REPORT OF TWO-YEAR FOLLOW-UP REVIEW
Massachusetts Department of Education

John J. Lynch Middle School
Holyoke Public Schools

Introduction

The Two-year Follow-up Review is the fourth and final stage in the process used to assess school performance under the Massachusetts School and District Accountability System. The first stage identifies schools in the lowest MCAS performance categories that are in need of improvement. Stage Two, the Panel Review, involves the visitation of a review team to assist the Commissioner of Education in determining whether a school that has been identified as in need of improvement is under-performing and in need of state guidance to improve student performance. Schools declared to be under-performing are required to undergo the next stage of the process, the Fact-Finding Review, to assist both the school and the Commissioner in determining the reasons for low student performance and in developing a factual basis from which to develop a plan to improve student performance. The John J. Lynch Middle School developed such a plan, and the Commissioner and Board of Education accepted the plan on January 23, 2001. The District is required to direct the implementation of this plan, and within two years, the school must demonstrate significant improvement.

The Under-performing Follow-up Review reports on progress at the end of this two-year period of implementation. The Commissioner and Board of Education will use the Follow-up Review Report to issue a judgment on the question of chronic under-performance at the John J. Lynch Middle School. The Follow-up Review was conducted on May 27-29, 2003.

The Panel's charge was to analyze data and written information on the school's performance and improvement efforts, visit the school, and meet with school and District officials in order to advise the Commissioner on the answers to the following five key questions:

1. Has the school shown improvement in student performance?
2. To what extent did the school implement the improvement plan, which was approved by the State Board of Education?
3. Are there other factors (changes in conditions or circumstances, i.e., policies, practices) in the school or district, which have contributed to or impeded the school's ability to implement their plan?
4. Is there currently a sound plan in place to guide continued improvement in student performance?
5. Are the conditions in place to sustain the gains achieved and support continued improvement in student performance?

The Panel's responses to the above key questions that defined the scope of the review are included in this report. These findings and conclusions are the product of the Panel's analysis,

discussion, and observation, based on the evidence available to it. A list of panel members who participated in the review is provided in Appendix A. A detailed schedule of the Panel's activities is provided in Appendix B.

The Panel's findings and conclusions on the five key questions will be forwarded to the Commissioner of Education for consideration, together with the school's status reports and student performance data, in determining whether John J. Lynch Middle School is deemed to be chronically under-performing. The Panel was not asked to formulate a sound plan for school improvement where such a plan does not presently exist or to recommend a course of action to create the conditions for successful implementation of sound improvement strategies where such conditions at present do not appear to exist.

Executive Summary

The John J. Lynch Middle School has made clear progress since the under-performing designation in 2001. The school, under direction of the continuing leadership, is organized to allow for frequent and varied meetings among teachers and full inclusion of the staff in the school improvement process. A new block schedule allows for more instructional time in English language arts and mathematics while also providing a structure for enrichment programs such as Soar to Success, a math robotics course, botanical science and art programs. The faculty and staff have fully implemented all recommendations from the Fact-Finding Report and the strategies listed in the School Improvement Plan approved by the Board of Education. The school improvement plans reflect growth in using data to drive the goals while maintaining a constant focus on the initial goals. The District has a new Superintendent who, in his initial fifteen months, has made great strides in organizing the district, developing a strategic plan, providing personnel resources and implementing a structure for accountability while providing support for schools through professional development opportunities. The challenge the faculty and staff currently face is deepening the thinking and conversations around teaching and learning to fully examine the relationship between the reasons for student performance and the instruction in the classroom.

Following are the findings for each of the five key questions:

Key Findings

1. The students have shown improvement in MCAS performance and have exceeded AYP in language arts and met AYP in mathematics. The performance gains have been uneven across the subgroups, with Special Education and Limited English Proficient (LEP) students showing less growth than mainstream students, especially in mathematics.

2. The faculty and staff have fully implemented the plan that was approved by the Board of Education. A system of communication through various committee meetings allows for the discussion and review of the initiatives in the Improvement Plan. School personnel have also fully implemented the recommendations from the in-depth Fact-Finding Review completed

in fall 2000. A key strength is their receptiveness to change and commitment to implementing approved initiatives.

3. A new superintendent and some contractual changes are other factors, which are expected to contribute to the school's success. Along with the Superintendent came a structure for accountability within the district and a focus on consistent implementation of District initiatives. Recent contractual changes allow for two extra professional development days as well as the use of written feedback forms assessing teachers' level of implementation of Connected Math and LINKS writing.

4. A detailed and organized plan exists that is guiding the work of the teachers. A key strength of the plan is that all faculty members are very familiar with its content and use the plan as a tool to guide their practice. Structures are in place to allow for the continual discussion of the plan and to assess its level of implementation. A key weakness of the plan is its focus on initiatives without making the connection between student performance and instruction or expectations. Some of the language of the plan reflects a low level of expectation for the students, citing socioeconomic or first language status as reasons for poor performance.

5. Conditions are in place to sustain the gains achieved. The Principal has shown impressive improvement and continues to grow as an instructional leader. The faculty is deeply committed and works together in a collaborative and respectful climate. The District is supportive of the school and, under the direction of the new Superintendent, is putting systems in place to support all schools while holding them accountable for implementing district initiatives. The key weakness is a current lack of reflection on instructional practice beyond the implementation of the initiatives. It is the consensus of the team that this is the next level of implementation needed in order to continue improved performance for all students.

