

REPORT OF TWO YEAR FOLLOW UP REVIEW

Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

Mt. Pleasant Elementary School New Bedford Public Schools

Executive Summary

The Mt. Pleasant Elementary School has made good progress since the designation of under-performance in 2002. For the past two years, a curriculum rich in MCAS test content and which sets high student performance expectations has been implemented. As a result, all students and all student subgroups met AYP targets in ELA and math in 2003 and 2004. The school received a performance rating of “Moderate” in ELA and “Very Low” in math, and the school’s improvement rate was “Above Target” in ELA and math. These results are substantially better than the results reported in 2001 and 2002.

A new building principal has been effective in improving the school. She has worked hard to establish a positive school climate. Her efforts have stabilized the staff, redefined the role of a literacy and a math coach, increased parental involvement, and reduced discipline and safety problems. She has also emphasized consistency in the application of school policies and practices.

The turn-around in students’ academic performance is related to the implementation of a data driven School Improvement Plan (SIP). The school has a viable system in place to track implementation of the SIP initiatives and to oversee periodic assessment of progress. Key elements of the system in place are external standards, school-wide goals developed by the staff following the Performance Improvement Monitoring (PIM) process, school-wide instructional approaches, professional development, continuous monitoring/ assessment, and test timing. The priority areas identified in the improvement plan accepted by the State Board of Education in 2003 are being addressed continuously.

Priority programs and practices adopted by the school staff are well-grounded and comprehensive.

Priority Findings

- I** The Mt. Pleasant Elementary School's MCAS test performance in reading, ELA, and mathematics improved consistently between 2001 and 2004.
- The 2003 Mid-Cycle MCAS test AYP Report and the 2004 MCAS test AYP data, based upon Mt. Pleasant Elementary School student performance, indicate a pattern of continuous improvement. All students met AYP targets in ELA and math in 2003 and 2004, and all student subgroups met AYP targets in ELA and math in 2003 and 2004. During 2003 and 2004, the school received a performance rating of "Moderate" in ELA and "Very Low" in math, and the school's improvement rate was "Above Target" in ELA and math.
- II** Effective leadership, provided by the building principal, continues.
- A new building principal has proved to be instrumental in improving the school. She has worked hard to establish a positive school climate. Her efforts have stabilized the staff, redefined the role of a literacy and a math coach, increased parental involvement, and reduced discipline and safety problems. She has also emphasized consistency in the application of school policies and practices.
- III** Ongoing work of a literacy coach and a math coach at the school is related to consistent improvement of students' performance on the MCAS tests.
- The appointment of the current building principal and the redefinition of the duties of the literacy and math coach has resulted in a leadership team committed to ELA and math curriculum and instruction improvements at the school. They have drawn upon outcomes of the Performance Improvement Monitoring (PIM) process, which focuses upon the analysis of student data, to involve school staff in an examination of the causes of students' poor academic performance. The leadership team, utilizing outcomes of the PIM process, has facilitated the preparation of a new SIP which was adopted by the Commissioner and the State Board of Education in January 2003.
 - During the past two years' implementation of the SIP, the literacy coach and the math coach have offered model lessons, conducted diagnostic work, provided in-service training, and monitored student performance. Both have championed the re-establishment of the school's computer laboratory, and have encouraged the use of this newly acquired resource. Substantial improvements in students' reading, ELA, and math MCAS test performance have occurred during this period.

IV There has been continuous implementation of the 2002 Mt. Pleasant Elementary School Plan for Improvement, which emphasized a curriculum rich in MCAS test content and which set forth high student performance expectations.

- The turn-around in students' academic performance is related to the implementation of a data driven School Improvement Plan. The school has a viable system in place to track implementation of the SIP initiatives and to oversee periodic assessment of progress. Key elements of the system in place are external standards, school-wide goals, school-wide instructional approaches, professional development, continuous monitoring/assessment, and test timing. The priority areas identified in the improvement plan accepted by the State Board of Education in 2003 are being addressed continuously.

V Two important aspirations of the principal, a positive school climate for all and high academic expectations for students, have been realized.

- The establishment of a positive school climate was the first priority for the new building principal four years ago. She addressed and helped resolve staff issues, school safety problems, student discipline issues, and negative parent attitudes toward school practices and the school environment. The Follow Up Review Team observed an entirely different school climate during the April 2005 visit, an environment that facilitated student achievement and encouraged parent involvement.
- The second priority was to turn around students' academic performance. This was accomplished with the adoption of a data driven School Improvement Plan. The school has a viable system in place to track implementation of the SIP initiatives and to oversee periodic assessment of progress. High academic expectations for students are a cornerstone of the SIP.

