

## **School Panel Review Report John Marshall Elementary School Boston Public Schools**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the School Panel Review Process is to assist the Commissioner of Education in determining whether State intervention is needed to guide improvement efforts in schools where students' MCAS performance is critically low and no trend toward improved student performance is evident from MCAS data. John Marshall Elementary School met this criterion for mathematics and was one of sixteen schools selected for panel review in winter, 2004. The panel review was conducted on January 26-27, 2004.

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 will be forwarded to the Commissioner of Education for consideration, together with school performance data, in determining whether John Marshall 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 sound improvement strategies 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.

### **John Marshall Elementary School Profile**

#### **Enrollment**

The John Marshall School is one of 83 elementary schools in Boston. The school serves students in kindergarten through grade five. Preliminary results show 688 students enrolled at the school as of October 1, 2003. Enrollment between 2001 and 2003 ranged from 775 and 815 students. The majority (63 percent) of students attending the Marshall School over the last four years have

been Black, followed by Hispanics, who composed 33 percent of the total student body. White and Asians each account for two percent of students at the Marshall School.

Over 80 percent of students at the Marshall School come from low-income families. Over the last four years, an average of 30 percent of students have been non-native English speakers; over 20 percent have been Limited English Proficient students. Fifteen percent of students enrolled last year and this year receive special education services.

Since 2000, attendance at the Marshall School has been steadily declining. In 2003, the attendance rate was 94.3 percent, compared with 94.9 in 2000. The average number of days students were absent during this period was nine. Retention rates at this school have steadily declined over the last four years, from eight percent in 2000 to 3.8 percent in 2003. Last year, out-of-school suspensions climbed to 8.1 percent from 0.4 percent in 2002. No in-school suspensions were reported between 2000 and 2003.

### **Staffing**

In its Staff Data Report submitted this academic year, the Marshall school reported having a staff of 62 that includes four administrators, one guidance counselor, one nurse, six support people, and 54 teachers. Forty percent of the staff has been there for fewer than five years. All but three teachers are licensed in the subjects they teach.

### **MCAS Overview**

Students at the John Marshall School are assessed in grades 3 and 4 in English language arts (ELA), and in mathematics in grade 4. In mid-Cycle III (2003), the school failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the aggregate and for all its qualifying subgroups ELA.<sup>1</sup> In the last five AYP determination cycles, the school received a positive determination twice. In mathematics in 2003, the school also failed to make AYP in the aggregate and for all its subgroups, except for African-American/Black. In the last five years, the school has not made AYP in this content area.

## **Student Performance in English Language Arts**

### **GRADE 3**

#### **Regular Education**

Although the distribution of regular students' performance at the Marshall School at the grade 3 level shows a slight improvement in 2003, there are no trends of sustained improvement in ELA.

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the federal No Child Left Behind Act passed in 2001, student performance is disaggregated by the following subgroups: Limited English Proficient, Special Education, Free/Reduced Lunch, African-American/Black, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Native American, and White. A minimum of 20 students per subgroup is required to issue a statistically sound rating or determination of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The subgroups meeting the minimum sample size at the Marshall School in 2003 were Limited English Proficient, Special Education, African-American/Black and Free/Reduced lunch and Hispanic.

In 2001 when the test was first administered, 31 percent of students were proficient; 56 percent performed at the Needs Improvement level; and 14 percent at Warning. In 2002, the proportion of proficient students fell to 28 percent; 62 percent were in need of improvement, while 10 percent scored at the Warning level. In 2003, there were 37 percent of all assessed third graders performed at the Proficient level, 50 percent at Needs Improvement and 13 percent at Warning.

#### Special Education

The performance of special education students in grade 3 in ELA has remained constant over the last three administrations. Six percent of students have performed at the Proficient level, about 42 percent at Needs Improvement, and 50 percent at Warning.

#### Limited English Proficient

In 2003, the performance of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students saw a sharp reversal of the trends from the two previous years. In 2001, 65 percent of assessed LEP students were proficient, and the remaining 35 percent performed at the Needs Improvement level. In 2002, the percentage of proficient LEP students rose to 73 percent, with the proportion of those at the Needs Improvement level declining to 27 percent. In 2003, there were no proficient LEP students. Forty-six percent scored at the Needs Improvement level while the majority (54 %) was at Warning.

