

**School Panel Review Report**  
**John F. Kennedy Elementary School**  
**Boston Public Schools**

**Introduction**

The purpose of the School Panel Review Process is to assist the Commissioner of Education in determining whether State intervention is needed to guide improvement efforts in schools where students' MCAS performance is critically low and no trend toward improved student performance is evident from MCAS data. John F. Kennedy Elementary met this criterion at the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and was one of 14 schools selected for panel review in spring, 2003. The Panel review was conducted on March 3–4, 2003.

The Review 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 two key questions:

1. Does the school have a sound plan for improving student performance?
2. Are the conditions in place for the successful implementation of the school's improvement plan(s)?

The Panel's responses to the two key questions that defined the scope of its 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, as well as school performance data, will be forwarded to the Commissioner of Education for consideration in determining whether John F. Kennedy Elementary School is deemed 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 a sound plan where such conditions at present do not appear to exist. Diagnostic and/or prescriptive intervention, where needed to assist an under-performing school, occurs at the next stage of the school review process.

**John F. Kennedy Elementary School Profile**

**Enrollment**

The Kennedy School is one of 70 K-5 elementary schools in the Boston Public Schools and serves approximately 460 students. The most recent enrollment data shows that demographic indicators have remained relatively stable over the last four years. In 2002, the school reported 71 percent of students as Hispanic, 26 percent Black, 2 percent White and 1 percent Asian. The percentage of students whose first language is not English has fallen from 59 percent in 1999 to 53 percent in 2002; the limited English proficient population has remained stable at or near 42

percent over the last four years. The John F. Kennedy School is a school-wide Title I school with 93 percent of students designated as low income and qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch. The attendance rate at the Kennedy has been 95 percent or higher over the last four years. In 2001, retention rates at the school rose sharply over the previous two years reported, increasing from 2.5 in 1998 and 1999 to 6.2 and 6.3 in 2000 and 2001.

The programs and services report indicates that 61 students, or 13 percent, receive special education services. Of this number, 47 receive instruction in the general education program while others receive services in either SAR or L4 classes. Almost one-third of students (144) are enrolled in Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) services in grades K-5. A smaller number of students (26) are receiving ESL support, including in-class and pull out. Fifty-nine students, or 13 percent, take advantage of an after school tutorial program (DOE school day and extended time grant) while 40 students participate in the Hyde Square Task force, a community partnership that provides tutoring, homework assistance and MCAS preparation. The Title I program provides small group in-class support in guided reading for approximately 40 students in grades 1, 2 and 4.

### **Staffing**

The John F. Kennedy Elementary School staff consists of the Principal, nurse, 32 teachers, one teacher leader/instructional facilitator, and nine teacher aides. Almost one-third (10) of the teachers are either on waiver or not certified in the area in which they teach. More than half of the teachers (18) have been teaching in the building for five years or less, while slightly less than half have been in the teaching profession for ten years or more. The student-to-teacher ratio is approximately 14 to 1 counting paraprofessionals and specialists who work in classrooms during specified times. In general, student-teacher ratios follow Boston guidelines: 22 to 1 for grades K-2, and an average of 23 to 1 for grades 3-5. Bilingual classrooms have 25 students with a teacher and paraprofessional.

### **MCAS Overview**

Students at the John F. Kennedy School are tested in grade 3 in English Language Arts (ELA) and in grade 4 in ELA and mathematics. The John F. Kennedy Elementary School failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in Cycles I (1999-2000) and II (2001-2002).

#### *Student Performance in English Language Arts*

In Cycle II, which cover the years 2001-2002, the school received a performance rating of “Very Low” in English language arts based on its proficiency index of 50.7. For improvement, the school received a rating of “No Change,” having shown no progress from Cycle I (1999-2000). Participation rates in Cycle II in the ELA test were 94 percent in 2001 and 97 percent in 2002.

