*****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:** | April 9, 2021 |
| **Subject:** | FY2021 Quarter 3 Report for Chronically Underperforming Schools |

This month, I am presenting the third of four quarterly progress updates to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) on the four chronically underperforming schools and their implementation of their school turnaround plans. As described in the first quarterly report[[1]](#footnote-2), the narrative for this progress update has been provided by the School Empowerment Network (SEN), based on classroom observations (the second in the series of three) led by that group in February and describes progress made since the first set of observations in November. The focus of these updates is the instructional core (curriculum, pedagogy and assessments). A final (annual) review will be submitted in June 2021 and will be based on the summative school quality review conducted in May.

**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: John P. Holland Elementary School (UP Academy Holland) and Paul A. Dever Elementary School (Dever) in Boston, Morgan Full Service Community School (Morgan) in Holyoke, and John Avery Parker Elementary School (Parker) in New Bedford.

**Learning Model**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the four schools designated as chronically underperforming began the 2020 – 2021 school year with students learning in either a fully remote or a hybrid (remote / in-person) learning model. At the time of the Interim School Quality Review (I-SQR) visits in February, all of the schools had increased the number of students attending in-person instruction daily. Nevertheless, observations of instruction conducted by SEN in February 2021 were done remotely. SEN reviewers observed both remote, synchronous instruction and in-person instruction.

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

Information provided by School Empowerment Network

**School Strengths**

Area of Strength # 1

Assessment

*Description*:

Beginning this school year, school leaders adjusted the schoolwide assessments utilized to determine student progress toward goals. In past years, the school had used the Achievement Network (ANet) and the Fountas and Pinnell assessments. This year, in response to recent research, school leaders have opted to utilize the NWEA MAP assessments (computerized, adaptative assessment of student skills) which, they believe, provide clearer evidence of ongoing student progress.

As was the case at the time of the baseline SQR in November 2020, students are identified for interventions based on the results of screening assessments, including the NWEA MAP assessment, the Fundations phonics assessment, and curriculum-embedded math assessments. Several Dever teachers are trained to use research-based early literacy interventions including the Wilson intervention. Literacy instruction and intervention features systematic, phonics-based instruction targeted to students’ assessed learning needs. Research-based curriculum includes Fundations and Wilson’s Just Words program. As a result, large numbers of Dever students are receiving targeted support and continuous progress monitoring.

**Areas of Focus**

Area of Focus # 1

Pedagogy

*Description*:

Pedagogy at Dever is guided by a set of concrete instructional strategies - the “ignite, chunk, chew, review” (ICCR) model, described in Zaretta Hammond’s *Culturally Responsive Teacher and the Brain*. Teachers engage students’ interest and activate relevant prior knowledge with “ignite” activities. However, teachers need additional support with pacing during the “chunk” and “chew” sections of lessons where teachers provide direct instruction and students engage in an authentic student-centered learning task. This is particularly true in English language arts (ELA) lessons where extended “chunk” activities sometimes mean students have less time to  engage with complex tasks in the “chew” section of the lesson.

A continued focus on instructional consistency is needed along with support for teachers to ensure that all students are doing the cognitive lifting of curricular tasks in every lesson. School leaders should implement a more robust teacher support and supervision system to provide regular feedback to all teachers. Feedback to teachers should align to a research-based teaching framework and should include analysis of student work products.

Area of Focus # 2

Curriculum

*Description*:

School leaders, with support from their Receiver, introduced a new mathematics curriculum at the start of the 2020 - 2021 school year. This curriculum - Heinemann’s *Contexts for Learning Mathematics* (CFL) - combines the structures of a mathematics workshop environment (for example, mini-lessons, collaborative investigations, and “math congress”) with a focus on authentic tasks rooted in students’ real-world experiences. Across classes, tasks in math lessons emphasize higher-order skills and lessons build students’ ownership of learning. While CFL has not yet been implemented in all grades (some grades are still using Eureka Math), evidence so far suggests that school leaders should continue to expand the use of this curriculum, as they have planned.

ELA curriculum varies by grade level. Enactment of the ELA curriculum does not consistently emphasize higher order skills and does not provide access points to content for all learners. Moving forward, school leaders should support teachers to ensure that students in ELA lessons are provided time to grapple with complex tasks requiring higher-order thinking skills, either independently or in collaboration with other students.

