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Commissioner

Proposed Modifications to the Morgan Preliminary Turnaround Plan: Information regarding adopted modifications

To: Superintendent Sergio Paez
Mayor Alex Morris, Chair, Holyoke School Committee
Morgan Elementary School Local Stakeholder Group
From: Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D., Commissioner
Date: April 18, 2014

Today, I released my final Level 5 school turnaround plan for Morgan Elementary School.

Pursuant to M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J(p), the Superintendent, the Holyoke School Committee, and the Morgan Local Stakeholder Group had the opportunity to propose modifications to the plan. (Proposing modifications was not required.) Superintendent Paez and the School Committee did not propose any modifications to the Morgan preliminary turnaround plan; the Local Stakeholder Group submitted its proposed modifications on April 6, 2014.

I appreciate the thoughtful input of the Local Stakeholder Group and have considered the modifications it proposed. Below, I provide information about the modifications I have chosen to adopt and those I have declined to adopt. For those I have adopted, I have provided information about where they are incorporated into the final turnaround plan.

Modifications I have adopted in the final Morgan turnaround plan

Priority Area 1:

No modifications were proposed for this Priority Area.

Priority Area 2:

No modifications were proposed for this Priority Area.

Priority Area 3:

- *Include “If student growth in the Holyoke Public Schools other than Morgan outstrips student growth at Morgan, the superintendent and the receiver will meet to identify promising practices in the district that might be incorporated at Morgan.”*
 - This has been incorporated into Strategy 3.5.

Priority Area 4:

- *Include “the receiver should put an intensive focus on attendance in Pre-K and Kindergarten.”*
 - This has been incorporated into Strategy 4.4.

Appendix A/Working Conditions

- *In the last “sub-bullet” in the middle of page 39, remove the remainder of the sentence after the words “Tutoring of students as needed” [the rest of the sentence contains a mischaracterization of the work of Special Education and ELL teachers as “tutoring”]*
 - This language has been clarified in Appendix A, Section I (in the section regarding expectations for staff members).

Other Proposed LSG Modifications:

- *Insert where appropriate: “In order to assure high quality services and supports for students with disabilities, the Receiver will develop and implement plans and processes for the following essential elements of a Special Education system: effective facilitation of the Special Education Team process under the leadership of a licensed special education professional; identifying, hiring, and supporting an appropriate number of licensed special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and other specialists needed to meet the requirements of IEP and 504 accommodations; and, implementation of multiple interventions and services to be provided at the school in order to meet the individual needs of Students with Disabilities.”*
 - Additional information about students with disabilities has been incorporated into Strategy 2.7, and Strategy 4.6 has been added.
- *Insert where appropriate: “In order to protect the rights of students to the Least Restrictive Environment, existing Holyoke Public Schools district protocols, including the involvement of HPS educators external to the Morgan School, will apply to any contemplated assignment of a Morgan student to a special education placement outside the school.”*
 - Language regarding compliance with federal and state special education regulations has been incorporated into Strategy 4.6.

Proposed modifications that will be addressed in the development of the Memorandum of Agreement

The Local Stakeholder Group also proposed a variety of modifications relating to assorted operating conditions for the school. Although I have not incorporated these changes into the turnaround plan, these operational issues will be addressed during the creation of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that is currently being developed between ESE, Project GRAD, and Holyoke Public Schools. These issues include:

- The agreements between Holyoke Public Schools and the US Department of Justice related to services for ELLs
- The name of the school
- How parent and family complaints will be handled at Morgan
- How special education services (including external special education placements) will be handled between Morgan and the district
- District’s liability for Morgan employees selected by the Receiver
- The impact of district funding and staffing reductions on Morgan
- Grant applications by Morgan School
- The impact of a potential future district attendance zone revision or reconfiguration on Morgan

Modifications I have declined to adopt in the final Morgan turnaround plan

Priority Area 1:

- No modifications were proposed for this Priority Area.

Priority Area 2:

- No modifications were proposed for this Priority Area.

