

School Panel Review Report White Street School Springfield, MA

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 not at a level that reaches the school's Adequate Yearly Progress targets in English language arts or mathematics or both. The White Street School met these criteria and was one of sixteen schools selected for panel review in winter, 2004. The panel review was conducted on Feb. 23-24, 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 the White Street 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.

White Street School Profile

Student Performance in English Language Arts

GRADE 3

Regular Education

In the last three years, regular education students in grade 3 have shown significant improvement in their ELA performance. In 2001, 22 percent of those assessed scored in the Proficient category, 70 percent performed at the Needs Improvement level, and eight percent at Warning. The following year, the proportion of third grade, regular education students in the Proficient

category rose to 40 percent, while those in need of improvement fell to 51 percent; nine percent scored in the Warning category. In 2003, 51 percent of students performed at the Proficient level. Forty-five percent of students scored at the Needs Improvement level, and four percent at Warning.

Special Education

In 2001, the performance of special education students in ELA was evenly divided between the Needs Improvement and the Warning categories. In 2002, fewer than 10 students were assessed, as a result no data is available for them. In 2003, eight percent of students were Proficient, 67 percent performed at the Needs Improvement level, and 25 percent at Warning.

Limited English Proficient

In 2001, 53 percent of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students were Proficient in ELA, and the remaining 47 percent performed at the Needs Improvement level. In 2002, fewer than 10 LEP students were assessed. Last year, there were no Proficient LEP students; 77 percent performed at the Needs Improvement level, and 23 percent at Warning.

GRADE 4

Regular Education

The performance of regular education grade 4 students in ELA over the last four years shows no sustained improvement trends. In 2000, 73 percent of students performed at the Needs Improvement level, and 28 percent at Warning. In 2001, 27 percent of students tested were found Proficient and Advanced, 50 percent were in Needs Improvement, and 23 percent scored at Warning. In 2002, the proportion of Proficient students fell to 11 percent. Fifty-three percent performed in the Needs Improvement category, and the proportion of those performing at Warning rose to 35 percent. Last year, 26 percent of students were Proficient and Advanced, 53 percent were in Needs Improvement, and 22 percent were at Warning.

Special Education

Performance patterns of grade 4 special education students in ELA show no marked improvement over the last four years. In 2000, 62 percent of special education students assessed performed at the Needs Improvement level, and the remaining 38 percent at Warning. The following year, 82 percent were in Needs Improvement and 18 percent scored at Warning. In 2002, 14 percent of students scored in the Proficient category. The percentage of those performing at the Needs Improvement level fell to 57 percent while Warning rose to 29 percent. Last year, the proportion of Proficient students decreased to eight percent, 54 percent were in Needs Improvement, and 38 percent of scored were in the Warning category.

Limited English Proficient

Prior to 2003, fewer than 10 LEP students were assessed in ELA each year at the White Street Elementary School. In 2003, all but eight percent of students performed in the Warning category. None were Proficient.

Student Performance in Mathematics

Regular Education

At the grade 4 level, the performance of regular education students in mathematics continues to show no improvement trends. In 2000, three percent of students were Proficient, 53 percent performed at the Needs Improvement level, and 45 percent at Warning. In 2001, 16 percent were Proficient and Advanced, 43 percent in Needs Improvement; and 41 percent scored at the Warning level. The following year, the proportion of Proficient and Advanced students decreased to four percent. Thirty-seven percent of regular education students were in Needs Improvement, and 60 percent performed at the Warning level. In 2003, four percent of students were Proficient, 60 percent of scores were in the Needs Improvement category, and 36 percent in Warning.

