*****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 18, 2021 |
| **Subject:** | FY2021 Quarter 4 Report for Chronically Underperforming Schools |

This month, I am presenting the fourth 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. These updates are focused on activities from May and June 2021. As described in the first quarterly report[[1]](#footnote-2), the narrative for this progress update has been provided by the School Empowerment Network, based on classroom observations led by that group during that timeframe.

**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 end of year School Quality Review visits in May and June, all of the schools offered in-person learning five days per week and had increased the number of students attending in-person instruction daily. Nevertheless, observations of instruction conducted by School Empowerment Network (SEN) in May and June of 2021 were done remotely. SEN reviewers observed both remote instruction and in-person instruction.

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

Information provided by School Empowerment Network

**School Strengths**

Area of Strength # 1

Assessment (sub-indicator B)

*Description*:

School leaders and teachers utilize shared formative assessments and screening assessments to determine student progress toward benchmarks and goals. These include NWEA MAP, the Fundations phonics assessment, and curriculum-embedded mathematics assessments. As was the case at the time of the previous site visits, students are scheduled for interventions based on the results of screening 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. Teachers make use of research-based curricula including Fundations and Wilson’s *Just Words* program. Student progress is monitored on an ongoing basis and groupings and instruction are adjusted based on assessment. As a result, most Dever students are receiving targeted academic intervention and continuous progress monitoring.

**Areas of Focus**

Area of Focus # 1

Pedagogy

*Description*:

Dever school leaders have established a framework to support teachers to enact an instructional vision – the ignite, chunk, chew, review (ICCR) model. They have provided professional development on the ICCR model. On previous site visits, instruction was not often aligned to the instructional vision. Evidence from the June site visit shows that professional development has become more tightly focused on concrete teaching moves and has included modeling of key practices and strategies. As a result, instruction is becoming more aligned to the instructional vision. Lessons observed included opportunities for accountable talk (purposeful, open-ended conversations where participants listen and add onto each other’s comments) and extended independent work time with grade-level content and text. In several English language arts (ELA) lessons students engaged in close-reading activities and text-based talk that emphasized interpretation of text. Moving forward, school leaders and teachers must sustain and build on the progress made in the last quarter of this school year. Continued focus on instructional consistency is needed along with support for teachers to ensure that all students are doing the cognitive lifting in every lesson. Professional development must continue to include modeling of key strategies and practices – in particular strategies for shifting the cognitive lift to all students. School leaders should implement a more robust teacher support system (see Area of Focus #2, below).

Area of Focus # 2

Teacher Support and Supervision

*Description*:

School leaders have prioritized professional development as a vehicle to drive instructional improvement. School leaders have allocated resources in the form of coaches and teacher-leaders to support instructional planning and data analysis in common planning time (CPT) meetings. A subset of Dever teachers receive instructional coaching in short cycles. However, there is not a systematic approach to supporting the development of all Dever teachers with feedback from frequent cycles of class observation. In addition, school leaders do not intentionally track teacher feedback. As a result, instructional practice is not, yet, as consistent or coherent across grades and content areas as it can be. There is not evidence that all teachers are developing over time. To increase coherence, accelerate instructional improvement, and drive student achievement, a teacher support and supervision system that provides regular feedback to all teachers is needed. Feedback to teachers should be grounded in a research-based teaching framework and should consistently focus on key teaching practices aligned to the instructional vision.

**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 (UAH) 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 in in-person and remote learing setttings 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.

Area of Strength # 2

High Expectations

*Description*:

School leaders communicate clear expectations for all members of the UAH community. They have developed support and accountability systems designed to ensure community members are prepared to meet expectations. Leadership team members utilize a shared process for providing feedback to teachers. As a result, feedback to teachers consistently aligns to academy goals and instructional priorities. UAH leaders coach teachers to establish consistent class routines, procedures, and expectations. As a result, across both remote and in-person learning environments consistent class routines and procedures are evident. Teachers readily identify expectations academy leaders have of them. They also describe systems designed to ensure that they are supported to meet those expectations. One such system is the “Drop Everything and Plan” (DEAP) system of collaborative instructional planning which ensures that every teacher understands UAH expectations for planning.