The performance of Regular Education students at the Kennedy School over the last four years has shown no significant improvement. In 1999, 23 percent of Regular Education students were proficient in ELA, 58 percent were in need of improvement, while 20 percent were in Warning. In 2000, 20 percent of students scored in the Proficient category 57 percent in Needs

Improvement, and 24 percent in Warning. In 2001, the percentage of proficient students rose to 27 percent, 53 percent were in need of improvement, and 20 percent of Regular Education students scored at the Warning level. In 2002, the proportion of those proficient fell by nearly half to 14 percent, while those in the Needs Improvement and Warning categories rose to 60 and 26 percent respectively.

The performance of Special education students in ELA in Cycle II at the Kennedy School declined as compared to Cycle I. In 1999, 14 percent of students scored at the needs Improvement level and 86 percent at Warning. In 2000, only seven percent of Special Education students were proficient, 20 percent were at the Needs Improvement level, and 73 percent at Warning. In 2001, there were no proficient students in this subgroup, eight percent scored in the needs Improvement category while 92 percent were in Warning. In 2002, 31 percent of scores fell in the Needs Improvement category, and 69 percent in Warning.

The performance of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students at the Kennedy School in ELA over the last four years has been characterized by low proportions of students performing at the needs Improvement level. In 1999, nine percent of LEP students were proficient, 74 percent in need of improvement, and 17 percent in Warning. In 2000, only three percent of students scored at the Proficient level, 73 percent at Needs Improvement, and 24 percent at Warning. In the first year of Cycle II, 14 percent of students in this subgroup were proficient, 50 percent were in need of improvement, and 36 percent in Warning. In 2002, the proportion of proficient LEP students fell to five percent, 45 percent were at the Needs Improvement level, and those in warning rose to 50 percent.

### *Student Performance in Mathematics*

In Cycle II, the Kennedy Elementary School received a performance rating of “Critically Low” in mathematics based on its proficiency index of 34.9. Having regressed from its performance in Cycle I, the school received an improvement rating of “Declined.” Participation rates in cycle II were 99 percent in 2001 and 97 percent in 2002.

The performance of Regular Education students at the Kennedy School in mathematics over the last four years has been characterized by very low proportions of proficient students, and increasing proportions of students scoring at the Warning level. In 1999, one percent of Regular Education students at the Kennedy scored at the Advanced level of performance in mathematics, while 10 percent were proficient, 51 percent in need of improvement, and 38 percent were at the Warning level. In 2000, there were no proficient or advanced students, 52 percent of students scored at the Needs Improvement level and 48 percent in Warning. In 2001, only four percent of students were proficient, 47 percent of Regular Education students’ scores fell in the Needs Improvement category, and 49 percent in Warning. In 2002, only seven percent of students were at the Proficient level, while the percent of students in the Needs Improvement category fell to 26 percent and those in warning rose to 67 percent.

Over the last three years, the distribution of the scores attained by Special Education students in grade 4 math at the Kennedy School has centered in the Warning level. High proportions of

students (ranging from 88-92 percent) have scored at the Warning level. In addition, there have been no Special Education students proficient in mathematics.

The performance of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students at this school over the last three years has varied greatly. In 2000, 43 percent of students were at the Needs Improvement level and 57 percent at Warning. In 2001, 53 percent of LEP students tested were at the needs Improvement level, while the percentage of those at Warning fell to 48 percent. In 2002, only five percent of LEP students were proficient, the percentage of those scoring at the needs Improvement level fell to 15 percent, and those at warning significantly rose to 80 percent.

#### **NOTE ON CONTEXT:**

The school principal began her post at Kennedy in late August, 2002. She inherited an improvement plan from her predecessor that had been rejected by the school district. Along with the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), she revised this document to the satisfaction of the district and began her efforts to improve the school. The Panel's analysis is thus a combination of evaluating both the written (inherited) plan, as well as the plan that is currently being developed and implemented at the school (the "living" plan).

### **PANEL RESPONSES TO THE KEY QUESTIONS**

#### **KEY QUESTION 1: DOES THE SCHOOL HAVE A SOUND PLAN FOR IMPROVING STUDENT PERFORMANCE?**

Yes. Although the school does not currently have broadly understood goals for student learning, and has yet to develop a written document that reflects the school's understanding of the reasons for poor student performance and their link to its improvement strategies, there is a "living" plan that is widely understood and supported by the Kennedy staff. The school has focused heavily on analyzing student performance data and has developed a clear understanding of what it needs to address in order to raise student achievement. Further, the school has developed a coherent set of strategies that are widely understood and accepted by the faculty. The work of school improvement is being conducted in such a way that makes successful implementation of its improvement and planning efforts likely.

