

REPORT OF TWO YEAR FOLLOW-UP REVIEW

Office of Educational Quality and Accountability Laurel Lake Elementary School Fall River Public Schools

Executive Summary

Laurel Lake Elementary School has made progress in improving student performance since the designation of under-performance in 2003. Three main factors have contributed: (1) the appointment of a new principal who was seen as a strong instructional leader; (2) the influx of new staff; and (3) a school improvement plan (SIP) that was developed with a majority of the teachers included on the school's Leadership Team. These changes have resulted in gains in reading, ELA, and math in Grade 3 and Grade 4. The SIP identified root causes and included a comprehensive data analysis of student performance. The district identified the school as a recipient of a Reading First grant and provided professional development in Developing Math Ideas (DMI) for the staff. These two factors resulted in major curricular and instructional changes in both reading and math, through the adoption of the Harcourt Trophies Reading Program and the Investigations Math Program (IMP). Staff credits the extensive professional development that accompanied these two new programs along with the instructional leadership of the principal as major factors in the improvement of their pedagogical skills. In the period from 2003 to 2005, the principal's methodological approach to supervising the implementation of the SIP has resulted in teachers using the document to guide lesson planning. The school has developed a culture of continuous improvement under the leadership of the principal and of collegiality among staff that resulted in collaboration and peer learning.

The school has made adequate yearly progress in Cycle III and Mid-Cycle IV. Improvement targets were met for both cycles in ELA and math while performance targets were not met in Cycle III in both areas nor were they met in the Mid-Cycle results. The school's aggregate student performance as measured by the Composite Performance Index (CPI) showed steady gains in both ELA and math. In 2002, the CPI in ELA was 50.8. In the three following years the results were as follows: 72.4, 74.3, and 76.4. Similar improvements were reported in math. In 2003, the CPI was 53.7. The CPI rose to 57.9 in 2004 and jumped considerably to 67.0 in 2005.

The principal, who has been at the helm of the school for two and one half years since her appointment in 2003, has retired. Her leadership of the new staff in implementing the new SIP and at the time that many changes were occurring in curriculum was viewed as crucial. She began her tenure with 65 percent of the staff new to the school. The new staff joined with the existing staff to develop a new spirit of collegiality in the school. Combined with other factors, such as district support and advance preparation on the part of the principal, these conditions signify that conditions are in place to continue school improvement.

Priority Findings

I. The Laurel Lake Elementary School MCAS test performance improved steadily from 2003 to 2005.

- In Grade 3 reading, the percentage of students who attained the rating of ‘Advanced/Proficient’ increased substantially from 2002-2005, from 39 percent to 52 percent. Simultaneously, the percentage of students in the ‘Warning/Failing’ range was generally flat starting at 3 percent, varying slightly, and arriving at 3 percent in 2005.
- In Grade 4 ELA, the percentage of students in the ‘Advanced/Proficient’ category varied widely in the years under review, but also showed general improvement from 13 percent in 2002, to a high of 43 percent in 2004, followed by a decline to 27 percent in 2005. The greatest improvements were in the numbers of students who moved from the ‘Warning/Failing’ category. In 2002, 33 percent were rated ‘Warning/Failing.’ A substantial decrease in 2003 to 14 percent was followed by a rise to 20 percent in 2004, and a marked decrease to 8 percent in 2005.
- The greatest gains were seen in the math results. Gains in the ‘Advanced/Proficient’ category in 2002-2004 were 10 and 12 percent respectively, but in 2005, 23 percent of the students attained the ‘Advanced/Proficient’ category. Steady decreases were seen in the number of students in the ‘Warning/Failing’ category: starting at 40 percent in 2002 and decreasing to 10 percent in 2005.

II. The school’s implementation of its SIP has resulted in the continuous improvement of its students under the leadership of the principal and with the impact of the new staff.

- With the appointment of the new principal in 2003, 65 percent of the staff was replaced from retirements and transfers. The administration and a majority of the teachers formed the leadership team, which developed the SIP. Root causes were identified during the SIP process and addressed through goals targeted to these areas. The plan included Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) and Instructional Change Objectives (ICOs), which have been faithfully put into practice in the classroom through the leadership of the principal who developed procedures to monitor the implementation of the SIP. The classroom monitoring tool made these changes manageable for teachers, provided for timely implementation in a sequential format, and guided the translation of the goals into daily lesson plans.
- The leadership team held monthly meetings to monitor progress of the goals and student achievement. Data analysis skills developed and refined during the Program Improvement Mapping (PIM) process were applied to determine curriculum decisions and to track individual student progress.