Family members report that they receive frequent communication from teachers and school leaders including communication about their children’s learning goals and progress to goals.

**Areas of Focus**

Area of Focus # 1

Curricula

*Description:*

School leaders have selected standards-aligned curriculum, including a new ELA curriculum for grades K through 4: the Expeditionary Learning curriculum.

Teachers’ enactment of the mathematics curriculum is consistently effective and sometimes expert. This is not, yet, the case in ELA. School leaders’ adjustment of the schoolwide collaborative planning process to include a focus on “worthwhile tasks” is resulting in students having more opportunities to engage with grade-level text and to develop writing skills in ELA lessons. However, there is not evidence that listening and speaking standards are consistently prioritized in ELA lessons. Enactment of ELA curriculum does not consistently emphasize higher-level thinking. To build teachers’ ELA content knowledge and support instructional decision-making in ELA, school leaders must provide ongoing professional development on the Expeditionary Learning curriculum and on ELA standards, habits of mind and key performances.

Area of Focus # 2

Pedagogy

*Description:*

As a result of well-established “intellectual prep” protocols, a variety of specific instructional strategies are consistently practiced across UAH classes. These include “cold calling,” “stamping the learning,” and providing in-the-moment feedback on student work. In addition, in alignment with the school’s beliefs about how students learn best, instruction more frequently emphasizes “worthwhile tasks” including tasks that require student collaboration. In mathematics lessons many tasks, questions, and prompts require higher-level thinking.

While progress has been made relative to this indicator, a continued focus on pedagogyis needed. Moving forward, school leaders should communicate a definition of student ownership of learning that includes student choice, open-ended tasks, curiosity, and personalization. They should build teachers’ capacity to develop students’ ownership of learning. In order to address speaking and listening standards, school leaders should leverage the expertise of the most-skilled teachers to support others to facilitate accountable student-to-student discourse in all content areas.

**Morgan Full Service Community School, Holyoke**

Information provided by School Empowerment Network

**School Strengths**

Area of Strength # 1

Positive Learning Environment

*Description*

Morgan classroom environments are safe, stable and free of disruptions to learning. Family members report that school leaders and teachers are responsive to family members’ questions and concerns and work to resolve issues quickly. School leaders have scheduled time daily for student social-emotional learning (SEL). School leaders have responded to families’ needs during this atypical year by creating systems such as All in for Morgan Support (AIMS) – staff members who contact families to ensure students have the resources to access remote or in-person instruction.

School leaders have taken steps that are resulting in an increasingly positive professional culture at Morgan. For example, leaders have increased the frequency of teacher coaching meetings. These one-to-one and small group coaching meetings are a vehicle for leaders to support teachers to improve their craft. This approach to teacher support is conducive to adult learning and has resulted in increased levels of respect between and among adults.

**Areas of Focus**

Area of Focus # 1

Pedagogy

*Description*:

Morgan school leaders have codified a schoolwide instructional vision. This vision is communicated in staff-facing documents and through professional development experiences. During previous site visits, enactment of instructional practices aligned to the vision was inconsistent. The evidence from this visit, however, is that instruction is becoming more coherent and consistent across classes. School leaders’ focus on “purposing” of lessons has begun to drive increased alignment of learning objectives, direct instruction, learning tasks and formative assessments in lessons. From class to class lessons shared a common structure. In the majority of classes observed students were provided significant time to practice standards-aligned skills and/or engage with grade-level text and content.

While progress has been made against this indicator, continued focus is needed. Pacing of lessons does not, yet, consistently result in sufficient time being spent on the most rigorous tasks. In addition, the emphasis on purposing of lessons is not, yet, resulting in high levels of student ownership of learning. Teachers are not consistently prioritizing the highest-level thinking in lessons and ensuring that every student engages with that thinking during independent work time. Moving forward, school leaders must build teachers’ capacity to consistently engage every student in activities that require higher-level thinking.

Area of Focus # 2

High Expectations

*Description:*

School leaders and staff have made progress against this indicator. This is, in part, a result of school leaders codifying goals and expectations in staff-facing documents. To an even greater extent, however, it is a result of school leaders beginning to align how they use their time to the school’s priorities and needs. For example, in the time since the I-SQR in February, school leaders have spent more of their time on activities that directly impact classroom instruction - supervision, teacher coaching, instructional rounds, norming on instructional quality.

