

## **School Panel Review Report William Monroe Trotter 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. The William Monroe Trotter Elementary School met this criterion was one of sixteen schools selected for panel review in winter 2004. The panel review was conducted on Feb. 9-10, 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 Trotter 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.

### **William Monroe Trotter Elementary School Profile**

#### ***Enrollment***

The Trotter School is one of 83 elementary schools in Boston. The school serves students in pre-kindergarten through grade 5. Preliminary enrollment figures indicate 563 students attending the school this year—consistent with previous years' enrollment. Between 2001 and 2004 an average of 85 percent of the total student population was Black. Hispanics constituted 10 percent, and the remaining five percent were Whites and Native Americans.

The percentage of non-native English speakers at the Trotter School fluctuated between two and 13 percent between 2001 and 2004. Fewer than three percent of students have been Limited English Proficient over the last four years. Low-income students have accounted for 68 to 77

percent of the student body over the last four years. In 2003, 18 percent of students enrolled were reported to be receiving special education. The same percentage is enrolled in special education programs this year.

In 2003, the Trotter School's attendance rate fell below the state's 92 percent minimum target to 88.5 percent. That year students were absent on average 7.7 days. Out-of-school suspensions reached 13.4 percent in 2003—more than double the state's 6.1 percent. There were no in-school suspensions reported that year or the previous year. Retentions reached 6.3 percent in 2003.

### ***Staffing***

This year the Trotter School reported having a staff of 46 that includes three administrators, one librarian, three specialists, four teacher aides, two curriculum facilitators, and 35 teachers. Fifty percent of the staff has been at the school for fewer than five years. The certification status of 17 percent of the staff was not reported. All others are certified in the subjects they instruct.

### ***MCAS Overview***

Students at the Trotter School are assessed in English language arts (ELA) in grades 3 and 4, and in mathematics in grade 4. In 2003, the school did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AY) in ELA in the aggregate and for all its qualifying subgroups except Special Education.<sup>1</sup> In mathematics, the school failed to make AYP in the aggregate and for all subgroups. In the last five years, the school has not made AYP in either subject.

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

### **GRADE 3**

#### ***Regular Education***

Since the test was first administered at the grade 3 level, the performance of regular education students has shown no sustained improvements. In 2001, 22 percent of students were proficient; 58 percent performed at the Needs Improvement level; and 20 percent at Warning. In 2002, the proportion of proficient students rose to 53 percent, and those performing at Warning declined by six percentage points to 14 percent. Last year, the percentage of proficient students fell to 18 percent; 64 percent were in need of improvement; and 19 percent at Warning.

#### ***Special Education***

In 2001, 21 percent of special education students performed at the Needs Improvement level while the majority (79%) performed at Warning. In 2002, fewer than 10 students were assessed. In 2003, 60 percent of students were in need of improvement, and 40 percent scored at the Warning level.

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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). In 2003, Special Education, Free Lunch, Black, and Hispanic students qualified for a determination in ELA. In mathematics, all the ELA subgroups save Hispanics qualified for a determination

***Limited English Proficient***

No Limited English Proficient students were enrolled in ELA at the grade 3 level between 2001 and 2003.

**GRADE 4*****Regular Education***

Over the last four years, the performance of grade 4 regular education students in ELA has shown no improvement. In 2000, 11 percent of student of students were proficient. The vast majority (64 percent) scored at the Needs Improvement level, and the remaining 25 percent at Warning. The following 19 percent of students were found proficient and advanced—an eight percentage point increase from the previous year. Forty-eight percent were in need of improvement, and the proportion of those who performed at the Warning level rose to 32 percent. In 2002, 15 percent of students were proficient; 57 percent performed at the Needs Improvement level, and 28 percent at Warning. Student performance in 2003 mirrored that of 2002.

***Special Education***

The performance of special education students in grade 4 in ELA continues to be characterized by high percentages of students performing at the Warning level and nearly none reaching proficiency. In 2000, 18 percent of students performed at the Needs Improvement level, and 82 percent at Warning. The next year all but six percent performed at the Warning level of performance. In 2002, 38 percent of scores were at the Needs Improvement level and 62 percent in Warning. At the last administration of the test, five percent of students were found proficient, 14 percent were in need of improvement, and 82 percent at Warning.

