REPORT OF TWO YEAR FOLLOW UP REVIEW

Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

Donahue School
Holyoke Public Schools

Executive Summary

The Maurice A. Donahue Elementary School in the district of Holyoke developed a School Improvement Plan accepted by the Commissioner and Board of Education in December 2003, shortly after the Department of Education declared the school underperforming. During the Follow Up Review, conducted February 7-8, 2006, the site team found that school and district leadership implemented a number of key changes in the efforts to improve the school, although Donahue's 2005 performance levels for ELA and math MCAS tests were below the 2002 levels which triggered the initial Panel Review.

The district has worked to create an aligned curriculum and to improve the use of assessments throughout the Holyoke Schools. However, school improvement planning and implementation efforts were inconsistent at Donahue School from 2003 to 2005, due to administrative turnover during that period, according to administrators interviewed by the team. In 2004, the school made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the aggregate in ELA and for the aggregate and subgroups in math. In 2005, the school failed to make AYP for ELA or math.

In the spring of 2005, the Massachusetts Department of Education, America's Choice, and Holyoke Public Schools agreed that Donahue would implement a whole school reform model. This America's Choice school reform model required that school-based leadership and staff participate in intensive training during the summer of 2005 and begin the model implementation in the fall of 2005. At the time of our visit, the Donahue School was in the seventh month of the reform model implementation.

District and school plans and continued improvement efforts are promising. The district chose America's Choice as a turnaround partner, and Donahue systemically implemented instructional changes beginning in the 2005-2006 school year that are supported by sustained professional development and an effective supervision and evaluation process. From the 2004 to 2006 school years, Holyoke rezoned and restructured the district to improve operational management and efficiency and to target improvement efforts. In this process, Donahue became a neighborhood school, and expanded from Kindergarten to Grade 5 to include grades 6 through 8. The school is making strides to shape and implement an effective School Improvement Plan which includes the expansion of grade levels at the Donahue School and the adaptation of the Americas Choice School Design.

District administrators, school staff, and parents praise the current Donahue school principal's success in building a school environment that is conducive to learning. Stakeholders interviewed by the team reported that there was a renewed culture of staff collaboration and an improvement

in the student climate, staff relationships with parents, and school and district communication. While the district still faces numerous challenges, Holyoke is starting to put in place the conditions for improvement at Donahue and throughout the district with the collaboration of the Department of Education and Americas Choice as the school and districts Turn-Around partner.

Priority Findings

I. Donahue's 2005 performance levels for ELA and math MCAS tests were below the 2002 levels that triggered the initial Panel Review.

- Grade 3 Reading proficiency levels declined steadily from 31 to 23 percent between 2002 and 2005. Proficiency declined from 12 to 3 percent for Special Education (SPED) students, and from 16 to 6 percent for Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. However,
    - For regular education students proficiency levels remained constant at approximately 42 percent or higher between 2002 and 2005.
    - Grade 3 students at Donahue outperformed their district peers each year from 2002 to 2005.
- Grade 4 ELA proficiency levels declined from 20 percent in 2002 to 11 percent in 2005, while the percentage of students in 'Warning/Failing' increased from 48 to 50 percent. 2005 proficiency levels were lower than 2004 levels for regular education (20 versus 46 percent) and for LEP students (0 versus 17 percent).
  However,
    - Between 2002 and 2004, the percentage of students scoring at or above the 'Proficient' level increased from 20 to 27 percent, and the 'Warning/Failing' level decreased from 48 to 32 percent.
    - In 2004, Donahue outperformed the district with a higher percentage of students at or above the 'Proficient' level (27 versus 24 percent) and a lower percentage of students at the 'Warning/Failing' level (32 versus 34 percent).
- Grade 4 math proficiency levels declined from 12 percent in 2002 to 8 percent in 2005. 2005 proficiency levels were lower than 2004 levels for regular education students (14 versus 38 percent) and for LEP students (0 versus 22 percent). The percentage of LEP students in the 'Warning/Failing' category also increased from 33 to 94 percent. However,
    - Grade 4 math proficiency levels for all students improved between 2002 and 2004, from 12 to 26 percent.
    - The school outperformed the district in 2003 and 2004 with higher percentages of students at or above the 'Proficient' level (19 and 26 percent versus 12 and 14 percent).
    - Grade 6 math scores improved in the first two years of its administration at the Donahue. The percentage of Grade 6 students scoring at or above the 'Proficient' level in math increased from 3 to 12 percent from 2004 to 2005. The percentage of students in 'Warning/Failing' decreased from 75 to 65 percent.
- Math was the content area with the most significant CPI decline in 2005, of -4.8 index points. All subgroups declined, and LEP students had the most significant decline of -8.0 index points. However,

  - The school made AYP in math for the aggregate in 2003 and 2004, with CPI gains of +9.8 and +9.2.
  - In 2004, all subgroups made significant gains in AYP. LEP students gained +22.1 index points, Hispanic students gained +10.4 index points, and low-income students gained +12.4 index points.
- The ELA CPI declined by -2.6 index points in 2005 and the school did not make AYP for all subgroups in 2003, 2004, or 2005. However,
  - SPED and LEP students gained +6.1 and +1.1 index points respectively in 2005.
  - The school made AYP for the aggregate in 2003 and 2004.
  - In 2004, the aggregate gained +11.2 in CPI points. LEP students gained +24.3 index points, low-income students gained +14.2 points, and Hispanic students gained +12.6 points in 2004.
- The school did not set reasonable and achievable MCAS test performance goals for accountability. The team found no evidence of clear, benchmarked, comprehensive, and coherent goals for MCAS test performance from 2003 to 2005. The team found no evidence that the 2005 School Improvement Plan was approved by the school committee, and the 2006 SIP was still in draft form at the time of the February 7-8 on-site visit. Also, no DOE report of the PIM process was available to the team. However,
  - A new principal is in place, after a succession of leadership changes from 2003 to 2005 interrupted the consistency of the year-to-year school improvement planning process.
  - The 2005-2006 SIP process includes a clear system of communication and accountability, the PIM leadership team consists of a wide swath of district specialists and teachers across different grade levels.
  - The draft of the 2005-2006 SIP includes benchmarks for progress monitoring in reading and math for all students and all subgroups.
- Staff attributed the 2005 performance decline to the transition stress of school leadership in school year 2005 and the school's expansion from K-5 in 2003 to K-8 in 2006.
  - Staff and parents reported that the new principal has brought positive change, stability, and focus to the school.
  - The school has stabilized as a K-8 school in 2006.
  - A new school attendance zone shows promise as a policy created to decrease inter-district transience.

II. The school is making strides to shape and implement an effective School Improvement Plan.

- The SIP process is more inclusive of instructional staff input than in 2004-2005, according to staff, and the new PIM leadership team roster represents a wide range of grades.
- The 2005-2006 SIP draft includes updates and improvements to the previous SIP's Student Learning Objectives, use of benchmarks, strategies, and action plan.
- The PIM leadership team and school leadership have established effective means of communicating SIP goals throughout the school, using staff meetings, planning periods, and memos to communicate student strengths and weaknesses and suggested instructional strategies.

- The principal conducts regular Learning Walks to ensure that teachers are implementing SIP strategies.
- Elements of the America's Choice program have been implemented in the SIP for grades 3-8, and the school is receiving the support of America's Choice coaches, the curriculum, standard routines and structures for the Literacy Block, and the safety net program, "Ramp Up Math."
- In interviews and in classroom observations, the team found that the school staff is beginning to understand the links between curriculum, instruction, student assessment, and student achievement. The staff has bought into the idea of the need to establish and maintain an instructional and learning environment based on data collection and analysis.

