

## **School Panel Review Report**

### **E. J. Harrington Elementary School**

### **Lynn Public Schools**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of the School Panel Review Process is to assist the Commissioner of Education in determining whether State intervention is needed to guide improvement efforts in schools where students' MCAS performance is critically low and no trend toward improved student performance is evident from MCAS data. The Harrington Elementary School this criterion at the fourth grade and was one of 14 schools selected for panel review in spring, 2003. The Panel review was conducted on March 4-5, 2003

The Review Panel's charge was to analyze data and written information on the school's performance and improvement efforts, visit the school, and meet with school and district officials in order to advise the Commissioner on the answers to the following two key questions:

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

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

The Panel's findings and conclusions on the two key questions, as well as school performance data, will be forwarded to the Commissioner of Education for consideration in determining whether the E.J. Harrington Elementary School is deemed under-performing. The Panel was not asked to formulate a sound plan for school improvement where such a plan does not presently exist or to recommend a course of action to create the conditions for successful implementation of a sound plan where such conditions at present do not appear to exist. Diagnostic and/or prescriptive intervention, where needed to assist an under-performing school, occurs at the next stage of the school review process.

#### **EJ Harrington Elementary School Profile**

##### **Enrollment**

The Harrington Elementary School is one of 30 schools in the Lynn, and 19 elementary schools in the district. Over the last four years (1999-2002), enrollment at the EJ Harrington Elementary School in Lynn steadily declined from 784 in 1999 to 718 in 2002. The school's student population during that time frame consisted of an increasing population of Hispanics who accounted for an average of 57 percent of students between 1999 and 2002. During this period, the proportion White, who averaged 20 percent of students, also experienced a steady decline. The population of Black students, also decreasing, averaged 17 percent, with the Asian student proportion averaging six percent of the school's student population between 1999 and 2002.

The proportion of students whose native language is not English steadily increased from 65 percent in 1999 to 83 percent in 2002. Despite the increase in the proportion of non-native English speakers at the Harrington School, the percentage of Limited English Proficient students remained the same, accounting for 35 percent of students.

The percentage of low-income students at the Harrington School saw a significant rise, going from 65 percent in 1999 to 83 percent in 2002. The Harrington is also designated as a Title I school.

In 1998, the Harrington registered an attendance rate of 99, but that rate declined by at least six points in the three subsequent years. The school's attendance rate for the period 1998-2001 averaged 95 percent. Retention rates during that period were, on average, five percent. The school recorded no in-school suspensions or exclusions between 1998-2001. Out-of-school suspensions during this time averaged three percent.

In 2003, the school reported that: 73 students were receiving Special Education, 115 students receiving Transitional Bilingual Education instruction, 78 students receiving English as Second Language instruction, 117 students receiving Academic Support Services from DOE-funded programs, 118 students receiving non DOE-funded Academic Support Services, three students enrolled in the Talented and Gifted program, and 53 students participating in Extended Time Enrichment/Recreational.

## **Staffing**

The Harrington Elementary School has a staff of 59 that includes two administrators, one long-term substitute, 49 teachers, and one Curriculum Facilitator. Thirty-five percent of the Harrington school staff has been at the school for five years or fewer. Five of the school's teachers are not certified to teach in their respective subjects.

## **MCAS Overview**

Students at the Harrington Elementary School are tested in grade 3 in English language arts (ELA), in grade 4 in ELA and mathematics. The school failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in both content areas in Cycle II.

### *Student Performance in English Language Arts*

In Cycle II (2001-2002), the school received a Proficiency Index of 46. Its performance in ELA was rated "Very Low," and it received an improvement rating of "Declined." Participation rates in the MCAS testing program in this content area in Cycle II were 75 percent in 2001 and 76 percent in 2002.

In 1999, two percent of all Regular Education students tested students in grade 4 ELA at the Harrington school scored at the Advanced performance level, while 13 percent were at Proficient, 54 percent at Needs Improvement and 30 percent at Warning. In 2000, there were no

Advanced students and 29 percent proficient. Thirty-nine percent were in need of improvement and 32 percent were at Warning. In 2001, the percentage of proficient students fell to just seven percent, 43 percent of students scored at the Needs Improvement level, and the percentage of Warning increased to 49 percent. In 2002, one percent of the Regular Education students tested scored in the Advanced category, 13 percent in Proficient, 45 percent in Needs Improvement, and 41 percent in Warning.