Priority Area 3:

- *Include “If student growth in district outpaces Morgan’s growth, Commissioner will reconsider receivership arrangement at Morgan.”*
 - I decline to adopt this modification because my assessment of when the Morgan will exit Level 5 status will be based on a variety of factors. For example, as part of my annual assessment of the school, I will consider the progress on the implementation of the Level 5 school turnaround plan, including:
 1. Attainment of annual benchmarks in each Priority Area of the Level 5 turnaround plan
 2. Attainment of Measureable Annual Goals (Appendix B)
 3. Institutionalization of the Conditions for School Effectiveness (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ucd/CSE.pdf>)
 4. Likelihood of sustainability of the academic progress made by the school if the school is returned to the district

Priority Area 4:

- *Include “the plan should reflect that Pre-K at Morgan is a top priority item for the school, and that the receiver should make a firm commitment to open a Pre-K classroom there in Fall 2014.”*
 - I decline to adopt this modification, because the plan clearly states (Strategy 4.4) our desire to create a Morgan pre-kindergarten program, pending available space.
- *Strike the following two sentences: “The overwhelming amount of material at Morgan is not organized for easy access by teachers. In mathematics, the current text does not appear to be well aligned with the Common Core State Standards.”*
 - I decline to adopt this modification because ESE and Project GRAD staff have been present at the school and viewed the disorganization of materials; we have also heard this from teachers. We have reworded the Challenges section of Priority Area 4 to indicate that the extent of Morgan’s curricular material alignment with state standards is currently unclear.
- *Insert “teachers who do not hold the SEI Endorsement will be granted appropriate release time to complete the training if training options overlap with the extended work day for teachers.”*
 - I decline to adopt this modification. However, ESE and Project GRAD are working together to plan the SEI endorsement training, and to the degree possible, plan to embed it in the school’s PD.
- *Insert “in light of historic stagnation at ELL Level 3 among many Morgan students, in planning for supports for ELLs, special attention and focus will be placed on the needs and progress of students at this level.”*
 - I decline to adopt this modification, because the turnaround plan includes a consistent, school-wide focus on SEI strategies and differentiated instruction that will include appropriate instruction for Level 3 ELLs. The Morgan plan focuses on SEI instruction to ensure that **all** students receive what they need; it does not only target specific subgroups of students.

Priority Area 5:

- *While the Turnaround Plan includes information about planned efforts related to family and community engagement, it does not appear that these efforts will follow the Full Service Community School development strategy used in the Holyoke Public Schools. If this is incorrect (if plans are in place for the Full Service Community School strategy to be continued at Morgan),*

a commitment to the FSC strategy should be directly stated in the Turnaround Plan. Alternatively, if a different strategy is planned, the LSG requests that “Full Service Community” be removed from the school’s name.

- I decline to adopt this modification. I recognize that Morgan students come to school with many needs and challenges, and I am committed to ensuring that all students’ needs are met so they can learn to their full potential. The turnaround plan includes multiple strategies to address students’ and families’ needs (see especially Priority Area 5), and to engage community stakeholders in the process of turning around the school (including, for example, Strategy 3.4); the turnaround plan also includes staff positions designed to lead the school’s engagement work with both families and community partners. While there may be slight differences between Holyoke’s definition of what constitutes a “full service community school” and what the turnaround plan describes, the differences are not so radical that the school’s name needs to be changed to something other than Morgan Full Service Community School.

Appendix A/Working Conditions:

