



**An Evaluation of the Commonwealth Pilot School Initiative**

**Year One Report:**

**Intermediate Outcomes of the Commonwealth Pilot School Model**

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An Analysis of School-level Changes and Preliminary Impacts of the Commonwealth Pilot Schools Initiative

August 2008



## Acknowledgements

It is with tremendous appreciation that the research team acknowledges the cooperation of the following partners in this research:

- Staff of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, including Kathe Kirkman, Sarah McLaughlin, and Carrie Conaway, who have provided critical direction and support to this project.
- Leaders, coaches, and research staff of the Center for Collaborative Education, including but not limited to Dan French, Dania Vazquez, Christina Brown, Arnold Clayton, Mary Cavalier, Mary Connery-Simmons, Rosann Tung, and Monique Ouimette.
- District leaders and their staff in the Boston, Fitchburg, and Springfield public schools, who have contributed their perspectives, knowledge, and available data.
- Headmaster Jose Duarte of The English High School in Boston, Principal Susan Quick of Academy Middle School in Fitchburg, and Principal Jonathan Swan of Duggan Middle School and Principal Kevin McCaskill of Putnam Vocational Technical High School in Springfield. The ongoing cooperation of these leaders and their staff has been tremendous and central to the success of this study.

## Executive Summary

In June 2008, four schools designated “underperforming” by the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education concluded their first year of operation as Commonwealth Pilot Schools. This marked the completion of a year of hard work and transformation at Academy Middle School in Fitchburg, The English High School in Boston, and Duggan Middle School and Putnam Vocational Technical High School in Springfield. Although each of these schools plotted a unique path, they also encountered common challenges and opportunities as they undertook conversion to Commonwealth Pilot Schools.

Following are the highlights of the many substantive changes and initiatives implemented in these schools over the past year, preliminary indications of their impact on school capacity and practice, and key lessons learned through the implementation process.

### I. Implementation of School-Level Changes

The Commonwealth Pilot conversion process led to a variety of substantive changes in school operations. Some of these were quickly implemented, while others will require additional time and planning to achieve.

#### **Personnel Autonomy Leads to Dramatic Changes in Staffing**

School leaders exercised autonomy over staffing, including releasing staff whose skills or philosophy did not align with their new school visions. Further, many teachers exercised their right to transfer rather than remain with their old schools through the conversion process. This led to high rates of turnover between SY07 and SY08, particularly at the middle school level, where rates were 61% at Academy and 73% at Duggan, compared to 44% at English and 16% at Putnam. New staff hires were less experienced than returning teachers, except at Duggan. Context limited staffing autonomy at Academy, due to a district-wide reduction in force, and at Putnam, whose vocational staff could not readily be transferred to other district schools. Duggan and English redeployed staff resources in an effort to bolster instructional leadership and student support services.

#### **Immediate Changes to Time in Learning; Incremental Changes to Curriculum and Assessment**

Three schools used new autonomy to modify their instructional schedules for SY08, increasing weekly time in learning at Academy (5 hrs. 55 min.) and English (3 hrs. 59 min.), and decreasing it at Duggan (-1 hr. 15 min.). They also shifted the time they devoted to English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and history/social studies. Duggan and English equalized time for these subjects, while Academy moved away from its equalized schedule to increase time for ELA and mathematics. Putnam, which had recently revised its schedule, did not alter it in SY08, citing a need for stability and the complexity of such an undertaking in a large vocational school.

While changes to instructional schedules were swiftly made, proposed changes to curriculum and assessment are being pursued in an incremental fashion, with many proposed changes still in planning and development. Factors such as staff turnover, the need to develop knowledge of new methods, and uncertainty regarding the limitations of curriculum autonomy were commonly cited as reasons for a more deliberate approach to curricular change.

#### **New Time Supports the Development of Collaborative, Professional Learning Communities**

Time for collaborative planning and professional development (PD) increased substantially at all four schools. Weekly collaborative planning time now ranges from 2 hours at Putnam to 6 hours, 20 minutes at English. All four schools increased the frequency of these meetings and now have at least two (at Putnam) and ranging up to five per week (at English). At three schools, new schedules were implemented that increased the length of the regular school day and created one or more shortened “alternative” days for students each week. Putnam retained

its existing schedule, adding an hour of after-school time each week for smaller learning community (SLC) meetings.

Overall, ratings of the amount of time for PD and three types of collaborative meetings—whole-school/SLC, departmental, and teacher team—suggest that time allocations are generally “just about right.” Substantial proportions of staff did report that too much or too little time was devoted to PD or a given type of meeting, but there was no consistent trend across schools. A wide majority of staff at each school agreed that collaborative meetings of all types were guided by clear objectives. However, of all meeting types, staff from all four schools most frequently disagreed that time for whole-school/SLC meetings was used effectively (28% to 48%).

### **Programs and Structures Installed to Personalize the School Environment**

Each school’s Design Plan proposed to create a more personalized, student-focused school. They pursued similar strategies, including decreasing student enrollment or community size, implementing student advisory programs, and enhancing student support. Three schools experienced significant decreases in enrollment, English and Duggan by design and Academy due to school choice, while Putnam increased enrollment 10%. Enrollment at English (820) and Putnam (1,470) remained in excess of the Commonwealth Pilot goal of 400. To compensate, these schools focused on enhancing existing SLC structures. All schools decreased their student-teacher ratios.

All four schools now operate student advisory programs, which provide scheduled time for groups of 10 to 12 students to meet with an assigned teacher. The frequency of advisory periods ranged from once every two weeks (Putnam) to daily (Academy), with two schools meeting twice per week (English and Duggan). Although all four schools’ staffs believe that advisory strengthens connections between students and faculty, ratings of the curricula and effectiveness of these programs were low. Duggan and English also took steps to enhance student support staffing and programs, and Academy made this a focus area as well.

### **Governance Systems Established and Operational**

Three of the four schools retained their SY07 principal/headmaster, with Academy being the exception. This may have added to the complexity of conversion at that school. Schools worked closely with the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) to establish new leadership teams and governing boards. School-wide leadership teams were established at three schools, while Putnam established a leadership team for each of its SLCs. All such teams included teacher representation, and some also included administrators and support staff.

Governing boards held their first meetings by December 2007. Each of the schools’ boards included the principal/headmaster, faculty, parents, and community members. All but Academy reported student representation. Meeting agenda and minutes, where available, reveal a focus on school policy and programs, the school budget, the development of a staff Work Election Agreement (WEA), and evaluation of the school principal/headmaster.

Staff at all four schools approved a new WEA that articulates working conditions for SY09. The most significant changes were observed in Academy’s WEA, which modified the school’s approach to its Expanded Learning Time (ELT) grant, thereby increasing the length of the teacher workday. Duggan and Putnam also made changes to refine or add clarity to working conditions, while English made no notable changes. Overall, 71% of school staff reported that they had the chance to provide input to the WEA, including a majority at three schools (ranging from 68% to 83%) and 33% at English. Overall, 30% of teachers and student support staff felt that they provided substantive input; compared to 64% of these staff who served on their schools’ leadership team or governing board.

### **CCE Technical Assistance Focused on Developing Capacity and Systems; Generally Well Received**

ESE contracted with CCE to provide technical assistance to support each school’s conversion. Work plans suggest that the development of professional learning communities capable of effectively leveraging curriculum and assessment autonomies, and the establishment of effective school governance structures, were focal points for

coaching services. Emphases differed, with middle schools more focused on time to support collaboration and PD, and high schools more focused on governance support and other activities.

Overall, 68% of survey respondents agreed that CCE coaches have helped their school to improve. This positive regard was most common at Duggan (80%), English (76%), and Putnam (67%), and far less frequent at Academy (44%). Respondents also rated the quality of four services—meeting facilitation, PD, governing board support, and leadership team support. CCE’s support for school governing boards received the most positive ratings (80% good or excellent). CCE’s leadership team support (74%), meeting facilitation (68%), and PD (63%) services were also received favorably, overall. Ratings of governing board support were substantially higher among board members, while ratings of leadership team support were slightly lower among leader team members. At three schools, a majority of staff offered positive ratings of all four services; while PD was less well received (39% positive) at Academy.

## II. Preliminary Impacts

Operational changes have in many instances resulted in changes to school capacity and practice. There is a strong sense that schools are moving in the right direction, but some concerns exist regarding sustainability.

### Staff Perceive Improvements in Capacity and Practice; Results Vary Widely by School

ES Table 1 presents the proportion of *returning staff* who reported improvement in specific practices or capacity in their school. Perceptions vary across schools. At least 83% of returning Duggan staff reported improvement in 9 of 11 areas of practice or capacity, and at least 60% reported improvements in 9 of 11 areas at English. Among Putnam’s returning staff, at least 50% perceived improvement on 6 of the 11 measures. Academy’s returning staff perceived the least improvement. It was the only school at which any measure was reported to have worsened overall; at least 45% of its returning staff indicated decline in 4 of 11 areas.

While improvement is evident in every area, it was most consistently reported in schools’ freedom to make decisions and staff collaboration. Both of these areas received tremendous emphasis and technical assistance in the past year. In contrast, less improvement was generally reported in the areas of curriculum, the use of assessment data, student behavior, and the relevance of PD. Curriculum and assessment are key focal points for the coming year, and these data suggest that student support services and the agenda for PD may warrant attention at Academy and Putnam, in particular.

Data suggest that some improvement is evident on these intermediate indicators of success, but that improvement varies widely across schools. It is not yet clear how short-term gains or optimism perceived by staff of these schools will translate to longer-term impacts on student learning. Each school offers a unique context for change and may therefore be expected to differ in its experience at this early point in the conversion process. Finally, these ratings are subjective perspectives of a subset of staff.

**ES Table 1: Percent of Returning Staff Reporting Improvement**

Area of Practice or Capacity	Academy Middle School	Duggan Middle School	Putnam V-T High School	The English High School
Number of returning staff completing survey	N = 11	N = 19	N = 92	N = 59
Freedom to Make Decisions	55%	94%	54%	65%
Sense of Direction	9%	94%	60%	85%
Focus on Student Needs	20%	94%	58%	77%
Sense of Collegiality	27%	94%	36%	66%
Approach to Student Support	10%	88%	55%	78%
Staff Collaboration	45%	89%	54%	73%
Use of Assessment Data	0%	71%	36%	52%
Quality of Instruction	20%	100%	57%	76%
Curriculum	22%	67%	43%	43%
Relevance of PD	18%	88%	28%	60%
Student Behavior	0%	83%	25%	76%

Source: 2008 Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey

### Commonwealth Pilot Schools Initiative Is Moving Schools in the Right Direction

Among survey respondents, 66% felt the Initiative was moving their school in “the right direction.” This optimism was highest in Duggan (88%) and English (72%), but also evident at Putnam (57%) and Academy (56%). Few respondents (6%) believe their school is heading in the wrong direction and many are reserving judgment. In interviews, many Putnam teachers were reluctant to attribute school improvement to its conversion to a Commonwealth Pilot, commenting that its current direction was established prior to conversion.

In a related finding, 55% of returning staff believe that their school’s capacity to improve student learning has improved in the past year, led by Duggan (100%), English (62%) and Putnam (46%). At Academy, 20% of staff felt this capacity had improved, while 70% said it remained the same.

### Sustainability is a Central Concern as Schools Look Forward

Among returning teachers, 60% reported an increase in hours worked per week, led by Academy (80%) and English (79%), and followed by Duggan (55%) and Putnam (45%). These data generally track with perceptions of sustainability. Among Academy’s staff, only 30% agreed that their current pace was sustainable, compared to other schools where responses ranged from 49% at English to 59% at Putnam. Overall, 95% of respondents agreed that staff in their school were busier than the year before. In this context, staff morale may be important to sustainability. In total, 49% of respondents agreed that morale was high in their school, with Duggan (90%) and Academy (13%) at the extremes.

Funding to continue current levels of staffing and technical assistance also emerged as an issue with implications for sustainability of the initiative, as both English and Academy currently benefit from supplemental funding. At English, teachers receive 15.4% bonuses for working an extended day, funded by the BPS Superintendent’s Schools program. It is unclear whether this funding will be available after SY09. Academy uses ELT funding to support staff positions and extended day schedules, and operates in an under-funded district. In Springfield, additional staff hours must be compensated at a per diem rate, and Duggan and Putnam will need to find this money from within their own school-based budgets in SY10.

Under these conditions, schools will need to work to generate new revenues, and find efficiencies in their deployment and use of staff and program resources. CCE has introduced school staff to sustainable models in existing BPS pilots through its Pilot Residency program. English and Academy may have the most pressing need to identify new revenue sources, such as grant and foundation funding. Revenue generation may challenge all four schools, particularly those with limited administrative resources, such as Academy. All schools may require assistance to develop this capacity.

### III. Lessons Learned

The experiences of leaders and staff in the four schools in this Initiative highlight some important lessons learned that may inform strategy development with respect to both the design/planning and implementation phases of the Commonwealth Pilot Schools Initiative.

#### Design and Planning Phase

Key lessons learned regarding the *school design and planning phases* include the following:

- Not all schools or districts are suited to the turnaround model as it is currently structured. Selection criteria may help identify those best positioned to benefit from the model.
- The school design process is a complex undertaking that may require more time than was possible in the Initiative's first year.
- Commonwealth Pilot Design Plans should explicitly include plans for district support of programs and autonomies, as well as for mitigating the impacts of enrollment and staffing changes on other district schools.

#### Implementation Phase

Key lessons learned regarding the Initiative's *implementation phase* include the following:

- Significant school-level change takes time, and not all Design Plan proposals can be realized in the first year.
- Support needs during conversion may vary across schools and districts. Technical assistance provided through the Initiative should be targeted to the highest priority needs at each school.
- Schools participating in this Initiative may not always benefit from simultaneous participation in other major redesign efforts, particularly where resources are limited.
- Outside facilitation and expertise are vital to school design and initial conversion, especially in districts with no prior experience with the pilot school model.
- Ongoing support may be needed to help schools and districts establish autonomies.
- The Initiative's impact on student achievement will be difficult to disentangle from changes in student enrollment patterns, both at Commonwealth Pilots and at other district schools.
- Although improved student achievement is the Initiative's ultimate goal, it will take time for this outcome to be realized. In the interim, short-term and intermediate outcomes may be monitored through reporting and accountability benchmarks.

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## Introduction

In November 2006, four schools identified as candidates for designation as “chronically underperforming” schools were invited by the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (the Board) to convert to Commonwealth Pilot Schools. Each of these schools—Academy Middle School in Fitchburg, John J. Duggan Middle School in Springfield, Roger L. Putnam Vocational High School in Springfield, and The English High School in Boston—had been in underperforming status for four years or more. In June 2008, this initial cohort completed their first year as Commonwealth Pilot Schools.

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of the progress and outcomes associated with the initial implementation of these schools’ Design Plans, as well as key lessons learned regarding the design/planning and initial implementation phases of the Initiative. It was developed by the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute (the Institute), which serves as the statewide evaluator for the Commonwealth Pilot Schools Initiative.

### The Commonwealth Pilot School Model

The Commonwealth Pilot Schools Initiative (the Initiative) is intended to introduce substantive reform to schools struggling with persistently low student achievement, and is patterned on a model in place in the Boston Public Schools (BPS). The Boston Pilot Schools model was developed by the BPS and the Boston Teachers Union (BTU) in 1995. Since that time, the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) has served as coordinator and advocate for Boston’s Pilot Schools.<sup>1</sup>

Program guidelines specify that Commonwealth Pilot Schools are granted autonomy in five operational areas: (1) staffing and hiring, (2) school schedule and calendar, (3) curriculum and assessment, (4) governance, and (5) budget. Implementation of these autonomies required that each participating district develop a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with its local teachers’ union, exempting proposed Commonwealth Pilot Schools from union contract work rules, while defining conditions under which school-level work rules could be established.

### The Conversion Process

Following the agreement of district superintendents, school committees, union leadership, and school faculties to pursue conversion as an alternative to designation as a “chronically underperforming” school, schools engaged in an intensive pre-pilot planning process led by a school design team. These teams—comprised primarily of school leaders and faculty and supplemented to varying degrees by representatives of district administration, community partners, and school parents—developed and revised Commonwealth Pilot Design Plans with the support of CCE coaches. Design Plans, which described the changes to be pursued by each school in the coming years, were approved by the Board in March 2007.

Once established as Commonwealth Pilots, each school developed a Work Election Agreement (WEA). The WEA serves a key role in defining school operations and teacher working conditions for the upcoming school year. Teachers and student support staff who wanted to remain at the school were required to sign their school’s agreement, thereby accepting its provisions. School leaders were not under obligation to rehire staff who signed the WEA, as their new staffing autonomy allowed them to release staff whose skills or vision for school improvement did not align with the school’s needs or direction. Staff who chose to leave the school or were not

<sup>1</sup> In fiscal year 2007, there were 20 pilot schools in the Boston Public Schools. At that time, the Fitchburg Arts Academy in Fitchburg was the only Massachusetts pilot school outside the Boston Public Schools.

invited to return by their leaders were guaranteed the right to a position in another school in their district, provided they had professional status under the established union contract.<sup>2</sup>

In September 2007, following extensive planning and professional development that extended through the summer months, each of the four schools opened its doors to students. Some changes called for in school Design Plans were already in effect, while many others were either in-process or in a planning stage. Throughout the 2007-2008 school year, schools continued to plan and implement changes associated with their conversion.

## The Purpose and Organization of this Report

The purpose of this report is to explore the progress and outcomes associated with the initial implementation of these four schools' Design Plans, and to identify lessons learned regarding the use of the Commonwealth Pilot Schools model as an intervention in struggling schools. Implementation progress and preliminary outcomes are presented on a school-by-school basis and are organized as follows:

- I. *School Characteristics and Achievement.* This section discusses the fundamental characteristics of each school—including student enrollment, staffing, and schedule—that may be modified when a traditional public school is converted to a Commonwealth Pilot School. Consideration of these data and their potential influence on student performance is critical to assessing long-term outcomes at each school. This section also presents recent trends in student achievement, focusing on school-level Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test results.
- II. *Key Operational and Programmatic Changes.* In their Design Plans, each school proposed changes to curriculum and instruction, staff collaboration and planning, school personalization, and/or governance. This section outlines discusses the extent to which schools were able to implement changes in these areas consistent with school Design Plans. Where key aspects of Design Plan were unable to be instituted, implementation challenges are also discussed. Findings presented in this section reflect key initiatives and processes identified by leaders, staff, and documentation as central to the school's conversion plans and do not encompass all initiatives currently being pursued at each school. Individual subjects are discussed in varying levels of detail depending on the extent to which specific data were available at each school.
- III. *CCE Technical Assistance.* ESE contracted with CCE to provide technical assistance to support each of the four schools. This section discusses the focus of technical assistance during SY08, as identified in coaches' work plans and Progress Reports to ESE. Staff perceptions of selected CCE services are also presented.
- IV. *Preliminary Impacts and Reflection on Current Direction.* The Initiative is intended to improve student achievement by enhancing school capacity, culture, and practices. This section presents survey data regarding the extent to which *returning* teachers and staff perceive improvement in key areas of school culture and operations. Although it is too early to anticipate significant changes in student achievement as measured by MCAS, staff perceptions of each school's current direction and of the sustainability of its current initiatives are also presented, providing some insight into the Initiative's potential for a lasting and positive impact on student outcomes.

Following this school-level exploration of progress and preliminary outcomes is a summary of the overarching conclusions of the first year of the Initiative's evaluation followed by a discussion of key lessons learned through implementation of the Initiative.

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<sup>2</sup> A district-wide reduction-in-force in Fitchburg limited school leadership's ability to exercise hiring autonomy, though school staff with professional status maintained their right to transfer to other district schools.

## Data Sources

Findings presented in this report synthesize data from a variety of sources collected over the first year of the Initiative. This section describes the data obtained through each of these sources, which include: the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), school- and district-level interviews, school and district documentation, the Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey, and interviews and documentation provided by CCE leaders and coaches.

### Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE)

ESE's Office of Information Services collects, validates, and reports a range of data related to public school enrollment and staffing. These data were a primary source of data related to enrollment and demographics; staffing levels and student-teacher ratios; and rates of teacher licensure and highly qualified status.

ESE also makes available school-level results for Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests, which assess student mastery of critical content and skills defined in the state's Curriculum Frameworks. This report features data from MCAS tests with the longest historical basis and which have longest been included in calculation of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the state's accountability system. These include the grade 6 mathematics, grade 7 ELA, grade 8 mathematics, and grade 10 mathematics and ELA exams.

Finally, ESE provided a range of documents from its Commonwealth Pilot Schools archives, which served as the basis for initial engagement with the schools and were used as direct source material. These include: Initiative guidelines and process documentation, approved Design Plans for each school, state review panel reports and notes, and 2008 Progress Reports submitted by each of the participating schools, districts, and coaching teams at the conclusion of the school year. These archives provided substantial documentation. However, the scope and quality of documents varied by school.

### School- and District-Level Interviews

School- and district-level interviews, conducted throughout the school year, provided an opportunity to understand the change process and preliminary impacts of Design Plan implementation from the perspective of leaders and staff at each of the four schools. Structured interviews were conducted with district superintendents<sup>3</sup> and school leaders between August and October 2007, with periodic follow-ups with school leaders, as needed.

Interviews with teachers and staff were conducted over the course of a full-day site visit to each school between February and March 2008. Staff interviews were conducted in small groups, ranging in size from four to eight, and were organized such that administrators and staff were not included in the same interview group. Interviews were conducted using predefined protocols that focused on: (1) changes implemented as a result of conversion, (2) the impact of changes on teaching and learning, (3) challenges encountered in implementation, and (4) preliminary feedback regarding the efficacy of the Commonwealth Pilot School model.

### School and District Documentation

Schools and districts were asked to provide documentation to support an analysis of historical baselines and initial changes at each school. Compliance with these requests varied, but was good overall. Documents made available to the evaluation differed in form and content across schools and districts, but commonly included: student bell

<sup>3</sup> In Boston, an interview was conducted with BPS Chief Operating Officer, James McIntyre, a designee of the then-acting superintendent.

schedules; teacher schedules, inclusive of common planning time, meetings, and professional development; school staff rosters; professional development calendars; and documents related to teacher turnover. The majority of these documents were first analyzed and summarized in an interim evaluation report, which can be downloaded at [http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/0308pilotsch\\_eval.doc](http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/0308pilotsch_eval.doc).

### Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey

In May 2008, administrators and staff of each school participated in a survey that measured perceptions of baseline conditions and of recent changes in school characteristics, practices and capacity. The 20-minute survey was administered to all available teachers, student support staff, and administrators. It posed questions regarding educator profile and workloads, as well as perceptions regarding professional development and staff meeting time, student advisory, school governance, school vision and culture, student culture, curriculum and instruction, CCE technical assistance support, and the initial impacts of conversion. Surveys were administered on-site by Institute staff, with all possible precautions taken to ensure respondent anonymity.

Data analysis included descriptive statistics, basic frequencies, and sub-group analysis using cross-tabulation. Chi-square tests were used to determine the significance of differences among sub-group responses to survey questions, with a .05 confidence level.

### Center for Collaborative Education Staff Interviews and Documentation

Beginning in September 2007, Institute researchers conducted periodic interviews with CCE leaders, research staff, and coaches. These included substantive discussions related to the Commonwealth Pilot School model, as well as its implementation and CCE coaching at each of the four schools. Ongoing communication was maintained with lead coaches at each of the schools, who provided a range of documents relevant to schools' implementation of their Design Plans. The focus of coaching services varied by school, leading to some variation in the documentation coaches were able to provide.

CCE provided documents pertaining to the Boston Pilot School model, including program guidelines, operational documents, and research reports and data collection protocols. On a school-by-school basis, commonly received documents included: SY08 and SY09 Work Election Agreements (WEAs) and related planning documents; SY08 and SY09 work plan agreements with each school; professional development calendars and planning documents; administrative and other leadership team meeting schedules and agenda; staff meeting schedules and agendas; and governing board rosters, meeting agenda and minutes. Not all documents were received from all schools.

## Academy Middle School, Fitchburg

Following are interim evaluation findings related to Academy Middle School in Fitchburg. Data sources include ESE data, district- and school-provided documents, leader and staff interviews, a staff survey, and ongoing documentation provided by CCE coaches. The interview process engaged 25 of Academy's staff, including its principal. In addition, 33 educators—83% of the school's eligible staff—participated in the 2008 Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

### I. School Characteristics and Achievement

Fitchburg is a former industrial center located in north central Massachusetts with a population of 40,000 that is estimated to be 75% white, 15% Hispanic, 4% Asian, and 3% African American.<sup>4</sup> The FPS district provides educational services to approximately 5,300 students in 10 schools, including four middle schools. Academy shares a building with one of these middle schools, the Fitchburg Arts Academy, which is the only traditional pilot school in Massachusetts outside the City of Boston.

Academy Middle School also participates in ESE's Expanded Learning Time (ELT) Initiative. ELT is a school redesign initiative that provides schools with additional funding to support an expanded school day (or year) for the purposes of increasing both time in learning for students and time for faculty planning and professional development. Individual grant recipients determine how best to deploy these additional resources. Academy's Design Plan and ELT implementation plan are intertwined.

