

REPORT OF TWO YEAR FOLLOW UP REVIEW

Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

German Gerena Community School Springfield Public Schools

Executive Summary

The Gerena School is located in a poor neighborhood which has high industrial pollution and high rates of asthma. The school has 93.8 percent of its students receiving free and reduced lunches. Seventy percent (74.9 percent) of the students are Hispanic and 16 percent are African American. Twenty-one percent (23.8 percent) of the students are Limited English Proficient (LEP) and 19.9 percent are designated as special education.

Cycle III results show that the school had double digit Composite Performance Index (CPI) improvement for 2003, but the school did not make AYP because of attendance. Those results (a CPI increase in the aggregate for ELA of 13.8 points and 30.7 points for math) were followed in Mid-Cycle IV (2005) with a small drop in ELA scores (-1.2 points) and a very small increase in math scores (+0.1 points). The school has not determined why rapid improvement has slowed and is now faced with 53 percent (312 students are bused) of its students new to the school this year because of a district Boundary Plan, where more students are walking to school and spillover for small schools in an eastern zone in the city are being sent to Gerena. Teachers are scrambling to know what their new students know and need, but are confident that they can learn and help their students learn.

The school now has a solid School Improvement Plan (SIP) and a staff of administrators, support staff, and teachers who value data, especially data that helps them target their teaching to students' current needs. A strong SIP team analyzes data and annotates the SIP as appropriate. Weekly grade-level teacher meetings including Collaborative Professional Development Teachers (CPDTs) or Reading First Coordinators and the principal or one of the assistant principals look at student work and data from formative and summative tests and discuss how best to teach. The school has many partners in the larger community of Springfield and beyond. Parents, teachers, community partners, students, and administrators are upbeat about the future of the school.

Priority Findings

- I. The Mid-Cycle IV AYP report (2005), when compared with Cycle III scores, shows that ELA scores dipped (down 1.2 points) and math scores flattened (up .1 point).
 - This follows double digit CPI improvements in Cycle III.
 - Making AYP in math mid-Cycle IV was thwarted by missing the attendance target by .1 percent. High asthma rates are a factor in Gerena's attendance problems.
 - The school has just begun its analysis of the 2005 MCAS test results.

- II.** The Gerena teachers and the School Improvement Plan Team (SIP Team) value both summative and formative data.
- Analysis of 2003 and 2004 MCAS test data is the basis for the current annotated SIP.
 - The teachers use a number of formative assessments to check student progress on a monthly basis.
 - The Step Up Springfield assessment serves as a summative assessment three times a year, but does not correlate well to MCAS test results.
- III.** The 2003-2004 School Improvement Plan and its annotated versions for 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 are much improved over the plan in place at the time of the Panel Review.
- Student performance goals are the result of careful analysis of student strengths and weaknesses on MCAS tests.
 - Student learning objectives, strategies, and activities are linked to the performance goals and emerge from identification of root causes of student weaknesses.
 - The SIP is a focus for teaching and is implemented through professional development and weekly discussions in grade-level teacher teams.
 - Teachers work collaboratively and collegially in their pods, in their grade-level teams, and on Service Teams. There is a culture of openness and cooperation rather than competition.
- IV.** The Gerena School has a strong leadership team that includes administrators, teachers, and partnerships with a wide variety of outside agencies and organizations.
- The principal sees the restructuring he did during his second year as key to AYP CPI improvements.
 - The principal has built capacity in the staff for maintaining continued improvement in student performance.
 - The district's Project LEAD has helped prepare assistant principals (AP's) for further service in the district, but has resulted in high turnover of AP's. This has been detrimental to Gerena.
- V.** The Gerena School is experiencing high student turnover this year, 61 percent of the students in Grade 1 are new to the school. The school is located in the poorest neighborhood in the state with the highest incidence of asthma and industrial pollution.
- Reaching AYP attendance targets has been a challenge, but new attendance initiatives are helping.
 - The school has formed partnerships to deal with health issues and with attendance problems.
- VI.** MCAS test scores of Grade 4 LEP students were high in 2004, particularly in math. Special education students score below their counterparts in the district and the state for the years 2003-2005 with 71 percent in 'Warning' in ELA and 76 percent in 'Warning' in math in 2005.
- ELL teachers run four classrooms focused on the needs of these students and ESL teachers are available to assist classroom teachers.
 - There is no in-depth analysis of subgroup MCAS test results.

Two Year Follow Up Review Process

Introduction

The Two Year Follow Up Review is the fourth and final stage in the process used to assess school performance under the Massachusetts School and District Accountability System. The first stage identifies schools in the lowest MCAS performance categories that are in need of improvement. Stage two, the Panel Review, involves the visitation of a review team to assist the Commissioner of Education in determining whether a school that has been identified as in need of improvement is underperforming and in need of state guidance to improve student performance. Schools declared to be underperforming are required to undergo the next stage of the process, the Fact Finding Review, to assist both the school and the Commissioner in determining the reasons for low student performance and in developing a factual basis from which to develop a plan to improve student performance. The Gerena Community School developed such a plan, and the Commissioner and Board of Education accepted the plan in October, 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 Gerena Community School. The Follow Up Review was conducted on December 5 and 6, 2005.

