

School Panel Review Report Lucy Stone 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. The Lucy Stone Elementary School met this criterion at the fourth grade and was one of five elementary schools selected for panel review in spring, 2003. The panel review was conducted on February 10-11, 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 Lucy Stone Elementary 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.

Lucy Stone Elementary School Profile

Enrollment

The Lucy Stone School is one of 70 K-5 elementary schools in the Boston Public Schools and serves approximately 200 students. The most recent enrollment data shows that demographic indicators remained relatively stable over the last four years. In 2002, the school reported 82 percent of students as Black, 12 percent Hispanic, 3 percent White, 2 percent Asian and 1 percent Native American. The percentage of students whose first language is not English has fallen from 13 percent in 1999 to 9 percent in 2002; the limited English proficient population has

remained stable at or near 1 percent over the last four years. The Lucy Stone School is a school-wide Title I school with 87 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch.

The last four years of data indicate that attendance at the school has been 94 percent or higher, with a rate of 94.7 in 2001, the most recent year available. The Stone school has consistently been above the state attendance rate and has closely followed the district average for all reported years. In 2001, retention rates at the school rose sharply over the previous two years reported, increasing at the 4th grade from 2.9 in 2000 to 17.0 in 2001. This rate is well above the district rate of 3.2 at the 4th grade. Grade 3 retention is also high in 2001, and increased to 9.0 from 0 in both 1999 and 2000. The district retained 3rd grade students at a comparably high rate of 10.1 in 2001.

The programs and services report indicates that 45 students receive special education services. The school's Title I services are all literacy-based and include Reading Recovery for grade 1, literacy support in grades 3-5, literacy skills for grade 4, and Readers' and Writers' Workshop support in grade 5. Ninety-three students take advantage of Title I services. Seventeen students participate in extended time/enrichment activities. The school does not offer gifted & talented, transitional bilingual education (TBE) or English as a second language (ESL) services.

Staffing

The Lucy Stone Elementary School staff consists of the Principal, school psychologist, nurse, librarian, 14 full-time teachers, eight part-time instructors, one long-term substitute and three teacher aides. All teachers have obtained state certification, with approximately 25 percent of the staff and the Principal certified in special needs. Nine of the staff are veteran teachers and have 20 or more years of classroom experience, while eight have been teaching at the Stone school between 6-10 years.

MCAS Overview

Students at the Lucy Stone Elementary School are tested in grade 3 in English language arts (ELA) and in grade 4 in ELA and mathematics. The Lucy Stone Elementary School failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in Cycle I (1999-2000) and Cycle II (2001-2002) in both ELA and mathematics.

Student Performance in English Language Arts

In Cycle II, the Stone Elementary School received a performance rating of "Very Low" for its proficiency index of 50.9 in ELA. Due to its small sample size, the school was not assigned an improvement rating. Participation rates in the ELA portion of the MCAS test in 2001 were 94 percent and 100 percent in 2002.

In 1999, 19 percent of Regular Education students at the Stone Elementary School scored at the Proficient level of performance, 70 percent were at the Needs Improvement level and 11 percent

at Warning in ELA. In 2000, the percentage of proficient students fell to just five percent, 63 percent were in need of improvement and those at Warning rose to 32 percent. In 2001, 12 percent of Regular Education students scored proficient, 60 percent were in need of improvement, and 28 percent scored at the Warning level. In the second year of Cycle II, 26 percent of scores were at the Proficient level, 63 percent at Needs Improvement, and 11 percent at Warning in ELA.

Fewer than 10 Special Education and Limited English Proficient students tested at this school in ELA both cycles.

Student Performance in Mathematics

In Cycle II, the Stone School received a proficiency index of 39.2, meriting a performance rating of “Critically Low” in mathematics. Due to the school’s size, an improvement rating could not be determined. Participation rates in the MCAS mathematics testing at this school in Cycle II were 94 percent in 2001 and 98 percent in 2002.

In 1999, only three percent of Regular Education students at the Stone were proficient, while 52 percent were at the Needs Improvement level and 45 percent were at Warning. In 2000, there were no proficient Regular Education students. Forty-two percent of students that year tested at the Needs Improvement level, and 58 percent at Warning. In the first year of Cycle II, only four percent of students scored at the Proficient level, 60 percent were in need of improvement and 36 percent at Warning. In 2002, three percent of Regular Education students tested at the Stone School were Advanced, 11 percent scored Proficient, the percentage of Regular Education students at the Needs Improvement level fell to 29 percent while those at Warning rose to 57 percent.