#### A. Student Enrollment and Demographics

In 2007-2008 (SY08), Academy Middle School served a student population of 368 in grades 5 through 8, a decrease of 20% from its SY07 enrollment of 462. This decrease was not the result of a need to downsize to meet Initiative guidelines,<sup>5</sup> but reflects the continuation of a downward enrollment trend that began in 2002. FPS district officials attribute the trend to intra-district choice and decreased demand for placement at Academy.

**Figure 1: Student Profile, Academy Middle School**

	SY06 (N=516)	SY07 (N=462)	SY08 (N=368)
Low-Income Status	80%	77%	78%
Non-White	64%	71%	71%
First Language Not English (FLNE)	36%	39%	33%
Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	23%	7%	11%
Special Education	18%	21%	24%

Source: MA ESE Information Services. Selected Populations Data.

As seen in Figure 1, Academy's student population was 78% low-income, 71% non-white, 33% first language not English (FLNE), and 11% limited English proficiency (LEP) in SY08. This profile does not appear to have changed substantially as a result of Commonwealth Pilot conversion. However, there is a three-year trend of

<sup>4</sup> MISER State Data Center analysis of Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF 1) 100-Percent Data.

<sup>5</sup> Small school size is a key feature of the pilot model, and schools in the cohort serving student populations larger than 450 were asked to decrease their enrollment or convert to multiple small schools sharing a common school building.

increasing special education rates and high volatility in the proportion of students reported as LEP. In interviews, several staff expressed their belief that the school's student population has become increasingly challenging, irrespective of demographic trends. Some attributed this to intra-district choice, noting that the school's poor reputation has triggered some concerned parents to seek other options.

## B. Administrators and Staff

Academy operates with an administrative team consisting of a building principal and one assistant principal. Principal Susan Quick was hired by FPS in June 2007 following the previous principal's departure. Academy is the only school in the Commonwealth Pilot Schools cohort to transition to a new principal during the conversion process. Principal Quick was considered well suited to the position due to her past experience with the Turning Points® model of middle school reform, which was a centerpiece of the school's Design Plan.

As shown in Figure 2, the school's SY08 teaching staff consisted of 34 teachers, measured in full-time equivalency,<sup>6</sup> a decrease of 17% from the previous year. Staffing levels decreased by a smaller proportion than did student enrollment, resulting in improved student-teacher ratios. Rates of teacher licensure and highly qualified status were reported to be 99.5% in SY07. The proportion of staff identified as highly qualified in SY08 was unavailable; however, ESE reported that 100% of the school's SY08 core academic classes were taught by highly qualified teachers.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 2: Staffing Profile, Academy Middle School**

	SY06	SY07	SY08
Total Number of FTE Teachers	45	41	34
Student-Teacher Ratio	11.6	11.4	10.9
Percent of Teachers Licensed in their Teaching Assignment	95.5%	99.5%	100%
Percent of Core Academic Teachers Identified as Highly Qualified	98%	99.5%	n/a

Source: MA ESE Information Services. Teacher Data.

District officials report that in SY07, Academy had 44 teaching and student support staff covered under teaching contracts who were required to sign the school's Work Election Agreement (WEA) in order to remain at the school.<sup>8</sup> Those who chose not to sign the WEA were given the opportunity to request transfer to other district schools. Ultimately, 27 positions were vacated at the end of SY07, a staff turnover rate of 61%. Of those who left, 15 exercised their right to transfer, 4 retired or resigned, and 8 who were on provisional teaching contracts were released as part of a district-wide reduction-in-force (RIF).

As a result of the RIF, the principal did not have the flexibility to exercise the autonomy over staffing that is central to the pilot school model. Typically, this autonomy allows leaders to release staff not matched to the school's needs and those with professional contracts are entitled to other positions within the district. The RIF did not, however, limit the rights of teachers with professional status to transfer to other district schools. Accordingly, most of Academy's turnover was initiated by staff. Some district and school staff suggested that many teachers supported conversion specifically because it would allow them to leave Academy for positions elsewhere in the district.

<sup>6</sup> Full-time equivalency (FTE) is a measure of staffing that indicates how many individuals would have been employed had all work, including that done by part-time workers, been performed by full-time employees.

<sup>7</sup> Beginning in SY08, ESE reports highly qualified rates as the proportion of academic *classes* taught by highly qualified instructors.

<sup>8</sup> School-reported teacher counts may differ from official ESE figures for several reasons, including, but not limited to, the fact that school-provided figures relate staff counts as opposed to FTE measurements, and may differently attribute itinerant district staff to individual schools. Differences in reporting dates may also result in discrepancies.

Academy's high turnover rates created a need for substantial new hiring, despite declining enrollment. Principal Quick reported that she had 23 positions to fill when she came into the job, including part-time staff to teach enrichment and ELT activities outside the regular school day. She noted that the search process relied largely on existing district applicant lists, and that she sought out people who were committed to children and who could bring diverse perspectives to their work. According to school leaders and coaches, finding qualified staff in the Fitchburg area is a major challenge, and Academy began its school year with four enrichment positions and two coaching positions unfilled. As late as December, the school was still seeking to fill nine positions, complicating implementation of its Design Plan and ELT strategy.

Staff survey data displayed in Figure 3 indicates that the teachers who joined Academy in SY08 reported fewer years of teaching experience than staff who returned from the previous year. One third of new teachers reported that they had been teaching for three years or fewer, compared to 10% of the returning staff. Definitive data were not available regarding the experience level of teachers who left Academy at the end of SY07.

**Figure 3: Experience among SY08 Teachers, Academy Middle School**

	New Hires (N=15)	Returning (N=10)	Total (N=25)
First-year teacher	13%	n/a	8%
Three or fewer years	33%	10%	24%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

### C. School Schedule

Academy used its ELT funding, as well as its Commonwealth Pilot autonomy, to implement dramatic changes to its schedule. In SY07, the school maintained a traditional five-day-per-week, six-hour-per-day schedule. Its weekly SY08 schedule featured a lengthened "regular" school day and two shorter "alternative" days, as displayed in Figure 4. The use of an alternative day reflects a common scheduling strategy among existing pilot schools to facilitate time for faculty collaboration or professional development among groups of teachers who would otherwise not have an opportunity to meet during the school day. This schedule increased time-on-learning available during the standard school day and also provided additional program time for students after the standard school day.

Under the SY08 schedule, students attend school from 8:00 am to 4:00 p.m. daily, with the exception of Wednesdays, when they are released at 12:45 p.m. The workday for teachers ends at 3:15 p.m. Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays, 2:30 p.m. on Thursdays, and at 3:00 p.m. on Wednesdays, when school-wide professional development activities occur.<sup>9</sup> School staff were not required to participate in the time beyond the standard school day, as this time was not included in the school's WEA. Instruction during this time was delivered by the school's designated ELT cadre, including teachers who opted to serve in this role, who received a stipend to do so.

**Figure 4: SY08 School Schedule, Academy Middle School**

	Regular Day	Alternative Days	
	Monday, Tuesday, Friday	Wednesday	Thursday
Standard Day	8:00 a.m. to 3:15 p.m.	8:00 a.m. to 12:45 p.m.	8:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.
Additional ELT	3:15 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.	No added ELT time	2:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

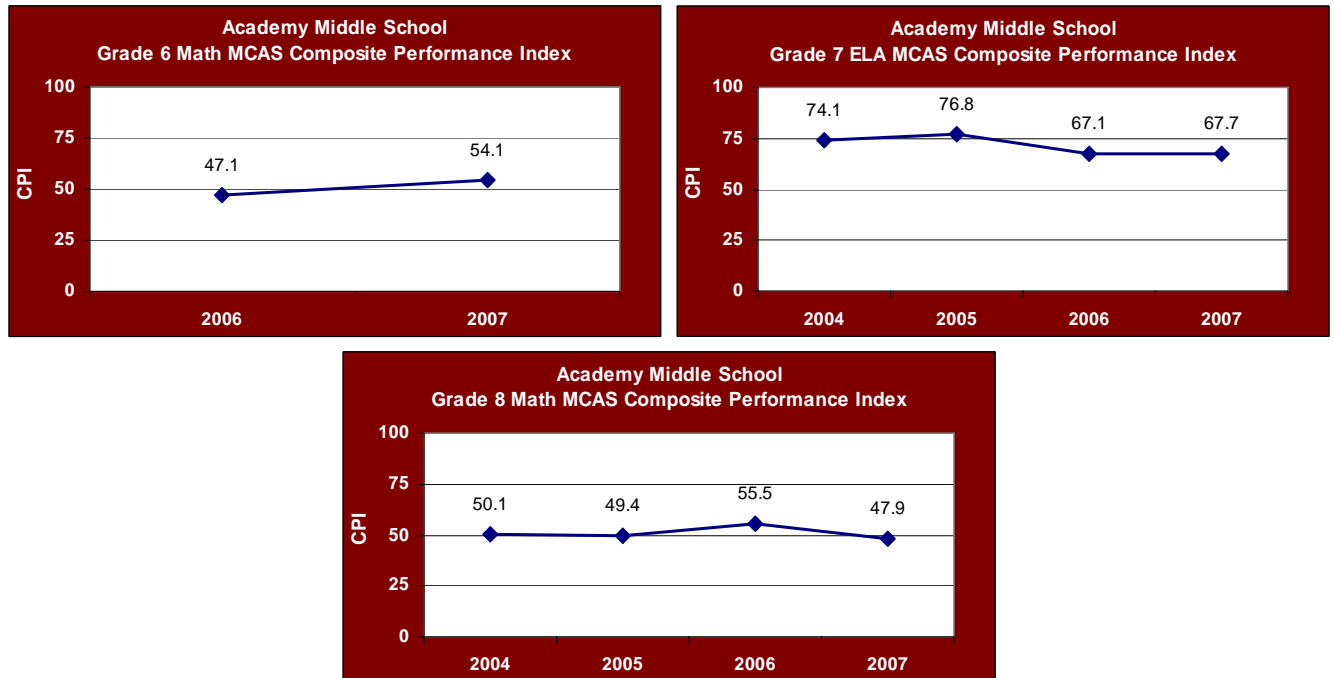
Source: School schedule documents provided by Academy Middle School.

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that teachers were required by the WEA to be on-site five minutes before and five minutes after the standard day.

## D. Student Achievement

Students at Academy have struggled to achieve proficiency on MCAS examinations, and in 2002 the school was designated “under-performing” by the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. Since that time, Academy has failed to demonstrate substantial improvement. The school did not meet its aggregate adequate year progress (AYP) targets in ELA in 2006 and 2007, and has failed to meet aggregate AYP in mathematics since 2004. The charts contained in Figure 5 show MCAS trends as measured by ESE’s Composite Performance Index (CPI).<sup>10</sup> Although performance on the Grade 6 mathematics MCAS improved from SY06 to SY07, there is little evidence of progress on other assessments.

**Figure 5: CPI Trends, Academy Middle School**



Source: MA ESE Information Services. MCAS Performance Results.

## II. Key Operational and Programmatic Changes

While changes to student enrollment, staffing, and schedule are the most immediate and tangible impacts of Commonwealth Pilot conversion at Academy, the school’s Design Plan also includes a series of operational and programmatic changes intended to improve teaching and learning. As summarized in this section, these included changes to curriculum and instruction, time for professional collaboration and development, development of a more personalized school setting, and the institution of new governance structures.

### A. Enhancing Curriculum and Instruction

Academy proposed to adopt the Turning Points® model of middle school reform and a series of ambitious reforms to teaching and learning, including a new school schedule and a fundamental redesign of its curriculum. In its first year as a Commonwealth Pilot School, Academy implemented a schedule consistent with the priorities outlined in its Design Plan. The school has taken preliminary steps toward the development of a new curriculum, and there are plans to make that goal a central focus during summer 2008.

<sup>10</sup> CPI is a calculation used to summarize MCAS achievement and illustrate progress toward proficiency. For a more detailed explanation of how CPI is calculated, refer to the MA ESE “School Leaders’ Guide to the 2007 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Reports” (pp. 4-6).

## Instructional Schedule

As presented in Figure 6, SY08 saw the implementation of a new school schedule that increased Academy's weekly time in learning by nearly six hours. Overall, the weekly schedule provided more than 34 hours of possible instructional time, including after-school ELT time. ELT funding played a critical role in leveraging the overall increase in time in learning.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 6: Weekly Time in Core Academic Subjects (hrs:mins), Academy Middle School<sup>12</sup>**

	SY07	SY08	Change	% Change
Time in the standard school day	28:20	30:30	2:10	8%
Additional ELT time after standard day	-	3:45	3:45	
<b>Total</b>	<b>28:20</b>	<b>34:15</b>	<b>5:55</b>	<b>21%</b>
ELA	4:31	10:10	5:39	125%
Mathematics	4:31	7:10	2:39	59%
Science	4:31	3:35	-0:56	-21%
History/social studies	4:31	3:35	-0:56	21%
<b>Total</b>	<b>18:04</b>	<b>24:30</b>	<b>6:26</b>	<b>36%</b>
Percent of total time in learning dedicated to these four core subjects	64%	72%	-	-

Source: Analysis of school schedules and related documents provided by Academy Middle School.

Academy also lengthened its standard instructional block to 90 minutes and reallocated what was once evenly distributed time to reflect a greater emphasis on mathematics and English language arts (ELA). On regular school days in SY08, students received one block of instruction in both mathematics and ELA, plus an additional 60 minutes of ELA taught by the school's enrichment cadre, which includes some ELT staff. Science and history/social studies classes were taught as half-year block courses in grades 7 and 8, and as daily half-blocks (45 minutes) in grade 6. Principal Quick would like to equalize time for ELA and mathematics in the coming year; lack of mathematics teachers in her ELT enrichment cadre was an obstacle in FY 08.

This new schedule reflects a substantial departure from the school's SY07 instructional schedule. That schedule featured a rotating five-day schedule comprised of six instructional blocks that allocated time evenly among four core academic subjects—ELA, mathematics, science, and history/social studies. For all grades, four of the six blocks were dedicated to these core academic subjects, with one block set aside for daily enrichment instruction. The remaining block was used to provide either MCAS preparation (grades 6-8) or mathematics enrichment (grade 5).

Teachers reported that working with fewer student groups for a longer period of time each day was a positive development for teaching and learning. As one teacher noted, with the longer instructional blocks, "students have time to digest and reflect on what we teach. In SY08, most teachers reported leading three classes per day, down from five the previous year. Teachers of grade 6 science and social studies classes may teach more given these classes occur in daily half-blocks.

ELT funding was essential to the implementation of a new schedule that increased time on learning. However, implementing the school's new ELT program presented challenges that hindered progress on other important initiatives outlined in the school's Design Plan. Academy lacked sufficient ELT and enrichment staff to

<sup>11</sup> Academy proposed an alternative schedule in its Design Plan should it not receive ELT funding. That schedule would have slightly decreased weekly time in learning to accommodate increased staff collaborative time.

<sup>12</sup> The school schedule presented here is for in grades 6 through 8. Fifth grade is taught in self-contained classrooms, and as such, it is difficult to definitively measure instructional time without observational studies.

adequately support all scheduled instructional time, and although some ELT positions were filled by Academy teachers, teachers reported that some positions were filled by unskilled or unreliable personnel, which contributed to student management problems within the school. Academy will change its approach in the coming year, incorporating all ELT time into the standard school day so that teachers are available to provide ELT instruction.

## Curriculum

Academy proposed adopting a school-wide, integrated approach to building literacy skills guided by the Turning Points® model. Further, it pledged to develop a new curriculum organized around “themes, essential understandings, and essential questions,” an approach proposed by Wiggins and McTighe.<sup>13</sup> School leaders and staff report that Academy lacked sufficient time to undertake a thoughtful redevelopment of its curriculum in SY08, but is poised to do so starting in summer 2008.

Academy did devote some of its 2007 summer planning time to this work and continued discussions relative to curriculum reform throughout the year. However, the timetable for curricular redesign proposed in the Design Plan was considered unrealistic given the level of staff turnover during summer 2007. Further, a set of initially proposed curricular changes was not implemented due to lack of alignment with the district’s Galileo assessment program. This exemplifies the tension that can emerge as Commonwealth Pilot Schools attempt to exercise curriculum autonomy without adequate planning. Principal Quick noted that Academy will dedicate time to curriculum development this summer with the support of a small targeted assistance grant from ESE.

### *B. Building a Professional Learning Community*

Another key goal identified in Academy’s Design Plan was the development of a school-wide professional learning community in which teachers “reflect on their work and progress in a systematic way.” This section presents an overview of changes in the amount and frequency of time available for professional collaboration and development at Academy, as well as staff perspectives on the use of collaborative professional time as reported on the spring 2008 survey.

## Time for Professional Collaboration and Development

Academy added substantial time for professional collaboration (including time for staff to meet and receive professional development) through its new weekly schedule. As shown in Figure 7, the SY08 schedule provided five hours for professional collaboration time each week, up from just over one hour in SY07. Teacher schedules continued to include a daily 45-minute individual planning block. Schedules are now coordinated such that grade-level teachers share the same individual planning block, allowing them to spend additional time in collaboration, at their discretion.

**Figure 7: Weekly Collaborative and Individual Planning Time (hrs:mins), Academy Middle School<sup>14</sup>**

	SY07	SY08	Change	% Change
Professional collaboration time	1:08	5:00	+3:52	341%
Individual planning time	3:45	3:45	-	-

Source: Analysis of interview data and teacher schedules provided by Academy Middle School.

<sup>13</sup> For more information on the model, see Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by Design*, 2nd ed. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

<sup>14</sup> Calculations for all schools reflect time available to staff who teach in core academic subject areas, and are inclusive of time in the schedule on a daily, weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly basis, adjusted to reflect weekly average totals.

## Staff Perceptions of Collaborative Professional Time

Increased professional collaboration time may provide opportunities for a variety of activities that enhance information sharing among teachers and support the development of a professional staff culture. At Academy, this time is devoted to professional development (PD), whole-school meetings, academic department meetings, and grade-level teacher team meetings. Academy dedicated the largest portion (three hours, or 60%) of its weekly collaborative time to grade-level teacher team meetings. This time, which occurs within the standard school day, is enabled by coordinated enrichment instruction, which creates 3 one-hour-long common planning blocks. (One result of this approach is that enrichment teachers do not participate in team meetings.) The remaining two hours of professional collaborative time, which occur during the school's Wednesday early-student-release day, are used primarily for weekly PD, although whole-school and/or departmental meetings are also sometimes held.

As presented in Figure 8, staff generally reported that the amount of time devoted to teacher team meetings, professional development, and whole-faculty meetings in SY08 was "just about right." However, findings suggest a need for more frequent departmental meetings, with more than half of staff indicating that too little time is available for these meetings.

**Figure 8: Adequacy of Time for Professional Collaboration, Academy Middle School**

Time for...	Too much	Too little	Just about right
Professional development (PD)	10%	21%	69%
Whole-faculty meetings	15%	15%	69%
Departmental meetings	14%	52%	33%
Teacher team meetings	11%	4%	85%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

Academy's school-based PD focused on subjects defined by the school and was delivered by school's leadership team and principal, as well as consultants from CCE and Commonwealth Corporation.<sup>15</sup> Interview data suggest that early PD activities were primarily related to supporting the use of new structures created in the Design Plan, particularly student advisories and leadership structures, while ongoing PD has focused on the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) to enhance teaching and learning for the school's sizeable population of English language learners, as well as on the use of Individual Student Success Plans within the school.

As presented in Figure 9, 71% of respondents felt whole-faculty meetings were guided by clear objectives, and data show a focus on whole-school improvement during these meetings. A similar proportion reported that department meetings were guided by clear objectives, with 62% agreeing that these meetings are focused on student needs. In total, 89% reported teacher team meetings were guided by clear objectives and focused on student needs, and from the perspective of school staff, this time was used more effectively than time for whole-faculty or departmental meetings. Fewer than half of respondents reported that any of these meetings were central to instructional planning.

<sup>15</sup> Academy was unable to fill mathematics and ELA instructional coaching positions, and hired consultants to fill these roles.

**Figure 9: Percent of Staff who “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” with Statements Regarding Meetings**

Meetings are...	Type of Meeting		
	Whole-faculty	Departmental	Teacher Team
Guided by clear objectives	71%	67%	89%
Focused on school improvement	84%	n/a	n/a
Central to instructional planning	48%	50%	46%
Focused on students and their needs	n/a	62%	89%
Time is used effectively	52%	55%	73%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

### C. Creating a More Personalized School Setting

A central feature of the Commonwealth Pilot School model is the creation of a personalized school environment that is responsive to the needs of its students, and Academy’s Design Plan identified this as a critical goal. The school proposed and implemented two key strategies to achieve this goal: the institution of a daily student advisory program, and the reorganization of student support services and discipline to improve school culture. These changes are discussed in this section, as are school size changes, which also had implications for Academy’s school culture.

#### Student Advisory Programs

Student advisories provide time in the schedule for small groups of students to meet with teachers, and are part of a plan of personalization that is one of the core principles of the Commonwealth Pilot School model. Academy built an advisory program into its design proposal that included a daily advisory class for all students.

Academy’s daily advisory classes were 30 minutes in length in SY08, except on Wednesdays when they were shortened to 10 minutes to accommodate early student release. The program was supported by PD during summer 2007, and a preliminary curriculum was provided. The school’s guidance counselors are responsible for ongoing curriculum development, which is also supported by a consultant from the Commonwealth Corporation’s Communities and Schools for Success (CS2) program. The typical advisory group size was 10 to 12 students, and 88% of teachers who responded to the staff survey reported that they led an advisory group.

As shown in Figure 10, staff generally embrace the notion that advisory strengthens connections between students and staff. However, their survey responses also raise concerns: 70% do not consider the program an effective use of time, and a similar proportion believes the school dedicates too much time to this activity. This may be attributable in part to what 88% of staff believed was a lack of effective advisory curriculum, as well as to staff uncertainty regarding the goals of the program.

**Figure 10: Staff Perceptions of Advisory, Academy Middle School**

Student advisory...	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Goals are clear	12%	36%	44%	8%
Strengthens staff/student connections	13%	70%	9%	9%
Has an effective curriculum	4%	8%	56%	32%
Is an effective use of time	4%	26%	48%	22%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

## Approach to Student Support Services

Academy proposed the development of a Student Support Office responsible for building-wide student management. Academy’s principal reports that she has taken an increased role in student support, sharing disciplinary responsibilities with the assistant principal. While the principal would like to enhance the school’s capacity to provide academic counseling services, teachers generally expressed a need for stronger student management and increased consequences for negative behavior to address what they see as escalating disciplinary problems and an unsafe building environment. As one teacher noted, “you can’t fix the problems without fixing discipline.”

Staff noted that problems staffing ELT classes during the regular school day created discipline problems that carried into the halls and subsequent classes. This is one reason the school is modifying its approach to ELT implementation in SY09.

## School Size

The Commonwealth Pilot School model emphasizes small school size as key to creating a personalized school environment, which may be of particular value in urban environments. As discussed earlier, student enrollment declined at Academy, while student-teacher ratios became more favorable as a result of a proportionally smaller decline in staffing.

Survey data suggest that average class size has also improved, as Figure 11 shows. Teachers who remained on staff from SY07 reporting average class sizes that decreased from 19.1 in SY07 to 14.8 in SY08—approximately 23%. In interviews, science and social studies teachers noted that the creation of shorter daily science and social studies classes for some students, and half-year classes for others, resulted in significant decreases in class sizes in those subjects, from nearly 30 students to as few as 15.

**Figure 11: Change in Enrollment and Staffing, Academy Middle School**

	SY07	SY08	Change
Student Enrollment	462	368	-20%
Average Class Size, Returning Teachers	19.1	14.8	-23%

Source: ESE Information Services (Student Enrollment). Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey (Average Class Size).

## D. Establishing Governance Structures

Academy’s Design Plan proposed new governance structures to manage and support its autonomies. These structures include: a leadership team to gather input from and communicate with staff; a governing board to oversee the school’s vision and improvement efforts; and an annual Work Election Agreement (WEA) that sets forth working conditions for school staff. All were implemented during SY08.

### Leadership Team

Academy’s leadership team was established in summer 2007 and held a retreat in August. At the time of leader team formation, the school’s full SY08 staff had yet to be established, and as a result, the team reportedly comprised “a core group of teachers” who remained from SY07.

The Design Plan states that the leadership team will “gather input from and communicate with the rest of staff” regarding PD, communication, decision-making processes, data-based inquiry, and support structures. Interdisciplinary teacher teams and content-area teams are expected to make recommendations to the leadership team. Academy’s ESE Progress Report indicates that the team most recently developed a PD calendar for summer 2008 and SY09.

Staff described the team as having a “tentative beginning.” Although teachers see the leadership team as their “voice” in school governance and decision-making, some expressed concern that this body has limited decision-making power and is “not as productive as it should be.” Academy’s Progress Report indicates that developing and maintaining focus for the leadership team will be a priority for CCE technical assistance in SY09.

## Governing Board

Academy’s governing board was formed in September 2007, with members elected by staff. The group held an initial retreat in October and commenced its regular monthly meeting schedule in November. Its membership consists of the principal, five teachers, five parents, and three community representatives. The principal acknowledges that this current membership includes more teachers than originally outlined in the school’s design proposal, and expects that in SY09 teacher membership will be reduced to three elected teacher representatives and one union representative. An additional community member is also expected to be added in SY09.