- III.** The adoption of new reading and math programs accompanied by on-going professional development altered the content and delivery of instruction significantly in these areas.
- The adoption of the Harcourt Trophies Reading program was accompanied by significant training for the teachers in grades K-3. The ongoing student assessment that was part of the program provided for constant monitoring of student progress.
 - The three-tier Harcourt Intervention System provided for student support in reading to be provided in a timely manner and allowed for flexible reading groups.
 - Professional development in DMI resulted in the staff voting to adopt the new math curriculum.
 - Both of these programs brought an abundance of materials to the classroom which supported teachers in using varied instructional strategies in the classroom.
- IV.** The district provided resources and support to the school and gave staff the tools to implement the SIP and to develop instructional strategies to foster increased student achievement.
- The district provided a school support specialist to assist the school in strategic planning and onsite support through monthly PIM meetings.
 - The district identified Laurel Lake as the recipient of the Reading First Grant which allowed for the adoption of the new reading series, professional development, and a reading coach.
 - The district selected the school as a pilot school for the math program, Investigations, and provided funds for the adoption of the program the following year. A full-time math coach was funded by Title I.
 - Both the reading and the math coaches worked productively with the staff. They were resources to the teachers in providing support with the new curriculum, collection of data, data analysis, and utilization of state frameworks to improve instruction and monitor individual student progress.
 - The district provided training in Looking at Student Work (LASW) which the staff continued to implement although the after school time was no longer funded by the district.
- V.** The team concluded that the school has conditions to support sustainability, even though the principal who was viewed as the catalyst for some of the major changes in the school is retiring.
- Teachers have been given leadership roles in the school over the last two years.
 - For the most part, the team observed effective teaching practices in the classrooms reflecting the incorporation of the new techniques and practices learned in the professional development during the past two years.
 - The climate of continuous improvement, which is seen in the willingness that teachers show in examining their own practice and receptivity to coaches' feedback and peer planning.
 - Specific leadership roles were assigned to staff by the principal in the new SIP of 2005-2007 in order to provide for continuity of goal implementation.

- The superintendent stated his commitment to appointing a strong instructional leader and to provide training for the new leader as well as to continue professional development for all staff.

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 Laurel Lake Elementary School developed such a plan, and the Commissioner and Board of Education accepted the plan in December 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 Laurel Lake Elementary School. The Follow-up Review was conducted on January 11 and 12, 2006.

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 four key questions:

1. Has the school shown improvement in student performance?
2. Is the school effective in using an improvement plan that results in the continuous improvement of student performance?
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. Are the conditions in place to sustain the gains achieved and support continued improvement in student performance?

The panel's responses to the above key questions that defined the scope of the review are included in this report. These findings and conclusions are the product of the panel's analysis, discussion, and observation, based on the evidence available to it. A list of panel members who participated in the review is provided in Appendix A. A detailed schedule of the panel's activities is provided in Appendix B.

The panel's findings and conclusions on the four 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 the Laurel Lake 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.

Laurel Lake Elementary School Profile

Enrollment

The Laurel Lake Elementary School is one of twenty three elementary schools in Fall River serving grades kindergarten through five. Laurel Lake enrolls 233 students which reflects steady enrollment since 2002. In 2005, 55 percent of students were White with the minority population including 19 percent Hispanic and 15 percent Black. These figures have remained relatively constant, as has the percentage of students whose language is not English which is currently 31 percent. The Limited English Proficiency population is at 5 percent and was reported at 0 percent for the years under review. The special education population makes up 10 percent of the school; a similar percentage was reported in 2004 with 0 percent indicated for the previous years. The average percentage of students in special education programs in K-5 schools in the district matches this figure.

Of the 23 elementary schools in Fall River, the Laurel Lake Elementary School ranks number 11 in the number of students enrolled. The school ranks fifth in percentage of low-income students and it ranks second in the district in the percentage of minority students. The attendance rate of 93.0 percent is the fifth lowest in the district. The average attendance for elementary school in Fall River is 93.5 percent. The 2005 attendance rate for the state for elementary schools was 94.2 percent. The percentage of chronically absent students in Laurel Lake Elementary was 30.6 percent for this past year. The percentage of chronically absent students is 8 percent higher in this elementary school than in the district.

The school has had a considerable decline in the retention rate. In 2002, the rate was 11.4 percent and decreased to 9.6 percent and 4.9 percent in 2003 and 2004 respectively. The rate is higher rate than the state's which was 2.9 percent in 2004, but lower than the district's which was reported as 5.7 percent in 2004. Retention rates have not been reported to date for 2005.

Out of school suspensions rates have increased. In 2003, 6 percent of the students were suspended; this rose to 15.9 percent the following year, and was reported as 17.6 percent in 2005, with the majority of suspensions occurring in grades 4 and 5. In the district, the suspension rate for students in grades 4 and 5 was 8.9 percent in 2005 compared to a rate of 29.6 percent for the Laurel Lake Elementary school during the same period. The overall suspension rate in the district hovered in the 17-18 percent range for the years from 2003-2005. In 2005, suspensions for all grades combined for the school and the district were similar, while the state rate was

considerably lower at the 3 percent range in 2003 and 2004 with an increase to 6.2 percent in 2005.

Staffing

The full time school staff for 2005 as reported by the administration consists of one principal, 11 teachers in the elementary self-contained classrooms, three reading teachers, two teachers of moderate disabilities, a reading coach, a math coach, and seven teaching assistants. Part-time positions include two half-time adjustment counselors, physical education, art, and music teachers, a part-time nurse, a part-time speech therapist, and a parent liaison.