##### **A. Has the school analyzed appropriate data and program information to accurately identify the gaps in student performance and determined why those gaps exist?**

Yes. Although the school's analysis of data for the 2002-03 Whole School Improvement Plan (WSIP) did not result in a clearly articulated understanding of the reasons for low student performance, the school has developed a systematic approach to analyzing internal and external assessments of student performance. These efforts have resulted in a shared understanding of students' strengths and weaknesses in terms of skills and content knowledge, as well as other critical issues that their current improvement planning efforts address.

In the 2002-03 WSIP, the school does not clearly articulate its understanding of the reasons for low student performance. In this document, the school reports conducting an item analysis of the results of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), but only identifies the types of questions with which students struggled (e.g., open response questions) and not the particular concepts and skills required to answer the missed questions. They also include grade level results from the district's Benchmark assessments (in Reading, Writing and Math). This analysis, however, did not result in a clear statement of the school's most pressing problems, its key strengths to build upon or an indication that the school had developed a shared understanding of the reasons why students struggled with certain concepts and skills.

This year the school established a Data Team, a subset of members of the school's Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), which spearheads a systematic approach to data analysis. The Data Team has engaged the entire school in an item analysis of the 2002 MCAS results, and through this effort grade level teams have identified student strengths, the four or five Learning Standards that the majority of students have yet to master, and the types of questions with which students struggle. For example, through its analysis of MCAS results in math, the school identified that students often do not understand the vocabulary included in word problems, or how to effectively explain their reasoning. The school also identified the specific math strands in which students need additional assistance (e.g., number sense). After teachers analyzed student performance data in grade level teams, they met in cross-grade level groups to develop strategies to address identified weaknesses. The school examined the results of the district Benchmarks, although how these efforts inform improvement planning is less clear.

The school's systematic approach to data analysis also led to a shared understanding of the reasons for low student performance and of a set of practices designed to improve student learning. Although not documented in the school's 2002-03 WSIP, the following themes consistently surfaced in interviews and focus groups where teachers were asked to identify the reasons for poor student performance: (1) ambiguity regarding the curriculum (several staff reported that they were more on their own last year in terms of curriculum), (2) poor communication between school leadership and the school faculty, (3) unsystematic data analysis, including a lack of knowledge and training in this area, and (4) language barriers. Although the Staff Survey indicates that several staff members believe that student background, parent education and economic circumstances are the most significant causes of low student performance, and some interviews and focus groups indicate that the instability and quantity of district initiatives is a factor (see question 2C below), the Panel found a broadly shared commitment to focus on issues under the school's direct influence.

Consistent themes also surfaced in interviews and focus groups where participants reported the strategies the school is using to address the most pressing issues. Specifically, the Kennedy staff referred to their on-going efforts to: (1) align curriculum with state standards and articulate it across grade levels, (2) analyze student achievement data, and (3) develop clear lines of communication within the school (these efforts will be described under question 1C below). One staff member reported, "We are all on the same page," a sentiment expressed by several others.

**B. Does the plan set out clear improvement goals with specific objectives that are grounded in the school’s analysis of the reasons for poor student performance?**

No. While the school’s 2002-03 WSIP includes student performance goals that are specific and measurable (“SMART” goals), they are not clearly linked to a statement of problem areas or an understanding of the reasons for poor student performance. Further, although the WSIP contains specific objectives (called “Priorities” in the plan) that include action steps, the identified objectives are not specific or measurable as written. Finally, outside of “raising student achievement,” the school has not identified widely understood student learning goals and, at the time of the Panel visit, has not established goals for student performance on the MCAS.

The 2002-03 WSIP includes the following goal:

‘Reading: By the end of the school year, June 2003, each grade level will have achieved an increase over 2001-02 in the percent of students who meet or exceed the BPS [Boston Public Schools] benchmark in Reading...’