By design, Commonwealth Pilot School governing boards are responsible for establishing the annual budget, evaluating the principal, developing the WEA, and setting the school vision and policies. In addition to these responsibilities, Academy’s governing board documents show an emphasis on (1) monitoring and evaluating the school’s ELT program, (2) improving enrichment opportunities for students, and (3) developing a rigorous curriculum. The board also established a public relations sub-committee to enhance the school’s image within the community and increase school-choice interest. For SY09, board involvement in the School Improvement Plan process is expected to increase.

## Work Election Agreement (WEA)

The school’s governing board approved its SY09 WEA by consensus in March 2008. Overall, 75% of surveyed staff reported that they were given an opportunity to provide input as part of the revision process, although only 25% said that they provided substantive input. Of those who provided substantive input, all felt that it had been seriously considered.

The most significant changes to Academy’s SY09 WEA relate to teacher schedules and address critical concerns related to the school’s ELT schedule. Key changes from the SY08 WEA include the following:

- An expansion of the work day for teachers. The SY09 work day will extend from 7:35 a.m. to 3:40 p.m., except on the Wednesday early-release day for students, when teachers will be released at 2:30 p.m. This will add more than 300 additional hours each year for Academy teachers compared to others in the district, supported by ELT funding.
- The creation of an exploratory block within the school day, referred to as an ELT “X-block.” Instruction during this time will be delivered by grade-level team teachers. To support implementation, weekly teacher preparation time for team teachers will increase from 225 minutes to 300 minutes.

These changes incorporate all ELT time within the standard school day. Other WEA changes include the following:

- Enhanced opportunities for staff to contribute to summer curriculum work and PD, organized by the school’s leadership team. Although participation is not mandatory, the principal indicates that it is strongly recommended. Participants will be compensated at the district stipend rate.
- A reduction in the number of required evening parent-teacher conferences from three to two.

### III. Center for Collaborative Education Technical Assistance

The Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) was contracted by ESE to provide technical assistance to Academy in support of its Commonwealth Pilot conversion. Although monitoring and assessment of CCE services was outside the scope of this evaluation, work plans and related data enable a review of the planned focus of CCE services in SY08. Survey data provide feedback regarding staff satisfaction with a subset of those services.

#### A. Focus of Technical Assistance

Academy's CCE team comprised three coaches, one of whom served as lead coach. In collaboration with Academy's principal, they developed a work plan to guide their services in SY08. An analysis of this plan,<sup>16</sup> which allocates 80 planned coaching days to various tasks and sub-tasks, reveals that approximately 71% of planned time (56.5 days) was allocated to supporting the development of a professional learning community. Much of this time was dedicated to building capacity among staff to effectively use newly created collaborative professional time. The majority of this was dedicated to supporting and facilitating staff collaborative time, including teacher team meetings (42 days), departmental meeting/PD time (5 days), and a winter retreat for staff (2 days). Time was also dedicated to supporting targeted PD (7.5 days) related to specific school initiatives.

Additionally, substantial time (18.5 days or 23%) was allocated to the development of school governance and leadership structures, most of which was budgeted to support Academy's newly created leadership team (7 days) and governing board (6.5 days). These activities included assisting with the establishment of initial membership, as well as providing ongoing planning support and meeting co-facilitation. Other activities related to governance and leadership included: supporting Academy's principal and administrative team (4 days) and assisting in the development of the school's SY09 WEA (1 day).

Other technical assistance activities outlined in the SY08 work plan were as follows:

- Assisting math and ELA consultants in developing strategies and a plan for implementing data-based instruction (2 days).<sup>17</sup>
- Providing workshops for faculty on the pilot autonomies (1 day).
- Supporting guidance counselors in the development of a new schedule (1 day).
- Coordinating meetings with the principal and school leaders regarding budget planning (1 days).

Tasks described in work plans reflect initial focus areas of CCE assistance, which may have changed due to school conditions and priorities. As an example, a CCE coaches' report notes that "a great deal of coaching time was devoted to helping [Academy's] new principal navigate a highly complex environment undergoing change," suggesting that additional time beyond the budgeted four hours was devoted to this activity.

#### B. Staff Perceptions of CCE Services

Of the 82% of surveyed Academy staff who expressed an opinion, 44% believed that CCE coaches have helped their school improve. Figure 12 presents staff ratings of two CCE services—meeting facilitation and PD—that were provided in a range of contexts to support multiple constituencies and school programs. As this figure shows, the majority of staff indicated that meeting facilitation services were either good (54%) or excellent (7%). Ratings for CCE's PD services were less favorable. The most common rating was poor (39%), although a similar proportion described services as either good or excellent. Only a small proportion of staff indicated "don't know" in response to these questions, the lowest among the four schools.

<sup>16</sup> CCE work plans allocated tasks and sub-tasks to goals related to individual pilot autonomies or groups of autonomies. This analysis summarizes time devoted to key school goals, and as such, classifications were slightly reconstituted.

<sup>17</sup> Due to Academy's difficulty hiring a qualified coach, the school hired math and ELA consultants to provide coaching services. ELA coaching services were provided by CCE under a separate contract. This time was not included in the CCE work plan.

In interviews, some staff suggested that coaches may have been “regarded as the ‘leadership’ team” in the early stages of conversion. Further, some tension was evident between teachers’ desire to work on what they viewed as immediate and critical needs, and the CCE coaches’ focus on capacity-building and long-term planning. A CCE progress report indicates that organizational issues related to ELT required substantial attention during team meetings, which distracted from coaches’ ability to introduce tools for collaborating and improving instruction and may have been a source of the tension.

**Figure 12: Staff Perceptions of CCE Meeting Facilitation and PD Services, Academy Middle School**

	Valid N	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't Know*
Meeting facilitation	28	7%	54%	21%	18%	9%
Professional development (PD)	28	4%	36%	21%	39%	9%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

\* “Don't Know” responses not included in distribution of valid response (excellent, good, fair, poor)

Two questions targeted CCE’s support for the development of key governance structures—the school’s governing board and leadership team. Figure 13 presents staff ratings of these services, both by members of the team and by all respondents. Among staff serving on Academy’s governing board, ratings were universally positive (17% excellent, 83% good), while overall ratings tended to be good. Ratings for leadership team support were mixed. Among leadership team members, 56% said support for their team was either good or excellent, compared to 48% of staff overall. Many staff indicated “don’t know” in response to these questions, but all respondents who were members of these groups offered a valid response.

**Figure 13: Staff Perceptions of Support for Governing Bodies, Academy Middle School**

		Valid N	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't Know*
Governing board formation	All staff	18	17%	50%	22%	11%	39%
	GB members	6	17%	83%	0%	0%	0%
Leadership team support	All staff	21	10%	38%	19%	33%	30%
	Leadership team members	9	0%	56%	11%	33%	0%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

\* “Don't Know” responses not included in distribution of valid response (excellent, good, fair, poor)

## IV. Preliminary Impacts and Reflection on Current Direction

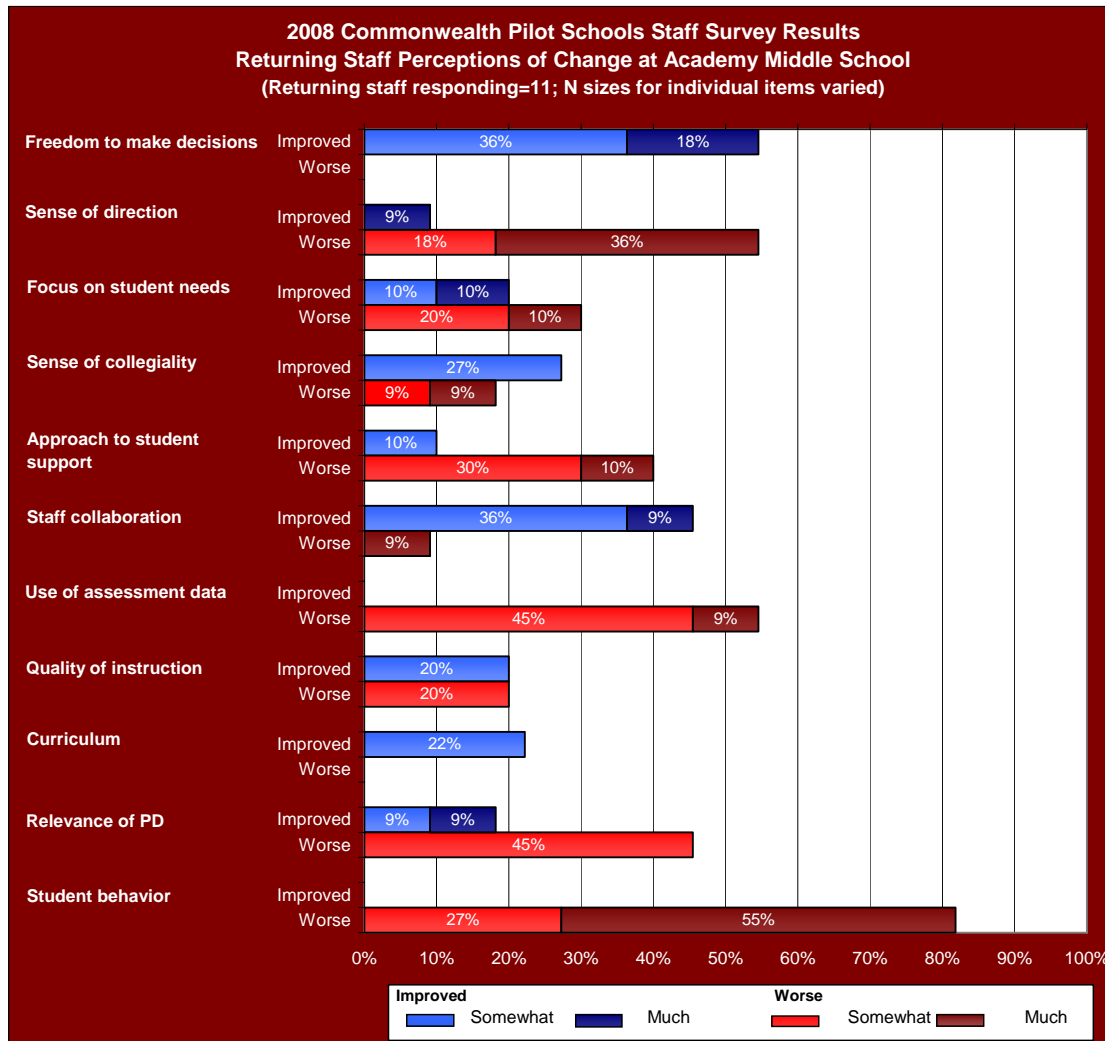
At an early juncture in the Commonwealth Pilot Schools initiative, it is important to gauge staff perspectives on progress and current direction. Long-term bottom-line outcomes, such as improved student achievement, remain on the horizon while the transformative process of becoming a Commonwealth Pilot occurs. This section summarizes survey data regarding immediate, observed changes in school capacity, operation, and culture, as well as staff perspectives on the current direction of their school and the sustainability of their Design Plan.

### A. Preliminary Impacts

Of 33 teachers and staff who responded to the survey, 11 had worked at Academy prior to SY08 and responded to a series of questions related to the preliminary impacts of Design Plan implementation on school characteristics, culture, and capacity. Survey results, presented in Figure 14, suggest that Academy’s first year as a Commonwealth Pilot School has produced mixed results, with increased opportunities for school-based decision-

making and staff collaboration, but substantial erosion with regard to student behavior, the school's sense of direction, and the use of assessment data. The following sub-sections present a more detailed summary of these data, with corresponding baseline data regarding conditions as of spring 2008.<sup>18</sup>

**Figure 14: Preliminary Impacts, Academy Middle School**



Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

## Positive Impacts

Positive impacts experienced by Academy include the following:

- **Freedom to Make Decisions** - 55% of returning staff reported that Academy's freedom to make important decisions at least somewhat improved. Among all staff, 47% agreed that Academy has the freedom to make important decisions.
- **Staff Collaboration** - 45% of returning staff reported that staff collaboration had improved, although a similar proportion said it was unchanged. Among all staff, 55% agreed that staff collaborate effectively.

<sup>18</sup> Small discrepancies of less than one percentage point may be observed between figures reported in-text and those calculated by summing across categories reported in Figure 14. Differences are attributable to rounding.

## Minimal Impacts

Returning staff generally reported that the following had remained relatively unchanged:

- Curriculum - 78% of returning staff said that the curriculum in their subject area had remained about the same, with the remaining 22% indicating that it had improved. Among all staff, 32% agreed that the school currently has a well-conceived curriculum in their subject area.
- Quality of Instruction - 60% of returning staff said that instructional quality had remained the same relative to the previous year, with the remaining 40% evenly split between somewhat improved and somewhat worse. Among all staff, 92% agreed that the school currently provides quality instruction.
- Staff Collegiality - 55% of returning staff said that collegiality among staff had remained the same, although 27% said it was improved. Among all staff, 47% agreed that Academy currently has a very collegial, professional environment.
- Student Support - 50% of returning staff said that the school's approach to student support services had remained about the same, while 40% said that it had worsened. Among all staff, 36% said that the school's approach to student support enhances teaching and learning.
- Focus on Student Needs - 50% of returning staff said that Academy's focus on student needs had remained the same. Among all staff, 62% of departmental meeting participants said that these meetings were focused on student needs, and 89% said that teacher team meetings were used in this way.

School-wide changes to curriculum and instruction are expected to be implemented in SY09, following summer 2008 planning. Interview data also suggest that the school is still working to articulate a unified vision, particularly with regard to student management.

## Adverse Impacts

Adverse impacts experienced by Academy include the following:

- Student Behavior - 82% of returning staff reported that student behavior had worsened, with 55% indicating it was much worse. Among all staff, 97% agreed that student behavior is currently a problem, and 93% believe that student discipline is not well-managed.
- Direction and Vision - 55% of returning staff reported that the school's sense of direction had worsened, with 36% describing it as much worse. Among all staff, 83% indicate that the school is not yet unified in support of a single vision.
- Use of Assessment Data - 55% of returning staff indicated that the school's use of assessment data had worsened. Among all teachers, 54% agreed that staff use assessment data to assess and refine the curriculum.
- Relevance of PD - Despite increased time for school-based professional development, 45% of returning staff said that PD was less relevant than a year ago. Among all teachers, 78% of staff said that PD was relevant to school improvement.

Academy's principal expressed a desire to create inquiry groups, consistent with the school's Design Plan, to improve the school's use of assessment data.

## *B. Reflections on Current Direction*

### **Is This the Right Path?**

Academy staff are cautious with regard to the school's current direction. Overall, 56% of survey respondents believed that the changes undertaken as a result of the Initiative are moving Academy in the right direction, with 31% unsure at this point in time. Further, 70% of returning staff believed the school's ability to improve student learning has remained "about the same" in the past year. Among all staff, 44% reported that the school's CCE coaches helped Academy to improve.

Overall, data suggest that leaders and staff are not yet on the same page regarding the school vision and its plans for improvement. This may not be unexpected given the context: the school has experienced very high turnover, including a leadership change, while simultaneously implementing and staffing a concurrent system-wide redesign with the ELT program. These factors have required the school and its CCE coaches to focus substantial attention on stabilizing the school, which limited the extent to which some Design Plan components could be implemented in SY08. As one teacher noted, "there are a lot of gaps in implementing the pilot school that have set us back. We need to patch those up in order to move in the right direction. We are getting better every day."

### **Is This Sustainable?**

Concerns were expressed in interviews and surveys regarding whether the initiatives associated with the Design Plan can be maintained over the long term. On the staff survey, respondents were unanimous in reporting that they were busier than a year ago. Overall, estimates of hours worked each week increased for 80% of returning classroom teachers, with an estimated average increase of 9 hours per week. Only 30% of staff believe that their current pace is sustainable, and only 13% report that morale is currently high.

A second sustainability concern relates to financial and technical assistance resources. The improvement strategies articulated in Academy's Design Plan rely heavily on the expansion of the school day through the receipt of ELT funding. Although the simultaneous implementation of two major redesign initiatives increased the complexity of the overall change process, ELT resources were instrumental in helping the school realize important scheduling goals, especially within the context of district-wide budget cuts. Interview data also suggest that coaching staff from CCE and other organizations have provided important administrative and leadership support in light of the school's lean administrative team. It is unclear whether the school has sufficient capacity to support continued program implementation if funding were reduced or eliminated.

## Duggan Middle School, Springfield

Following are interim evaluation findings related to Duggan Middle School in Springfield. Data sources include ESE data, district- and school-provided documents, leader and staff interviews, a staff survey, and ongoing documentation provided by CCE coaches. In total, the interview process engaged 23 of Duggan’s staff, including its principal. In addition, 44 educators—81% of the school’s eligible staff—participated in the Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

### I. School Characteristics and Achievement

Springfield is the largest city in western Massachusetts. Its population of 150,000 is estimated to be 49% white, 27% Hispanic, 20% African American, and 2% Asian.<sup>19</sup> Springfield Public Schools (SPS) district provides educational services to 25,000 students, the demographic profile of which differs from that of the city as a whole. Public school enrollment is 53% Hispanic, 24% African American, and 17% white.

The district operates 44 schools, including 6 middle schools serving grades 6 through 8. Fourteen SPS schools participate in the district’s magnet schools program, focusing on a specific area of study or a unique instructional approach. This includes Duggan, which houses an Expeditionary Learning (EL) program. EL schools deliver academic content through active explorations of important questions and engage students in “learning expeditions;” real-world projects, often with an interdisciplinary focus.

#### A. Student Enrollment and Demographics

In 2007-2008 (SY08), Duggan Middle School served 437 students in grades 6 through 8, a decrease of 44% relative to its SY07 enrollment of 778. This decrease was the result of a change in the school’s neighborhood boundaries,<sup>20</sup> implemented by SPS to comply with ESE guidelines relative to Commonwealth Pilot School size.<sup>21</sup>

Downsizing appears to have affected Duggan’s student profile. As Figure 15 shows, In SY08 the school served a substantially smaller proportion of LEP students, as well as decreased proportions of FLNE and non-white students. This is consistent with interview data that suggest that the change in neighborhood boundaries eliminated a zone with a sizeable LEP population.

**Figure 15: Student Profile, Duggan Middle School**

	SY06 (N=699)	SY07 (N=778)	SY08 (N=437)
Low-Income Status	84%	81%	77%
Non-White	91%	87%	82%
First Language Not English (FLNE)	28%	24%	17%
Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	18%	16%	7%
Special Education	27%	26%	28%

Source: MA ESE Information Services. Selected Populations Data.

<sup>19</sup> MISER State Data Center analysis of Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF 1) 100-Percent Data.

<sup>20</sup> SPS primarily relies on a citywide district boundary plan to assign students to middle schools, although students are given the option of attending district magnet schools. As an EL magnet school, Duggan is intended to receive 70% of its students from a geographically-defined “neighborhood” zone and 30% through magnet enrollment.

<sup>21</sup> Small school size is a key feature of the pilot model, and schools in the cohort serving student populations larger than 450 were asked to decrease their enrollment or convert to multiple small schools sharing a common school building.

## B. Administrators and Staff

Although the school has a history of high turnover among leadership and staff, Duggan's current principal, Jonathan Swan, has served since 2004. His administrative team consists of two assistant principals and two deans of students. This staffing strategy reflects a departure from the schools' previous approach, in which administration consisted of a principal and three assistant principals who reportedly focused primarily on discipline. Principal Swan noted that the addition of deans of students allowed the assistant principals to focus on instruction. Additionally, administrators are no longer assigned by grade level, but rather to one of the school's two "houses." Each house is comprised of three teaching teams, one at each grade level

The school's SY08 teaching staff consisted of 42 teachers, measured in full-time equivalency.<sup>22</sup> This reflects a decrease of 29%, a smaller proportional decrease than in student enrollment. As a result, Duggan's overall student-teacher ratio (STR) improved considerably, as shown in Figure 16.

Excluding charter schools, SPS has the lowest rate of teacher licensure and highly qualified status in the Commonwealth. Although licensure and highly qualified rates increased by more than 10 points at Duggan in SY07, they were still considerably lower than district averages of 86% and 81% respectively. Licensure rates remained relatively constant between SY07 and SY08. The proportion of staff identified as highly qualified in SY08 was unavailable; however, ESE reported that 63% of the school's SY08 core academic classes were taught by highly qualified teachers.<sup>23</sup>

**Figure 16: Staffing Profile, Duggan Middle School**

	SY06	SY07	SY08
Total Number of FTE Teachers	66	59	42
Student-Teacher Ratio	10.6 to 1	13.2 to 1	10.5 to 1
Percent of Teachers Licensed in their Teaching Assignment	62%	78%	76%
Percent of Core Academic Teachers Identified as Highly Qualified	55%	66%	n/a

Source: MA ESE Information Services. Teacher Data

School documents indicate that in SY07, Duggan had 62 teachers and student support staff who, under Commonwealth Pilot guidelines, were required to sign the school's Work Election Agreement (WEA) in order to remain at the school.<sup>24</sup> Principal Swan used his staffing autonomy to make dramatic changes to the school's teaching and student support staff. In total, 73% of positions were vacated at the end of SY07. The principal reports that of the 45 staff who were not retained, 31 left at his initiative, while 6 exercised their right to transfer to other district schools. Two teachers reportedly retired and six were promoted within or outside SPS.

High turnover created a need for substantial hiring. To find qualified staff, the school's principal initiated recruitment efforts as early as February 2007, and looked beyond district lists. School representatives attended job fairs in Springfield, Boston, and at the University of Massachusetts, and many prospective staff were reportedly asked to perform demonstration lessons in the classrooms of teachers who were returning for SY08.

Staff survey results, shown in Figure 17, indicate that newly hired teachers were more experienced than the school's returning staff. One third of the new teachers reported teaching for three years or fewer, whereas half of those retained from the previous year reported this level of experience. In interviews, the principal noted that the

<sup>22</sup> Full-time equivalency (FTE) is a measure of staffing that indicates how many individuals would have been employed had all work, including that done by part-time workers, been performed by full-time employees.

<sup>23</sup> Beginning in SY08, ESE reports highly qualified rates as the proportion of academic *classes* taught by highly qualified instructors.

<sup>24</sup> School-reported teacher counts may differ from official ESE figures for several reasons, including, but not limited to, the fact that school-provided figures relate staff counts as opposed to FTE measurements, and may differently attribute itinerant district staff to individual schools. Differences in reporting dates may also result in discrepancies.

school's EL focus helped attract qualified applicants to the school. Definitive data were not available regarding the experience levels of those who left Duggan at the end of SY07.

**Figure 17: Experience among SY08 Teachers, Duggan Middle School**

	New Hires (N=25)	Returning (N=12)	Total (N=37)
First-year teacher	20%	n/a	14%
Three or fewer years	32%	50%	3%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey

### C. School Schedule

As displayed in Figure 18, Duggan used its scheduling autonomy to alter its traditional school schedule by lengthening its regular day by 15 minutes and creating a weekly late-start day for students. The use of an alternative day reflects a common scheduling strategy among pilots to facilitate time for faculty collaboration or professional development among groups of teachers who would otherwise not have an opportunity to meet during the school day. The SPS memorandum of agreement (MOA) regarding pilot schools prohibited schools from adding additional time to teachers' schedules without full compensation.

**Figure 18: Schedule Comparison, Duggan Middle School**

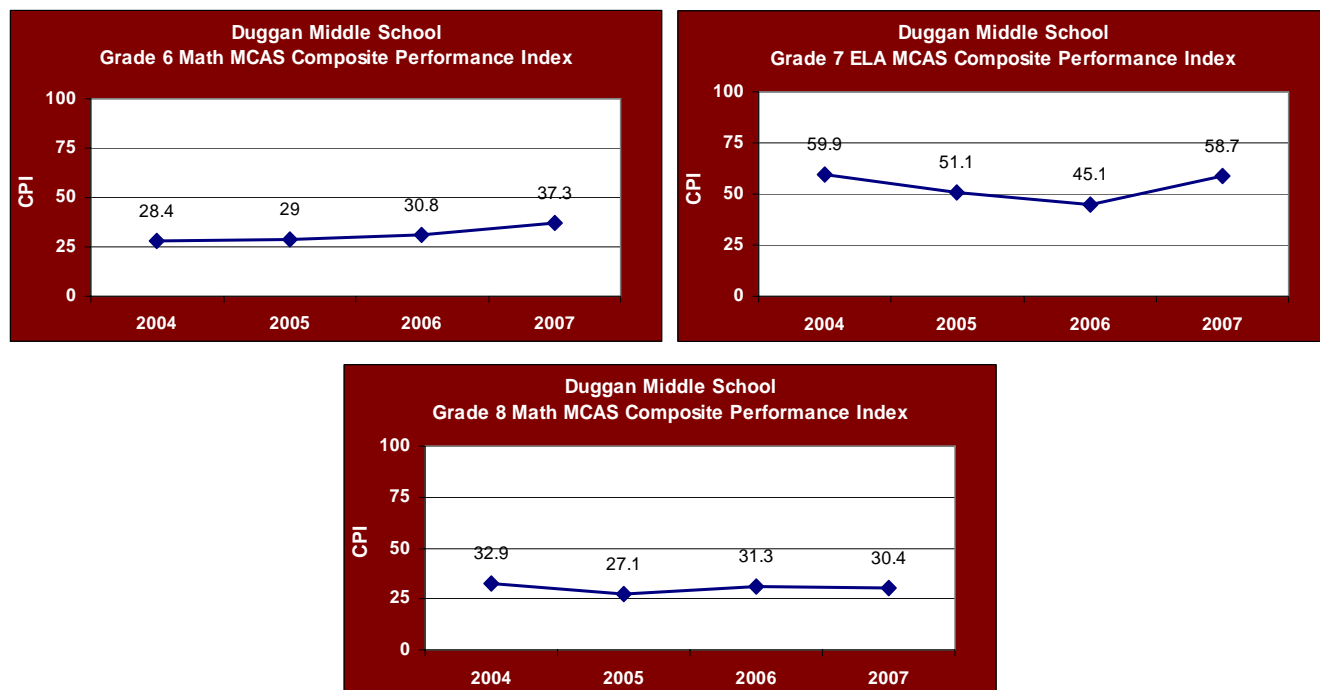
	SY07	SY08
Regular day	Monday – Friday 7:45 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.	Mon, Tues, Thurs, Friday 7:45 a.m. to 2:45 p.m.
Alternative day	n/a	Wed: 10:15 a.m. to 2:45 p.m.