Even so, continued focus on this indicator is needed. School leaders have not established systems of accountability which are robust enough to ensure that all teachers are consistently working to meet instructional practice targets. As a direct result, levels of staff accountability for team or schoolwide priorities are not sufficient to drive whole-school improvement. Students and family members are not able to articulate goals they are working toward or specific next steps needed for improvement. Moving forward, school leaders must develop and leverage internal systems of accountability. They must more consistently communicate learning targets to students and families.

Area of Focus #3

Teacher Support and Supervision

*Description:*

School leaders have made progress relative to this indicator. They have engaged in instructional rounds to calibrate on assessment of instruction and on high-leverage feedback. The principal and leadership team have expanded the teacher support system. As a result, Morgan teachers now receive either weekly or bi-weekly observations with both written and in-person feedback.

Although it has not been in place for long, the expanded teacher support system is already beginning to have impact. Teachers are able to share examples of specific feedback they have received from their coaches and how they have adjusted their instruction as a result of this feedback. Feedback sessions include analysis of student work, analysis of video clips of instruction, teacher reflection, and co-planning of a lesson.

Continued focus is needed in this area. There is not, yet, consistent planning of professional development based on trends in observation data. The expanded system has not been in place long enough to have had impact on all teachers’ planning and instructional decision making. It is critical that school leaders consistently enact this system from the very first days of the 2021-22 school year.

**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 developed and utilize a “data hub” – a set of linked spreadsheets for tracking and analyzing student data. Included in the “data hub” are a wide range of student assessment data sorted by content area, grade and homeroom, and intervention group. This tool has proven to be particularly valuable given the lack of 2019-20 MCAS assessment data. Teachers and teams take accountability for their data. They utilize assessments and the data hub to determine students’ learning needs, to program students for academic intervention, to do root cause analysis and to adjust instruction when necessary.

The planning protocol teachers use to prepare lessons includes time for anticipating potential student misconceptions in advance of lesson delivery. Across the majority of classes, teachers utilize formative assessment practices to monitor student progress and understanding. These practices include clipboarding, conferring, and the use of sticky-notes to check for understanding. As a result, lessons are adjusted to address student learning and skill gaps and students regularly receive actionable feedback on their work.

Area of Strength # 2

Teacher Teams and Distributed Leadership

*Description:*

Parker teachers engage in structured, data-based collaborations that promote the achievement of school goals. Every teacher meets weekly with a team during teacher collaboration time (TCT) to engage in collaborative planning and/or data analysis. During TCT, teachers develop unit and lesson plans aligned to both grade-level curriculum and to the Parker “planning for learning cycle.” Data analysis meetings are focused and solutions-oriented. Teachers take accountability for their class data and plan adjustments to instruction to address students’ unfinished learning. TCT meetings are facilitated by teacher-leaders. Teacher-leaders receive targeted professional development on team leadership. School leaders have established three separate leadership teams comprised of teachers and other staff members. Each leadership team has a set of goals which are delineated in the school’s strategic plan. Leadership teams monitor data related to their goals and may make adjustments to strategies to ensure goals are met.

**Areas of Focus**

Area of Focus # 1

Pedagogy

*Description:*

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 remains 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, including strategies for facilitating student ownership of learning and for ensuring that all students fully engage with “the ask of the [learning] task.”

Area of Focus # 2

Curriculum

*Description:*

Enactment of the mathematics curriculum continues to emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills. In previous site visits during this school year, enactment of the ELA curriculum was not observed to emphasize higher-order skills. However, school leaders and teachers have made progress relative to this indicator through the adoption and implementation of a standards-aligned ELA curriculum. Observations of ELA lessons during the May site visit reveal a renewed emphasis on close-reading, analysis, and interpretation skills. Even so, continued focus in this area is needed. Data indicates that across grades student growth in reading fluency has outpaced growth in reading comprehension during this school year. Moving forward, school leaders should continue to support teachers to enact the ELA curriculum to emphasize higher-order skills, to promote reading comprehension through close reading and discourse, 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)