

Holyoke Teachers Association

Turnaround Plan Recommendations for Local Stakeholder Group

In order to ensure that the turnaround plan in the Holyoke school district addresses the complex, underlying causes of educational underperformance declared by the Board of Education, and in order to address the real educational, social, health, and economic needs of Holyoke students and their parents, the Local Stakeholder Group should include the following in its recommendations to the Receiver, provided pursuant to G.L. c. 69, section 1K(c):

- (1) Steps to address social service and health needs of students at the school and their families, to help students arrive and remain at school ready to learn; provided, however, that this may include mental health substance abuse screening:
- (2) Steps to improve or expand child welfare services and, as appropriate, law enforcement services in the school community, in order to promote a safe and secure learning environment:
- (3) Steps to improve workforce development services provided to students and their families at the school, to provide students and families with meaningful employment skills and opportunities.
- (4) Steps to address achievement gaps for limited English-proficient, special education and low-income students:
- (5) Alternative English Language Learning programs for limited English proficient students, notwithstanding chapter 71A:
- (6) A budget for the district including any additional funds to be provided:

The HTA has grouped their recommendations into the following categories, using the law as its guiding principle:

- I. Health and Well-Being**
- II. Restructuring Special Education Services**
- III. Restructuring ELL (English Language Learner) Services, including the Culture of all our Learners**
- IV. Safe and Secure Learning: Student Learning Conditions and Teacher Working Conditions, one in the same.**
- V. Community Workforce Development**
- VI. Budget**

I. Health and Well-Being

Social Service and Health Needs of Students & Families

1. A School Doctor hired to work with and oversee all health care personnel in the District
2. One School Psychologist for each of the following grade spans at each school: PreK-2; 3-5; 6-8; and 9-12. This person should be experienced in issues for the appropriate developmental level.
3. One certified, trained Social Worker or more assigned to each school who will oversee and coordinate the physical, mental, social and emotional health care needs of all students in that school.
4. One Parent/Community Outreach Worker or more at each school who will oversee and coordinate the services students and families receive, be responsible for communicating with parents/guardians, and will work with the Social Worker to help meet all the needs of the child and family
5. Two Nurses at each school to handle, coordinate, and communicate about health needs and issues, scheduled in flexible shifts so that the office is always open during the school day.
6. One trained Crisis Intervention Specialist at each grade level (PreK-2; 3-5; 6-8; 9-12) to handle the social/emotional issues that arise.

Improve and Expand Child Welfare Services

1. One certified, trained Social Worker or more assigned to each school who will oversee and coordinate the physical, mental, social and emotional health care needs of all students in that school.
2. One Parent/Community Outreach Worker or more at each school who will oversee and coordinate the services students and families receive, be responsible for communicating with parents/guardians, and will work with the Social Worker to help meet all the needs of the child and family. This person will also do home visits to help with issues that may be stemming from the home environment.
3. More guidance counselors, adjustment counselors, transition counselors and intervention specialists.
4. Add Behavior Interventionists to all buildings
5. In order for Holyoke to realize its full potential and help its students achieve at the highest levels, the Holyoke teachers feel that class size must be addressed. A potential framework for such a discussion would include setting maximum limits in how many students are in a class based on grade level, such as, 12-15 in preK-2, 15-18 in 3-6, and 18-22 in 7-12.

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6. Part of having a full, well rounded, enriching educational experience, students must have access to programs such as music, art, extracurricular activities regardless of their academic performance. ALL students, no matter what their educational challenges or issues are, MUST have equal access to these important components of a well-rounded education. The constraints of scheduling or personnel must not dictate whether or not a certain population of students receives these experiences.
7. Adequately fund and provide extracurricular activities and sports to both high schools, so that students from each school can fully participate on any team they so chose.
8. Adequately fund and provide extracurricular activities and trips to all students, regardless of family's financial ability to pay, to all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status or the school's PTO's ability to raise funds. Example, if one 5th grade class goes on a trip to Plymouth Plantation, all 5th graders in the district are afforded the same opportunity.
9. Each school year, each grade level, is provided with an annual, fully funded field trip to a location, outside of the general Holyoke area to a museum, historical location, etc. to expose all children to the experiences that are outside the limits of their socioeconomic status.
10. Reinstate a PTO at each school, no matter what grade level. Actively recruit people to serve on these committees to support the schools.