- *The LSG acknowledges a gap between the increased hours/days to be worked by teachers according to the Turnaround Plan and the proposed teacher pay rates in the plan. The LSG suggests revisions to the required hours/days worked by teachers and/or the compensation provisions of the plan in order to provide for a compensation structure that will support the receiver’s ability to hire and retain high-quality teachers.*
 - I decline to adopt this modification. The final turnaround plan includes a new performance-based compensation system that I believe will support the Receiver’s ability to attract and retain high-quality teachers who are committed to the goals of the turnaround plan.
 - Lawrence Public Schools has a similar compensation approach; this compensation system has been an incentive the district uses to attract applicants and retain teachers.
- *Regarding the compensation of teachers for 2015-16 and beyond: in light of a lack of research supporting compensation systems based on student and teacher performance as effective in improving student achievement, the LSG proposes tabling the proposed performance-based compensation system in order to allow for further study of multiple forms of salary schedule constructs in order to determine which will be most effective in attracting and retaining high-quality teachers at Morgan School.*
 - I decline to adopt the requested modification and, as noted above, have decided to implement the performance-based compensation plan for the upcoming school year. For the reasons spelled out in Appendix C of the preliminary turnaround plan, the development of a performance-based compensation plan is an essential strategy for maximizing the rapid academic achievement of students at the Morgan school. Further, early results from the Lawrence Public Schools, where a similar compensation plan is in place, are demonstrating the efficacy of compensation based on performance that is tied to opportunities for teacher leadership and expanded responsibility. It is envisioned that a new professional compensation system, coupled with a rich professional learning environment and a high-performing, collaborative culture, will contribute to increases in student outcomes by attracting and retaining high potential teachers and leaders.
- *Replace the final bullet in the Dispute Resolution section with the following: “If the employee is not satisfied with the decision of the Receiver, the employee may request resolution by an external arbitrator using a “fast-track” arbitration process similar to that currently in use for arbitration of grievances related to Level 4 schools.”*
 - I decline to accept this modification. The fast-track arbitration procedure set out in G.L. c. 69, § 1J(o) is applied specifically to dismissals of teachers with professional teacher status from Level 5 schools. This procedure will be used for such dismissals. For issues

other than dismissals, the dispute resolution process in the turnaround plan will be an effective process for resolving concerns in an expeditious manner.

Other Proposed LSG Modifications:

- *Insert where appropriate: “The Morgan Local Stakeholder Group will remain in existence throughout the implementation of the Turnaround Plan. Copies of all reports related to Turnaround Plan progress will be shared with the Local Stakeholder Group. Representatives of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and/or Project GRAD will meet quarterly with the LSG to report on progress in implementing the Turnaround Plan.”*
 - I appreciate the service that Morgan’s Local Stakeholder Group (LSG) has provided, first making its recommendations for the Level 5 turnaround plan, and then proposing modifications to the preliminary plan as the final plan was being developed. The law does not provide a continuing role for the LSG. However, there will be many opportunities for LSG members to remain involved with Morgan. Several of these opportunities are highlighted in the turnaround plan, including the School Site Council (Strategy 5.1), the ELL Parent Advisory Committee (Strategy 5.1), the working group around a potential STEM magnet middle school at Morgan (Strategy 3.5), and the stakeholder input process in the development of pre-K for Morgan (Strategy 4.4).
- *Additionally, LSG members want to call attention to the critical importance of student MCAS results as measured by DESE’s Performance and Progress Index (PPI) system in the Commissioner’s decision to declare Morgan a Level 5 school, and to call for the same level of focus on MCAS results and PPI as the single most critical indicator of improvement at Morgan School during the receivership period.*
 - I share the LSG’s belief in the critical importance of MCAS results as a measure of progress in Level 5 schools. The Morgan Level 5 turnaround plan already includes Priority Area benchmarks and Measurable Annual Goals (Appendix B) that are based on MCAS scores.
 - I will evaluate the Morgan school at least annually. The purpose of the evaluation will be to determine whether the school has met the annual goals in its turnaround plan and assess the implementation of the plan at the school. However, MCAS scores aren’t the only measure I will consider as I determine whether Morgan is making progress, and eventually, whether Morgan is ready to exit Level 5 status. I will also consider
 - Attainment of annual benchmarks in each Priority Area of the turnaround plan
 - Attainment of the Measurable Annual Goals (Appendix B)
 - Institutionalization of the Conditions for School Effectiveness (<http://www.doc.mass.edu/apa/ucd/CSE.pdf>)
 - Likelihood of sustainability of the academic progress of the school if the school is returned to the district