### **P1#y1Massachusetts 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:** | March 20, 2023 |
| **Subject:** | Update on Chronically Underperforming Schools: SY2022-2023 Quarter 3 Reports |

This month, I am presenting the third of four SY2022-2023 quarterly progress updates to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) on the three chronically underperforming schools’ implementation of their school turnaround plans, focusing on activities from January to March 2023. As described in the first two quarterly reports,0F[[1]](#footnote-2) the narratives for these progress updates have been provided by the School Empowerment Network, based on classroom observations led by that group during that timeframe. The focus of these third-quarter updates is the instructional core (curriculum, pedagogy and assessments). Final annual reviews of the three schools will be presented in June 2023 and will be based on the summative school quality reviews to be conducted in May.

**Chronically Underperforming Schools**

Three schools are currently designated as chronically underperforming: John P. Holland Elementary School (UP Academy Holland) and Paul A. Dever Elementary School (Dever) in Boston, and John Avery Parker Elementary School (Parker) in New Bedford.

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

**School Strengths**

Area of Strength #1

Curriculum

*Description:*

Paul A. Dever Elementary School has continued to strategically incorporate an inquiry-based mathematics curriculum into its standards-aligned instruction, enabling students to be consistently engaged in rigorous math investigations. Since the fall 2022 School Quality Review (SQR) visit, school leaders and the Receiver, School and Main Institute, have provided additional professional development focused on the pedagogy of the math investigation units. Grade-level teams have focused on understanding the lesson elements of the math investigations and planning appropriate scaffolds for student learning aligned to grade-level standards. The impact of this work was evident in some classrooms where students engaged with more complex math tasks than had been observed in the fall. However, the consistency of the use of complex tasks aligned to grade-level standards varied across classrooms. Opportunities for higher order thinking and student discourse also varied across classrooms.

To strengthen schoolwide instruction in English Language Arts (ELA), the school has dedicated weekly professional development time to internalize the content of upcoming ELA lessons and prepare appropriate scaffolds for student learning. The Receiver also provided feedback to teachers on how to incorporate language acquisition strategies for multilingual learners into their lesson plans. However, the impact of this work has not yet been fully realized in the classrooms. The review team observed the same variability of curriculum implementation across ELA classrooms as they saw across math classrooms.

**Areas of Focus**

Area of Focus #1

Pedagogy

*Description:*

Dever school leaders have communicated that student discourse and having students grapple with complex tasks are priorities. While there has been improvement from the fall 2022 SQR visit, student discourse and task complexity continue to be inconsistent in math and ELA instruction. In some classrooms, student partners engaged in complex tasks using clear routines and practices for students to support each other’s learning. In other classrooms, however, there was little evidence of meaningful discourse and/or few complex tasks.

Moving forward, school leaders should work to develop instructional consistency across all classrooms. The instructional leadership team should articulate high-leverage instructional moves and showcase classrooms where teachers are effectively utilizing those moves to carry out the schoolwide instructional vision. The instructional leadership team needs to continue to calibrate and norm its feedback to educators to support their internalization of key schoolwide practices. This work will require providing additional training and tools to the instructional leadership team. For example, school leaders and coaches would benefit from an enhanced observation and feedback tool that clearly articulates core instructional practices aligned to the school’s instructional vision. They also would benefit from support and guided practice on identifying trends across classrooms and providing high-leverage feedback to teachers.

Area of Focus #2

Assessment

*Description:*

Dever school leaders and teachers have made progress in this area since the fall 2022 SQR visit. School leaders and teachers can identify examples of assessment data they have used to make instructional shifts. During common planning time, teacher teams analyze student work and use their analysis to plan student groupings and instructional moves. To build upon this progress, school leaders should choose a robust protocol for teacher teams to look at student work together. At the leadership level, school leaders also should develop processes for using assessment data to make decisions and to guide and prioritize their work.