***Limited English Proficient***

No LEP students have enrolled in grade 4 in the last four years.

**Student Performance in Mathematics*****Regular Education***

The performance of regular education students at the Trotter School continues to get worse in mathematics as fewer students are found proficient and increasing numbers are performing at the Warning level. In 2000, 15 percent of grade 4 students were proficient an advanced in mathematics. Thirty-nine percent performed at the Needs Improvement level and 45 percent at Warning. In 2001, the proportion of proficient and advanced students decreased by five percentage points; 43 percent were in need of improvement; and 47 percent performed at Warning. The next year, the percentage of proficient students fell again to three percent, leaving 39 percent of scores at the Needs Improvement level, and 57 percent in Warning. In 2003, two percent of students were found proficient and equal percentages (49) performed at the Needs Improvement and Warning levels.

***Special Education***

In the last two years, special education students have made some modest gains in mathematics; however, large proportions continue to perform at the Warning level and none have been found

proficient. In 2000, nine percent of special education students were in Need of Improvement, while 91 percent scored at the Warning level. The following year, all scores were at the Warning level. In the first year of Cycle II (2002-2003), 14 percent of students performed at the Needs Improvement level and 86 percent at Warning. In 2003, the percentage of those scoring at the Needs Improvement level rose to 18 percent, and those at Warning decreased to 82 percent.

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

No LEP students have enrolled in grade 4 in the last four years.

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

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

Yes. The William Monroe Trotter Elementary School is implementing a Whole School Improvement Plan (WSIP) that is likely to guide increased student achievement. Trotter has formulated student learning objectives based on data analysis, and specified instructional strategies that are expected to facilitate student learning. The WSIP is clear, well-documented, and has been developed through a process that involved all the necessary key players to support its successful implementation.

#### **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. Trotter Elementary School has done a formal examination of student test scores to identify areas of weakness. As a result of these analyses, the school identified “root causes” for gaps in student performance, which serve as the basis for school improvement initiatives. Beyond analyses targeting student learning and instructional strategies, Trotter has further examined areas of weakness central to the organization and structure of the school, which may also have contributed to gaps in student performance.

With the assistance of the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), Math and Literacy Leadership teams, the school technology specialist, and information provided on the “MyBPS” website, Trotter conducted an analysis of student MCAS results to identify areas of weakness (*School Leadership Report*). While MCAS data was the primary informant, the school used other information including: formative data (e.g. DRA, SRI), informal observations (e.g. “Looking At Student Work”), and needs assessments (surveys) that were completed by teachers to further identify and confirm student weaknesses.

Given the results of these analyses, Trotter was able to pinpoint areas in which their students struggled, prioritize areas of greatest need, and identify “root causes” for performance gaps (*School Leadership Report*, superintendent, principal and ILT interviews). The example below demonstrates the process Trotter used to convert data into an analysis of performance gaps, including the reasons for the existing disparities as documented in the WSIP. Examples include:

- **Data:** On the 2002 MCAS math test, only six percent of students were proficient... “in the open response our students averaged a score of 1 or less.” Consistent with these results, “60 percent of our students scored at level one... on open response items,” on the mid-year assessment (*page 5*).
- **Identified Weakness (gap):** “Student performance on the multi step and open response items was particularly low.” Although responses “contained the appropriate mathematical concepts.... students did not display academic stamina” to complete test items correctly (*page 5*).
- **Root Cause (why):**
  - 1) “Students have not been presented with the appropriate forum or opportunity to regularly discuss and analyze mathematical models and representations.”
  - 2) “Sufficient organizational tools and manipulatives have not been made available to students on a regular basis with opportunity for practice within multi step problems” (*page 10*)

The inconsistent and incomplete implementation of the math curriculum (*TERC Investigations*) and to a lesser extent the ELA strategies (*Readers and Writers Workshop*) has also been identified by administration and staff as contributing to student performance gaps. The *School Leadership Report* indicated the “implementation of *TERC Investigations* was problematic due to inconsistency... which affected the momentum and commitment to the initiative.” Faculty at Trotter confirmed these reports, suggesting that curriculum training across cohorts of schools scheduled for implementation by the district had been inconsistent, and total staff “buy in” has been hindered as a result of incomplete training (Interviews with the ILT, math coach, teachers and staff focus groups). These reports were corroborated by teacher surveys, where at least 20 percent of those reporting (n=33) indicated inconsistent implementation of curriculum as one of the “barriers” to improving student performance. The 2003 WSIP identified that only 80 percent of teachers had been consistently trained in the ELA curriculum (workshop models) and 60 percent of classrooms were “fully implementing the *TERC* model,” although some classes were “still in the beginning phases of implementation” (*WSIP, page 8*). The WSIP identified implementation of curricula as an instructional weakness, suggesting this factor has likely contributed to poor student achievement.