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 continued improvement in student performance?
3. Are there other factors (changes in conditions or circumstances, i.e., policies, practices) in the school or district which have contributed to or impeded the school's ability to implement their plan?
4. Are the conditions in place to sustain the gains achieved and support continued improvement in student performance?

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

The panel's findings and conclusions on the four key questions will be forwarded to the Commissioner of Education for consideration, together with the school's status reports and student performance data, in determining whether the Gerena Community 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.

The Gerena Community School Profile

The Gerena Community School is one of 32 elementary level schools in Springfield. The school opened in 1975 as a city-wide magnet school based on the controlled choice plan to achieve racial balance in the city school system. According to the latest data from the recent U.S. census report, the school is located in the poorest neighborhood in Massachusetts with the highest rates of industrial pollution and asthma. Currently, 2005-2006, 708 students are enrolled in pre-kindergarten through Grade five. The gender distribution is 332 females and 376 males. In school year 2004-2005, 72.2 percent of the school's student population was identified as Hispanic, 20.5 percent as African American, and 6.9 percent as White. Springfield Public Schools reported for the same year 50 percent Hispanic, 28 percent African American, and 19 percent White; state averages reported were 12 percent Hispanic, 9 percent African American and 74 percent White. In 2005-2006, 19.6 percent of the student population receives special education services and 23.4 percent are identified as Limited English Proficient. Currently 22.8 percent are identified as English Language Learners. The percentage of the school's current students who are low income is 93.1 percent, an increase of 6 percent since 2002. The district reported 76 percent of its students as low income in 2004-2005. The current attendance rate is 93.87 percent, up from 90.6 percent in 2004-2005. The retention rate for 2003-2004 was 4.1 percent, down from 7 percent in 2003. The district's retention rate was 7.6 percent in the same year. In-school and out-of-school suspension rates for 2004-2005 were down from the previous year by 8.4 percent and 20.4 percent, respectively. The district's in-school suspension rate went up by 6.3 percent and the out-of-school suspension rate went down by 7.3 percent in 2004-2005.

The Gerena Community School benefits from a school-wide Title I program, a Comprehensive School Reform Grant, a Reading First Grant, and a Title III Grant in conjunction with the University of Massachusetts. The school currently has partnerships with Smith College, University of Massachusetts, the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, the Basketball Hall of Fame, and other community agencies and organizations. (See Partnerships under Key Question 3)

Staffing

The Gerena School has a principal who is in his fourth year. He has been in the educational system in Springfield for 36 years and he grew up in the Gerena neighborhood. The two assistant principals (AP's) are in their first year at Gerena and in administration. Assistant principals turn over rapidly at Gerena as their time is seen as preparation for them to move on in the system. The principal has discussed with the district how it hurts Gerena to not have consistency in the AP position. The district says that the current AP's will be in their positions for longer than a year. There is also an intern serving from October to February of this school year who is a participant in Project LEAD, the leadership development program of the district.

There are 63 teachers at the school. They are all certified except for two special education and three bilingual teachers who have waivers. Thirty two of the teachers (51 percent) have master's degrees and they all have bachelor degrees. Teachers have an average of 14.5 years of teaching

experience and an average of 8.2 years of experience at Gerena. Four teachers are new to the school this year. Thirty teachers have been at the school for five years or less and fourteen have over ten years of teaching experience at Gerena.

The school also has two adjustment counselors, two teacher leader curriculum facilitators, two Reading First curriculum facilitators, and a librarian. All are new to the school this year.

MCAS Test Results

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

The Gerena Community School made double digit CPI improvements in ELA and Math in Cycle III. The CPI improvements in math are particularly striking. The aggregate CPI improvement in math was 30.7 points. LEP students had CPI improvements of 27 points in ELA and 42 points in math. The school did not meet AYP in the aggregate or in its subgroups in ELA for Cycle III because its attendance figures did not reach the required 92 percent. Math performance scores for Cycle III did meet state targets in the aggregate, and for the low income and Hispanic subgroups, but attendance figures again kept the school from achieving AYP in math. Participation in Cycle III was 99 percent or 100 percent in the aggregate and for all subgroups. Cycle III ELA and math results are provided in the Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS									
Student Group	Cycle III Combined Data for 2003-2004					2004		AYP 2004	
	Performance			Improvement		Attendance			
	N	CPI	Met Target	CPI Change	Met Target	%/Change	Met Target		
Aggregate	401	69.6	No	13.8	Yes	91.0 -0.2	No	No	
LEP	75	59.0	-	27.0	-	89.7 -1.8	-	-	
Spec. Ed.	76	52.6	-	13.9	-	90.5 -0.4	-	-	
Low Income	379	68.2	No	12.7	Yes	90.8 -0.3	No	No	
Afr. Amer./Black	118	74.6	No	11.6	Yes	91.5 0.4	No	No	
Asian or Pacif. Isl.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Hispanic	262	67.5	No	15.0	Yes	90.8 -.0.4	No	No	
Native American	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
White	-	71.3	-	8.0	-	91.5 -0.6	-	-	