#### GRADE 4

In 2001, the performance of regular education students at the grade 4 level made some strong gains; since then, however, performance at this grade 4 level has been static. In 2000, one percent of students tested at the grade 4 level was proficient; 84 percent scored at the Needs Improvement level and 15 percent at Warning. In 2001, the percentage of proficient students rose to 18 percent. Sixty-four percent of students were at the Needs Improvement level, and 18 percent at Warning. In 2002 and 2003, the proportion of proficient students has remained constant at 18 percent. In 2002, sixty-nine percent of regular education students were at the Needs Improvement level and 14 percent at Warning. In 2003, 62 percent were in need of improvement with the remaining 20 percent scoring in the Warning category.

#### Special Education

The performance of special education students at the Marshall School over the last four years has been marked by high percentages of students performing at the Warning level, and very few, if any, reaching proficiency. Except for 2001 and 2003 when eight and four percent of students respectively performed at Proficient, there have been no proficient special education students at the grade 4 level. Over the last four years, on average, 30 percent of students have scored at the Needs Improvement level and 70 percent at Warning.

#### Limited English Proficient

The performance of LEP students has varied widely over the last four years. In 2000, there were no proficient LEP students in grade 4 in ELA. Seventy-three percent performed at the Needs Improvement level and 27 percent at Warning. In 2001, 23 percent of those assessed were proficient, 54 percent in need of improvement, and 23 percent scored in the Warning category. In 2002, 93 percent of LEP students' performance was in the Needs Improvement category and seven percent in Warning. In the most recent administration of the math test, 33 percent performed at Needs Improvement and 67 percent at Warning.

### **Student Performance in Mathematics**

#### **GRADE 4**

##### **Regular Education**

The performance of regular education students in mathematics at the Marshall School has shown no improvement since 2000. In 2000, seven percent of students tested in this content area were proficient; 68 percent in need of improvement, and 25 percent performed at Warning. In 2001, four percent of students score Proficient and Advanced. The proportion of those at the Needs Improvement level fell to 58 percent as those in Warning rose to 38 percent. In 2002, the percentage of proficient regular education students decreased to four percent, as did those in need of improvement to 46 percent. That year, 50 percent of students performed at the Warning level. At the last administration, eight percent of students were found proficient and advanced, 51 percent in need of improvement, and 40 percent scored at the Warning level.

##### **Special Education**

The performance of grade 4 special education students in mathematics has been static for the last four years. Except for 2000 and 2003 when two and three percent of students, respectively, were found proficient there has not been other proficient special education students in mathematics. Between 2000 and 2003, each year on average one-third of students have performed at the Needs Improvement level while the remaining two-thirds of scores have been at the Warning level.

##### **Limited English Proficient**

While the performance of LEP students in mathematics has varied over the last four years, there is no evidence of improvement. In 2000, 71 percent of all LEP students scored at the Needs Improvement level, and 29 percent at Warning. In 2001, 13 percent performed at the Advanced level of performance; 63 percent were in need of improvement, while 25 percent scored at Warning. In 2002, LEP students' performance as evenly divided between the Needs Improvement and Warning categories. Last year, 54 percent of scores were at the Needs Improvement level and 46 in Warning.

## PANEL RESPONSES TO THE KEY QUESTIONS

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

Yes. The John Marshall Elementary School has produced a Whole School Improvement Plan (WSIP) that is clearly focused on several key instructional priorities in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. The school has analyzed data from various sources to examine student achievement, including both strengths and gaps, and instructional needs going forward. The process involved the collaboration of the entire staff in the determination of root causes and the development of strategies to address resulting deficits.

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

Yes. As stated in the plan and confirmed in interviews with staff and the school principal, the process of data analysis began in the fall of 2002 when the school's Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), which had received three days of training in data analysis the previous summer, commenced the review of both MCAS and Boston Public Schools (BPS) formative assessment data for the entire school as well as disaggregated subgroup results. The process included the work of grade level teams, which analyzed test items for areas of weakness, as well as the efforts of the entire staff working together on root cause analysis. The ILT also examined the school's instructional programs in mathematics and ELA to determine and address weaknesses in implementation.