Special Education

The performance of special education students at the White Street School fluctuated in mathematics over the last four years. However, there is no clear indication of sustained improvement. In 2000, 38 percent of students scored in the Needs Improvement category and the remaining 62 percent performed at the Warning level. The next year, 18 percent of students were found Proficient, and 73 percent performed at the Needs Improvement. The proportion of those performing at the Warning level fell to nine percent. In 2002, the proportion of those students who scored in the Proficient category rose to 33 percent. Forty-seven percent of students were in Needs Improvement and the Warning percentage more than doubled to 20 percent. In 2003, 14 percent of students performed at the Proficient level, 36 percent at the Needs Improvement level, and the percentage of those performing at Warning increased by 30 percentage points to 50 percent.

Limited English Proficient

Prior to 2003, fewer than 10 LEP students had been assessed in mathematics at this school. In 2003, all but 15 percent of students performed at the Warning level. None were Proficient.

PANEL RESPONSES TO THE KEY QUESTIONS

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

No. As an outgrowth of its review of White Street School documents and meetings with district and school personnel, the Panel Review Team concluded that while many positive elements of the School Improvement Plan are emerging, it presently lacks the specificity and comprehensiveness to make it a sound roadmap for improving student achievement. The plan was not constructed on a complete analysis of available data and while it notes causes for poor student performance, it does not identify the core skills and knowledge deficits that explain the performance gaps.

It is pivotal to many aspects of this report to note that the school's regular principal was injured early in the school year and the school was administered by the head teacher until late October. The district reassigned one of its assistant principals as the school's interim principal to assume responsibility at that time and she will complete the year in this position. The plan reviewed was crafted under the guidance of the principal of record but the revision process, inherent to the Springfield Public Schools, has been fully coordinated by the acting principal and an expanding group of teachers. Although not required to do so, the regular principal participated in a Team interview describing the developmental process of the plan. The continuity of information that would normally accrue to a visitation team was impacted to some degree by this situation.

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

No. The Team found minimal evidence to suggest that in formulating the School Improvement Plan (SIP) the school used a comprehensive data analysis approach to accurately assess student learning, either in its examination of MCAS results or the evaluation of program information or instructional practice.

The district began work last January for schools in need of improvement to align their SIPs with the Department of Education's Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) process. The White Street School plan was written last summer by the principal, two teachers for ELA and three in math with consultation from district planning leaders. The causal determinants of student knowledge and skill needs as detailed in the school's plan are generally limited in scope, primarily focused on lack of exposure to, practice in or insufficient instruction associated with the identified student learning objectives. For example, the referenced MCAS gaps in ELA concentrate on the literature strand and delineate four skills to be strengthened as learning experiences are adopted and instructional changes made. However, the predominant rationale for students' lack of knowledge/skills is the inadequate coverage of those competencies (revisiting text, interpreting different genre, making real world connections and utilizing grade level vocabulary) the school aims to address. In grades K-3, the primary assessment tool is the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). As with the evaluation of MCAS, the plan's repeated explanation for student knowledge and skills gaps is the insufficient attention to comprehension skills, phonemic awareness and fluency in varied genres. While the stated gaps in

instruction are likely valid contributors to student learning weaknesses, they are too broad to fully explain the reasons students may be experiencing learning difficulties.

The Team viewed the array of district curriculum documents provided to all teachers as a strong resource, supplying clear guidance in content, structure, pacing and often methodology. While staff interviews generally revealed a sound grasp of the many available curriculum materials and their appropriate use in the scheme of instruction, the Panel was not convinced that past oversight of instruction and evaluation of programs and initiatives capitalized on the richness and scope of the curriculum documents generated by the district in the last few years. In her interview, the principal of record indicted that teachers often “did their own thing” and that the monitoring of the implementation of curriculum was difficult. The Panel heard from the superintendent and the district supervisor of elementary principals that union resistance represented a persistent issue for the principal and often undermined efforts to move forward with change initiatives.