(2002-03 WSIP, p. 5)

The WSIP includes identical goals for Writing and Math. Within each area, the plan includes a chart that provides more specific BPS Benchmark targets for student performance in each cohort group, including regular education and bilingual students. For example, 73 percent of the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students passed the Reading Benchmark in June 2002 so the goal for June 2003 is to have 83 percent of the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade pass. These goals, established last spring under the leadership of a different principal, do not appear to be widely embraced or understood by the Kennedy staff. Teachers did not refer to the end of the year Benchmark scores when asked about the school goals.

Per BPS guidelines, the 2002-03 WSIP includes specific improvement objectives (“Priorities”), framed within the following Six Essentials of Whole School Improvement: (1) Effective Instructional Practice and a Collaborative School Climate Lead to Improved Student Learning, (2) Student Work and Data Drive Instruction and Professional Development, (3) Investments in Professional Development Improve Instruction, (4) Shared Leadership Sustains Instructional Improvement, (5) Resource Use Supports Instruction and Improved Student Learning, and (6) School Partners With Families and Community to Support Student Learning. Within each Essential, the school identifies priority areas, a rationale and specific action steps. For example, under the first Essential the WSIP lists the following:

Literacy Priority

- ◆ Teachers will extend their understanding and implementation of standards-based literacy instruction and the workshop method.

Rationale

- ◆ To improve achievement in Reading and Writing
- ◆ To meet BPS expectations for implementing Readers and Writers Workshop

(2002-03 WSIP, p. 7)

While both the priorities and the rationale could be considered goals, they are not specific or measurable as stated (no measurement indicators are included), and are not linked to the school's analysis of data or a clearly articulated understanding of the reasons for low student performance (see 1A above).

During interviews and focus groups the Kennedy staff would typically report that the school goal was to "raise test scores" or "improve student achievement." Staff did not refer to specific goals for student learning, either the SMART goals included in the WSIP or goals for the MCAS. Beyond the broad goals of improving student achievement, Kennedy has not identified student learning goals that are specific, measurable, and widely understood by the school staff.

**C. In order to accomplish each improvement objective, does the plan specify strategies which appear likely to lead to improved student results?**

Yes. Although the 2002-03 WSIP identifies instructional strategies that are not clearly linked to an articulated understanding of the reasons for low student performance, in its current planning efforts the school has developed a shared understanding of students' strengths and weaknesses in terms of the skills and content knowledge, a common belief in the reasons for poor student performance and commitment to a set of strategies that are likely to lead to improved student achievement. The school has developed several promising approaches to raise the quality of teaching and learning.

Kennedy's 2002-03 WSIP includes action steps that are clearly linked to its improvement objectives. Further, the WSIP lists Reader's and Writer's Workshop for literacy and TERC's *Investigations* for math are identified as key programmatic strategies, the same strategies that are central to the school's current improvement efforts. However, because the WSIP does not include a clear articulation of the either the specific knowledge and skills students lack or of the reasons for low student performance (see 1A above), the Panel could not establish a clear link between the selected strategies and the problems that need to be addressed, the instructional improvements desired, or the areas of student weakness targeted. When asked what was expected of them according to the improvement plan, Staff Survey respondents provided a broad range of answers (including about 25 percent who indicated that they did not know what was expected of them).

In interviews, focus groups and classroom observations the Panel found, despite the results from the Staff Survey, that the school is implementing the Workshops and *Investigations* with a clear focus on specific areas of student weakness (identified through the school's data analysis; see question 1A). Through its MCAS analysis the school has identified both the types of questions (open response, multi-step problems) and the specific content areas (e.g., math vocabulary) with which students struggle. The Workshops and *Investigations* are being implemented with a clear sense of purpose and focus.

Through its current improvement efforts the school has identified specific problem areas and developed a clear understanding of the reasons for low student performance in literacy and math (see question 1A above). As a result, the school has developed specific improvement objectives

to target areas identified through its data analysis. The table below shows the reasons for low performance and Kennedy's key improvement strategies, as reported in staff interviews and focus groups.