Fewer than 10 Special Education and Limited English Proficient students tested at this school in mathematics both cycles.

PANEL RESPONSES TO THE KEY QUESTIONS

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

The Panel found that the school does not have a sound plan for improving student performance. While the school’s Whole School Improvement Plan includes action steps, timelines and responsible staff, it is unlikely that its implementation will lead to improved student performance. Success for the plan is undermined by its failure to develop a shared understanding of the reasons for poor student performance and of the specific skills and knowledge that students lack, and the reliance on assessment data that does not reflect the skills and knowledge contained in the curriculum frameworks.

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

No. Although the school analyzes a range of student achievement data, and identifies broad areas of student weakness, they have not yet analyzed such data to determine the specific skills and knowledge students lack, identified root causes, clearly prioritized problems and concerns or systematically analyzed other types of important data. Finally, the value of the internal assessments regularly administered and analyzed is limited as they are not aligned with external assessments or the curriculum frameworks.

The school administers the Boston Public School (BPS) assessments in reading, writing, and math—called “Benchmarks”—three times a year (typically, it administers the assessments in September, January and June although this year they are using the June 2002 Benchmarks to assess student progress in mathematics). The school reports using this data to identify areas of student weakness, to group students in need of additional support and to help teachers address the learning needs of individual students. Based on the Benchmark data, the school identified that students struggle with open-response questions, short answer questions and questions involving multiple steps or dimensions. The school corroborated these areas of weakness by examining Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) data.

The school has not identified the specific content knowledge and skills that students need to improve. For example, their analysis does not document the math strands in which students perform well and those in which they struggle. The Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), the Principal and the district representative did not identify student strengths or weaknesses with any greater specificity than the broad areas mentioned above. Although the Principal and some teachers referred to conducting an item analysis of Stone’s results on the MCAS, the Panel found no evidence that such analyses informed the development of the Whole School Improvement Plan (WSIP).

Although school documents and Panel interviews indicate that the school has access to multiple forms of data, the Panel found little evidence that the school uses these resources in its improvement planning efforts. For example, school documents include analyses of MCAS data disaggregated by gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status (free or reduced price lunch). In a bar chart that displays the percentage of boys and girls who achieved a proficiency rating on the 4th grade MCAS, it is reported that 48 percent of boys and 27 percent of girls earned this rating in math, a substantial difference. Neither in the school’s planning documents nor in on-site interviews was there any mention of this discrepancy. Another example of a missed data analysis opportunity comes from the fact that only one of the two fourth grade teachers is trained in the school’s (and district’s) math curriculum, *TERC Investigations*. A central strategy of the school to raise student performance in mathematics is to train all teachers in *Investigations*. The school has not, however, compared the progress of students in the two classes to see whether or how teacher training influences student performance.

Beyond identifying that students struggle with open response, short answer and multi-step questions, the school has not clearly articulated its understanding of the reasons for poor student performance, nor developed clear written statements of the priority problems. In her leadership report, the Principal lists the following reasons for low student performance: 1) the school’s past ineffective and disjointed instructional practices; 2) their “first steps” in the transition to more

student focused learning; 3) the school's history of not having a balanced literacy program; 4) previous professional development efforts that were not focused on implementing best practices in literacy and math; 5) limited resources to help move forward more quickly; 6) an acceptance of low performance; and 7) past practices of staff working in isolation. However, based on the staff survey and on-site interviews, only the need for additional resources to support classroom instruction consistently surfaced as a reason for poor student performance. Many teachers and the Principal report that the sheer number of district directives negatively impacts student performance. The staff survey and the interviews also reveal that some teachers believe that Stone students' backgrounds are a barrier to improved student performance. Thus, while the Principal cites a number of reasons for poor student performance in her leadership report, for the most part these differ from results from the staff survey and data collected during the Panel visit.

The student performance data the school collects and analyzes—the Benchmarks—are not aligned to external assessments. While the school uses student performance data to identify areas of student weakness, to help teachers address individual students' learning needs and to establish school-wide performance goals, the usefulness of these efforts is compromised because the Benchmarks do not adequately assess the skills and knowledge contained in the curriculum frameworks. The Principal, deputy Superintendent and several teachers noted this discrepancy in Panel interviews, and school documents reveal the same inconsistency—while a relatively small percentage of students achieve proficiency on the MCAS, the majority of students do so on the Benchmarks, as indicated on the Formative Assessment Data Summary (WSIP).