III. After a period of instability in school leadership, the current Donahue School principal is building a school environment that is conducive to learning, with a positive student climate, a cooperative relationship with parents, effective relationships with district officials, and a culture of staff collaboration.

- The principal is effective in uniting stakeholders to prioritize student learning and professional responsibility.
- Staff reported an improvement in student behavior that is conducive to classroom instruction.
- Parent involvement at the school is increasing, and parents reported that the principal communicates well and frequently with parents, and that relationships between the school administration and families have improved.
- The principal communicates regularly and frequently with district officials, and district officials are providing technical, professional development, and leadership support to the principal.
- Staff reported that the principal provides effective leadership and that administrator-teacher communication has improved since the previous year.
- Though not all systems are in place yet, the new principal is starting to implement systems and structures to boost staff collaboration, accountability, and professionalism.

IV. The district is facing numerous challenges, but is starting to put in place the conditions for improvement at Donahue and throughout the district.

- The district has experienced significant funding challenges due to an increase in charter school enrollments, an increase in retirement costs, and a reduction in Title I funds. However,
    - The district has maintained a consistent level of district support and staffing for the Donahue School.
    - The district received Grant 220 funds to implement America's Choice for grades 6-8 throughout the district, and has selected the Donahue School to pilot America's Choice programs in grades 3-5 as well.
    - The district runs a 21st Century funded after-school program at Donahue that supports students and families with extended care activities and homework support.

- The district has faced a 50 percent annual turnover in building principals and difficulty in recruiting experienced and qualified candidates. However,
    - The district is actively training new principals through leadership programs, through the University of Massachusetts, the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL), and America's Choice.
    - The superintendent recruited the current Donahue School principal and is providing effective coaching support from district staff and professional development from NISL and America's Choice.
- According to interviewees, the district had no cohesive curriculum that was clearly documented and implemented in the school prior to the 2004-2005 school year, and the current curriculum is in draft form and is still being revised. However,
    - The existing 2004-2005 curriculum is standards-based and is providing a framework for completing the district's work in completing the horizontal and vertical alignment of the content areas, and incorporating instructional programs, timelines, and student assessment benchmarks.
- The district did not systematically use data to shape policy and make program decisions prior to 2003, according to interviewees and documents reviewed by the team. However, the new superintendent has led the district to
    - Create its new school attendance zones.
    - Make an informed decision to restructure elementary and middle schools.
    - Create the District Improvement Plan (DIP) and the new curriculum, and
    - The district is increasing its capacity to collect and use data to inform curriculum, program, and professional development decisions.
- The district did not support the school in using data to inform instruction until 2004-2005 because Holyoke had no formative assessment system across the district for monitoring the performance of all K-8 students. However,
    - The district implemented Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments for grades 3-8 in 2004-2005. MAP tests are used to measure ELA and math performance three times during the school year. Results are immediate and easily accessible to teachers, and teachers are beginning to use data to adjust whole class instruction and to make progress in differentiating instruction.
    - The district implemented regular writing prompts for grades 3-8. In the classroom, writing rubrics are being implemented in some grades for instruction, discussion, and feedback.
    - The district supports DIBELS for grades K-3 at the Donahue School, even though Donahue is not one of the district's Read First schools in which DIBELS testing is a grant requirement.
    - The district-wide Read 180 program results in regular progress monitoring and skill-building instruction in reading for middle school students below grade level.
- Bargaining unit negotiations and contract limitations have hindered or slowed some district efforts to improve student performance. All eight bargaining units have no updated contract for the 2005-2006 school year, and are operating under the 2002-2005 contract. The district was unable to implement a Saturday academic support program because of bargaining issues. Contract limitations resulted in the professional development for America's Choice implementation to be split into two sessions and in the district's inability to make some professional development sessions mandatory. The

school has also not been able to enforce common time planning for grades K-5 because of the elementary school's teacher contract. However,

- The superintendent has maintained a focus on improving student performance while working with all the employee stakeholders.
- The principal has been successful in establishing relationships and in communicating with bargaining groups to create a culture of collaboration and to support the instructional mission.
- The school leadership has worked with teachers and the schedule to encourage common planning time in grades K-5 even with present contractual language limitations.

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 test 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 Donahue 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 Donahue School. The Follow Up Review was conducted on February 7-8, 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 Donahue 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.

Donahue School Profile

The Donahue School is one of four schools enrolling Kindergarten to Grade 8 students in the district of Holyoke. Donahue is the third largest of the district's thirteen schools with a population of 652 students. Approximately 81 percent of the students at Donahue are Hispanic and 16 percent are White. African Americans, Asians, and Native Americans each represent approximately one percent of Donahue's enrollment. Seventy-six percent are low-income students; fifty-nine percent are FLNE (first language not English) students; and 34 percent are limited English proficient (LEP) students. Twenty-three percent of the students receive special education. See Table 1.

Donahue's enrollment is similar to the district. In school year 2005, most sub-group populations at Donahue and throughout the district were within three percentage points of each other. The three largest subgroup population differences between Donahue and the district were within seven percentage points. Donahue enrolled a higher percentage of Hispanics (81.4 versus 73.8 percent) and LEP students (34.4 versus 27.8 percent), and a lower percentage of White students (15.5 versus 21.2 percent). Compared to the other eight schools containing either or both elementary and middle grades, Donahue has the largest enrollment, the median population of minority students, low-income students, LEP students, and SPED students, but the second lowest percentage of White students. See Table 1.

Table 1. Donahue School in Comparison to the District Subgroup Enrollment 2005

Student Subgroups	% of Donahue	% of Holyoke	% of State
African American	**1.4**	3.7	8.9
Asian	**0.9**	1.1	4.8
Hispanic	**81.4**	73.8	11.8
Native American	**0.8**	0.2	0.3
White	**15.5**	21.2	74.2
FLNE	**58.9**	56.2	14.0
LEP	**34.4**	27.8	5.1
Low-income	**76.4**	76.3	27.7
Special Education	**22.7**	22.0	15.9
Data Source: Department of Education data			

Three years ago, Donahue was an elementary school that housed grades K-5. In the 2004 school year, Holyoke began the process of rezoning the district and restructuring some of its schools. The district selected Donahue to become a neighborhood school, and to expand its grades from K-5 to K-8 over three years. As one of the elementary schools chosen to expand and include middle grades, the Donahue School added Grade 6 in 2003-2004, Grade 7 in 2004-2005, and Grade 8 in 2005-2006. Donahue will remain a K-8 neighborhood school as it is currently configured.

Although Donahue has completed its grade expansion and has become a neighborhood school, student demographics have changed only slightly. Only the percentage of the low-income subgroup changed more than three percentage points from 2002-2005. In 2002 the low-income population was 83 percent of Donahue's enrollment. In 2005, the population dwindled to 76 percent. For all the other subgroups—Asian, African American, Hispanic, Native American, White, FLNE, LEP, and SPED—the enrollment in 2005 was within three percentage points of the 2002 enrollment, prior to rezoning and reorganization.

Attendance

Compared to the district, the school has poorer attendance statistics for grades 1-5 and Grade 7. In these grades, Donahue averages a higher number of days absent, an equal or lower rate of attendance, and a higher percentage of chronically absent students. See Table 2.