John Lynch Middle School Profile

Enrollment

The John Lynch School is one of 14 schools in Holyoke and three middle schools in the district. Enrollment at the school between 1999 and 2002 averaged 422 students. Over 70 percent of the student body during this period was Hispanic, while White students accounted for twenty percent of the student body.

Between 1999 and 2002, the percentage of low-income students attending the school steadily increased, from 60 percent in 1999 to 85 percent in 2002. Until 2002, students whose first language is not English accounted for 55 percent of the population. However, in 2002 these students made up only 22 percent of the student body. In 1999 and 2000, 30 percent of students were Limited English Proficient (LEP), however in 2001 and 2002 only five percent of students were LEP.

Attendance at the Lynch School between 1998 and 2001 averaged 90 percent, with students absent 20 days on average. During this period, in-school suspensions averaged 48 percent while

out-of-school suspensions were 40 percent. Exclusions during that time averaged 12 percent. An average of 11 percent of students was excluded during this period.

MCAS Overview

Students at the John Lynch Middle School are tested in the MCAS in grade 6 in mathematics, in grade 7 in English language arts, and in grade 8 in mathematics. In Cycle II (2001-2002), the school was found to have made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in both ELA and mathematics.

Student Performance in English Language Arts

In Cycle II, the Lynch School received a proficiency index of 64.3 in ELA, meriting a performance rating of *Low*. For its 12.9-point improvement over its Cycle I (1999-2000) performance, the school received an improvement rating of *Above Target*. Student participation rates in Cycle II at this school were 92 percent in 2001 and 99 percent in 2002.

Regular Education

In 2001, 28 percent of Regular Education students tested were proficient, 61 percent scored at the Needs Improvement level and 11 percent at Warning. In 2002, 45 percent of students performed at the Proficient level, 43 percent were in need of improvement and 12 percent were in Warning. While Regular Education students outperformed the district in this content area, large disparities remain when compared with state-level results.

Special Education

Seven percent of Special Education students were proficient in 2001, 32 percent scored at the Needs Improvement level, and 61 percent at Warning. In the second year of Cycle II, six percent of students in this subgroup were proficient, 35 percent in need of improvement and 59 percent at Warning. Compared to the district composite results, Special Education students at the Lynch School performed better in ELA; however, their performance lags behind state-wide performance of students in this subgroup.

Limited English Proficient

In the first year of Cycle II, seven percent of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students tested were proficient, 14 percent scored in the Needs Improvement category, and 79 percent in Warning. In 2002, zero percent of LEP students were proficient, 45 percent in need of improvement and 55 percent in Warning. Although the performance of LEP students in this school was better than district, the former has yet to reach the percentages of proficient LEP students at the state level.

Student Performance in Mathematics

The Lynch School received a performance rating of *Critically Low* in mathematics in Cycle II based on its proficiency index of 38.3. Improvement was rated *On Target*. Participation rates in the mathematics portion of the test were 95 percent in 2001 and 99 percent in 2002.

Regular Education Students

The grade 6 mathematics test was first administered in 2001. In 2001, 12 percent of Regular Education students at the grade 6 level tested at the Lynch School were proficient. Thirty six percent of students in this group scored at the Needs Improvement level while 52 percent were at Warning. In the second year of Cycle II, 18 percent of those tested were proficient, 33 percent were found to be in need of improvement, and 49 percent performed in the Warning category. Compared to other grade 6 Regular Education students in the district, students at the Lynch fared better. Compared to other students in the state, however, Lynch students lag far behind.

While the scores of Regular Education students in grade 8 improved in Cycle II compared to Cycle I, there are no discernible trends in student performance in mathematics at this school. In 1999, five percent of Regular Education students tested scored proficient, 17 percent were in need of improvement, and 78 percent were at Warning. In 2000, one percent scored in the Advanced category, seven percent in Proficient, 20 percent in Needs Improvement, and 72 percent in Warning. In the first year of Cycle II, 16 percent of students in this group were proficient, 35 percent in need of improvement and 49 percent performed at the Warning level. In 2002, only three percent of students tested were found proficient, 38 percent were at the Needs Improvement level and 60 percent at Warning.

While the differences between the performance of grade 8 Regular Education students at the school level and the district are subtle, when compared to the state the performance gaps are very wide in this content area. See Table 1 below.

Table 1. Comparing Regular Education Students' Performance in Mathematics in grade 8 (1999-2002)

Regular Ed.	**1999**			**2000**			**2001**			**2002**		
	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State
Advanced	0	0	7	1	1	12	0	0	13	0	0	13
Proficient	5	5	26	7	7	27	16	6	27	3	5	26
Needs Improvement	17	17	34	20	17	29	35	28	37	38	27	36
Warning	78	77	33	72	74	32	49	66	23	60	68	25

Special Education Students

In 2001, there were no proficient Special Education students at the grade 6 level. Six percent of students in this subgroup performed at the Needs Improvement level and 94 percent at Warning. In the second year of Cycle II, 22 percent of students scored in the Needs Improvement category while the remaining 78 percent were in Warning.