The Principal, ILT and some of the teachers interviewed by the team expressed optimism that *MyBPS*, an on-line data organization system, will provide an important resource for analyzing data for improvement planning. At this point, however, the Panel found no evidence that this data informs improvement planning efforts.

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

No. The Stone's Whole School Improvement Plan (WSIP) identifies student improvement goals ("SMART goals") that are specific, measurable and achievable, as well as specific objectives ("Essentials") that have clear action steps, timelines, and responsible parties (see 1C below). However, these goals and objectives are not linked to a clearly articulated understanding of the reasons for poor student performance or the specific skills and knowledge that students lack. The limited depth of the school's data analysis compromises the soundness of the WSIP. In addition, because the internal formative assessments are not aligned with external summative measures (see Question 1A above), the Panel questioned the appropriateness of setting the SMART goals in terms of gains on the Benchmark assessments.

In its WSIP, the school lists the following student performance goals for math, reading and writing:

Math

- By June 2003, 75% of Lucy Stone students (except those on IEP 502.4 where noted) in grades 1-3 will pass or exceed the required BPS math benchmark.
- By June 2003, 65% of Lucy Stone students (except those on IEP 502.4 where noted) in grades 4-5 will pass or exceed the required BPS math benchmark.
- By June 2003, all of Lucy Stone students with an IEP (502.4) will show progress and movement as measured by an individual math item analysis for each student.

Reading

- By June 2003, 80% of Lucy Stone students (not on IEPs) in grades 1-5 will pass or exceed the required BPS benchmark in reading.
- By June 2003, 80% of Lucy Stone students in grades K2 tested (not on IEPs) will pass a minimum competency benchmark in reading using the Record of Oral Language and Observation Survey.
- By June 2003, all of Lucy Stone students with an IEP (502.4) will show progress and movement as measured by the DRA or SRI assessments.

Writing

- By June 2003, students in grades 1-5 will show improvement in writing as measured by using baseline writing prompts three times during the school year.
- By June 2003, students in grades K2 will show improvement in writing as measured by using baseline writing prompts two times during the school year.
- At least 80% of our students in grades 1-5 will be on level 2 or above as measured by the BPS grade level Task Description sheets.
- At least 60% of Kindergarten students will score level 6-8 on the K2 writing assessment.

Each of the SMART goals listed above is specific, measurable and achievable. They are not, however, rigorous. In almost every case, the goal is to have students perform either marginally better than last year or actually perform not as well. For example, during the 2001-02 school year 86 percent of students in grades 1-3 and 82 percent of students in grades 4-5 passed the reading benchmark (using DRA and SRI respectively); however, in the current WSIP the school goal is to have 80 percent meet this mark. Similarly, the goal for K2 students not on IEPs is to have 80 percent of them pass a minimum competency benchmark; last year, 100 percent met this mark (with the exception of word study). Thus, while the school's student performance goals are specific, measurable and achievable, they lack rigor. When asked about this, one staff member interviewed by the Panel responded, "They are supposed to be achievable."

In order to achieve the SMART goals, the school, per BPS guidelines also developed the following six "Essentials": 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 (Stone 2002-03 WSIP). The link between the Essentials and the school's data analysis is discernable only at the broadest level.

In the Panel Review team’s judgment, selecting literacy and math programs and devoting professional development time and other resources to help teachers implement them in order to address student’s poor performance in English Language Arts and math is, in theory, a sound improvement strategy. However, because the school does not clearly articulate its understanding of the reasons for poor student performance, the school’s improvement objectives—the Essentials—fail to target the most critical areas of need in instruction and student learning. Instead, the Essentials list general priorities (e.g., “To demonstrate the implementation of Readers’/Writers’ Workshops/TERC”, WSIP, p. 1), and document general strategies (e.g., establish time for teachers to debrief with literacy and math coaches). The Panel did not find any evidence that the school has a shared understanding of whether teachers are, for example, struggling with all aspects of Reader’s Workshop or just with one or two components. School documents and on-site interviews do not reveal a clear understanding of the link between the Essentials, the SMART goals and a shared understanding of the reasons for poor student performance.

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

No. The successful completion of the action steps in the school plan are unlikely to lead to improved student achievement because as they are not linked to an identification of weakness and/or a clear articulation of root causes of low performance. Further, while Reader and Writer’s Workshops provide a means of organizing instruction, teachers, in interviews and focus groups, expressed concern over the lack of specific guidance these programs provide for the preparation of daily lessons. Many teachers also expressed concern over the lack of direct instruction included in the English Language Arts and math curriculum.