**UP Academy Holland, Boston**

Information provided by School Empowerment Network

**School Strengths**

Area of Strength # 1

Assessment

*Description*:

School leaders and teachers at UP Academy Holland consistently and intentionally utilize schoolwide and classroom-level assessments to determine progress to learning targets for individual students and groups of students. Leaders place student outcomes and data analysis at the center of their regular check-ins with the teachers they support. As a result, teachers know individual students’ performance levels as well as group performance trends in their classes and make adjustments to instruction based on assessment results.

Across classes, lessons include multiple formative assessments for every student. Teachers utilize distance learning tools including Desmos and Google Classroom to review student work in-progress and provide timely feedback. Moving forward, school leaders should continue to support teachers to provide impactful feedback that is specific and targeted and to include opportunities for student self- and peer-assessment in lessons.

**Areas of Focus**

Area of Focus # 1

Curriculum

*Description:*

School leaders have selected standards-aligned curriculum across grades and content areas. Teacher teams prioritize “essential standards” in planning units and lessons. Well-established processes - called “intellectual prep” - are in place to support teacher planning from curriculum. Based on feedback, school leaders and teachers have recently added a new component to the intellectual prep process for prioritizing "worthwhile" tasks and ensuring that most time in class is spent on those worthwhile tasks that engage students to reason, think critically, make connections, and solve problems.

At the start of the 2020-2021 school year, the UAH team transitioned to a new ELA curriculum for grades K through 4: the Expeditionary Learning (EL) curriculum. Principal Thompson has skillfully managed this change process. As a result, enactment of the EL curriculum continues to improve. The curriculum is being implemented, for the most part, in remote-learning environments, which present barriers to both teaching and learning.

While progress has been made relative to this indicator, continued work is needed. The focus on “worthwhile” tasks in the planning process has resulted in improvement, but practice is not yet consistent. For example, inefficient questioning of one student at a time (rather than using more efficient strategies to check for understanding from multiple students in a shorter period) resulted in lost time-on-task in several lessons. Moving forward, teachers need continued support to enact all of the curriculum’s underlying principles and goals.

Area of Focus # 2

Pedagogy

*Description:*

Many instructional practices are consistently utilized across UAH classes as a result of well-established “intellectual prep” protocols. In addition, instructional practices continue to align more closely to a shared set of schoolwide beliefs about how students learn best with each successive visit. A majority of classes include tasks that require higher-level thinking and/or student collaboration.

While progress has been made relative to this indicator, a continued focus on pedagogyis needed. Moving forward, school leaders should communicate and norm with teachers toward a definition of student ownership that includes student choice, curiosity, and personalization. School leaders should also communicate clear expectations for co-teaching pairs to consistently plan lessons to maximize the utilization and impact of both adults on learning. Teacher teams should further develop practices that maintain consistent student collaboration levels while in Zoom breakout rooms.

**Morgan Full Service Community School, Holyoke**

Information provided by School Empowerment Network

**School Strengths**

Area of Strength # 1

Curriculum

*Description*:

Morgan school leaders have communicated clearly to staff about the necessity to use high-quality, standards-aligned curriculum. As a result, across classes written curriculum, texts, daily objectives, and learning tasks are aligned to grade-level standards. Utilized curricula include Eureka Math, Fundations, and EL (Expeditionary Learning) Education’s literacy curriculum. All of these are highly rated for alignment to state standards by the Massachusetts Center for Instructional Support’s “Curriculum Ratings by Teachers” project (CURATE). Teachers are supported in collaborative planning time to identify key or essential standards. Teachers, with guidance from school leaders, also “unpack” modules prior to teaching them to plan supports that specific groups of students, including students with disabilities and English-language learners, may need to access the content. As a result, across classes students engage with grade-level content and text. Teachers’ enactment of the curriculum is not yet consistent enough to accelerate all students’ learning. Continued support of teachers’ pacing and efforts to maintain rigor for all students while implementing the curriculum is needed.

**Areas of Focus**

Area of Focus # 1

Pedagogy

*Description*:

Morgan school leaders and teachers continue to articulate a shared set of beliefs about how students learn best, which was codified earlier this year in a staff-facing document, the Morgan Handbook, with confidence and in detail.

In the time since the baseline SQR in November 2020, members of the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) who coach teachers in implementing the instructional vision in their classrooms have engaged in frequent co-observation of classes. The purpose of these co-observations is to norm ILT members on the key, vision-aligned teaching practices on which they will give teachers feedback after every observation. These co-observations have also allowed Principal Moguel to determine whether all ILT members’ assessments of teacher practice are calibrated with his own. This is important and needed foundational work for the ILT. Looking ahead, an important next step for the ILT is to norm on best practices for providing teacher feedback.