VI Improvements in school climate, school safety, and student academic performance have contributed to increased involvement of parents in the school.

- The Fact Finding Review Team report submitted in 2002 describes a poor school climate. It was reported that little support was provided to the staff for instruction, professional development, and materials acquisition. The discipline protocols for students were inconsistent and often problematic. Furthermore, Mt. Pleasant had the highest elementary out-of-school suspension rate in the district, and school attendance was consistently below the state average.
- Again, an entirely different school climate was observed during the April, 2005 visit. Team members saw a school engaged in academic work; behavior problems were not apparent; safety concerns had disappeared;

school suspensions were no longer a problem; and student attendance surpassed state averages. Parent involvement has increased during before and in after school activities, in the re-establishment of a Parent Teacher Organization, and in school volunteer work.

Two Year Follow Up Review Process

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 underperforming and in need of state guidance to improve student performance. Schools declared to be underperforming 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 Mt. Pleasant Elementary School developed such a plan, and the Commissioner and Board of Education accepted the plan on January 28, 2003. The district is required to direct the implementation of this plan, and within two years, the school must demonstrate significant improvement.

The Underperforming 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 underperformance at the Mt. Pleasant Elementary School. The Follow Up Review was conducted on April 12 and 13, 2005.

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 response 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 two 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 Mt. Pleasant Elementary 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.

Mt. Pleasant Elementary School Profile

Enrollment

One of 23 elementary schools in New Bedford, the Mt. Pleasant Elementary School currently serves 363 students in Pre-K through grade 5. The school's racial composition in 2004-2005 was 46% Hispanic, 36% White, 17% Black, 1% Asian, and 1% Native American. English is not the first language (FLNE) for 35% of the student body. Twenty-five percent of the students are identified as having special needs. A School-Wide Title I program is in place, with 91% of the students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (which is about triple the state average).

Enrollment declined from 397 in 2002 to 363 in 2005. Attendance rates improved over this period from 92.9% to 94.6%, which is now above the state average. Also, the average days absent declined from 12.8 to 9.3 and is now below the state average. Enrollments in racial subgroups, low-income levels, first language not English students, limited English proficiency students, and special education students were all stable between 2002 and 2005.

Attendance rates and special education student composition were similar for all subgroups. Out-of-school student suspension declined from 9.5% to 3.9% and is now below the state average. Whereas, the number of students retained in grades 1, 2, and 3 increased from none in 2002 to 23 in 2004.

Staffing

The Mt. Pleasant Elementary School staff in 2005 consisted of one principal, 19 teachers, 7 paraprofessionals, three academic coaches (one primarily serving the district), 2 adjustment counselors, 2 special education teachers (for speech and language therapy and occupational and physical therapy), and one full-time nurse. The professional staff are all

certified, all earned bachelor degrees and one-half earned masters degrees. Nine teachers hold additional certifications, five related to special needs students and four to early childhood education.

The teaching staff is experienced, ranging from 4 to 36 years in the classroom. The median number of years teaching is 13 plus. These teachers have served Mt. Pleasant between 2 and 36 years, with the median at the school being 7 plus years.

MCAS Overview

Students at the Mt. Pleasant Elementary School are tested in the MCAS in grade 3 reading, in grade 4 English Language Arts (ELA), and in grade 4 mathematics. The School made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the aggregate and for all subgroups in 2003 and 2004 for the first time since testing was initiated. The Cycle III ELA performance rating was “Moderate” and the improvement rating was “Above Target.” In mathematics, the Cycle III performance rating was “Very Low” and the improvement rating was “Above Target.”

Tables 1 through 6 present regular education student and special education student MCAS performance in reading, ELA, and Math between 2001 and 2004. Mt. Pleasant Elementary School results are compared with New Bedford and state results in each table. Percentage changes in the Proficient and Warning categories between 2001 and 2004 are highlighted.

Student Performance in Reading

Regular education students’ performance on the grade 3 MCAS reading test improved considerably between 2001 and 2004. In 2001, 13% of the students scored in the Proficient category, whereas 77% did so in 2004. This represented a 64% improvement in performance. Similar performance improvement was noted in the Warning category: 18% of the students scored at this level in 2001; whereas, none scored at this level in 2004.