Table 2. Donahue School
Attendance Statistics
2005

	Average Days Absent		Attendance Rate		% Chronically Absent	
Grades	**Donahue**	Holyoke	**Donahue**	Holyoke	**Donahue**	Holyoke
K	12	12.5	92.6	92.1	24.3	27.4
1	12.5	9.9	92.5	93.8	22.8	17.0
2	10.4	9.4	93.8	94.2	15.9	15.1
3	11.2	9.3	93.2	94.3	21.1	16.1
4	9.2	8.5	94.7	94.7	14.1	13.2
5	9.2	12.1	94.7	94.7	14.1	13.2
6	11.3	12.5	93.2	92.5	22.5	24.3
7	9.7	17.0	94.2	92.2	12.2	24.4
Data Source: Department of Education data						

Suspensions

Donahue assigns in-school suspensions far less than the district average. Donahue recorded no in-school suspensions for 2003 and 2004. In 2005, only two grades had suspension rates above zero percent, with 1.0 percent of Grade 4 students and 1.4 percent of Grade 7 students suspended one or more times during the school year. By comparison, district suspension rates were 3.9 percent for Pre-K-3; 9.3 percent for Grade 4; 11.3 percent for Grade 5; 30.8 percent for Grade 6; and 29.7 percent for Grade 7.

For grades 4-7, the percentage of Donahue students receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions is comparable to the district average. In 2005, Donahue's suspension rates were lower than the district for Grade 5 (15.3 versus 23.8 percent) and Grade 6 (20.0 versus 26.4 percent), and slightly higher for Grade 4 (17.8 versus and 14.9 percent) and Grade 7 (29.2 versus 29.0 percent). However, in 2005 Donahue's suspension rate for grades K-3 was almost twice the district Pre-K-3 average. Of 319 students in grades K-3, 42 received one or more suspensions. The Donahue's suspension rate of 13.2 percent was higher than the district average of 7.1 percent, and higher than Donahue's suspension rate in 2003 (7.6 percent) and 2004 (3.8 percent).

Retentions

There are no significant trends of difference between Donahue and the district in student retentions per grade. See Table 3.

Table 3. Donahue School in Comparison to the District Retentions 2003-2004

Retentions	2003		2004	
Grades	**Donahue**	Holyoke	**Donahue**	Holyoke
1	3.9	9.3	7.4	7.2
2	7.3	5.7	5.1	4.1
3	2.5	2.7	2.1	3.0
4	1.2	1.2	0.0	1.4
5	0	0.2	1.3	1.6
6	NA	NA	1.2	5.3
Data Source: Department of Education data				

Staffing

Donahue has a new principal and assistant principal this year. The Donahue School has a total of 59 teachers: seven ELL co-teachers, 28 regular education teachers, nine special education teachers, six literacy/math co-teacher specialists, and nine subject special teachers (art, physical education/health, music, library, and Read 180). Total years of teaching experience range from two to 35 years, with an average (mean) of 20 years. The average number of years teaching at Donahue is over eight years. Eight teachers have been teaching at Donahue for one to two years. The total number of staff at Donahue is 115, including instructional paraprofessionals and administrative support staff.

MCAS Performance Level Results

2005 performance levels for all of the ELA and math MCAS tests were below the 2002 performance levels which triggered the initial Panel Review.

Student performance at the Donahue School declined between 2004 and 2005. Prior to this decline, student performance generally improved between 2003 and 2004 except for Grade 3 Reading. In Grade 4 ELA, Grade 4 math, and Grade 6 ELA, scores had been improving since 2002, until the 2005 decline. Grade 6 math was the only test with improvement over the two years of the test administration at Donahue.

Further, the Donahue underperformed the district on all 2005 tests except Grade 3 Reading and Grade 7 ELA (administered for the first time at the school in 2005).

ELA Results

In Grade 3 Reading, the percentage of students in the ‘Proficient’ category incrementally decreased from 2003-2005, from 26 to 24 to 23 percent respectively. The percentage of students in the ‘Warning/Failing’ category increased from 26 percent to 31 percent from 2003-2005.

In all three years, however, Donahue slightly outperformed the district, with an equal or higher percentage of students in the 'Proficient' category and a lower percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category. The variance between the district and the school was between zero and four percent in each year from 2003-2005. The district and the school significantly lag behind the state in Grade 3 Reading.

Table 4. Donahue School in Comparison to the District and State Grade 3 MCAS Reading Results 2001-2005

Year		*N*	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning/ Failing
2005	**Donahue**	**97**	**23**	**46**	**31**
	Holyoke	533	21	46	33
	State	71,463	62	31	7
2004	**Donahue**	**91**	**24**	**51**	**25**
	Holyoke	525	24	47	29
	State	73,332	63	30	7
2003	**Donahue**	**81**	**26**	**48**	**26**
	Holyoke	559	26	46	28
	State	74,049	62	30	7
2002	**Donahue**	**78**	**31**	**40**	**29**
	Holyoke	516	29	48	23
	State	74,423	67	27	6
2001	**Donahue**	**111**	**20**	**43**	**37**
	Holyoke	639	20	53	27
	State	75,112	62	31	7

Data Source: Department of Education MCAS Data

In 2005, Grade 4 ELA performance sharply declined to levels lower than in 2001. Grade 4 ELA performance had increased steadily between 2001 and 2004. The percentage of students at or above the 'Proficient' level between 2001 and 2004 increased from 15 to 20 to 20 to 27 percent. In 2005, however, the percentage of students at or above the 'Proficient' level sharply declined from 27 percent to 11 percent. Correspondingly, the percentage of students in 'Warning/Failing' decreased between 2002 and 2004 from 48 to 43 to 32 percent. In 2005, the percentage of students in 'Warning/Failing' increased from 32 to 50 percent.

The school outperformed the district in 2004, but underperformed the district in 2005 when school scores fell. The school and district significantly underperformed the state. See Table 5 below.

Table 5. Donahue School in Comparison to the District and State Grade 4 MCAS ELA Results 2001-2005

Year		*N*	Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning/ Failing
2005	**Donahue**	**90**	**1**	**10**	**39**	**50**
	Holyoke	515	1	11	45	43
	State	72,780	10	40	40	11
2004	**Donahue**	**76**	**1**	**26**	**41**	**32**
	Holyoke	529	2	22	42	34
	State	73,111	11	45	35	9
2003	**Donahue**	**79**	**0**	**20**	**37**	**43**
	Holyoke	524	1	18	45	36
	State	74,852	10	45	34	10
2002	**Donahue**	**118**	**0**	**20**	**32**	**48**
	Holyoke	606	2	20	43	35
	State	74,291	8	46	37	10
2001	**Donahue**	**93**	**0**	**15**	**38**	**47**
	Holyoke	539	0	17	46	36
	State	78,849	7	44	38	11

Data Source: Department of Education MCAS Data

In Grade 7 ELA in 2005, performance at the school matched the district, with 25 percent at the 'Proficient' level, and 28 percent at the 'Warning/Failing' level. No comparative data from previous years is available because the school added Grade 7 in the 2005 school year. See Table 6 below.

Table 6. Donahue School in Comparison to the District and State Grade 7 MCAS ELA Results 2001-2005

Year		*N*	Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning/ Failing
2005	**Donahue**	**68**	**0**	**25**	**47**	**28**
	Holyoke	567	2	23	47	28
	State	76,717	10	56	27	7

Data Source: Department of Education MCAS Data
Note: Note: The Donahue School expanded to include Grade 7 in the 2005 school year.

MATH Results

Grade 4 math gains between 2002 and 2004 were reversed in 2005. The percentage of students at or above the 'Proficient' level steadily increased between 2002 and 2004, from 12 to 19 to 26 percent respectively. However, in 2005, proficiency sharply declined from 26 to nine percent. Correspondingly, the percentage of students in 'Warning/Failing' fell between 2002 and 2004, from 62 to 46 to 35 percent. In 2005, the percentage of students in 'Warning/Failing' increased from 35 to 58 percent.

The school outperformed the district in 2004, but underperformed the district in 2005 when school scores fell. The school and district significantly underperformed the state. See Table 10.