Although the performance of Special Education students in grade 8 improved slightly in Cycle II, no pattern emerges from the distribution of students' scores over the last four years. In 1999,

all Special Education students scored in the Warning category. In 2000, all but the six percent of students who scored Proficient scored in the Warning category. In 2001, 10 percent of students scored at the Needs Improvement level and 90 percent at Warning. In 2002, 20 percent of students in this subgroup were at the Needs Improvement level while 80 percent were at Warning.

The performance patterns of Special Education students at this school are, in many ways, consistent with those at the district level. To align Special Education student performance with the state, the school will need to reduce the percentage of students scoring at the Warning level and raise the percentage of those proficient. See Table 2 below.

Table 2. Comparing Special Education Students' Performance in Mathematics in grade 8 (1999-2002)

Special Ed.	**1999**			**2000**			**2001**			**2002**		
	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State
Advanced	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1
Proficient	0	0	5	6	1	6	0	0	6	0	0	5
Needs Improvement	0	2	18	0	0	16	10	4	23	20	8	22
Warning	100	98	77	94	99	77	90	96	70	80	92	72

Limited English Proficient Students

All Limited English Proficient students tested in 2000 through 2002 scored at the Warning level. This trend for LEP students at the grade 8 level in mathematics is consistent with this subgroup's performance at the grade 6 level.

PANEL REPONSES TO THE KEY QUESTIONS

KEY QUESTION 1: Has the school shown improvement in student performance?

Overall, the school has shown improvement in student performance, but results from the MCAS and Terra Nova suggest improvement is uneven among regular education, Limited English Proficient (LEP) and Special Education students and between English language arts and mathematics.

On the MCAS, the school performed above target on the 2001 and 2002 AYP ratings for English language arts. The school performed on target on the 2001 and 2002 AYP ratings for mathematics. Regular Education student at the school have shown improvement in student performance in both math and English language arts on the MCAS. Limited English Proficient students have shown improvement in English language arts but little improvement in mathematics. Special Education students have shown improvement in mathematics, but little improvement in English language arts. While an examination of the scaled scores shows slight growth, all of the limited English proficient students remain in the Warning category in

mathematics. Overall, the school outperforms the district in all MCAS tests but remains well below the state. The school's Limited English Proficient population performs at the same level as the district LEP population in 6th grade mathematics and slightly worse than district LEP population in 8th grade mathematics. The school's LEP population outperforms the district's LEP population in 7th grade English Language Arts.

Results from the Terra Nova, reported in the school's improvement plan and progress report, show students having mixed results. It is important to note that the school did not report out on the performance of any cohort groups over time, and in some cases the data is presented as percent of students at or above grade level or percent of students above or below the 25th percentile. Also, the school used different versions of the test with the 2002 7th and 8th graders and all grades for 2003; therefore it is difficult for the panel to make comprehensive or specific judgments about students' performance over time, after 2002, based on the Terra Nova.

Based on the Terra Nova data in the School Improvement Plan, in 6th grade, students showed an improvement from the 2001 6th graders to the 2002 6th graders in the percent of students reading at or above grade level (from 24% to 33%). In the 7th grade, students showed a decline from the 7th grade class of 2001 to the 7th grade class of 2002 in reading, from 39% to 35% at or above grade level. In the 8th grade, students showed a decline from the 8th grade class of 2001 to the 8th grade class of 2002 from 41% to 37% of students performing at or above grade level.

The improvement plan contains the percent of students in each of the quartiles on the language portion of the Terra Nova. All three grades show an upward movement of students from the bottom quartile between 2000 and 2002. Data is not disaggregated to show subgroup gains.

From data provided in a report by the CMP coach, students at the Lynch show improvements in mathematics on the Terra Nova test. Two cohorts identified in the report showed improvements in grade equivalency. From the bar graph, cohort one had a grade equivalency of 5.0 on the 1999 test, 6.0 in 2000 and approximately 6.8 in 2002. Cohort two had a grade equivalency of 5.0 in 2000 and approximately 6.6 in 2001. Data was not disaggregated to show subgroup gains and the composition of each cohort is unclear. Data from the Terra Nova math in the improvement plan shows little movement of students from the bottom quartile.

In the binder for the visit, the school included some data on students in the Soar to Success and Phonics to Fluency programs indicating the program is having a positive affect on the reading skills of students who complete the program. Data shows students NCE scores from the Terra Nova test pre and post their completion of the Soar to Success class. In its initial year of 2000-2001, mainstream students showed a slight improvement of 3 NCE points on the Terra Nova test, Special Education students showed a zero NCE change, and ESL students showed a negative 1 decrease in their NCE scores. In year 2, 2001-2002, mainstream students showed an improvement of 4 NCE points, Special Education students showed an improvement of 12 NCE points, and ESL students showed an improvement of 8 NCE points. Over the two years, all students showed an average of a 7 point gain between their pre and post NCE scores, with special education and ESL students showing the largest gains. The total number of students or the numbers in each sub group are not included.

KEY QUESTION 2: To what extent did the school implement the improvement plan, which was approved by the State Board of Education?

The school has extensively implemented the School Improvement Plan approved by the State Board of Education as well as implemented all of the recommendations from the January 2001 Fact-Finding Report. The school manages this implementation through an organized network of committee meetings and communication.

The school named three areas, reading comprehension, math, and student behavior, in its first School Improvement Plan after the under-performing designation. In order to improve students' reading ability, the school implemented the Soar to Success and PhonoGraphix programs. For writing, the school implemented LINKS strategies across content areas. To address behavior problems, the school implemented the Responsible Behavior Program. From the Panel Review, it was evident that the school has fully implemented all three of the initiatives named in its improvement plan.