All of the teaching staff has earned bachelor degrees with 12 having earned master's degrees. All members of the teaching staff are designated as highly qualified according to No Child Left Behind regulations. Teaching experience of the staff ranges from two to thirty-one years. A majority of the teachers (80 percent) have been at the school for three years or less, having come to the school with the appointment of the new principal.

MCAS Test Overview

Students at the Laurel Lake Elementary School were tested in the MCAS Grade3 reading, Grade 4 English Language Arts (ELA), and Grade 4 math during the period under review. The School's Cycle III combined MCAS test results for 2003 and 2004 resulted in an affirmative AYP rating in both ELA and math. Improvement in ELA was rated "Above target" and in math was "On target." Performance was rated "Moderate" in ELA and "Very Low" in Math.

The 2005 Mid-Cycle AYP report indicated that the school made substantial gains in the Composite Index Rating (CPI) in both ELA and math and once again met the criteria for the designation of AYP. Improvement targets were again met, whereas performance targets lagged behind. The participation rate for the 2005 Mid-Cycle IV MCAS was 100 percent. The years between 2003 and 2005 marked a breakthrough for the school in terms of student performance. The school had not achieved AYP in the years from 1999-2002.

During the period under review the school surpassed its SIP goals in both ELA and math. In ELA the anticipated CPI was set at 53.8 in 2004, and 58.5 for 2005. Specifically, the CPI rose from 50.8 in 2002 to 72.4 in 2003, to 74.3, and 76.4 in 2004 and 2005 respectively. In math the goals were set at 54.9 in 2004 and 59.4 in 2005. There was an increase in math scores from 2003 to 2004 from 53.7 to 57.9 and a substantial jump to 67.0 in 2005. This latter figure represents 7.4 points over the target set by the school. In ELA the school exceeded its goal by 17.9 points.

Tables 1 through 5 present regular education and special education MCAS test performance in reading, ELA and math between 2002 and 2005. Laurel Lake Elementary School results are compared with Fall River Public Schools' and the state's results in each table.

Student Performance in Reading

Test results on the Grade 3 reading test were reported for regular education only. Results for

minority sub groups were not reported because of the relatively low numbers. Students scoring in the ‘Proficient’ category improved overall from 2002 to 2005. From 39 percent of students scoring in the ‘Proficient’ category in 2002, there was a gain to 46 percent in 2003, a leveling off at 45 percent in 2004, and the school achieved the highest number of student at proficiency in 2005 with 52 percent. Compared to the district Grade 3 reading results were generally similar for the year under review with the Laurel Lake Elementary School slightly outperforming the district in 2005. Compared to the state, the school showed 10 percentage points fewer students scoring in the ‘Proficient’ category; however, in its favor, 4 percent fewer students were ranked in the ‘Warning/Failing’ category.

**Table 1. Laurel Lake School
In Comparison to the District and State
Grade 3 MCAS Reading Results
2002-2005**

Year		Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning
2002	School	39	58	3
	District	50	44	7
	State	67	27	6
2003	School	46	46	8
	District	47	44	8
	State	63	30	7
2004	School	45	48	7
	District	48	43	9
	State	63	30	7
2005	School	52	45	3
	District	48	40	12
	State	62	31	7

Student performance in ELA

Grade four ELA results showed substantial gains from 2002 to 2004 and dropped dramatically in 2005. This was the first year results for special education students were reported separately but this did not significantly alter the results; although it is noteworthy to report that this group represents almost 25 percent of the population. In 2002 the ‘Advanced/Proficient’ percentage was at 13 percent. In the years that followed, the figure rose to 19 percent with a huge gain reflected in the 2004 results putting students in the ‘Advanced/Proficient’ category at 43 percent. In 2005, 28 percent of the regular education students achieved at the highest level, representing a decline of 15 percent from 2004. The district outperformed the school at the highest levels in 2005: 37 percent of the district’s regular education students at the ‘Advanced/Proficient’ level compared to 28 percent for the Laurel Lake Elementary School. Achievement rates for special education students in the district were comparable to the school.

**Table 2. Laurel Lake Elementary School
in Comparison to the District and State
Grade 4 MCAS ELA Results
2002-2005**

Year		Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning
2002	School	0	13	55	33
	District	2	30	50	17
	State	8	46	37	10
2003	School	0	19	67	14
	District	3	33	50	14
	State	10	45	34	10
2004	School	3	40	37	20
	District	4	36	47	13
	State	11	45	35	9
2005	School Regular Education	3	25	67	6
	School Special Education	0	27	55	18
	District	4	31	53	12
	State	10	40	40	10

Student Performance in Math

As in ELA results were reported for both regular education students and special education students only for the 2005 MCAS test. The greatest gains for the Laurel Lake Elementary School occurred in math. Between the years 2002 and 2005 the school increased the number of students who achieved in the 'Advanced/Proficient' categories by 20 percent. Concurrently the numbers of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category fell from 40 percent to 8 percent for regular education students. Gains were especially marked from 2003 to 2004 with a gain of 10 percent in 'Advanced/Proficient.' The drop in the number of students in 'Warning/Failing' was steady, reflecting a clear trend. In 2005, special education students lagged behind their peers in 'Advanced/Proficient' categories and the 'Warning/Failing' category by 10 points in each category.