Source: Interview data and school schedule documents provided by Duggan Middle School.

### D. Student Achievement

Students at Duggan have consistently struggled to achieve MCAS proficiency, and the school was declared “underperforming” by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in 2003. Since 2004, the school has failed to meet its adequate year progress (AYP) targets in mathematics and ELA, with respect both to aggregate student performance and to sub-group results. Overall, student performance is very low in ELA and critically low in mathematics, with 67% of grade 6 students and 72% grade 8 students receiving a score in the “warning” level on the 2007 mathematics MCAS. Although performance on the grade 6 mathematics test has improved slightly in recent years, as shown in Figure 19, the school shows no discernable trend toward improvement on other tests as measured by ESE’s Composite Performance Index (CPI).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> CPI is a calculation used to summarize MCAS achievement and illustrate progress toward proficiency. For a more detailed explanation of how CPI is calculated, refer to the MA ESE “School Leaders’ Guide to the 2007 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Reports” (pp. 4-6).

**Figure 19: CPI Trends, Duggan Middle School**

Source: MA ESE Information Services. MCAS Performance Results

## II. Key Operational and Programmatic Changes

Duggan’s Design Plan outlined a series of operational and programmatic changes. These include ambitious changes to curriculum and instruction, development of a professional learning community, increased personalization, and new structures for school-based decision-making and governance.

### A. Enhancing Curriculum and Instruction

During the design process, Duggan—an Expeditionary Learning school since 2004—committed to full implementation of the EL model, a goal it had not attained in previous years. The Design Plan proposed changes to the school’s instructional schedule and identified “active pedagogy,” one of five core practices of EL, as the focus of school improvement during its first year as a Commonwealth Pilot. Consistent with this strategy, Duggan altered its instructional schedule and used autonomies to develop its school-wide capacity to implement EL instructional approaches.

#### Instructional Schedule

Although Duggan’s new school schedule increased the length of its regular day, the introduction of a weekly late-start day for students decreased the amount of available time in learning by 1 hour and 15 minutes, while increasing time for teacher collaboration and professional development, which were considered essential to preparing its staff—many of whom were new to the school—to implement EL.

The amount of weekly instructional time devoted to four core academic subjects in SY07 and SY08 is presented in Figure 20. These data reflect a reallocation of instructional time such that all students receive daily instruction in each of these subjects. Instructional time in science and technology/engineering, and history/social studies, which were only taught on alternating days in SY07, increased, while the total time devoted to mathematics and ELA each week decreased.

**Figure 20: Weekly Time in Core Academic Subjects (hrs:mins), Duggan Middle School**

	SY07	SY08	Change	% Change
Total weekly time in learning	31:15	30:00	-1:15	-4%
ELA	7:30	5:25	-2:05	-28%
Mathematics	7:30	5:25	-2:05	-28%
Science and technology/engineering	3:45	5:25	+1:40	+44%
History/social studies	3:45	5:25	+1:40	+44%
Total	22:30	21:40	- 0:50	-4%
Percent of total time in learning dedicated to these four core subjects	72%	72%	-	-

Source: Analysis of interview data and school schedule documents provided by Duggan Middle School.

Duggan’s schedule was restructured from a four-block daily schedule to one that features five instructional blocks on regular days, and four blocks and a community meeting on weekly late-start days. Block length varied over the course of the week such that blocks in all subjects were 75 minutes on regular days (two per week), 65 minutes on days that advisories were held (two per week), and 45 minutes on the Wednesday late-start day for students. This differs slightly from the schedule proposed in Duggan’s Design Plan, but ultimately accomplishes many of the core objectives identified during that process, including daily instruction in all four core academic subjects and daily enrichment classes.

Increasing the number of blocks in its daily schedule for students resulted in a similar increase in the number of class periods that its teachers conduct. Among returning regular-education teachers, the majority (75%) reported that they were responsible for three class periods each day in SY07, while the same proportion reported teaching four classes each day in SY08.

### Curriculum and Instructional Practice

Although Duggan formally adopted EL as its fundamental design strategy in 2004, interview data suggest that the model’s instructional approaches were unevenly implemented in SY07. To support full implementation of the model’s core practices school-wide, Duggan’s principal used his staffing autonomy to hire and retain educators who he judged to be fully committed to the school’s instructional philosophy. Teachers also received focused professional development in instructional practices consistent with the EL model—including use of student portfolios, reading across the curriculum, and learning expeditions—from consultants from the Expeditionary Learning Schools network.

Interview data suggest that during its first year as a Commonwealth Pilot School, Duggan teachers were required to post “student-friendly” learning targets aligned with state frameworks, as well as implement student portfolios. Most teachers reportedly led a learning expedition or a similar student project, and planning rigorous expeditions will continue to be a key focus in the upcoming school year. Development of another key component of the school’s Design Plan—the development of curriculum-aligned interim assessments—is an expected focus for SY09.

## B. Building a Professional Learning Community

A second goal of Duggan’s Design Plan was to establish a professional learning community in which all teachers are supported in their effort to become reflective practitioners. The school proposed increases in the frequency and duration of time for professional collaboration and development, as well as a more effective system for instructional support and peer observation. Each of these strategies was implemented in SY08.

### Time for Professional Collaboration and Development

As shown in Figure 21, Duggan substantially increased time for professional collaboration—including time for staff to meet and receive professional development (PD)—in SY08, affording teachers a weekly average of 5 hours and 35 minutes. Consequently, individual planning time was reduced substantially, such that teachers received only two individual planning blocks each week. Teacher schedules were coordinated so that teachers on each team have the same block of time for individual planning, enabling teachers to use these blocks for collaborative purposes at their discretion. Although such arrangements were informal, Duggan’s principal estimated that approximately one third of teachers used their individual planning time for collaboration.

**Figure 21: Weekly Collaborative and Individual Planning Time (hrs:mins), Duggan Middle School<sup>26</sup>**

	SY07	SY08	Change	% Change
Professional collaboration time	2:00	5:35	+3:35	+179%
Individual planning time	6:00	2:20	-3:40	-61%

Source: Analysis of interview data and school schedule documents provided by Duggan Middle School.

In SY08, teachers participated in two mandatory teacher team meetings each week, one devoted to curriculum and instructional planning (65 minutes) and the other focused on student support issues (75 minutes). Meetings were observed by administrators to monitor implementation of intended agenda. Teachers also had 2 hours of meeting and professional development time on the school’s late-start day, plus 2 hours and 30 minutes of after-school professional development every other week. This bi-weekly block reflects the school’s consolidation of a weekly 75-minute after-school professional development block required by Springfield district policy.

Enrichment and ELL teachers do not participate in the teacher team meetings, but may participate in planning sessions held on the Wednesday late-start day. Special education teachers who provide pull-out services engage in teacher team planning; those who teach in self-contained classrooms work as their own team and attend departmental meetings for the subject in which they have the greatest need for professional growth.

### Staff Perceptions of Collaborative Professional Time

As Figure 22 shows, staff report that the time devoted to PD, large staff meetings, and departmental meetings was appropriate. However, 53% of teacher team meeting participants expressed a need for more time for this activity.

**Figure 22: Adequacy of Time for Professional Collaboration, Duggan Middle School**

Time for...	Too much	Too little	Just about right
Professional development (PD)	18%	8%	75%
Whole-faculty or house meetings	13%	15%	73%
Departmental meetings	12%	19%	69%
Teacher team meetings	6%	53%	42%

<sup>26</sup> Calculations reflect time available to staff who teach in core academic subject areas, and include time in the schedule on a daily, weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly basis, adjusted to reflect weekly average totals.

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

Documents show that Duggan’s SY08 PD focused primarily on awareness and implementation of new school structures and approaches. These include student portfolios, student-led conferences, looking at student work, active pedagogy, data and assessment use, cooperative discipline, reading across the curriculum, and looping. Teachers noted that summer professional development was critical to acclimating staff to new structures and provided a “foundation for all the work that [teachers and staff] are doing this year.”

On the survey, 86% of staff reported that professional development is well designed and delivered, and more than 90% said that PD is relevant to school improvement goals. In interviews, ongoing PD was described as both “comprehensive and useful.” However, some teachers expressed a desire for more differentiation in PD, to account for differences in teachers’ knowledge and experience.

As Figure 23 shows, staff characterized time spent in all meetings as guided by clear objectives. Large staff meetings were seen as focused on school improvement by most participants (93%). Teacher team meetings were characterized as focused largely on students and their needs, but were also characterized as central to instructional planning by 71% of staff. Nearly 70% reported that departmental meetings were central to instructional planning, with a similar proportion reporting that these meetings are focused on students and their needs. Generally, staff reported that time spent in all meetings was used effectively.

**Figure 23: Percent of Staff who “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” with Statements Regarding Meetings**

Meetings are...	Type of Meeting		
	Whole-faculty/House	Departmental	Teacher Team
Guided by clear objectives	95%	86%	92%
Focused on school improvement	93%	n/a	n/a
Central to instructional planning	65%	73%	71%
Focused on students and their needs	n/a	71%	94%
Time is used effectively	73%	79%	82%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

## Peer Observation and Instructional Feedback

Duggan implemented a formal peer observation program in SY08. Its first round of observations was conducted in fall 2007, with facilitation from CCE coaches, and the program has continued throughout the year. Observations, also referred to as “labs,” are conducted by a small group of teachers, followed by time for reflection on characteristics of the lesson. All teachers are required to participate, either by observing another teacher or by being observed. These labs may be interdisciplinary, which may ultimately support implementation of learning expeditions.

Duggan also proposed new systems to monitor instructional practice and provide support and feedback to teachers. The role of assistant principals was redefined in SY08, such that these individuals are now expected to serve as instructional leaders in their respective houses. Administrators used a building-wide protocol, referred to as “stars and stairs,” to help individual teachers identify strengths and weaknesses, as well as develop strategies to improve. In interviews, teachers indicated that Duggan’s assistant principals were visible, providing instructional support to staff, particularly those who were struggling.

### C. Creating a More Personalized School Setting

In its Design Plan, Duggan proposed to create a more personalized, relationship-oriented school, in which students are all personally known, and adults “identify and fulfill student issues which interfere with student success.” To support this goal, the school implemented a twice-weekly student advisory program and redefined its student support services approach and philosophy. These changes are discussed in this section, along with changes to school size and student-teacher ratios, which also had implications for Duggan’s student culture.

#### Student Advisory Programs

Duggan implemented a student advisory program in the fall of 2007. Referred to as “crew time,” advisories were held twice weekly in 45-minute blocks. Teachers were required to lead an advisory group as part of the school’s WEA, and the school used portions of its summer and ongoing professional development time to support its implementation. Teachers were provided a prescribed curriculum, adapted from an established advisory program used in schools in Ohio, which reportedly emphasizes character-building and includes time to explore student-defined topics. Duggan also used its advisory to support student portfolio development, and advisory leaders helped students prepare to present their work in student-led conferences.

Staff perceptions regarding the school’s advisory program are shown in Figure 24. Overall, 97% of responding teachers reported that they were responsible for leading a student advisory. The vast majority of these advisory leaders (81%) agreed that the program strengthens connections between students and staff, and 74% agreed that the goals of the program are clear. However, only 39% believed the school had an effective curriculum for the program. Staff reported mixed opinions with regard to whether advisory is an effective use of time, with 44% indicating that too much is time dedicated to the program.

**Figure 24: Staff Perceptions of Advisory, Duggan Middle School**

Student advisory...	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Goals are clear	10%	64%	23%	3%
Strengthens staff/student connections	16%	65%	14%	5%
Has an effective curriculum	3%	36%	47%	14%
Is an effective use of time	8%	51%	32%	8%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

#### Approach to Student Support Services

Duggan also proposed school-wide structures focused on “full student support.” The principal indicated that Duggan intends to transform student management by implementing cooperative discipline to handle disciplinary issues in the classroom. CCE coaches facilitated professional development on cooperative discipline and “de-escalation strategies.” Some teachers indicated that the newly hired deans of students support are still adapting to their roles, but have offered strategies to help teachers manage their classrooms. Duggan also eliminated in-house suspension in favor of a Student Support Center that is intended to engage students in regular class work until an action plan is developed by the student’s house dean.

Duggan also created a school-wide Student Support Team (SST), whose membership includes student support staff and facilitators from each of the school’s six service teams. The SST is responsible for reviewing student behavioral data and recommending school-wide student management systems. Documents indicate that the group is currently developing a system to collect and track behavioral data from all teacher teams. CCE’s SY09 work plan for Duggan includes increased coaching time to support these efforts.

## School Size

Duggan’s overall enrollment decreased considerably in SY08, and because staffing levels declined by a smaller proportion than enrollment, student-teacher ratios improved. As Figure 25 shows, class sizes also appear to have improved. On the staff survey, returning regular-education teachers reported that their average class size decreased by nearly one third, from 23.8 to 16.4. Duggan reports that class sizes in grades 7 and 8 were about 16, while classes in grade 6 averaged 11.7. In interviews, teachers indicated that smaller class sizes facilitate effective classroom management.

**Figure 25: Change in Enrollment and Staffing, Duggan Middle School**

	SY07	SY08	Change
Student Enrollment	778	437	44%
Average Class Size, Returning Teachers	23.8	16.4	-31%

Source: ESE Information Services (Student Enrollment). Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey (Average Class Size).

In addition to decreasing its enrollment, Duggan implemented a house structure in which teachers in grades 6 and 7 “loop,” so that students can stay with the same group of teachers for two years. In SY09, grade 6 teachers will move to grade 7 with their students while grade 7 teachers will loop down to work with the incoming class of grade 6 students in September 2008.

### *D. Establishing Governance Structures*

Duggan’s Design Plan proposed new governance structures to manage and support its Commonwealth Pilot autonomies. These structures include: a leadership team to gather input from and communicate with staff; a governing board to oversee the school’s vision and improvement efforts; and an annual Work Election Agreement (WEA) that sets forth working conditions for school staff. All were implemented during SY08.

#### **Leadership Team**

Duggan established a new leadership team for SY08. Described as “a representative form of governance for teachers,” the group comprised six teachers—one from each of the school’s teaching teams—as well as representatives from student support and special education.

The team meets monthly to discuss issues raised in individual teacher teams and make recommendations to the school’s principal and governing board. Documents indicate that the team also discussed staff concerns regarding WEA changes and established a subcommittee to draft a proposed WEA, in conjunction with the principal, for governing board review and approval.

#### **Governing Board**

Duggan’s governing board was formed in October 2007. After holding a retreat that same month, the board met monthly throughout the year. Its membership comprises the principal, four teachers, four parents, two community partners, and two students. The board is chaired by one of its community partners. A new Springfield MOA requires board membership to comprise one more teacher than the total number of parent-, community-, and administrator-members.

Governing board documents define the board’s responsibilities, which include: (1) maintaining the school’s vision, (2) conducting an annual review of student engagement and achievement indicators, (3) ensuring a plan to address gaps in student achievement, (4) developing school policies, (5) approving the budget, (6) assisting in the evaluation and hiring of the principal, and (7) approving the annual WEA. Subcommittees of the board include a

WEA committee, a budget and finances advisory committee, and a principal evaluation committee. In addition, the board also established a fundraising and community outreach committee to engage additional support for the school and a personnel subcommittee to handle the dispute resolution process. The board allows non-member parents to serve on the budget and finance and the fundraising and community outreach committees.

Major policy issues considered by the board at its SY08 meetings included looping for grades 6 and 7 and planning time for teachers. The board is the final decision-maker, but entertains recommendations from Principal Swan, who also conveys recommendations from Duggan's leadership team.

### Work Election Agreement

In March 2008, the board unanimously approved a revised SY09 WEA, which was voted on and approved by a majority of staff that same month.<sup>27</sup> On the staff survey, 68% of teachers and support staff reported that they were given an opportunity to provide input as part of the revision process, and nearly half (48%) said that they provided substantive input. Of those who provided input, 75% said they felt that it had been seriously considered.

Changes to the school's WEA reflect ongoing implementation of Design Plan components, and suggest that the school continues to maintain flexibility with respect to the management of its professional development, curriculum and assessment, collaborative planning, and student support services. This new agreement:

- Requires teachers to participate in a school-based mentoring program, distinct from the SPS Professional Improvement Partner (PIP) and professional development portfolio evaluation programs.
- Eliminates the requirement that teachers follow district pacing guides, allowing the school to develop and implement its own pacing and assessment protocols based on the school's established learning targets.
- Provides teachers with an average of 45 minutes of common planning time per day, and notes that every effort will be made to increase individual planning time for teachers. Individual time was reduced substantially in SY08 to create more time for collaboration.
- Requires teachers to implement cooperative discipline strategies and de-escalation techniques, a key part of the school's student management philosophy.

### III. Center for Collaborative Education Technical Assistance

The Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) was contracted by ESE to provide technical assistance to Duggan in support of its conversion to a Commonwealth Pilot School. Although monitoring and assessment of CCE services was outside the scope of this evaluation, work plans and related data enable a review of the planned focus of CCE services in SY08. Survey data provide feedback regarding the quality of a subset of those services.

#### A. Focus of Technical Assistance

Duggan's CCE team comprised four coaches, one of whom served as lead coach. In collaboration with Duggan's principal, they developed a work plan to guide service delivery in SY08. An analysis of this plan,<sup>28</sup> which allocates 80 planned coaching days to various tasks and sub-tasks, reveals that 73% of planned time (58 days) was dedicated to developing a "high functioning professional collaborative community focused on teaching, learning and assessment." The majority of this time (30 days) was allocated to planning, attending, and co-facilitating teacher team meetings, with more of this time budgeted for the first half of the school year. Other activities included: planning and facilitating weekly PD time with school leaders (15 days), supporting peer observation and

<sup>27</sup> The Springfield MOA regarding pilot and Commonwealth Pilot Schools requires WEAs to be approved by a simple majority vote.

<sup>28</sup> CCE work plans allocated tasks and sub-tasks to goals related to individual pilot autonomies or groups of autonomies. This analysis summarizes time devoted to key school goals, and as such, classifications were slightly reconstituted.

reflection (10 days), and training department chairs and teacher leaders in facilitative leadership and collaborative protocols (2 days).

Substantial time (13 days or 16%) was also allocated to the development of school governance and leadership structures. This time was budgeted to support Duggan’s newly created governing board (5 days) and leadership team (2 days), which included assisting with the establishment of initial membership and providing ongoing planning support and meeting co-facilitation. Other activities related to governance and leadership included: supporting the administrative support team (5 days) and assisting in the development of the SY09 WEA (1 day).

Additional technical assistance activities outlined in the SY08 work plan were as follows:

- Supporting the student support team (4 days) in analyzing discipline data and reviewing student management practices.
- Assisting with the development of the SY09 schedule (2 days)
- Providing workshops for faculty on pilot autonomies (2 days).
- Meeting with the principal and district office personnel to support budget autonomy and effective budget planning (1 day).

Tasks described in work plans reflect initial focus areas of CCE assistance and do not represent an exhaustive list of actual services delivered at the school. As an example, documents indicate that CCE coaches participated in and facilitated a school quality review benchmarking visit, a service not identified in the work plan.

## B. Staff Perceptions of CCE Services

Of the 68% of surveyed staff who expressed an opinion, 80% believed that CCE coaches have helped Duggan improve. Figure 26 presents staff ratings of two CCE services—meeting facilitation and PD—that were provided in a range of contexts to support multiple constituencies and school programs. As this figure shows, a small majority said that these services were either good (41%) or excellent (15%). A similar percentage (55%) responded positively regarding professional development. Only a small proportion of staff indicated “don’t know” in response to these questions. Interviews and surveys revealed some tension between what staff perceived as Duggan’s unique needs and CCE’s focus on protocols and successful approaches in other pilots.

**Figure 26: Staff Perceptions of CCE Meeting Facilitation and PD Services, Duggan Middle School**

	Valid N	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't Know*
Meeting facilitation	39	15%	41%	41%	3%	11%
Professional development	37	16%	41%	38%	5%	14%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

\* “Don't Know” responses not included in distribution of valid response (excellent, good, fair, poor)

Two other questions targeted CCE support for the development of key governance structures—the school’s governing board and leadership team. Figure 27 presents staff ratings of these services, both by school leaders and by all respondents.<sup>29</sup> Among school leaders, ratings of governing board support were overwhelmingly positive (43% excellent, 43% good). Overall ratings of governing board support were also positive, although lower (22% excellent, 44% good). Leader team support was rated positively by both school leaders (76%) and overall (67%). Many staff indicated “don’t know” in response to these questions, but larger proportions of school leaders, including members of these groups, offered a valid response.

<sup>29</sup> The number of governing board and leadership team members who responded to this survey item is too small to allow sub-group reporting. Therefore, results for school leaders, including administrators, members of the school’s governing board, and leadership team members are presented. These individuals are directly engaged in policy development and school management and governance.

**Figure 27: Staff Perceptions of CCE Support for Governing Bodies, Duggan Middle School**

		Valid N	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't Know*
Governing board formation	All staff	18	22%	44%	33%	0%	57%
	School leaders	7	43%	43%	14%	0%	22%
Leadership team support	All staff	24	21%	46%	29%	4%	43%
	School leaders	8	38%	38%	13%	13%	11%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

\* "Don't Know" responses not included in distribution of valid response (excellent, good, fair, poor)

## IV. Preliminary Impacts and Reflection on Current Direction

Duggan staff indicated that many aspects of school capacity, culture, and operations had improved and were generally optimistic that changes brought about as a result of the Commonwealth Pilot Schools Initiative would improve student achievement. This section summarizes survey data regarding immediate, observed changes in school capacity, operation, and culture, as well as staff perspectives on the current direction of their school and the sustainability of their Design Plan.

### A. Preliminary Impacts

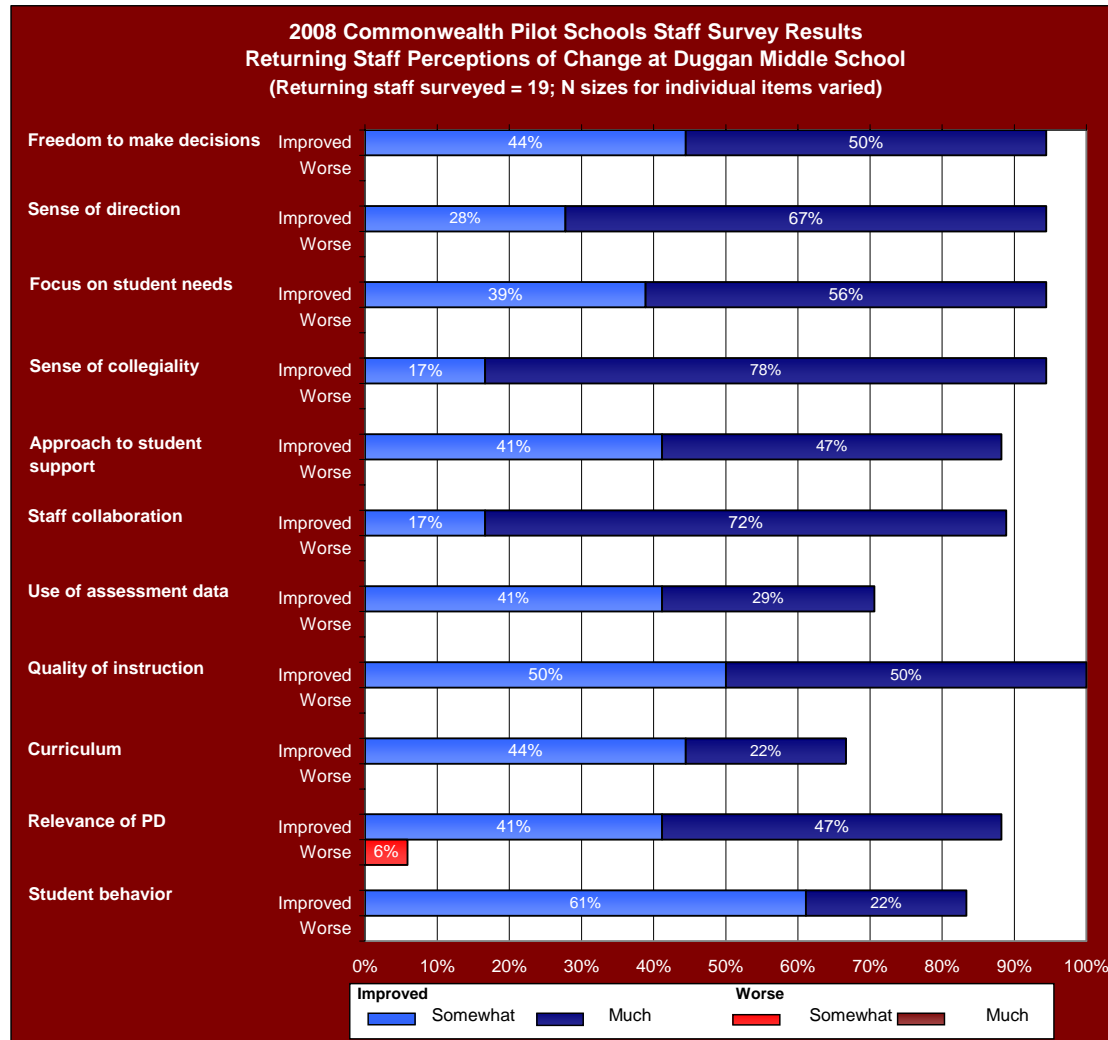
Of 44 educators who responded to the staff survey, 19 had been at the school for more than one year and were therefore eligible to respond to questions related to the preliminary impacts of Design Plan implementation on school characteristics, culture, and capacity. These results, shown in Figure 28, suggest that returning teachers perceived widespread improvement across measures of school practice and capacity included on the survey.<sup>30</sup>

### Positive Impacts

A majority of returning Duggan teachers indicated positive impacts on all 11 measures included on the survey. The school's quality of instruction, sense of collegiality, focus on student needs, freedom to make important decisions, and sense of direction were those areas in which over 90% of eligible respondents reported improvement.