The Essentials represent a coherent framework for school improvement that is supported by existing research (see 1B for a complete list of the Essentials). However, without a clear understanding of the reasons for poor student performance it is unclear what problems the school is trying to solve, instructional improvements it is trying to make or areas of student weakness it is targeting through the action steps outlined within the Essentials framework.

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

No. The school’s written improvement plan is clear and specific, but it lacks a clear statement of the problem and methods for monitoring implementation of the identified improvement objectives. The BPS Essentials framework provides a potentially effective template for improvement planning (see 1B above), requiring schools to develop clear and specific action steps to address key aspects that may lead to improved student achievement. However, the prospects for improved student achievement are undermined by the fact that the school lacks a clearly articulated statement of its understanding of its problems, an analysis of the causal factors that lead to low student performance, and a systematic process for evaluating implementation of the district mandated programs.

The WSIP establishes clear and specific action steps within each of the six Essentials. For each Essential, the school identifies action steps, realistic implementation timelines and the staff responsible for carrying out particular tasks. Further, as a planning document, the WSIP establishes linkages between its various parts, the Essentials. For example, under “Effective Instructional Practice and a Collaborative School Climate Lead to Improved Student Learning” (Essential 1), the school specifies the following action step:

Most teachers will participate in ten hours of professional development in LASW [Looking at Student Work]/ Curriculum issues around Literacy and TERC.

The WSIP also identifies the parties responsible for completing this action (Coaches, Principal, ILT) and a general timeline for implementation (beginning in September, 2002). Then, under “Investments in Professional Development Improve Instruction” (Essential 3), the WSIP specifies:

Coaches will be scheduled to work collaboratively with each grade level team to implement LASW and to develop inquiry groups leading to improved teaching.

For this action step, the WSIP specifies that the Principal and coaches will begin implementation in September 2002. These two elements of Stone’s WSIP illustrate the internal consistency of the document—where the document calls for improving instructional practice through LASW, it also specifies that the Principal and coaches provide professional development for implementation.

The above example also illustrates the plan’s lack of linkage between the action steps and its analysis of the reasons for poor student performance and/or a clear statement of the problem(s). Presumably, creating inquiry groups and LASW will address one of the reasons for poor student performance—the quality of teachers’ instructional practices, for example—but nowhere in the document or in Panel interviews with staff is there an indication that instructional practices have been systematically evaluated nor has there been a statement of how LASW will improve them.

In addition to lacking a clear linkage between strategies and an understanding of the reasons for poor student performance, the WSIP does not specify a systematic process for evaluating implementation. Although the WSIP does, for example, specify that the ILT will “monitor the implementation of its 2002-2003 PD Plan to determine progress” for the action steps illustrated above, it does not spell out how they will do so. The focus group conducted with the ILT did not reveal any activity in this area, nor did individual interviews with teachers and the Principal. Finally, teacher interviews indicate that assessment data generated through Reader’s and Writer’s Workshop, a potentially useful means of evaluating the effectiveness of these programs, are not yet reliable enough to serve this purpose.

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

Yes. The process the school used to develop its improvement plan has several components that will support successful implementation. In developing its WSIP, all Stone faculty had the

opportunity for input. Each staff member was given two elements of the 2001-02 WSIP—for example, Essential 3 (professional development) and the SMART goal for math—and was asked to provide feedback. Based on this input, the ILT then revised and updated the WSIP before submitting it to the district Deputy Superintendent, Instructional Leader and Cluster Leader for approval and feedback. The Principal and ILT then revised the WSIP before it was finalized.

Parents report being well informed of the school's improvement efforts and outside partners indicate that they were both aware of and responsible for different aspects of its implementation. For example, FAMILY, an organization that helps links specific Stone families with available and appropriate social services, helps recruit parents for Stone's Parent Council (one of the action steps listed under Essential 6, School Partners with Families and Community to Support Student Learning).

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

While the district provides substantial resources to support improvement planning and implementation, the number and instability of district initiatives overwhelms and frustrates many of the Stone staff. Further, although school leadership successfully develops community partnerships and school management, it is less successful in providing instructional leadership and nurturing a positive professional climate.

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

In some areas. School leadership is focused on sound management and developing community partnerships, but is less adept at improving the quality of classroom instruction and fostering a positive school climate. The evidence suggests that school leadership excels at operational management. Students are well behaved, the corridors are clean and proudly display student work, and classrooms reflect an environment rich for learning. Several teachers interviewed by the team characterize the Principal as dedicated and hardworking, as a highly capable manager, as being very effective at securing outside grants and as being successful at encouraging the involvement of parents and other community members and organizations in the lives of Stone students. Parents interviewed by the Panel praise the Principal for helping them personally and keeping them well informed about their children's progress.