In 2002, the district outperformed the school, but by 2005 the elementary school outperformed the district. Whereas the district had 22 percent of the students in 'Advanced/Proficient' and the school had 10 percent in 2002, by 2005, the district declined to 18 percent and the school was at 30 percent. Similarly in 'Warning/Failing,' the school outperformed the district in 2005, with 8 percent scoring in the 'Warning/Failing' category, and the district at 24 percent. The state outperformed the school in 'Advanced/Proficient' by 11 percent in 2005, but the reverse was evident in 'Warning/Failing' where the school had 7 percent fewer students in that category.

**Table 3. Laurel Lake Elementary School
in Comparison to the State
Grade 4 MCAS Math Results
2002-2005**

Year		Needs			
		Advanced	Proficient	Improvement	Warning
2002	School	0	10	50	40
	District	5	16	45	34
	State	12	27	42	19
2003	School	0	12	62	26
	District	5	19	53	23
	State	12	28	43	16
2004	School	3	19	69	20
	District	8	21		
	State	14	28	44	14
2005	School Regular Education	11	19	61	8
	School Special Education	0	0	82	18
	District	4	14	58	24
	State	14	27	44	15

PANEL RESPONSES TO THE KEY QUESTIONS

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

Yes, the school has shown improvement in student performance since 2003. The Laurel Lake School has met Adequate Yearly Progress in Cycle III which combines 2003 and 2004 scores and in the Mid-Cycle 2005 results. Prior to 2003, the school had not made Adequate Yearly Progress from the years 1999 to 2002. The most significant improvement occurred from 2002 to 2003 in Grade 4 both in ELA and in math. The number of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category decreased substantially in both English and math, and the number of students in the 'Advanced/Proficient' categories rose dramatically in 2004 in ELA and in 2005 in math. The Laurel Lake School surpassed its MCAS goal in its SIP. The low-income sub group was the only identified sub group. Very few of the aggregate were not in the sub group since 77 percent of the students were identified as low income; therefore, the school has only identified the aggregate in its improvement efforts.

Compared to five demographically similar schools in the district, the Laurel Lake School fell in the middle range in Grade 3 reading. In Grade 4 math, the school outperformed three of the five schools by a wide margin, while scoring slightly lower than two of the schools. The school did not fare as well in a comparison of the Grade 4 ELA results, scoring better than only one of the five schools. This was the result of a decrease of 16 percent in the number of students in the 'Advanced/Proficient' categories on the 2004 MCAS test. By contrast, in 2004, the school outperformed all but one of the comparison schools in Grade 4 ELA. In 2005, the Laurel Lake School outperformed the district in Grade 3 reading and Grade 4 math, but not in Grade 4 ELA.

Because of the small numbers taking the test, subgroups were not identified in Grade 3 reading. In Grade 4 ELA and math the special education subgroup was identified only in the year 2005. This subgroup comprised 25 percent of the Grade 4 class. In ELA, the results were generally comparable to the regular education students with 27 percent achieving proficiency, compared to 25 percent of the regular education students achieving proficiency. In the special education subgroup, 18 percent fell in the 'Warning/Failing' category while 6 percent of the regular education students fell in this category. There was little variation with district results for this subgroup. The Laurel Lake School had slightly fewer students in the 'Warning/Failing' category. In the 'Proficient/Advanced' categories, the school outperformed the state with 10 percent fewer students in the 'Warning/Failing' category (20 percent versus 30 percent) and 10 percent more students in the 'Proficient' range (27 percent versus 17 percent).

In math, the Laurel Lake Elementary School special education subgroup was out performed by both the district and the state. No special education students scored in the 'Advanced/Proficient' category in math, whereas 15 percent of the state and 12 percent of the district scored at that level. On the other hand, the percentages of special education students who scored in the 'Warning/Failing' level were 18 percent at the Laurel Lake, compared to 39 percent and 38 percent at the district and state levels respectively.

Comparative Performance Index data (CPI) indicate significant improvement in Grade 4 ELA. In 2002, this score was 50.8. The index rose steadily. In 2003 it was 72.4; the Cycle III CPI in 2004 was 74.3; and in mid-cycle 2005 it was 76.7. In math, there was also an upward trend as scores rose from 53.7 in 2003, to 57.9 in 2004, and to 67.0 in 2005.

The area of greatest improvement can be seen in math. The Grade 4 scores rose from 10 percent in the 'Advanced/Proficient' range to 23 percent in 2005. The number of students who failed the test decreased from 40 percent in 2002 to 10 percent in 2005. In Grade 3 reading there was an increase of 13 percent in the number of students in the 'Proficient' level from 2002 to 2005, representing a gradual increase with one year of very slight backsliding. Grade 4 ELA scores rose from 13 percent in 2002 to a high of 43 percent at the 'Advanced/Proficient' level in 2004, but a decline of 16 percent occurred in 2005. Simultaneously the numbers in the 'Warning/Failing' range decreased from 33 percent to 8 percent over the three-year period from 2002-2005.

