

Panel Report
Candidate Compass School Review
Barbieri Elementary School
Framingham Public Schools

INTRODUCTION

The Program

The Commonwealth Compass Schools Program is one part of the Massachusetts School and District Accountability System. The Compass Schools Program recognizes and celebrates improvement in Massachusetts' public schools, and to encourage networking and sharing of ideas, effective practices, and models for success. The program is intended to provide a means for the schools to share their expertise with other schools in the state.

In this Mid-Cycle III year, sixty schools from among the top thirty most improved schools in mathematics in 2003, the thirty most improved schools below state targets in one or both (ELA and mathematics) that made AYP for all reported subgroups in 2003, and/or from among the strong semi-finalist applications from last year were invited to participate. Twenty-eight of the schools chose to apply by submitting completed applications that included written responses to three questions on the initiatives undertaken to improve student performance at the school in the past three or four years. School leaders and staff were asked to focus on those programs and practices that they think have had the most positive impact on their students' performance. Four high schools, five elementary schools, and one kindergarten through eighth grade school were selected as finalists. Ten finalist candidate schools were scheduled for closer review to learn more about their highlighted programs and to determine willingness and capacity to serve in the program. Data and information gathered from the applications review process of these schools will be published in a report this fall.

The Commissioner will designate up to ten schools to serve as 2004 Commonwealth Compass Schools. Compass Schools receive special recognition and a \$10,000 grant to support the participation of their administrators and staff in information sharing and dissemination activities over the next year.

The Report

This report summarizes the findings and analyses of a small team of education professionals during a one-day visit to the Barbieri Elementary School on June 2, 2004. The report will assist the Commissioner in determining which schools from among those visited will be designated to serve as 2004 Commonwealth Compass Schools.

The panel evaluated data and written information on the school's performance and improvement efforts, including the school's two-part Compass School application; and then visited the school to meet with school leaders, staff, parents and students and visit classrooms in order to answer the following two key questions:

1. Is this school using effective improvement initiatives that could be replicated in other similarly profiled schools?
2. Are the conditions in place for this school to serve as a model of effective practices and successful improvement initiatives?

The panel's responses to these two questions frame the report. In the process of answering these questions, the report focuses primarily on the initiatives that the school identified in its application as having had the most positive impact on student performance.

The findings and conclusions presented here are the product of analysis, discussion, and observation, and are based on the evidence made available to the panel before and during their visit. A list of panel members who participated in the school panel review is provided in Appendix A. A detailed schedule of the panel's activities is provided in Appendix B.

School Profile

The Barbieri School is one of 13 schools in Framingham. There are eight elementary schools in the district. A school-wide Title I program serves its 620 students in grades K through 5. Enrollment increased from an average of 545 students per year over the preceding three years to 620 in 2004. Forty-eight percent of the students are Hispanic, (which is nearly triple that of the district rate of 18%) 45% are White, 4% are Black, 2% are Asian and one percent is Native American. Forty-three percent receive free and reduced lunch (FRL), 29% are designated as Limited English Proficient (LEP), and English is not the first language (FLNE) for 48% of the students. Seventeen percent of the student population is serviced by Special Education.

The daily attendance rate has remained steady with an average of 95.2% from 2000 to 2003. This rate is slightly above that of the state's 93.9% rate and that of the district's rate, 94.3. The school reports the average number of days absent per pupil at 8.3 days last year. The retention rate for 2003 was .6% while district levels for similar schools was 1.2%. The out-of-school suspension rate has continually decreased from .9% in 2000 to .2% in 2003. This is below the district rate of 3.8% and well below the state rate of 6.1%. The rate of in-school suspensions, which is lower than both the state and district rates, has fluctuated dipping to .6% and .4% in 2000 and 2002 respectively while increasing slightly to .9% in both 2001 and 2003.

Staffing

The school administration includes one principal, who has been in her current position for three years. There is one administrative intern who has been at the school for a year (it is likely that this individual will become the school's assistant principal in the coming year). There is one full-time guidance counselor, a school psychologist, and a school nurse.

There are 64 teachers and 20 paraprofessionals in the building. There are 13 additional specialized, part time staff members.