The Principal is skilled at building community partnerships and obtaining outside resources. Through the Lucy Stone Initiative, a "five-year public-private partnership aimed at transforming the Lucy Stone School...into a comprehensive full-service school" (school documents), the school has raised substantial funds and services to supplement those provided by the Boston Public Schools. For the current school year, the school reports it has raised over \$500,000 in supplemental programs and services from foundations and community organizations such as the Codman Square Health Center and Boston Excels. Services provided through such efforts include after-school tutoring, coordinating social service resources for families and in-school tutors and mentors.

The Principal is less adept at creating and sustaining the conditions necessary to improve the quality of classroom instruction, relying primarily on the content coaches (math and literacy), district professional development providers, and teacher collegiality. Several teachers interviewed by the Panel indicate that the Principal rarely visits classrooms, providing little support or feedback on their instructional practices outside of contractually stipulated evaluations. Many teachers report receiving some support from the content coaches, although both the Principal and teachers believe that the level of support is incommensurate with the level of need, especially when teachers are being asked to implement three new curricula (TERC *Investigations* for math and Reader's and Writer's Workshop). Further, teachers report receiving inconsistent messages regarding how to implement these curricula from various support providers (e.g., from the content coaches and through district professional development). Many of the teachers interviewed indicate that most teachers rely on each other for the majority of the support they receive for classroom instruction, curriculum planning, classroom management, etc.

Although the Stone faculty appears to be a highly collegial staff, the Principal does not appear to focus on developing a positive school climate. Comments from teachers interviewed include that the Principal is "too rigid," "not a people person," and can be "very impatient." Further, although the Principal reports that she seeks input into school decisions, some of her staff feel that she "asks for input but doesn't listen" and makes "too many decisions on her own." The Principal acknowledges that she does not see it as her job to proactively nurture positive staff morale, reporting, "Morale is what you make of it."

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

Not fully. While Stone's faculty is dedicated, many are uncertain whether their efforts will be effective. The Principal describes her staff's dedication in glowing terms, recounting efforts to pursue professional development on their own, devoting considerably more time than contractually required, their willingness to try new initiatives and their desire to do what is best for students. The staff is implementing the core academic programs mandated by the district—TERC *Investigations*, and Reader and Writer's Workshop. Further, most teachers interviewed by the Panel report they find aspects of these programs as promising and potentially effective. However, she also reports (and teachers corroborate) that staff is frustrated by the absence of measurable improvement on external assessments, overwhelmed by the number of new district initiatives and confused by the inconsistent messages they receive on how they should implement the literacy and math programs (as mentioned in question 2A above).

Although most teachers are willing to try new initiatives, many teachers are skeptical regarding the likelihood that current improvement efforts will lead to improved student performance. The main reasons they cite are the "constant changes" mandated by the district, inadequate classroom level support, insufficient instructional materials and inconsistent messages regarding implementation. Some staff apparently believe that family and non-school related issues (hunger, housing, etc.) must be addressed before any improvement efforts are successful, as evidenced by teacher responses on the staff survey, the leadership report submitted to the DOE, and interviews with the school Principal. Thus, concerns about the stability of district policy, confusion about implementation and a tendency to focus on influences outside of those not under

their sphere of control undermine teachers' belief that implementing the WSIP will lead to measurable gains on external measures.

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

No. The multiple forms of support and guidance provided by the district are generally not effective. Although the district provides significant human resources, planning guidance and professional development opportunities, staff interviews indicate that the volume, limited duration and conflicting interpretations of district initiatives all contribute to staff confusion and frustration. District leaders do not appear to be well informed about the specific needs of this school.

The Boston Public School District (BPS) provides a wide array of support to the Stone Elementary School's improvement planning and implementation efforts. This includes a coherent guide or template for improvement planning (the six "Essentials", described under question IB); organizational assessments tools including a self-assessment checklist for school climate; Benchmarks in reading, writing and math administered three times a year; 64 days of support for a literacy coach and approximately 18 days of support from a math coach; additional professional development for teachers and the Principal; feedback on a draft of the Stone's WSIP and periodic "walk-throughs" throughout the school year. However, all of these supports have not targeted the specific needs of Stone faculty and leaders in ways that will likely lead to improving the quality of classroom instruction or raising the level of student performance.