II. Restructuring Special Education Services

1. Consolidated, Consistent, Equitable Referral Process for all Services: There should be one process to follow to get student services such as speech therapy, Special Ed services, etc. This process, currently known as Building Based Support Teams, or BBST, must be consistently implemented, composed, and run across all schools. Currently, there are 13 schools and 13 ways the BBSTs are run.
2. Consistent, Equitable Supports and Staffing in all schools. In order to equitably serve and educate the students of Holyoke, each school must have consistent and equitable supports, services and staffing. This way, if a child moves from one school to another midway through the year, his services will remain the same. (i.e. all schools, at all grade levels MUST have RISE, functional, TIP and Replacement model classrooms to serve students with a variety of needs.)
3. Staffing for special education services should include staffing levels that allow for co-teachers to be assigned full-time to each classroom.
4. Employ, train and assign sufficient paraprofessional staff to provide dedicated classroom and 1:1 support for all students on IEPs.

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5. Educate the Special Education and ELL parents as to their rights under the law. Offer free classes to the Special Education and ELL parents about advocating for their students.
6. Provide the parents with the “Know your Rights” pamphlet at every meeting. These have not been given out in the last 5 years or more. Provide these in both languages.
7. Mandatory Educational Advocates provided for Special Education and ELL parents for all IEP meetings.
8. Additional school psychologists so the testing does not take too long. Special Education teachers should not be doing the testing or running their own meetings.
9. Develop a district-wide special education referral process that simplifies paperwork. All Special Education referrals should be monitored for timely responses, i.e. within 10 days.
10. Provide ongoing, district wide professional development opportunities for all staff to develop shared understanding and strategies for working with students who have experienced trauma, homelessness, transiency, mental health issues, substance abuse, or other issues as identified by the faculty and staff.
11. Provide ongoing, multi-lingual workshops for parents and caregivers on services, strategies and supports for issues such as trauma, homelessness, transiency, mental health issues, substance abuse, rights under Special Education laws, rights for students in ELL programs and accessing district and community services.
12. Limit the ratio of Special Education and ELL students to regular education students in each classroom, regardless of the number of staff assigned to the classroom.
13. Return to the full Inclusion model. Caseload management is NOT working.
14. Consistent, equitable supports across all grade levels, at all schools. Return to the co-teaching model with one regular education teacher and one special education teacher in the classroom.
15. Expedite the referral process. Teachers should not have to implement all parts of the DCAP before a referral is started. The process is too cumbersome, too detailed. Many teachers are so overwhelmed with paperwork that they do not know how to complete nor have been trained to complete.
16. Provide appropriate support staff and services for all students.
17. Ensure that ELL and Special Education teachers are ONLY used to provide direct services to their students. They are not used for duties, study halls, testing, substituting, etc. Meetings and paperwork times are scheduled into their day. They do not take place during times that teachers are scheduled to service the students.
18. Do not schedule all ELL and Special Education students all into one class. These learning issues cannot occur within the same constraints.

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19. Recreate the Central Office Team that was eliminated in 2007. The team included the OTs, PTs, psychologists, evaluators and all Special Education personnel, with a secretary dedicated to them, to handle testing, referrals, etc. There were two district wide evaluators, one bilingual and one monolingual, who handled all the testing. The team was centralized. They handled all aspects of testing. The team met and discussed students on a regular basis. All files, referrals, etc. went through this office. All Special Education referrals handled by the same staff, in a consistent manner, following a specific protocol. (For more information, see Norma Casillas, who was the bilingual evaluator.)
20. Appropriately service students with the specialized teacher who will better serve his/her need. For example, if the student needs a Bilingual Special Education teacher, then that is what should be provided.
21. Additional funding for ELL and Special Education teachers to meet the needs of all the populations.
22. Explicitly define the services provided by the Tiered Support Specialists. Let all teachers know what services that these TSSs provide.
23. Explicitly define what type of services that students need during periods such as the Intensive Learning Center, pull out services or Enhancement classes. This time should have a structured task list or curricula to follow. Behaviorally-challenged students should not be sent to these services.