<b>Reason for Low Performance</b>	<b>Strategy for Improvement</b>
Ambiguity regarding the curriculum	Staff to meet in grade level teams to discuss curricular objectives; cross grade teams, including the ILT, focus on developing a cohesive curriculum.
Poor communication within the school	Reconstituted ILT has representatives from each grade level who serve as liaisons between grade level teachers and school leadership; principal maintains an open-door policy; clear documentation of ILT, Data Team and grade level meetings.
Unsystematic data analysis	Created Data Team as part of ILT; engaged all staff in analyzing MCAS results.
Language barriers	Focus on vocabulary; communications sent home in English and Spanish; more tutoring for bilingual students; literacy coach provides guidance to address and support ESL students.

(Source: teacher interviews and focus groups)

In addition to the improvement strategies listed above, the school has extended and increased the services of two content coaches, one for literacy and one for math. The content coaches are central to the school's professional development efforts—they conduct workshops, model lessons and provide feedback for classroom teachers. In the opinion of the Panel, these efforts represent promising strategies for improving student achievement.

**D. Are the school's written improvement planning document(s) clear and specific enough to guide their implementation of planned improvement initiatives?**

No. Although Kennedy's 2002-03 WSIP has improvement objectives that are supported by clear action steps, it is missing several elements of a sound plan. The plan developed last year and revised and approved this past fall does not include a clear statement of the problem, an understanding of the reasons for low student performance, or the critical issues facing the school; implementation timelines (with the exception of their professional development plan); or a sound plan for monitoring implementation and reviewing progress. However, the current planning efforts initiated with the new principal in the current school year include an increased focus on using data analysis to guide improvement planning and classroom instruction, and a more systematic effort to monitor and document the implementation and progress of school initiatives.

In addition to listing priorities and a rationale for each Essential (as described in question 1B above), Kennedy's 2002-03 WSIP includes action steps that are clearly connected to the identified priorities. For example, for the literacy priority listed under the first Essential—"Teachers will extend their understanding and implementation of standards-based literacy instruction and the workshop method" (2002-03 WSIP, p. 7), the school identifies the following action steps:

- ◆ Whole-staff professional development and common planning time will be devoted to Writer's Workshop including running the workshop, mini-lesson planning, mentor texts and conferring
- ◆ Our CCL [Collaborative Coaching and Learning] cycles will focus on establishing the Writer's Workshop in each classroom.
- ◆ Our guided reading library will be expanded to include more nonfiction titles. The Take Two Program will be used to provide both fiction and nonfiction titles focusing on the same theme.

(2002-03 WSIP, p. 7)

While each of these action steps are clearly related to the priority area, with the exception of the Essential related to professional development, the WSIP does not include timelines, the parties responsible for implementation, or a strategy for monitoring the implementation of planned improvement initiatives or evaluating their effectiveness. Further, because the WSIP does not identify root causes or specific areas of student weakness, the WSIP does not establish a clear link between the improvement objectives and the school's understanding of the reasons for low student achievement.

The WSIP does not specify a systematic process for monitoring implementation or evaluating its effectiveness. No where in the school's 2002-2003 WSIP is there mention of how the effectiveness of the school's improvement strategies will be determined. Although the school administers the BPS Benchmark assessments, the WSIP does not establish a link between this effort and the monitoring or evaluation of the school's improvement initiatives.

In its current improvement planning efforts, the school has established a more systematic approach to analyzing student achievement data, and has developed a shared understanding of specific areas of weakness and the reasons for low student performance (see question 1A above). Further, the ILT has engaged the Kennedy faculty in a careful review of the WSIP. Along with its careful documentation of its improvement efforts, the school is well-poised to monitor implementation and evaluate the effectiveness of its initiatives as it moves forward.

### **E. Was the School Improvement Plan developed through a process that will support its successful implementation?**

Yes. While the Kennedy's district-approved WSIP was not developed by a representative portion of the faculty, the school's current improvement planning efforts are more likely to lead to successful implementation of the plan. The school has established a process for engaging staff

in the planning process, and has created mechanisms for reviewing progress and making adjustments. Further, although the school's improvement efforts are not detailed in one coherent document, staff appear to understand their role(s) in implementing school initiatives and are actively engaged in implementation.