Of the 64 faculty members, 37 have been at the school for more than three years. Of the remaining 27 teachers with less than three years of service at Barbieri, 22 have three years or more experience as classroom teachers. Thirty teachers have more than ten years of experience and fifteen have more than 5 years teaching experience.

MCAS Results

The Massachusetts Department of Education 2003 Mid-Cycle AYP Report the school shows an increase in the Composite Proficiency Index (CPI) for ELA. A 2.4 increase for students in the aggregate brought the CPI to 81.6 – six points higher than the state target. The school made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in ELA for all of its subgroups except for Limited English Proficient students who experienced a 6.5 decrease from Cycle II. However, students in Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) category showed an increase of 18.1 in their Composite Proficiency Index for ELA. This raised the CPI for this population to 80.4.

In mathematics, the 2003 Mid-Cycle Report shows the school finishing with an 80.2 CPI for students in the aggregate. This is nearly 20 points higher than the state target of 60.8. Students in every subgroup made AYP. Of particular note are the increases of every subgroup over the school's Cycle II results for the same populations. Hispanic students showed an increase of 15.3; White students increased by a margin of 18.8. Students in the Free and Reduced Lunch category showed an 18.3 improvement and Special Education students increased by a 26.2 margin.

Panel Responses To The Key Questions

KEY QUESTION 1: Is This School Using Effective Improvement Initiatives That Could Be Replicated In Other Similarly Profiled Schools?

Yes. The Panel Review Team unanimously concluded that the Barbieri School has implemented effective improvement initiatives that could be replicated in similarly profiled schools. The Panel saw evidence of a well-constructed Balanced Literacy approach that is in use throughout the school. Members of the Panel were likewise able to verify the school wide implementation of Every Day Math.

Beginning in 1997, the school sought a solution to the problem of lagging student achievement results in ELA. At that time a partnership was forged between Lesley College and the Barbieri School. Through this partnership, the school adopted the Balanced Literacy approach to instruction in ELA. The partnership dissolved in school year 2000 – 2001. However, the administration and staff at Barbieri continued to implement and improve upon the chosen model.

In recent years the Framingham School District shifted to the Every Day Math program for a number of its schools including the Barbieri School. Staff members have attended a number of professional development sessions with representatives of Every Day Math, as well as with district curriculum and school staff members.

The strengths of these programs provided the Panel with more than adequate evidence to arrive at its conclusion. However, as the Panel conducted its review, it became more and more aware of the fact that there were additional and important factors that have led to the successful implementation of the aforementioned programs.

The Panel learned that in support of the school's programs is an all-inclusive communication system that constantly seeks, shares, and analyzes a wide variety of data. This communication in turn allows for processes that the staff uses to identify and address those areas of school operation that are in need of improvement. Embedded within this system, and vital to the success of improvement processes, is the clear sense of ownership and empowerment that exists between and among all school community members. The Barbieri School has experienced a purposeful evolution from an environment that had experienced frustration and under-achievement in student results to a highly functioning organization that is led with competence, is appreciative of its staff, is caring of students and stakeholders, and that is clearly and singularly focused on learning. The Panel concluded that it is the school's effort to share leadership and to infuse in all stakeholders a real sense of worth, coupled with the construction of a self-sustaining communication system, that is responsible for the Barbieri School's successful implementation of its programs which have led to an increase in MCAS scores. In addition, this effort has fostered a school-wide culture that is the foundation for a high degree of teacher satisfaction, an extraordinary level of parental involvement, and its continued forward progress in student achievement.

A. Which improvement initiatives have had the greatest impact on student performance results?

As noted above the Barbieri School has adopted and implemented programs to address the needs of students in the areas of ELA and math. In order to fully appreciate the success of the school, it is necessary to understand the evolution and development of the aforementioned communication infrastructure that supports and enhances school improvement and student achievement.

Faculty members at the Barbieri School had long been accustomed to collaboration in teaching and sharing of practices. The school has still today a highly regarded two-way bilingual program that has been exempted from Massachusetts General Law c. 71A (Question 2) because of its success. The very nature of the two-way program made it necessary for teachers to conduct professional conversations around student work and results. In interviews, teachers stated that the two-way bilingual program provided a vehicle for discussion and sharing while helping to create an atmosphere of collegiality within the school.