The school reviewed MCAS scores in mathematics for the years 2000, 2001 and 2002 for the fourth grade. Additionally, BPS formative math assessments for grades 1-5 were examined. This review, aligned with standards, showed that student deficits were greatest in attainment of proficiency in the areas of number sense and open response questions, and led to the articulation of the school's math priorities to (1) build students' understanding of number sense and problem solving strategies; and (2) build students' ability to communicate their mathematical thinking using words, numbers, and/or pictures in the context of open response questions.

For ELA, scores for 2001 and 2002 for grades 3 and 4 were analyzed. BPS formative reading and writing assessments were determined to be below the district's grade level benchmarks. The data found weaknesses in proficiency in vocabulary and reading comprehension skills as well as those related to writing with organization, focus, and adequate topic development. The school then determined that its ELA priorities are to (1) strengthen reading comprehension for all students across all genres with an emphasis on vocabulary; and (2) build the writing skills of all students with a strong focus on vocabulary and topic development.

When results were disaggregated by subgroups, the school noted similar weaknesses for all students and formulated the same priorities. It is in the area of instructional strategies that adaptations and accommodations have been enumerated for special education students and English language learners in the WSIP, and in the newly completed appendix to the WSIP that

was provided to the panelists during the visit. There was a severe decline in the 2003 test scores of ELL learners who previously had been tested in Spanish. MCAS regulations required eleven more ELL students to be tested in English for the 2003 administration (two more on grade 3 ELA, five more on grade 4 ELA, and 4 more on grade 5 mathematics).

The ILT also examined the school's instructional programs and practices to determine the extent and success of implementation. The school's math program, *TERC Investigations*, was only in its first year of full adoption when the plan was developed last year. A number of weaknesses were identified such as inconsistency in teachers' use of the BPS Scope and Pacing Guide, inadequate engagement of students in considering and analyzing solutions, and lack of consistency in requiring students to use appropriate mathematical terminology and notation. Other identified deficits were the lack of training for some teachers in *Investigations* and the lack of intensity and consistency from a BPS coach in mathematics. A coach is only provided by the district twice a month, and the coach has been changed four times during the year.

For Writer's Workshop, the district's instructional program for writing, the ILT identified implementation weaknesses including lack of uniformity in keeping notes on conferences with students to inform instruction; a need to implement genre-based units of study in all classes; and inconsistent posting of learning objectives in all classrooms. For Readers' Workshop, lack of uniformity in conferring with students, inconsistency in use of texts reflecting various genres, and the need to incorporate word study and vocabulary were cited as instructional weaknesses.

The root cause analysis in the WSIP addressed the gaps that exist due to inconsistent delivery of the instructional program; limited use of assessment to inform instruction; limited practice afforded to students to apply problem-solving strategies; inappropriate utilization of instructional time; lack of teacher questioning to encourage students to reflect and verbalize; insufficient emphasis on acquisition and use of new vocabulary; and providing students with only minimal experience with a wide variety of genres.

The school's curricula are guided by Boston Public Schools Standards, which are reportedly aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Teachers now have access to, and are supposed to be teaching from curriculum guides available on the district's *MyBPS* web site. Schools were also directed this year to create curriculum maps for ELA, which would lay out a scope and sequence already available in pacing guides customized by the district from guides provided by the *TERC Investigations* math curriculum.

In addition, certain programs are based in the school according to district needs and the size of available facilities. This year, the John Marshall Elementary School is a new Sheltered English Instruction Center for Spanish speaking students. A substantially separate language-based class houses students who are assigned from other schools beginning in fourth grade by the special education department. There is also a Learning Adaptive Behavior (LAB) cluster behavior modification program that serves students in all grades. Based on high Stanford Achievement Test scores, approximately ten fourth grade students leave the school annually to attend an advanced work program in another building. As a result of these district assignment practices, Marshall Elementary serves special populations that may present instructional challenges.

The school made schedule adjustments for all students to accommodate the district's mandate for increased mathematics instruction. For K-5, one hour each day is devoted to the fast-paced *Investigations* program with an additional ten minutes to review daily math routines. In grades 3-5 there is another 30 minutes daily of AYP math to focus on opportunities to answer multiple choice, short answer, and open response questions similar to those found on MCAS. These opportunities to provide additional practice and review basic operations help to address teachers' concerns that the *Investigations* program moves too quickly for the school's students.