Regular education students’ performance on the grade 3 MCAS reading test improved considerably between 2001 and 2004 in comparison with district and state students’ performance as well. Both state (69%) and district (45%) students performed much better in the Proficient category when compared with Mt. Pleasant students (13%) in 2001. By 2004, a reversal in rankings was noted. There were 77% of the Mt. Pleasant students in the Proficient category in comparison with the district (53%) and state (72%) students. An similar reversal occurred in the Warning category, with Mt. Pleasant students going from 18% in 2001 to zero in 2004.

Table 1. Grade 3 Regular Education Students' Performance in Reading (2001-2004)

Year	2001			2002			2003			2004		
School Level	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State
Performance Level Results %												
Advanced	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Proficient	13	45	69	50	52	74	71	50	71	77	53	72
Needs Improvement	69	48	28	34	40	23	29	44	26	23	42	25
Warning	18	7	3	16	7	2	0	6	3	0	5	3

Special education students' performance on the grade 3 MCAS reading test also improved between 2001 and 2004. In 2001, 17% of the students scored in the Proficient category, whereas 30% did so in 2004. This represented a 13% improvement in performance. Similar progress was made in the Warning category: 17% of the students scored at this level in 2001; whereas, 10% scored at this level in 2004.

Special education students' performance surpassed the performance of their district and state counterparts between 2001 and 2004 in the Warning category, but not in the Proficient category. Mt. Pleasant students did improve relative to their state counterparts.

Table 2. Grade 3 Special Education Students' Performance in Reading (2001-2004)

Year	2001			2002			2003			2004		
School Level	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State
Performance Level Results %												
Advanced	0	0	0	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Proficient	17	13	31	-	18	34	23	29	30	30	30	35
Needs Improvement	67	51	47	-	62	47	46	50	50	60	47	45
Warning	17	36	23	-	20	19	31	21	20	10	23	21

Student Performance in ELA

Regular education students' performance on the grade 4 MCAS ELA test improved considerably between 2001 and 2004. In 2001, none of the students scored in the Proficient category, whereas 21% did so in 2004. Similar performance improvement was noted in the Warning category: 72% of the students scored at this level in 2001; whereas, 19% scored at this level in 2004. This was a 53% performance improvement.

When regular education student performance on the grade 4 ELA test is compared with district and state scores, both the district and state results are superior. Mt. Pleasant Elementary School students scored below their district and state counterparts in the Proficient and Warning categories between 2001 and 2004.

Table 3. Grade 4 Regular Education Students' Performance in ELA (2001-2004)

Year	2001			2002			2003			2004		
School Level	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State
Performance Level Results %												
Advanced	0	1	8	0	1	9	2	3	13	2	0	14
Proficient	0	25	50	11	31	52	9	36	51	21	53	51
Needs Improvement	28	56	36	56	54	34	61	51	31	58	42	31
Warning	72	17	6	33	13	5	27	10	5	19	5	4

Special education students' performance on the grade 4 MCAS ELA test yielded mixed results. In 2002 and 2004, there were no special education students in the Proficient category. However, improvements occurred in the Warning category: 43% of the students scored at this level in 2002; whereas, 25% of the students scored at this level in 2004.

Special education students at the district and state levels scored better than Mt. Pleasant Elementary School students in the Proficient category in 2002, 2003, and 2004. Mt. Pleasant Elementary School students' scores were slightly better than their state peers and slightly poorer than their district peers in the Warning category.

Table 4. Grade 4 Special Education Students' Performance in ELA (2001-2004)

Year	2001			2002			2003			2004		
School Level	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State
Performance Level Results %												
Advanced	-	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	2
Proficient	-	5	16	0	4	18	0	15	20	0	30	20
Needs Improvement	-	41	49	57	43	50	36	49	50	75	47	50
Warning	-	54	34	43	52	31	67	37	30	25	23	30

Student Performance in Math

Regular education students' performance on the grade 4 MCAS math test revealed some improvement in the Proficient category (9%) and considerable improvement in the Warning category between 2001 (86%) and 2004 (23%). Comparisons between the Mt. Pleasant Elementary School, district, and state scores were unfavorable for the school. Proficient category score comparisons and Warning category score comparisons favored the district and state students.