Both principals acknowledged that the school was in a preliminary phase of in-depth data analysis. This observation was reinforced as the Panel heard few references from teachers that correlated the school’s instructional priorities to specific standards that surfaced as MCAS problems. The file of work assembled by the math “PIM” team did not contain general trends in item analysis over time, nor did the Panel see a school-based evaluation that examined the performance of students on MCAS by question type. When asked about the soft data such as daily student classroom work that would contribute to a causal assessment of student needs, most stakeholders did not cite particular instructional strategies that were ineffective. There was minimal reference to district writing, math and reading tests administered three times a year or the assessments that accompany curriculum materials as tools to evaluate student performance. The Team noted that although student performance information is readily accessible from the district in a variety of formats for specific purposes, it appeared that the school did not take full advantage of these resources in assessing student performance.

In the teacher survey and during discussions with school personnel, there was consistent recognition of language difficulties as a critical challenge for many of the school’s students, 55 percent of whom are Hispanic. The SIP uniformly targets *all* students in its improvement goals and activities. It did not present any disaggregated test data or discuss specific instructional needs for its ELL population, despite a 2003 MCAS warning rate of 92 percent in ELA and 85 percent in math, both figures exceeding the district’s performance profile for this population. One class on each grade is designated as the Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) group and has the benefit of a second full-time bilingual teacher. However, the school-wide practice of organizing for instruction on the basis of homogeneous grouping raised numerous review panel concerns about a cross-section of key issues as they relate to the improvement of student achievement. Student placements are determined by DRA scores for grades 1-4 and MCAS for grade five.

The leadership report and teacher narrative surveys highlighted student discipline problems as a major barrier to effective instruction. Teachers identified behavior management and classroom organization as two prominent areas for professional development that would be most beneficial to them as a faculty. During its visits to individual classrooms and common areas of the building

the Team observed a calm and pleasant atmosphere with few classroom disruptions, allowing for a positive instructional flow. In discussions with teachers and with school and district leaders the improved climate was attributed to the growing internalization of the Responsive Classroom, now in its third year, the principal's utilization of Title I funding to create the position of a behavior specialist and the launching of the CARES classroom to accommodate the immediate and short-term *instructional* needs of students requiring removal from class to regain self-control.

The White Street School has been awarded the Reading First grant which directly targets improvement in the number of students reading on grade level by the end of the third grade. The assessment component of this program is the Dynamic Indicators of Basic early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). Teachers and school leaders indicated that the assessment process and review of student performance data linked to instruction in Reading First activities provide a highly systematic approach to data analysis. Several Team members examined the documentation of the K-3 fall and winter screening of student fluency skills and agreed that this reflected the kind of thorough and promising collaborative analysis required at the school. The data analysis and ongoing evaluation of program effectiveness connected with the Reading First Plan was not incorporated into the original SIP because the grant was approved after the plan was drafted. However, the work being done under the grant, including the creation of the school assessment team (eight teacher members) should provide a modeled forum for future use of performance data. In the Team's judgment, the same quality of data sources are not utilized in grades four and five.

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

No. Student improvement goals in English-language arts call for increasing the percent of students answering questions correctly (56%-80%) on the literature strand of MCAS over the next two years. The format of the goal is the same for moving students taking the DRA (43%-75%) to, or above grade level through third grade. In mathematics, similar performance goals are framed around the two key initiatives, number sense (41%-57%) and statistics and probability (39%-57%) and challenge expanding percents of students to answer those strands correctly on two successive administrations of MCAS.

During the Team interview with the school's principal of record, the nature and depth of the data analysis process described was vague and incomplete. The Panel saw no documentary analysis of student performance data that would enrich the causal statements for poor student performance. Only two of the five teachers who worked on the SIP with the principal last summer were available for interviews. They informed the Panel member who conducted the interview that the targets were selected because reaching these percents would move students "on the bubble" into the next performance category. While these goals are specific, clear and measurable, the Team could not declare that they were based on thoroughly examined root causes, well grounded in teaching and learning or that they considered key subgroups. Although the district improvement template accounted for the needs, interventions and concrete indicators of progress for all

subgroups in the system, the Team noted that the White Street School plan does not specifically detail instructional objectives for special needs and ELL students.

