of school is extended. As a result, turnaround plans for the four schools will remain in effect pursuant to 603 CMR 2.06 (6) (a).

Future quarterly updates for FY2021 will be presented in January 2021 and March 2020, and a final annual review in June 2020.

**Chronically Underperforming Schools**

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

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

Margaret Reardon began her first year as the principal of the Paul A. Dever Elementary School (Dever). Formerly, she was the longstanding assistant principal at Dever respected by the faculty for her ability to lead building operations and develop strong collaborative relationships with staff and families. Mayra Cuevas joined the Dever administrative team as the new assistant principal bringing with her extensive knowledge of Boston and the Boston Public Schools (BPS). Also beginning this year, School & Main Institute (SMI) assumed the role of receiver at Dever replacing the retiring Michael Contompasis. Dever began the school year with a staggered opening. Consistent with the approach taken by the district, Dever opened school in a fully remote model. The first day of school for students in grades 1 - 5 was September 16; followed by pre-K and kindergarten on September 21. After putting in place the health and safety requirements, Dever welcomed high priority students to in-person learning on October 1. This initial cohort (approximately 140 students) included students in self-contained special education classrooms, homeless students, those under the custodial care of the Department of Children and Families (DCF), and those with low levels of English proficiency. These students began in-person learning at Dever two days per week with the option of transitioning to four days a week on October 13. Students in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten transitioned to a two day per week in-person hybrid model on October 15. On October 22, Dever transitioned to full-remote learning in line with the district’s decision to move all students to remote instruction. The goal of Dever's remote learning model is to create highly engaging and interactive synchronous lessons, while fostering a sense of community and connection. Each day begins with Morning Meeting and ends with Closing Circle as a means to enhance community building, relationships, and social emotional development. Through Zoom, teachers capitalize on instructional platforms such as Seesaw, Google Classroom, and Nearpod to ensure students are participating in discussions, solving complex tasks, and receiving feedback on their work. All students receive a daily synchronous special in either Physical Education, Art, Music, or Cultures and Connections.

Dever has had an average daily attendance rate of 89 percent and 98 percent for students and staff respectively. To remove barriers to remote learning, the Dever staff established a protocol during the first week of instruction that gave parents quick access to a staff member to troubleshoot any technology issues. Three hundred fifty-one of 353 students received a district Chromebook, and all students have reported on-line access at home. In addition, Dever distributed over 235 backpacks to families filled with school supplies. They continue to monitor attendance and engagement and support families with any technological barriers.

Dever staff returned to work on August 26 for approximately three weeks of professional development in preparation for school reopening. The staff focused their professional learning on culturally responsive teaching and participated in a 5-day training on Responsive Classroom, a student-centered, social and emotional learning approach to teaching and discipline. This training stressed the importance of relationship building and strategies that create safe, supportive, and culturally responsive learning communities. As a follow up, teachers were provided planning time and support to transfer these practices into remote lessons for the start of school. Additionally, staff increased their capacity to deliver remote instruction through virtual training on instructional platforms (e.g., Seesaw, Nearpod, and Google Classroom). In parallel with this learning, staff spent a significant amount of time and effort connecting with families virtually, addressing their concerns, assessing and supporting their technological needs, and ensuring that students and families had the necessary resources to support remote learning.

**UP Academy Holland, Boston, MA**

Victoria Thompson returned for her second year as school principal of UP Academy Holland (UAH) and her seventh year with the school. The first day of school at UAH was September 1. Consistent with the approach taken by the district, UAH opened in a fully remote model. On October 1, UAH began a phase-in hybrid model with students with high needs returning to in-person learning two days a week. This phasing in of students to in-person learning expanded to kindergarten students on October 15. On October 22, UAH transitioned to a full-remote model in line with the district’s decision to move all students to the remote model. UAH’s daily remote learning model consists of whole group instruction via synchronous Zoom sessions in the morning including community building, social emotional learning, mathematics and literacy. After a break and a class with a specialist (art, physical education, music, dance, or library), students return for small group synchronous Zoom sessions. These afternoon sessions also include Closing Circle, a designated time to end the school day as a classroom community. UAH has had an average daily attendance rate of 89 percent and 95 percent for students and staff respectively. UAH distributed close to 650 devices so that every student has access to either a Chromebook or iPad to use during remote learning.