Table 5. Grade 4 Regular Education Students' Performance in Math (2001-2004)

Year	2001			2002			2003			2004		
School Level	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State
Performance Level Results %												
Advanced	0	2	12	0	3	14	0	3	15	2	6	17
Proficient	0	11	28	3	14	31	2	20	32	9	24	33
Needs Improvement	14	58	47	22	52	42	48	56	43	65	56	43
Warning	86	29	13	75	31	14	50	21	10	23	14	8

Special education students' performance on the grade 4 MCAS math test also revealed some improvement in the Proficient category (8%) and considerable improvement in the Warning category between 2001 (86%) and 2004 (23%). Comparisons between the Mt. Pleasant Elementary School, district, and state scores were positive and negative. The Proficient category comparisons favored the district and the state, whereas the Warning category performance improvement favored the school.

Table 6. Grade 4 Special Education Students' Performance in Math (2001-2004)

Year	2001			2002			2003			2004		
School Level	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State
Performance Level Results %												
Advanced	-	0	2	0	1	3	0	0	3	0	1	3
Proficient	-	4	10	0	6	13	8	10	15	8	8	14
Needs Improvement	-	39	45	14	29	42	8	50	48	58	55	48
Warning	-	57	42	86	64	42	83	40	35	23	36	35

PANEL RESPONSES TO THE KEY QUESTIONS

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

Yes. The Mt. Pleasant Elementary School has improved considerably in student performance over the last two rating cycles. This determination has been made by considering data obtained within the context of a complex backdrop of change.

Prior to these change initiatives – in 2002 – the school received a performance rating of “Critically Low” in both ELA and math and the school’s improvement rating was “No Change” in ELA and “Declined” in math. Furthermore, the school was not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in either ELA or math at this time.

The 2003 Mid-Cycle MCAS test AYP Report and the 2004 MCAS test AYP data, based upon Mt. Pleasant Elementary School student performance, indicated a pattern of continuous improvement. All students met AYP targets in ELA and math in 2003 and

2004, and all student subgroups met AYP targets in ELA and math in 2003 and 2004. During 2003 and 2004, the school received a performance rating of “Moderate” in ELA and “Very Low” in math, and the school’s improvement rate was “Above Target” in both ELA and math.

Between 2001 and 2004, grade 3 reading MCAS test results for regular students improved 64% in the Proficiency category and declined 18% to zero in the Warning category; whereas, special education students improved 13% in the proficiency category and declined 7% in the Warning category. These are significant improvements.

During the same period, grade 4 ELA MCAS test results for regular students improved 21% in the Proficiency category and declined 53% in the Warning category; whereas, special education students did not attain proficiency during the period, but declined 18% in the Warning category. Grade 4 math MCAS test results for regular students improved 9% in the Proficiency category and declined 63% in the Warning category; whereas, special education students improved 8% in the Proficiency category and declined 63% in the Warning category.

In summary, regular education students improved their Proficiency category and Warning category performance in reading, ELA, and math across all three grades. Special education students improved their grade 3 Proficiency category and Warning category performance in reading, their grade 4 Proficiency category performance in math only, and their Warning category performance in both ELA and math.

Grade 3 regular education students at the Mt. Pleasant Elementary School performed better on the reading MCAS test than their district and state counterparts; whereas, special education students matched this performance only in the Warning category of the test.

Grade 4 regular education student ELA and math MCAS test performance was below district and state results. Special education student ELA MCAS test performance was below the district and the state in the Proficiency category and above the state in the Warning category. Their math MCAS test performance was above the district and state in the Warning category, and below the state but tied with the district in the Proficiency category.

When Mt. Pleasant Elementary School MCAS test results are compared with the district and state, the grade 3 reading results stand out as strongest. Grade 4 ELA and math results for regular education students are the opposite; whereas special education student performance varies from the best of the three groups in math to the weakest of the three groups in ELA.

These data suggest the specific components of a School Improvement Plan (SIP) which was adopted in January 2003, were selected wisely by the school staff. The plan emphasized a curriculum rich in MCAS test content and which set forth high student performance expectations. The plan was implemented within the context of an initiative

to improve the climate of the school, to make the school safe, and to involve more parents in school activities.

The SIP came about as an outcome of a Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) process in which the school's staff identified areas of weakness in student learning. The PIM process was initiated during the summer of 2001, and has continued since that time. As part of this process, the staff determined that eight general factors, contributing to student performance, needed to be addressed at the school. The SIP was conceived to address these factors, to provide a context for ascertaining student progress, and to facilitate continuity.

