

**Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
Level 4 Monitoring Summative Report**

**District: Holyoke Public Schools**  
Plan Monitor: Dr. Nadine Bonda

**School Year: 2011-2012**  
Date of Report: October 23, 2012  
(revised January 9, 2013)

**Introduction**

The Holyoke Public School District under the leadership of Superintendent David Dupont began work on its Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP) in the 2011-2012 school year. The plan was developed to address five issues identified by the leadership team.

**Issue 1: Persistently low student achievement across the district** (CPI 20 points lower than the state average in mathematics and ELA).

**Issue 2: An exceptionally high number of special education students and English language learners in the Warning/Failing category on the MCAS** (at least double the statewide average).

**Issue 3: A lack of consistent districtwide instruction, assessment and intervention policies and procedures.**

**Issue 4: A lack of clear expectations for use and dissemination of data, monitoring procedures, and sufficient professional development support for the analysis and use of data.** And,

**Issue 5: Insufficient levels of training and staffing to support high needs populations.**

Holyoke Public Schools has experienced traction in 2011-12 through the implementation of its Accelerated Improvement Plan, working diligently to lay the foundation for significant improvement in student achievement. To make the focus on raising student achievement coherent and actionable, the district has organized its core work around its AIP, promoted common language and aligned practices. The superintendent reported that the greatest change was that in one year there was a change in the culture of the school district to one in which there was a sense of urgency from district and school-based administrators through teachers in every school and a new seriousness about implementing the AIP and school improvement plans (SIP). The superintendent reported that everyone from the school committee down understands this and has helped create an atmosphere of change in the district. He reports that now in the district, people share a common language and have in-depth conversations around what rigor needs to look like in classrooms. Also, the district has moved significantly in building leadership capacity at the district and school levels.

The superintendent reported that some impediments to accomplishing the goals of the AIP this year included having to create systems that were not previously in place. For example, before benchmark assessments could be given and data analyzed, a complete data overhaul had to be done to

ensure that all students were accounted for and all test scores could easily be assigned to the correct student in the correct school. This was not a simple task. As well, capacity had to be developed in district and school-based administrators in order to do the hard work that lay ahead. Because of a small district office staff, a small number of people were working on all the issues in the district while capacity was being built. As in any organization, when big change is happening and there is a sense of urgency, some people have difficulty adjusting. Consequently, there were changes in some leadership positions. The task of keeping morale high and people engaged can be challenging. And finally, there were additional challenges in the district such as managing Level 4 turnaround work, especially at Dean Technical High School.

### **AIP Objectives**

#### **Objective 1: Improve instructional quality by building leadership capacity throughout the district to continuously improve teaching and learning.**

In the 2011-2012 school year there was a great investment of time and effort to build the capacity of principals and to supervise and monitor their improvement activities. The District Instructional Leadership Team (DILT) met monthly and worked collaboratively on a variety of ways to address issues in the school district. Each DILT meeting was day-long professional development aimed specifically at helping administrators better understand instructional initiatives to increase student achievement at their schools. A system of classroom walkthroughs developed a common vision for rigorous instruction. Actionable feedback was then provided to teachers and principals. Principals set goals for the number of informal observations they would complete on a monthly basis, thus getting into classrooms and giving individual teachers more feedback than had ever occurred in Holyoke schools. School Improvement Plans (SIPs) were tightly linked to the AIP, and SIPs were monitored through monthly meetings between principals and the superintendent and assistant superintendent. The expectations and work of principals became public and was shared and collaboratively discussed at monthly DILT meetings. This brought a new openness to principals' practice in Holyoke.

#### **Objective 2: Foster a cycle of continuous improvement and accountability by using data to effectively examine and improve teaching and learning.**

The district worked diligently to set the scene for collecting and analyzing data. It developed a student management system that would allow the accurate recording of benchmark assessment results and the ease of use of that data. The district then adopted an inquiry-based approach to using data from both walkthroughs and assessments to begin to address areas of student need and work on methods to promote improvement. For the first time this year, the entire district implemented common assessments and collected and analyzed data in a uniform fashion. The district is beginning to use that data to respond to the needs of groups of students and individual students.