The school formulated the SIP in the summer of 2003 with a team representing a large group of teachers at the school and representatives from the district. The result was a comprehensive plan, which included detailed steps to implement goals, which rose from a study of root causes and a thorough analysis of MCAS test data. Specific goals were aligned with the weaknesses in the curriculum and instruction. Adherence to the SIP and to the timelines was monitored closely by the principal and the teachers themselves. The SIP was routinely used as a reference point as teachers formulated their lesson plans. Members of the team shared outcomes of the PIM training with their colleagues. A leadership team, composed of the school principal and eight teachers, met monthly to monitor goals and make programmatic adjustments as necessary.

KEY QUESTION 2: Is the school effective in using a school improvement plan that results in the continuous improvement of student performance?

The current plan sets out clear improvement goals both in the areas of instruction, Instructional Learning Objectives (ICOs), and in individual student achievement, Students Learning Objectives (SLOs). At the Laurel Lake School, the SIP is a working document that has resulted in continuous improvement in student achievement. The SIP was routinely used by teachers in formulating daily lesson plans. The principal sought ways to monitor the implementation of the plan that were effective and useful for the staff. In order to make this a manageable process, the goals were organized into categories to be implemented on a monthly basis and a classroom-monitoring tool was developed. Teachers were expected to incorporate the assigned monthly goals in their lesson planning. In this way, both the principal and the teachers were focused on the same instructional and curricular concepts when the principal made observations in the classroom using this classroom-monitoring tool. Monthly meetings of the leadership team discussed issues related to goal implementation. This has resulted in a culture of continuous improvement.

The plan was developed through a collaborative process, engaging a large number of staff. The leadership team, which monitored the plan, had 12 members last year. This year it was composed of members that represented a high percentage of the staff. The SIP was managed by the principal using the monitoring tool she developed. The new SIP for 2005-2007 contained a number of leadership roles for members of the current staff to insure continuity and faithfulness to the SIP, according to the principal.

The adoption of a new reading program and the professional development that accompanied the new series had a profound effect on the teaching of reading according to the staff. The phonetic and assessment components of the reading program were cited by the teachers as having an impact on student achievement. Whereas support for the reading program had extended only to Grade 3 previously, teachers in grades 4 and 5 were participating in after school workshops for additional training in the effective use of the new reading program. A full-time reading coach worked closely with teachers in K-3 to support teachers in the adaptation of new reading strategies in the classroom. The assessment tools, Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM) and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy (DIBELS) allowed for continuous tracking of student progress and for flexible reading groups which were adjusted as warranted by progress monitoring from the staff.

In 2004, the school piloted a new math program, Investigations. As in the adoption of the new reading program, the staff was consulted. Since all of the staff had participated in a professional development program the year before on "Developing Math Ideas" (DMI), they were overwhelmingly in favor of replacing the former math program with Investigations. A math coach was assigned full-time to the school to support the implementation of the new program; she is viewed as a valuable resource by the staff.

Another influential professional development series focused on Looking at Student Work (LASW). The program was funded by a grant that allowed teachers to work with a protocol for looking at student work to effectively inform instruction and to develop strategies to help

individual students improve writing. This after school program is not funded this year, but a number of teachers were continuing the effort.

Teachers used rubrics to assess student writing, but the administration and the staff agreed that different rubrics needed to be developed to promote greater student progress and awareness in how to improve their writing skills. A committee of teachers was focused on this task.

A goal of the SIP was to create student friendly versions of the standards to post in each classroom. Teachers made references to these standards in introducing new work to the students. Along with the standards, vocabulary words from the new vocabulary program and words from all subjects were used for word walls which were observed in all of the classrooms. As a result of analysis of student weaknesses on the MCAS test, the school initiated a daily vocabulary program from grades K-3. The principles of the program carry over to grades 4 and 5. This is a proscribed program with many visuals and a variety of methods to engage students' attention. Teachers were observed using the program and carrying over the use of the words throughout other lessons.

Since the writing of the SIP, the school has fully implemented a three-tier intervention model in grades K-3. This program provided for targeted assistance for students falling behind in reading. The paraprofessionals and all support staff were trained in intervention strategies. Students received extra reading instruction once the determination had been made by using the results of the DIBELS and progress monitoring. The three levels of intervention provided an appropriate level of extended instruction in small group settings. Recently the model has been extended to Grade 4.

The school has received considerable support from the district. The district implemented a district wide independent reading program, to which all teachers adhere at the school and which is integrated into daily lesson plans. The district also restructured time on learning, calling for a 90 minute reading block and increased the time allotted for math instruction from 45 minutes to one hour. The teachers welcomed both of these extensions of time.