In the staff report, the team noted that most teachers have a number of years of experience and are teaching within their areas of certification. Nine of 62 staff members have three years or less of experience in education. Seven had no certification indicated. In the staff survey, of teachers generally reported that they know what they are expected to do to fulfill the school improvement plan to improve student performance; only one responded "unsure." Teachers repeatedly cited the plan's priorities such as vocabulary development, solving word problems in math, and improving reading comprehension.

Although the current WSIP does not look back at previous plans to determine how successful they were, it is clear from looking at the previous plans that the principal and the ILT are familiar with the planning process and the analysis of data. Over time, the BPS has provided training in this process and this is reflected in the level of detail apparent in the current plan and its accompanying appendix. In particular, the 2003-2004 WSIP appears to be better focused than previous plans, as evidenced by the emphasis on multi-step problem solving and vocabulary and comprehension development, root cause analysis and clearly defined improvement strategies, and thus affords a higher likelihood of successful implementation. The district also encouraged schools to look beyond the Six Essentials format of the previous WSIP template and take a closer look at causal factors implied in the data

One set of data that the school did not analyze or address in the plan concerned attendance. From the data provided by the Massachusetts Department of Education for the Panel Review, the team noted that the school's attendance rates have dropped from 91.7 percent in 2001 to 87.3 percent in 2003. However, this information has been corrected to reflect an actual attendance rate of 94.3 percent, little changed from previous years. In view of this correction, overall attendance is no longer an issue that merits attention in the SIP.

In 2003, 23.4 percent of students were identified as chronically absent (defined as absent more than 10 percent of days in membership). The average number of days absent declined, however, from 14.9 in 2001 to 9.4 in 2003. The superintendent stated that attendance is a district-wide issue and noted that as a district, Boston did not make AYP because of attendance. The school also did not address strategies for its approximately 25 percent in/out turnover rate, as reported by the principal, with a plan to acclimate new students promptly.

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

Yes. The plan delineates specific collaboratively determined goals tied to improved student performance on the MCAS. Although these goals are ambitious, they are required to meet AYP and are specific and reasonable in terms of the school's analysis. For grade 4 math, this includes goals for English language learners as well as special education students. For grade 4 ELA, there is a goal for special education students. For grade 3, there are no disaggregated goals and the goals specified are for all students. In the appendix to the WSIP, BPS outcome benchmarks are tied to each of the school's math and ELA instructional priorities and will be measured at varying intervals throughout the year. Formative assessments to be used to measure the student performance objectives in ELA include DRA, SRI and writing prompts. Formative math assessments include MCAS-like multi step problems and open response questions. The John Marshall Elementary School is piloting the BPS benchmarks for local assessments (formative) in grades three and four as part of the Boston Plan for Excellence. These are being designed to more closely parallel MCAS type questions and work in ELA.

In focus groups and interviews, as well as in the staff survey, teachers demonstrated that they are able to articulate student needs and the goals of the plan. The observations conducted by the Panel Review Team showed that staff is actively engaged in addressing these needs and fulfilling the goals of the plan in the classroom.

A Classroom Observation Checklist has been developed for each priority in ELA and mathematics for teachers and administrators to determine that the plan is on target for implementation. The checklist specifies strategies for teachers of regular education students as well as the language-based, LAB and ELL classes. Some examples:

- At least once during a Read Aloud session, LAB teachers will discuss and reference genre charts.
- SEI classroom work will reflect accurate use of graphic organizers.
- At least once during math class teachers will model questions to ask before starting a problem.
- At least once a week, teachers will plan a lesson using a multi-step or MCAS open response problem.

As a result of these checklists, the plan becomes not only a blueprint for student achievement, but one for teacher improvement as well, with implementation monitored by administration. Teachers are also able to monitor their own work with improvement rubrics and a self-reflection component that is to be completed in June.

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

Yes. The WSIP for the John Marshall Elementary School specifies a number of strategies tied to each instructional priority that are likely to lead to improved student results if they are diligently

implemented. The programs and practices in current use in the school and the BPS, such as *TERC Investigations*, and *Readers' and Writers' Workshop*, are all well-known programs that have been successfully adopted in other places.

In interviews, focus groups and classroom observations, the team determined that math and literacy strategies are now in place to implement the plan. Plentiful professional development has been made available to staff and many have participated over the past several years. Despite the fact that this year teachers are involved in a district wide job action and are working to rule, several are currently engaged in the professional improvement opportunities the district offers. During the day, there are regular cycles of literacy and math coaching that take place at the school. Although the district-provided math coach is only in the building twice a month, collaborative coaching and learning (CCL) activities also provide opportunities for teachers to improve instruction. As teachers take turns observing each other and providing feedback, they are able to reflect on the strategies in the WSIP.