Table 2

MATH								
Student Group	Cycle III Combined Data for 2003-2004					2004		AYP 2004
	Performance			Improvement		Attendance		
	N	CPI	Met Target	CPI Change	Met Target	%/Change	Met Target	
Aggregate	196	68.5	Yes	30.7	Yes	91.0 -0.2	No	No
LEP	37	60.8	-	42.0	-	89.7 -1.8	-	-
Spec. Ed.	36	52.1	-	24.3	-	90.5 -0.4	-	-
Low Income	187	67.6	Yes	31.2	Yes	90.8 -0.3	No	No
Afr. Amer./Black	57	67.1	-	25.7	-	91.5 0.4	-	-
Asian or Pacif. Isl.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hispanic	130	69.6	Yes	35.8	Yes	90.8 -0.4	No	No
Native American	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
White	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

The Mid-Cycle IV AYP report, when compared with Cycle III scores, shows that ELA scores dipped (down 1.2 points) and math scores flattened (up .1 point) in the aggregate. The school is now 10th out of 32 schools in the district in math, and 20th out of 32 in ELA. The school would have made its AYP CPI improvement in math except for attendance which was .1 percent below the required 92 percent. Low income students and African American students improved their attendance enough to meet the AYP target for attendance. African American students had the highest CPI in ELA of all subgroups (72.0, 0.9 above the state CPI for the subgroup), but did not meet the improvement target because the CPI change was negative 2.6. Relevant Mid-Cycle IV scores are in Tables 3 and 4 below.

Table 3

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS								
Student Group	Mid-Cycle IV (2005) Data					2005		AYP 2004
	Performance			Improvement		Attendance		
	N	CPI	Met Target	CPI Change	Met Target	%/Change	Met Target	
Aggregate	171	68.4	No	-1.2	No	91.9 0.9	No	No
LEP	38	68.4	-	-	-	91.6 1.9	-	-
Spec. Ed.	26	68.3	-	-	-	89.3 -1.2	-	-
Low Income	160	67.7	No	-0.5	No	91.8 1.0	Yes	No
Afr. Amer./Black	41	72.0	No	-2.6	No	92.4 1.0	Yes	No
Hispanic	118	66.1	No	-1.4	No	91.5 0.7	No	No

Table 4

MATH									
Student Group	Mid-Cycle IV (2005) Data					2005		AYP 2004	
	Performance			Improvement		Attendance			
	N	CPI	Met Target	CPI Change	Met Target	%/Change	Met Target		
Aggregate	94	68.6	No	0.1	Yes/EB	91.9	0.9	No	No
LEP	18	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Spec. Ed.	15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Low Income	89	67.4	No	-0.2	No	91.8	1.0	Yes	No
Afr. Amer./Black	27	66.7	-	-	-	92.4	1.0	Yes	-
Hispanic	60	69.2	Yes	-0.4	No	91.5	0.7	No	No

Proficiency Data

Except for 2003, Gerena Grade 3 regular education students score lower than their district and state counterparts. Gerena student proficiency percents were generally flat between 2004 and 2005. See Table 5 below.

Table 5

Grade 3 Regular Education Students' Performance in Reading									
Performance Level Results %									
	2003			2004			2005		
	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State
Proficient	51	50	71	26	47	72	25	49	71
Needs Imp.	43	41	26	62	45	25	60	45	26
Warning	6	9	3	12	8	3	15	7	3

There are more Gerena LEP students in 'Proficient' and fewer in 'Warning' than for the state in 2003. In 2004 Gerena LEP students did not do as well as district and state counterparts, but in 2005 Gerena students outperformed students in the district and the state. See Table 6 below.

Table 6

Grade 3 LEP Students' Performance in Reading									
Performance Level Results %									
	2003			2004			2005		
	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State
Proficient	19	20	23	18	25	28	29	28	26
Needs Imp.	69	40	47	47	49	51	57	53	51
Warning	13	39	30	35	25	21	14	19	23

Gerena special education students do not do as well as their district and state counterparts in any of the three years 2003-2005. Special education students showed a slight improvement between 2004 and 2005 with more students scoring in 'Advanced' and fewer in 'Warning.' See Table 7 below.

Table 7

Grade 3 Special Education Students' Performance in Reading									
Performance Level Results %									
	2003			2004			2005		
	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State
Proficient	5	17	32	0	23	35	8	25	34
Needs Imp.	45	44	45	19	43	45	17	44	45
Warning	50	39	22	81	34	21	75	31	21

The Gerena Grade 4 regular education students in ELA moved up in 2004, from 32 percent to 62 percent in 'Advanced/Proficient' (A/P), and dropped down in 2005 to 25 percent in A/P. The Grade 4 MCAS ELA test includes a long composition and is more comprehensive than the Grade 3 reading test. The Grade 4 ELA results have been lower than the Grade 3 reading results according to statewide trends; however, the opposite was true at Gerena in 2004. The district also moved up in 2004 from 39 percent to 46 percent in A/P and moved down in 2005 to 38 percent in A/P. The state had 65 percent in 2004 and 58 percent in 2005 in A/P. See Table 8 below.