III. Restructuring ELL Services, including the Culture of all our Learners

1. Establish a procedure to regularly review existing ELL programs at a building level to ensure teachers and students get appropriate supports and staffing.
2. Staff each school with sufficient licensed ESL teacher who are assigned to a single grade level and who have specific assignments.
3. Establish multiple ELL programs specifically designed to meet the needs of newcomers, long-term ELLs, ELLs with disabilities, and academic supports for ELLs who are reaching English proficient and students who have exited ELL programs (levels 4, 5, and formerly limited English proficient)
4. Recruit and hire more bilingual educators in all positions, in all areas, in all schools.
5. Services for the Level 4 and 5 ELL students should be provided by an ELL teacher, not a SEI-certified person. A dually licensed teacher cannot focus on content and language acquisition at the same time and accomplish either fully.
6. Offer ongoing, no-cost SEI Endorsement and ongoing SEI professional development opportunities for all educators.

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7. See further recommendations for ELLs in next sections.
8. Specialized training provided to staff around issues such as transiency, poverty, trauma, chronic absences, etc.
9. Provide enrichment experiences, such as field trips, specials, and out of classroom experiences
10. Follow the English Language Development guidelines. Do not use a teacher with multiple certifications to cover multiple responsibilities

Culturally responsive recommendations:

1. Include dates, such as Hispanic Heritage month, that will be celebrated along with our traditional holidays/history.
2. Reach out to parents to set up a centralized calendar, activities, events for schools, parents and others, but also include activities to help educate students.
3. Roll out a prepared ELA curriculum across grade levels, which include culturally sensitive literature and resources for the classroom.
4. More resources that students can identify with: LGBTQ literature, Puerto Rican Culture, etc.
5. Teach students and staff how to overcome obstacles in a positive way.
6. Offer all staff Professional Development such as Spanish for Educators, Ethnic Studies and Diversity Training.
7. Offer English Language Learning Lessons to parents at all schools.
8. Continue to work with the Latin@ Educational Advisory Group
9. Add a Puerto Rican History and Culture class to our History offerings.
10. Add Puerto Rican Cultural Education to our curriculum.
11. Reinstitute and restructure the schools' annual celebration of Puerto Rico and the United States.
12. Transitional bilingual education did not work in Holyoke previously because the staff hired were not bilingual, biliterate. We lost many bilingual teachers when they had to pass a literacy test. If we hire people who have the skills, the programs could work.
13. Continue the dual-language education programs at Metcalf.
14. Expand dual-language education programs to offer at least one dual-language classroom at each building and each grade level.
15. Offer dual-language content area courses at both high schools.
16. Offer courses and pathways for educators to qualify for the Transitional Bilingual Learning Endorsement (603 CMR 7.14)

17. While we realize it was repealed in 2002, we believe that the strongest and most prudent course of action to address the ELL population in Holyoke would be to reintroduce bilingual education in the schools.
18. Hire truly bilingual, biliterate teachers to teach the two-way bilingual programs, to promote literacy in both languages.
19. We favor a two-way program as is being piloted at Metcalf.