Because the math performance goals are exclusively based on MCAS results, the absence of other student learning benchmarks in the plan highlights the problem in achieving a progressive and comprehensive grasp of student needs at all grade levels at different points during the year. In the Team's judgment, the goals lack the reliability of those formulated by multiple measures of student performance, including assessment tools based on daily instruction.

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

No. The instructional change objectives enumerated in both the math and ELA sections of the SIP are designed to be part of an explicit link to the root causes of poor student performance, the student learning goals established by those needs and the projected learning experiences that will satisfy the stated goals. Statements of the analysis lack a substantive connection to instructional skills. The two overarching math objectives pinpointed for increased attention were number sense and statistics/probability. Strategies common to both objectives centered on using math language in oral and written form to attack student performance challenges and practicing problem solving techniques to accomplish required tasks. Since both topics have been cornerstone skills in existing curriculum mandates, the plan should supply some detail about how instructional delivery will be different, but it fails to do so.

Examples of instructional change objectives and correlated student learning experiences are for teachers to:

- Include brief daily assessment of student learning to drive instruction.
- Provide opportunities for students to solve open-ended number sense problems.
- Post problem solving strategies as reference guides for students.
- Allocate daily time for students to reflect on math lessons in both oral and written form.
- Create word walls with their students to include math vocabulary on an ongoing basis appropriate to scope and sequence.

The Panel saw the majority of these specified strategies in the plan as process rather than practice-based and did not get to the core of *how* the student learning objectives would be instructionally realized. In interviews and focus groups, teachers generally referred to the main objectives without clearly articulating how the elements of the plan would change instruction.

The impetus to accelerate the district commitment to improved student performance this year is embodied in their chief professional development model, job-embedded coaching. Springfield Public Schools has provided all elementary schools in Need of Improvement with Collaborative Professional Development Teachers (CPDT) in literacy and math to enrich instructional practice by working with teachers in lesson planning- developing key guided questions, establishing clear learning outcomes, helping teachers to reflect on instructional decisions, assessing student achievement and determining lesson effectiveness. Although the math CPDT did not arrive until

November, the Team saw impressive, graphic evidence of valuable work she has already done with staff to strengthen and clarify the analysis and application of school MCAS data. The school has yet to hire a Reading First Coordinator and so the planned responsibilities of the ELA coach have been diverted to running that program. Nevertheless, teachers and administrators praised the work of both coaches and appear to appreciate the potential offered by their professional support.

The Panel was informed by many teachers that the assignment of CPDT positions is a boost to the school change process, one that offers the opportunity to spotlight teaching practice, an overall weakness in the plan. However, Panel members believe that any improvement initiatives would be compromised by the school's present leveled student grouping system. The sharp distinctions one would expect to see in a fully tracked elementary school were evident during classroom observations. Marked differences were apparent in the nature of student engagement, rigor of work, time on task and classroom climate. Many teachers interviewed saw the absence of role models as problematic, and in focus groups, even those with higher functioning classes questioned the viability of this policy. That said, the Review Panel observed many examples of productive teaching and learning situations, ample evidence that the plan is being implemented and instances of effective teaming in both special needs inclusion and bilingual classes. Word walls across content areas were utilized and posted strategies for reading (decoding, summarizing, self-questioning, creating mental images and using context) were successfully incorporated into a number of ELA lessons observed by the review panel.

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

No. While the student performance goals and learning objectives in the White Street School Improvement Plan are clear and specific and along with the instructional change objectives are clearly guiding implementation of the improvement initiatives, at the time of the Review Team visit the White Street School Improvement Plan was still an incomplete document, missing both student/learning performance benchmarks and program evaluation standards. Teachers still did not have the ELA action plan in their possession. This segment of the document lists the activities designed to execute the instructional strategies, required resources, varied timelines and measures of implementation, structured only to check periodic progress for compliance. The existing template for gauging student learning benchmarks has not been started. The interim principal reported to the Team that this process will soon be underway with a group of nine teachers currently working to update the plan. The Panel was not able to determine to what extent the unfinished status of the White Street School plan can be ascribed to the shift in school leadership or whether the district's benchmarking work has not reached the implementation level at the school.