Through administrator and teacher interviews, Panel members learned that in 1997 the school's analysis of student assessment data revealed that the students at the Barbieri School were not succeeding in reading and writing. At that time, a member of the school's staff, Rebecca Center, offered to attend and receive training in Balanced Literacy through Lesley College. The intent was, if the program met the needs of their students, that this individual would become a trainer for other members of the Barbieri staff. The program seemed a perfect fit and soon the Barbieri School and educators from Lesley College formed a partnership between the two institutions. The formation of the partnership supported programming at the school by providing professional development opportunities for teachers in literacy strategies. One component of the partnership agreement called for the organization of a literacy committee at the Barbieri School. With this body in place, the staff went about implementing the Balanced Literacy initiative - initially in grades K through 2 and later in grades 3 through 5 (in 2001-2002). After three years, and largely as a result of budgetary constraints, the partnership with Lesley College was dissolved. However, the work of the Literacy Committee at Barbieri expanded and became a central body that was responsible for data analysis, communication, and improvement for literacy in the early grades.

The Literacy Committee met regularly to discuss issues of teaching and learning. The work of each session was documented and the results of the meetings reported to the staff. Representatives from each grade level, K through 2, served on the committee. With this system in place (and due to an appreciable degree to the precedent of professional conversation resulting from the Two-Way Bilingual program) the work of the Literacy Committee was communicated to K to 2 teachers during bi-weekly, grade-level meeting times. In addition, the grade level representative was charged with reporting the pertinent information discussed at grade level meetings back to the committee. In this way, while implementing a program to increase the skills of its students, the school simultaneously developed a communications model through which staff members were constantly apprised of the development of ELA initiatives while simultaneously providing feedback to a school-wide body for discussion and decision-making.

Although the formal partnership with Lesley College has ended, the Barbieri School continues to enjoy benefits of its relationship with the college. Evidence of this is the increase of professional development opportunities within the school. Staff members who were trained through Lesley College now train teachers in approaches and strategies in Balanced Literacy. This training is available to all teachers in the district through the Barbieri School. This program is very well attended and is highly valued by school administrators and staff. For example, prospective

candidates for teaching positions at Barbieri are advised that this training will be necessary as a condition of hiring. The school has similar relationships with Framingham State College and the University of Massachusetts Boston. Each institution offers graduate courses to teachers onsite at the school. Staff members of the literacy committee also conduct trainings at the school for teachers working in the other schools in the district.

All of this occurs with the support of the building principal. In interviews with district leaders, it was noted on several occasions that the work of Mrs. Gonzalez has been exemplary throughout her career in the Framingham School Department. Mrs. Gonzalez has served as school principal at Barbieri for the three years. Prior to that, she worked in the school in the Two-Way Bilingual program. Several teachers interviewed commented that having Mrs. Gonzalez as leader is a unique and welcome addition. Teachers stated, "She's one of us," indicating that she was keenly aware of the importance of collegiality and teacher empowerment in establishing and maintaining a focus on continuous improvement.

B. How did the school plan their improvement initiatives and put them into practice?

The success and the positive impact of the Literacy Committee for the younger grades served as a model for establishing additional committees. As the Balanced Literacy approach grew within the school (coupled with students graduating to higher grades), the need arose to establish a second Literacy Committee that would serve the needs of teachers and students in the upper grades 3 through 5. The work of the new committee is similar to that of the original committee in terms of regularly scheduled meetings and focus on disseminating the committee's recommendations and using teachers' feedback to continue to improve teaching.

It is important to add that these committees and grade level teams have developed a wealth of curriculum tools, maps, and resources for their colleagues. The Panel was particularly impressed with the school's comprehensive literacy center. The center is a single room that is filled with leveled books in both English and Spanish. The cataloging of these resources is a remarkable work of organization, perseverance, and attention to detail. Books are leveled and neatly stacked so that they are readily available to the staff. As books are borrowed from the library, teachers place markers (with their names attached) directly on the shelf where the books had been stored. As an additional safeguard for books, teachers fill out a log that names the books, the dates, and the individuals who borrowed them. The coordination of the center is an exemplar of the care and thoroughness of approach that the administration and staff of the Barbieri School brings to their work.