Fewer than 10 Special Education students were tested in both Cycles. In Cycle II, fewer than 10 Limited English Proficient students were tested in Cycle II.

### *Student Performance in Mathematics*

The school's performance in the mathematics test in grade 4 in Cycle I and Cycle II was much worse than its ELA performance. With a Proficiency Index of 35.7, the Harrington Elementary School received a performance rating of "Critically Low," and an improvement rating of "No Change." MCAS participation rates in mathematics at the Harrington vacillated between 80 percent and 90 percent over the last four years.

Over the last four years there have been high percentages of Regular Education students scoring at the Warning level in grade 4 mathematics at Harrington Elementary School. In 1999, only two percent of all students in this group were proficient, and 30 percent were at the Needs Improvement level, while most—68 percent—were at the Warning level. In 2000, two percent of students scored at the Advanced level, while 15 percent were found proficient. Forty percent of students that year scored in the Needs Improvement category, and the percentage of students at Warning fell to 44 percent. In 2001, only one percent was advanced, and the percentage of proficient students fell to nine percent. Thirty-eight percent of students were at the Needs Improvement level, and the percentage in Warning rose to 51 percent. In 2002, the percentage of proficient students fell to four percent; 34 percent of scores fell in the Needs Improvement category; and the percentage of Warning students once again rose, to 61 percent.

Fewer than 10 Special Education students were tested in both cycles. The percentage of LEP students scoring at the Warning level over the last three years has stayed at 75 percent.

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

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

In its current form, the School Improvement Plan (SIP) for the E.J. Harrington Elementary School does not provide a clear identification of specific student learning needs, instructional objectives and goal priorities to improve student achievement. The stated objectives and corresponding action plans are described in broad terms and are not based on a review of multiple sources of data or thorough analysis of assessment results.

As a way of determining the school's capacity to improve student achievement, a team of district administrators, coordinators and teachers recently conducted an audit of Harrington's programs, schedules and policies. Closer district oversight and the school's participation in the Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) process have increased the teachers' awareness of the school improvement plan content, purpose and the need to inquire more deeply into an array of data to uncover the causes of poor student performance. Some teachers and grade teams are beginning to identify the gaps in student achievement and articulate implications for classroom instruction in a more systematic way. While the Review Panel found that major district-directed curriculum programs are in place at the school, the plan is limited to a listing of curriculum elements and descriptions of program practices and activities that are not linked to particular learning gaps, performance goals or standards of effectiveness.

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

No. For the past three years, analysis of testing data has generally been a centralized function of the Principal, and fundamentally limited to MCAS. While the SIP included the standard item analysis and school report summaries from the Department of Education, the Principal chose to limit the focus of MCAS analysis exclusively to items with high numbers of blank responses in math, ELA and science/technology. Although this analysis provided useful information about the need to address open response and short answer questions, panel members felt that it represented only a small segment of MCAS data available to the school to assess ELA performance in the very low performance range and math in the critically low category. In the opinion of the Panel, the MCAS data was not reviewed in a comprehensive or substantive manner with staff to formulate a school-wide sense of student learning needs. MCAS was not approached diagnostically, allowing the staff to fully grasp the link between data and the effectiveness of curricular and instructional programs. Because the plan's content, method and range of data analysis has not changed for three years, no framework was established for teachers to identify the continuing gaps in student performance or to explore the explanations for those gaps.

There was evidence that the school utilizes other forms of student performance assessment tools. In reading, the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) is administered in grades K-3 and is supplemented by running records. However, results are not analyzed at a grade or school level, nor are they embodied in the school improvement plan. The school also administers the Student Reading Inventory (SRI) to grades 3-5 and Star Math. Again, this assessment data is not widely shared with teachers and consequently furnishes no insight to student performance or progress and serves no function in driving instruction.

The Principal is charged with managing the analysis of the district's central curriculum initiatives, expressly Mimosa math, Balanced Literacy and the John Collins writing process, periodically collecting and examining student work samples and forwarding them to the district. However, this evaluation process is limited to an assessment of teacher use of the programs and not as a measure of student performance. During his interview with the Panel, the deputy Superintendent indicated that the core of district attention at Harrington is how programs and services are implemented. In summary findings of the district's February visit to the school, the Superintendent noted concern over use of the results of student testing that was being conducted,

oversight of the teachers' plan books and quality of student math and writing folders. As a result, the school will be asked to use the results of the SRI and Star Math tests to identify areas of strength and weakness among students in grades 3, 4, and 5. *Mimosa* and Collins student work samples are to be more closely scrutinized as will Individual Student Success Plans.