Table 8

Grade 4 Regular Education Students' ELA									
Performance Level Results %									
	2003			2004			2005		
	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State
Advanced	0	4	13	6	7	14	2	4	12
Proficient	32	35	51	56	39	51	23	34	46
Needs Imp.	64	49	31	32	44	31	68	50	37
Warning	4	12	5	6	10	4	8	11	5

Gerena Grade 4 LEP students in ELA made significant gains from 2003 to 2004, from 10 percent to 38 percent in A/P, but then dropped significantly in 2005 to 7 percent in A/P. LEP students district-wide moved from 12 percent to 19 percent to 15 percent in A/P over the three years. State-wide the scores in A/P over the three years went from 16 percent to 19 percent to 15 percent in A/P. The 38 percent of Gerena students in A/P in 2004 doubled the state figure of 19 percent in A/P in 2004; but the 7 percent Gerena figure for 2005 is less than half the state figure of 15 percent in 2005 in A/P. The percentages of Gerena LEP students in 'Warning/Failing' (W/F) are significantly lower than the district or the state in all three years. See Table 9 below.

Table 9

Grade 4 LEP Students' ELA									
Performance Level Results %									
	2003			2004			2005		
	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State
Advanced	0	0	1	13	2	1	0	2	1
Proficient	10	12	15	25	17	18	7	13	14
Needs Imp.	80	44	41	50	46	48	73	57	50
Warning	10	43	43	13	29	32	20	29	35

Gerena students in special education went from 23 percent in A/P in 2003 to 6 percent in 2004 and 2005; and the number of students in ‘Warning’ increased each of the three years, from 58 percent to 69 percent to 71 percent.

See Table 10 below.

Table 10

Grade 4 Special Education Students’ ELA									
Performance Level Results %									
	2003			2004			2005		
	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State
Advanced	8	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	1
Proficient	15	13	22	6	13	22	6	9	17
Needs Imp.	19	37	47	25	39	48	24	47	51
Warning	58	49	29	69	46	28	71	43	30

In Grade 4 math, regular education students made gains between 2003 and 2004, but fell back in 2005. Figures for A/P for the three years went from 35 percent in 2003 to 41 percent in 2004 and then to 27 percent in 2005. The number of students in ‘Warning’ went from 12 percent in 2003 to 4 percent in 2004 and then to 15 percent in 2005. The school consistently has fewer students in ‘Warning’ than the district. Gerena students outperformed their district counterparts in 2003 and 2004 in the number of students scoring in A/P. See Table 11 below.

Table 11

Grade 4 Regular Education Students’ Math									
Performance Level Results %									
	2003			2004			2005		
	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State
Advanced	5	5	15	10	8	17	6	7	17
Proficient	30	19	32	31	24	33	21	21	31
Needs Imp.	52	51	43	54	52	42	58	54	44
Warning	12	25	10	4	16	8	15	18	8

The school outperformed the district and the state in 2003 with 27 percent of special education students scoring in A/P. The school and the district dropped in the number of special education students scoring in A/P from 2003 to 2005. In 2005, the school had no students in A/P and the district had 8 percent. The state had 17 percent in A/P in 2003 and 2004 and then slipped to 15 percent in 2005. See Table 12 below.

Table 12

Grade 4 Special Education Students’ Math									
Performance Level Results %									
	2003			2004			2005		
	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State
Advanced	15	2	3	0	1	3	0	2	3
Proficient	12	11	14	19	9	14	0	6	12
Needs Imp.	0	30	45	25	37	48	24	39	47
Warning	73	56	38	56	52	35	76	53	38

In math, Gerena had 31 percent of LEP students in A/P in 2004 which was much better than the district and the state in A/P. This dropped to 14 percent in 2005 which was still better than the district (13 percent) and the state (14 percent) in A/P. There were fewer Gerena LEP students in 'Warning' in 2004 (25 percent) and 2005 (20 percent) when compared to the district (42 percent and 37 percent) and even with the state (44 percent and 39 percent). Many students moved into the 'Needs Improvement' category in 2005. See Table 13 below.

Table 13

Grade 4 LEP Students' Math									
Performance Level Results %									
	2003			2004			2005		
	School	District	State	School	District	State	School	District	State
Advanced		1	3	0	3	4	7	2	3
Proficient		11	11	31	13	13	7	11	11
Needs Imp.		37	41	44	41	47	67	50	47
Warning		52	44	25	42	36	20	37	39

PANEL RESPONSES TO THE KEY QUESTIONS

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

Yes, the Gerena School has made significant improvements in its MCAS test performance; however, the improvements were not sustained in all areas. Cycle III results for ELA and math showed double digit gains in CPI improvement. (Most of those gains were made on the 2003 MCAS test.) CPI performance targets were met for students in the aggregate, for low income students, and for Hispanic students. AYP was not achieved because of attendance problems. On the other hand, the mid-Cycle IV data shows that in ELA student scores in the aggregate declined by 1.2 points and in math scores improved by only .1 points. The math improvement target was met within the error band.

In terms of proficiency, Grade 3 regular education students' reading scores were better than the district in 2003 and then were flat from 2004 to 2005. LEP students did much better than the district in 2003, mirrored the district in 2004, and then did better than the district and the state in 2005. Special education students were not served well by the school and did not do as well as their district and state counterparts in the period 2003-2005. In 2005 the percent of special education students in 'Warning' for Grade 3 reading was 75 percent.