Table 7. Donahue School in Comparison to the District and State Grade 4 MCAS Math Results 2002-2005

Year		*N*	Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning/ Failing
2005	**Donahue**	**90**	**1**	**8**	**33**	**58**
	Holyoke	517	3	9	38	51
	State	72,831	14	27	44	15
2004	**Donahue**	**77**	**3**	**23**	**39**	**35**
	Holyoke	537	3	11	45	41
	State	73,323	14	28	44	14
2003	**Donahue**	**81**	**4**	**15**	**36**	**46**
	Holyoke	531	2	10	46	42
	State	75,202	12	28	43	16
2002	**Donahue**	**118**	**4**	**8**	**27**	**62**
	Holyoke	606	4	10	39	47
	State	75,649	12	27	42	19
2001	**Donahue**	**93**	**0**	**11**	**34**	**55**
	Holyoke	539	2	9	41	48
	State	78,849	10	24	46	19

Data Source: Department of Education MCAS Data

For Grade 6 math, performance improved in the two testing periods since the school expanded grade levels. Between 2004 and 2005, the percentage of students at or above the 'Proficient' level increased from three to 12 percent, and the number of students in 'Warning/Failing' decreased from 75 to 65 percent. Donahue Grade 6 math scores trailed behind the district in 2005 in the 'Proficient' and above categories by three percentage points, and exceeded the district in the 'Warning/Failing' category by nine percentage points. See Table 8.

Table 8. Donahue School in Comparison to the District and State Grade 6 MCAS Math Results 2004-2005

Year		*C. N*	Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning/ Failing
2005	**Donahue**	**77**	**3**	**9**	**23**	**65**
	Holyoke	547	2	13	29	56
	State	74,789	17	29	30	23
2004	**Donahue**	**80**	**0**	**3**	**23**	**75**
	Holyoke	561	1	8	30	61
	State	76,661	17	25	32	25

Data Source: Department of Education MCAS Data
Note: The Donahue School expanded to include Grade 6 in the 2004 school year.

MCAS Performance Level Comparison to Peer Schools

As shown, student performance at the Donahue is generally lower than the district and significantly lower than the state. Demographic factors may contribute to part of this performance gap. Donahue has a higher population of minority, FLNE, and low-income students compared to the district and state. The following is a comparison between Donahue and peer school student performance levels in 2005.

Although no district or schools can compare equally to others, four peer schools were found in the demographically comparable district of Chelsea. Two Chelsea elementary schools and two Chelsea middle schools were compared to Donahue for peer-to-peer performance comparisons. In 2003, when Donahue was declared underperforming, the school was K-5; the school is currently a K-8 school. These schools are comparable to Donahue in terms of urban location; a high percentage of minority, LEP and low-income subgroups; and district per pupil expenditures for regular education (In 2003, the last year in which DOE reported district PPE data, Holyoke's PPE was $7,094 and Chelsea's was $7,162). Comparable populations-within five percentage points between the two districts are: African-Americans, Asians, Hispanics, Native Americans, and low-income subgroups. Holyoke has a higher percentage than Chelsea of LEP students (27.8 versus 17.1 percent) and SPED students (22.0 versus 15.1 percent). However, Holyoke has significantly fewer FLNE students than Chelsea (56.2 versus 77.4 percent). Kelly Elementary has a comparable population of LEP students (35 percent) to Donahue (34.4), and Wright Middle has a comparable population of SPED students (18.7 percent) to Donahue (22.7). See Table 9 below.

Table 9. Donahue School
in Comparison to Peer Schools in Chelsea
Subgroup Enrollment
2005

Enrollment Percentage Comparisons Schools (grades)						District	
Subgroup	Donahue (K-7)	Hooks (1-4)	Kelly (K-8)	Wright (6-8)	Browne (6-8)	Holyoke	Chelsea
African American	1.4	9.9	3.5	8.1	6.9	3.7	7.7
Asian	0.9	4.5	1.3	3.3	4.8	1.1	3.5
Hispanic	81.4	71.5	85.8	75.2	73.2	73.8	74.6
Native American	0.8	0.7	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
White	15.5	13.5	9.4	13.2	14.9	21.2	14.0
FLNE	58.9	76.0	86.7	76.6	75.4	56.2	77.4
LEP	34.4	20.2	35.0	11.0	15.9	27.8	17.1
Low-income	76.4	84.3	80.5	84.3	83.9	76.3	80.1
Special Education	22.7	12.8	11.4	18.7	16.9	22.0	15.1

Data Source: Department of Education MCAS Data

Compared to two peer schools, Donahue had lower rates of proficiency and a higher percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category on all grade-level math and ELA MCAS tests. The gap between Donahue and peer schools was far greater at the elementary level than for grades 6 and 7. See Table 10.

In Grade 3 Reading, Hooks and Kelly led Donahue by 18 and 6 percentage point differences in the percentage of students in the 'Proficient' category. Hooks and Kelly had fewer students in the 'Warning/Failing' category than Donahue, by 20 and 15 percentage points. See Table 10.

In Grade 4 English Language Arts, the peer schools outperformed Donahue with a higher percentage of students reaching proficiency (at or above the 'Proficient' level). The proficiency gap between Donahue and Hooks was 34 percentage points; the proficiency gap between Donahue and Kelly was 17 percentage points. Correspondingly, Donahue exceeded Hooks and Kelly in the percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category by 49 and 33 percentage points. See Table 10.

In Grade 4 math, the proficiency gap between Donahue and Hooks was 31 percentage points; the gap between Donahue and Kelly was 29 percentage points. Donahue exceeded Hooks and Kelly in the percentage of students in 'Warning/Failing' category by 53 and 43 percentage points. See Table 10.

In Grade 6 math, Browne Middle and Wright Middle both led Donahue in proficiency rates by six percentage points. The percentage of Donahue students in the 'Warning/Failing' category exceeded its peers by 15 and 17 percentage points, respectively. See Table 10.

In Grade 7 English Language Arts, Browne Middle and Wright Middle led Donahue in proficiency rates by ten and five percentage points. The percentage of Donahue students in the 'Warning/Failing' category exceeded its peers by seven and ten percentage points, respectively. See Table 10.

Table 10. Donahue School
in Comparison to Peer Schools in Chelsea
MCAS Results
2005

Comparative MCAS Tests Percent Of Students At Each Performance Level					
Grade And Subject	Name of School	Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning/ Failing
Grade 3 Reading	**Donahue**	**NA**	**23**	**46**	**31**
	E. Hooks	NA	41	49	11
	G. Kelly	NA	29	55	16
Grade 4 ELA	**Donahue**	**1**	**10**	**39**	**50**
	E. Hooks	7	36	56	1
	G. Kelly	7	21	54	17
Grade 4 Mathematics	**Donahue**	**1**	**8**	**33**	**58**
	E. Hooks	10	30	54	5
	G. Kelly	12	26	47	15
Grade 6 Mathematics	**Donahue**	**3**	**9**	**23**	**65**
	Browne Middle	3	17	31	50
	Wright Middle	3	17	32	48
Grade 7 ELA	**Donahue**	**0**	**25**	**47**	**28**
	Browne Middle	1	34	44	21
	Wright Middle	1	29	52	18
Data Source: Department of Education MCAS Data					

Further analysis is provided in Key Question 1.

PANEL REPONSES TO THE KEY QUESTIONS

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

No. As discussed in the previous section, student performance at the Donahue School declined between 2004 and 2005. Prior to this decline, student performance generally improved between 2003 and 2004. However, 2005 performance levels for ELA and math MCAS tests were below the 2002 performance levels which triggered the initial Panel Review.