Reports and conversations with school personnel detail a history over the last four years of simultaneous initiatives (particularly in ELA) inaugurated at both the school and district level that had either an overlapping or inconsistent impact on instruction. There is little documentary evidence to demonstrate that the results of these programs were formally assessed. The common message communicated to the Panel from all stakeholders, including the current principal was a

need to stabilize the school's instructional direction. Discussions with teachers and an examination of district curriculum materials in both math and ELA persuaded the Team that the staff is successfully utilizing the District Reading Plan, scope and sequence, Reading First Plan (K-3) and the plethora of resources affiliated with the Harcourt Trophies series. The Panel's meetings with teachers similarly conveyed a confidence that the District Math Plan, Addison-Wesley program and Investigations are all well supported and aligned by the comprehensive district Math Instruction Guide. While these are sound resources and the staff appears to be using them efficiently, the plan will not serve students well without a systemic process to develop student outcomes and to establish the means to generate evidence of quality implementation.

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

Yes. Although initial planning efforts took place with a small nucleus of teachers and the principal, many teachers mentioned that dissemination of progressive work on the plan took place regularly and was discussed during faculty meetings. Discussions with the school's Site Council Decision Making team (SCDM) indicates that they were engaged and informed about the evolution of the plan, and that teacher representatives on the team provided and received feedback from staff. Interviews with the SCDM and a review of their meeting minutes reveal that their authority over some SIP issues extends to budgetary allocation of expenses, application for grants and decisions to purchase computers and educational supplies. The team commended the efforts of the school's principal for keeping them fully apprised of major activities and school needs. They strongly endorsed the leadership of the interim principal for establishing immediate communication with their group.

Several sources of evidence point to growing attention to the plan by the school and district. The primary vehicle for professional development is the weekly, seventy five minute Extended Day provision of the teacher contract. Teachers report and agendas confirm that some aspect of the school's planning procedures occur during this forum and increase staff familiarity with the plan. The district requires all schools to prepare a School Improvement Plan Summary Sheet for ELA and math. These overviews are condensed, user friendly versions of the SIP, listing the essential targeted skills. The chief mechanism to monitor the plan's implementation is the District SIP Implementation Visit (Learning Walks). Classroom observations are conducted by district leaders and the principal to evaluate literacy or math instructional objectives spotlighted for the specific walkthrough. Feedback reports to the school include an analysis of the findings and questions raised for further review. Debriefing sessions are held with the CDPT and principal to develop follow-up strategies. Panel members reading the reports and meeting with district leaders understood the visits to be confined to "process" benchmarks as they relate to the SIP.

Wide-spread confidence and support was articulated in the interim principal's personal and management approach in promoting increased attention to the plan. As an outcome of its discussions with individual teachers and focus groups, an observable tenuousness about the next phases of the school's direction was notable in numerous teacher interviews. The Panel strongly believes that sustained support for the improvement process is largely dependent on the district

making a relatively quick and conclusive decision about the future of the principalship at the school.

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

Yes. Despite the need for an unanticipated leadership change in the third month of school, the implementation of the improvement plan has proceeded smoothly. It brings an expanding base of participation to the next steps of the process, appears to have adequate personnel and material support and an invigorated dialogue has emerged between school and district leadership. The full value of the newly created CPDTs, positions the school to focus on instructional quality. Recent work on the assessment component of Reading First is training some staff to develop skills in close data analysis.

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

Yes. District and school personnel alluded to the current principal's thoughtful and distributive leadership style. Although she has been at the school for only four months, teachers portrayed her as a decisive problem solver who has energized the staff, is purposeful and organized in her work approach, offering significant and frequent feedback.