After schools submit a draft WSIP each June, a Deputy Superintendent, his or her Instructional Leader and the school's Cluster Leader all review the draft and provide feedback. The school then resubmits the plan and it is approved in September or early October or sent back to the school for further revisions. In January district representative then revisit action steps outlined in the WSIP, helping the school establish what has been accomplished and what remains to be done. In general, the district monitors implementation of the WSIP by conducting three visits or "walk-throughs" a year, providing written feedback and recommendations to the school.

Despite the level of support and involvement described above, BPS does not appear to be well informed of the needs of the school. When asked about the most pressing needs at Stone, the district leader interviewed by the Panel responded by citing general challenges in the district such as improving the quality of instruction and training teachers in literacy, but was not sure whether these are barriers to improved student achievement at the Stone. She was unfamiliar with the Lucy Stone Initiative and disclosed that she only recently became responsible for the school.

It is unclear whether the district realizes the substantial levels of teacher frustration and confusion. From the teachers' perspective, district policy is "constantly changing" and undermines the school's ability to build teachers' knowledge and expertise about a particular program or curriculum. Many teachers report feeling that the district changes policies before the school has had the time to implement them—the required district reading program, for example. (Indeed, BPS is in the process of applying for the federally funded Reading First grant, and, if they receive it, the Stone will be asked to retrain teachers in the five components of reading

included in the program and discard the Reader's Workshop). Teachers and the school Principal are unsure whether investing the time and energy to learn the new literacy and math programs is worth the effort—they fear the district will soon change these programs, as they reportedly have done in the past. Thus, based on interviews conducted by the Panel, while willing to implement district policy, teachers and the Principal would like more support and more consistent messages regarding how to implement BPS curricula, are skeptical about its stability, and have some reservations about whether the mandated programs are the best for Stone students.

CONCLUSION

The Panel found that Stone Elementary does not have a sound plan for improving student performance. While the school identified broad areas of weakness it did not articulate a clear understanding of the reasons for poor student performance or the specific skills students lack. Further, although the school's improvement plan includes specific and measurable goals, action steps, timelines, and the staff responsible for implementation, it does not link these to a clear understanding and prioritization of problem areas. Finally, the appropriateness of the goals for student learning is questionable as they are not aligned with external measures.

While the district provides substantial resources to support improvement planning and implementation, many teachers are overwhelmed and frustrated by the number and instability of district initiatives. Further, although school leadership successfully develops community partnerships and school management, it is less successful in providing instructional leadership and in nurturing a positive professional climate.

APPENDIX A
Team Members

Tom Buffett, Panel Chair, SchoolWorks, Beverly, MA

Margaret Kelliher, Supervisor-Project LEAD, Springfield Public Schools, Springfield, MA

Scott Kelley, Ph.D., Coordinator, Massachusetts Department of Education, Malden, MA

Susan Nutting, Primary School Principal, Weymouth, MA

Joanne Roy, Assistant Director of Curriculum, Lynn Public Schools, Lynn, MA

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

All activities take place in the school

- 7:30—8:00 a.m.* Panelists meet with the Principal
- 8:00—8:30 a.m.* Panelists meet with the School Council
- 8:30—9:00 a.m.* 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.

Panelist A	Panelist B	Panelist C	Panelist D	Panelist E
Focus Group	Focus Group	Focus Group	Focus Group	Focus Group

9:00—11:00 a.m. Classroom observations and teacher interviews

	Panelist A	Panelist B	Panelist C	Panelist D	Panelist E
9-10 a.m.	Observe teacher 1 and teacher 2	Observe teacher 3 and teacher 4	Observe teacher 5 and teacher 6	Observe teacher 7 and teacher 8	Observe teacher 9 and teacher 10
10-11 a.m.	Interview teacher 1 and teacher 2 individually	Interview teacher 3 and teacher 4 individually	Interview teacher 5 and teacher 6 individually	Interview teacher 7 and teacher 8 individually	Interview teacher 9 and teacher 10 individually

11 a.m.—12:30 p.m. **Team meeting # 3:** panelists meet 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.

1:00—2:00 p.m. Panelists meet with teachers in groups; consultant co-chair is free to work on report

	Panelist A	Panelist B	Panelist C	Panelist D	Panelist E
1:00-1:30	Teacher	Focus Group 1	Teacher	Focus Group 3	Prepare report
1:30-2:00	Teacher	Focus Group 2	Teacher	Focus Group 4	

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. **Team meeting # 4:** panelists deliberate and form conclusions