By email

December 17, 2024

Andrew O’Leary, Superintendent

New Bedford Public Schools

455 County Street

New Bedford, MA 02740

Jacell Suarez, Principal

John Avery Parker Elementary School

705 County Street

New Bedford, MA 02740

Dear Superintendent O’Leary and Principal Suarez:

I am writing to inform you that the John Avery Parker Elementary School (Parker) will formally exit chronically underperforming status on January 1, 2025. On October 29, 2024, I announced my decision to remove Parker’s chronically underperforming designation pending the completion of exit assurances. Enclosed please find the exit assurances document for Parker that was completed on December 9, 2024. Under 603 CMR 2.06 (11)(a), upon my removal of the Parker from chronically underperforming status on January 1, the provisions of M.G.L. c. 69, § 1J for schools designated as chronically underperforming will cease to apply to the Parker, except for those maintained through exit assurances; and the employment of School & Main Institute as Parker’s receiver will end.

I commend the students, families, educators, staff and leaders of the Parker School, both past and present, for their tremendous collective efforts that have lifted the school to a higher trajectory of student achievement. I am grateful for the clear vision of School & Main Institute that has sustained the school’s progress amidst very challenging conditions during the pandemic, by focusing on the unconditional belonging of all members of the Parker school community.

The Department is aware that the New Bedford School Committee voted on December 9, 2024, to convert the Parker into an early childhood center in the 2025-26 school year. As a result, the Department will monitor the implementation of Parker’s exit assurances for the remainder of the 2024-25 school year only. My team also will continue to collaborate with district and school leadership so that Parker students, families, staff and leaders are well supported throughout the upcoming transition of their school community.

It is my sincere hope and expectation that the Parker School will continue to uplift its current students, families and staff with its culture of unconditional belonging for the duration of their time together as a school community. In the years ahead, I hope that every member of the Parker community carries forward the inclusive values and culturally responsive practices that have been the hallmark of their school, as they continue their educational endeavors in New Bedford and beyond.

Regards,

Russell D. Johnston

Acting Commissioner of Elementary of Secondary Education

Cc: Chantel Devaughn, School & Main Institute

Mayor Jonathan Mitchell, City of New Bedford

Lauren Woo, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Encl: Chronically Underperforming Schools Exit Assurances and Strategies for Sustainability for John Avery Parker Elementary School, signed December 9, 2024