# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:**  | Russell Johnston, Acting Commissioner  |
| **Date:**  | January 21, 2025 |
| **Subject:** | Update on Chronically Underperforming Schools: SY2024-2025 Quarter 2 Reports |

This month, I am presenting the second of four SY2024-2025 quarterly progress updates to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) on the two chronically underperforming schools’ implementation of their school turnaround plans, focusing on activities from October to December 2024. The narratives for this progress update have been provided by the School Empowerment Network, based on classroom observations led by that group during that timeframe. The third quarterly update will be presented in March and a final annual review will be provided in June.

**Chronically Underperforming Schools**

There are currently two schools designated as chronically underperforming: UP Academy Holland (UAH) and Paul A. Dever Elementary School (Dever) in Boston. As of September 26, 2022 and January 1, 2025, respectively, the Morgan Full Service Community School in Holyoke and the John Avery Parker Elementary School in New Bedford are no longer designated as chronically underperforming schools.[[1]](#footnote-2)

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

**School Strengths**

Area of Strength

Leveraging Resources

*Description:*

Dever leaders have structured staff time to enable leadership teams and teacher teams to meet regularly and receive professional development supports. School leaders have aligned teachers’ professional responsibilities with the school’s instructional goals and intentionally focus teacher time on instructional improvement work. School leaders have structured their own daily schedules to prioritize classroom observations and are aligning expectations and feedback with instructional coaches and teacher leaders. Additionally, leaders have allocated resources to increase the consultation hours of the school’s external professional development providers. These consultants now join the leadership team on monthly classroom walkthroughs to support a tighter loop of professional development, observation and feedback for teachers.

**Areas of Progress**

Area of Progress

Pedagogy

*Description:*

The leadership team has instituted regular classroom walkthroughs to provide teachers with feedback on their implementation of the school’s curriculum and instructional vision. A focus on accountability to professional development expectations in this year’s strategic plan has led to notable growth in this indicator. Reviewers observed teachers successfully enacting the curriculum and instructional vision in seven out of ten classrooms visited.

Across classrooms, reviewers found evidence of many of the essential components of the instructional vision, including rigorous, standards-aligned tasks, increased student discourse, and scaffolds for multilingual learners. Moving forward, leaders must build teachers’ capacity to use effective questioning strategies to advance student learning. Additionally, leaders must ensure that all adults assigned to each classroom are utilized effectively as co-teachers to maximize their impact on student learning.

**Areas of Focus**

Area of Focus #1

Assessment

*Description:*

School leaders have established a strategic plan that includes clear and measurable goals tied to specific student outcomes, such as proficiency rates on end-of-unit assessments in English language arts, math, and science and benchmark measures of reading skills. At the same time, leaders have not yet established consistent expectations for ongoing formative assessments in classrooms. Teachers also lack clarity about expectations for providing feedback to students. Finally, while there is a plan to monitor reading skills development, school leaders and teachers also must devote comparable efforts to monitoring student progress in foundational math skills.

Area of Focus #2

Student Support and Intervention

*Description:*

Leaders have prioritized the development of co-teaching structures to better meet the needs of students. The school has implemented new and robust data systems to inform intervention structures and approaches. Additionally, leaders have allocated resources to significantly increase the number of teachers trained in structured reading intervention methods, to support multiple literacy intervention programs and a specific focus on the needs of multilingual learners. The school will need to devote the same level of attention to math intervention to drive gains in student outcomes across content areas.

**UP Academy Holland, Boston**

**School Strengths**

Area of Strength

Student Support and Intervention

*Description:*

UP Academy Holland’s (UAH’s) approach to student support and intervention is informed by an equity lens and is culturally and linguistically responsive. The school has established a multi-tiered system of instruction and intervention that includes academic and social-emotional-behavioral programming designed to meet the needs of all students. Teacher teams regularly utilize evidence-based screening tools to identify students who are exceeding benchmarks or are at risk for inadequate or inequitable learning outcomes, including mathematics, reading, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes. Students, family members, and educators are aware of students’ progress in relation to benchmarks and the individualized interventions and enrichments that are planned in response to data.

Areas of Focus

Areas of Focus #1, 2, 3: Pedagogy, Teacher Support and Supervision, Leveraging Resources

*Description (combined across all three areas of focus):*

Reviewers have observed inconsistent implementation of the school’s instructional vision during several recent site visits. During the most recent school quality review visit, reviewers observed teachers successfully implementing the curriculum and instructional vision in two out of ten classrooms visited. To strengthen pedagogy schoolwide, UAH leaders will need to take into account that some teachers are successfully executing the school’s instructional vision in their classrooms, while other teachers either do not understand what the vision looks like in practice or for other reasons are not yet able to actualize it.

Currently, teachers spend a significant amount of time planning lessons with support from instructional coaches. More coaching time and resources must be put into lesson implementation, particularly for teachers who are struggling to actualize the instructional vision. Leaders should consider leveraging the experience and expertise of teachers who are implementing the instructional vision successfully, by identifying model classrooms and establishing peer observation cycles supported by instructional coaches. The school should carefully audit and reallocate the time of the instructional leadership and coaching teams, to allocate more resources to supporting teachers who are struggling with lesson execution.

1. The September 26, 2022 letter announcing the change in designation for Morgan may be found here: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/level5/schools/morgan.html>. The December 17, 2024 letter announcing the change in designation for Parker may be found here: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/level5/schools/john-avery-parker.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)