IV. Safe and Secure Learning: Student Learning Conditions and Teacher Working Conditions, one in the same.

A fully serviced and staff alternative school

1. Establish a Pre-K through Grade 12 Alternative School, which services students from pre-K through 12 grade, which includes the following:
 - 1.1. An Alternative, Therapeutic Setting for our students with Social/Emotional Issues: The current Therapeutic Intervention Programs (TIP) are not therapeutic. These students need a quiet, well-established routine, in a safe place, that allows them to learn and receive the emotional supports and therapies that they need.
 - 1.2. A Behavior Intervention program for students who are consistently off track, disruptive to the learning environment, and the educational progress who do not qualify for Special Education Behavioral Support. This program will concentrate on correcting the disruptive behaviors in order that they might return to the least restrictive environment.
 - 1.3. A Behavior Alternative program for our students who cannot comply with the behavior norms of a regular setting. Currently, most of these students are serviced in TIP, with our most emotionally fragile students. These students need a separate, structured program of their own, staffed by Restorative Justice trained personnel to work with and around their needs. There also needs to be a correctly equipped program to effectively and separately deal with these children. They need to be provided with supports and systems that will most effectively facilitate their learning and correct their behavior.

Social Skills and Discipline

1. A comprehensive Social Skills curriculum taught at each school, which address age level appropriate issues/concerns taught by a full-time, licensed teacher. (Example of a Middle School program is available at <http://www.cccoe.net/social/skillslist.htm>)

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2. Fully enforce and follow through with the Student Code of Conduct as written. Discipline needs to be consistent in all schools. It is currently the number one complaint for all teachers at the middle school and high school level.

Safe and Secure Learning Environment

1. An assigned, consistent School Resource Officer assigned to each 6-8 and 9-12 school daily. Each of the middle and high schools needs a regular SRO presence to handle the variety of community issues that arise among adolescents and teenagers. The SRO will provide students and staff a safe person to go to report such things as bullying, threats of violence, drugs etc.
2. An assigned, consistent SRO who visits the PreK-2 and 3-5 schools on a weekly basis. This will help to teach our students that the SRO is another safe adult they can reach out to. This SRO can also help administration deal with issues, such as bullying and violence, that arise even in the earliest grades.
3. Offer restraint and de-escalation training to all staff.
4. Well-written, specific, detailed Emergency Management plans that are written for all emergency type situations. Things such Code Red and Code White should be the same and handled the same through all the schools. These plans should be distributed to all staff and reviewed on a regular basis. These plans should include plans for things such as a fire alarm during inclement weather, blocked exits, delay in fire personnel response, etc.

Curricula, Schools, and Teaching Staff

1. Consistent, fully funded, well researched curricula for all grade and subject levels.
2. Adopt, implement and provide a curriculum and stick with it.
3. Provide teachers who are teaching curricula with a full, paid training to understand and implement the curricula, before he/she are expected to teach the curriculum.
4. Provide teachers with all materials, especially student resources, needed to teach the curricula.
5. Do not use teachers as substitutes, except in an emergency situation. Clearly define what an emergency is for using teachers as substitutes.
6. Centralize services for providing and obtaining substitutes- employ building-based, permanent substitutes and set minimum qualifications and compensation for day-to-day substitutes. (Use Kelly Services, like Chicopee)
7. Eliminate the 90-minute blocks. Students cannot focus for that long.
8. Eliminate K-8. Return to K-5, 6-8, and high school.
9. Return to five schools (K-5), two middle schools (6-8), and two high schools (9-12).

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10. Reinstate the K-5 recess of at least 15 minutes or more. This is in addition to their 40 minute (SHOULD be 20 minute eating, 20 minute recess) lunch period. This would be time to go outside, exercise and socialize. All schools must have this opportunity.
11. Technology is widely discussed when speaking of our students achieving in the 21st century, but rarely is the money put in place to back such strong words. If we are to have our students excel in all things, then we have to provide them with the means of doing so. Each classroom must have fully functioning, up-to-date, supplied equipment to meet the needs of the learners. Ideally, each student would have access to a computer for all classes.
12. If we want students in Holyoke to succeed then we have to provide them and their teachers with the supplies needed. The smallest things being absent from the room can be detrimental to the learning process. Each classroom must have adequate supplies such as printer toner, pencils, paper, folders, crayons, scissors, and other necessary implements. There should not be an extensive lag time between when supplies are ordered and when the teacher receives them. Currently, teachers often have to wait months for supplies, such a printer toner, and often wind up buying their own.
13. Eliminate neighborhood schools, get kids out of their neighborhoods and expose them to other parts of the City.