In developing teachers’ uses of data, the instructional leadership team should pay particular attention to helping teachers understand how to confer with students individually and in small groups. In their conferral practices, teachers need to be coached on how to make decisions about what questions and student responses to elevate for the whole class to advance student thinking and deepen understanding for all learners. School leaders should identify model classrooms where teachers frequently provide high-quality, in-the-moment feedback to students and utilize these classrooms to create opportunities for peer observations.

**UP Academy Holland, Boston**

**School Strengths**

Area of Strength #1

Assessment

*Description:*

School leaders at UP Academy Holland have developed a comprehensive assessment system that provides actionable feedback to students. Teachers frequently utilize protocols for looking at student work together. Teacher teams analyze student work with the goal of providing feedback on where students should hone their thinking to correct misconceptions or to strengthen their work. The school’s comprehensive assessment calendar addresses all content areas and tiered levels of student learning needs. Teachers administer common assessments to determine students’ progress toward learning goals and utilize the results to adjust curricula and instruction.

To support schoolwide professional development on “instruction that invites and expects student thinking,” the school has adjusted its data analysis process to align with this instructional priority. Teachers regularly review data from daily formative assessments, such as exit tickets, to immediately inform the next day’s instruction within a unit. Furthermore, teachers are now purposefully integrating interim assessments into their units of study, rather than administering standalone interim assessments as they had done in prior years.

The revised data analysis cycle incorporates two additional components that provide feedback on students being “expected and invited to think” in every lesson. First, teacher teams analyze how the student work reveals which students in each class are or are not being expected to think critically. Teachers then adjust their practices to ensure that all students are invited and expected to do the thinking. Second, the team uses standard mastery data to reflect upon the thinking opportunities provided to students during instruction.

**Areas of Focus**

Area of Focus #1

Curriculum

*Description:*

UP Academy Holland school leaders and teachers have selected core curricular resources for ELA and math that align to grade-level standards and to the school’s instructional vision. School leaders and teachers have worked to build vertical alignment by utilizing these resources across grade levels. The vertical alignment of curricula has enabled teachers to strengthen their pacing of curriculum units in each successive year of implementation, and teachers report that students’ habits and preparation for their next levels of learning also have grown stronger from year to year.

Throughout the school, daily classroom instruction is consistently guided by curricular documents. Teachers refine their lesson plans, tasks and student groupings using feedback from student work and achievement data.

In classrooms observed during the second SQR visit, more time was devoted to inviting and expecting thinking from students than was the case in the fall. There has been progress in this schoolwide initiative, and there continues to be room for improvement. Teachers need to plan for differentiated supports within each portion of the lesson to keep all learners productively engaged in rigorous and sustained grade-level thinking.

The school’s curriculum implementation does not yet consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher order thinking skills across all grades and classrooms. While some progress has been made in this area, more consistent use of concrete strategies to invite and expect thinking from students—particularly ones that support student collaboration and dialogue—would lead to more effective enactment of the school’s curricula.

Area of Focus #2

Pedagogy

*Description:*

The UP Academy Holland community has developed a clear vision for instruction in which students do most of the thinking during instruction, with teachers serving as facilitators. In comparison to the start of the 2022-2023 school year, there is deeper alignment in how the community describes teacher actions matched to that vision. Examples of teacher actions aligned to this vision include: strategic monitoring of student work to provide group-based feedback, highlighting transferable understandings, and using whole-class participation techniques.

Since the fall SQR visit, the school leadership team has made key strategic moves to support teachers in taking actions aligned with the instructional vision. First, leaders introduced a set of classroom look-fors that generate evidence of student thinking, for example by tallying class participation at critical thinking moments.Second, school leaders and coaches began to utilize video recordings as a coaching tool to support teachers in reviewing their own instruction. Teachers stated that this strategy has enabled them to view their instruction in a new light.

In the classrooms observed during the second SQR visit, the vision of students doing most of the thinking was not yet consistently realized. Student work products and discussions reflected uneven levels of student thinking and participation. The review team also observed variability in the worthiness of tasks given to students and the amount of time given to students to work on those tasks. Teachers need additional support around creating opportunities for rigorous student discussions and supporting students to build their discourse habits with each other. While the school has invested considerable effort to articulate its instructional vision and associated teacher actions, school leaders and teachers now will benefit from thinking more deeply about how to incorporate student actions into their classroom observational tools.