One of the promising interventions has been the designation of a Math Leadership Team (MLT). This group meets regularly to advance the school's math program. It is comprised of one member from each of the school's grade level instructional teams. Since the school is in corrective action because of lack of AYP in math, the establishment of this group has been particularly timely and can be a key to the school's turnaround.

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

Yes. Teachers report that the plan has indeed changed the focus of their work with students. In interviews, several teachers indicated that WSIP priorities are considered in planning. In focus groups, teachers stated that the strategies in the plan were clear and would lead to improvement with implementation. They also declared that the plan contributes to consistency from grade to grade and expressed appreciation of its focus and specificity.

The administrative team has created an *Improving Students' Performance Tool Kit* and provided it to each teacher. This extensive and impressive document includes the WSIP and appendix; the key elements of effective lesson plans including planning and preparation, connections/building background, learning strategies, review and assessment; BPS curriculum information for ELA and math including learning standards, assessments and information on workshop instruction for ELA and *Investigations* for math. The math section is particularly detailed including pertinent unit vocabulary, suggested teacher questions, and the pacing guide. Sections for science and social studies instruction are also included.

The team observed numerous instances of implementation of planned improvement activities including:

- Students showed classmates how they solved specific problems.
- Students showed how they solved a problem in two different ways and explained how both ways would give the same correct answer.

- Students have math journals filled with examples of how they solved problems. Examples of this kind of writing were also posted on walls.
- Students used math vocabulary in their explanations.
- Math and other vocabulary lists were posted in classrooms on word walls.
- Teachers modeled metacognitive approaches to answering questions.
- Students, including children in first grade, were observed reading independently and writing about what they read.
- Lesson objectives were articulated by teachers and were posted in classrooms.
- Teachers' plan books were detailed and focused on student learning objectives.

In the Department of Education staff survey, teachers were asked what they are expected to do, according to the school's improvement plan, to improve student performance. One teacher's response stated it succinctly and demonstrates the plan's clarity:

Build problem solving skills including problems with ...multiple steps. Build writing skills and students' vocabulary and topic development. Strengthen reading comprehension across all genres.

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

Yes. The ILT, which consists of nine teachers, the principal, assistant principal, literacy coach, and LAB cluster coordinator, had primary responsibility for the development of the plan. This group meets every other Monday. Minutes are kept and available to all teachers. Teachers had an opportunity to view the plan in process during professional development and grade level meetings. Grade level teams analyzed MCAS data and looked at student responses to questions. It was a whole school process that looked for causes for poor student performance and delineated plans and strategies for improvement that included benchmarks married to instructional priorities, timelines and persons responsible. While the main impetus for change may frequently originate with the ILT, the Panel Review Team heard from many teachers that the grade level meetings provided a productive source for the content of the final plan.

The Superintendent claimed that this plan represents an "exemplar" for the district. The school's structure supports successful implementation. Weekly grade level team meetings provide opportunities for looking at student work and planning for curriculum implementation and Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL) sessions. At these meetings, representatives from the ILT report on whole school initiatives and concerns. Communication between the ILT, MLT and grade level teams is a back and forth open process that allows for sharing among teachers in the rollout of the plan and its implementation.

The Panel Review Team, however, did note that the Leadership Report and the staff identified professional development needs that were not followed through in the WSIP and implementation to date. These needs include strategies for diverse learners including LEP students, alternative strategies for students with disabilities, and additional coaching in math.

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

Yes. The Panel Review Team determined that the school's prospects for effective implementation of the School Improvement Plan are facilitated through strong leadership, faculty support, and district oversight. The principal is a strong instructional and organizational leader who commands utmost respect from the school. She accepts input from the school's Instructional Leadership and School-Based Management Teams as well as classroom teachers. These groups have helped clarify the school's learning priorities and have created the roadmap to reach the proposed goals.