Prior to opening school, UAH provided staff with professional development that focused on engaging students remotely. Topics covered included virtual teaching, small group instruction in a remote setting, and preparing daily lessons for a virtual environment. The professional development schedule intentionally allocated significant time for teachers to communicate with families and to focus on their own self-care given the demands of time and energy to navigate remote teaching and learning effectively.  UAH initiated the implementation of a family communication plan which is a strategic priority for the year, and the faculty met their September 1 goal of contacting 100% of families through individual phone calls and Zoom meet and greets. UAH held supply pick up days where they distributed all necessary student materials (books, workbooks, manipulatives, pencils, etc.). In addition, UAH teachers made supply bags for every student designed to align with the curriculum, meet any individual needs of the students and enhance academic engagement during remote learning.

**Morgan Full-Service Community School, Holyoke, MA**

Steve Moguel returned for his third year as principal of the Morgan Full-Service Community School (Morgan). Dr. Alberto Vázquez Matos began his tenure as receiver for the Holyoke Public Schools (HPS) and Morgan on July 1, 2020. September 14 was the first day of school for students in grades 1-4; pre-K and Kindergarten students joined on September 21. Morgan opened in a fully remote model following the HPS reopening plan. Valley Opportunity Center (VOC) operates a community-based preschool classroom at Morgan and began in-person learning on October 5. VOC students attend school four days per week leaving Wednesday for building cleaning. Following HPS planning, community health metrics and guidance by Dr. Vázquez Matos, Morgan will phase into in-person learning by grade level bands starting with pre-K-2. Morgan is following the HPS guidelines for remote learning which includes synchronous sessions in all content areas in the morning with small group instruction, intervention sessions, and asynchronous learning opportunities in the afternoon. Since the start of the year, average daily attendance rate has been 84 percent and 97 percent for students and staff respectively. Morgan has distributed approximately 450 Chromebooks to support remote learning both during the school closure last spring and the start of this school year. Many of the Chromebooks distributed last spring are now being replaced with newer models this school year as needed.

Morgan staff engaged in 14 days of professional learning prior to the opening of school; 9 of those were district led and 5 were school based. During the district-led sessions, all staff were trained on consistent COVID-19 safety measures and protocols as well as remote learning expectations and technology support. Additionally, staff chose from a menu of content-based options for training on district approved curriculum resources and social emotional learning (SEL) resources. During the school based sessions, Morgan leaders focused on their school goals and priorities providing professional learning and collaboration related to professional team building; creating an anti-racist school by intentionally dismantling structural and institutional racism; using high quality curriculum resources and high leverage teaching strategies to improve student outcomes; using a variety of formal and informal assessments to choose and implement appropriate interventions; and, engaging families as full partners in the school and academic experience. Morgan leaders designed an explicit tiered system called All in for Morgan(AIM) for family outreach and two-way communication to ensure a strong start to the school year and robust student engagement in remote learning. Every Morgan student is matched with a staff member who is responsible for checking in with his or her students regularly to monitor attendance and student engagement and troubleshoot any issues quickly. The Morgan Jag team which consists of the school-based dean, school adjustment counselor and family engagement coordinator, intervene when serious and complex issues are identified through the AIM system. Morgan leaders are focusing on teacher morale and support using frequent classroom observations, immediate feedback, responsive coaching, and ongoing professional development. Morgan leaders have been very intentional about teaching skills and building staff capacity to use technology resources effectively. In addition, they have been intentional about ensuring that professional development on remote learning and technology is in service of delivering high quality instruction and intervention.

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

Jennifer Mainelli returned for her third year as principal of the John Avery Parker Elementary School (Parker) and the School & Main Institute (SMI) team returned for their third year as receiver. September 10 was the first day of school for Parker students. Following the New Bedford Public Schools’ (NBPS) plan, the school opened in a fully remote model. Parker transitioned to a hybrid model, 2 days per week in person, for Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students on October 5. Students in grades 1-5 returned in-person to school in the same 2-day per week hybrid model on October 19. Since the start of school, Parker has had an average daily attendance rate of 85 percent and 93 percent for students and staff respectively. Parker staff have continued extensive outreach to parents to remove any barriers to remote learning. The school has issued Chromebooks to all 216 of their students and all students currently have internet access.

Prior to the start of school, Parker staff engaged in 10 days of professional development for staff. This included preparation for the implementation of health and safety protocols for in-person learning, communication with and outreach to families, training to implement a new English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum, a book study focused on supporting the social emotional needs of staff during this stressful time, and training to implement a social emotional program for students. The foundation of Parker’s remote learning program includes interactive slides, teacher and student made videos, virtual social and emotional lessons, small group instruction, monitoring student engagement, and technical support for families. Grade level teacher leaders facilitate all collaborative instructional planning, allowing for teacher creativity and ingenuity. Parker continues to address the needs of families through access to community resources, frequent communication with teachers on their child’s progress, and one-on-one technical support to remove any barriers to remote learning.