Each of the school's three initiatives has had significant impact on the school. The school had begun with the LINKS program immediately prior to the under-performing visit. The faculty attended professional development and a consultant from LINKS worked with the teachers to implement the strategies, such as using graphic organizers or a standard paragraph format to improve student writing. The Team also saw teacher-created lesson plan formats with the LINKS strategies on them. While this is an optional tool, many teachers indicated they like to use this format in order to indicate which LINKS strategies they use during the lesson. In student focus groups, pupils revealed a familiarity with LINKS strategies and were able to articulate how the practices have facilitated the writing process.

The school implemented the Soar to Success program as a way to improve the reading ability of some of their students. Students are placed in a ten-week Soar class based on their test scores and teacher recommendation. Four teachers were trained in Soar. The Principal, Assistant Principal and a few teachers examine student test data and use this, along with teacher recommendations, to place students in the Soar to Success class. One of the teachers also received training in the PhonoGraphix program and has implemented that in her Soar class. Data provided by the school and discussed under question 1, page 7, indicates the Soar to Success program has had a positive effect on the reading skills of the students who attended the program.

The behavior plan has had an impact on the school. Teachers stated they use the intervention room and the In-School Suspension (ISS) process. In focus groups, students stated they use mediation when they have a problem with another student and that the school liaison officer does an effective job in coordinating this program. School-wide attendance has risen from 89.9% to 90.25% and the external suspension rate, while still high, has decreased from 48% of the students in the 99-00 school year to 27% of the students being suspended throughout 00-01 school year. While not specifically stated by the teachers, it appears block scheduling and the daily team

meetings have also had some positive impact on discipline at the school. During the site visit, the Team noted students were well behaved and respectful. In focus groups, students stated they felt safe at the school, there is no bullying, and they like being at the school.

Although not stated in the plan, the teachers and school leaders spoke at great length during the visit about the positive impact the curriculum mapping has had on the school. This past summer a team of teachers worked to map out the curriculum across all three grade levels and align it with the state standards. Neither the school nor the District had such a document previously. By forming a committee to do this work, which followed a recommendation of the Fact-Finding Review, the school has taken the lead in the district in developing a more focused curriculum. The committee plans on revisiting the work this summer to make any changes after receiving input from the entire staff. The Review Team saw the work the teachers had done in aligning the curriculum with the standards and mapping the curriculum throughout the three grade levels. The school now has a much clearer guide for the teachers to follow in designing their lessons, planning interdisciplinary units, ESL and Special Needs integrated classes, as well as grade and content level planning.

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The school has a number of committees in place in order to ensure faculty involvement in and communication about the improvement initiatives. The teachers all belong to grade level academic teams, which meet daily. Special education, ESL, guidance counselors and coaches are included in the academic teams. Each academic team has a team leader and all of the team leaders meet with the Principal weekly. Team meeting summaries are maintained as a reporting vehicle to the Principal. The agenda items routinely cover school climate issues, SIP review, assessment of student work, differentiated instruction and LINKS matters. Teachers also meet monthly in vertical teams by content area. The school also has an Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), a School Site Council, a School Improvement Plan committee, and a LINKS committee that has taken the lead in organizing the implementation of LINKS writing strategies across content areas. The school's curriculum committee worked last summer (2002) to do curriculum mapping in order to align the school's curriculum with the state standards. Finally, the school has regular faculty meetings. Besides the committee system, the school has also evaluated its programs through its written progress reports to the Department of Education.

Through interviews with teachers and the Leadership Team, it is evident all staff feel included in the development and implementation of the initiatives. Staff was knowledgeable about the plan and the current initiatives at the school. In focus groups, teachers described the plan as a "living document" and spoke about how they constantly look at the plan and "raise the bar once we meet a goal." Changes in the improvement plans reflect the school's analysis of the original plan. In the second year, the school added math as an improvement area. The current plan contains a needs assessment. In the current plan under section G—needs assessment—the school examined all of its initiatives in order to make adjustments to the plan. The second year plan and the current plan have a stronger focus on data.

The school has received numerous supports from the District, State, and its own faculty. The District has supported the school through the use of one-to-one coaching for the Principal, on-site consultants, and outside professional development. Since the school's under-performing designation, the District has allowed for numerous half-days for professional development at the

school above and beyond the district requirements. The state has supported the school through money the school used for faculty work during the summers and professional development. The staff supports the school through its commitment and buy-in of the improvement initiatives.

The school receives a number of support services from the District. The school belongs to the New England League of Middle School (NELMS) and the Regional Educational and Business Alliance (REBA). Both NELMS and REBA provide one-to-one coaching for the school's Principal. NELMS also works with teachers on instructional practice. REBA also conducts monthly principal leadership meetings with other area principals. The District also provided the school with a consultant from LINKS who provided monthly technical assistance during the 01-02 school year and continues with periodic visits this year. The District also provided the school with membership in Turning Points. The school has a coach from Turning Points who meets weekly with the staff during their common planning time to provide support and facilitation in working as a team and looking at student work. The Turning Points' coach also helped develop the school's ILT. The staff has elected to discontinue its relationship with Turning Points for next year, preferring to concentrate its resources on in-class coaching and modeling. To support the implementation of Connected Math, the District provided training along with a coach from Boston College for 01-02 and 02-03 school years who works with the math teachers both in their classrooms and in group trainings.