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

Yes. The school has a capable principal who is a knowledgeable and effective instructional leader with a clear focus on putting children first. A number of structures are in place to assist with leadership, management and communication functions including the instructional leadership team, grade level teams, a math leadership team (MLT) to work toward full implementation of *Investigations*; and a school-based management team (SBT), which is the school site council that meets monthly. This latter group actively participates in programmatic, budget and hiring decisions subject to school and district constraints. The school has been structured into five K-5 families (each with the name of a planet) and located in distinct clusters in the building. Students remain in the same family throughout their years at Marshall. The school's assistant principals are each in charge of one or two K-5 families, and perform a number of administrative and supervisory responsibilities.

The principal is pro-actively monitoring the *Investigations* program to ensure implementation. She participates, along with teachers, in all professional development, sits in on some of their grade level meetings, inspects plan books and, according to teachers, establishes non-negotiable expectations for their performance. She has mandated peer observation (CCL) of at least one lesson each year in math and ELA. She has been designated as a cluster leader for the district to mentor other principals and is considered by the superintendent to be one of Boston's outstanding principals. In one focus group, the principal was acknowledged as one of the "strongest administrators in the city."

Now that the plan has been completed, the ILT is involved in all aspects of school governance, has non-evaluative monitoring responsibility and reviews children's notebooks. Members meet in their grade level teams to discuss student work and provide feedback to teachers and act as mentors to provide curriculum support. ILT members also participate in the CCL process. The ILT initiated the production of the *Tool Kit*, which, together with the Implementation Benchmarks document recently developed as an appendix to the WSIP, will provide a monitoring tool to gauge progress in implementation of the required improvement strategies.

Grade level teams meet every Wednesday for 90 minutes to examine student work, develop pacing charts, and share and review classroom literature and math units. Agendas for the grade level teams may be determined by the ILT, by the administration or by the group itself depending on what needs to be accomplished. Each grade level team has a representative on the ILT and the MLT who bring relevant information to the table. This process helps to ensure standardization of the curriculum in math and ELA. Each SPED resource room teacher works with one grade level and meets with grade level teams. Families, however, only break into groups about four times a year during school wide professional development, which may limit opportunities for vertical articulation of the curriculum, despite the fact that test data has, for the past two years, been broken down by family according to the principal.

The principal has modified schedules to enable teams to meet and have effective common planning time and classes to have more instructional time in mathematics. She is aware of the school's math needs and plans to eliminate one assistant principal to add two half-time in-house math coaches next year.

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

Yes. Teachers agreed in the staff survey, interviews and focus groups that the school's goals in ELA and math are appropriate and necessary. The team observed fourteen teachers and interviewed them individually; in addition to the ILT, MLT and SBT, over 30 teachers were interviewed in focus groups. The evidence was overwhelming that the staff has embraced the planned improvement efforts. Teachers participated in the development of the plan from analysis of data to designation of root causes and development of strategies to address them. They agree that a critical focus of the plan is to build math and ELA vocabulary. From observation and interview, teachers appear comfortable with the *Readers' and Writers' Workshops*, and despite the difficulty of implementing *TERC Investigations*, are confident that it will yield the results they are looking for.

Specific learning objectives for each lesson are required. The team saw these objectives posted in classrooms and heard them reiterated during lessons. Teachers' plan books were visible, complete and up-to-date. In classrooms there were no discipline problems observed; students worked quietly and with engagement. In one first grade classroom children easily used words like "equation" and were able to define and give examples of compound words. Third grade students were observed learning about figurative language including similes and metaphors. Use of graphic organizers such as a Venn diagram was observed. One fifth grader was seen reading *Huckleberry Finn*. Student work assignments displayed in classrooms were standards based. Examples included personal narratives, persuasive essays, and narratives about the conversion of fractions to decimals and percents.

In an interview with 25 students from grades four and five, they indicated that teachers try to help them; that they are practicing how to take tests and reported regular practice using past MCAS questions; and that they are reading books that they are enjoying. When queried on what they were writing in language arts, these students mentioned personal narratives, fictional stories,

cinquains and persuasive essays. When asked to describe what a persuasive essay was, one student did so quite articulately.

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

In general the school is receiving adequate guidance from the district leadership although fiscal support is not ideal. For example, the school does not have sufficient funds to provide both a computer lab and a school library. Some teachers reported that they need additional books and the computers in the classrooms are not up-to-date. The school had to give up an art teacher in order to expand library services. However, class size is reasonable and in some cases is less than the 22-25 maximum allowed. The Superintendent expressed his strong support for the Principal and his belief that the school can improve. He was knowledgeable about the school's situation and told the team that he had supervised the Principal directly for two years previously. The Deputy Superintendent in charge of the cluster for the John Marshall Elementary School approved the school's WSIP.