Besides identifying variables focused on learning and instructional strategies, Trotter has looked at the factors central to the structure and organization of their program that may have influenced student performance gaps. Although the current principal has been the leader at Trotter for the past two years, previously, it was reported the school had experienced four principals in the last five years. Furthermore, until recently the literacy and math coach positions had been either understaffed or inconsistently staffed. These continuous changes have lead to some “lack of stability” and “discontinuity” (deputy superintendent, principal, teacher interview and focus groups). Further, at least 25 percent of teacher surveys reported lack of consistency or organizational structure as one of the “barriers” to improving student performance.

Although peripheral to curriculum and instructional strategies, Trotter has also identified other areas specific to their demographic population which may influence a learning environment. In an interview, the deputy superintendent suggested this school has “a lot of students in crisis.” A focus group with special educators, various counselors and school administrators noted a number

of students at Trotter have social-emotional problems and “high need families.” The Site Based Management (SBM) team indicated that “parent outreach is challenging.” Results from the teacher survey supported these suggestions, indicating student behavior problems (35%), lack of parental involvement (25%) and student apathy (25%) as issues contributing to low student performance.

Not only has Trotter Elementary School analyzed data pertaining to weaknesses in student achievement, they have considered curriculum implementation, staffing, school structure and potential demographic indicators in their analysis of performance gaps. This analysis is thorough, well-supported and lays the groundwork for implementation of learning objectives and specific strategies that are likely to lead to improved student results.

**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. Based on their analysis of student data, Trotter Elementary School has specified clear student learning and instructional objectives that are tied to areas of identified weakness.

Analysis of formative assessments and MCAS results indicated students at Trotter had difficulty in most key achievement areas. The school prioritized the highest areas of weakness to use as the basis for student learning objectives. This is indicative of improvement goals based on reasons for poor student performance. Further, the use of “priorities” suggests discretion in selecting objectives and lends to the likelihood that they are reasonable and achievable.

The WSIP indicates four priority areas, two in math and two in ELA, which are clearly based on learning and teaching goals. The student objectives are based on identified weaknesses and learning needs, as evidenced in the plan:

- “Strengthen students’ ability to solve multi-step problems, use solid mathematical strategies, communicate ideas mathematically, and display perseverance and stamina to work through frustration” (*WSIP, page 10*).

Instructional goals focus on teaching strategies specific to student learning objectives, which have been designed to address the root causes of poor student performance. This is also evidenced in the WSIP:

- “Facilitate student discussions specific to word problems in which mathematical thinking is explained or communicated” (*WSIP, page 10*).

As reported earlier, Trotter cited lack of parent involvement in their analysis as a factor contributing to low student achievement. It is noteworthy that the WSIP contains an objective specific to eliciting parent involvement in student learning for mathematics.

- “Family centered workshops to support families with the TERC” (*WSIP, page 10*).

While the WSIP is specific in its presentation of improvement objectives for the general population, the plan lacks explicit learning and instructional objectives for special education students, consistent with the plan template provided by the district. This oversight was already

pointed out to the school in a report issued by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) in May 2003, which indicated that the WSIP must contain, “special education data... including goals for increased academic achievement.” The data analyses on which the priorities in the 2003-04 WSIP are based, indicates “a clear achievement gap” for special education students. However, it does not prioritize areas of weakness or indicate goals for these students (*WSIP, page 6*). Nearly 20 percent of the students at Trotter are receiving special education services. In order to reduce performance gaps, it is imperative that future improvement planning include specific learning objectives for special education students.

**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 contains specific instructional strategies which are based on identified achievement gaps and closely matched to student learning objectives. While strategies identified in the WSIP are central to increasing student performance, Trotter has also employed efforts to address weaknesses in curriculum development and daily schedule structure. Collectively, implementation and execution of these strategies are likely to foster increases in student performance.