The Principal inherited the school's 2002-03 WSIP in August and revised the document according to district recommendations. Based on panel interviews, this plan was developed by a small group of individuals with little opportunity for meaningful input from the staff. In the estimation of the Panel, this document is not widely embraced or understood by the Kennedy staff.

The school's current planning efforts, which have not yet been fully documented in writing, are more likely to lead to successful implementation. One of the Principal's first actions was to reconstitute the ILT. Previously, ILT meetings provided an open forum for all staff members. Currently, the ILT has representatives from each grade level (the Principal asked each grade to select a teacher to represent them), as well as teacher representatives for special education and English as a second language students and the school's literacy and lead coaches. This group meets two times per month. When interviewed, ILT members described the two-way information flow between the ILT and grade level teachers, a key strategy for soliciting input from staff and disseminating information about school improvement initiatives. ILT members report that they consensually establish agendas and share facilitation and other team roles (timekeeper, recorder, etc.). Finally, the school established a Data Team, a subset of ILT members, who spearhead efforts to use data to inform improvement planning and guide instruction throughout the school.

The ILT has recently guided the school through a review of the WSIP to determine what was working and what was not. Rallying around data analysis, the school has created a more systematic approach to monitoring implementation and evaluating the effectiveness of their improvement efforts. Through grade level meetings and ILT initiatives, the school has engaged the Kennedy staff in the improvement planning process, including a review of the WSIP ("Our own report card" according to the Principal). The Principal also reported that she monitors implementation of the school's improvement strategies through her classroom observations and through examining the unit assessments that accompany the *Investigations* program. When asked how the school monitors implementation of the improvement plan, one ILT member said, "We are the plan."

Through interviews, focus groups and classroom observations, the Panel found evidence that the staff understands what is expected of them and is actually implementing the planned improvement initiatives. Although the Staff Survey elicited a broad range of responses when teachers were asked about their specific responsibilities for implementing the plan, the Panel found a more focused and coherent approach to school improvement when on site. It may be that Staff Survey respondents were uncertain whether the question referred to the 2002-03 WSIP or the school's current improvement efforts. In any event, the school has a "living" plan that appears to be understood and supported by the Kennedy staff (see question 2B below).

**KEY QUESTION 2: ARE THE CONDITIONS IN PLACE FOR THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE IMPROVEMENT PLAN(S)?**

Yes. Kennedy's new principal has gained the respect and confidence of the school community. She reorganized school leadership by creating new lines of communication and new means for involving staff in school decisions. The school's improvement efforts are widely understood and supported by the staff. The district provides the school a host of resources to help support Kennedy's improvement efforts. With sound leadership, staff support and district guidance, the conditions are in place for successful implementation of the school's planned improvement initiatives.

**A. Does the school have effective leadership and sound management?**

Yes. In a relatively short amount of time, the school principal has gained the respect and confidence of teachers and parents, and has helped foster a team-based, collaborative school climate. She effectively communicates to parents and her faculty, and appears to involve many stakeholders in school decisions. She has created an infrastructure for planning and implementing improvement efforts, focusing on analyzing data, examining classroom practice and maintaining high expectations for student learning.

Interviews and focus groups with teachers, parents and other school personnel revealed a high level of support for Kennedy's new principal. Several teachers indicated that she is highly focused on classroom instruction. She reportedly has led professional development workshops and has a strong classroom presence, frequently using 'rapid memorandums' to provide teachers feedback on their practice. Her expertise about teaching and learning has helped her gain the respect of the Kennedy staff.

The Principal communicates effectively and is leading the school in a positive way. Interviews and focus groups with teachers and parents indicate that most staff see her as positive and very accessible. For example, she helped the ILT see the Panel review as an opportunity to grow and develop as a school community. Several teachers and parents shared the perception that the school climate has improved, reporting less tension and more cohesion. Several staff members report that she models the behavior she expects from others, whether it be instructional practices or collaboratively making decisions.