In 2005, the Donahue School did not make Adequate Yearly Progress in ELA or math, for the aggregate or for sub-groups. 2005 marked a downturn from performance in previous years. The most significant change between 2004 and 2005 was the decline of composite test performance in math. Participation targets for the aggregate and all sub-groups were met in 2005, as they were in 2004. No performance targets for the aggregate and sub-groups were met in either 2005 or in 2004. No significant changes in attendance occurred in the two years. However, the Composite Performance Index (CPI) for math and for ELA declined in Mid-cycle IV (by -2.6 points and by -4.8 points, respectively). Previously, the school made AYP for the aggregate, having increased the CPI in ELA (by +8.1 in 2003 and +11.2 in 2004), and in math (+9.8 in 2003 and +9.2 in 2004).

Table 11. Donahue School
AYP Performance
2003-2005

Aggregate AYP	ELA CPI (change)	Met AYP? ELA Agg	Met AYP? All Subs	Math CPI (change)	Met AYP? Math Agg	Met AYP? All Subs
2003 Mid-cycle III	58.8 (+8.1)	Yes	No	49.3 (+9.8)	Yes	No
2004 Cycle III (03-04)	61.9 (+11.2)	Yes	No	48.7 (+9.2)	Yes	Yes
2005 Mid-cycle IV	59.3 (-2.6)	No	No	43.9 (-4.8)	No	No
Data Source: Department of Education data						

Change in CPI Compared to Peer Schools

Donahue's CPI scores in ELA and math are significantly lower than the identified peer schools in Chelsea: Hooks Elementary, Kelly Elementary, Browne Middle, and Wright Middle. In ELA, the gap between the Donahue's CPI score and the comparison schools ranged from 7.4 to 18.9 index points. In math, the gap between the Donahue's CPI score and the comparison schools ranged from 4.6 to 33.6 index points. Like Donahue, the comparison schools also experienced a decline on the ELA CPI score in 2005. Only one of the four Chelsea comparison schools also declined on the math CPI score. See Tables 12 and 13 below.

Donahue's CPI scores are also compared to two other Holyoke schools that shared a similar student population and also expanded from grades K-5 to grades K-7 between 2003 and 2005. Donahue had a higher CPI in ELA than both Kelly and Wright. Kelly's CPI change of -7.3 in ELA represents the most significant decline among the schools, while White was the only school with an increase of ELA CPI, albeit a modest +1.7 index point growth. In math, White outperformed Donahue in both CPI (+ 5.3 index points) and in improvement; White made a +6.5 index point gain. Donahue outperformed Kelly in math by 6.6 index points; Kelly also had a decline in math CPI in 2005. See Tables 12 and 13 below.

Table 12. Donahue School
ELA CPI, Improvement and Accountability Statues
Compared to Peer Schools
2005

ELA Mid-cycle IV data	CPI Change Aggregate	2005 CPI	Accountability Status
Donahue K-7	**-2.6**	**59.3**	**Identified for Improvement-Subgroups Only**
E. Hooks Elem. (Chelsea)	-0.3	78.2	No Status
G. Kelly Elem. (Chelsea)	-3.7	68.4	No Status
Browne Middle (Chelsea)	-6.2	66.7	No Status
Wright Middle (Chelsea)	-3.8	69.1	No Status
Kelly Elem. K-8 (Holyoke)	-7.3	45.2	**Identified for Improvement**
White Elem. K-7 (Holyoke)	+1.7	58.1	Corrective Action

Table 13. Donahue School
Math CPI, Improvement and Accountability Statues
Compared to Peer Schools
2005

Math Mid-cycle IV data	CPI Change Aggregate	2005 CPI	Accountability Status
Donahue K-7	**-4.8**	**43.9**	**No Status**
E. Hooks Elem. (Chelsea)	-5.2	77.5	No Status
G. Kelly Elem. (Chelsea)	+1.2	72.0	No Status
Browne Middle (Chelsea)	+1.4	48.3	Identified for Improvement
Wright Middle (Chelsea)	+2.4	49.5	Identified for Improvement
Kelly Elem. K-8 (Holyoke)	-3.0	37.3	Corrective Action
White Elem. K-7 (Holyoke)	+6.5	49.2	Corrective Action

Subgroup performance

All subgroup CPI scores in ELA and math were flat or declined in 2005, with the exception of a +6.1 SPED student gain in ELA. See Tables 14 and 15 for the analysis below.

First, consider subgroup performance in ELA for the last two cycles. The LEP subgroup made double-digit improvement in ELA in Cycle III with a +24.3 gain, but had only a +1.1 gain in Mid-cycle IV. The LEP subgroup did not make AYP because of the low attendance rate for the two periods (91.4 and 91.9 percent). The low-income and Hispanic subgroups also made double-digit CPI gains of +14.2 and +12.6, but had small negative CPI changes in Mid-cycle IV of -2.0 and -0.7. Both groups made AYP in Cycle III, but not in Mid-cycle IV. The SPED subgroup gained +9.4 in Cycle III, but did not make AYP because of a 91.7 percent attendance rate. The SPED subgroup had the largest gain in Mid-cycle IV with +6.1, and they made AYP. The White subgroup had the highest CPI of 81.8 compared to the aggregate of 61.9, but the smallest gain of +2.4 points in Cycle III. In Mid-cycle IV, the CPI for the White subgroup was 72.4. AYP was not determined for Whites, African Americans, Asians, or Native Americans because of the small population sizes. See Table 14.

The aggregate performance level data for each MCAS test, discussed in the profile section, is also available for regular education, special education, and LEP students. This data further informs the analysis for these subgroups.

Again, Grade 3 Reading proficiency levels have declined steadily from 31 to 23 percent between 2002 and 2005. However, declines in proficiency did not occur for regular education students; levels remained constant at approximately 42 percent at or above the 'Proficient' level between 2003 and 2005. For Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, proficiency declined from 16 to 6 percent. For Special Education (SPED) students, proficiency also declined from 12 to 3 percent, while 'Warning/Failing' increased from 38 to 65 percent. In comparing CPI and performance level data, note that MCAS-Alternate Assessments (MCAS Alts) affect these reporting measures differently. MCAS-Alts are included in the 'Warning/Failing' category but can contribute points in the CPI calculation. LEP and SPED students respectively comprised of 34 and 23 percent of the Donahue School population in 2005, so the performance of these two subgroups significantly impacts Donahue's aggregate performance.

As noted in the previous section, Grade 4 ELA proficiency levels increased from 2002 to a peak in 2004 with 1 percent 'Advanced,' 26 percent 'Proficient,' and 32 percent 'Warning/Failing.' Performance in 2005 was lower than in 2002, however, with 1 percent 'Advanced,' 10 percent 'Proficient,' and 50 percent 'Warning/Failing.' The precipitous drop between 2004 and 2005 proficiency levels occurred for regular education students and LEP students. The percentage of students scoring at or above the 'Proficient' level in these two years dropped from 46 to 20 percent for regular education students and from 17 to 0 percent for LEP students. SPED performance remained constant from 2004 to 2005.

Mid-cycle IV CPI includes Grade 7 ELA test results, unlike for Cycle III, because the school expanded to grades K-7 in 2005. Subgroup trend data is therefore unavailable.