Grade 4 regular education students' ELA results showed significant improvement in A/P figures in 2004 (62 percent over 32 percent in 2003), but the figures dropped in 2005 to 25 percent. Math regular education A/P figures showed improvement from 2003 to 2004 then dropped back in 2005, the same pattern as in ELA. LEP student figures mirrored this pattern only more dramatically, 2004 A/P figures rose from 10 percent in 2003 to 38 percent, but then dropped down to 7 percent in 2005. There were fewer Gerena LEP students in 'Warning' in 2004 (25 percent) and 2005 (20 percent) when compared to the district (42 percent and 37 percent) and even with the state (44 percent and 39 percent). The percentage of special education students scoring in 'Warning' increased in each of the years 2003-2005 for ELA. In math, special

education students A/P figures declined from 27 percent to 0 percent between 2003-2005. The percentage of special education students in 'Warning' was at 73 percent in 2003 and 76 percent in 2005.

Despite the mixed results in MCAS test scores the school is using assessment to help teachers know what students need to make progress. The DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills), the DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment), the GRADE (Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation), the Math Monthly assessments (created by the teachers at Gerena), and the Harcourt unit tests all supply teachers regularly with data that helps them target and differentiate their teaching. The Step Up Springfield test, administered three times during the year, is not reliable as a predictor of how the students will do on the MCAS test, and it does not provide the diagnostic results that help teachers. It is an indicator of progress against the baseline throughout the year.

Although there has been an increase in the number of LEP students in the school, the scores for these students are stable or improving. Scores for special education students are lower than their district and state counterparts. The team did not see any deep analysis of subgroup test results. The student performance improvement goals are set for all students and are driven by AYP. Improvement goals are not set for subgroups. The school houses four district-wide substantially separate classrooms for special education students. Almost all of the students in these classrooms compile portfolios in lieu of taking the MCAS test. According to a district special education administrator, there was little formal analysis of district special education results at the central office, and the district did not provide building principals direction or support in interpreting the MCAS special education subgroup results for their schools.

The teachers and administrators seemed to be genuinely committed to collecting and using data to inform teaching. They were especially interested in those tests that provided data that could be used immediately to help students make progress. Two Collaborative Professional Development Teachers (CPDTs; coaches), two Reading First Coordinators, and the three administrators, all help keep teachers talking about the data and how it can be used in their teaching. Weekly team meetings of grade-level teachers provide a regular setting to look at data and at instructional practices. The culture of Gerena supports cooperation rather than competition, and teachers help each other in their open pods where it is easy to see who needs help. The principal talked about breaking through the belief that the Gerena students could not be high performing. He has used the Gerena Scholars classrooms to help with this breakthrough. Our conversations with teachers and our observations confirmed high expectations for students and teachers.

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

Yes, the school has a solid improvement plan for student performance that is respected and is used by administrators and faculty of the school.

The school was determined to be underperforming in the spring of 2003. In the summer a team from the school went through the PIM training and created a new school improvement plan that was approved by the Board of Education in October of 2003. This plan showed much improvement over the plan that the school was using during the Panel Review and the Fact Finding Review. In the new plan the team identified root causes of problems that students had on the 2003 MCAS test. The plan identified student performance goals (AYP targets); these were linked to student learning objectives (state standards) which were linked to strategies in action plans. Action plans identified how strategies and activities would be evaluated and what data would be collected to do that. The plan grew out of the examination of MCAS test results and item analysis of those results. The annotated plan for 2004-2005 and the current plan for 2005-2006 built on the 2003 plan.

The school is effective in using the plan because it has an infrastructure to ensure that the plan is being followed and a culture that values the use of data. The infrastructure includes 1) use of two professional development days before school starts to focus on the annotated SIP and how it will be implemented by teachers in each grade; 2) Collaborative Professional Development Teachers, Reading First Coordinators, and administrators who meet with teacher teams weekly to lead discussions that include implementing the SIP; 3) a SIP team that analyzes data, prepares it for distribution, and then distributes it to teachers, plus annotating the SIP to address needs of students that are identified; and 4) individual teachers who value data, particularly data that helps them focus on students' real needs now. In addition to the above, the school is exploring the use a SIP Implementation Visit or Learning Walk form that would facilitate observations of strategies and activities that are called for in the SIP. This infrastructure provides the support for successful implementation of the plan.

The district has been supportive of the school's development of the SIP and the skills required in keeping it vital to the improvement of student performance. The district has provided an ELA and a math CPDT and supported the school team that did the PIM training to develop the plan. The district provides a school support specialist, a former teacher, and a principal, who is at the school one day a week to work with the SIP team and the administration on improvement.

The current principal has worked on creating a culture in which teachers collaborate and share rather than compete. When he came to the school in 2002-2003, the staff was organized into three academies or schools within a school. He observed this for one year and decided that the academies were substantially separate and that they competed. In his second year 2003-2004, he reorganized the school into a whole school structure where teacher teams met by grade, three times a week every other week for joint planning. In the third year the teacher teams cut back to meeting once a week, and included the special educators. Teachers collaborate and share around looking at data and student work together. They make suggestions for each other about how to meet specific student needs. The visiting team also heard that the open pods were positive in the sense of creating more possibilities for helping each other out and for knowing what each other is doing. Teachers do not have the option of going into their rooms and closing the door.

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?