As documented already in this report, the WSIP contains instructional strategies that address “root cause” weaknesses, all of which are guided by student learning objectives. The teaching strategies described in the plan are clear, manageable and promote use of differentiated instructional techniques.

- “Teachers will incorporate mathematical modeling within the classroom on a daily basis. This includes teacher modeling of process, student modeling and sharing of strategies, and peer feedback for mathematical processes” (*WSIP, page 10*).

Evidence of implementation was seen across grades and curriculums during Panel observations. Specific to instruction, an observation of a first grade Writer’s Workshop demonstrated whole group instruction, small group work and one-to-one teacher student conferencing. Other strategies documented in the WSIP (*page 10*, for example) are word walls, math journals and daily agendas. The Panel saw evidence of at least one of these tactics implemented in each of the 13 classrooms observed during their visit.

Inconsistent and incomplete implementation of the math curriculum (*TERC Investigations*) and ELA curriculum (*Readers and Writers Workshop*) were identified as causal factors for low student achievement. This year, *TERC Investigations* is in its first year of “full” implementation and the workshop models have been almost completely “phased in” (ILT and teacher interviews). The director of instruction suggested that now there are more classrooms administering the full curricula than are not, which had not been the case previously. When asked about the collective staff impression of the math curriculum one teacher said, “There was difficulty buying in, but we love it now that there is full training. And, they see the students using it!” The complete implementation of these curricula is an initiative likely to lead to improved student results.

With consistent leadership in place for the past two years, Trotter has been able to make some scheduling changes to the daily routine. Set schedules now include daily common planning times, weekly grade level meetings and “free periods” for math and literacy specialists during the final time slot of the day, allowing teachers increased time to access the expertise of these teachers. It was reported that these changes have “facilitated congeniality,” “consistency” and “clear expectations” (teacher focus group) and appeared to the Panel to be a shared attitude school wide. Changes in scheduling have seemingly allow teaching staff increased access to specialists whose foci are in the area of instructional priority as well as additional planning across grade levels, both of which have reportedly been important in facilitating the improvement process at a classroom level. This seems especially important since the current organization into “clusters” or “pods” is not based on a clear rationale, but a random distribution of classrooms across grade levels. For example, Pod C contains one first grade, two third grades, two fourth grades, and one fifth grade classroom. Administrators and staff at Trotter alluded to the “inefficiency” of this current organization, but plans to change the structure and discussions of exactly *how* to implement this change, appear unresolved at this time.

Another effective improvement strategy that is in place at Trotter is the Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL), or professional development (PD) model. CCL is the primary form of staff development district-wide for supporting implementation of the *Reader’s and Writer’s Workshops* and *TERC Investigations*. The WSIP contains a clear professional development calendar dedicated to CCL cycles of 8 weeks, usually by grade level, and based on selected topics relevant to implementing TERC and the workshop models (*WSIP, page 18*). The principal indicated CCL cycles were implemented by grade level and “set-up in demonstration form,” which allows teachers to study and inquire about teaching and learning practices within the grade level. These cycles are typically taught by the coaches who demonstrate lessons and provide feedback on instruction as teachers implement new strategies. The literacy coach stated CCL was “a clear focus” at Trotter and faculty school-wide confirmed its use (interviews and focus groups). If implemented effectively and consistently, CCL and other PD activities are likely to contribute to the improvement efforts at Trotter.

Trotter has identified increased parent outreach and involvement as a school-wide goal and possible indicator for increasing student achievement. The Site Based Management (SBM) team, with assistance from Project Service Innovations (PSI), is in the process of developing methods of communicating better with parents, from phone trees to flyers sent home with students. Further, based on their WSIP goal, Trotter conducted a family centered workshops on the *TERC Investigations*, with 50 to 60 parents participating (SBM focus group and teacher interviews). The SBM team further suggested that implementation of this initiative is in its “beginning phases” and that they have “a lot of hope for it.” Parent outreach and involvement based on instructional strategies and student learning may have an effect on some students’ performance.

The WSIP specifies clear improvement strategies and Trotter has instituted a number of professional development efforts focused on curriculum training and implementation. Although the current physical arrangement, or “cluster” structure may be inefficient, changes have been made to the school-day schedule, which appear to have alleviated some of the cluster limitations.