These observations were affirmed by Panel members. Survey remarks about discipline issues and the negative effect on staff morale and instruction were not apparent during the visit. The Team characterized this as a happy staff whose classroom connections with students and with each other were positive and supportive in an uncontrived manner. All stakeholders reported that if the principal did not have a ready response to a question or concern, it would be provided expeditiously. Staff members claim to have a better understanding of the plan because Extended Day meetings are well organized, substantive and facilitated by the principal or a resource person with a clear, meaningful agenda. The District Support Supervisor for PIM schools indicates that the interim has requested the kind of technical assistance that should enhance people's understanding of data. During the Team interview, the principal indicated that her data review suggested a distinct need to address open response instruction at the school, a finding that did not pervasively surface in the original identification of student needs.

Several important findings were derived from interviews with teachers and key district leaders about past practice. The previously referenced homogeneous student grouping process had taken on a variety of configurations over the years. When teachers returned to work in September it had assumed a new, more complete structure that had not been a subject of discussion last year. The tracking policy itself has little buy-in at the school. Information from the district and school staff describes routine movement of teachers between grades from year-to-year, often involuntarily. The Team heard this from the regular principal and questioned the educational rationale for these personnel relocations.

While the school does not yet have a standard instructional leadership team in place, (not required) the framework for one seems to be developing through various activities. The two CPDT members are generating professional discussion about curriculum implementation and

instruction with all staff. The principal has recruited eight teachers, balanced across grade levels and disciplines to be part of the school improvement effort. The assessment team (7-8 teachers) associated with Reading First is engaged in collegial data analysis, and according to school leaders has the potential to have a positive influence on team -building and strengthen assessment skills. As a separate focus group and in the SCDM, parents articulated support for the school's leaders and teachers.

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

No. Although there is abundant evidence that the teachers are implementing the planned improvement initiatives, a formal and organized process for regular review and assessment of instructional practice has not been fully established. Because the original analysis of data was not thorough enough to uncover the root causes of poor student performance, the remedial strategies do not address the core of instruction and are not clearly student centered initiatives. Staff buy-in is therefore evolving without the depth to drive a robust improvement effort.

During staff interviews the Panel heard observations reflecting a strong familiarity with plan content but only a developing internalization of how the accurate use of data could influence instruction. For example, when asked how the plan has changed instructional practice Team members were told there is "more hands-on work" and "there is a greater emphasis on number sense." The major thrust of the written staff narrative survey asking teachers to identify the main barriers to learning at the school centered on factors such as poor parenting, discipline, language issues, a history of multiple school/district initiatives, class size, inclusion and absence of cooperative planning; many of these references surfaced during interviews. While program and curriculum related antecedents of learning did come up during teacher interviews, responses about the critical issues of instruction and assessment were not prevalent.

Many teachers felt that the students at the school are over-assessed. There are curriculum unit tests, DRA(3X), Dibles,(3X) Stanford, MCAS and district assessments in reading, writing and math three times a year. While the Team acknowledged staff frustration, it was felt that the central issue was the absence of an organized process to manage, interpret and apply the data. The SIP has not attached a student outcome component to its instructional objectives or described how all the available assessment information can create a unified portrait of student achievement. Near the end of the visit the Team learned that the revision work recently completed on the ELA action plan had not yet been distributed to staff. The staff understands, supports and is implementing the elements of the plan that are currently in place but until the significance of instructional strategy and performance benchmarking are incorporated, this remains an unfinished document.

The Team believed that the capacity to address the qualification noted above is exemplified by the CPDT work already started, adequate staffing, cohesive curriculum status and the various resources the district continues to commit to the school. The Panel regarded the continuity of leadership and a broad-based review of student grouping philosophy as dominant issues to be resolved.

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

Yes. The team found broad evidence that the district has provided the support and guidance to enhance improvement initiatives at the White Street School. The superintendent and district leaders seemed well aware of the school's overriding needs. Their selection of the interim principal was an appropriate assignment for the staff at this time. Systemically, they have allocated the funding to provide the school-based coaching model to strengthen instruction and curriculum implementation. There have been five School (Plan) Implementation Visits made this year, covering five-six classrooms per visit. Written feedback and meetings with school personnel are worthwhile monitoring procedures to keep the school on track with stated objectives. Teachers and school leaders referred to the high accessibility, visibility and active engagement of the District Directors of Math and Reading, coaches and their staffs as curriculum efforts and materials are fine-tuned.