Attendance

Attendance has been a problem. According to the latest data from the recent U.S. census report, the school is located in the poorest census tract in Massachusetts with the highest rates of industrial pollution and asthma. The district's use of partial days, both before Thanksgiving and Christmas vacations and in delayed openings with storms adds to the school's attendance issues. The school is focused on attendance issues and is making progress in addressing it. The current attendance rate for 2005-2006 is 93.87 percent. An attendance committee consisting of five teachers, three parents, and the staff from the North End Outreach Network developed the attendance plan. It includes a number of ways of recognizing good attendance. Mentioned most often by parents and teachers was the celebration for students with perfect attendance. At this event two bicycles were raffled off and food brought by parents and teachers was served. Also, a DVD has been created that will be sent home for viewing by parents. An administrator and a member of the North End Outreach Network visit students with severe attendance problems. The district has a Connect Ed system for calling parents when students are absent.

Partnerships

Positive support for achieving the goals of the SIP is provided by the partnerships that have been formed with community organizations. One of the strongest partnerships is with Smith College whose president writes in a letter to the EQA, "The extent to which our partnership has flourished in just two short years is remarkable, with activities engaging our combined faculty, students, staff, and alumnae in a vital learning community, the benefits of which are mutual." Smith provides after-school tutors, teaching assistants, student teachers, sports instruction, and scholarships to 25 students for a summer program and leadership training. Smith has been awarded a three-year grant by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development to engage North End residents, the Gerena community, in the development of a community family literacy center at Gerena. One Smith graduate has become a teacher at Gerena. The University of Massachusetts is involved with the Gerena Community School through its Accela program which trains teachers. The program leads to a Reading Specialist license and ELL endorsement.

In addition to Smith College and University of Massachusetts, Gerena has working relationships with a number of businesses and agencies including Bay State Medical, the North End Outreach Network, Springfield School Volunteers, the Puerto Rican Veterans Association, the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, the Efficacy Institute, the Community Health Center, and the Basketball Hall of Fame. One project is the creation of an oral health resource at the school. Students will be able to receive preventive care and repair. In addition, children and parents will receive education about oral health.

Grants and Programs

The school has received a Reading First grant. Teachers and administrators reported that this grant has been pivotal in the schools' ability to improve student performance. The assessments and the three-tier instructional model has been especially helpful. All teachers in Reading First classrooms have been trained.

Teachers reported that the use of *Early Reading Intervention* kits, *Write Source*, and the Isabel Beck's *Bringing Words to Life* program are all helpful in their meeting student learning needs.

Gerena teachers not trained in the *Responsive Classroom* will be trained this year so that the entire school will be using this approach, especially for morning meetings.

Nineteen staff members participated in a nine-day summer Reading First workshop that focused on comprehension in the classroom.

In the summer, five staff members completed the Math Monthly Assessments which are used to assess student progress and are discussed in the grade-level team meetings.

Intensive Support Services

Students with severe behavioral issues are placed in this classroom in an effort to modify their behavior and reintegrate them back into the general student population. Students usually stay in this classroom for several months. There is a limit of eight students in this classroom at any one time and staffing includes a paraprofessional and a counselor. This is a successful program that is now being duplicated in other Springfield schools.

Intensive Curriculum Support Services

Teachers send students with behavioral problems to this service with work to be completed and the students are taught by a teacher. This avoids students being in-service suspension because the students are being taught; it is not recorded as such. Students are in this classroom for brief one to two day stays.

Service Teams

The Service Team is a case work model that has been fully implemented at the Gerena Community School. Nine service teams meet to discuss strategies that can be used for specific students to modify classroom behaviors or to address academic concerns. Almost all teachers participate in a Service Team and are paid for their services.

Teaching at the Gerena

The team observed twelve classrooms and rated five of the twelve lessons (42 percent) as exemplary and seven as average. Three of the classrooms were Gerena Scholar classrooms, seven were heterogeneous in their mix of students, one was an ELL classroom, and one was a special education classroom. The team saw four ELA and four math lessons, one science, one music, one special education, and one mixed lesson. Common strengths observed across classrooms included the use of a variety of instructional methods, good classroom management with little or no incidence of behavior problems, good use of in-class support, and frequent use of assessments. Teachers reported targeting their teaching to specific student needs, but the team saw centers being used for differentiation in only two classrooms. There were few to no computers in the classrooms and little evidence of teachers pushing for higher order thinking and for rigor. The principal acknowledged the need to explore the use of technology that would be academically relevant, but stated that the district technology budget was limited. The school is wired and ready for the use of computers. The pace of the lessons observed was appropriate in

some classrooms and either too slow or too fast in others. The team did observe inclusion and mainstreaming in three of the classrooms.

The team reviewed teacher evaluations and did not find one that rated a teacher as “needing improvement.” Notes of observations by administrators were thorough, but did not correlate with ratings and comments on the evaluations. The principal admitted that the union contract made it exceedingly difficult to dismiss a teacher for performance, but said that discussions were frank and open in grade-level team meetings about student performance data reported by classroom.

Pupil Progression Plan

The district has a plan that specifies what students must know and be able to do before they can be promoted. It was revised for elementary schools in 2003 and first implemented in 2004-2005. Retention rates for that year were not available. The retention rate for Gerena was lower than the district’s rate, 4.1 percent to 7.6 percent in 2004. The assistant superintendent described this as a significant strengthening of the expectations for elementary students based on the work of the highest performing elementary schools. She said it was needed both because retentions were indefensibly high in some schools and because there was social promotion of unprepared students in others.