KEY QUESTION 3: Are there other factors (changes in conditions or circumstances, i.e., policies, practices) in the school or district which have contributed to or impeded the school's ability to implement their plan?

A new superintendent as well as some contractual changes have been the most influential factors contributing to the school's ability to implement their plan. Interviews with the Superintendent, school leadership, and faculty, along with a new district template for the School Improvement Plan, indicate that the Superintendent is creating a structure and an environment for school improvement that did not previously exist in the district. These same interviews also suggest that some changes in the teachers' contract this year are enhancing the school's ability to implement its plan. The school has also had an approximately 50 percent turnover of faculty and a significant decrease in the number of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students since the time of the under-performing visit. Finally, the District has named the Lynch a full inclusion school for Special Education and ESL students.

Holyoke Public Schools had a change in district leadership in January 2002, approximately 15 months prior to this review. The new Superintendent has been a strong influential factor contributing to the school's ability to implement its plan. The current Superintendent is very supportive of the Principal and the school. During the interview, it was evident he has a clear plan for district improvement focused on literacy and math. The elementary grades are now all using TERC math and the Superintendent continues to support Connected Math for the middle schools along with Balanced Literacy. He described the district focus on "bringing in good practice that is research based" and "professional development tied to good instruction and good assessment." Since his arrival he has organized the budget to a zero-based budgeting system and organized the central office to reflect a system of accountability. The Superintendent structured

the previously flat central office into five divisions: Curriculum and Assessment, Operations, Budget and Finance, Educational Technology, and Student Services. The division that appears to offer the most help to the Lynch is the Curriculum and Assessment Division. There are now Curriculum Directors for the middle school who offer guidance, data analysis, and support for the districts' three middle schools. He also mandated extra hours in English language arts and mathematics and advocates for teachers to assess students in a manner similar to MCAS. Perhaps the change the Superintendent brings with him with the most potential for positive impact is his unyielding belief in the students of Holyoke. During the interview, he expressed there are two things he expects of all teachers, "believe that your students can learn and believe that you [teachers] can teach them."

As part of his system of accountability, the Superintendent provided schools with an observation checklist for the Connected Math Program. Schools must complete five observation checklists each week and turn them into the Central Office. Recent contract negotiations allow for the use of the observation checklist for math as well as for literacy. Contract negotiations also now allow for more days of professional development. The District previously had two days of professional development and will have four days for the 2003-2004 school year.

The Lynch is in its first year of full inclusion for Special Education and ESL students. This structure allows for teachers to co-teach in the majority of the core content classes, with a Special Education or ESL teacher in the classroom with the regular content teacher. Special Education and ESL teachers are now attending professional development in Connected Math and literacy along with their regular education colleagues. During the visit, teachers reported they feel positive about the co-teaching and plan lessons together with the ultimate goal being either teacher could lead the lesson. In focus groups, students reported they view both teachers equally. Currently, Special Education students receive instruction in English language arts in a separate classroom but will also be included in the regular English literacy block next year. The inclusion of special education and ESL students has resulted in a focus on differentiated instruction. The teachers have received professional development in differentiated instruction and are in the initial stages of implementation, as discussed under key question 5.

KEY QUESTION 4: Is there currently a sound plan in place to guide continued improvement in student performance?

A detailed plan exists that is focused on portions of initiatives, including data and goals, key problems, action steps, timelines, persons responsible, and measurable outcomes. The plan does not reflect a close examination of how the student performance data influences classroom instruction or changes pedagogy.

The school conducted a needs assessment before writing the current plan including data from 1999-2002 MCAS, 1999-2002 Terra Nova, 2001-2002 Attendance, 2000-2002 suspension data as well as reports and teacher assessments. The school has clearly made gains in its use of data to inform its plan. At this time, most of the analysis appears to be at a superficial level without indications that there is a clear link between the analysis and the initiatives in the improvement plan or the state standards. For example, it does not appear the school has done an item analysis

of the MCAS English language arts to determine specific areas for improvement, which can then be linked to initiatives and related to specific instructional practices. Students who perform poorly in reading are placed in the Soar to Success program, which offers a scripted program to a small group of students. It does not appear that the school examined the individual weaknesses of each child to determine the best methods of instruction within the support program or the regular classroom. For example, Goal #2 in the current plan focuses on reading comprehension yet lacks a deeper analysis of the reasons why the students' reading comprehension may be low; such as weaknesses in decoding skills, fluency, vocabulary, prior knowledge, familiarity with the text, etc. With a more specific analysis of the skills that students need, teachers could then discuss specific strategies they use to address these skills. For example, reciprocal teaching is one Soar to Success strategy that addresses many skills that affect reading comprehension. The plan does a better job at identifying weaknesses in mathematics and relating them to the action steps.