The district selected the Laurel Lake School to be the recipient of the Reading First Grant. A full-time reading coach supported the staff in the implementation of the program. The selection of the Laurel Lake School to participate in the Reading First Grant provided professional development to teachers which has carried over into the classroom and was noted during observations of lessons. During interviews, teachers stated that their effectiveness as reading instructors was vastly increased as a result of their participation in the professional development provided. The teachers welcomed both of these extensions of time. The assessment tool provided by the reading program, DIBELS provided for regularly monitoring of student progress. Through the grant, the district supported a three-tiered intervention system which called for additional time for reading instruction for students who fall in the second tier as a result of the DIBELS assessment and for students who need additional intervention, the third tier adds 30 minutes outside of the classroom in a smaller group setting to target areas of improvement. The resultant groupings were flexible and students were moved between the tiers as mastery was accomplished.

The district provided professional development in DMI, which was attended by a majority of the school staff. This experience generated interest among the staff to adopt a math program that matched the concepts as explored in DMI more closely. In this way, the new math program, Investigations, was brought into the school. Teachers stated during interviews that the professional development that preceded the implementation of Investigations made them confident as instructors to engage student interest and excitement about math and to advance their math skills. Both new programs in reading and math came with an abundance and variety of materials, which allowed for teachers to handily use an assortment of instructional strategies in the classroom.

The district also provided professional development in Looking at Student Work (LASW), which, although the district no longer funded the program, continued to be a part of common planning time for some of the staff. Through the school support specialist, the district assisted the school in strategic planning at monthly PIM meetings and on-site support for SIP monitoring.

The leadership and the faculty have effectively demonstrated their understanding of the connections between changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment and improvements in student performance. All of the new initiatives included curriculum changes with accompanying new instructional strategies; frequency of assessment and analysis of results demonstrated the extent to which the school staff and leadership understood and put into practice how student achievement was connected to these variables. Two examples of making these connections are (1) the Individual Student Success Plan (ISSP) which details the areas of weakness for each student sequentially and which has a system for recording mastery of the listed skills by individual students, and (2) the adoption of a new vocabulary program which came as a result of analysis of test data which noted students' weaknesses in this area.

The school has not been effective in using an improvement plan that resulted in the continuous improvement of attendance. The current plan does not set out clear improvement goals for attendance with specific objectives that are grounded in the school's analysis of the reasons for poor student attendance. The school's improvement planning documents were not clear and specific enough to guide improved attendance. However, the school has implemented an attendance policy based on incentives for improved attendance by whole classrooms. Last year was the first year of the program, and although the data reflects only a slight improvement in attendance, the staff indicated that it has raised awareness among the students as they see the focus and the rewards associated with good attendance.

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

The appointment of a new principal with a strong instructional background and the simultaneous replacement of 65 percent of the staff were credited with having the most impact on student achievement. A number of professional development opportunities have been available to the staff and a vast majority of the teachers have participated in these efforts in the areas of reading and math. The collegial climate that pervades the school has affected a positive climate for peer

learning and collaboration. The teachers at the Laurel Lake School have voluntarily given up their preparation periods to meet for common planning time three days a week, resulting in sharing of instructional strategies, discussions of curriculum, and analysis of assessment data.

Ongoing monitoring by the school, strong principal leadership, commitment of the staff, and measures and tools for accountability have contributed to the school's ability to implement their plan. Changes in district policies affecting reading and math instructional times have also had a positive affect on the achievement of students at the school. As described in the previous section, new reading and math programs resulting from the district's attention to the needs of the school have had a wide-ranging positive effect of academic progress. The new programs were adopted at the school after teachers indicated their agreement that these programs matched the needs of the students.

The district adjusted the time on learning requirement in both reading and math, extending the reading time to 90 minutes from 60 minutes and the math time from 45 minutes to 60 minutes. Independent reading time was also mandated by the district and has been integrated into the daily lessons at the school.

The selection of the school as the recipient of the Reading First Grant has had a profound affect on the instruction of reading in the school. The professional development opportunities provided by the district in math also completely changed the way this subject was taught at the school. A fulltime reading coach was assigned to the school as part of the implementation of the new program. A math coach was also added to the Laurel Lake staff to support the implementation of the Investigations program. The position was supported by Title I funds.

Another example of the responsiveness of the district to the needs of Laurel Lake was the provision of training for staff in LASW. This activity was cited in the Fact Finding Report as lacking at the school. All three of these areas, which were targeted by the district, were effectively carried over into the Laurel Lake School by the administration and the staff, both of which carefully evaluated the value and appropriateness of these programs for the students at the school.

The decision by the faculty to use their preparation time for common planning reflected the willingness of teachers to work collaboratively to plan for effective curriculum and instruction for the advancement of students. The union has not interfered with this practice and the collective feeling at the school is that the union does not stand in the way of student achievement as stated by one of the teachers.

Teachers stated that the absence of the after school program which was offered to students in 2003 has affected the amount of support some students required in order to make substantial progress in the areas of math and reading. They viewed after school tutoring and support services for students as essential. Many students required more additional individual attention than what can be offered during the school day. Lack of district funding for the program was the cause of its demise.