Varied explanations were offered identifying the reasons for consistently low student achievement levels. In the written leadership report, the Principal enumerated class size, second language issues, staff turnover, transient student population and poor test-taking skills as key determinants for student achievement results. Narrative responses in the teacher survey largely identified external factors such as language barriers between home and school, poor parenting skills, attitudes and lifestyles, lack of parent involvement and accountability, attendance, tardiness and second language issues. The deputy Superintendent emphasized that other district schools have similar demographics but achieve at higher levels. He highlighted the need for the school to redirect its focus on performance rationale to explicit elements such as instructional practice, personnel use and delivery of service. For example, the deputy cited *Mimosa's* emphasis on the use of manipulatives and the discovery that teachers at the school are generally not employing them during instruction. He reported that many second language learners are mainstreamed and not receiving ESL support and there has been consistent staffing instability in grades four and five.

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

No. The SIP objectives are stated in vague, overarching language, are not connected to specific content area skills or knowledge and contain no implementation procedures or standards of achievement. For example, the ELA objective is: "To strive to meet accountability standards as specified in MCAS ELA for the current two year cycle." Although the district curriculum documents parallel state Frameworks and include learning standards across content areas, the SIP does not prioritize learning and instructional objectives that target the strengths and weaknesses for this school's students.

The Principal explained that the original plan drafted years ago was constructed to meet compliance and mandate criteria for Title I funding and the school's magnet status. There was no evidence that the previous district administration assessed the plan's rigor or implementation. Current district leadership pointed to the absence of high standards and specificity in the present plan but predicted that the school's involvement in the PIM work would improve future planning at Harrington. There were numerous indications from panel interviews and early drafts of the PIM materials that the school's planning team is becoming more aware of different approaches to examining student performance data and developing more concrete, school-level determinations for achievement gaps.

The current school improvement document, as well as its earlier iterations, is primarily a collection of nonspecific statements that outline the components, tasks, activities and time allocations for Collins process writing, Balanced Literacy and *Mimosa* math. There are no descriptors of student success, summative improvement goals or any mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of curricular or instructional activities. Within the SIP there are occasional

references to assessments that normally occur during the implementation of a program, such as mandated Pre K-3 testing associated with the Read Excellence Grant. Although *Mimosa* math incorporates a strong assessment component, the SIP did not reference this either as a means to evaluate student performance or to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum.

While the leadership report and staff survey generally identified language issues as a determinant of poor student achievement, there was no stated recognition that *Mimosa* is a heavily language-based program requiring a general grounding in vocabulary, amplified by the development and consistent use of a specific math vocabulary. In the view of panel members, the school's PIM planning activities inaugurated a more focused attention on the primacy of vocabulary in math and across content areas. During the Panel interview, the Principal articulated the importance of building a sight and conversational vocabulary and creating a strong and sufficient math vocabulary to serve as a foundation for improved student achievement in the subject. In individual interviews and focus group discussions, teachers referenced vocabulary as a critical weakness and talked about creating a culture of rich language emerging from the development of improved vocabulary skills and oral conversation. While this phase of reading proficiency is not covered in the SIP, the PIM document currently under construction identifies this as a significant cause of low student achievement. During its lesson observations, the Panel noted word walls in many classrooms and evidence that math vocabulary was being used to support student work. In one class, several math vocabulary charts contained a series of directions intended to guide students through computation activities and multi-step problem solving situations.

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

No. Rather than constructing an improvement plan based on prioritized goals, instructional objectives and strategies, the Harrington SIP consists of academic statements that are essentially a compendium of district mandated curricula. Apart from academic components, the plan describes activities, programs and services linked to parent involvement, professional development, transition to kindergarten and extracurricular activities. These facets of the SIP are similarly not goal-based, outline no implementation processes or clear timelines and do not appraise the success of the initiatives.