The Improvement Plan has clear goals and specific objectives, but in some cases they are not grounded in the school's analysis of poor performance or are grounded in a superficial analysis. For example, goal 1 states, "*Every student will succeed in a rich and rigorous standards-based core curriculum that embraces diverse learners*." However, within the action steps there is nothing that addresses the "standards-based core curriculum." We know from the visit that the school has done curriculum mapping and aligned it with the standards, but this is not reflected in the plan. Goal 4 states, "*Students will employ a wide range of strategies in all content areas as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes."* However, the plan does not mention the Lynch Writing Project or identify specific weaknesses in writing. In section 2, page 2 of the Jan 2001 Executive Summary, the school does list specific weaknesses in writing as "topic development, word usage, grammatical rules, and vocabulary." While the current plan shows growth in its structure and use of data, the previous plans demonstrate a more comprehensive link between the identified weaknesses and the components of the programs intended to address those weaknesses.

In some parts of the plan, it does not appear the school has done a specific analysis of the data in order to identify root causes and note them as specific skills needing attention to address deficits. In identifying causal factors for poor student performance, the plan uses language implying a lower level of expectations from students at income levels or where English is not the first language. For example, a root cause under Goal 1 following MCAS data states: "*The majority of the students are second language learners and/or come from impoverished backgrounds... .*" In Goal 2, following a display of Terra Nova data, the Key Problem/Root Cause of the Problem column states, *"The student population has a high incidence of poverty and interrupted schooling…"* and "*The school has over 70% English language learners who bring with them a variety of needs including low literacy levels in their first language and lack of outside opportunities outside school to develop vocabulary and vital reading skills in English."* Goal 3 comes closest to addressing the skills of the students versus their income level or language. For example, following the presentation of MCAS and Terra Nova data in mathematics, the key problem states, "*Data shows that students have difficulty communicating their thoughts and responses in mathematical terms."* In focus groups and interviews, math teachers were clear about the strengths of the Connected Math Program (CMP), but the strategies they found effective were not outlined in the plan as practices requiring continued emphasis.

In general, the current plan is missing the practical connection between the causes of the problem and the specific components of programs in the action steps that refer to instruction. Some of this is evident in previous plans or from the site visit, indicating the school may simply be working out the best way to fit this information into the new format of the plan. Other aspects, such as the use of language stating poverty and language as root causes and key problems indicates the staff has some work to do in reflecting on their belief system and level of expectations for students.

KEY QUESTION 5: Are the conditions in place to sustain the gains achieved and support continued improvement in student performance?

The committed staff, improvement in leadership, and the new Superintendent all indicate the conditions are in place to sustain the gains achieved and the willingness to continually grow in order to support continued improvement in student performance exists. At this time, the school in general does not do an effective job of relating student weaknesses to classroom instructional practices. In the opinion of the Team, this is the next step needed in order for the school to experience continual improvement for all of its students.

The Principal has made clear, strong improvements in her leadership. During interviews, all members of the school community noted the growth in the Principal and commended her support of staff and willingness to work on her own development. Since the under-performing designation, she has consistently worked with two consultants to develop her leadership skills. She has received one-on-one coaching from them and also attended a number of professional development sessions. Both consultants described the Principal as "extremely receptive" and state one of her strengths is in "listening to teachers' needs and making it work." As part of REBA, all Principals complete a "stretch project" each year. The stretch project deals with developing their leadership from "crisis management to instructional leadership." According to the REBA consultant, the Principal had the highest percent shift among all participating principals in her style from crisis management to instructional leadership. The Superintendent also expressed he has "no qualms" about the leadership at the school, stating she "has grown a lot," and "has more confidence." Staff also noted a change in her leadership and described her as "more confident," "supportive," "focused" and "here for the kids." The Principal has helped create an organized schedule for teachers to meet while maximizing instructional time for students in a variety of classes. She also holds teachers accountable for implementing the programs, such as LINKS, Connected Math, and Soar to Success, while also ensuring they are supported and receive the professional development they request. Teachers also praised the Principal's visibility, regular and consistent evaluations and observations- formal and informal- with useful feedback.

Under her leadership, the school has created a culture of collaboration and cooperation. The entire staff is clearly very supportive of the goals in the improvement plan. Teachers all work together, often on their own time, in order to implement the initiatives and plan lessons as co-teachers. During interviews and focus groups, teachers all used a common language around the initiatives. They all were able to speak about the content of the school improvement plan and the common goals they are focused on as a school. Staff indicated that there are regular, valuable

interdisciplinary units conducted and that team meetings are a strong vehicle for promoting this work. There has also been a creative use of the schedule, building enrichment activities around academic programs with a constructivist, creative thinking base- math robotics and botanical awareness- exposing most of the school to these offerings. Also, the computer teacher does some sound common planning with "visiting" academic staff. For example, during a classroom observation, a history teacher brought his class into the computer lab to create individual power point presentations highlighting the research they had already done on the Reconstruction. Students were summarizing the similarities and differences between the Ku Klux Klan and a modern-day hate group they had researched using the Internet. The history teacher and the computer lab teacher planned the lesson so students could learn the technical aspects of how to construct a power point presentation while demonstrating the ability to compare and contrast the Reconstruction period in history to today.

The school has a positive climate. The building is bright and clean. Numerous bulletin boards displaying student work, much of it project-based, line the hallways as well as the classrooms. For example, one display shows student reports about sea otters. This was the culmination of research on the animal inspired by their reading of the novel "Island of the Blue Dolphins." The school has a strong student activities program with a variety of after school programs and clubs. For example, students spoke about a "Literacy Night" at the school. This was an evening assembly where students read their work to their parents. Afterward, they had a dinner where the students served the parents and the choir performed. The school was also the first recipient of the Michael E. Smith Innovation Award. The award is named for the former Superintendent of South Hadley who passed away last year and is given to a team of educators "who have made an outstanding contribution to the improvement of educational quality in their school or district."