If the school continues to consistently and effectively implement the strategies set forth, it is likely that Trotter will see increases in student achievement.

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

Yes. The written version of the WSIP is based on the template set forth by the district. It focuses on areas of highest priority in ELA and math which are specific enough to guide improvement efforts in these areas. Based on the state and district standards, the plan contains written goals and benchmarks for attaining Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). In addition to the written plan, Trotter has specified additional improvement initiatives, implementation strategies and monitoring processes intended to enhance student achievement.

As evidenced already in this report, the WSIP documents specific student learning objectives based on root cause weaknesses, which are well-supported by clear instructional strategies to guide teaching. The WSIP further contains clear timelines, measurement strategies and identifies persons responsible for executing and overseeing the implementation of objectives that address the identified weaknesses. For example:

- **Timelines:** "Beginning in January, teachers will assign weekly multi-step math problems" (*WSIP, page 11*).
- **Measurement strategies:** Math journal will be the focus of LASW (Looking At Student Work) sessions in December, February, and April; teachers will cite evidence that students are demonstrating perseverance with regard to multi-step math problems" (*WSIP, page 11*)
- **Persons responsible:**
  - 1) "Teachers will be responsible for implementing (this) timeline item" (*WSIP, page 11*).
  - 2) "The principal will be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the instructional strategies (listed)" (*WSIP, page 11*).

A 2004 Addendum to the WSIP includes an elaboration of implementation benchmarks, clearly documenting methods and timelines for collecting information. Examples include:

- "LASW will take place in grade level teams once per month" (*2004 WSIP Addendum*)
- "TMM (Ten Minute Math) is documented and recorded" (*2004 WSIP Addendum*).

The 2004 Addendum also identifies "Evidence of Quality Implementation" based on the strategies set forth, another specific indicator to guide implementation of improvement efforts.

- "Teachers are using TMM routines as specified in the scope and sequence pacing guide" (*2004 WSIP Addendum*).
- "Instruction is highly interactive and includes students sharing and discussing their strategies with each other and the teacher with a focus on mathematical thinking" (*2004 WSIP Addendum*).

Teacher interviews acknowledged consistent and effective use of these evaluative measures and observations of classrooms confirmed their school-wide implementation. Trotter uses a number of different monitoring strategies including: LASW sessions, pacing guides, review of assessment portfolios and math journals (teacher interviews and focus groups). The Panel saw

evidence of at least one of these measurement components being implemented in 11 out of 13 classrooms observed, the exceptions being special education cohorts.

Learning Walks and classroom observations are also scheduled to be conducted throughout the school by the principal, director of instruction, members of the ILT, as well as math and literacy coaches (principal, ILT and teacher interviews) to verify and evaluate implementation of improvement initiatives. It should be noted that the ILT has not been meeting since the October work-to-fairness request by the Boston Teacher's Union; and so has been unable to monitor classroom implementation of the plan. As a result, this work has reportedly been carried on primarily through the grade level teams during this school year (ILT focus group and teacher interviews). The deputy superintendent, principal and school coaches mentioned use of checklists to track implementation of curricula during classroom observation. The Panel was provided with a blank copy of a checklist, but did not see evidence of a completed checklist, indicating use of this evaluative procedure is in a preliminary phase. In interviews and focus groups, teachers indicated significant amounts of "informal" feedback via conversations with administrators and other teaching staff that were "valuable" for monitoring student achievement. Consistent communication and feedback is an important component in monitoring student progress. However, other than these checklists, the Panel saw little documented evidence of this informal monitoring. As Trotter continues to implement its improvement initiatives, formal documentation of observations and dialogues should be considered.

While the school has yet to establish an overarching system of monitoring and tracking all evaluative procedures being used, the written WSIP contains clear and specific enough documentation to sufficiently guide the implementation of planned improvement initiatives.

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

Yes. When asked about the school's improvement plan in her initial interview, the principal stated, "we say it is a school-wide plan, because each year we are doing better; moving forward as a whole." Themes of teamwork and ownership of the improvement initiatives were heard throughout the day at Trotter, indicating to the Panel that the WSIP was developed through a process that is likely to support its successful implementation.