As indicated above, there are a number of district programs housed at the school that provide a challenge to staff, such as the language cluster, the LAB cluster, and the ELL program that provides services to 120 students who are at step zero in English language acquisition. In addition, approximately ten third grade students leave each year for the advanced work program. The Panel Review Team could not determine the effect of these populations on whole school achievement or upon subgroups. This may also raise a question about equity or adequacy of district support for resources needed to enable this diverse student body to attain proficiency.

The district offered training in data analysis and root causes as part of the development of the WSIP and provided a consultant from the Harvard School of Education to provide training for the principals. In addition, a Harvard intern was assigned to the John Marshall Elementary School and in return the principal and two other members of the ILT were able to take a graduate class on data analysis at Harvard.

Two years ago, the district mandated the introduction of the math TERC *Investigations* program but was not able to provide sufficient math coaching for teachers to implement the program. Three of six teachers in grade four are new and lack training in TERC, yet the coach comes only twice a month to help them. According to the Superintendent, the district has been unable to locate trained math specialists to hire for coaching positions. There appears to be sufficient coaching available for implementation of *Readers' and Writers' Workshops*.

The district has provided a math vocabulary list by unit, in addition to the pacing guide. This year the district has begun working on the alignment of the formative assessments with the curriculum and MCAS. The district's *MyBPS* website offers a variety of supports for teachers to download, including strategies and curriculum guides. The Superintendent told the team that he expected the formative assessments to be posted on the website as well. The school is also a pilot site for the Boston Plan for Excellence formative assessment development.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Panel Review Team concluded that the John Marshall Elementary School has a sound school improvement plan for improving student achievement. The school has analyzed and identified student instructional needs and is implementing strategies designed to move students forward. Conditions appear to be in place at the school to support successful implementation of the plan. All stakeholders have a common understanding of the plan and its strategies and share a focused vision. The staff, operating under the leadership of a strong, respected principal who is valued by district leadership, is cohesive, committed and determined to succeed.

Conditions that may provide stumbling blocks along the way result from a lack of district provided resources, previously identified, such as deficits in available math coaches or funds to provide a full complement of services like a computer lab and a school library. The number of relatively new teachers in the building (14), teachers working outside their areas of certification, chronically absent students, the fact that after school professional development cannot be mandated above the contractual 30 hours, and lack of parental involvement through a PTA or PTO were also noted by the Team as potential obstacles to success.

## **APPENDIX A Team Members**

**Nick Feldman, Panel Chairperson**, is a consultant for SchoolWorks.

**Zita Samuels, Panel Co-Chair**, is a professional grant writer and evaluator and a consultant for SchoolWorks

**Denise Delorey, PHD, Panel Coordinator**, Massachusetts Department of Education, Office of Accountability and Targeted Assistance.

**Dr. Kenneth Cooper** has been principal of the Doyon Memorial School, Ipswich Public Schools, for the past seventeen years.

**Susan Cote** is assistant superintendent/Title I director in the Swansea Public Schools.

**Joanne Garska** is an evaluation team leader at the Boland School, Springfield Public Schools.

**Susan Nutting** is principal of the Thomas Nash Primary School, Weymouth 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 judgments 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& F	Panelist G
Focus Group	Focus Group	Focus Group	Focus Group	Focus Group	Interview

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

	Panelist A	Panelist B	Panelist C	Panelist D	Panelist E	Panelist F	Panelist G
9-10 a.m.	Observe teacher 1 and teacher 2	Observe teacher 3 and teacher 4	Observe teacher 5 and teacher 6	Observe teacher 7 and teacher 8	Observe teacher 9 and teacher 10	Observe teacher 11 and teacher 12	Observe teacher 13 and teacher 14
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	Interview teacher 11 and teacher 12 individually	Interview teacher 13 and teacher 14 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	Panelists F & G
1:00-1:30	Interviews or Focus Groups	Interviews or Focus Groups	Interviews or Focus Groups	Interviews or Focus Groups	Interviews or Focus Groups	Prepare report
1:30-2:00	Interviews or Focus Groups	Interviews or Focus Groups	Interviews or Focus Groups	Interviews or Focus Groups	Interviews or Focus Groups	

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