Table 14. Donahue School
ELA Results in Cycle III and Mid-Cycle IV

Group	Cycle III Results (Combined data from 2003-2004)					Mid-cycle IV Results (2005 data)				
	N	CPI	Change	Met Imp Target?	Met AYP?	N	CPI	Change	Met Imp Target?	Met AYP?
Aggregate	*173*	**61.9**	+11.2	Yes	Yes	**N**	**59.3**	-2.6	No	No
LEP	*64*	**47.1**	+24.3	Yes	No	*254*	**48.2**	+1.1	No	No
SPED	*47*	**49.7**	+9.4	Yes	No	*84*	**55.8**	+6.1	No	Yes
Low-inc.	*129*	**58.1**	+14.2	Yes	Yes	*67*	**56.1**	-2.0	No	No
Af-Am.	-	**-**	-	-	-	*202*	**-**	-	-	-
Asian	-	**-**	-	-	-	*3*	**-**	-	-	-
Hispanic	*135*	**57.2**	+12.6	Yes	Yes	*3*	**56.5**	-0.7	No	No
N. Amer.	-	**-**	-	-	-	*207*	**-**	-	-	-
White	*31*	**81.8**	+2,4	-	-	*0*	**72.4**	-	-	-

Data Source: Department of Education MCAS Data
Note: N=the number assessed, not the number enrolled. A dash (-) represents that the figure was not reported in the DOE data.

Next, consider the subgroup performance in math. In Mid-cycle IV, neither the aggregate nor reported subgroups met the improvement target or made AYP. In Cycle III, the aggregate and all reported subgroups met the improvement target and made AYP. The CPI change for the LEP subgroup was +22.1 in Cycle III, but was -8.0 in Mid-cycle IV. For the SPED subgroup, the changes in these two periods were +12.4 and -4.6, respectively. For the Hispanic subgroup, the changes were +10.4 and -3.4, respectively. In Cycle III, the CPI of the White subgroup was 69.9, higher than the 48.7 aggregate CPI. In Mid-cycle IV the White subgroup CPI in math was 64.1 and the aggregate was 43.9. AYP was not determined for Whites, African Americans, Asians, or Native Americans because of the small population size.

The Cycle III increase and Mid-cycle IV decrease in math CPI correspond with Grade 4 math performance trends. Again, the Grade 6 math test was administered for the first time at the Donahue in SY 2004, when the school expanded to K-6, and the performance levels improved in the two year period, from 3 to 12 percent at or above the 'Proficient' level, and from 75 to 65 percent 'Warning/Failing.' Grade 4 math proficiency levels improved from 2002 to a peak in 2004, with a high of 26 percent at or above the 'Proficient level' and a low of 35 percent in the

'Warning/Failing' category. The sharp decline in performance levels occurred for regular education students (proficiency dropped from 38 to 14 percent) and for LEP students (proficiency dropped from 22 to 0 percent). The percentage of LEP students in the 'Warning/Failing' category correspondingly increased from 33 to 94 percent, which contributed to the LEP CPI decline of -8.0 index points.

Table 15. Math Donahue School
Math Results in Cycle III and Mid-Cycle IV

Group	Cycle III Results (Combined data from 2003-2004)					Mid-cycle IV Results (2005 data)				
	N	CPI	Change	Met Imp Target?	Met AYP?	N	CPI	Change	Met Imp Target?	Met AYP?
Aggregate	*163*	**48.7**	+9.2	Yes	Yes	*170*	**43.9**	-4.8	No	No
LEP	*109*	**38.8**	+22.1	-	-	*56*	**30.8**	-8.0	No	No
SPED	*40*	**38.2**	+9.5	-	-	*52*	**37.5**	-0.7	No	No
Low-inc.	*116*	**45.2**	+12.4	Yes	Yes	*138*	**40.6**	-4.6	No	No
Af-Am.	-	**-**	**-**	-	-	*2*	**-**	-	-	-
Asian	-	**-**	**-**	-	-	*2*	**-**	-	-	-
Hispanic	*127*	**44.1**	+10.4	Yes	Yes	*142*	**40.7**	-3.4	No	No
N. Amer.	-	**-**	**-**	-	-	*0*	**-**	-	-	-
White	*30*	**69.9**	+2.4	-	-	*24*	**64.1**	-	-	-

Data Source: Department of Education MCAS Data
Note: N=the number assessed, not the number enrolled. A dash (-) represents that the figure was not reported in the DOE data.

Performance data and SIP goals

School and district staff in interviews attributed the 2005 performance decline to the transition stress of school leadership in school year 2005 and the school's expansion from K-5 in 2003 to K-8 in 2006. The superintendent added that transience and mobility have affected student performance. Key Question 4 details the district response, resulting in a more stable Donahue in 2005-2006, with a cultural change agent principal, a stabilized K-8 school structure, and a new attendance zone that shows promise to decrease mobility.

The team found evidence that the succession of leadership changes from 2003 to 2005 impacted the school's effectiveness at setting and monitoring student performance goals from year to year. A new SIP was created under the leadership of each successive principal, so there is a 2003-2004 SIP, a 2004-2005 SIP, and a 2005-2006 SIP draft. The student performance goals are not comparable from year-to-year, so there was no coherent set of benchmarked goals for MCAS test performance for the period from 2003 to 2006. The team also found that the 2003-2004 and the 2004-2005 goals were not adequately clear, benchmarked, or comprehensive.

As the school's improvement plans did not articulate clear goals for the performance of all students and measures of accountability, the school's progress toward achieving its own student performance goals in 2004 and 2005 could not be determined.

Further analysis of the school's improvement effort is provided in Key Question 2.

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

No, the school has not been effective in using an improvement plan that results in increased student achievement. The 2004-2005 SIP process was inadequate, and student performance declined in 2005. However, Donahue is making strides to shape and implement an effective SIP, although the 2005-2006 SIP is still in draft form.

Measures of the effectiveness of the school's use of an improvement plan include the school's ability to set effective goals and to monitor them closely, to galvanize the entire staff to carry out their roles in implementing the SIP, to improve instruction using the SIP and ongoing data analysis, and to use the SIP to increase achievement. The answer to this key question is divided into these measures under four sections: Setting and Monitoring Goals, Staff Participation and Implementation, Using the SIP to Improve Instruction and Analyze Data, and Impact on Student Performance.

Setting and Monitoring Goals

Key Question 1 describes the lack of a coherent set of MCAS test performance goals benchmarked from year-to-year for effective monitoring and assessment of SIP implementation from 2003 to 2006. Although the school had not set reasonable and achievable MCAS test performance goals for accountability in the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 SIPs, the school is making progress in setting effective goals for the current SIP. Unlike previous SIPs, the 2005-2006 SIP draft includes benchmarks for progress monitoring in reading and math for all grades using standardized tests administered three times a year (MAP and DIBELS) as well as the district's writing prompt and open response prompt for math. While the SIP draft provides no explanation how and why the particular goals were selected, benchmarking represents progress in SIP development.

Goals for MCAS test performance in the current SIP draft are more specific than the goals in the previous SIPs but still lack some clarity. The SIP draft goals are not stated in language that allows teachers and other stakeholders to use publicly reported MCAS test performance data to understand and measure Donahue's goals and progress. The ELA goal, constructed similarly to the math goal, is as follows.

> Students will decrease in the 'Warning/Failing' Low category from 4 to 3 percent, and from 26 to 18 percent in the 'Warning/Failing' High category. Students will maintain at 24 percent in the 'Needs Improvement' Low category while increasing from 22 to 27 percent in the 'Needs Improvement' High category, and from 23 to 27 percent in the 'Proficient/Advanced' category.

Assuming that the goal applies to all ELA tests (grades 3, 4, and 7), stakeholders would have to reconstruct the four reported performance categories, use reported percentages and participation numbers to figure out the number of students that fell in each category for each grade level test, and then calculate the percentage of students that fell in each category for all ELA tests. The stakeholder would then be able to determine movement from each DOE reported category, but

still would not be able to determine whether the school met its goal to move students from 'Low' to 'High' within a performance category, unless the school provided that data.