There was ample evidence in lesson observations and teacher interviews that all teachers are provided copies of the Frameworks, district developed guides, resource material to support instruction and a trimester overview of core content knowledge detailing the Learning Standards to be covered during the course of each unit. In this sense, the structured nature of the curriculum and the guidance it provides ensures that the content is in place to cover the literacy and math skills required to improve student achievement. Because the plan has no system to describe the completion of curriculum activities, no school-wide implementation strategies or performance standards for teachers, the Panel concluded that the full burden for the success of the instructional program and the prospects for increased student achievement rest with the competencies of individual teachers.

While support personnel are in place to strengthen literacy and math performance, the Panel questioned the school leadership's use of two key individuals. The Curriculum Facilitator was

assigned to the school several years ago to introduce science kits, provide assistance with *Mimosa*, support the training of new teachers and conduct demonstration lessons for Collins writing teachers. Staff feedback identified this as an important service and one that was effectively carried out. Having worked between two buildings last year, his role this year has been reconfigured because of budget considerations. The new title of the position, Curriculum Instructional Teacher (CIT), allocates 9 of 30 weekly teaching blocks to provide coaching and other assistance to staff members. The CIT currently serves as a second teacher in K-3 classrooms to bolster Guided Reading activities, with a smaller commitment to grade four. While his duties in this program are significant, some teachers experienced the role shift as a loss of support because of a continuing, communicated need for more classroom-based modeling and training. The Panel could not determine if the Principal had the discretion to keep the Facilitator in a teacher-training role.

Staff informed the Panel that a preponderance of service in reading is centered on the lower grades. The major part of the schedules for the Curriculum Facilitator and both Title 1 reading teachers is directed to K-3 instruction. A number of upper grade teachers indicated that they had requested added support. Given the articulated concerns of the Principal and district with stability of fourth and fifth grade instruction, the strong concentration of service from Title I reading specialists weighted to the lower grades seemed problematic to panel members.

The school has used its math specialist to model and teach *Mimosa*, to keep new teachers at a consistent pace, to facilitate the maintenance of math folders, to conduct demonstration lessons and to secure necessary resources for teachers. The bulk of her schedule this year is with the fourth grade, preparing students for MCAS testing this spring. While there is limited time for the specialist to collaborate with the teachers she serves, her work with staff has targeted the inherent difficulties in *Mimosa*- coverage and pacing, misalignment of some units with MCAS, the need for additional computation practice and language-based issues. Teachers described the math specialist's function as being the primary instructor, with the classroom teacher generally observing the lesson. While the Panel recognized the value in this sort of professional development and understands that the specialist is not an evaluator, the faculty acknowledged a pivotal need for increased mentoring in mathematics.

The school offers a wide menu of academic, artistic and recreational after school programs. Academic selections represent all content areas, are largely grant sponsored and include enrichment activities, Saturday sessions with an MCAS emphasis, and remedial summer school. Participating teachers point to strong attendance and observe a payoff in teaching critical skills in a more informal setting. Beyond tracking enrollment by gender and ethnic/racial composition, there is no formal system to evaluate the impact of the after school or summer programs.

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

No. The overriding student performance challenges embedded in the plan's academic objectives are sketchy and vague and do not inform stakeholders of the strengths or specific student learning needs. For example, the social studies objective is "to provide a variety of methods and strategies to enhance social studies skills." The action steps are a brief outline of grade level time

allocations, major units of study, instructional materials and possible field trips. Although MCAS testing and formal assessments may not be applicable here, the school has yet to identify those skills, content and dispositions that individual teachers, grade teams or curriculum committees expect from students based on their current needs and performance. As with all other subjects, the social studies curriculum has a coherent, specific scope and sequence that aligns to state Frameworks and is tied to Learning Standards. While the fundamental tools are firmly in place for identified skill deficits or grade level objectives to be integrated into an improvement plan, there has been no recent history of their inclusion in the SIP.

Though the plan designates the staff person(s) charged with implementing and supervising an activity, there is generally no role or responsibility description. Other than personnel, resources are not identified and while there is a proposed date of accomplishment, it is listed without benchmarks or procedures that describe an end product or target for each initiative.

Within its work group, the PIM team is adopting a more expansive approach to the analysis of student achievement data. The full panel assessed the ELA and math PIM documents and observed that some specific student performance goals have been set and the PIM team's observations are closely linked to a more complete review of student performance information. In a focus group session with the PIM planning team, a Review Panel member was informed of the objectives, successes and obstacles that have surfaced to date. Teachers and the School Support member of the PIM committee asserted that they feel more confident about their analysis of student performance and school improvement goal setting. However, they stressed that the real success of their work hinges on improving communication channels at all levels in the building, establishing the capacity to create effective leadership teams and providing for productive, systemic feedback in the school.