KEY QUESTION 2: How effectively has the school implemented the improvement plan which was approved by the State Board of Education?

Well implemented. The panel review team of 2002 found that the SIP being used did not establish clear causes for poor student performance and also lacked reasonable goals, measurable benchmarks, and definitive timelines. Following the subsequent declaration of underperformance, the Mt. Pleasant Elementary School leadership team participated in PIM training provided by the Massachusetts Department of Education. As a result of this training, the leadership team conducted an extensive and detailed analysis of MCAS test, STAR Math, and other test data. This analysis revealed numerous weaknesses in student performance in ELA and math. Outcomes of the leadership team's work were shared with the teaching staff at Mt. Pleasant Elementary School. Working through the PIM steps, teachers began to recognize their role in contributing to a comprehensive review of SIP.

The resulting 2002-2003 SIP focused upon three student learning objectives in ELA and four in math. It detailed strategies and tactics intended to overcome the deficiencies documented. Among them were better utilization of literacy and math coaches, acquisition of ELA and math texts and other resources, detailed assessment options, and implementation of ELA and math curricula and instruction modifications. The SIP was reviewed and modified in 2003-2004 and again in 2004-2005. All the salient elements of the SIP remain intact, and are being implemented continuously.

Verification of the SIP implementation occurred in two ways: firstly, by interviewing members of the district and school staff and others; and, secondly, by conducting a school "walk-through" and by observing classroom work. Persons interviewed from the district central office and the school (teachers, coaches, parents, and students) – in their own ways – shared common perspectives on how the school came to turn around student performance. For example, they told the team how the new principal had worked hard to establish a positive school climate. They talked of her efforts to stabilize the staff, to increase parental involvement, and to reduce discipline and safety problems. They also told the team how she had emphasized consistency in the application of school policies and practices, such as high academic expectations, common curriculum and instruction opportunities, and behavioral expectations.

Those interviewed offered examples of the curriculum and instructional changes mentioned in the SIP. Reading and ELA examples cited included the new Open Court reading program, the Daily Edit, the monthly writing prompts, DRA and DIBELS assessments, and the Rigby program professional development. Math examples cited included the Daily Math Activity and Calendars, Math 4 Today weekly assessments, STAR Math, and Mass Insight teacher training. Finally, varied examples of the contributions of the literacy and math coaches were described, such as offering model lessons, conducting diagnostic work, providing in-service training, and monitoring student performance.

A school “walk-through” was followed by nine classroom observations and a field trip observation. The “walk-through” revealed class sizes ranging from 14 to 27 students, teacher-led large-group instruction in the Open Court reading program, extensive instructional resources, computers in each classroom (none, however, being used), student behavior charts, and regular education/special education inclusion classes. Curriculum and instruction consistency was apparent across classrooms. There was no school library; however, a newly equipped computer lab was observed.

As per the SIP, nearly all the teachers observed were engaged in Open Court reading program instruction, the Daily Edit, and the Daily Math Activity; a computer lab geometry lesson was observed, as was a field trip (3 classrooms) to the Whaling Museum. Teachers used large-group lecture/discussion methods primarily (as called for in the Open Court protocol); they maintained effective control of the classroom throughout the lessons; and the students were involved in their work. The Whaling Museum staff engaged the children meaningfully in the activities provided; the children were well-behaved during the trip; and they asked appropriate questions. Parents and grandparents assisted the teachers during the field trip.

The team concluded that the SIP had identified clear causes for poor student performance, and offered reasonable goals, measurable benchmarks, and definitive timelines. They were able to relate improved student performance on the MCAS test to specific components of the SIP being implemented. Finally, classroom observations revealed numerous curriculum and instruction applications arising from the SIP.

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?

Yes. The appointment of the current building principal and the redefinition of the literacy and math coach positions brought together three people committed to ELA and math curriculum and instructional improvements at the school. These three people now constitute the core instructional leadership team. They have drawn upon outcomes of the PIM process, which focuses upon the analysis of student data, to involve school staff in an examination of the causes of students’ poor academic performance. The right people utilizing outcomes of the right process facilitated the preparation of a new SIP that was adopted by the Commissioner and the State Board of Education in January 2003.