V. Community Workforce Development

Adult Learning Programs for Families & Community

1. Restore the Worker Training Programs offered at Dean Technical: offer vocational and career training for parents at the local high schools, especially in the shops at Dean. Offer parents and other adults the opportunity to improve their skills and expand their knowledge to better support themselves and their children.
2. Coordinate services with CareerPoint and other outside community agencies to offer parents help in training for, interviewing for, getting and keeping better jobs.
3. Target work programs and career services to parenting teens at the middle and high schools levels.
4. Restore a Career Services and Opportunities Office at each of the High Schools: This office, which was disbanded in 2000-2001, provided much needed services to all our high school students. This is the place where students went to work on resumes, write cover letters, get job applications, complete portfolios of vocational work, etc. This office also put students at Holyoke High out on work-study and students at Dean out on co-op. When we lost this office, our students lost a go-to place and person for jobs and career assistance. When we

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had this office at its services, our students were much better prepared to obtain the part-time jobs, which helped their families stay afloat in many instances.

5. Review the daily schedule at Holyoke High School to better accommodate alternative learning programs, such as internships, work-study and other career services. Maintain the rotating schedule of classes for all the underclassmen. Rotate the schedule for the seniors only. Do not alter the schedule for underclassmen to accommodate this or the outside partners who may be coming in.
6. Review district policies to allow work-study or work-experience to count towards graduation credit at both high schools.
7. Coordinate the work placement coordinators at both schools, so that jobs/positions are made available to all students
8. Expand English as a Second Language classes to the offerings for parents, at night, offered at multiple locations throughout the district, free of cost.
9. Expand offerings of parent-education courses that are currently offered through other local organizations.
10. Field trips to local factories, companies, etc. that revolve around exposing the students to the variety of employment opportunities available to the community.
11. Teacher internships at local factories (School to Career, connecting Activities, Grant 480)
12. Reinstate popular vocational programs, such as Building and Grounds and HVAC to the Dean Technical High School.
13. Add additional popular vocational programs, such as Allied Health and Child Care Services to the Dean Technical High School.

VI. Budget

1. Qualified, full time grant writers, one for each school and one district-wide, to apply, monitor and report on external grant funding.
2. Training for teachers to help them write grants for their classrooms.
3. Professional development for teachers to help them search out and qualify for grants to use in their curriculums.
4. Additional funding for ELL teachers to meet the needs of the populations.
5. In accordance with MGL 69J, the turnaround plan should include an adequate, fully funded budget to fulfill the recommendations that are outlined in this plan.
6. Build a new school. The last new school in Holyoke was Dean in 1989. Seek out money for new buildings. Some of our schools, such as McMahon are very out of date and in desperate need of repairs. Money for these repairs keep getting squashed, where does the money go?

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7. Move the School Department Offices out of Suffolk Street into the Lawrence School, the Lynch School (if the Mayor gives it back to the schools) or another School Department or City owned location that will not cost the City \$350, 000 a year to lease.
8. Return Lynch School to the School department as a School Department owned building. This building is built to be a school and completely outfitted to be such. Right now it is sitting vacant and not used.

In closing, in order to ensure that the turnaround plan is being fully implemented and continuously reassessed to determine where adjustments may need to be made, the HTA recommends:

1. That the LSG continue to meet on a quarterly basis to discuss progress and make additional recommendations to the Commissioner and the Receiver. We believe this is necessary to ensure that the turnaround process is authentic and sustainable in the long run.
2. That the turnaround plan should include joint labor-management committees at both the school and district level to promote continuous teamwork, which will lead to effective implementation and ongoing two-way feedback to better student achievement. This will also ensure that teachers' input is solicited and given meaningful consideration.
3. That the Receiver should commit to ensuring there is a culture of success for educators as well as students, which includes respecting them and valuing their expertise.