The school's leaders and faculty are focused primarily on the priority improvements in implementing the initiatives of LINKS, Soar to Success, and Connected Math. As noted under question 2, the school has done excellent work in creating school-wide implementation of the programs, especially the LINKS strategies. At this time, it appears the focus is on the strategies and the programs as the answer to increasing student achievement as opposed to instructional practice. In focus groups and interviews, leadership and teachers did not make the link between the strategies and what specific weaknesses they address, either in student performance or in their own instructional practice. For example, the school noted in its plan that students demonstrate a weakness on the open-response answers on the MCAS and state to "increase higher order thinking skills" as an action step. From classroom observations, the team saw mixed evidence of teachers pushing for critical thinking or encouraging students to extend answers. In some classrooms, teachers were using the textbook as a guide while students followed along with little or no extension of answers. In other classrooms, students were asked to give an example of a strategy they could use to help their reading comprehension. Out of a number of possible strategies, the three students who answered the question all used the same strategy. No one was asked to use a different strategy or to extend the answer of the responding students. When asked in the focus groups and interviews how the improvement initiatives have changed their instructional practice, most teachers spoke about the use of the strategies, such as graphic organizers. They did not speak about their actual pedagogy, such as extending responses or getting multiple responses and discussing the answer or how they create high expectations in their classrooms for all students. The school recognizes the need to focus on literacy, but appears

to rely on the safety net programs of Soar to Success and PhonoGraphix along with the use of LINKS strategies to address the need. The District has chosen Rigby's Balanced Literacy program and the Superintendent described it as "the best literacy program out there to help second language learners." At the time of the visit, approximately 12 teachers at the school had attended training in Balanced Literacy, yet there was little evidence of the use of Balanced Literacy strategies from classroom observations or teacher interviews. From classroom observations and interviews, it does not appear the reading comprehension strategies in the Soar to Success program, such as reciprocal teaching, predicting, summarizing, and clarifying and questioning strategies are used consistently or across content areas.

Differentiated instruction is noted as important in the SIP and the DOE teacher survey and it is in the initial phases of implementation. For example, while the Reading/Comprehension goal in the SIP calls for students to "*apply wide ranging strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate and appreciate text,"* the Team saw little evidence of this during classroom observations. The majority of classes all had a framework for practicing differentiated instruction, such as balanced group activity, opportunities for reflective work and problem solving, and reading and writing components. However, in the majority of cases instruction did not challenge students to extend answers, delve into deeper analysis of responses, or push themselves to their best work. From focus groups, individual interviews, and classroom observations, it appears instruction is not differentiated for students other than those with mandated Individual Education Plans. Teachers and students report using a variety of activities during the class period, such as whole class, group, projects and individual work. However, interviews and classroom observation indicate students are not given different or individual opportunities for either remediation or enrichment during the class period. The school also does not appear to have a consistent method for differentiated assessment of students. For example, teachers reported mixed ways of assessing students based on language ability. Some teachers do not assess students differently while others reported that they do sometimes assess students differently based on the students' language ability. For example, one teacher reported that she may assess a student whose native language is not English based more on the effort the teacher perceives the student put forth in the assignment than his or her actual performance. Another teacher reported she does not assess any of her students differently, that despite English language ability, she assesses all students on the same standards. The school is in the initial stages of practicing differentiated instruction so the current status of implementation is understandable. However, the Team noted a lack of recognition both in the written plan and on the part of the school staff of the further need for reflection on practice and professional development needed in order to effectively use differentiated instruction for all students.

CONCLUSION

The faculty and staff at the John Lynch Middle School have shown commitment to improving the education students receive while attending the school. The Principal has attended numerous professional development activities and by all accounts has shown marked improvement in her abilities as an instructional leader. The faculty works together in a cooperative and collaborative manner in order to plan and implement improvement strategies. Students met AYP as measured by the MCAS mathematics and reading exams. The new Superintendent appears to have brought to the District a sense of organization, accountability, and a focus on students. The staff has

shown growth in its use of data in writing the School Improvement Plan. That same Plan, along with interviews and classroom observations, also indicates the faculty has not yet fully made the connection between students' academic performance and their own instructional practice. In the opinion of the Review Team, this connection is crucial in order for the students at the Lynch to reach their full potential.

APPENDIX A
Team Members

Janet Schulze, Team Leader, SchoolWorks, Beverly, MA

Emilys Pena, Team member, SchoolWorks, Beverly, MA

Nick Feldman, Team member, SchoolWorks, Beverly, MA

Joe Nigro, Team member, Massachusetts Office of Educational Quality and Assessment, Malden, MA

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APPENDIX B
TWO YEAR FOLLOW-UP REVIEW SCHEDULE
Detailed Schedule for School Site Visit

Tuesday, May 27, 2003
All activities take place at the Day's Inn, New Bedford

10:00 – 10:30	Debriefing and review folders
10:30 – 12:00	Key Question #1 Summarize MCAS/Stanford 9 Data
12:00 – 12:30	Break/Working Lunch
12:30 – 1:00	Key Question #2 Summarize and draft key statements on the School Improvement Plan
1:00 – 2:30	Key Question #3: Implementation Work on summary maps Develop interview questions for all focus groups/prioritize questions
2:30 – 3:00	Prepare for interviewing with the Superintendent/Assistant Superintendent Refine interview questions
3:00 – 4:00	Interview with Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent
4:00 – 6:00	Debriefing Develop interview questions for Day 1