- **Quality of Instruction** - 100% believed that the quality of instruction had improved, with half reporting it had improved substantially. Among all staff, 93% reported that Duggan teachers provide quality instruction.
- **Staff Collegiality** - 94% reported improvement in the school's sense of collegiality, with 80% indicating that it was much improved. Among all staff, 97% reported that the school has a very professional, collegial environment.
- **Focus on Student Needs** - 94% indicated the school's focus on student needs had improved. Although there is no baseline measure for this question, among all staff, a high proportion reported that teacher team meetings (94%) and departmental meetings (71%) were focused on student needs.
- **Direction and Vision** - 94% believed that Duggan has improved its sense of direction. Among all staff, 95% said the school has a clear vision, while 81% said that staff are unified in support of that vision.
- **Freedom to Make Decisions** - 94% said the school's freedom to make important decisions had improved. Among all staff, 77% believe that the school has freedom to make important decisions.

<sup>30</sup> Small discrepancies of less than one percentage point may be observed between figures reported in the text of in this section and those calculated by summing across categories reported in Figure 28. These differences are attributable to rounding error.

**Figure 28: Preliminary Impacts, Duggan Middle School**

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

*At least 80% of eligible respondents* reported improvement in staff collaboration, relevance of professional development, approach to student support services, and student behavior.

- Staff Collaboration - 89% said that collaboration had improved. Among all staff, 86% reported that staff collaborate effectively.
- Relevance of PD - 88% said that the relevance of PD had improved. Among all staff 90% said that PD was relevant to school improvement.
- Student Support- 88% reported that the school's approach to student support services had improved. However, only 55% agreed that the school's current approach enhances teaching and learning, and only 51% agreed that student discipline is well-managed.
- Student Behavior - 83% believed that student behavior had improved. However, among all staff, 90% reported that student behavior remains a problem.

In its 2008 Progress Report, Duggan pledged to continue to dedicate resources to building capacity in collaborative discipline and student support, with support from its CCE coaches.

*Over two thirds of eligible respondents* reported improvements to curricula and the use of assessment data.

- Use of Assessment Data - 71% believed that use of student assessment data had improved. Among all staff, 54% agreed that Duggan uses assessment data to improve its curriculum, and 67% said that they use data to inform their classroom instruction.
- Curriculum - 67% reported that the curriculum in their subject area has improved. Among all respondents, 71% agreed that there is a well conceived curriculum for their subject area.

Although teachers reported improvement in the school's use of assessment data, the school's ESE Progress Report indicated that the development of a school-based assessment system was more time-consuming than the design team had anticipated, and that the school relied primarily on existing district assessments in SY08. Principal Swan intends to deploy technical assistance resources to support implementation of school-based interim assessments in SY09. Rigorous expedition planning is also reported to be an important year-two implementation goal and may have an impact on perceptions of the curricula.

### **Minimal Impacts**

As noted, there were no areas in which the largest proportion of Duggan's returning staff reported that conditions or performance had remained about the same.

### **Adverse Impacts**

As noted, there were no areas in which the largest proportion of Duggan's returning staff reported that conditions or performance had become worse.

## ***B. Reflections on Current Direction***

### **Is This the Right Path?**

Duggan staff are optimistic with regard to whether these changes will support increased student achievement. Overall, 88% believed that the changes undertaken as a result of conversion are moving the school in the right direction, with the remainder withholding judgment. Similarly, 100% of returning staff reported that Duggan's ability to improve student learning had improved, and 56% believed it was much improved. Among all staff, 80% said that CCE coaches had helped the school to improve.

As one teacher noted during interviews, "the structure and the people are combining to make [this] school work better." Duggan's principal indicated that autonomy with regard to staffing and scheduling was pivotal in bringing about these changes.

### **Is This Sustainable?**

While teachers and staff were generally positive about the school's overall progress, many expressed concern whether initiatives could be sustained. Among staff survey respondents, 96% agreed that they were busier than they were last year and only 54% agreed that their current pace is sustainable. Among returning teachers, 62% reported an increase in work hours, with an average of 7.5 additional hours per week. This is consistent with interviews, during which staff said that the workload has been "a juggling act to manage," and implementation was described as "intense."

Despite these concerns, approximately 90% of Duggan's staff indicated that morale is high. In interviews, many attributed this to the school's positive staff culture, which they believed helped teachers cope with the challenges they face. Many were also optimistic that once the school completes its transition, school practices will become "automatic," and the pace will ease. Others cautioned that additional resources would likely be necessary to

maintain momentum. As one teacher articulated, “we need more time and money to be successful with this model...teachers will get burned out without more support.”

Resource constraints appear likely to become an acute challenge, as the school’s magnet schools assistance grant has expired. In interviews, the principal and staff noted that the school’s limited budget and its difficulty securing autonomy over budget resources has prevented it from acquiring needed curriculum resources and supplies to support student projects. This is consistent with staff survey data, which show that nearly three fourths of staff believed that the school does not have sufficient resources to pursue its vision.

Another budgetary concern relates to the ability of Duggan to maintain staff common planning time after SY09. The school is required to compensate staff for all hours in excess of what is required under the district teachers union contract. Although SPS provided funds in SY08 and committed funds to support additional staff time in SY09, a revised agreement between SPS and the Springfield Education Association regarding both Commonwealth Pilot and pilot schools, stipulates that beginning in SY10, all school will be required to pay for additional staff time out of their normal district allocation.

## Putnam Vocational Technical High School, Springfield

The following interim evaluation findings related to Putnam Vocational Technical High School in Springfield. Data sources include ESE data, district- and school-provided documents, leader and staff interviews, a staff survey, and ongoing documentation provided by CCE coaches. The interview process engaged 28 of Putnam's staff, including its principal. In addition, 141 staff members—75% of the school's eligible staff—participated in the spring 2008 Commonwealth Pilot School Staff Survey.

### I. School Characteristics and Achievement

Putnam is one of five secondary schools operated by the Springfield Public School (SPS) district, four of which serve grades 9 through 12 exclusively.<sup>31</sup> At the high-school level, SPS uses an intra-district choice system to assign its 6,950 students to high schools. District officials report that, as the only vocational technical school in the district, demand for seats at Putnam has increased in recent years. Currently, Putnam receives more applicants than the number of available seats, and maintains a waiting list of approximately 500 students, according to school officials' estimates. The district has established minimum entry requirements for the school.

#### A. Student Enrollment and Demographics

As Figure 29 shows, Putnam provided educational services to 1,472 students in 2007-2008 (SY08), an increase of approximately 10% relative to its SY07 enrollment (1,333). School leaders' claim that the overall increase in size is due to increased student persistence, and data show that between SY07 and SY08, the size of the freshman class accepted at the school remained level at 454 students, while class sizes in upper grade levels increased substantially.<sup>32</sup>

The decision to increase Putnam's enrollment was attributable to two factors. First, as the only vocational high school in Springfield, student re-assignment was impractical. Second, school leaders reported their understanding that Chapter 74 regulations governing vocational schools would not allow Putnam to sub-divide into smaller schools that would each individually operate a lesser range of vocational programs.

**Figure 29: Student Profile, Putnam V-T High School**

	SY06 (N=1,164)	SY07 (N=1,333)	SY08 (N=1,472)
Low-Income Status	67%	69%	69%
Non-White	91%	86%	87%
First Language Not English (FLNE)	19%	22%	25%
Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	12%	11%	10%
Special Education	27%	25%	22%

Source: MA ESE Information Services. Selected Populations Data.

<sup>31</sup> The fifth secondary school, Springfield Renaissance School, is a middle-high school intended to serve grades 6 through 12.

<sup>32</sup> The incidence of transfers into upper grade levels is confined to students transferring from other vocational schools. There are no other such schools in Springfield, and accordingly incoming transfer of students in upper grades is not a likely explanation for increasing enrollment.

In SY08, Putnam’s student population was 69% low income, 87% non-white, 25% first language not English (FLNE), and 10% limited English proficient, a demographic profile relatively consistent with that of the previous year. Although the proportion of Putnam’s students identified as special needs or FLNE changed slightly during its conversion year, these changes were consistent with those experienced in the previous year. In interviews, several teachers noted that minimum entry requirements and increased demand for placement in Putnam have positively affected the school’s student profile such that the school receives “better students than [it] had before.”

## B. Administrators and Staff

The school’s principal, Kevin McCaskill, has served in this role since spring 2004. His administrative team consists of a director of vocational services, as well as vocational and academic administrators responsible for each of the school’s four smaller learning communities (SLCs).<sup>33</sup> This administrative approach was retained from SY07, and the school is actively working to enhance its SLC leadership structures as part of its Design Plan. To enable SLC leaders to focus more substantially on instruction, a dean of students position—responsible for discipline and attendance issues—was added to each SLC.

According to ESE data, Putnam’s SY08 teaching staff consisted of 153 teachers, measured in full-time equivalency.<sup>34</sup> This represents an increase of 14% relative to FY 07, which is larger than the increase in student enrollment, causing Putnam’s student-teacher ratio (STR) to improve by 0.4 students per teacher, as shown in Figure 30. Overall, the district average student-teacher ratio for SPS decreased 0.2 students per teacher over the same period.

**Figure 30: Staffing Profile, Putnam V-T High School**

	SY06	SY07	SY08
Total Number of FTE Teachers	130	134	153
Student-Teacher Ratio	9.0 to 1	10.0 to 1	9.6 to 1
Percent of Teachers Licensed in their Teaching Assignment	61%	76%	74%
Percent of Core Academic Teachers Identified as Highly Qualified	63%	68%	n/a

Source: MA ESE Information Services. Teacher Data.

School leaders report that in SY07, Putnam had 147 teaching and student support staff covered under teaching contracts, 24 of whom left the school at the end of FY 07.<sup>35</sup> The principal notes that most left for reasons unrelated to conversion. Of those who the principal reported left due to conversion, four were let go at his initiative, and three voluntarily exercised their right to transfer within the district.

Putnam’s principal attributed the school’s low turnover rate—16%; the lowest among the four schools—to the fact that he was largely happy with his existing staff, believing they were moving the school in the right direction. However, his staffing autonomy may also have been limited because the district could not as readily re-assign vocational teachers to other schools. Although Putnam did not make dramatic changes to its staff, some teachers, including those in vocational positions, reported that the school’s ability to transfer staff has given leaders increased leverage as they implement changes.

<sup>33</sup> The creation of a fifth SLC consistent with the school’s Design Plan is currently being finalized.

<sup>34</sup> Full-time equivalency (FTE) is a measure of staffing that indicates how many individuals would have been employed had all work, including that done by part-time workers, been performed by full-time employees.

<sup>35</sup> School-reported teacher counts may differ from official ESE figures for several reasons, including, but not limited to, the fact that school-provided figures relate staff counts as opposed to FTE measurements, and may differently attribute itinerant district staff to individual schools. Differences in reporting dates may also result in discrepancies.

Rates of teacher licensure and highly qualified status remained low in FY 07—76% and 68% respectively—due in part to protracted union contract negotiations which have reportedly resulted in recruitment and retention challenges across the SPS district. The proportion of teachers licensed in their teaching assignment increased by nearly 15 percentage points in FY 07 but remained relatively constant during conversion. The proportion of staff identified as highly qualified in SY08 was unavailable; however, ESE reported that 71% of the school’s SY08 core academic classes were taught by highly qualified teachers.<sup>36</sup>

Principal McCaskill reported that vacancies created as a result of turnover and newly created staff positions were filled primarily through district teacher recruitment lists. As Figure 31 shows, nearly two thirds of new staff reported that they had been teaching for three years or less, compared to one in five returning teachers. Among survey respondents:

- Newly hired teachers in academic and vocational areas were equally likely to be first-year teachers (52% of new academic teachers and 50% of new vocational teachers).
- Newly hired teachers in vocational areas were slightly more likely to have three or fewer years of teaching experience than did new academic teachers, although this difference was not statistically significant at the .05 level (63% of new academic teachers compared to 71% of new vocational teachers).

**Figure 31: Experience among SY08 Teachers, Putnam V-T High School**

	New Hires (N= 41)	Returning (N= 76)	Total (N=117)
First-year teacher	51%	n/a	18%
Three or fewer years	66%	22%	38%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey

### C. School Schedule

As displayed in Figure 32, Putnam operates on a standard daily schedule in which students attend school from 7:45 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. each day. This remains unchanged from SY07.

**Figure 32: Schedule Comparison, Putnam V-T High School**

	SY07	SY08
Regular day	Monday – Friday 7:45 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.	Monday – Friday 7:45 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.
Alternative day	n/a	n/a

Source: Interviews and school schedule overviews provided by Putnam Vocational Technical High School.

### D. Student Achievement

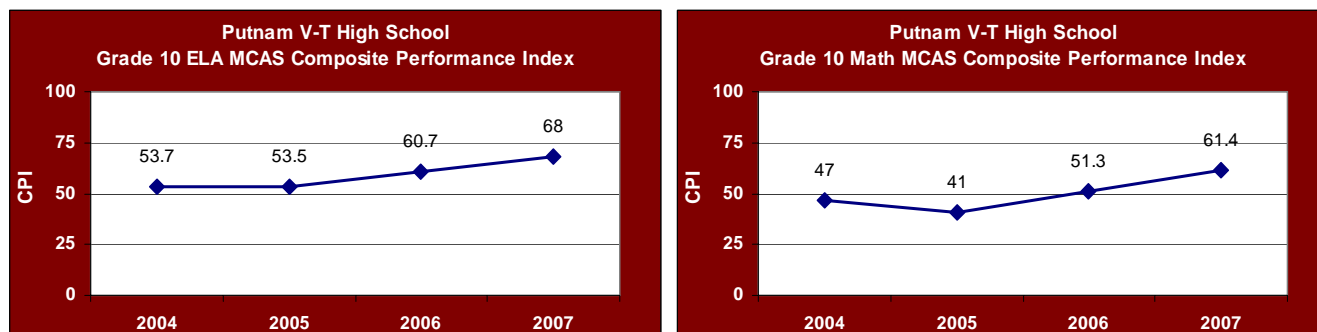
Historically, Putnam students have struggled to achieve MCAS proficiency, and the school was declared “underperforming” by the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in 2002. Prior to the Board’s declaration, in 2001, four out of five Putnam students failed the grade 10 ELA MCAS test, and nearly nine out of ten students failed in mathematics. Recent trends in student performance are as shown in Figure 33, which displays the school’s Composite Performance Index (CPI).<sup>37</sup> Although students have demonstrated

<sup>36</sup> Beginning in SY08, ESE reports highly qualified rates as the proportion of core academic *classes* taught by highly qualified instructors.

<sup>37</sup> CPI is a calculation used to summarize MCAS achievement and illustrate progress toward proficiency. For a more detailed explanation of how CPI is calculated, refer to the MA ESE “School Leaders’ Guide to the 2007 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Reports” (pp. 4-6).

improvement from the school's critically low baseline, overall student performance at the school remains low. Putnam failed to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) targets for aggregate student performance in both mathematics and ELA from 2005 through 2007.

**Figure 33: CPI Trends, Putnam V-T High School**



Source: MA ESE Information Services. MCAS Performance Results.

## II. Key Operational and Programmatic Changes

School leaders report that Putnam has undergone a series of changes over the last several years intended to increase student achievement. Putnam proposed to use Commonwealth Pilot autonomies to strengthen the school's existing initiatives, while making additional changes to curriculum and instruction, staff culture, student personalization, and governance and decision-making. The following section discusses key changes within each of these areas undertaken during SY08.

### A. Enhancing Curriculum and Instruction

Putnam proposed to implement a daily double-block class period for the integration of vocational and academic subjects as well the development of school-based curricula and pacing guides. While academic departments have reportedly begun to revise their curricula, proposed schedule changes have yet to be implemented.

#### Instructional Schedule

Although the design team investigated schedule design at other vocational schools during the pre-pilot planning process and proposed a model in the Design Plan, leaders report that the complexities of scheduling at a large vocational school with highly differentiated SLCs made implementing this schedule impractical for SY08. Staff deployment across SLCs was one of the issues Putnam could not fully resolve. Further, leaders were concerned that the proposed schedule would have resulted in a loss of time for mathematics and ELA instruction.

As a result, the daily schedule at Putnam continues to provide eight 43-minute instructional blocks. As is common in vocational-technical high schools statewide, students alternate between vocational and academic instruction in weekly cycles. During their academic weeks, Putnam's students receive a daily double-block of mathematics and ELA, a single block of science and technology/engineering, and a single block of history/social studies. The remaining two blocks are allocated for a single elective and either physical education/health (grade 9) or integrated vocational and academic instruction through a "related subjects" course (grades 10-12). Students in grades 9 and 10 receive additional instruction in mathematics and ELA through a daily single block for each subject provided during their vocational (or "shop") week.

Figure 34 presents the instructional time provided by this schedule, averaged across each two-week cycle, in each of four core academic subjects. As this figure shows, students in grades 9 and 10 receive 50% more instructional time in mathematics and ELA than students in grades 11 and 12, which was also the case in SY07. This additional

time is intended to remediate skill deficits from middle school and to support proficiency in advance of the grade 10 MCAS examinations. Although instructional time in the core academic subjects remained unchanged at Putnam between SY07 and SY08, the school reports that prior to entry into the Commonwealth Pilot cohort, instructional time in mathematics and ELA had increased by 50%.

**Figure 34: Weekly Time in Core Academic Subjects (hrs:mins), Putnam V-T High School**

	Grades 9 and 10		Grades 11 and 12	
	SY07	SY08	SY07	SY08
Total weekly time in learning	31:15	31:15	31:15	31:15
ELA	5:23	5:23	3:35	3:35
Mathematics	5:23	5:23	3:35	3:35
Science and technology/engineering	1:48	1:48	1:48	1:48
History/social studies	1:48	1:48	1:48	1:48
Total	14:22	14:22	10:46	10:46
Percent of total time in learning dedicated to these four core subjects	46%	46%	34%	34%

Source: Analysis of interview data and school schedule overviews provided by Putnam Vocational Technical High School.

School leaders note that complexities of scheduling and insufficient staffing capacity also limited their ability to implement distinct classes for the integration of core academic subjects with vocational instruction. Instead, the school focused its efforts on strengthening its existing related “sciences block,” designed to demonstrate the relevance of academic subjects within the vocation. This block is taught by vocational teachers.

## Curriculum

Some mathematics and ELA teachers indicated that district curricula are difficult to implement within the vocational-technical context, given that instructional time must be balanced between vocational and academic subjects. Putnam’s Design Plan proposed the development of subject-area curricula that are “student-centered, standards-based, integrated across vocational and academic programs, interdisciplinary, active, and rigorous.” Putnam indicated that academic departments have begun this curriculum development, and that its ELA department has made the most progress in this area.

Leaders and staff report that integration of academic and vocational curricula remains an important priority at the school. One vocational teacher noted that the administration was “pushing harder” toward the integration of ELA and mathematics into vocational lessons. Although the school has strengthened its SLCs, many academic teachers still instruct students from multiple SLCs, and this lack of SLC “purity” has impeded the school’s ability to integrate instruction. Some teachers noted that increased time for teacher collaboration and planning would be needed to effectively pursue this goal.

### *B. Building a Professional Learning Community*

Developing a collaborative, professional learning community among educators was identified as a critical focus of school improvement. To support this effort, the school proposed an increase in the amount time for professional collaboration and development provided to teachers.

## Time for Professional Collaboration and Development

Figure 35 shows the amount of time devoted to professional collaboration, which includes professional development (PD) as well as large staff, departmental, and teacher team meetings. For SY08, Putnam doubled both the amount and frequency of time for professional collaboration for teachers. Building on a Springfield district policy in place in SY07 requiring teachers to participate in 60 minutes of weekly after-school professional development, the school used its scheduling autonomy to add additional extended days for staff. Individual planning time, which occurs during the school day, remains unchanged, and teachers continue to receive a daily 43-minute planning block.

**Figure 35: Weekly Collaborative and Individual Planning Time (hrs:mins), Putnam V-T High School<sup>38</sup>**

	SY07	SY08	Change	% Change
Professional collaboration time	1:00	2:00	+1:00	+100%
Individual planning time	3:35	3:35	-	0%

Source: Analysis of interviews conducted at Putnam Vocational Technical High School.

In SY08, Putnam's professional collaborative time was dedicated primarily to PD and departmental meetings (60 minutes on Tuesdays) and to SLC teacher meetings (60 minutes on Wednesdays). Two other extended days for teachers are not included in estimates of collaborative professional time, as these are dedicated to providing extra help for students and to student support activities, including teacher-led clubs and organizations or student service teams, which focus attention on students who are struggling.

## Staff Perceptions of Collaborative Professional Time

On the staff survey, all teachers indicated that they routinely participate in large staff meetings, and the vast majority said that they participate in departmental meetings (95%) and PD (81%). Fewer than half (41%) indicated that they regularly participate in teacher team meetings. As Figure 36 shows, among the minority of staff who regularly engage in teacher team meetings, only half said that there was enough time for these meetings. Many teachers expressed a desire for more time to work with other teachers in less structured small groups. Other survey findings with regard to the use of time are as follows:

- Clear consensus does not exist among staff with respect to whether the amount of time dedicated to PD, SLC meetings, and departmental meetings is appropriate. Although a majority reported that the amount is “just about right” for all meeting types, a sizeable proportion indicated that more time is needed for PD (36%) and departmental meetings (25%), and that less time should be devoted to SLC meetings (39%).
- Vocational teachers were more likely to report a need for additional time for departmental meetings, while academic teachers were more likely to report that too much time was dedicated to these meetings. The difference is statistically significant at the .05 level.

**Figure 36: Adequacy of Collaborative Professional Time, Putnam V-T High School**

Time for...	Too much	Too little	Just about right
Professional development (PD)	13%	36%	51%
Whole-faculty or SLC meetings	39%	4%	57%
Departmental meetings	19%	25%	56%
Teacher team meetings	22%	29%	49%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

<sup>38</sup> Calculations for all schools reflect time available to staff who teach in core academic subject areas and are inclusive of time in the schedule on a daily, weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly basis, adjusted to reflect weekly average totals.

As shown in Figure 37, most staff characterized time spent in large staff meetings (whole-faculty or SLC) as guided by clear objectives and focused on school improvement. Although the school’s Design Plan suggested that this time would be used to plan “integrated, possibly project-based learning activities,” and all four SLCs identified this as one of their focus areas, fewer than half (41%) said that this time is central to instructional planning. Interviews suggest that this goal was limited by lack of SLC purity. As one teacher noted, “you must have pure SLCs to make these meetings work,” suggesting that the school may have needed additional time to build the model prior to beginning these meetings. Overall, only about half of those who participated in these large staff meetings felt that the time was used effectively.

About three-quarters of staff reported that time spent in departmental and teacher team meetings was effectively used. Staff generally characterized these meetings as guided by clear objectives, central to instructional planning, and focused on students and their needs. However, vocational teachers were much more likely to respond positively to statements regarding departmental meetings. On the survey:

- More vocational teachers (nearly 91%) reported that departmental time is focused on students and their needs, than did academic teachers (66%).
- More vocational teachers (nearly 95%) agreed that departmental meeting time was used effectively than did academic teachers (68%).

These differences were significant at the .05 level.