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

**School Strengths**

Area of Strength #1

Curriculum

*Description:*

John A. Parker Elementary School utilizes workshop-based instruction in both ELA and math to drive instruction that prioritizes student access, engagement, collaboration, and problem solving. School leaders have chosen curricula that are complex, including a newly revised ELA curriculum that integrates linguistic knowledge into reading and writing instruction in all grade levels. While the school curriculum is complex, the school has provided a high level of support to teachers and worked to create coherence across classrooms. In classrooms visited by reviewers, students were learning reading and writing in an integrated way, with students writing about texts they read.

Parker’s curriculum consistently anchors learning in a complex task or a problem. The curriculum resources in both ELA and math support engaging, rigorous instruction by focusing teachers on complex tasks and constructive collaboration among students. Furthermore, both the ELA and math curricula support teachers in making student thinking visible. The school’s focus on teaching language structures and uses in ELA also benefits students’ abilities to share their thinking in math. The visual learning aids embedded in the math curriculum, such as posters created and presented by students, place student thinking at the center of instruction. As a result, the review team observed many opportunities for students to carry the cognitive lift in classrooms.

The review team also observed a range of differentiation strategies in Parker classrooms, including grouping, teacher support, graphic organizers, and teacher scribing. Teachers also utilized student discourse structures to increase the access and confidence of all learners.

**Areas of Focus**

Area of Focus #1

Pedagogy

*Description:*

The Parker faculty demonstrates high levels of buy-in regarding their school’s pedagogical approach. The school’s pedagogy is producing tangible benefits for student learning. Strong implementation of the school’s curriculum was evident in some classrooms. Students feel the power of student-to-student discourse and recognize that the opportunity to talk among themselves helps them to figure things out.

There was some unevenness observed in the implementation of math and ELA curricula. This unevenness is likely due to the fact that several teachers at Parker are new to the teaching profession. In addition, the revised ELA curriculum units are new to all Parker teachers this year. In math instruction, some classrooms demonstrated strong implementation of the workshop-based curriculum while others did not. In some math classrooms, students engaged in the type of meaningful discourse that leads to deep conceptual understandings and helps students to clarify their own misconceptions. In other classrooms, students spent too much time on disconnected approaches to a problem because of their misunderstandings of what the problem asked of them and their lack of knowledge about how to approach the problem.

Instructional variability is an area that requires time and attention. To effectively implement their school’s complex and rigorous curricula, Parker teachers will continue to require high levels of support in their planning and professional development, as well as ongoing observation, feedback, and coaching.

Area of Focus #2

Assessment

*Description:*

Parker School has a system of assessment practices in place, as evidenced by the schoolwide assessment calendar and evidence demonstrating that school leaders and teachers review data regularly to monitor progress and make adjustments. Additionally, the leadership team has established regular meetings between school leaders and instructional coaches to review walkthrough data and plan targeted supports to teachers. However, the data that are currently being collected and reviewed point to some key issues for school leaders to address. For example, while classroom observation data demonstrate an increase in student discourse, midyear ELA assessment data did not show anticipated achievement gains. The school’s new curricular resources and the professional development in support of their implementation likely will require additional time to take hold, particularly among the school’s newer teachers. Assessment will play an instrumental role in supporting teachers to implement the school’s curricula with fidelity and to effectively diagnose and respond to student misconceptions and lagging skills.

Parker teachers require additional support in using formative assessment data to make effective in-the-moment adjustments to their instruction. Some teachers are struggling to diagnose what they are seeing in student work products and others are struggling to respond effectively to what they are seeing in student data. They will benefit from additional professional learning and modeling of how to provide effective whole-group and small-group feedback.

1. The first two quarterly reports for SY2022-2023 can be found here:

   Q1 report: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2023/2022-10/item7.docx>

   Q2 report: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2023/2023-01/item7.docx> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)