The district provided grant funds and other resources to facilitate the implementation of the SIP. A Safe Harbors grant and a CSR grant enabled the leadership team to obtain materials and equipment, support professional development, purchase new reading and math programs, and support special education students better. The district provided these resources and supported the directions taken by the staff in curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Other recently enacted district-wide policies are impacting the school. These include: a district-wide standardized curriculum and benchmarking, a new staff evaluation form, and a mandated promotion policy tied to assessment results and to student attendance.

The most noteworthy external factors to impact on the implementation of the school plan to date have been the appointment of the new building principal, the redefinition of the literacy coach and math coach roles, the utilization of the PIM process, and the acquisition of substantial grant funds.

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

Yes. The current SIP is an effective working document. It is the outcome of extensive data analysis, PIM-based staff training, and student needs identified by staff. It relates specific student learning objectives to causes of problems and to potential problem solutions. Instructional benchmarks have been established to monitor changes taking place. The plan focuses on an MCAS test-based content curriculum and on sustaining high academic expectations for students.

The SIP has been modified annually. During 2002-2003, 40 student tutors from the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, were assigned to work one-on-one with grade 3 and grade 4 students; parents volunteered for miscellaneous staff support work in conjunction with a Transitional Assistance benefits program; pre- and post-testing of students in reading and math was expanded with the utilization of DRA, QRI, and STAR math tests; and, a Math & Literacy Resource Center was established to assist teachers in Grades 3 to 6.

During 2003-2004, a new 24-unit computer laboratory was established, inclusion classes were offered at every grade level, teachers' common planning time was increased, E-SPED was introduced to facilitate on-line IEP report preparation, a Parent Teacher Organization was re-established by parents for the first time, and a variety of instruction modifications to current practices were adopted.

The modifications and fine-tuning of 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 resulted from leadership team and staff analyses of student performance assessments, from leadership team initiatives, and from the building principal's recognition of opportunities provided (e.g., the tutors). The revised SIP is aimed at strengthening the school's ELA and math curricula and instruction to improve student results.

The school has a viable system in place to track implementation of the plan's initiatives and to oversee periodic assessment of progress. A document, entitled Mt. Pleasant School – Whole School Improvement Plan At-A-Glance, provides a bird's-eye view of the system in place. External standards, school-wide goals, school-wide instructional approaches, professional development, continuous monitoring/assessment, and test timing, are detailed and inter-related in the document.

The format, goals, and objectives of the Mt. Pleasant Elementary School's SIP have been adhered to consistently during the two-year time period under review. Persons interviewed verified that the SIP approved in January 2003, remains in effect appropriately revised. Classrooms observed provided specific examples of the SIP as a working document in implementation.

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

Yes. Conditions are in place to sustain the gains achieved and to support continued improvement in student performance. The principal and literacy coach remain in place and the math coach, now employed at the district level but still based at the school, has been replaced by another full-time coach. The principal continues to emphasize consistency in the application of school policies and practices, such as high academic expectations, common curriculum and instruction opportunities, and behavioral expectations.

The PIM process, which involved the school's staff in identifying areas of weakness in student learning, resulted in a SIP approved by the Commissioner and State Board of Education in January 2003. The SIP has been embraced by central office administrators as well as the school staff.

The SIP fine-tuning process continues in 2005 in various ways, for example: scheduling school-wide musical and story-telling performances monthly in order to increase teachers' common planning time; introducing software and manipulatives to stimulate higher-order thinking skills; placing more emphasis on the small group and student-initiated aspects of the Open Court program; providing support for before and after school activities (e.g., math-related clubs); and sustaining math-related professional development work through commitment to the Mass Insight Math Initiative.

While positive conditions are in place at the school, some shortfalls have the potential to impact adversely upon gains realized. The most threatening of these is a substantial district-wide budget shortfall projected for the 2005-2006 school year. Secondly, it is not clear that, as outside funds used to support the multiple initiatives come to an end, the school staff will be able to sustain the programs and practices in place. Thirdly, a new retention program tied to test score performance and student absenteeism has the potential to increase student retention rates substantially. In 2004, the percentage of chronically absent students at the Pre-K level was 61.5%; at the K level, it was 30.8%;

and, at grade 1, it was 11.3%. Because retention is tied to attendance, if these chronically absent students continue their behavior as they pass through the grades, retention rates will increase. Fourthly, students' performance in math, is still not fulfilling expectations. Fifthly, a school-wide classroom behavior protocol has not been developed yet; hence, each classroom teacher pursues personal preferences. Finally, the computer is not an integral part of instruction at the school even though computers are located in classrooms and a computer laboratory has been re-established.