The Panel also saw examples of classroom guides for teachers that include sample lessons and assessments for teachers. Most recently, the school established yet another committee that reflected the model and work of the initial Literacy Committee. The school's new Math Committee meets regularly and is focusing its work on adapting the Every Day Math program for the school.

The impetus for creating this committee was the frustration and confusion that teachers experienced after the district's adoption of the Every Day Math program. The school leadership used this opportunity to form the Math Committee. The initial task of the committee was to gather data from the staff that would aid in pinpointing the difficulties that Every Day Math presented. A teacher survey was developed and input sought from all faculty members. Survey results indicated that more professional development was needed to make the program successful and, beyond that, the program itself needed to be supplemented by additional math lessons in order to ensure that it met student needs. The Math Committee members and grade level team members began the work of bringing solutions to these problems.

An impressive outcome of this work is the development of math guides for teachers in grades K through 3. These guides provide suggestions for lessons, a curriculum calendar, standards, and assessments. The guides were lauded by the administration as having been a tremendous source of support for newly hired teachers. In interviews with teachers, the Panel heard that veteran staff members have also found the guides to be of great value. The next challenge for the Math Committee comes in assembling a math resource center similar to the aforementioned Literacy Center.

C. Does the school think these initiatives can be successfully used in similar schools? Why?

Yes. Faculty members, administrators and district leaders all agreed that the initiatives at the Barbieri School could be successfully replicated in similar schools. As evidence of this, several district leaders pointed out that many of the curriculum and communication tools developed by the Barbieri staff are being used in other schools across the district. Furthermore, the Balanced Literacy approach and the Every Day Math program are well known and are in use in many schools. Likewise, most schools convene committees to analyze data and to move initiatives forward. In these regards the Barbieri School is much like many others. However, as one teacher noted in an interview, the replication process will not meet success unless school leadership is willing to recognize and promote the talent and expertise of her/his staff members and to encourage sharing of those abilities with all learners in the school community.

KEY QUESTION 2: Are The Conditions In Place For This School To Serve As A Model Of Effective Practices And Successful Improvement Initiatives?

Yes. The Panel concluded that the conditions for the Barbieri School to serve as a model of effective practices and successful improvement initiatives are in place. The school's principal is thoughtful and proactive in her work. The faculty is extremely knowledgeable and articulate in sharing the key elements of the school's improvement initiatives. Documentation to support the history and progress of these initiatives is most thorough.

The building is beautifully maintained and is well suited for visitations from other school faculties who wish to interact with and learn from the experience and expertise of the members of the Barbieri School community.

A. Do leadership and staff have a shared understanding and use a common language to describe the changes/initiatives that have led to improvements in teaching and learning?

Yes. As noted earlier, faculty members at Barbieri have long enjoyed an atmosphere of collaboration and collegiality. Mrs. Gonzalez' predecessor, Dr. Peter Dittami, was cited by district leaders as an administrator who valued and encouraged collaboration between and among staff members. Under consecutive tenures of these thoughtful and competent principals, the working environment has taken on a more formal structure in the form of committees and grade level meetings. The development of the Literacy Committee for grades K to 2 and the implementation of Balanced Literacy strategies in those grades introduced common goals and a common language that administrators and teachers use to discuss student achievement and improvement. In interviews, teachers pointed to committee work and grade level teamwork as the main source for the promotion of common understanding of initiatives across the school. It must be added, however, that in interviews with district leaders, school administrators, teachers, and parents, the Panel discovered that overall school improvement is largely credited to the clear lines of communication and responsibility combined with shared leadership and teacher empowerment that serve as the foundation for the operation of all aspects of the school.

B. How effectively do leadership and staff articulate the connections between specific changes and improvement initiatives they have implemented, and the improvements made in teaching and learning?