The Donahue School Improvement Plan does provide general performance goals in the outline related to ELA and math improvement. The school support specialist indicated that individual grade performance goals have been developed and are included in the final SIP as an amendment, although this document was not provided to the team during the site visit. The school support specialist reported that these individual grade level performance goals and the assessment benchmarks are used by grade levels and the leadership team to monitor student achievement and the schools progress.

After the on-site visit, the district presented evidence that the leadership team conducted a root cause analysis for student performance each year from school years 2004 to 2006. The documents included the principal's executive summary of the Donahue Plan for 2003-2004, the 2004-2005 leadership team analysis, and a PowerPoint presentation to teachers of the team's MCAS test analysis. The team was unable to evaluate the process in which the leadership team created the goals because no SIP minutes or reports of the PIM process were made available to the team. Although "causes affecting" ELA, math, and all content areas were listed, none of the SIPs in the 2003-2006 period included a root cause analysis of student performance. Both the 2003 and the 2004 SIPs stated only that, "Based on the needs of the students determined by assessment data our students have been provided with a number of instructional programs and/or strategies that will help them achieve high academic standards and improve their overall performance."

The team found insufficient evidence that the school adequately set and monitored its goals for MCAS test performance. First, SIP goals were not clear or disaggregated enough for MCAS test performance monitoring. Secondly, the SIPs lacked a trend analysis and performance goals for each MCAS test. The team found no evidence of minutes, memos, or other communication about MCAS test performance goals for grade level tests. The team found little staff awareness of the specific MCAS test performance targets from year to year, although all agreed that improvement was necessary; and they all looked for improvement when reviewing progress within the year. The team found no evidence that the school committee was involved in or aware of School Improvement Plan goals after the board-approved plan was revised significantly in 2004-2005, and the 2005-2006 plan was still in draft form.

Staff Participation and Implementation

In the 2004-2005 school year, the School Improvement Plan was not developed through a process that resulted in the entire staff understanding, supporting, and carrying out their roles in the implementation of the SIP. SIP changes in 2004 were mostly made by the principal, according to school and district staff interviewed by the team. The effectiveness and level of inclusion in SIP process varied from year to year, however. The initial SIP approved by the Board of Education was created in 2003 after a DOE-trained team from the school worked inclusively to craft the improvement plan. The team sought feedback and incorporated input from sessions attended by 75-80 percent of the staff, according to PIM team members who participated in the process.

The new SIP is being drafted through an inclusive process led by the 2005-2006 PIM leadership team, consisting of the new principal, the assistant principal, and a wide swath of district specialists and teachers across different grade levels. The PIM leadership team and school leadership have established effective means of communicating SIP goals, student strengths and weaknesses, and suggested instructional strategies throughout the school. The PIM leadership team and school leadership communicate school improvement efforts and staff responsibilities through weekly memos from the principal and bi-monthly staff meetings. Teachers are supported in their implementation by team meetings and by feedback from the principal. The principal conducts regular Learning Walks to monitor instructional effectiveness and SIP implementation at the classroom level. Teachers reported that the principal visits each classroom at least once a week, and that she provides helpful oral feedback. In interviews and in classroom observations, the team found that the school staff is beginning to understand the links between curriculum, instruction, student assessment, and student achievement.

The district provides support for school implementation of SIP goals through technical support provided by the school support specialist, other district officials, and the district's turnaround partner, America's Choices. Elements of the America's Choice program have been incorporated in the SIP for grades 3-8, and the school is receiving the support of America's Choice coaches, new curriculum, the program's prescribed standard routines and structures for the Literacy Block, and their safety net program, "Ramp Up Math."

The team concluded that the 2005-2006 SIP planning process supports effective SIP implementation, and shows a significant improvement from the previous year.

Using the SIP to Improve Instruction and Analyze Data

The school is becoming more effective in using a School Improvement Plan to support instructional improvement and the effective use of data. The 2005-2006 SIP draft includes updates and improvements to the previous SIPs' Student Learning Objectives, use of benchmarks, strategies, and action plan.

The school is improving instruction primarily through several systems that support SIP objectives: Learning Walks, a list of ELA and math strategies, and meetings facilitating collaborative teacher planning and support. Regular Learning Walks are conducted by the principal to monitor instruction effectiveness and SIP implementation. Teachers reported that they use a list of "ELA and math strategies" created by the PIM team and that they attempt to incorporate the strategies in the classroom. The team found evidence of teacher use of some of these strategies in classroom observations described in greater detail under Key Question 4.

Impact on Student Performance

Key Question 2 is answered negatively because the school had not been effective in using an improvement plan that resulted in increased student achievement. Further, the 2005-2006 SIP was still in draft form at the time of the February 2006 on-site visit, due to leadership transitions

that hindered timely SIP development. Finally, the impact of the new SIP on student performance is unknown.

However, the school's new improvement planning process, new SIP, and guidance by new leadership all show promise. Additionally, school conditions are starting to set the stage for successful implementation. The transition stress that staff attributed as a cause for the performance decline (as discussed in Key Question 1) is being alleviated. Staff and parents reported that the new principal has brought stability, focus, and positive change to the school this year. The school has made progress in overcoming an array of obstacles that have hindered progress in previous years.

Further discussion of obstacles that have hindered the school's ability to implement their plan in the past is provided in Key Question 3. Key Question 4 provides an analysis of the current conditions at the school and the prospect for improvement in the future.

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

Yes, factors that impeded the school from implementing its SIP included changes in school leadership, ineffective instructional leadership, and changes in the student population due to school restructuring, district rezoning, and student mobility and transience.

A period of instability in school leadership led to the erosion of the school environment. The superintendent reported that school leadership suffered in spite of district efforts to recruit, provide leadership training through the University of Massachusetts, and provide on-going principal support. The district still faced a 50 percent annual turnover in building principals and difficulty in recruiting experienced and qualified candidates.

During a period of instability and change from 2003-2005 due to leadership turnover and restructuring, school conditions did not adequately support the school's instructional mission. Staff reported that student misbehaviors increased, parent participation and involvement decreased, and staff were isolated in their classrooms with minimal collaboration across grades. School systems, structures, and practices did not encourage staff collaboration, accountability, and professionalism. Communication between school leadership and staff was infrequent and inadequate. There was no system or expectations for grade level planning, and the supervision and evaluation process lacked adequate monitoring and accountability.

The district made careful decisions to efficiently and effectively use dwindling financial resources. District-wide restructuring and rezoning not only made sense instructionally and organizationally, but improved financial efficiency. Still, funding challenges limited the availability of district resources to bolster improvement efforts. The district has experienced significant losses due to an increase in charter school enrollments, an increase in retirement costs, and a reduction in Title I funds. The district applied for Read First funding for Donahue, but the school was not among the district's schools that was selected for the program. Still, the district has maintained a consistent level of district support and staffing for the Donahue School,

and continued to respond to grant opportunities that would support the school's improvement. The district runs a 21st century funded after-school program at Donahue that supports students and families with extended care activities and homework support. The district received Grant 220 funds to implement America's Choice for grades 6-8 throughout the district this year, and the district has selected the Donahue School to pilot America's Choice programs in grades 3-5 as well.

The current superintendent started his tenure in 2002, three days after an EQA review was conducted due to poor student performance. According to the Superintendent, the district administration has worked to improve many of the district's systems and structures since his arrival, but results of district improvement efforts were not immediate.

Interviewees reported that the district had no clear and consistently implemented curriculum in place until the 2004-2005 school year, and the current curriculum is still being revised. District staff reported that Holyoke did have a curriculum in place and provided curriculum documents to the team. Through interviews and a review of documents, the team found that the district did not support the school in using data to inform instruction until 2004-2005 because Holyoke had no formative assessment system across the district for monitoring the performance of all K-8 students. In 2004-2005, the district implemented writing prompts and Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments for ELA and math in grades 3-8, but school leadership optimized the use of this data in that turbulent year.