The climate of continuous improvement at the school can be discerned in the participation of

staff in the current professional development offered by the district on differentiated instruction. There has been a participation rate of 95 percent of the Laurel Lake School staff in professional development offered by the district. A number of teachers commented favorably on the impact they expected the new techniques will have on their classrooms. As one teacher said, it is making her a creative teacher. A number of teachers were also serving on a school-based committee to improve rubrics for writing assignments. A consensus reached during the monthly PIM meetings led to the decision to revise the current rubrics to make them both more meaningful for students and effective in measuring progress over time. School-wide writing prompts were administered three times a year. Currently there were no district-wide writing assessments. A committee has been formed to develop a district wide tool.

The district is currently in its second year of administering a norm based assessment, the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA), to measure student progress from the beginning of the school year to the end of the year. The instrument is standards based and matched to the state frameworks. The superintendent stated that the district would be offering workshops for school staff to use the results of this assessment to monitor individual student academic progress from the beginning of the year to the end and from year to year.

KEY QUESTION 4: Are the conditions in place to sustain the gains achieved and support continued improvement in student performance?

The current principal who was the major catalyst for change has retired. The principal and district have put structures in place to continue gains that have been achieved over the past two years.

The principal's distributive management style has empowered teachers to take leadership roles. That factor in combination with the extensive training teachers have received in so many curricular areas led to the conclusion of the team that conditions were in place to further student achievement. In order to make provisions for continuity, the principal and the leadership team placed the primary responsibility of overseeing the goals of the SIP from 2005-2007 on teachers in the building. The teachers stated that they were confident of their ability to continue on the path crafted by the principal. During her principal's tenure, a majority of the teachers were on the leadership team and were strongly committed to school improvement. In addition, the commitment of the superintendent to seek a principal with strong leadership and instructional skills placed the school in a position to remain on target in the implementation of the SIP.

The replacement of 65 percent of the staff two years ago fostered an immense culture change in the school as noted by teachers who had been there previously, by central administration, and by parents who have noted the change. During the parent focus group, a number of parents agreed that the teachers seemed "more involved," demonstrated a positive attitude toward children, and were more enthusiastic. They also said that the school felt safer. The school has an "Open Door Policy" when it comes to welcoming parents into the school. A "Bring Your Parent to School Day" was initiated to increase parent involvement and to give parents a deeper understanding of the teaching and learning that forms the daily school life of their children. A number of parents have participated, and the staff continued to look for ways to increase parent participation in this

program as well as in the school in general.

An instructional staff survey was completed by 28 members of the professional and non-professional staff at the school in November of 2005. Respondents were asked to react to a series of statements about the school's programs and services using a five point scale. An overwhelming number (93 percent) strongly agreed that the principal has provided effective leadership. Most also agreed that the school has a "well-defined plan for reaching students performance goals." There was also general agreement in the "strongly agree" range and "agree" range that the school has effective strategies to keep parents informed. There was also agreement that the curriculum is "effective and appropriate." The staff reported that they met once a week to discuss "strategies and services for individual students."

The seriousness with which the staff viewed the SIP is seen in its presence next to teachers' desks, its incorporation in daily lesson plans, and in the comment of one teacher who said she views it as a "bible" for instruction. The continued participation of a majority of the teaching staff on the leadership team which meets monthly to discuss and monitor the goals also indicated their support for the SIP. The participation of 95 percent of the staff in district-wide professional development combined with the positive ratings the team gave to classroom observations reflected the dedication and seriousness of purpose of the staff and the successful integration of new teaching methods in daily lessons.

In rating classroom instruction, the combined scores of the team indicated that instruction as a whole was better than average, with a number of classes rating as "exemplifying" good practice. The comprehensiveness with which the teachers incorporated the Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) and Instructional Change Objectives (ICOs) in their lesson plans was also an indication of the commitment to the successful implementation of the school's plan. The members of the team observed teachers using a respectful tone with students, giving students adequate time to respond to questions, and creating a positive climate for learning. There was some concern that in some cases instruction was geared more to the middle and low levels of achievement in the classroom, leaving the more advanced students to wait for others to catch up and not giving them the opportunity to use their time to advance in the subject area.

The monitoring tool developed by the principal to focus on goal implementation during classroom observations has been useful to both staff and administration. For teachers, it has been a manageable way to incorporate SIP goals into their daily lessons because the tool has grouped the goals and divided them into monthly and quarterly sections. The tool included a calendar for the ICOs and consequently allows for monitoring by the principal in a timely way since teachers use the form to notify the principal when implementation can be observed in the classroom. A monthly benchmark report was presented to the leadership team quarterly and analyzed for future actions. The faculty spoke positively about this initiative. The principal followed-up the observations with written comments to teachers noting areas of needed improvement or strengths. Teachers commented that this has been valuable feedback in helping them improve discreet components of instruction, indicating their willingness to examine their practice critically. There is support for the procedure of using a common template with common elements to be turned into the principal weekly. The principal returned these plans to teachers with comments to insure that they contained vital components of the SIP.

The district demonstrated continued support for the new math and reading programs by providing weekly forums for the reading and math coaches with the district curriculum leaders to improve their skills as a resource for teachers. The district was looking to sustain the current level of funding to maintain the coaches as full-time in the school. A more comprehensive writing program was in the planning stages and on-going professional development to support the Investigations and Reading First programs was a goal of the district. A majority of the teachers were participating in a series of district sponsored workshops on Differentiating Instruction.