The processes used to develop the WSIP were clearly collaborative. While the ILT bears primary responsibility for organizing initiatives around instruction, it is "a coordinated effort" (principal interview). The development of the WSIP contained a sequence of events and involved personnel school-wide. As described by the principal, WSIP development was based on (principal interview unless otherwise specified):

- Input from a teacher needs assessment (survey) to establish their priorities
- Input from school math and literacy coaches, who have expertise in the prioritized improvement areas
- Item analysis of MCAS data by the ILT, Math and Literacy Leadership teams and the school technology specialist (*School Leadership Report*)
- "Report-outs" from cross-grade level discussions

- Feedback based on grade-level representatives
- A school-wide survey specific to professional development needs and areas of priority

The development of the improvement plan was also supported by district personnel who completed a review of the WSIP Trotter developed and provided feedback to the school on areas in need of revision. Once the ILT had constructed the final version of the WSIP, it was made available to faculty at grade level meetings, whole school staff meetings and on-line (ILT and teacher interviews).

As a result of the processes used to develop and disseminate the plan, knowledge and agreed upon understanding of the established weaknesses and necessary improvement initiatives was substantiated throughout the school. One teacher stated “we (teachers) were concerned, so they (ILT) made sure certain things were addressed; we are all very comfortable with the result.” A teacher focus group indicated that the development and implementation of the plan “helped (staff) to focus in on things that needed to be done to guide learning.” Other teacher comments included, “the vision is clear to all” and “everyone is working together more.” Teacher survey results further corroborated these comments, with 85 percent of respondents indicating they knew what the WSIP expected them to do to increase student achievement. Furthermore, 70 percent of those surveyed “Strongly Agreed” or “Agreed” that they were well-informed about the initiatives that were undertaken by the school to improve student performance .

The WSIP was developed through a collaborative process, which has resulted in a feeling of ownership of the plan across the entire Trotter community. Although in its initial phases of implementation, administrators and staff evidenced a team oriented approach to improvement strategies as well as a clear vision, understanding of and support for the plan’s intent. If this perseverance continues through the ongoing development and implementation of the WSIP at Trotter, the process currently being used is likely to support successful execution and promote necessary improvements.

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

Yes, the conditions are in place at Trotter Elementary School to foster successful implementation of the improvement initiatives. After several leadership changes the past few years and limited personnel in other management positions, the school currently has sufficient staffing and support to facilitate and implement necessary structural changes and instruction-based strategies. The district has provided the necessary assistance to guide Trotter in the development and implementation of their improvement initiatives. Also, the faculty clearly supports the planned improvement efforts. However, in order to see necessary reductions in performance gaps, it is the judgment of the Panel that these conditions *must* remain in place and future planning *must* continue to focus on enhancing current improvement goals and initiatives.

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

Yes. Because many of the leadership positions at Trotter were instituted just this year, some in the past month, it was difficult for the Panel to come to a finite conclusion on this question. However, the infrastructure is in place and the initial steps have been taken which lend optimism that Trotter is moving toward sound management. Based on teacher interviews and focus groups, collective impressions of leadership at Trotter were at the least adequate and efficient.

The leadership team at Trotter consists of a principal who also oversees instruction at the lower grade levels (K-2); two assistant principals (AP), one in charge of discipline and the other who serves as the director of instruction primarily at the upper grade levels (3-5); and a LAB cluster coordinator for special education. The school also has two part-time math coaches and one literacy coach who provide support to teaching staff as they implement curriculum changes and instructional strategies outlined in the WSIP. The principal is in her third year at Trotter. The AP for discipline is in her first year in this position and the director of instruction is new to the school this year. Although math coaches have been present at Trotter throughout the school year, the two persons currently in place have serviced this school for only a month.

Teacher survey results indicate that 18 percent “Strongly Agree” and 45 percent of the instructional staff “Agree” that the principal provides effective leadership to guide and support staff efforts to improve student performance. However, 24 percent responded they were “Unsure.” When the Panel asked about leadership at the school, on several occasions, responses were met with hesitation. Such hesitations were followed up with impartial replies by teaching staff suggesting “there is more consistency. Now I know what’s to be expected” (teacher focus group). The school has “been through changes but now it’s stabilizing” (teacher interview). On the other hand, the Panel heard clear support for the principal in some instances. She has “100% vision for the school... she always says yes to PD and pushes us to visit other teachers who are exemplary.” The principal further received collective support for her work establishing outreach programs at Trotter, including volunteers at lunch, organizations that support student learning throughout the day, as well as after school programs (teacher, administrative and SBM focus groups).