According to interviewees, bargaining unit negotiations and contract limitations have hindered or slowed some district efforts to improve student performance. For example, the district was unable to implement a Saturday academic support program because of bargaining issues. Common planning time for grade level teams is key for improvement efforts, but is not enforceable in the K-5 contract. The contract limits the capacity of the school department to require professional development beyond the contract allotment.

In spite of obstacles faced by the school and the district, school and district leadership have worked to create the conditions necessary to implement a plan to support improvement in student performance. This leads us to Key Question 4.

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

No. The school still lacks the documented systems, technology-based initiatives, financial support, and worker contracts to secure the conditions needed to support improvement in student performance. Further, student performance on the MCAS test declined between 2004 and 2005.

However, the school is currently in the process of implementing change initiatives and creating the conditions conducive to student achievement. Current school efforts show promise, provided that the efforts are sustained and that the school continues to develop, improve, and monitor its systems, structures, and instructional practices in response to performance data. The leadership and staff are committed to the improvement of student performance, and there is unity among the stakeholders.

After a period of instability in school leadership, the current Donahue school principal is building a school environment that is conducive to learning, with a positive student climate, a cooperative relationship with parents, effective relationships with district officials, and a culture of staff collaboration. The principal is effective in uniting stakeholders to prioritize student learning and professional responsibility. Staff reported an improvement in student behavior that is conducive to classroom instruction. Parent involvement at the school is increasing, and parents reported that the principal communicates well and frequently with parents. Parents also stated that relationships between the school administration and families have improved. The principal communicates regularly and frequently with district officials, and district officials are providing technical, professional development, and leadership support to the principal. Staff reported that the principal provides effective leadership and that administrator-teacher communication has improved since the previous year. Though not all systems are in place yet, the new principal is starting to implement systems and structures to boost staff collaboration, accountability, and professionalism.

At the district level, numerous challenges remain, but the district is starting to put in place the conditions for improvement at Donahue and throughout Holyoke. Interviews and documents indicate that the district has maintained a consistent level of district support and staffing for the Donahue School. The district has also supplemented improvement efforts with Grant 220 funds to implement America's Choice for grades 3-8 and a 21st century funded after-school program that provides homework support.

The superintendent recruited the current Donahue School principal and is providing effective coaching support from district staff and professional development from the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) and America's Choice.

The 2004-2005 curriculum framework is standards-based and, according to interviewees, is guiding the district's work in completing the horizontal and vertical alignment of the content areas, and incorporating instructional programs, timelines, and student assessment benchmarks.

According to district staff interviewed by the team, the district is improving its efforts to use data to shape policy and make program decisions in the attempt to improve student attendance and achievement. The district used housing, attendance, and street pattern data to create its new school attendance zones, according to the superintendent. The district restructured elementary and middle schools to decrease student mobility, increase student and parent school affiliation, and use district resources more efficiently. District staff report that they used data to create the District Improvement Plan (DIP) and the new curriculum. Finally, through a review of documents and through interviews, the team found that the district is increasing its capacity to collect and use data to inform curriculum, program, and professional development decisions.

Holyoke's formative assessment system, implemented across the district in 2004-2005, supports schools in monitoring the progress of all K-8 students. The school uses Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments for grades 3-8 to test ELA and math performance three times during the school year. Results are immediate and easily accessible to teachers, and teachers are beginning to use data to adjust whole class instruction and to make progress in differentiating

instruction. The district implemented regular ELA writing prompts and math open response prompts for grades 3-8. In the classroom, writing rubrics are being implemented in some grades for instruction, discussion, and feedback. The district uses DIBELS for grades K-3 at the Donahue School, even though Donahue is not one of the district's Read First schools in which DIBELS testing is a grant requirement. The district-wide Read 180 program results in regular progress monitoring and skill-building instruction in reading for middle school students below grade level. The Ramp-Up math instructional program from America's Choice is adjusted using ongoing assessments.

Bargaining unit negotiations and contract limitations continue to slow efforts to improve student performance. Bargaining unit negotiations are presently in their last year of the extension of the 2002-2005 contract. Contract limitations resulted in the professional development for America's Choice implementation to be bifurcated, and for some days to be voluntary rather than required. One grade level team at the school meets irregularly because the contract does not include common planning time for elementary teachers. However, district and school leadership have maintained a focus on improving student performance while working to resolve employee and contractual issues. The principal has been successful in establishing relationships, communicating with bargaining groups, creating a culture of collaboration, and supporting the instructional mission.

CONCLUSION

Student performance at the Donahue School declined between 2004 and 2005, and 2005 performance levels for ELA and math MCAS tests were below the 2002 performance levels which triggered the initial Panel Review. In 2005, the Donahue School did not make Adequate Yearly Progress in ELA or math, for the aggregate or sub-groups; and the most significant change between 2005 and 2004 was the decline of composite test performance in math. No performance targets for the aggregate and sub-groups were met in either 2005 or in 2004.

The school has not been effective in using an improvement plan that results in increased student achievement. The 2004-2005 SIP process was inadequate, and student performance declined in 2005. Factors that impeded the school from implementing its SIP included changes in school leadership, ineffective instructional leadership, and changes in the student population due to school restructuring, district rezoning, and student mobility and transience. The school still lacks the documented systems, technology-based initiatives, financial support, and worker contracts to secure the conditions needed to support improvement in student performance.

However, the district and the school are currently in the process of implementing change initiatives and creating the conditions conducive to student achievement. The district rezoned Donahue, expanded the grades, hired a new principal, adopted America's Choice as a turn-around partner, increased levels of district support, and improved its curriculum and assessments. Donahue is making strides to shape and implement an effective SIP, although the 2005-2006 SIP is still in draft form. The leadership and staff are committed to improve student performance, and there is unity among the stakeholders.

Current school efforts show promise, provided that the efforts are sustained and that the school continues to develop, improve, and monitor its systems, structures, and instructional practices in response to performance data.

APPENDIX A
Team Members

Eva Mitchell, Examiner and Coordinator, Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

Rena Shea, Senior Examiner, Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

Dr. John Burruto, Examiner, Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

Joe Nigro, Associate Examiner, Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

****

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

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

8:00—9:00 a.m. Team members meet with the principal.

9:00—10:00 a.m. Team members meet with the district superintendent (and Assistant Superintendent, if appropriate).

10:00—11:00 a.m. Team members meet with the school's curriculum and instruction leadership team and members of the school site council.

11:00—1:00 p.m. 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 p.m. 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	TEACHER FOCUS GROUP #3	TEACHER FOCUS GROUP #4
2:00-2:30	TEACHER FOCUS GROUP #5	TEACHER FOCUS GROUP #6

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

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

3:00—5:00 p.m. 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

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

8:00—8:30 a.m. Team members visit classrooms and interview teachers.

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

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

	REVIEWER A	**REVIEWER B**	**REVIEWER C**	**REVIEWER D**
1:00 - 1:30	Observe teacher 11	DOCUMENT REVIEW		Observe teacher 12
1:30 - 2:00	Interview teacher 11			Interview teacher 12

2:00—3:30 p.m. Team structured time. Members identify any gaps in the evidence collected and request additional information from the principal in the form of documents, meetings with specific individuals or groups who can respond to questions relevant to the panel review protocol.

3:30—4:00 p.m. Closing meeting with the principal to discuss next steps (all members are present)

4:00—5:00 p.m. Members deliberate, form conclusions and plan for final team deliberation.