May 28, 2003
Day 1 on site schedule
All activities take place in the school

8:00—9:00	Panelists meet with the principal.
9:00—10:00.	Panelists meet with Group I: The school's Leadership Team
10:00—11:00.	Panelists meet with Group 2: The school's curriculum and instruction leadership team and members of the school site council.
11:00—1:00.	Panelists meet to discuss findings so far and to plan the remainder of the day (working lunch). Panelists use time as needed to analyze findings and to gather more information; panelists may conduct an informal walk through with a focus on school culture and climate for learning.
1:00—3:00.	Panelists meet with teachers in focus groups.

	PANELIST A and PANELIST B	PANELIST C and PANELIST D
1:00-1:30	**TEACHER FOCUS GROUP #1**	**TEACHER FOCUS GROUP #2**
1:30-2:00	**TEACHER FOCUS GROUP #3**	**TEACHER FOCUS GROUP #4**
2:00-2:30	**TEACHER FOCUS GROUP #5**	**TEACHER FOCUS GROUP #6**

2:30-3:00 Panelists meet with parents and students in focus groups.

	PANELIST A	PANELIST B	PANELIST C	PANELIST D
2:30 - 3:00	**PARENT FOCUS GROUP #1**	**PARENT FOCUS GROUP #2**	**STUDENT FOCUS GROUP #1**	**STUDNET FOCUS GROUP #2**

3:00—5:00 Panelists synthesize information, further define findings, prepare questions, and develop a team strategy for second day of the on-site visit.

May 29, 2003
Day 2 on-site schedule
All activities take place in the school

7:30—8:00 a.m. Panelists meet with the principal for follow-up questions

8:00—8:30 a.m. Panelists visit classrooms and interview teachers.*

	PANELIST A	PANELIST B	PANELIST C	PANELIST D
8:00-8:30	Observe teacher 1	Observe teacher 2	Observe teacher 3	Observe teacher 4
8:30-9:00	Interview teacher 1	Interview teacher 2	Interview teacher 3	Interview teacher 4
9:00-9:30	Observe teacher 5	Observe teacher 6	Observe teacher 7	Observe teacher 8
9:30-10:00	Interview teacher 5	Interview teacher 6	Interview teacher 7	Interview teacher 8
10:00-10:30	Observe teacher 9	Observe teacher 10	Observe teacher 11	Observe teacher 12
10:30-11:00	Interview teacher 9	Interview teacher 10	Interview teacher 11	Interview teacher 12

11:00—1:00. Panelists meet to discuss findings so far and to plan the remainder of the day (working lunch). Panelists use time as needed to analyze findings and to gather more information.

1:00—2:00. Team structured time. Panelists will identify any gaps in the evidence collected and may request additional information from the principal in the form of documents, meetings with classroom teachers, curriculum facilitators, content-area specialists, grade-level instructors, or other specific individuals or groups who can respond to questions relevant to the panel review protocol.

	PANELIST A	PANELIST B	PANELIST C	PANELIST D

1:00 - 2:00				

2:00—2:30 p.m. Closing meeting with the principal to discuss next steps (all panelists are present)

2:30—5:00 p.m. Panelists deliberate and form conclusions.

*Instructions for classroom observations, teacher interviews, and focus groups

Please inform all school faculty and students that Review Panel members will be visiting a cross-section of classrooms during the site visit. The selection of classrooms will be determined mutually by the Panel Review Coordinator and the Principal using the staff directory information provided by the school. All faculty members are asked to be prepared to accommodate a visitor on the morning of the site visit. Panel members will make every effort to minimize the disruption of planned classroom activities.

1. Observations Each panelist will observe three class lessons (for a total of 12 classes observed overall) in order to obtain a representative sample of the school's individual classrooms. The purpose of the classroom observation is to judge the quality of the learning environment, which is a critical aspect of the school's overall conditions, and a determinant in whether or not the school will be able to successfully implement its improvement plan. The learning environment includes:
    - The physical setting—space, lighting, size, classroom temperature, etc.,
    - The classroom organization—desk arrangement, resources available to students, orderliness, etc.,
    - The level of the teacher's preparation for instruction; the students' readiness for learning
    - The level of the teacher's expectation for student learning and performance
    - The interaction between teacher and students—the students' level of engagement or withdrawal.
    - The level and quality of instructional practice in the school (Panelists are not evaluating individual teachers).

2. Individual Teacher Interviews The purpose of the teacher interview that follows the observation is to:
    - Clarify the evaluator's impressions of the classroom dynamic and learning environment
    - Determine what the teacher considers to be the chief learning needs of students across the school and within his or her classroom
    - Determine the teacher's understanding of the school's plan to address those needs and to improve student performance
    - Determine the teacher's role in the overall mission and improvement plan of the school

3. Teacher Focus Groups The purpose of the teacher focus groups is to:
    - Determine what each teacher considers to be the chief learning needs of students across the school and within his or her classroom
    - Determine each teacher's understanding of the school's plan to address those needs and to improve student performance
    - Determine each teacher's role in the overall mission and improvement plan of the school