Some of the new differentiated approaches to instruction were being incorporated into the classroom. Some teachers commented that an increased variety of approaches may have an effect on discipline in the classroom. There was a protocol in place for staff to follow when student disruptions occurred in the classroom, but the staff had not had specific training. The school had a yearly event which allowed for a day long planned program for older and younger students to work together to build comradeship and mutual understanding, but there was no on-going school wide program that addressed common school values.

The superintendent stated that he would be aggressive in securing funding for long-term professional development for staff and administration. He was committed to appoint an administrator who would continue the strong instructional leadership provided by the current principal and he expected that all new administrators and teachers would participate in continuous training to improve the quality of education for the students. He initiated a pro-active recruitment campaign to enlist the support of the school committee and town council to hire new staff early to allow for a wide selection of good candidates.

CONCLUSION

It was the consensus of the Panel Review Team that the Laurel Lake Elementary School has systematically implemented its School Improvement Plan that was presented to the State Board of Education in 2003. Since then the school has kept attuned to the needs and progress of its students, using the data analysis skills learned through the PIM process. Evidence of this was the adoption of new Reading, math, and vocabulary programs to remedy weaknesses in curriculum and instruction. The school amended its 2003 SIP to include the new initiatives.

The combination of a school administrator who developed an effective monitoring tool for the implementation of the SIP into daily lessons and a committed, talented staff characterized by its professionalism and commitment to student achievement resulted in an ethos of continuous improvement and a spirit of collaboration that pervaded the school; teachers worked as a team in analyzing data, looking at student work, and planning lessons to meet the needs of the students. The district has provided support for the school in the numerous ways which were cited in this report. The school's success in making AYP in Cycle III and mid-Cycle IV for the first time since the inception of the measure in 1999 could be attributed to these factors.

The school had a viable system in place to monitor individual student progress and to provide

intervention opportunely. The curriculum was rich in engaging materials for students and in providing teachers with diverse instructional strategies to meet individual student needs. Focused professional development with its concurrent application at the classroom level continued to be a priority of the district. The district's adoption of the NWEA, to measure student progress within the school year and from year to year, provided information to further guide staff in making decisions about curriculum and instruction.

The adequacy of the physical space was of concern. Lack of adequate space could be seen in the use of the halls for nursing services and small group work. The building was refreshed with a coat of paint after the Fact Finding Team of 2003 commented on the condition of the physical plant and the lack of building maintenance. Lack of after school programs continue to leave a gap in needed student services.

The question remains: What will be the impact of the retirement of the principal? The superintendent has pledged to appoint an instructional leader who will continue to lead the staff towards increased student achievement. At the same time, the staff is confident in its ability to carry on with the initiatives in curriculum and instruction that have become imbued in the school over the past two years. The Panel Review Team has concluded that optimism of the staff was well placed, given the instructional skills evident in classroom observations and the spirit of professionalism that pervades the school.

APPENDIX A
Team Members

Lisa Bryant, Coordinator, Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

Eva Mitchell, Examiner, Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

Joe Nigro, Examiner, Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

Helen Apostolides, Associate Field Examiner, Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

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

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

Day 1 on site schedule
All activities take place in the school

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

	REVIEWER A and REVIEWER B	REVIEWER C and REVIEWER D
1:00-1:30	TEACHER FOCUS GROUP #1	TEACHER FOCUS GROUP #2
1:30-2:00	DOCUMENT REVIEW	TEACHER FOCUS GROUP #4
2:00-2:30	STUDENT FOCUS GROUP #1	STUDENT FOCUS GROUP #2

	REVIEWER A	REVIEWER B	REVIEWER C	REVIEWER D
2:30 - 3:00	PARENT FOCUS GROUP #1		PARENT FOCUS GROUP #2	

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

Day 2 on-site schedule
All activities take place in the school

7:45—8:15 Team members meet with the principal for follow-up questions

	REVIEWER A	REVIEWER B	REVIEWER C	REVIEWER D
8:15 8:45	Observe teacher 1	Observe teacher 2	Observe teacher 3	Observe teacher 4
8:45- 9:15	Interview teacher 1	Interview teacher 2	Interview teacher 3	Interview teacher 4
9:15- 9:45	Observe teacher 5	Observe teacher 6	Observe teacher 7	Observe teacher 8
10:15- 10:45	Interview teacher 5	Interview teacher 6	Interview teacher 7	Interview teacher 8
10:45- 11:15	Observe teacher 9	Observe teacher 10	Observe teacher 11	Observe teacher 12

	REVIEWER A	REVIEWER B	REVIEWER C	REVIEWER D
11:15 - 11:45	Interview teacher 9	Interview teacher 10	Interview teacher 11	Interview teacher 12

11:45—2:00 Team members met to discuss findings so far and to plan the remainder of the day (working lunch). Members used time as needed to analyze findings and to gather more information.

2:00—2:30 Closing meeting with the principal to discuss next steps (all members are present)

2:30—5:00 Members deliberate and form conclusions.