



**Dr. Stephen Zrike, Jr., Superintendent/Receiver**

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September 24, 2019

Dear Holyoke Public Schools Community:

Earlier today, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) released the accountability results for all schools and districts. The state's accountability system measures school and district improvement on MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System) achievement and growth (for all students and a variety of subgroups), as well as a broader set of indicators, including chronic absenteeism, English learners' progress towards English proficiency, advanced coursework completion, graduation rates, dropout rates and students' extended enrollment in high school.

**In the second year of the state's revised accountability system, we are pleased to see that the Holyoke Public Schools is making "substantial progress" towards its performance targets** and that many of our schools made strong progress towards established targets.

- 100% of elementary and middle schools made at least moderate progress towards improvement targets in 2019. Of this, 67% of elementary and middle schools made strong improvement, with E.N. White, Kelly, Lawrence and Metcalf "meeting or exceeding" their targets (meaning they met 75% or more of their targets!) Additionally, Donahue and McMahon made "substantial progress" towards their targets (meeting 59% and 65% of their targets, respectively.) Please note that two schools (Holyoke STEM and Veritas Prep) were designated as insufficient data since it was their first year in existence.
- 67% of schools with accountability targets met more in 2019 than in 2018. The 6 schools to achieve this are: Donahue, E.N. White, Kelly, Lawrence, McMahon, and Sullivan. (Metcalf did not have a target percentage in 2018.) Three schools met fewer targets than in the prior year: Holyoke High\*, Morgan, and Peck.
- New this year - E.N. White and Metcalf have been designated as "not requiring assistance or intervention," which is a testament to their performance over the last two years. (Similar to last year, Lawrence is also in this category, since they only serve through 3rd grade and do not have growth data.)

## **Highlights**

### **MCAS Highlights**

- English Language Arts (ELA) and Math achievement improved in grades 3-8. Over the last two years, the percent of students scoring Meeting Expectations or higher has increased by 4 percentage points in ELA and by 2 percentage points in Mathematics.
- The percent of students scoring Meeting Expectations or higher in grades 3-8 has improved in 4 of 6 grade levels in ELA and in 4 of 6 grade levels in Math. In particular, we were encouraged to see a 4-point gain in 8th grade ELA.
- The percent of grade 3 students scoring Meeting Expectations or above in ELA has improved by 5 percentage points over the last two years.
- Metcalf's 3<sup>rd</sup> grade exceeded state averages in both ELA and Math.

- Achievement levels improved significantly for the lowest performing students (the lowest 25% of students based on prior year's results) in grades 3-8 in ELA and Math, which means our students who are furthest behind are making more progress. This is critical as we work to catch these students up to grade level.

### **Additional Highlights**

- E.N. White met or exceeded an astounding 96% of its established targets in 2019!
- Chronic absenteeism rates improved at both the elementary/middle school and high school level. (A student is defined as chronically absent if they miss more than 10% of the school days, which equates to 18 days or more if the student is enrolled for the full year. So, a decline in chronic absenteeism means that more students are in school for more days!)
- At the high school level, the district met or exceeded its targets for graduation rate, extended engagement in high school the past four years (a better outcome than leaving without a diploma), and dropout rate. More students are coming to school, staying in school and graduating. We are especially pleased that we exceeded the graduation target for students who are current and former English Learners and students with disabilities.
- More high school students are also taking advantage of college level courses. The district met its target in 2019, with a 5-point increase from 39.8% to 45% of students taking at least one advanced course, such as through dual enrollment and Advanced Placement courses.

While our students and staff should be proud of these gains, significant work remains to ensure that our students are prepared to excel beyond their tenure in the Holyoke Public Schools.

### **Areas for Continued Improvement**

- The percentage of English Learners making progress on the ACCESS assessment declined, meaning that our English Learners are not making enough progress in their language acquisition
- While growth rates are the highest in the last three years in grades 3-8, they fall short of the acceleration needed to close significant gaps in student performance in Math and ELA.
- Science data at the high school level declined from 2018 to 2019.
- Performance for students with disabilities declined on the grades 3-8 ELA and Math MCAS.

\*It is important to note that this past Spring, DESE implemented a new "next generation" MCAS in high school English Language Arts and Mathematics and in grades 5 and 8 in Science. The new computer-based test contains more rigorous standards and is aligned to college and career readiness indicators; it sets a new performance baseline for students, schools, districts and the state. As a result, scores for students in high school and elementary/middle school science are difficult to compare with prior results. However, our achievement levels and growth data on the high school MCAS reveal that we have tremendous work to do in order to better prepare our students for future success in college and/or career.

### **Next Steps**

We are intensely focused on providing our students with the tiers of academic, social and emotional support necessary for more of our students to experience grade-level learning success. More specifically, we have established four overarching goals:

- Dramatically increase grade-level reading and math proficiency for all students (including students with disabilities and English Learners)
- Meet the majority of students' academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs in the universal core instructional block

- Empower families to partner with schools to meet the needs of their children
- Support the growth and development of educators and staff in order to achieve remarkable results for all students

In the realization of these aggressive goals, we have committed to a finite number of priorities:

- Ensure appropriate time on learning and utilize research-based resources to strengthen core instruction and tiered supports (academic, social-emotional and behavior) to promote and accelerate the learning and growth of all students.
- Expand and strengthen innovative, high-interest pathways for students.
- Strengthen two-way communication with families to understand, promote and enhance the learning and growth of their children enrolled in HPS.
- Create a culture across the school system where educators have an active voice, collaborate frequently, and communicate effectively in our efforts to accelerate the learning and growth of all students.

In the coming weeks, we will continue to examine school, classroom and individual student data to ensure that our improvement efforts are responsive to what our students need most. Most urgently, we have already reorganized district support for the schools that did not make significant improvement last year. Additionally, in order to address the urgent need of increasing our students' language acquisition and the performance of our students with disabilities, we are strengthening professional development for ESL, special education and classroom teachers and are re-examining how services are delivered.

For more information on the accountability system and detailed information on individual school and districtwide results, families, staff and community members are encouraged to visit [www.doe.mass.edu/accountability](http://www.doe.mass.edu/accountability). In the next few weeks, individual student reports will be sent to families. As always, families are also welcome to contact their child's teacher or principal with questions about their child's performance. Finally, we are grateful for the partnership and significant investment that our families, staff and community partners have made in our schools and invite you to continue to partner with us to ensure a successful pathway for every student.

Sincerely,



Stephen Zrike, Receiver/ Superintendent