Demographics and Location

The Gerena is located in the poorest census tract in the state. It is also the neighborhood with the highest industrial pollution and the highest rates of asthma. The absences of students for medical reasons are high and affect the attendance rate of the school. The principal was able to get one waiver from the Department of Education for the AYP attendance requirement, but he was denied his second request based on narrowed definitions, including the need for doctor’s notes for absences which overlooks health access issues for this population. The review team also noted that school personnel were not aware that they could have sought a physician’s authorization for homebound instruction for certain students who were absent 14 or more days for medical reasons. Students in homebound programs under the special education law are counted as present.

The Boundary Plan of the district has resulted in 53 percent of the students at Gerena being new to the school in 2005-2006. Grade 1 reported 61 percent new students and Grade 5 reported 43 percent. Many of the new students came from the overflow of small schools in a distant eastern zone of the Springfield Public Schools. Teachers reported that they have had to work hard to assess what students know and are able to do. Many student records from previous schools were not available or incomplete. Teachers have used Gerena assessments to identify student needs and they report that because of the structures and processes in place they “haven’t missed a beat.” Teachers also reported that since students were taught the same district curriculum in their sending schools that they, the teachers and the students, are not starting from scratch. The full impact of the Boundary Plan for the future is unknown at this time.

Union Contract

Administrators reported that several teachers, including one CPDT, left the Springfield Public Schools for positions in other school districts because of the salary freeze. This kind of turnover

hinders consistency from year to year. It takes time for new staff to become acclimated to the Gerena culture. The Union called off a work to rule order earlier this year because it achieved some movement on part of the city in meeting its demands. Teachers seldom mentioned the problems associated with not having a contract and the union's struggle with the district and the city.

Facility

The Gerena is a large facility that was built in 1975. It has suffered from water damage over the years and whenever it rains the water table rises and water comes into the public walkway that runs through the center of the building. The building itself has suffered water damage, but it is mainly on the lower levels, not where the classrooms are located. The gym and swimming pool are located quite a distance down the public walkway. The lack of a playground was mentioned by parents and teachers as a problem. The open pods seem to have positives and negatives. Noise is a problem for some and at least one teacher said that students have to be kept abnormally quiet in the pods. Two students with ADHD were observed in a pod classroom and, though they were separated from their classmates, they were attentive and engaged in the lesson. Teachers can see each other and can offer assistance when needed. In the open pod it is easy to move a disruptive student to another classroom for a time out.

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

Yes, the conditions are in place to support the continued improvement in student performance.

The leadership in the school is distributed and effective in implementing improvement initiatives and helping students make progress. The principal has shared leadership, particularly with his AP's and the SIP team. He has built the capacity needed for the system to function effectively. The principal, assistant principals, and the SIP team keep the school focused on achieving the SIP performance goals and the student learning objectives.

Teachers and teacher teams are enthusiastic about helping students achieve. Teachers are collaborative and collegial in a school culture that emphasizes cooperation rather than competition.

The SIP team is strong and has developed skills in data analysis and in facilitating grade-level teams in using the data to inform instruction. Summative and formative data are valued by the teachers.

A number of innovative classrooms support teachers in their classroom management. For example, the Intensive Support Services classroom and the Intensive Curriculum Support Center provide long term and short term placements for students with behavioral problems. The Service Teams also help teachers deal with students' emotional, behavioral, and academic problems in a timely and effective manner.

Parents are enthusiastic about the work of the school and parent volunteers for the PTO were numerous. Parents reported that teachers are very accessible, making the pod phone number available. Teachers are good about returning parent phone calls the same day. Parents feel welcomed at the school and face few barriers to seeing a teacher and their children.

The district is supporting the school in a number of ways through professional development, leadership development, curriculum planning, the school's support officer, district Learning Walks, and funding of CPDT's. The team did hear that the district was not providing support for the Special Education Supervisor at the school.

CONCLUSION

The Gerena School has shown that it is capable of significantly improving student performance. The leadership and the culture of the school are in place to continue improving student performance in the future. The strengths of the Gerena School are more substantive and more numerous than the weaknesses and unknowns.

Focus groups of students, parents, teachers, the SIP team, and community groups uniformly are positive about the school and its future. There is an upbeat energy about the school which translates into creative and hard work on behalf of students' success. Leadership is shared and not vested solely in the principal. Teachers on the SIP team are empowered. The reports of the grade-level teams and the service teams are of collegiality, openness and use of data to identify what students need now. School-based professional development and professional development targeted to what teachers need to help students enhances teacher skills and teacher effectiveness. The school is clearly open to reaching out to the community for additional resources through its partnerships. The school is open to parents who want to visit and teachers are responsive to those parents who call for information. Classroom management is strong and student behavior is not distracting from instruction significantly. The classroom management is supported by the Intensive Support Services classroom and by the Intensive Curriculum Support Center.

The school has not analyzed the most recent MCAS test results to determine why improvements in student performance dipped and flattened in 2005. The opportunity has not been taken to look closely at the special education students' results to understand why they are not doing as well as other subgroups, especially LEP students. The impact of having 53 percent of the students enrolled this year who are new to the school is unknown. Teacher evaluations are not sufficiently direct about teachers' needs for improvement. There is no structure to assure the vertical alignment of the curriculum. Unless checked, the impact of teacher turnover could affect both learning and the leadership of the SIP team. Finally, the facility itself does not provide for students' needs for physical activity and the open pods can be distracting for teachers and students.