Intensive, initial professional development was provided for the CPDTs, and through Learning Walks and sessions with district curriculum staff, this assistance continues. Principals received SIP training and the network of Reading First principals are exposed to some of the extensive professional development work afforded their teachers. Contractually, the district ties the performance evaluation of its principals to student achievement in math and literacy and the building of staff capacity. Classrooms are well staffed, most having two full-time teachers, the pairings designed to meet either special education or bilingual/ ELL needs and mandates. The behavior specialist serves dual roles as the coordinator of the CARES room and as a school-based resource to teachers. Teachers believe that the school schedule time allocations of 90 minutes each for math and literacy blocks are viable and the prescribed guidance of the district Math and Reading Plans and collateral resources provide a sound learning framework.

Professional development in ELL techniques remains an identified and underserved need impacting student learning at the school. Students not assigned to the one bilingual class on every grade are provided language service on a pull-out basis by the school's ESL teacher. Teachers report that they have students with varied language proficiency phases in the same class. There are approximately 70 ESL students in the building. The visitation log of the district ELL Coordinator suggests the need for a second position, greater professional development on the ELL benchmarks, outcomes and guidelines and more coaching on SEI strategies. Some teachers believe that a bilingual counselor would be a key asset for parent outreach and student attendance.

In discussions, several district leaders indicated that they were aware of the grouping practices at the school. The Team was not able to clarify whether the district viewed the student placement issue as problematic and if there had been any dialogue about its influence on student achievement. There was no clear sense of when the district will require schools to include student learning benchmarks as a precondition for approval of the improvement plan. Despite these concerns and questions, the district has provided the necessary guidance and support to facilitate the conditions for a sound improvement process. Realistic opportunities for improved student performance should begin to flourish under the stewardship of an instructional leader

able to enlist staff cooperation and maintain the good faith work that has surfaced over the past few months.

CONCLUSION

The White Street School has developed a framework for change that is vastly improved over previous planning documents. The present plan for improvement however, was not the result of a thorough, well-documented analysis of data or a broadly based school discussion of multiple sources of performance information reflecting the underlying reasons for poor student achievement. Instructional objectives established under the plan describe activities to more adequately cover the curriculum but fail to address the key instructional strategies that will enable those activities to work effectively. The plan does not yet include either benchmarks for evaluating student achievement or a process to monitor the effectiveness of programs at the school.

The Panel believes that the current school infrastructure provides an opportunity for successful implementation of an improvement plan. The district's coaching model has already started the process of working with teachers to examine student performance data more comprehensively. The CPDT design itself is centered on collaborative analysis of classroom instruction, self reflection of practice and how to gear teaching to specific learning needs. Curriculum resources are strong, aligned, understood and being used well. District intervention practices have been effective and acknowledged by staff. All stakeholders described highly competent leadership demonstrated by the interim principal, a view confirmed by the Team through direct interview and a review of a number of documents generated during her tenure.

**APPENDIX A
Team Members**

Jim Neary, Panel Coordinator, Department of Education, Office of Accountability and Targeted Assistance, Malden, MA

Nick Feldman, Panel Chairperson, Consultant for Schoolworks, Beverly, MA.

Megan Tupa, Panel Co-Chair, Consultant for Schoolworks, Beverly, MA.

Marjorie Gerard, Panel Member, Director of Pupil Services, Gateway Regional School District.

William Malloy, Panel Member, Assistant Superintendent, Curriculum and Instruction, Fall River.

Nancy Zamierowski, Panel Member, School Support Specialist, Boston Public Schools.

APPENDIX B UNDER-PERFORMING PANEL REVIEW SCHEDULE

Day 1

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

Day 2

All activities take place in the school

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

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

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

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