Most faculty indicated support for instructional management throughout the school, seemingly facilitated by the director of instruction who “keeps teams on track,” “arranges meetings”, and “keeps us (teachers) accountable.” The math and literacy coaches are available to the school several times a month. They focus on priority areas of instruction in the WSIP and work closely with staff via co-teaching, demonstrations, workshops, and providing other support where necessary (principal interview). The ILT is reportedly the instructional “link” for teachers. Any instructional or curriculum concerns are raised at grade level meetings and presented to the ILT. Support for the leadership of this team was clear. “The ILT is a dynamic team. They take the priorities set forth in the WSIP and tailor the plan to meet student needs” (staff focus group).

Lines of communication at Trotter appear to be channeled. As mentioned above, teachers discuss concerns at grade level team meetings and present issues at “faculty senate” or to the respective team: Instruction and curriculum based concerns to the ILT and staffing or budget matters to the SBM team. The principal reported regular meetings with the math and literacy coaches, the deputy superintendent, and efforts to have daily “in-house” administrative meetings.

As the leader of the school, the principal appears to provide and facilitate a variety of communication channels which appears to be an effective management tactic.

In summary, Trotter seems to be building a system of “distributive” leadership, with the principal spearheading these efforts. While faculty support was hesitant in some instances, this seems inevitable given the number of leadership changes that have recently occurred at the school. One teacher stated, “We never had a DI... and it was never brought up how long she will be here.” It is difficult to build an effective leadership system without consistency, respect and support, all which take time to mature. It is the judgment of the Panel that the elements for a sound infrastructure appears to be in place at Trotter, which will likely guide improvement initiatives. However, all of these conditions *must* remain in place to ensure the likelihood that increases in student performance will occur and persist.

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

Yes, there is evidence that the school’s faculty supports the improvement initiatives at Trotter. The development of the WSIP and the current focus on improvement initiatives has further helped to unite and rejuvenate the faculty.

Many of the themes discussed earlier in this report (see Key Question 1D) describe the attitude and commitment of faculty at Trotter toward the improvement process as well as their understanding of the initiatives that need to be implemented in order to increase student performance. Stability in leadership and the development of the improvement plan seem to be key factors that have contributed to the faculty’s overwhelming support. “The plan has helped to focus us (teachers)... workshops and training have rejuvenated commitment to teaching with new methodology” (teacher interviews).

While the length of time it took to implement the current curricula (TERC *Investigations* and the workshop models) seemed to hinder effectiveness and teacher buy-in in past years, this no longer appears to be the case. Teacher survey results report that 70 percent of the instructional staff “Strongly Agree” or Agree” that the curriculum implemented in the school is effective and appropriate. Now that curricula have been fully implemented and there is complete training, staff indicated they now “feel confident” and it seems that “reading levels are higher” (teacher interviews). When asked about the TERC *Investigations*, another teacher stated “everyone has bought into it.” A member of the ILT suggested, “The academics in the plan are great. They have been nailed; they are not clouding my teaching.” Implementation of the curricula was further corroborated by the class visits, citing application in 12 out of the 13 classrooms observed. Not only does this suggest belief in the improvement strategies and active engagement in their implementation, but a likelihood that student performance will increase.

Beyond commitment to the improvement initiatives and the curricula, faculty dedication to student achievement as well as the school community at Trotter was substantiated on several different levels. The deputy superintendent showed her support for the faculty, indicating “teachers (at Trotter) are beginning to truly work as a team” (interview). While the principal cited the primary school goal is for MCAS scores to meet criteria, she suggested the general

school-wide mentality is to “give students an adequate opportunity to move forward.” In other interviews, teachers revealed their continued dedication to the improvement initiatives, stating “We are doing the best we can and know what needs to be done.” Further, loyalty to the students and school community is a dominant feature at the school: “No one leaves Trotter- the staff is committed” (teacher interview).

Not only does the faculty at Trotter support the improvement initiatives, there is a genuine belief in the school community and the likelihood of increased student performance as a result. With continued support and stability in leadership, it seems the faculty at this school will remain dedicated, even as student needs and improvement efforts shift.