Despite the absence of a cohesive and specific plan for improvement, many teachers interviewed and observed in classrooms, demonstrated an understanding of student learning needs and were attempting to tailor their activities to satisfy the instructional essence of the district's curriculum initiatives. The Panel met with one grade team that appeared to be using its common planning time judiciously by looking at student work, talking about teaching strategy and developing rubrics.

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

No. The original draft of school improvement plan now in force dates back to the 1999-2000 school year. With the exception of updating annual MCAS test results, there has been little substantive change to the introduction, mission statement or needs assessment during that time. Each year a survey is issued to the School Council on the main strands of the plan, namely academic programming, parent involvement, school climate, class size, special education and bilingual issues, asking them to reach consensus on the ranked importance of sub-elements for each topic as a way of prioritizing needs. The strengths and weaknesses of instructional techniques, professional development, family involvement and school climate, identified in the survey, have not changed over the three year period. The Panel did not judge this to be a

manifestation of the stability of the school culture, but rather a case of the school's leaders not responding to the results of prior years' needs assessment surveys to reflect changing conditions and issues. Faculty members reported they had not seen the full results of any of the surveys and had not been invited to use the survey information to develop effective strategies for improvement.

There was no faculty analysis of the reasons for poor student performance factored into the original school improvement document. The first version of the SIP (1999) was principally directed by an outside consultant. Teacher interviews revealed minimal exchange between teacher members of the school council and the full staff regarding the content and consequences of the plan. At no point was there widespread staff understanding of the SIP as a design to represent the school's formal statement of instructional focus and direction for improvement. This ambiguity continued until very recently. This year, the plan was not circulated to the staff until February, 2003, just prior to the Panel visit. The chief thrust of teacher contact with the SIP has been in the context of a review of fourth grade MCAS scores. Many teachers suggested that staff would benefit from a professional development day dissecting MCAS data from *all* grades, not just fourth grade scores, followed by small group meetings providing input about the curriculum initiatives in the SIP. Currently, staff members receive a summary completed by the Principal of strengths and weaknesses identified in the survey (a list that has not changed in three years) but teachers are not engaged in a detailed examination of the survey results or discussion of their validity.

On the day of the site visit, several long-standing members of the Harrington School Council praised the school as a place that nurtures children and is characterized by a sense of family. The School Council was able to speak to issues of vocabulary and comprehension, the difficulties encountered by second language learners and the struggle to involve parents in the education of their children. In September, the Principal includes essential goals for the year in the teacher's handbook. This is effectively an executive summary of the highlights of the SIP. Documents, staff and leadership interviews suggest no evidence that the previous year's plans are evaluated or that there is a routine review process for plans within the course of a year.

The Department of Education teacher survey suggested that approximately 60 percent of the respondents saw the school as having a clearly-defined plan for reaching student performance goals and teachers were well-informed about the initiatives undertaken by leadership and staff. This finding did not coincide with panel observations during the course of individual and teacher focus group interviews. Although some teachers were able to articulate particular elements of the plan, the Panel heard minimal knowledge of its details.

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

Although there were examples of effective instruction in many of the classrooms visited during the school review, the Panel concluded that this represented a reflection of individual teaching proficiencies, strengthened by an organized, supported and aligned curriculum, rather than the by-product of a cohesive, systematic plan for school improvement. The school's leadership has not adopted an effective, inclusive approach to defining specific instructional objectives, framed

by student learning needs that have been identified by an analysis of multiple sources of data. The school has also not revised its plans for improving student performance or established internal accountability systems to monitor and assess any aspect of its SIP.

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

The Department of Education Instructional Staff Survey completed by the Harrington staff before the Panel Review registered approximately 50 percent of the staff in agreement with the statement that the Principal provides effective leadership in guiding and supporting staff efforts to improve the academic performance of the school's students. This finding was reinforced during staff interviews. Teachers remarked that widespread talk about teaching strategy is not prevalent and that the schedule could be fine-tuned to further encourage shared practice and collegial support. While it's not unusual for some grade level teams to meet in more directed and productive ways than others, the Principal has not established clear expectations for focused and structured use of common planning time. Some teachers cited the need for enhanced administrative collaboration with faculty about best practice, student assessment, and meeting the particular learning demands of special needs and ESL students. There were several concerns raised about the use of personnel, specifically why the coaching and training role of the Curriculum Facilitator changed and why specialists (enrichment teachers) were being used in a co-teaching function during the literacy block without adequate training in literacy instruction.