The leadership and staff clearly identify and articulate the connections between changes and improvement initiatives and their work as a staff of learners and educators. One such connection was described in a teacher focus group interview. The school's Literacy Specialist, Margaret Fawley, teaches an after school course in her area of expertise. In her role, Mrs. Fawley models lessons and performs classroom observations. Several interviewees commented that this type of association augments the instructional practices, strategies, and techniques that are shared in the graduate level coursework in the following manner.

Much of what is learned during coursework is put into classroom practice immediately. This gives classroom teachers the opportunity to implement new instructional techniques in the presence of a specialist who may offer insight and suggestions about the effectiveness of a particular strategy. The degree of success or the need for improvement in delivery can then become a topic of discussion at the next class meeting. Of the many advantages to offering professional development opportunities in the building, these teachers have found that close collaboration with peers during coursework has been most beneficial to teaching. Once again, the

collegial and professional atmosphere of the school aids in making these discussions possible and effective.

The school's Literacy Specialist stated in an interview that she has witnessed a great deal of change in the work of the teachers. Grade level team meeting minutes also indicate that improvement initiatives and issues around those initiatives are often items for discussion.

The staff at the school is also extremely proud of the autonomy and creativity that is evident in the classrooms observed by the Panel. Principal Gonzalez and all faculty members have labored to ensure that the curriculum delivered within the school is aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks as well as the district curriculum. In that regard, teachers are charged with meeting the standards set forth from each of those sources. However, through an interview with the school principal, and through subsequent interviews with classroom teachers, the Panel learned that teachers are allowed and encouraged to choose methods and materials that best illuminate the talents and interest of staff and students. The Balanced Literacy approach, therefore, is not at all a set of prescriptive lessons with accompanying methods. Instead, the approach is a vehicle that is used to promote the best in classroom practices. The latitude enjoyed by teachers and their ability to articulate its value yet again underscores the staff's thorough understanding of improvement initiatives.

The Panel observed, in separate interviews, that the administrators and faculty members at the school spoke with unanimity and clarity in their assertion that a combination of an empowering environment, a school wide acceptance of change, close attention to the professional development needs of the staff, meaningful meeting time for teachers, and a solid focus on student learning are the elements that have facilitated change and progress at the Barbieri School.

C. Is there a school wide focus on, and sufficient investment in, continued improvement of student performance?

Yes. Documentation from committee and grade level team meetings reflects the continued effort on the part of all teachers to increase their knowledge and skills as educators. During grade level meetings, for example, it is not unusual for teachers to seek the input of their peers in an area of instruction that presents a challenge. Meeting time is used to tap into to other teachers' experience and talents and to discover or develop alternatives to address classroom issues. In interviews, many teachers lauded this time (1 hour of common planning time per week) as being absolutely vital to the flow of communication and as a valuable source of embedded professional development. From the documentation mentioned above, the Panel noted that teachers depended on assessment data to both identify weaknesses in student learning and to carefully examine the quality of their instructional practices and adherence to curriculum. The faculty uses a variety of assessment data to make these determinations including MCAS results, DRA, Clay's Observation, as well as teacher-developed assessments.

The district and school focus on professional development is also evidence of the investment in continued improvement in student performance. As mentioned earlier, the Barbieri School provides district-wide professional development opportunities through Framingham State College and the University of Massachusetts Boston. In addition, the professional development needs of staff are often at the center of the school's committee work. One example is that of the Math Committee's response to teachers' request for additional training in Every Day math.

D. Does the school appear to have the capacity to host site visits and to participate in various activities to share effective strategies and practices with other schools in the state?

Yes. The administration, faculty, and staff are most welcoming and accommodating. In addition, the students are quite accustomed to greeting and interacting with guests from outside of the building. Documentation to support and explain initiatives and that benchmark student progress are readily available. The physical space is very well kept and there are several areas that would be ideal for meetings or presentations. The auditorium is air-conditioned and comfortable. The media center is spacious (and well-stocked) and has an adjacent conference room that can hold a number of people and would serve nicely for discussions and presentations.

The school and committee leaders have gone to great lengths to maintain accurate and thorough documentation. As mentioned above, visitors will find these documents easily accessible and readable. The compilation of these documents expertly chronicles the evolution of committee work and improvements within the school. All teachers interviewed were clear and concise in their appraisal of the school's inner workings and how it has led to their professional growth and to the achievement of student learners.