**Figure 37: Percent of Staff who “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” with Statements Regarding Meetings**

Meetings are...	Type of Meeting		
	Whole-faculty or SLC	Departmental	Teacher Team
Guided by clear objectives	79%	90%	83%
Focused on school improvement	86%	n/a	n/a
Central to instructional planning	41%	79%	77%
Focused on students and their needs	n/a	77%	77%
Time is used effectively	53%	80%	73%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

### C. *Creating a More Personalized School Setting*

Putnam’s Design Plan notes that-developing a “safe and personalized school culture where respect for oneself and others is of vital importance” has been a consistent focus of its ongoing improvement efforts. The school proposed an expansion of its existing student advisory program as well as the creation of more robust student support services. Although Putnam is the largest school in the cohort, it has also implemented an SLC structure in recent years to create a sense of “smallness” within the school. -

#### **Student Advisory Programs**

Putnam was the only school in the cohort to have an advisory program in place prior to conversion. First implemented in 2005 as part of an SLC grant, advisories became mandatory for all teachers in SY07. Teacher participation in the program was included as a condition of the school’s SY08 Work Election Agreement (WEA). Putnam’s advisories follow a standard curriculum adapted from an advisory program implemented in Ohio, and occur in small group settings of 10 to 12 students

In SY08, students at Putnam participated in a single 43-minute advisory period every other week, which remained unchanged from the previous year. The schedule proposed in the school's Design Plan, which would have created a daily advisory block, was not implemented.

Approximately 85% of surveyed teachers were responsible for leading a student advisory session. As Figure 38 shows, overall, staff agree with the general concept of advisory as a means to strengthen overall relationships among students and staff, and consider the goals of the program to be clear. However, 56% of advisory leaders feel that the school does not yet have an effective curriculum and 48% of advisory leaders do not consider the program an effective use of limited time in the schedule. In interviews, one teacher indicated that the fact that teachers are not matched with their own students is a limitation to the program's effectiveness, noting:

“It's tough...we need to be with kids we work with. Last year more of us worked with kids we know. The idea is to give kids exposure to someone new, but a lot of kids won't talk. We may not be ready for it yet.”

Thirty percent of those leading an advisory said that the school provides “too much” time to the program, while a similar percentage (26%) said that there was “too little” time for the program.

Overall, academic teachers were more likely to report that the goals of advisory were clear (74% compared with 50% of vocational teachers) and that the school has an effective advisory curriculum (46% compared with 37% of vocational teachers), although these difference were not significant at the .05 level. No notable differences were observed between academic and vocational teachers with respect to whether advisory is an effective use of time.

**Figure 38: Staff Perceptions of Advisory, Putnam V-T High School**

Student advisory...	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Goals are clear	17%	50%	27%	7%
Strengthens staff/student connections	14%	56%	24%	7%
Has an effective curriculum	11%	34%	44%	12%
Is an effective use of time	10%	41%	38%	10%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

## Approach to Student Support Services

Putnam proposed to continue efforts to enhance student support services within individual SLCs as a means to improve student culture. In recent years, the school assigned several school-wide student support staff to individual SLCs, and in SY08, Putnam strengthened this model by adding a dean of students position to each SLC. Deans of students are responsible for managing discipline within their SLCs, and are also intended to engage with the local community.

All teachers at the school are now required to participate in either a student service team or lead a student club as part of the school's student support strategy. Student service teams “identify students who are struggling, track them for at least a month, and provide counseling and support.” The school reports the number of student clubs increased from 5 to 25, which is intended to improve student engagement.

## Creating a Small Schools Environment

While overall student enrollment increased at Putnam in SY08, leaders leveraged the school's existing SLC structure to create a more personalized environment for students. Aided by flexibility over staffing and increased planning time, leaders sought to increase the purity of SLCs, which refers to the extent to which students and staff are exclusive to individual SLCs. Although leaders report that SLCs are not yet “100% pure,” many teachers noted that “student assignment has progressed this year,” and that the school is “keeping teacher and student cohorts together better than in the past.”

Putnam's student-teacher ratios and class sizes have also improved. As Figure 39 shows, returning regular education teachers in both academic and vocational areas estimated that their average class size had declined by approximately one student per class.

**Figure 39: Student Enrollment and Staffing, Putnam V-T High School**

	SY07	SY08	Change
Student Enrollment	1,333	1,472	10%
Average Class Size, Returning Teachers (Vocational)	15.2	14.3	-6%
(Academic)	21.6	20.6	-5%

Source: ESE Information Services (Student Enrollment). Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey (Average Class Size).

#### *D. Establishing Governance Structures*

Putnam proposed new governance structures to manage and support its Commonwealth Pilot autonomies. These structures include: a system of SLC leadership teams to gather input from and communicate with staff; a governing board to oversee school progress and set important school-wide policies; and an annual Work Election Agreement (WEA) that sets forth working conditions for school staff. All were implemented during SY08.

##### **SLC Leadership Teams**

Putnam retained its SLC structure from SY07 and established new SLC leadership teams to share decision-making responsibilities with administrators. Team composition differs across SLCs. All four include teachers and student support staff, while some also include instructional specialists, administrators, paraprofessionals and/or students. Teams range in size from 6 (Freshman Exploratory) to 12 (Hospitality and Human Services/Allied Health).<sup>39</sup>

These teams are intended to play a central role in the school's overall governance. Leaders indicate that because of Putnam's size and structure, "some issues and decisions that might come before a governing board at a smaller school are coming before individual SLC Leadership Teams." The school has invested substantial energy in building the capacity of these teams to establish objectives, respond to SLC-level concerns, and implement school-wide policies within their SLC, such as integration of vocational and academic coursework. Coaches' work with leader teams included PD in facilitative leadership and ongoing coaching and meeting support. By the end of the year, leadership teams were reportedly sharing more responsibilities with SLC administrators. Some teachers also noted that they saw evidence of increasing engagement in SLC meetings, intended to be led by leadership teams.

##### **Governing Board**

Putnam's governing board was established in December 2007, following faculty elections. Governing board membership consists of the principal, the director of Chapter 74 programs, five teachers, one paraprofessional, three community representatives, four parents, and two students. The school's 16-member board is substantially smaller than the 24-member board proposed in the school's Design Plan, as the administrative team and coaching staff believed that it would be difficult to sustain such a large board. Board composition is expected to change for SY09 as a result of a new Springfield MOA that requires teacher membership to comprise a larger proportion of overall membership, as well as a requirement for equal representation between vocational and academic teachers. The board's current membership does not include any academic teachers.

<sup>39</sup> The Hospitality and Human Services/Allied Health SLC is intended to split into two separate SLCs, bringing the total number of SLC Leadership Teams to five.

The board held its first meeting in mid-December and met monthly through April. CCE coaches report that Putnam's board adopted a charter, elected officers, actively participated in the development and approval of a revised WEA, and identified a process by which to evaluate the principal. The school has also begun work on a five-year plan for the school, which it is expected to continue developing in SY09.

Some teachers note that it has been difficult to "get people to exercise their right to self-govern," and the school is still developing its capacity in this area. Interview data suggest that few teachers volunteered to participate on the governing board.

### **Work Election Agreement**

Putnam finalized its SY09 WEA in March 2008. To revise the agreement, SLC leadership teams solicited input from faculty through a survey and worked with a school-wide "WEA task force" to draft a proposed agreement. However, interview data suggest that these surveys received low response. Ultimately, the task force's recommendations were submitted to the governing board, which negotiated changes before finalizing the document and submitting it for full staff approval.

On the Commonwealth Pilot staff survey, the majority of teachers and support staff (83%) indicated that they were given an opportunity to provide input into the new agreement, but less than a third said that they provided substantive input. Of those who provided some level of input, the majority (89%) said they felt that their input had been seriously considered.

The resulting agreement reflects Putnam's ongoing exercise of autonomies related to staffing and schedule. The document established a procedure by which teachers and staff considered in non-compliance with the school's mission and vision must receive a written warning and "progression plan" for improvement prior to being involuntarily released from Putnam's staff. In addition, although no additional time was added to teacher schedules, changes were made to the way that time was to be used, including the following:

- A committee of leaders and staff was empowered to redefine the school's after-school meeting schedule. This schedule is expected to be completed on August 31, 2008.
- All teachers are required to remain after school for one hour Monday through Thursday, as opposed to having the choice of Monday or Friday as their "extra help" extended day.

These changes may ultimately provide leaders with increased flexibility to respond to staff concerns, including the need for increased common planning time to support integration activities and to offer student clubs on multiple days so that students can participate in more than one activity if they choose.

Other substantive changes to the SY09 WEA include:

- A decrease in the number of required family and community involvement events from four to three.
- Meetings between a teacher and SLC administrators regarding disputes must be documented; teachers are given the option of filing a grievance through the Springfield Education Association.

### **III. Center for Collaborative Education Technical Assistance**

The Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) was contracted by ESE to provide technical assistance to Putnam in support of its conversion to a Commonwealth Pilot School. Although monitoring and assessment of CCE services was outside the scope of this evaluation, work plans and related data enable a review of the planned focus of CCE services in SY08. Survey data provide feedback regarding the quality of a subset of those services.

## A. Focus of Technical Assistance

Putnam's CCE team comprised four coaches, one of whom served as lead coach. In collaboration with the school's principal, they developed a work plan to guide their services in SY08. An analysis of this plan,<sup>40</sup> which allocates 145 targeted coaching days to specific tasks and sub-tasks, reveals that approximately 57% of planned time (82 days) was allocated to supporting the development of a professional learning community. The largest portion of this time was budgeted to planning and facilitating SLC meetings with leaders (30 days). Time was also allocated to support effective departmental meetings by training and supporting department chairs (5 days) and by helping department chairs plan and facilitate meeting (20.5 days). Coaches were also obligated to provide Critical Friends Group training to 15 faculty members (12 days). The remaining 14.5 days of time to support professional collaboration were dedicated to supporting the development of interdisciplinary academic/vocational teams within each SLC capable of supporting the integration of academic and vocational instruction.

Substantial time (42 days or 29%) was also allocated to supporting effective school governance and leadership. Most of this was budgeted to organizing and supporting leadership teams for each SLC (25 days) and the school's governing board (7 days). Specific activities included support for the establishment of the group, as well as ongoing planning support, agenda-development, and meeting co-facilitation. Time was also dedicated to assisting the administrative team in developing and implementing a distributed leadership model (8 days) and to assisting in the development of the SY09 WEA (2 days).

Additional technical assistance activities outlined in the SY08 work plan were as follows:

- Providing two half-day workshops for administrators who evaluate staff (6 days) in order to establish a consistent model for staff observation and evaluation.
- Providing workshops for faculty regarding pilot autonomies (6 days).
- Developing programs to engage families and community with SLC leadership teams (5 days).
- Meeting with the principal and district office personnel to support budget autonomy and effective budget planning (2 days).
- Assisting with the development of the school's SY09 school schedule (2 days).

Tasks described in work plans reflect initial focus areas of CCE efforts, and as such, do not represent an exhaustive list of actual services delivered at the school. As an example, a coaches' report indicates that CCE coaches participated in and facilitated a walkthrough and school quality review with SLC leadership teams, a service not identified in the initial work plan.

## B. Staff Perceptions of CCE Services

Of the 50% of surveyed staff who expressed an opinion, 67% believed CCE coaches have helped Putnam improve. Figure 40 presents staff ratings of two services—meeting facilitation and PD—that were provided in a range of contexts to support multiple constituencies and school programs. As this figure shows, a majority of staff responded positively regarding CCE meeting facilitation (66%), and a similar proportion responded positively regarding PD (67%). A large proportion of staff indicated “don't know” in response to these questions.

Interviews revealed some tension between teachers' desire for unstructured meeting time and what staff perceived as CCE's focus on agendas and protocols. As one teacher noted:

“Structure has its place, but we need to keep focus on the most important concerns rather than the program. Some of us want to have roundtable discussions, less facilitation occasionally.”

CCE coaches identified resistance among some staff as an important challenge to their work with SLC and departmental meetings. This tension may have influenced staff ratings of CCE meeting facilitation and PD.

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<sup>40</sup> CCE work plans allocated tasks and sub-tasks to goals related to individual pilot autonomies or groups of autonomies. This analysis summarizes time devoted to key school goals, and as such, classifications were slightly reconstituted.

**Figure 40: Staff Perceptions of CCE Meeting Facilitation and PD Services, Putnam V-T High School**

	Valid N	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't Know*
Meeting facilitation	91	14%	52%	27%	7%	31%
Professional development (PD)	84	12%	55%	23%	11%	36%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

\* "Don't Know" responses not included in distribution of valid response (excellent, good, fair, poor)

Two questions targeted CCE's support for the development of key governance structures—the school's governing board and leadership team. Figure 41 presents staff ratings of these services. Among those more directly involved in school governance (administrators and members of the school's leadership teams and governing board),<sup>41</sup> ratings of governing board support were generally higher (44% excellent, 50% good) than overall ratings (20% excellent; 71% good). Regarding leadership team support, a similar proportion of leadership team members and all staff responded positively (82% versus 86%), although a larger proportion of leadership team members said that services were excellent. Many staff indicated "don't know" in response to these questions, but larger proportions of the respondents associated with these groups offered valid responses.

**Figure 41: Staff Perceptions of CCE Support for Governing Bodies, Putnam V-T High School**

		Valid N	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't Know*
Governing board formation	All staff	56	20%	71%	7%	2%	56%
	School leaders	16	44%	50%	6%	0%	27%
Leadership team support	All staff	65	22%	65%	11%	3%	50%
	Leadership team members	11	45%	36%	9%	9%	15%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

\* "Don't Know" responses not included in distribution of valid response (excellent, good, fair, poor)

## IV. Preliminary Impacts and Reflection on Current Direction

Changes at Putnam over the last year were intended to increase the school's capacity to improve student achievement outcomes. While it is too early to observe changes in achievement directly, this section presents preliminary staff survey results regarding observed changes in school capacity, operations, and culture, as well as staff perspectives on the current direction of their school and the sustainability of current improvement initiatives.

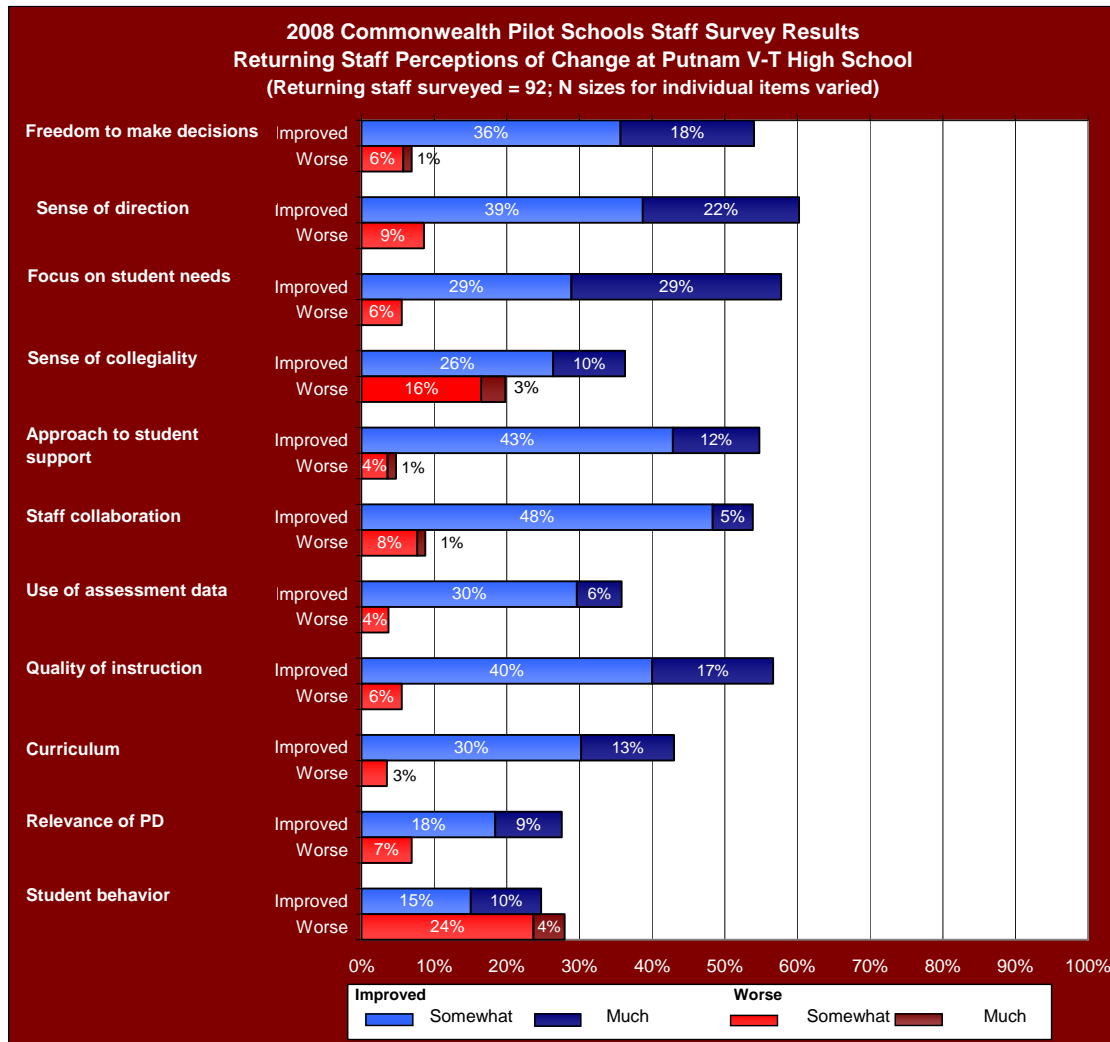
### A. Preliminary Impacts

On the survey, returning staff were asked to respond to a series of questions related to the preliminary impacts of Design Plan implementation. Of the 141 Putnam teachers and staff who responded to the survey, 92 reported that they had been at the school for more than one year. Survey results, shown in Figure 42, suggest that most staff believe school conditions have either improved or stayed the same; few reported that aspects of the school had gotten worse. However, in interviews, many teachers indicated that they believed that the school had been improving prior to conversion, and that improvements were attributable as much to ongoing initiatives as to the Commonwealth Pilot model.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> The number of governing board members who responded to this survey item is too small to allow sub-group reporting. As a result, administrators and members of the school's leadership team, who participate in policy development in conjunction with the governing board, are also included in this analysis.

<sup>42</sup> Small discrepancies of less than one percentage point may be observed between figures reported in the text of in this section and those calculated by summing across categories reported in Figure 42. These differences are attributable to rounding error.

Figure 42: Preliminary Impacts, Putnam V-T High School



Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

## Positive Impacts

Positive impacts experienced by Putnam include the following:

- **Direction and Vision** - 60% of returning staff indicated that the school's sense of direction had improved. Among all staff, 93% said that the school had a clearly articulated vision, and 74% said that staff are unified in support of their school vision.
- **Focus on Student Needs** - 58% of returning staff indicated that the school's focus on student needs had sharpened, half of whom said that it was much improved relative to the previous year. Although there is no baseline for this measure, a high proportion of staff reported that departmental meetings (86%) and teacher team meetings (71%) were focused on student needs.
- **Quality of Instruction** - 57% of returning staff indicated that the quality of instruction at the school had improved. This is consistent with a coaches' report indicating that a CCE-facilitated "school quality review" focused on teaching and learning found "a general upward trend." Among all staff, 80% said that teachers at the school provide quality instruction.

- Student Support - 55% of returning staff indicated that the school's approach to student services had improved. Among all staff, 82% said that Putnam's approach to student support services enhances teaching and learning.
- Freedom to Make Decisions - 54% of returning staff indicated that the school's freedom to make important decisions had improved. Among all staff, 59% said that Putnam has freedom to make important decisions.
- Staff Collaboration - 54% of returning staff indicated that staff collaboration had improved. Among all staff, 64% said that staff currently collaborate effectively.

## Minimal Impacts

Most returning teachers indicated that the following have not changed substantially over the last year:

- Relevance of PD - 66% of returning staff indicated that the relevance of PD programming was relatively unchanged, although 28% said that it had improved. Among all staff, 81% said that PD is relevant to school improvement goals.
- Use of Assessment Data - 60% of returning staff indicated that Putnam's use of assessment data had not changed, while 36% said that it had improved. Among all staff, 83% said that the school uses assessment data to assess and refine the curriculum; 73% of teachers said that they use assessment data to inform classroom practices.
- Curriculum - 53% of returning staff indicated that the school's curriculum had remained about the same, while 43% said that it had improved. Among all teachers, 76% said that Putnam has a well-conceived curriculum for their subject area.
- Student Behavior - 47% of returning staff indicated that student behavior had remained about the same, while 28% said that it had actually worsened. Among all staff, 72% said student behavior is a problem.
- Staff Collegiality - 44% of returning staff indicated that the school's overall sense of collegiality had remained about the same, while 36% said that it had improved. Among all staff, 68% described the culture at Putnam as very collegial and professional.

Although improvement was not reported overall, a sizeable proportion of returning staff reported improvement in four of the five. Student behavior was the only minimal impact area for which the proportion of staff reporting that conditions had become worse exceeded the proportion reporting improvement.

## Adverse Impacts

As noted, there were no areas in which the largest proportion of Putnam's returning staff reported that conditions or performance had become worse.

### *B. Reflections on Current Direction*

#### Is This the Right Path?

Many teachers and staff indicated that Putnam was already on a trajectory toward improvement prior to this Initiative. One staff member noted that while more time is needed to evaluate the model, Putnam was "going in the right direction long before we became a pilot school." This caution was reflected in overall survey results, with 57% of teachers indicating that the school conversion is moving the school in the right direction, and 40% unsure at this point in time. Further, most staff (48%) indicated that the school's ability to improve student learning remained about the same, although a similar proportion (46%) said that it had improved. Approximately two thirds (67%) said that CCE coaches had helped the school improve.

## Is This Sustainable?

Concern was evident that the initiatives undertaken at the school may not be sustainable. On the staff survey, the vast majority of respondents (95%) indicated that they were busier than they were a year ago. Among returning teachers, 45% indicated that they worked more hours than they had the previous year, although a similar proportion said that they had not changed the number of hours that they worked each week. Among teachers reporting an increase, the average increase was nearly 6 hours per week. Overall, 59% indicated that the school's current pace is sustainable. Approximately 47% of staff indicated that morale at the school is high.

Other challenges relate to resources. SPS has not historically used school-based budgeting, and the current district system reportedly limits the extent to which schools can be provided budget autonomy. Putnam's principal reports difficulty accessing discretionary funds, and only 28% of surveyed staff said that the school had sufficient resources to pursue its vision. Further, in SY08 SPS provided funds to support additional after-school time for staff. A revised agreement between SPS and the Springfield Education Association stipulates that beginning in SY10, the school will be required to pay for this time out of its normal district allocation. This may make it difficult for the school to maintain extra after-school time for professional collaboration and student support.

## The English High School, Boston

Following are interim evaluation findings related to The English High School in Boston. These findings chronicle The English High's progress during its first year of operation as a Commonwealth Pilot School. Data sources include ESE data, district- and school-provided documents, leader and staff interviews, a staff survey, and ongoing documentation provided by CCE coaches. The interview process engaged 30 educators, including the school's headmaster. In addition, 90 staff members—approximately 96% of the school's eligible staff—participated in the Commonwealth Pilot Schools staff survey.

### I. School Characteristics and Achievement

Boston is the largest city in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Its population of approximately 590,000 is estimated to be 50% white, 24% African American, 14% Hispanic, and 8% Asian.<sup>43</sup> The Boston Public Schools (BPS) provides educational services to more than 56,000 students. The demographic profile of BPS students differs substantially from that of the city. ESE data indicate that it is 39% African American, 37% Hispanic, 13% white, and 9% Asian.

The district operates 138 schools, including 34 secondary schools. At the high school level, BPS uses an intra-district choice system to assign approximately 18,400 students in grades 9 through 12 to high schools across the city. Twenty district schools, including eight secondary schools, are pilot schools.

#### A. Student Enrollment and Demographics

In 2007–2008 (SY08), The English High served 820 students in grades 9 through 12, a decrease of 34% relative to the previous year. While this size is nearly double ESE's Commonwealth Pilot School guidelines, it is consistent with the school's building capacity, and in interviews, teachers noted that downsizing alleviated a serious problem of overcrowding at the school. To reduce enrollment, BPS decreased the number of new grade 9 students assigned to The English High in SY08 from a typical incoming class of 400 students to 100.<sup>44</sup> The district also stopped assigning new transfers to The English High in spring 2007, which, combined with attrition, resulted in a decrease in enrollment. Student mobility rates at the school have hovered near 40% over the past three years.<sup>45</sup>

**Figure 43: Student Profile, The English High School**

	SY06 (N=1,314)	SY07 (N=1,244)	SY08 (N=820)
Low-Income Status	71%	69%	62%
Non-White	95%	96%	96%
First Language Not English (FLNE)	54%	53%	51%
Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	23%	24%	25%
Special Education	21%	20%	23%

Source: MA ESE Information Services. Selected Populations Data.

<sup>43</sup> MISER State Data Center analysis of Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF 1) 100-Percent Data.

<sup>44</sup> In September 2008 there were 190 grade 9 students enrolled at English High, including 90 who were retained from the previous year.