In conclusion, the positive conditions in place at the Mt. Pleasant School are sufficiently well grounded and broad-based to sustain student performance gains realized. The SIP provides sturdy architecture for continuing reform and the school staff are able builders of an MCAS test-driven ELA and math curriculum. This is resulting in meaningful student performance improvements in reading and ELA and steady performance improvements in math.

CONCLUSION

The priority initiatives in the Mt. Pleasant Elementary School's School Improvement Plan, as presented to the State Board of Education in 2003, are being implemented successfully. A strong leadership team and a stable, committed staff have brought consistency, safety, and a positive climate to the school, have improved parent involvement in the school's business.

For the past two years, a curriculum rich in MCAS test content and which set forth high student performance expectations has been implemented. All students and all student subgroups met AYP targets in ELA and math in 2003 and 2004. The school received a performance rating of "Moderate" in ELA and "Very Low" in math, and the school's improvement rate was "Above Target" in ELA and math. These results are substantially better than the results reported in 2001 and 2002.

The turn-around in students' academic performances is related to the many initiatives noted. The school has a viable system in place to track implementation of the SIP initiatives and to oversee periodic assessment of progress. Key elements of the system in place are external standards, school-wide goals, school-wide instructional approaches, professional development, continuous monitoring/assessment, and test timing. As the school staff learns how to make more effective use of the instructional resources obtained during the past two years, the beneficiaries will be the students.

Whereas student academic performance is now very good in reading and acceptable in ELA, math remains a work in progress. Student attendance is now above the state average; teacher-pupil ratios are reasonable; instruction and instructional leadership are strong; and classroom behavior is conducive to learning.

APPENDIX A
Team Members

Mr. Peter Davies, Chair, Classmeasures

Mr. W. C. Wolf, Jr., Scribing Examiner, Classmeasures

Ms. Lisa Demoulias, Consultant, Classmeasures

Ms. Helen Apostolides, Examiner, Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

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

Mount Pleasant School

Day 1 on site schedule

All activities take place in the school

- 8:00 – 9:00* Panelists met with the principal.
- 9:00 – 10:00* Panelists met with the school’s curriculum and instruction leadership team and members of the school site council.
- 10:00 – 1:00* Panelists met to discuss findings and to plan the remainder of the day. Panelists also conducted an informal school walk-through.
- 1:00 – 2:00* Panelists met with teachers in focus groups.

	PANELIST A and PANELIST B	
<i>1:00 – 1:30</i>	TEACHER FOCUS GROUP #1 Five teachers	
<i>1:30 – 2:00</i>	TEACHER FOCUS GROUP #2 Six teachers	
<i>2:00 – 2:30</i>	Parent FOCUS GROUP Seven parents	Student FOCUS GROUP Five students

- 3:00 – 5:00* Panelists synthesized information, further defined findings, prepared questions, and developed a team strategy for second day of the on-site visit.

Day 2 on-site schedule

- 7:30 – 8:00 a.m.* Panelists met with the principal for follow-up questions.
- 8:30 – 9:00 a.m.* Panelists visited classrooms and interviewed teachers.

	PANELIST A	PANELIST B	PANELIST C	PANELIST C
8:30-9:00	Observe teachers at Whaling Museum Three classes	Observe teacher 1 Gr. 1	Observe teacher 2 Gr. K Integrated	Observe teacher 3 Gr. 4 Integrated
9:00-9:30		Interview teacher 1	Interview teacher 2	Interview teacher 3
9:30-10:00		Observe teacher 4 Pre-K	Observe teacher 5 Gr. 2	Observe teacher 6 Gr. K.
10:00-10:30		Interview teacher 4	Interview teacher 5	Interview teacher 6
10:30-11:00		Observe teacher 7 Gr. 4	Observe teacher 8 Gr. 5	Observe teacher 9 Gr. 2 Integrated
11:00-11:30		Interview teacher 7	Interview teacher 8	Interview teacher 9

11:00 – 1:00

Panelists met to discuss findings and planned the remainder of the day (working lunch). Panelists used time as needed to analyze findings and to gather more information.

1:00 – 2:00

Panelists met with the Deputy Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, and PIM Director.