The Principal is a savvy organizational leader. She has developed clear lines of communication such that staff interviewed by the Panel, including those who do not serve on the ILT, are aware of the school's decision making process and her focus on the quality of instructional practice. One teacher commented, "We are working together on it [school improvement], not in a box," while another said, "We are all on the same page." Through establishing grade level representation on the ILT and charging ILT members to share information and solicit input from their colleagues at grade level meetings, the Principal has effectively involved many people in school decisions. Through this effort, as well as her focus on relating data to performance improvements and her ability to establish clear expectations, she has built confidence among the Kennedy staff.

**B. Is there evidence that the school's faculty supports the planned improvement efforts?**

Yes. Staff supports the school's focus on literacy and mathematics, and on using data to drive instruction. Teachers understand the need to focus their instructional practice on specific skills and content that data indicate students have not yet mastered. Teachers appear to accept responsibility for student learning and are committed to the success of the Kennedy school and to its improvement efforts.

Staff supports the school's focus on literacy and mathematics. Based on interviews and focus groups, the staff appear to support the Workshops and *Investigations* as key programs for improving student performance. In addition to whole staff professional development, several staff members have sought further assistance in implementing the *Investigations* curriculum. In addition, although they are not scheduled to begin until next year, several staff voluntarily participated in the district's "Collaborative Coaching Learning" process, an effort designed to build collaborative approaches to instructional improvement and, in the words of the Superintendent, "Take your practice public."

Teacher interviews and classroom observations indicate that the Kennedy staff is implementing the school's improvement efforts. Teachers were observed using guided reading and *Investigations*, and the Panel recorded specific instances where teachers posed open-response questions and employed strategies to develop students' vocabulary, for example. In English language arts, teachers understand the need to help students with vocabulary, writing and non-fiction reading. In math their focus is on open-ended questions, multi-step problems and technical vocabulary. In both subjects teachers are helping students develop test-taking strategies to improve MCAS performance.

Staff is engaged in data analysis in the service of instructional improvement. The ILT's Data Team has conducted multiple analyses of summative assessment data that are shared and discussed at grade level team meetings. Teachers report using this data to identify students in need of additional assistance, to determine the specific skill and content that students lack, and generally to guide instruction. The staff appears to be galvanized around the importance of using performance data as a basis for modifying instruction.

Staff interviews and focus groups revealed a high level of staff support for Kennedy's improvement efforts. Several staff indicated that there is more "ownership" and "investment" in improvement initiatives than there was in the past, and that the school has developed a collaborative environment with more trust this year.

**C. Is the school receiving adequate guidance and support from the district leadership?**

Yes. The district provides adequate resources to support the school's development and implementation of the WSIP. The district appears to be well-informed of school needs, providing an array of professional development that is consistent with needs identified by the school.

Finally, the district provides additional guidance through providing a template for improvement planning and feedback on school plans.

The district provides a variety of coaching support. The district assigned a lead coach to assist the Principal in the improvement planning process—he works closely with the Principal and the ILT in the on-going process of improvement planning. Teacher interviews and focus groups also revealed the importance of the literacy and mathematics coaches. These part-time instructional experts provide in-class supports for Kennedy teachers, modeling and providing feedback on the implementation of the Workshops and *TERC Investigations*.

The Superintendent appeared to be well-informed of the needs of the school. In addition to the literacy and mathematics coaches, the district provides on-going opportunities for professional development for Reader's and Writer's Workshops and *TERC Investigations*. The district provides a mentor for the Principal, and supports an inquiry group to address the needs of new principals. To support the school's focus on using data to guide instruction, the district also provides training and support for *MyBPS*, an on-line resource for collecting, organizing and analyzing student assessment data.

Finally, the school district provides a template for improvement planning (the Essentials framework), and typically establishes MCAS goals for each school (at the time of the Panel visit, the Kennedy School had yet to receive its MCAS goals for the current year). In addition, the district's Deputy Superintendent and Instructional Leader reviewed, provided feedback for and ultimately approved Kennedy's 2002-03 WSIP.

## CONCLUSION

Although the school does not currently have broadly understood goals for student learning, and has yet to develop a written document that reflects the school's understanding of the reasons for poor student performance and its improvement strategies, Kennedy has a "living" plan that is widely understood by the Kennedy staff. The school focuses heavily on analyzing student performance data and has developed a clear understanding of what it needs to address in order to raise student achievement. Further, the school has developed a coherent set of strategies that are widely understood and accepted by faculty.