<sup>45</sup> Mobility rates were calculated using student-level SIMS data provided by ESE and reflect the proportion of students who either (1) enrolled after the start of the school year, or (2) began the year at the school, but left before the conclusion of the school year. Exact arrival and departure dates cannot be identified, but fall between ESE reporting periods in October and June of a given school year.

Figure 43 displays student demographics at The English High for the past three years. The school's student profile did not shift dramatically between SY06 and SY08. However, it did experience a moderate decrease in the proportion of students from low-income households in the past year. In interviews, some teachers suggested that increasing the length of the school day in a district with school choice had resulted in a somewhat less challenging student profile. One teacher noted that "some kids didn't want to come back...those who chose to be here are easier to hold accountable."

## B. Administrators and Staff

In planning for The English High's conversion to a Commonwealth Pilot School, BPS leaders chose to retain Headmaster Jose Duarte, who has led the school since 2000. Duarte made dramatic changes to the school's administrative team, which in SY07 consisted of four assistant headmasters—one for each of the school's smaller learning communities (SLCs)—and directors for its English language learner (ELL)<sup>46</sup> and special education programs. In SY08 he reduced the number of assistant headmasters to two, consistent with a reduction in the number of SLCs at the school. He kept the ELL and special education program director positions and added subject area program directors responsible for curriculum development and implementation in four academic subjects: ELA, mathematics, science and technology/engineering, and history/social studies.

The English High's SY08 teaching staff consisted of 70 full-time equivalents,<sup>47</sup> a decrease of 13% relative to the previous year. Because staffing levels decreased by a much smaller proportion than did student enrollment, the school's overall student-teacher ratio (STR) improved considerably relative to SY07, as shown in Figure 44.

Rates of teacher licensure and highly qualified status for SY07 were 96% and 90%, respectively. In SY08, teacher licensure rates increased slightly. The proportion of staff identified as highly qualified in SY08 was unavailable; however ESE reported that 88% of the school's SY08 academic classes were taught by highly qualified teachers.<sup>48</sup>

**Figure 44: Staffing Profile, The English High School**

	SY06	SY07	SY08
Total Number of FTE Teachers	96	80	70
Student-Teacher Ratio	13.7 to 1	15.6 to 1	11.7 to 1
Percent of Teachers Licensed in their Teaching Assignment	95%	96%	99%
Percent of Core Academic Teachers Identified as Highly Qualified	94%	90%	n/a

Source: MA ESE Information Services. Teacher Data.

In SY07, The English High had 85 teachers on staff,<sup>49</sup> all of whom were required to be rehired by the school's headmaster and sign the school's Work Election Agreement (WEA) in order to return in SY08. In total, Headmaster Duarte reports that 37 teachers (44%) left at the end of SY07. Among those leaving as a result of the WEA and staff rehiring processes, 7 reportedly left at the initiative of the headmaster, while 12 exercised their right to transfer within the district. Five other departing teachers retired, six left for non-teaching positions within or outside BPS, and seven were on provisional licenses and forced to leave due to certification issues.

<sup>46</sup> The ELL program director also served as an assistant headmaster in one SLC such that the school had five administrators in six positions.

<sup>47</sup> Full-time equivalency (FTE) is a measure of staffing that indicates how many individuals would have been employed had all work, including that done by part-time workers, been performed by full-time employees.

<sup>48</sup> Beginning in SY08, ESE reports highly qualified rates as the proportion of academic *classes* taught by highly qualified instructors.

<sup>49</sup> Note that school-reported teacher and teacher turnover data for English High include teaching staff only. School-reported teacher counts may differ from official ESE figures for several reasons including, but not limited to, the fact that school-provided figures relate staff counts as opposed to FTE measurements, and may differently attribute itinerant district staff to individual schools. Differences in reporting dates may also result in discrepancies.

Duarte reported that turnover required that he hire 32 new staff and that the school established a hiring committee to assist him with hiring decisions. Approximately half of new hires were reportedly from within the BPS system. Staff survey data (Figure 45) show that only 10% of newly hired teachers were new to teaching. However, 35% indicated that they had taught for three years or fewer, compared to 4% of The English High's returning teaching staff. Definitive data were not available regarding experience levels of the 37 teachers who left the school at the end of SY07.

**Figure 45: Experience among SY08 Teachers, The English High School**

	New Hires (N= 20 )	Returning (N= 46)	Total (N=66)
First-year teacher	10%	n/a	3%
Three or fewer years	35%	4%	14%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey

### C. School Schedule

In SY07, The English High operated on a traditional six-hour school schedule that included four standard days and a district-mandated early release day for students every other Wednesday. As shown in Figure 46, the school used its new scheduling autonomy to expand its regular day by 1 hour and 18 minutes and to implement a weekly early release day for students. These changes dramatically increased time in both students' and teachers' schedules, and were funded by a 15.4% increase in teacher pay implemented in SY08, which was stipulated in the school's Work Election Agreement (WEA) and supported through the BPS Superintendent's Schools program. This district program provides financial support to struggling schools implementing ambitious improvement plans.<sup>50</sup>

**Figure 46: Schedule Comparison, The English High School**

	SY07	SY08
Regular day	Monday – Friday 7:25 a.m. to 1:45 p.m.	Monday – Thursday 7:45 a.m. to 3:23 p.m.
Alternative day	Every other Wednesday Thurs: 7:25 a.m. to 12:41 p.m.	Every Friday 7:45 a.m. to 12:45 p.m.

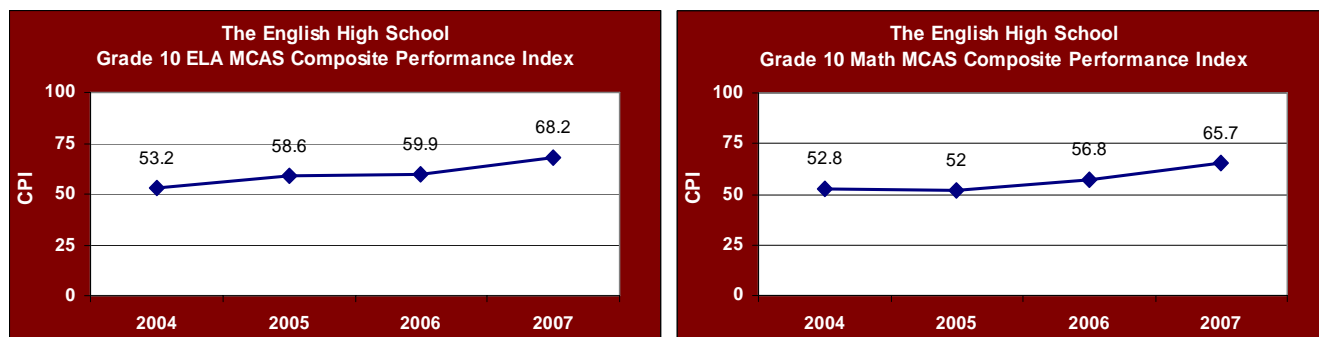
Source: School schedules provided by The English High School.

### D. Student Achievement

Students at The English High have struggled to achieve proficiency on the state's MCAS tests in both mathematics and ELA, and the school was declared "underperforming" by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in 2002. Since that time, student performance on both tests has improved, as shown in Figure 47, which presents the school's ESE Composite Performance Index (CPI) scores.<sup>51</sup> Overall, the proportion of students receiving a failing score in ELA declined from 34% in 2004 to 17% in 2007. The proportion of students failing in mathematics declined from 43% in 2005 to 23% in 2007. However, The English High failed to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) standards for student sub-groups in each of the last four years (through SY07).

<sup>50</sup> Boston Public Schools Back-to-School 2007 Fact Sheet. Available at <http://boston.k12.ma.us/bps/news/schoolfacts07.pdf>.

<sup>51</sup> CPI is a calculation used to summarize MCAS achievement and illustrate progress toward proficiency. For a more detailed explanation of how CPI is calculated, refer to the MA ESE "School Leaders' Guide to the 2007 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Reports" (pp. 4-6).

**Figure 47: CPI Trends, The English High School**

Source: MA ESE Information Services. MCAS Performance Results.

## II. Key Operational and Programmatic Changes

While changes to enrollment, staffing, and schedule reflect the most immediate and tangible impacts of Commonwealth Pilot School conversion at The English High, the school also proposed a series of changes to operations and programs in its Design Plan, which it began implementing in SY08 with support from CCE and BPS. Proposed changes included enhancements to the school’s curriculum and instruction, the development of a professional learning community among educators, increased personalization for students, and new structures for school-based governance and decision making. The following section discusses key changes undertaken by The English High during the first year of implementation efforts within each of these areas.

### A. Enhancing Curriculum and Instruction

In its Design Plan, The English High outlined a commitment to “high expectations for students” and a focus on preparing all students for success in college. The school proposed a series of changes to teaching and learning, including the introduction of an extended school day for students and the development of rigorous and effective curricula for each subject culminating in an Advanced Placement (AP) or other capstone course. In its first year as a Commonwealth Pilot School, The English High implemented its new schedule, a new ELA curriculum, and began planning similar curricular changes in other subject areas.

#### Instructional Schedule

The English High’s extended day schedule added more than four hours of average weekly time in learning for students. The school’s instructional schedule was restructured from one that provided four 80-minute daily blocks, to one consisting of six instructional periods, the length of which varied over the course of the week. Through this change, science and technology/engineering and history/social studies courses—which were previously one-semester courses—were made full-year classes, and student access to electives was increased. Whereas students had one half-year daily elective in SY07, SY08 schedules provided up to two year-long daily electives.

The inclusion of elective courses in student schedules makes it difficult to estimate the amount of time dedicated to each individual subject. However, student schedules at The English High reportedly include at least one daily period for each of four core academic areas—ELA, mathematics, science and technology/engineering, and history/social studies. The amount of weekly instructional time provided by this base schedule is shown in Figure 48. These data indicate that the total time devoted to these four subjects did not change substantially, but was redeployed such that all subjects received equal emphasis in SY08. It should be noted that individual student schedules may include additional time for any of these subjects as a result of elective choices.

**Figure 48: Required Weekly Time in Core Academic Subjects (hrs:mins), The English High School<sup>52</sup>**

	SY07	SY08	Change	% Change
Total weekly time in learning	29:03	33:02	3:59	14%
ELA	6:41	4:56	-1:45	-26%
Mathematics	6:41	4:56	-1:45	-26%
Science and technology/engineering	3:21	4:56	+1:35	47%
History/social studies	3:21	4:56	+1:35	47%
Total	20:04	19:44	- 0:20	-2%
Percent of total time in learning dedicated to these four core subjects	69%	60%	-	-

Source: Analysis of interview data and school schedules provided by The English High School.

Staff reported that under the six-period schedule, most teachers are responsible for four class periods each day. In SY07, most teachers were responsible for three classes.

### Curriculum and Instruction

Interview data suggests that the most significant change to curriculum and instruction at The English High during SY08 was the full implementation of the America's Choice curriculum and assessment system for ELA. In SY07, the America's Choice Ramp-Up Literacy<sup>®</sup> curriculum was used as an intervention in classrooms serving struggling students; for SY08 the program's "core units" were added such that all ELA classrooms now use America's Choice. Other departments retained their existing curricula. However, teachers noted in interviews that departments have the flexibility to make adjustments where necessary.

According to its SY08 Progress Report to ESE, other curriculum changes are being discussed and developed in departmental and content-area meetings under the direction of program directors and Headmaster Duarte. Among these changes, the ELA department has developed a new "comprehensive curriculum," which is consistent with America's Choice and is reportedly backwards-designed to culminate in the school's intended capstone course, AP English Language and Composition. This new curriculum is expected to be implemented in SY09. Other departments focused on developing sequence and pacing for existing curricula (mathematics), horizontally aligning with the ELA curriculum (history), and developing new capstone courses (both science and history). These three departments are expected to focus increasingly on backwards-mapping in SY09.

The English High also implemented an Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) elective for students in grades 9 and 10.<sup>53</sup> Use of AVID is supported by BPS, which provides funding for AVID staff training and coaches in several BPS schools. The program focuses on study skills and college awareness and preparation, and leaders report that they chose to adopt the program to support the school's mission and "College for All" philosophy. The English High's AVID strategies have reportedly been aligned with mathematics and science instruction, and teachers say that the skills students learn in these courses have helped them to "take notes and organize their work better."

AVID is supported by BPS and focuses on study skills and college awareness and preparation. Leaders report that they chose to adopt the program to support the school's mission and "College for All" philosophy. The English High's AVID strategies have reportedly been aligned with mathematics and science instruction, and teachers say that the skills students learn in these courses have helped them to "take notes and organize their work better."

<sup>52</sup> SY07 figures reflect average weekly instructional time, taking into account the school's bi-weekly early-release day.

<sup>53</sup> AVID is a fourth- through twelfth-grade system to prepare students in the academic middle for four-year college eligibility. More information is available at <http://www.avidonline.org>.

New Learning Centers were also implemented – one in each of The English High’s two SLCs. These centers offer struggling students a place to receive tutoring and other assistance, and are staffed by teachers with support from college students from Boston University (BU), a key partner with the school. Students who are referred to the centers visit during their elective classes or after the school day. Staff frequently expressed enthusiasm for this program designed to serve failing and struggling students.

### *B. Building a Professional Learning Community*

A second critical component of The English High’s vision was the development of a collaborative, professional learning community in which “staff members respect and have great expectations of all students and of one another.” In SY08, The English High greatly increased the frequency and amount of time for staff collaboration and professional development (PD).

#### **Time for Professional Collaboration and Development**

As shown in Figure 49, an analysis of The English High’s school schedule revealed that time for professional collaboration (including time for staff to meet and receive professional development) increased by more than four and one-half hours per week in SY08. Leaders report that the SY08 schedule provided teachers with five blocks for professional collaboration each week, four during the regular school day and one on the Friday early release day for students, up from an estimated 1.5 weekly blocks in SY07. Time for individual planning also increased, as leaders report that SY08 schedules provided teachers with one full class period for individual planning each day.

**Figure 49: Weekly Collaborative and Individual Planning Time (hrs:mins), The English High School** <sup>54</sup>

	SY07	SY08	Change	% Change
Professional collaborative time	1:45	6:20	+4:35	+262%
Individual planning time	3:40	4:56	+1:16	+35%

Source: Analysis of interview data and school schedules provided by The English High.

For SY08, the school dedicated a large portion of its weekly time to content-area teacher team meetings, which occurred during the school day and the length of which varied over the course of the week. Some of this time was dedicated to the continuation of the school’s Collaborative Coaching and Learning program (CCL), which was active during SY07. The program calls for staff to alternate between active engagement in CCL—which brings groups of teachers together for coaching and to share practices—and time for less structured, individual reflection.

Additional collaborative professional time is built into the after-school schedule on The English High’s weekly early-release day for students. A majority of this time was devoted to weekly departmental meetings (approximately 80 minutes), which provided opportunities for school-based content-specific professional development (PD) and curriculum development. The remaining 60 minutes was dedicated to PD related to a variety of priority topics, including: student advisory (ten sessions), AVID (nine sessions), SLC activities (eight sessions), whole-school activities (five sessions), and additional content-focused PD (seven sessions). As per the school’s WEA, all teachers, were required to participate in these collaborative professional activities, including special education and ELL teachers.

For its summer 2007 PD, The English High selected what it considered to be the most relevant and timely offerings from available BPS district resources. This included training for its AVID program and content PD for America’s Choice core units to be implemented by its ELA department. For other subject areas, school-based content PD was provided to staff, led by program directors and consultants.

<sup>54</sup> Calculations for all schools reflect time available to staff who teach in core academic subject areas and are inclusive of time in the schedule on a daily, weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly basis, adjusted to reflect weekly average totals.

## Staff Perceptions of Collaborative Professional Time

As presented in Figure 50, most staff reported that the amount of time devoted to PD, and to whole-faculty/SLC, departmental, and teacher team meetings was “just about right.” However, many staff indicated that there was too much time devoted to PD and departmental meetings. Similarly, many staff indicated that more time should be dedicated to whole-faculty/SLC and teacher team meetings. It was noted that some grade or subject area teachers do not have coincident planning blocks due to the need to ensure that students have access to necessary classes, which is the top priority.

**Figure 50: Adequacy of Time for Professional Collaboration, The English High School**

Time for...	Too much	Too little	Just about right
Professional development (PD)	36%	4%	60%
Whole-faculty or SLC meetings	13%	32%	55%
Departmental meetings	25%	11%	64%
Teacher team meetings	11%	23%	67%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

As Figure 51 shows, 79% of staff reported that large staff meetings (whole-faculty or SLC) were focused on school improvement. Departmental and teacher team meetings both appear to have focused on instructional planning and on discussing students and their needs. All meeting types were reported to be guided by clear objectives. About 80% of staff considered department and teacher team meetings as an effective use of time, compared to 66% who reported that time was used effectively in large staff meetings.

**Figure 51: Percent of Staff who “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” with Statements regarding Meetings**

Meetings are...	Type of Meeting		
	Whole-faculty or SLC	Departmental	Teacher Team
Guided by clear objectives	83%	92%	81%
Focused on school improvement	79%	n/a	n/a
Central to instructional planning	56%	84%	90%
Focused on students and their needs	n/a	84%	86%
Time is used effectively	66%	80%	81%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

### C. Creating a More Personalized School Setting

To support student achievement, The English High proposed to develop a more personalized school setting in which “every student is known well” and “strong, enduring, supportive and respectful relationships are developed among, students, teachers, and administrators.” Key strategies to create this culture included the introduction of a student advisory program, a series of student support initiatives, and changes to the school’s enrollment and SLC structure, all of which were implemented in SY08.

#### Student Advisory Programs

The English High implemented a student advisory program for SY08 and included two 57-minute advisory periods in its schedule each week. As part of the school’s WEA, all teachers were required to lead an advisory group using a prescribed curriculum. More than 9 in 10 teachers responding to the staff survey reported that they led an advisory group in SY08. School documents indicate that The English High dedicated approximately one 60-minute PD block each month to reflection and training related to its advisory program.

The English High’s advisory used a curriculum developed by the Chicago Public Schools, which reportedly focuses equally on building relationships and on developing and supporting academic goals. Leaders report that the school is currently working with its CCE consultant to develop its own unique program, and this work is expected to continue through SY09. It is notable that through a partnership with Boston University (BU), The English High also began a second, smaller advisory program in SY08 targeting student athletes. That program was not examined by this evaluation.

As shown in Figure 52, survey data reveal that 90% of staff embrace the notion that advisory strengthens connections between students and staff, and 73% believe that the goals of the program are clear. However, 46% were concerned that the program may not be an effective use of time, and nearly half said that the school dedicates “too much” time to advisories. This may be attributable in part to concerns regarding the current curriculum, which was widely described as ineffective. As one teacher noted, advisory is “falling apart right now, but it’s a good idea.” Some staff thought the curriculum should focus more explicitly on academic support, while others thought it should pair students and staff based on common interests, as they reported is done in the BU “sports advisory” program.

**Figure 52: Staff Perceptions of Advisory, The English High School**

Student advisory...	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Goals are clear	24%	49%	19%	8%
Strengthens staff-student connections	35%	55%	7%	3%
Has an effective curriculum	13%	21%	35%	31%
Is an effective use of time	21%	33%	29%	17%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

### Approach to Student Support Services

During SY08, The English High implemented critical elements of its Design Plan related to student support services. Two social workers were added to the school’s staff, one stationed in each SLC so they could be “near the action.” This reportedly allows guidance staff, also assigned to individual SLCs, to focus on academic support and counseling. A director of student support coordinates support services and activities across SLCs.

Staff also described a new computer-based communication tool implemented in SY08, referred to as “Code Blue.” The system is intended to serve as a “hub of communications about all SLC/school activities, initiatives, achievements and challenges,” and is accessible to all school staff. Staff also described it as a critical student support resource that allows teachers to track student discipline, support referrals, and nurses’ office visits. In interviews, one teacher noted that as a result of this system and other changes to student support services, “kids are less likely to fall through the cracks.”

In addition, instructional supports, such as AVID and SLC-based Learning Centers, are also intended to impact student culture or students’ connections to faculty and to the overall goals of the school in very direct ways. The BPS-supported AVID program is intended to increase college awareness and preparation, while also teaching students skills to support academic success. Learning Centers are intended to provide personalized academic support to students, during and after the school day, boosting students’ prospects for academic and social success.

### School Size and Structure

The English High’s student enrollment declined dramatically. Many teachers reported that reducing enrollment to a size consistent with building capacity had improved overall student culture. Student-teacher ratios improved substantially, and survey data suggest that average class sizes have also improved. As Figure 53 shows, teachers who remained on staff from SY07 reported that their mean class size had fallen by an average of more than 3.1

students, from 25.5 to 22.4. In interviews, some teachers expressed a belief that this had improved student-teacher relationships and allowed teachers to be more effective. However, it was also noted that the increase in the number of class periods that teachers staff each day (from three to four) resulted in higher overall student loads for some teachers.

**Figure 53: Change in Enrollment and Staffing, The English High School**

	SY07	SY08	Change
Student Enrollment	1,244	820	-34%
Average Class Size, Returning Teachers	25.5	22.4	-12%

Source: ESE Information Services (Student Enrollment). Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey (Average Class Size).

The English High also dramatically altered its SLC structure to further enhance the sense of community between students and teachers. The school, which had previously been divided into four thematic SLCs, reorganized into two equally-sized SLCs. Headmaster Duarte entirely reconstituted student groups and teaching teams, which he saw as “a chance to start fresh.” Each SLC was assigned its own building space (one floor), and a unique teaching staff and student population.

The SLCs are intended to have their own cultural identity, but share in the school’s overall culture, curriculum, and “College for All” philosophy. Students from both SLCs have access to all elective courses. The classrooms for electives are located on a separate floor from the SLCs. Some teachers noted that these communities are “stronger” and “more pure,” than those in the previous structure, and that this approach “really works” to create a sense of community.

#### *D. Establishing Governance Structures*

The English High’s Design Plan proposed new governance structures to manage and support its Commonwealth Pilot autonomies. These structures include: an instructional leadership team to gather input from and unify SLCs; a governing board to oversee the school’s vision and improvement efforts; and an annual Work Election Agreement (WEA) that sets forth working conditions for school staff. All were implemented during SY08.

#### **Instructional Leadership Team**

The English High established a school-wide instructional leadership team (ILT). Comprised of administrators and representatives from each of the school’s SLCs, the ILT is intended to serve as a single deliberative body that addresses school-wide concerns related to teaching and learning. The team serves as a key structure to promote the school’s “one school” philosophy whereby SLCs serve as personalization structures for students but do not operate autonomously as policy-making entities.

According to the school’s Design Plan, the ILT is responsible for analyzing data, including student performance data and feedback from learning walk, to assess current conditions, identify needs, and plan appropriate interventions. The team may also make recommendations to individual boards related to specific programs, such as advisory or AVID.

#### **Governing Board**

The English High’s governing board was formed and held the first of eight monthly meetings in November 2007. At the time of its first meeting, the board was comprised of the headmaster, faculty, parents, and a non-voting ex-officio member. However, by the end of SY08, its membership also included students and representatives from the school’s alumni association, the community, and a university partner (BU)—a configuration more consistent with the school’s Design Plan. Members representing faculty, parents, and students were each elected by their peers, and include representation from each SLC. The board’s chair is a community/university/business partner-

member elected by its membership, with the headmaster serving as co-chair. Board committees include an executive committee, a personnel committee, and a finance committee.

In SY08, the board created bylaws and approved the school's budget and WEA for SY09. Bylaws indicate that the group has authority over the school vision and philosophy, major student policies, planning, budget approval, fundraising, and the headmaster's evaluation, which is submitted to the district superintendent. The board serves in an advisory role with regard to curriculum, assessment, and parent and community involvement. During SY08, it considered a variety of issues, including promotion policies, schedule priorities, staff recruitment, learning center policies, advisory structures, inclusion, and the possibility of forming a "grade nine academy." At each meeting, time was allocated for the headmaster, teachers, and parents to make reports and raise issues of interest to their constituencies. Meeting notes are reportedly posted on the school's Code Blue communication system.

### **Work Election Agreement**

The governing board approved a WEA for SY09 that continued the school's extended day schedule and made no changes relative to school's SY08 agreement. It was suggested by one observer that the governing board had wanted to give new school systems, particularly the school's extended day, more time before judging their success and/or making major changes. The observer noted, "Next year [the board] will look more closely" at whether changes are warranted.

Only one-third of surveyed teachers and support staff indicated that they were given an opportunity to provide input as part of the WEA revision process. Fewer still (16%) said that they provided substantive input, and only three teachers and support personnel not serving on the school's governing board reported they provided such input. Among those who did provide input, all felt that it had been seriously considered.

## **III. Center for Collaborative Education Technical Assistance**

The Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) was contracted by ESE to provide technical assistance to The English High in support of its conversion to a Commonwealth Pilot School. Although monitoring and assessment of CCE services was outside the scope of this evaluation, work plans and related data enable a review of the planned focus of CCE services in SY08. Survey data provide feedback regarding the quality of a subset of those services.