#### **Objective 3: 85% of all Holyoke children will be proficient readers by the end of third grade by 2014**

There was a focus on the improvement of instruction in reading and ELA throughout grades K-3. Professional development was provided to administrators on balanced literacy so that administrators would have a clear understanding of what they should be seeing in the elementary classroom and how they could help teachers to improve their practice. Ongoing professional development was also offered to teachers. Benchmark

Assessment System (BAS) data was collected and analyzed. The reading and comprehension skills of students were assessed. As well, the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment was given in ELA. Using the inquiry process, each principal examined data and determined which grade in their school had the most needs. They determined which classes made the most and the least progress. They then developed action plans for how they would work with those grades and with specific teachers to help them improve practice. Walkthrough data was also tracked in the area of reading and ELA instruction. Feedback was given to every teacher after every walkthrough.

An early literacy taskforce was formed and met regularly. A family literacy center was developed at each elementary school. Several organizations in Holyoke joined with the schools to donate books to early grade students so they can start their own home libraries. A local group sponsored a family literacy night, which drew over 800 participants. Classes were offered to teach parents how to get the most out of reading to their children. Early literacy became a very positive community effort.

The short-term outcome that states that 80% of K-3 ELL students who are identified as needing reading intervention will participate in safety net/intervention programs was not monitored by the ELL department, thus no evidence was presented. The goal of 85% of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders reading on grade level by 2014 was not yet achieved, and the district is currently not on track to meeting this level of proficiency as measured by the MCAS. In 2011, 21% of Holyoke's 3<sup>rd</sup> graders scored Proficient or higher on the ELA MCAS; in 2012, 20% did so.

#### **Objective 4: Focus on literacy in grades 4-8.**

By January, the district was in a position to begin to implement its literacy plan in grades 4 to 8. Professional development in balanced literacy was offered to coaches, and through coaches to teachers. Administrators and coaches learned how to administer and analyze benchmark assessments. They learned how to do action planning and how to adjust instruction based on the data.

Professional development was provided for principals on how to extend early literacy instruction to grades 4-8. Grades 4-5 continued to do balanced literacy, while grades 6-8 used readers and writers workshop. Principals received professional development in what to look for when observing readers and writers workshops. Like Objective #3, evidence showed that the most important parts of this Objective were met, except in the area of English language learners.

#### **Progress and Performance Ratings**

As part of their quarterly reporting, ESE Accountability Monitors assign each district two categories of ratings for each Strategic Initiative in the Accelerated Improvement Plan. Each category is based on a four-level rubric designed to communicate to stakeholders the extent of the district's progress toward successful implementation of each Initiative. *Improvement Process ratings* indicate the degree to which the district has implemented and embedded the key practices of a given Initiative. In this category, districts receive one of the following ratings for each Initiative: Fully Embedded; Practices in Place; Technical Implementation; or Problematic Implementation/At Risk. *Performance ratings* describe the results the district has achieved based on the benchmarks in a given Initiative. In this category, districts receive one of the following ratings for each

Initiative: Reached High Performance Goals Consistently; Reached Performance Goals; Partially Reached Performance Goals; or Performance Goals Not Reached.

The Holyoke Public School District earned generally consistent ratings in each category throughout the 2011-2012 school year. Most of the district's Strategic Initiatives were consistently rated as being at the Technical Implementation or the Practices in Place stages of implementation and were rated as Partially Reached Performance Goals in the Performance category. By the end of the year, eight of the fourteen Initiatives were at the "Practices in Place" stage and six in the "Technical Implementation" stage. All Initiatives partially reached performance goals by the end of the year. Initiatives were generally implemented with fidelity and consistency throughout the course of the year, and two initiatives saw improvements in their performance ratings:

- *Initiative 1.3: Increase the instructional capacity of teachers to implement a range of instructional strategies with a specific focus on students with limited English proficiency and those with special needs:* Improved from Problematic Implementation/At Risk to Technical Implementation and from Performance Goals Not Reached to Partially Reached Performance Goals
- *Initiative 3.4: Provide at least three reports on student progress PK-3 to the school committee by reporting for each school and grade by percentage of grade level equivalent:* Improved from Technical Implementation to Practices in Place (rated as Partially Reached Performance Goals on both reports)

In the first year of the Accelerated Improvement Plan process, the Holyoke Public School District did not meet the final outcomes established in its Accelerated Improvement Plan, which were based on student proficiency in ELA, literacy, and math. 2011 and 2012 MCAS data for all students and for high needs<sup>1</sup> students are noted in Tables 1 and 2. In the second year of the Accelerated Improvement Plan process, the Department provided additional support to districts as they determined their final outcomes. All districts have now established final outcomes based on a Progress and Performance Index (PPI) of 75.