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

Yes. The supports offered by the Boston Public School District (BPS) have adequately guided the improvement efforts and needs of Trotter Elementary School. The WSIP was formulated with district supervision and the school has been allotted appropriate and sufficient personnel to implement the necessary improvements initiatives. However, these conditions *must* remain in place in order to achieve necessary reductions in performance gaps at Trotter.

The template for the WSIP was provided by the district, setting the groundwork for the school improvement plan. While much of the plan’s content development is the result of collaborative efforts by teachers and administrators at Trotter, the district provided feedback during the revision process to ensure that objectives were learning based and instructional strategies focused on methodologies that would elicit change (deputy superintendent interview). Other standards set forth by the district that must be contained in the WSIP in order to receive “approval” include: disaggregated data that show clear areas of strength and weakness, priorities that are based on root causes, and an overarching development strategy for implementation of the stated improvement initiatives. District guidance appears to have had significant influence on the WSIP at Trotter, contributing to the strength of the WSIP and the improvement initiatives school-wide.

Both the principal and faculty report that district level support has been sufficient. In the *School Leadership Report*, the principal cites “adequate support and guidance” from math and ELA program directors, the school support specialist and the deputy superintendent. Teacher survey results indicate that district level support was available and adequate in terms of curriculum guidance and implementation (58%), assessment (52%), and professional development (52%).

In addition to guidance on the WSIP, the district has allocated increased personnel to support instruction at Trotter. The director of instruction and the addition of a second math coach have seemingly been instrumental in implementing improvement efforts. Further, the increase in leadership positions at Trotter has likely enabled the necessary shifts in the school day schedule, which appear central to the increased morale school wide. Allocation of additional staffing at the school indicates district awareness of the needs at Trotter. Increased personnel have also allowed Trotter to institute the CCL model. Reports suggest that it has been an effective tool for

guiding curriculum implementation instructional strategies, another indicator that the district has supplied adequate guidance at the school.

The conditions set forth by the district have clearly been influential in guiding improvement efforts and developing the WSIP at Trotter Elementary School. However, the school remains in the initial phase of implementing improvement initiatives and stability of leadership is important. District level support, both in the form of guidance *and* human resources *must* remain intact in order to foster the necessary improvements in student performance. It is the judgment of the Panel that failure to maintain these conditions could be detrimental to the improvement efforts at Trotter.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Trotter Elementary School has developed a school improvement plan that is based on an analysis of root cause weaknesses, matched learning objectives and instructional strategies, which is likely to result in increased student achievement. Not only is this plan likely to guide improvement initiatives in its written form, but the understanding of the plan school-wide and faculty support for the intended efforts enhances the likelihood that Trotter will see reductions in performance gaps. Changes to the organizational structure of the school have been well received, adding consistency, stability and increased leadership, which have been seemingly influential in establishing and supporting the improvement initiatives. The conditions are *currently* in place at Trotter and have clearly supported the initial improvement efforts. However, it is the judgment of the Panel that in order to continue to foster improved student achievement and elicit necessary reductions in performance gaps, these conditions *must* remain in place, both at the school and district level.

**APPENDIX A  
Team Members**

**Megan Tupa**, Panel Chairperson, SchoolWorks, Beverly, MA

**Denise Delorey**, Ph. D., Panel Coordinator, Department of Education, Malden, MA

**Rose Marie DiResta**, Principal, Riverside School, Danvers, MA

**Denise Messina**, Supervisor, Parent Information Center, Springfield Public School District

**Earl Metzler**, Principal, Sterling Middle School, Quincy, MA

## 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.
- 12:00—2:00 p.m.* **Team meeting # 1:** team meets for the first time to discuss each panelist’s individual analysis; team forms preliminary judgements on key questions.
- 2:00—3:00 p.m.* Panelists meet with the district Superintendent (and Assistant Superintendent, if appropriate).
- 3:30—4:30 p.m.* Panelists meet with Principal (and one other school-based individual, if appropriate).
- 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.

### Day 2

#### All activities take place in the school

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

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

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

	Panelist A	Panelist B	Panelist C	Panelist D	Panelist E
9-10 a.m.	Observe 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
10-11 a.m.	Interview teacher 1 and teacher 2 individually	Interview teacher 3 and teacher 4 individually	Interview teacher 5 and teacher 6 individually	Interview teacher 7 and teacher 8 individually	Interview teacher 9 and teacher 10 individually

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

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

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

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

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

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