### ***A. Focus of Technical Assistance***

The English High's CCE team comprised five coaches, one of whom served as lead coach. In collaboration with school leaders, they developed a work plan that served as the basis for coaching services throughout SY08. An analysis of this document,<sup>55</sup> which allocates 100 planned coaching days to various tasks and sub-tasks, reveals that 37% of planned time (37 days) was dedicated to the development of "high functioning collaborative communities" within SLCs and departments. Most of this time (27 days) was allocated to planning and facilitating PD and common planning on weekly early release days for students. Coaches were also obligated to devote time to train program directors and SLC leaders in facilitative leadership (3 days) as well as to provide Critical Friends Group training—intended to develop skills in collaborative techniques and protocols within each SLC—to 10 faculty members (7 days).

A similar amount of time (35 days) was dedicated to supporting school governance and leadership structures. This time was split between the governing board (19 days) and the school's instructional leadership and data teams (16 days). Specific activities included supporting the initial establishment of teams, planning with school leaders, and helping to plan and facilitate ongoing meetings.

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<sup>55</sup> CCE work plans allocated tasks and sub-tasks to goals related to individual pilot autonomies or groups of autonomies. This analysis summarizes time devoted to key school goals, and as such, classifications were slightly reconstituted.

Additional technical assistance activities identified in the work plan include the following:

- Supporting the development of an effective advisory program (15 days), including curriculum development and the provision of professional development (PD) for staff.
- Supporting the development of “a strong program for involving families and the community” (10 days). A coaching progress report indicates that this included direct engagement with the school’s family coordinator and the provision of “limited PD on family engagement” to staff.
- Promoting the understanding of Commonwealth Pilot autonomies and practices among staff, students, and families by providing workshops and presentations (1 day) and planning visits to other Commonwealth Pilot Schools (2 days).

Tasks described in work plans reflect the initial focus areas of CCE activities, and as such, do not represent an exhaustive list of actual services delivered. As an example, a coaches’ report indicates that CCE coaches participated in and facilitated learning walks in science, math and ELA, a service not identified in the work plan.

### B. Staff Perceptions of CCE Services

Of the 56% of surveyed staff who expressed an opinion, 76% believed that CCE coaches have helped The English High improve. Figure 54 presents staff ratings of two CCE services—meeting facilitation and PD—that were provided in a range of contexts to support multiple constituencies and programs within the school. The vast majority of responding staff indicated that meeting facilitation services were either good (49%) or excellent (33%). Staff also responded positively regarding CCE’s PD services (24% excellent, 52% good). A large proportion of staff indicated “don’t know” in response to these questions.

**Figure 54: Staff Perceptions of CCE Meeting Facilitation and PD Services, The English High School**

	Valid N	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't Know*
Meeting facilitation	51	33%	49%	12%	6%	40%
Professional development (PD)	42	24%	52%	14%	10%	50%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

\* “Don’t Know” responses not included in distribution of valid response (excellent, good, fair, poor)

Two questions targeted CCE’s support for the development of key governance structures—the school’s governing board and instructional leadership team (ILT). Figure 55 presents staff ratings of these services, both by members of the team and by all respondents. Among those serving on the governing board, ratings of support for their board were universally positive (89% excellent; 11% good); overall ratings were lower, but still quite positive (47% excellent; 29% good). Regarding ILT support, nearly 64% of ILT members indicated that services were either excellent or good, with overall ratings somewhat higher (71%). Many staff indicated “don’t know” in response to these questions, but most respondents who were members of these groups offered a valid response.

**Figure 55: Staff Perceptions of Selected CCE Support Services, The English High School**

		Valid N	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't Know*
Governing board formation	All staff	34	47%	29%	18%	6%	58%
	GB members	9	89%	11%	0%	0%	0%
Instructional leadership team (ILT) support	All staff	35	34%	37%	26%	3%	58%
	ILT members	11	36%	27%	36%	0%	14%

Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

\* “Don’t Know” responses not included in distribution of valid response (excellent, good, fair, poor)

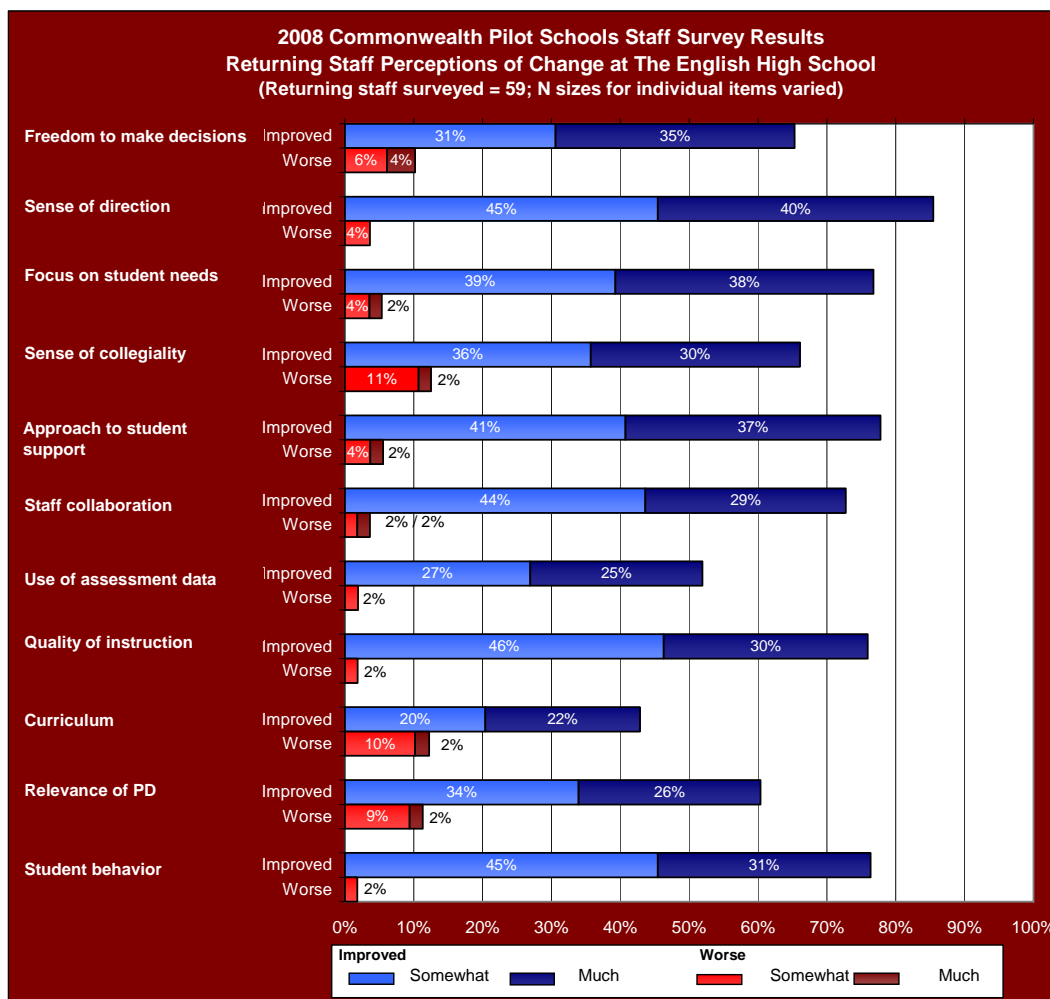
### IV. Preliminary Impacts and Reflection on Current Direction

Changes undertaken at The English High are intended to increase the school’s effectiveness and, ultimately, enable the school to boost student achievement. While it is too early to observe changes in student achievement directly, this section presents preliminary results from the staff survey regarding immediate, observed changes in school capacity, operations, and culture, as well as staff perspectives on the current direction of their school and the sustainability of their Design Plan.

#### A. Preliminary Impacts

Of the 90 teachers and staff at The English High who responded to the survey, 59 had been at the school for more than one year and were eligible to respond to a series of questions related to the preliminary impacts of Design Plan implementation on school characteristics, culture, and capacity. These results, shown in Figure 56, suggest that most returning staff perceive improvement in nearly all areas of the school addressed by the survey. The most positive feedback was offered with regard to improvements in the school’s sense of direction. While still positive overall, staff least frequently reported improvements in curriculum and assessment use. These results are discussed in greater detail below and include relevant baseline measures as of May 2008.<sup>56</sup>

**Figure 56: Preliminary Impacts, The English High School**



Source: Commonwealth Pilot Schools Staff Survey.

<sup>56</sup> Small discrepancies of less than one percentage point may be observed between figures reported in the text of in this section and those calculated by summing across categories reported in Figure 56. These differences are attributable to rounding error.

## Positive Impacts

The school's sense of direction, student support services, focus on student needs, quality of instruction, student behavior, and staff collaboration were among those areas for which the largest proportion of staff indicated improvement relative to the previous year.

- Direction and Vision - 85% of returning staff reported that the school's sense of direction had improved, nearly half of whom said it was much improved. Among the entire staff, 88% said that the school has a clearly articulated vision, and 69% said that the school's staff is unified in support of that vision.
- Student Support - 78% of returning staff said that the school's approach to student services had improved. Among all staff, 80% reported that its current approach to student support services enhances teaching and learning.
- Focus on Student Needs - 77% of returning staff indicated that the school's focus on student needs had sharpened. Among all staff, 84% who regularly participate in departmental meetings and 86% of those who participate in teacher team meetings said that this time is focused on students and their needs.
- Quality of Instruction - 76% of returning staff said that quality of instruction had improved. Among all staff, 92% said that the school's teachers provide quality instruction.
- Student Behavior - 76% of returning staff indicated that student behavior had improved. However, 72% agreed that student behavior was a problem, and only 47% said that student discipline is well managed.
- Staff Collaboration - 73% of returning staff indicated that staff collaboration had improved. Among all staff, 75% said that staff collaborate effectively.

At least 50% of returning staff said that the school's freedom to make important decisions, its overall sense of collegiality, and relevance of PD programming had improved.

- Staff Collegiality - 66% of returning staff reported that the school's sense of collegiality had improved. Among all staff, 73% said that the school has a very collegial, professional environment.
- Freedom to Make Decisions - 65% of returning staff said that the school's freedom to make important decisions had improved. Among all staff, 59% believe the school has freedom to make important decisions.
- Relevance of PD - 60% of returning staff believed that the relevance of PD had improved. Among all staff who regularly participated in PD, 80% said that it was relevant to school improvement.
- Use of Assessment Data - 52% of returning staff indicated that the school's use of assessment data had improved. Among all teachers, 89% said they have access to assessment data, 82% said they use data to inform instruction, and 64% said that data is used to assess and refine the curriculum.

## Minimal Impacts

The largest proportion of The English High's returning staff (45%) indicated that curriculum remained about the same, resulting in its description as an area of minimal impact. However, a similar proportion (42%) reported improvement in this area. This mixed result may be attributable to the fact that substantive changes were implemented in some areas, most notably ELA, while changes to other subject areas remain in the planning phase. Overall, 63% of teachers consider the curriculum for their subject area to be well conceived.

## Adverse Impacts

As noted, there were no areas in which the largest proportion of The English High's returning staff reported that conditions or performance had become worse.

## *B. Reflections on Current Direction*

### **Is This the Right Path?**

Staff of The English High were optimistic with regard to the school's current direction. Overall, 72% believed that changes undertaken through conversion are moving the school in the right direction, while 9% expressed concern that it was moving in the wrong direction. Further, 62% of returning staff believed the school's ability to improve student learning had improved over the past year, compared to 4% who said that it had worsened. Among all staff, 76% reported that the school's CCE coaches helped The English High to improve. Overall, indicators point to a school moving toward success.

### **Is This Sustainable?**

Interview and survey responses reveal concern among staff as to whether the initiatives implemented at The English High can be sustained over the long term. On the staff survey, 93% of respondents reported that they were busier than a year ago, with estimates of hours worked per week increasing for 76% of returning teachers. The average estimated increase was 11.2 hours per week for teachers and nearly 16 hours for leaders and student support staff. About half of all staff indicated that they believe that their current pace is sustainable, and 45% agreed staff morale was high at the time of the survey in May 2008.

In interviews, it was suggested that over the course of the year, staff were beginning to show signs of burnout. As one outside observer suggested, at the beginning of the school year, "cleaning, painting, and downsizing gave [staff] a feeling of tangible change," but this high level of enthusiasm is sometimes difficult to maintain as staff grapple with the day-to-day realities of implementing a comprehensive whole-school reform. As one teacher noted, "we weren't prepared for the amount of work it takes to change ourselves and our curriculum." Similarly, some staff noted that while they understand that they need to have patience to see the outcomes of this change process, it can be challenging to remain optimistic in the short term.

Another critical concern voiced by leaders and staff relates to the long-term commitment of resources to support The English High. Teachers received substantial bonuses from BPS for working the extended day implemented at the school, which some teachers estimated compensates them for approximately 100 of the 180 additional hours they work each year under their WEA. Teachers described the bonuses as a "big incentive to stay," which was vital to maintaining staff commitment to the extended day schedule. While BPS committed to continuing this funding for SY09 through its Superintendent's Schools program, uncertainty exists regarding the availability of these resources beyond the upcoming academic year.

## Conclusions

### Implementation of School-Level Changes

The Commonwealth Pilot Schools Initiative is intended to establish conditions conducive to productive change in persistently struggling schools. Although the Initiative remains at an early juncture, evaluation results provide evidence of change within each of the four schools, with the most extensive changes realized in Academy, Duggan, and English. Foremost among the changes in these three schools are reductions in student enrollment and dramatic turnover in staff from SY07 to SY08. Putnam did not follow these trends, increasing enrollment and experiencing only modest turnover among its staff, many of whom are vocational teachers who could not be readily re-assigned to other district schools.

Academy, Duggan, and English implemented sweeping changes to school schedules called for in their Commonwealth Pilot Design Plans. This resulted in substantive changes to student's time in learning, and to the amount of time available for staff collaboration and professional development. With regard to time on learning, Academy and English added four-plus hours per week, while Duggan lost over one hour per week. Putnam did not revise its student schedule, but did expand after-school meeting time to allow an hour-long SLC meeting each week. All four schools realized overall increases in time for staff collaboration and professional development. Duggan and Putnam experienced smaller changes in teacher work hours than their counterparts, driven in part by conditions set out in Springfield's Memorandum of Agreement with its teachers union.

Each school proposed to create a more personalized, student-focused school and identified similar strategies to attain this goal. This included creating smaller learning environments through decreased enrollment or implementation of "pure" SLCs, implementing student advisory programs, and taking steps to improve student support staffing or approaches. With regard to creating smaller learning environments, Duggan and English were downsized, while Putnam actually increased in enrollment. English, which still operates at nearly double the recommended size for a Commonwealth Pilot School, and Putnam both worked to improve their existing SLC structures. Academy, which was already near the recommended size of 400 students, experienced a further reduction in enrollment due to intra-district school choice. Staff of Duggan and English applauded the reduction in student enrollment in their schools.

Each of the schools implemented an advisory program—one was already in place at Putnam—devoting varying amounts of time to this activity. Staff generally view advisory as a promising idea for strengthening connections among students and staff, but were very critical of existing advisory curricula, which remain under review and development at all schools. Leaders at Duggan and English exercised new autonomy to re-shape their staffing and approach to student discipline and other support services. Less notable changes were noted at Academy and Putnam. Overall, student behavior remains a chief concern among leaders and staff of all four schools.

Key governance structures are now operational in each of the four schools. Specifically, each school now has a functioning governing board comprised minimally of school leaders, staff, parents and community members, as well as students in three schools. These governance boards have become engaged in matters of school policy, budget, principal evaluation and the development and approval of Work Election Agreements (WEA) that define working conditions for school staff. In addition, each school has established at least one instructional leadership team, which liaisons with the governing board and other school-level decision making bodies.

The Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) has served as the primary provider of technical assistance to these schools as they pursue their conversion to Commonwealth Pilot Schools. Overall, staff believe CCE coaches have helped their schools to improve. They have been most positive in their ratings of support provided for the formation of governing boards, but feedback has been positive with regard to other selected services, including leadership team support, meeting facilitation services and professional development.

## Preliminary Impacts

Perceptions of the preliminary impacts of conversion vary widely among returning staff of the four schools. Duggan's were extremely positive in their assessment of improvements in school capacity and practice. The English High's staff were very positive and Putnam's were generally positive, as well. Academy hired a new principal in SY08 and also labored through the concurrent implementation of the Commonwealth Pilot School and Expanded Learning Time initiatives. These and other dramatic changes may have overwhelmed the school, and its returning staff did not report substantial improvement, noting areas in which capacity or practice may have worsened.

Although variations exist in the extent and impact of changes within each of the four schools, staff generally feel that the Initiative is moving their school in the right direction. Among those respondents who did not report that this was the case, most elected to reserve judgment until the impacts of changes become clearer to them. Further, a slight majority of survey respondents reported that their school's ability to improve student learning improved over the course of the past year, with most other respondents reporting that it remained the same.

With these generally promising results in hand, the chief concern expressed by schools may be their ability to sustain the pace they set in SY08, as staff almost universally described themselves as busier than in the previous year. Of particular concern is the possible loss of funding used to create incentives for staff to stay at The English High and, to a lesser extent, at Academy. In addition, schools are anxious to know the long term plans for the Commonwealth Pilot Schools program and the implications of these plans for their schools.

## Lessons Learned

This report is intended to summarize the implementation progress and preliminary outcomes of the Commonwealth Pilot Schools Initiative. It also provides an opportunity to reflect upon many important lessons learned since these four schools became actively engaged with the Initiative in January 2007, which may inform its ongoing management and implementation. The following lessons learned were gleaned from the school planning and design phase, as well as the first year of implementation of school Design Plans.

### Planning and Design

#### 1. **Not all schools or districts are suited to the turnaround model as it is currently structured, and selection criteria may help identify those best positioned to benefit from the model.**

A number of factors may limit schools' ability to effectively use the autonomies intended to create conditions for improved school performance. For example, the present cohort includes a large vocational school with limited ability to decrease enrollment or release vocational teachers to other district positions, limiting staffing autonomy and the ability to conform to school size guidelines. As the pool of candidates grows, district and school selection criteria may support more effective use of limited resources. Criteria might include:

- Is the district of sufficient size to support relocating staff or students at the grade level in question?
- Does the district or school have characteristics that will facilitate or hinder conversion?
- Are district leaders committed to supporting the autonomies granted to a Commonwealth Pilot School?
- Does the district have internal budget processes that support this complex autonomy?
- Does the school have the leadership and administrative resources needed to support this change?

#### 2. **The school design process requires more time than was available in the Initiative's planning phase.**

Schools became fully immersed in the design process in January 2007 with support from the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE). The deadline for initial proposals was February 9, 2007. Following a panel review process, revisions were due by March 13, and the BOE approved each of the four schools' Design Plans two weeks later. Concurrently, CCE assisted districts with the development of memoranda of agreement (MOA) with their respective teachers unions, without which Design Plans could not be implemented.

Concerns were expressed that this aggressive schedule did not allow time for schools to study and select from among multiple models of change. In some instances it may not have allowed for adequate review, consideration, and consensus-building among staff, or adequate engagement with parents and the community. There is consensus that this timeline was not consistent with the developmental process recommended by the BPS pilot school model, and that more time should be dedicated to design planning for future cohorts.

#### 3. **Design Plans should explicitly include plans for district support of programs and autonomies, as well as for mitigating impacts of enrollment and staffing changes on other district schools.**

Implementation of autonomies for Commonwealth Pilot Schools may require fundamental changes in district operations, with implications for budgeting, human resources, and curriculum, instruction and assessment systems. SY08 saw a degree of uncertainty regarding some schools' autonomy in each of these areas, due to administrative system design constraints (particularly with regard to budgeting) or to disagreements related to schools' presumed exemption from district curriculum pacing and assessments.

Further, to the extent that conversion leads to a substantial migration of staff or students to other district schools, the process may have profound impacts on those schools. This issue is of particular concern in smaller districts or at grade levels for which even large districts have few schools. A district-level design component may benefit the implementation of this model by encouraging early consideration of these topics.

## Implementation

### 1. Significant school-level change takes time; not all Design Plan goals can be realized in a single year.

By re-shaping their staff, establishing time for collaboration and PD, increasing personalization, and creating mechanisms for school-level decision-making, schools established new capacity to support improvements to teaching and learning. However, the year also revealed a developmental curve, even in the presence of CCE coaching and facilitation, with schools and their staffs still learning to use new tools and structures to bring about change in other areas. For example, while SY08 afforded an opportunity to approach changes to curriculum, instruction, and assessment, these were areas in which Design Plan proposals were often left unrealized. This was at least partly due to the need to develop new structures and staff capacity, but was also complicated by uncertainty in some schools with respect to budget and curriculum autonomy.

The overall success of schools in implementing operational and programmatic changes—including those related to staffing, schedules, enrollment, advisory programs, and governance—underscores the practicality of identifying these as target goals for the first year of the conversion process. This should inform strategy with regard to the development of school designs, implementation schedules, and technical assistance arrangements (both in terms of nature and duration), as well as assessment of the Initiative's outcomes.

### 2. Support needs during conversion may vary across schools. Technical assistance provided through the Initiative should be targeted to the highest priority needs both across and within schools.

The first year of Commonwealth Pilot conversion highlighted the disparate and distinct resources within each district and school. Acknowledging these varying capacities, technical assistance should be tailored to local needs to ensure well-conceived, achievable school designs and successful implementation. This may require a preliminary needs assessment to identify school-specific needs. Some observed areas of difference include district policies and budget systems, complexity of school organization (affecting scheduling), school-level administrative leadership capacity, ability to recruit qualified staff, and financial resources.

### 3. Schools participating in this Initiative may not always benefit from simultaneous participation in other major redesign efforts, particularly where resources are limited.

Commonwealth Pilot conversion is a whole-school redesign that may commonly alter school characteristics, systems, and practices. Successful implementation of changes observed in SY08 required considerable planning and a targeted approach to resource deployment. In this context, simultaneous implementation of other major initiatives could disperse limited resources (including administrative attention) too thinly across multiple initiatives, the success of which may be critical to ongoing system stability. Where schools propose such plans, even where initiatives are complementary, a deliberate and phased approach to implementation may be desirable to ensure that key changes associated with each Initiative are adequately supported.

### 4. Outside facilitation and expertise are vital to school design and initial conversion, especially in districts with no prior experience with the pilot school model.

CCE technical assistance was crucial to the Initiative's design phase and to the initial implementation of resulting plans. Coaches facilitated district-level agreements and provided direction to the development of school Design Plans. This was particularly important in districts with limited or no past experience with pilot schools. The ability to advocate for and build awareness of pilot autonomies among district and school staff was of particular value to school leaders, who may not otherwise be in a strong position to advocate for these rights. The need for advocacy and awareness-building persists as schools begin SY09.

CCE also provided energy and direction to the first year of Design Plan implementation at each school. This started with summer PD and continued throughout the year, as CCE coaches assisted schools in the development of new structures and capacity. Schools also leveraged their internal expertise and other external consultants to support the change processes, particularly for services not related to the installation of pilot structures or programs.

**5. Ongoing support may be needed to help schools and districts establish and exercise autonomy.**

Specific budget practices and teacher agreements that have supported autonomies in Boston were unable to be implemented in some Commonwealth Pilot districts in SY08. This includes: lump-sum budgets; discretionary district services from which schools can opt out and receive corresponding funds; and MOA language allowing schools to increase teacher work hours to a specified level before additional compensation is required.

Districts and schools were also unable to be held strictly to initial conversion guidelines, including those related to size and budgetary systems. This accommodated local constraints, but raises questions regarding the extent to which the model can be consistently implemented in all schools and districts. A defined set of autonomies specific to Commonwealth Pilots—establishment of which is a condition for ongoing school and district participation—may reduce uncertainty and minimize variation in the model’s application across districts. Development of these autonomies may also require phased implementation strategies, as well as district training and technical assistance programs to support adaptation of existing systems.

**6. The Initiative’s impact on student achievement will be difficult to disentangle from changes in student enrollment patterns, both at Commonwealth Pilots and at other district schools.**

Student cohorts may be substantially altered when a school converts to Commonwealth Pilot status, complicating long-term impact assessment. This is particularly true in districts where neighborhood boundaries are altered as part of the conversion process or where school choice exists and changing school reputations or programs fundamentally alters families’ demand for the school. Rigorous outcomes evaluation will require monitoring changes in student profiles at converted schools, including observed demographic shifts as well as differences in the prior achievement profile of incoming student cohorts. In addition, changing cohorts in Commonwealth Pilots may affect achievement in other district schools. These impacts should be considered as part of overall program impact assessment.

**7. Although improved student achievement is the Initiative’s ultimate goal, it will take time for this outcome to be realized. In the interim, short-term and intermediate outcomes may be monitored through reporting and accountability benchmarks.**

The Initiative is intended to increase student achievement outcomes through the development of more effective school communities, yet there is general consensus that such outcomes may take years to manifest. Considering the centrality of accountability to the Commonwealth Pilot School designation, school leaders and staff expressed uncertainty regarding interim progress expectations. The experience of this cohort suggests that tiered reporting and accountability benchmarks should be developed and communicated, and should reflect phases of expected progress and provide guidance to schools as they prioritize implementation of Design Plan proposals. Benchmarks related to the development of new structures and programs may be relevant in the first year of implementation, while those related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices would become increasingly important once first-tier benchmarks are met.