Overall, levels of student proficiency and student growth were essentially unchanged between 2011 and 2012. See Tables 1 and 2. The Composite Performance Index (CPI), which measures proficiency, remained flat in ELA (with a 0.0 CPI change) and in math (with a 0.1 CPI change). The median SGP, which measures student growth, also remained virtually unchanged in ELA (with a 2.0 change in SGP) and in Math (with a -3.0 change in SGP). The same pattern was seen in the performance of the "high needs" subgroup (88% of Holyoke's 5,877 students). Overall proficiency for high needs students remained flat in ELA (with a 0.9 CPI change) and in Math (with a 1.0 CPI change). Similarly, the median SGP in ELA was virtually flat (with a 2.0 change in SGP) as well as in Math (with a -3.0 change in SGP) for the high needs subgroup. Although the Holyoke Public School District achieved little improvement in student performance or growth, the district took steps to build a foundation and establish some systems necessary to create a throughline from district practice to the classroom level in order to promote improved student outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> Defined as students who fall into at least one of the following categories: low-income students, English language learners, former English language learners, or students with disabilities.

**Table 1: Composite Performance Index (CPI)<sup>2</sup>**

Aggregate					High needs				
Year	District		State		Year	District		State	
	ELA	Math	ELA	Math		ELA	Math	ELA	Math
2011	67.1	58.2	87.2	79.9	2011	64.1	55.0	77.0	67.1
2012	67.1	58.3	86.7	79.9	2012	65.0	56.0	76.5	67.0
<b>Change</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>-0.5</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>-0.5</b>	<b>-0.1</b>

**Table 2: Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)<sup>3</sup>**

Aggregate					High needs				
Year	District		State		Year	District		State	
	ELA	Math	ELA	Math		ELA	Math	ELA	Math
2011	44.0	54.0	50.0	50.0	2011	44.0	54.0	46.0	46.0
2012	46.0	51.0	50.0	50.0	2012	46.0	51.0	46.0	46.0
<b>Change</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>-3.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>-3.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>

**Ongoing Work**

In the summer of 2012, all district-level directors developed work plans with specific goals aligned to the AIP. The superintendent and assistant superintendent reviewed plans and gave directed feedback. Plans were made for the directors to meet once per week with each other, to bring their work to the table and share their ongoing progress. In addition, there will be monthly meetings with the assistant superintendent and directors to monitor and support directors’ work. Principals and their teams began writing their new SIPs to align with the 2012-2013 AIP. The superintendent and directors gave feedback on those drafts and principals are revising them. Directors and principals worked together to review data and make

<sup>2</sup> Differences of more than 2.5 CPI points are more likely to be educationally meaningful than differences of fewer than 2.5 points, which are likely not educationally meaningful.

<sup>3</sup> Typical student growth percentiles are between about 40 and 60 on most tests. Groups outside this range have higher or lower than typical growth. Differences of more than 10 SGP points are more likely to be educationally meaningful than differences of fewer than 10 SGP points, which are likely not educationally meaningful.

decisions about what the benchmark outcomes should be. Administrators and teachers took part in professional development in preparation for the new educator evaluation plan. And finally, the DILT met to determine what specific areas of rigor in classroom instruction they would focus on in the 2012-2013 school year. The widespread participation across the district in the development of the AIP, and the link between the Plan and the evaluations of individual educators, shows great promise in strengthening the district-wide ownership, alignment of efforts, and collaboration needed to result in accelerated improvement in the Holyoke Public Schools.

### **Summary and Recommendations**

The implementation of the plan has established conditions upon which broader reform can be achieved. Despite this initial progress, more significant work remains to embed change in every classroom in order to dramatically increase student achievement. To that end, this year the district should:

- Continue deepening and aligning the district's work through its 2012-2013 Accelerated Improvement Plan.
- Focus on increasing the achievement of English language learners and students with disabilities.
- Devise a strategy for training, coaching, and monitoring teachers to ensure progress in this area.
- Continue building the capacity of administrators with unique growth needs, in order to ensure that the administrators have the skills to build the capacity of teachers at different stages of development. Ultimately, all teachers will need to be proficient in delivering classroom instruction that reaches all their students.

We look forward to seeing greater levels of success reached by the district as we continue monitoring the implementation of the district's Accelerated Improvement Plan.