The school has an active and supportive parent organization. The Panel was provided attendance data from parent nights and open houses that indicated a remarkable level of parental involvement. The communication between the school and the home is also exemplary. Bulletins are sent home in both English and Spanish to keep parents informed of school news. In addition, teachers provide parents with bi-weekly progress reports on student achievement and behavior.

E. Does the panel recommend that this school be designated to serve as a Commonwealth Compass School?

Yes. The Review Panel Team does recommend that the Barbieri Elementary School be designated as a Commonwealth Compass School.

CONCLUSION

Barbieri School
 Framingham Public Schools

The Review Panel concluded that the work of the Barbieri School’s two Literacy Committees and that of its Math Committee serve as a procedural conduit through which information is provided, decisions are made and, most importantly, practices that will best serve the needs of its students will be shared. Time allocated for grade-level team meetings and efforts within those meetings dedicated specifically to matters of teaching and learning also serve as the workshops for continuous improvement. This activity is whole-heartedly supported by the district and school administrations. The support of the district leadership takes form in myriad ways such as financial support for professional development and for necessary program materials. This support is also evident in the sense of ownership and empowerment communicated to the Review Panel Team by the faculty. Finally, the obvious awareness of, and attention to, the needs of all stakeholders make the Barbieri Elementary School a highly functioning organization that is poised for continued growth and achievement.

**Appendix A
 Team Members**

James Neary, Chair, Department of Education
Jenni McGiverin, Holyoke Public Schools
Yves Salomon, Department of Education
Nancy Zamierowski, School Support Specialist, Boston Public Schools

CANDIDATE COMPASS SCHOOL PANEL REVIEW VISIT SCHEDULE

All activities take place at the school.

7:15—8:00 a.m. Panel meets to prepare for day
 8:00—8:30 a.m. Panelists meet with the Principal
 8:30—9:00 a.m. Panelists meet with focus groups

Panelist A	Panelist B	Panelist C	Panelist D Chair
Student Focus Group	Parent Focus Group	Focus Group TBD	School Council Focus Group

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

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

	teacher 1 and teacher 2	teacher 3 and teacher 4	teacher 5 and teacher 6	teacher 7 and teacher 8
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

11 a.m.—12:30 p.m. 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; including follow-up questions for the principal or other staff members.

1:00—2:00 p.m. Panelists meet with teachers in focus groups*

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

2:15—2:30 p.m. **Chair** meets briefly with principal for exit meeting to outline next steps
Panelists organize and collate notes from focus groups

2:30—5 p.m. Panelists deliberate, document evidence, form conclusion/recommendation

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

1. 1. Classroom Observations Panelists will observe two classes each, followed by individual interviews with the teachers observed. The purpose of the classroom observations in candidate Compass Schools is to learn the extent to which the improvement initiatives the school has described as having the most positive impact on student achievement are in evidence in the classroom and throughout the school. Observers will also gather additional detail/information on those specific programs and practices.
2. 2. Individual Teacher Interviews The purpose of the teacher interview that follows the panelist’s observation of that teacher’s classroom is to:
 - Clarify the evaluator’s impressions of the classroom dynamic and learning environment

- Determine teachers' understanding of the initiatives cited in the application as having had the most positive impact on student achievement, and the extent to which the improvement initiatives are guiding their classroom practice (for instance, curriculum, instruction and assessment).
 - Determine what has changed at the school over the past three years.
 - Determine each teacher's role in implementing the improvements made to student performance at the school.
3. 3. Teacher Focus Groups The purpose of the teacher focus groups is to:
- Determine teachers' understanding of the initiatives cited in the application as having had the most positive impact on student achievement, and the extent to which the improvement initiatives are guiding their classroom practice (for instance, curriculum, instruction and assessment).
 - Determine what has changed at the school over the past three years.
 - Determine each teacher's role in implementing the improvements made to student performance at the school.

Taken together, the observations, individual teacher interviews, and teacher focus groups will provide a comprehensive view of the staff's understanding of, and participation and investment in, the programs and strategies to improve student performance that could be shared by the school, if designated.