APPENDIX A
Team Members

Dr. Peter Clark, Senior Consultant: Accountability, Class Measures

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

Dr. James McAuliffe, Associate Examiner, Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

Douglas Renick, Consultant, Class Measures

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

- 7:30-8:00 Team meeting
- 8:00—9:00 Team members meet with the principal.
- 9:00—10:00. Team members meet with the district Assistant Superintendent and a School Support Specialist
- 10:00—11:00. Team members meet with the school’s curriculum and instruction leadership team and members of the school site council.
- 11:00—1:00. Team members meet to discuss findings so far and to plan the remainder of the day (working lunch). Panelists use time as needed to analyze findings and to gather more information; panelists may conduct an informal walk through with a focus on school culture and climate for learning.
- 1:00—3:00. Team members meet with teachers in focus groups.

	REVIEWER A and REVIEWER B	REVIEWER C and REVIEWER D
1:00-1:30	TEACHER FOCUS GROUP #1 8 Teachers	TEACHER FOCUS GROUP #2 8 Teachers
1:30-2:00	TEACHER FOCUS GROUP #3 8 Teachers	TEACHER FOCUS GROUP #4 8 Teachers
2:00-2:30	TEACHER FOCUS GROUP #5 8 Teachers	TEACHER FOCUS GROUP #6 8 Teachers

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

	REVIEWER A	REVIEWER B	REVIEWER C	REVIEWER D
2:30 - 3:00	PARENT FOCUS GROUP	COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUP #1 Higher Education Partners	COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUP #2	STUDENT FOCUS GROUP

3:00—5:30 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

7:30-7:45 a.m. *Team meets*

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

8:45—9:15 a.m. Team members meet

	REVIEWER A	REVIEWER B	REVIEWER C	REVIEWER D
9:15- 9:45	Observe teacher 1 Math Grade 5	Observe teacher 2 Math Grade 4	Observe teacher 3 Math Grade 5	Observe teacher 4 Math Grade 3
9:45- 10:15	Interview teacher 1	Interview teacher 2	Interview teacher 3	Interview teacher 4
10:15- 10:45	Observe teacher 5 SPED K-2	Observe teacher 6 ELA Grade 1	Observe teacher 7 ELA Grade K	Observe teacher 8 ELA Grade 2
10:45- 11:15	Interview teacher 5	Interview teacher 6	Interview teacher 7	Interview teacher 8
11:15 11:45	Observe teacher 9 ELA Grade 4	Observe teacher 10 ELA Grade K	Observe teacher 11 Music/Choir Grade 4	Observe teacher 12 Science Grade K

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

11:15—1:00. 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.

1:00—2:00. Team structured time. Members will identify any gaps in the evidence collected and may request additional information from the principal in the form of documents, meetings with classroom teachers, curriculum facilitators, content-area specialists, grade-level instructors, or other specific individuals or groups who can respond to questions relevant to the panel review protocol.

	REVIEWER A	REVIEWER B	REVIEWER C	REVIEWER D
1:00 - 2:00	Focus Group with a portion of the SIP Team	Random observations of classrooms		Observe Intensive Student Support Classroom

2:15—2:30 p.m. Closing meeting with the principal to share general feedback and to discuss next steps (all members are present)

2:30—6:15 p.m. Members deliberate and form conclusions.

*Instructions for classroom observations, teacher interviews, and focus groups

Please inform all school faculty and students that Review Panel members will be visiting a cross-section of classrooms during the site visit. The selection of classrooms will be determined mutually by the Review Coordinator and the Principal using the staff directory information provided by the school. All faculty members are asked to be prepared to accommodate a visitor on the morning of the site visit. Team members will make every effort to minimize the disruption of planned classroom activities.

1. Observations Each reviewer will observe three class lessons (for a total of 12 classes observed overall) in order to obtain a representative sample of the school’s individual classrooms. The purpose of the classroom observation is to judge the quality of the learning environment, which is a critical aspect of the school’s overall conditions, and a determinant in whether or not the school will be able to successfully implement its improvement plan. The learning environment includes:

- The physical setting—space, lighting, size, classroom temperature, etc.,
- The classroom organization—desk arrangement, resources available to students, orderliness, etc.,
- The level of the teacher’s preparation for instruction; the students’ readiness for learning
- The level of the teacher’s expectation for student learning and performance
- The interaction between teacher and students—the students’ level of engagement or withdrawal.

- The level and quality of instructional practice in the school (Panelists are not evaluating individual teachers).
2. Individual Teacher Interviews The purpose of the teacher interview that follows the observation is to:
- Clarify the evaluator's impressions of the classroom dynamic and learning environment
 - Determine what the teacher considers to be the chief learning needs of students across the school and within his or her classroom
 - Determine the teacher's understanding of the school's plan to address those needs and to improve student performance
 - Determine the teacher's role in the overall mission and improvement plan of the school
3. Teacher Focus Groups The purpose of the teacher focus groups is to:
- Determine what each teacher considers to be the chief learning needs of students across the school and within his or her classroom
 - Determine each teacher's understanding of the school's plan to address those needs and to improve student performance
 - Determine each teacher's role in the overall mission and improvement plan of the school