According to numerous comments from staff members, the plethora of after-school programs traditionally makes it difficult for the full staff to attend monthly faculty conferences or school-wide professional development sessions. This represents a substantial but removable obstacle to a staff requiring unification and exposure to viable and organized collegial work. The Panel was not able to readily identify significant school-based initiatives to complement the district curriculum. The report of the district review indicated that the Principal was not maximizing student instructional time in math and ELA because of excess planning time for staff and recess periods for students. These conditions were adjusted in the Superintendent's advisory to the Principal.

The Panel observed a school climate that was conducive to learning. For a school in excess of seven hundred students there was a stable, calm and pleasant work atmosphere evident in classrooms. In spite of the school's poor performance results, the Panel did not hear from a pessimistic staff. Teachers commended the Principal as an intelligent, kind and caring individual who connects well with children and is a visible, accessible and nurturing presence in creating and maintaining a positive social tone in the school. The assistant principal was similarly credited with the effective management of the discipline program, enforcing the code of conduct fairly and swiftly. While this phase of the school's culture is sound, the unavailability of collaborative professional consultation and decision making has created an acknowledged, mutual tension between faculty and school leadership.

Though the PIM strategy is an excellent planning device, the Panel saw indications that some of the pitfalls of the SIP work at the school were being replicated as this process evolves. The number of teachers in the PIM group is small and not necessarily representative of the faculty, and the team has not engaged in any systematic outreach to the full staff to share their work. The

majority of teachers were largely unaware of the specific purpose and work of PIM even though its activities began in November. The staff's first "introduction" to the work of the PIM committee took place in February. Many teachers questioned whether the Principal was prepared to alter his leadership style to elevate the level of open discussion about teaching and learning, provide rich feedback and embrace the concept of shared ownership of the challenges, responsibilities and solutions associated with improving student performance.

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

Yes. The Panel's response to this question is effectively an assessment of the faculty's implementation of the Lynn Public School curriculum. The Panel agrees that while it is fair to say that the staff supported the planned improvement efforts in the current Harrington plan by carrying out the district mandated curricula, they were doing so without a real awareness of what was in the plan and had little guidance about strategies, goals or assessment of progress. In the teacher narrative survey, aimed at eliciting role expectations in executing the improvement plan, the teachers' responses were clear and described the district's programs and objectives: Collins, Guided Reading, *Mimosa*, Wilson, reading comprehension, writing skills, MCAS prep, state standards, Read Excellence Program and math problem solving skills.

In ten classroom observations, the Panel typically saw students engaged in some segment of a two hour literacy block that could involve Wilson phonics, whole class decoding work with follow-up activities as part of a guided reading lesson. With several exceptions, the Panel observed well planned and delivered John Collins writing lessons covering a variety of Focus Correction Areas. One teacher skillfully used a Venn diagram with a third grade class to promote an understanding of comparing and contrasting pieces of literature. Students in a second grade class displayed an understanding of adjectives, verbs and nouns and were able to effectively grasp a challenging inference activity. Strong questioning techniques were noted, classes were seen brainstorming new ideas in response to a previous lesson and a kindergarten class used bar graphs to do classification work. Classes were generally on-task, worked purposefully, maintained respectful interaction with teachers and conducted themselves well in groups. Classrooms and corridors had ample evidence of good student work. Modifications were made in Collins writing and *Mimosa* for ESL students, and observers were also aware of teachers' attention to the IEP demands of their students. Many real world glitches and disappointments were also noted confirming that the school's work on the day of the visit was natural and typical and not contrived.

During interviews, teachers talked about the strengths and drawbacks of the district's instructional programs with great facility, convincing the Panel that they were fairly well grounded in their work. Teacher focus groups generally noted that the Balanced Literacy model has been successful in raising student reading performance levels. Forty-four percent of last year's third grade students scored in the proficient category, tripling the number from the previous year. This same cohort of students is now completing its fourth year with *Mimosa* as well. The Principal expressed the hope that the current fourth graders would do well on MCAS because of their tenure with these programs. However, the Panel heard no evidence that their progress this year had been benchmarked by any assessments. A number of teachers told panel members that in a more collaborative culture, the release of faculty expertise could be a positive

professional development force in the school. On the basis of the *best* examples of teaching observed, the Panel concurred.