In a relatively short amount of time, Kennedy's new principal has gained the respect and confidence of the school community. She reorganized school leadership, creating new lines of communication and new means for involving staff in school decisions. The school's improvement efforts are supported by the school staff, and the school district provides adequate resources to help support Kennedy's improvement efforts. With sound leadership, staff support and district guidance, the conditions appear to be in place for successful implementation of the school's planned improvement initiatives.

**APPENDIX A**  
**Team Members**

**Tom Buffett**, Panel Chair, SchoolWorks, Beverly, MA

**Scott Kelly**, Ph.D. Panel Coordinator, Massachusetts Department of Education, Malden, MA

**Edward Sacco, Ed.D.** Assistant Superintendent, Nashoba Regional School District

**Denise Messina, Ed.D.**, Assistant Principal, Special Education / 504 Coordinator, Springfield  
Public Schools

**Pamela Holmes**, Title 1 Director, Somerville Public Schools

## APPENDIX B UNDER-PERFORMING PANEL REVIEW SCHEDULE

### Detailed Schedule for Review Panel School Site Visit

**The times specified on the following schedule may be adjusted slightly to align with the daily schedule and practices in each of the schools being reviewed.**

#### Day 1

- 10:30—12:00 Panel chairperson and panel coordinator meet to discuss and clarify roles, prepare for the first team meeting, and review general logistics/schedule for the review. [location: hotel]
- 12:00—2:00 p.m. **Team meeting # 1:** team meets for the first time to discuss each panelist’s individual analysis; team forms preliminary judgements on key questions. [location: hotel]
- 2:00—3:00 p.m. Panelists meet with the district Superintendent (and Assistant Superintendent, if appropriate). [location: hotel]
- 3:30—4:30 p.m. Panelists meet with Principal (and one other school-based individual, if appropriate). [location: the school]
- 6:00—8:00 p.m. **Team meeting # 2:** panelists synthesize interview information, further define findings, prepare questions, and develop a team strategy for Day 2 of the review. [location: hotel]

#### Day 2

- 7:30 – 8:00 a.m. Panelists meet with the Principal in Conference Room
- 8:00 – 8:30 a.m. Panelists meet with the ILT in the Library

#### 8:30 – 9:00 a.m.

Panelist A	<i>Panelist B</i>	<i>Panelist C</i>	<i>Panelist D</i>	<i>Panelist E</i>
Parent Focus Group	Parent Focus Group	Student Focus Grp.	Student Focus Grp.	Student Focus Grp.
<b>Library</b>	<b>Teacher’s Room</b>	<b>Room 102</b>	<b>Room 203</b>	<b>Room 205</b>

Panelists meet with Focus Groups. The Panel Review Coordinator and the Principal will identify participants for each Focus Group. The groups will be organized, as appropriate, to include groups of individuals who can respond to questions designed for parents, students, classroom teachers, curriculum facilitators, content-area specialists, grade-level instructors, or other specific inquiry groups.

- 9:00 – 11:00 a.m. Classroom observations and teacher interviews. (See attached)
- 11:00 – 12:30 p.m. **Team meeting # 3:** team meets to discuss findings so far and to plan the remainder of the day (working lunch)

12:30 – 1:00 p.m.

Panelists use time as needed to analyze findings and to gather more information; panelists are encouraged to roam the entire school and visit classrooms not yet seen.

	<b>Panelist A</b>	<b>Panelist B</b>	<b>Panelist C</b>	<b>Panelist D</b>	<b>Panelist E</b>
1:00 – 1:30	<i>Teacher Focus Group 1</i>		<i>Teacher Focus Group 3</i>		<i>Prepare Report</i>
1:30 – 2:00	<i>Teacher Focus Group 2</i>		<i>Teacher Focus Group 4</i>		

*Panelists meet with teachers in groups; consultant co-chair is free to work on report*

2:00 – 2:30 p.m.

**In the Library**

*Closing meeting with the Principal to discuss next steps (all panelists are present) No preview of judgment is offered.*

2:30 – 5:00 p.m.

*Team meeting # 4: Panelists deliberate and form conclusions*