Teachers’ enactment of instructional practices aligned to the instructional vision continues to be inconsistent. In order to consistently enact key instructional practices, teachers need support. This support must include frequent written feedback. It must also include exemplars and non-exemplars (examples of what high-quality versions of the practices look like and examples of what low-quality versions of the practices look like, respectively) along with modeling of practices across grades and subject areas.

Area of Focus # 2

Assessment

*Description:*

All Morgan students take screening assessments to determine which interventions students might require to meet grade-level benchmarks. Results are utilized to identify students for small groups for interventions. To expand schoolwide capacity to provide intervention, in the time since the baseline SQR, school leaders have ensured that all paraprofessionals are trained to use the school’s selected math intervention. They have also implemented clearer guidelines for progress monitoring interventions linked to a shared tracker document that captures the impact of interventions provided. In addition, school leaders have shifted intervention curriculum based on student outcomes.

At the same time, there is still not evidence of intentional use of daily end-of-lesson assessments (i.e., exit tickets) to determine whether every student has met the day’s learning target. School leaders say they are encouraging teachers to use exit tickets in grades K-4, but there is not consistent evidence of this practice in class observations. Moving forward, school leaders should communicate clear expectations for use of end-of-lesson assessments, mid-lesson checks for understanding, and student feedback. They should allocate professional development and teacher collaboration time to supporting teachers to meet those expectations.

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

Information provided by School Empowerment Network

**School Strengths**

Area of Strength # 1

Assessment

*Description:*

School leaders and teachers have made clear progress relative to this indicator. Screening assessments are used to determine students’ learning needs and identify students for academic intervention. Teachers use ongoing progress monitoring to determine when students have reached benchmarks and can exit interventions.

The planning protocol teachers use to prepare lessons includes time for anticipating potential student misconceptions in advance of lesson delivery. Lesson plans show evidence of planning to address those anticipated misconceptions, if they do arise. In lesson plans, student work samples, and class observations there is increased evidence of the use of rubrics to provide feedback and guide student work. Across the majority of classes, teachers utilize formative assessment practices to monitor student progress and understanding. As a result, lessons are adjusted to address student learning and skill gaps and students regularly receive actionable feedback on their work.

**Areas of Focus**

Area of Focus # 1

Pedagogy

*Description:*

More Parker students are learning in-person at this time than in the fall. Teachers working with in-person students are already utilizing instructional practices and learning structures that had been common in Parker classrooms before the shift to remote learning. These include collaborative small-group work on the classroom rug and “math congress.” Teachers still working with students in remote settings continue to face challenges related to building class community, engaging students in collaborative work, and fostering student-to-student discourse. These teachers exhibit energy and resourcefulness in their attempts to overcome these challenges.

School leaders have clearly communicated a compelling vision for instruction at Parker. While all teachers express belief in this vision and work to align their instruction to the vision, enactment of instructional strategies aligned to the vision is still inconsistent across classes. There is evidence of skilled enactment of key strategies in some classes. School leaders should use these classes as models for other teachers. Moving forward, school leaders should utilize professional development, teacher collaboration time, and an enhanced teacher support and supervision system to provide teachers with models of high-quality enactment of key instructional practices.

Area of Focus # 2

Curriculum

*Description:*

School leaders and teachers are continuing their first full year of implementation of a newly adopted ELA curriculum, Wit & Wisdom. This curriculum received the highest rating - “meets expectations”- in three of the four categories rated by the Massachusetts CURATE project. In addition, teachers are using the Fundations curriculum to support students’ development of phonemic awareness and phonics in early grades and in interventions. Heinemann’s Contexts for Learning (CFL) is the curriculum school leaders have selected for math and has been in use for several years.

Teachers’ planning from these curricula is guided by a schoolwide framework that calls for all lessons to include: a complex task, activities to engage/ignite/hook student interest, and strategies to hold every student accountable for grappling with the task. Enactment of the CFL math curriculum has, in the past, consistently emphasized rigorous habits and higher-order skills, and continues to do so now, even as most Parker students learn in a remote, synchronous setting. Moving forward, school leaders should continue to support teachers to enact the ELA curriculum to emphasize higher-order skills and to provide all students with access to the rigor of the target standards.

1. The first quarterly report for FY2021 can be found here: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2021/2020-11/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)