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

Yes. The current district administration has demonstrated varied and highly proactive types of support to the school. Although some flaws were outlined for each of the central literacy and math initiatives, the staff generally expressed confidence in the programs and the resources received from the district to support instruction. In the last several months, three central office administrators participated in a panel review outside the district in order to understand the process and be better able to assist Harrington in its review process. A two day needs assessment visit to the school was conducted by district administrators and master teachers with a focus on staffing, resources and instructional time allocation. Two permanent substitutes were hired to ease the school's coverage challenge and all 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers were given professional days to observe peers at similar grade levels in other schools.

Two copiers were purchased for the school and MCAS prep material in science, remedial reading and math was secured. A John Collins workshop was run exclusively for Harrington and upper grade teachers were recruited for special training in *Mimosa* math. The Executive Director of Curriculum and the School Support Coordinator assigned to the school for the PIM process met with the Principal and fourth/fifth grade teachers to plan a course of professional development in reading and to assist in the preparation of standards-based lesson plans. A district review of the school schedule mandated increased instructional time in math and ELA. The restructuring of the central office has increased the number of curriculum and technical assistance personnel available to work in schools. Measures were introduced to formalize student assessment procedures and use them for program and student performance oversight. In his directive for the Principal to submit lesson plans along with student math and ELA folders for review, the Superintendent is seemingly setting the stage for upgrading the rigor of the supervision process.

### **CONCLUSION**

Although there has been a new infusion of energy to improve planning at the Harrington School, the present plan does not provide the specificity, goals, clear action steps or assessments to adequately drive the effort to improve student performance. The SIP lacks an organizational vision, and school leaders have not yet developed a culture or system that analytically looks at student achievement or promotes meaningful staff engagement as a learning community.

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

**Nick Feldman**, Panel Chairperson, Consultant for SchoolWorks  
**Geri Lyn Ajemian**, Ed.D., Panel Coordinator, Department of Education- Accountability Unit  
**Erin Furey**, Panel Member, Assistant Principal, Newburyport Public Schools  
**Diane Juknavorian**, Panel Member, Teacher, Haverhill Public Schools  
**Pam Shufro**, Panel Member, Director of Reading/Language Arts Title 1, Fitchburg Public Schools

## APPENDIX B UNDER-PERFORMING PANEL REVIEW SCHEDULE

### Detailed Schedule for Review Panel School Site Visit

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

#### Day 1

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

#### Day 2

#### All activities take place in the school

- 7:30—8:00 a.m.      Panelists meet with the Principal
- 8:00—8:30 a.m.      Panelists meet with the School Council
- 8:30—9:00 a.m.      Panelists meet with Focus Groups. The Panel Review Coordinator and the Principal will identify participants for each Focus Group. The groups will be organized, as appropriate, to include groups of individuals who can respond to questions designed for parents, students, classroom teachers, curriculum facilitators, content-area specialists, grade-level instructors, or other specific inquiry groups.

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

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

	Panelist A	Panelist B	Panelist C	Panelist D	Panelist E
9-10 a.m.	Observe	Observe	Observe	Observe	Observe

	teacher 1 and teacher 2	teacher 3 and teacher 4	teacher 5 and teacher 6	teacher 7 and teacher 8	teacher 9 and teacher 10
10-11 a.m.	Interview teacher 1 and teacher 2 individually	Interview teacher 3 and teacher 4 individually	Interview teacher 5 and teacher 6 individually	Interview teacher 7 and teacher 8 individually	Interview teacher 9 and teacher 10 individually

*11 a.m.—12:30 p.m.*     **Team meeting # 3:** panelists meet to discuss findings so far and to plan the remainder of the day (working lunch)

*12:30—1:00 p.m.*     Panelists use time as needed to analyze findings and to gather more information; panelists are encouraged to roam the entire school and visit classrooms not yet seen.

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

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

*2:00—2:30 p.m.*     Closing meeting with the Principal to discuss next steps (all panelists are present)

*2:30—5:00 p.m.*     **Team meeting # 4:** panelists deliberate and form conclusions