

**Panel Report**  
**Candidate Compass School Review**  
**Donald McKay School**  
**Boston 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 McKay 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 Donald McKay School is one of 136 schools in Boston and one of 83 elementary schools. Located in the East Boston section of the city, the school has a school-wide Title I program that serves 607 students in grades K through 8. Enrollment has declined over the past three years at about the same rate as in other schools in the district from 669 in 2001. Eighty-nine percent of the students are Hispanic, 6% are White, 6% are Black and 1% Asian. Ninety-one percent receive free and reduced lunch (FRL), 44% are designated as limited English Proficient (LEP), and English is not the first language (FLNE) for 75% of the students surpassing district averages substantially. Ten percent of the students are currently on Individual Education Plans; this is well below the district average of 16% and half the state average of 20%.

After a dip in 2002 to 92.6, the daily attendance rate was back up to 96.2% in 2003, above state levels and well above district averages for the same grades, with an average number of days absent at 5.9% last year. Retentions averaged 6% over the past three years, consistent with district levels, but above state levels. The out-of-school suspension rate was down from 5.2 in 2002 to 2.9 in 2003, and there were no in-school suspensions reported during 2002 and 2003.

### **Staffing**

The school administration includes one principal, who has been in her current position for six years, and two assistant principals, two of whom have been in their current position four years and one for one year. There is one full-time librarian, a school nurse, and one long-term substitute.

Of the forty-two teachers, sixteen have been in the building from one to three years; ten have been in the building from four to seven years; and seven have been teaching at the McKay from ten to fifteen years. Eight special education teachers are not certified in the area in which they are teaching.

## MCAS Results

During Cycle II (2001-02) the school was well above Improvement Targets for ELA and mathematics at both the fourth grade, with a PI change of 12.5 in ELA and 6.2 in mathematics; and the eighth grade, with a PI change of 19.2 in ELA and 19.4 in mathematics.

The 2003 Mid-Cycle AYP Report shows McKay at just under the State NCLB Performance Target for math with a CPI of 58.1. This is an increase of 8.4 points over Cycle II. In English language arts, the CPI of 68.1 shows an increase of 13 points at mid-cycle, and remains 7.5 points short of the State NCLB Performance Target of 75.6 school-wide.

There is a notable dip in student performance among LEP students in grade 3 on ELA tests, from 5% Warning in 2001 to 26% Warning rate in 2003. During that time the rate of Proficiency also dropped from 61% to 12%. This mirrors similar levels of decline at the district level, and to a lesser extent at the state level. At the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Warning rates declined for regular education students from 43% in 2001 to 6% in 2003 and for Special Education students, from 100% to 67%. During that same time, the Warning rate increased for LEP students from 29% to 64%, following a decrease in the Warning rate from 49% in 2000 to 29% in 2001. Warning rates at the district level in LEP also increased overall, from 34% to 49% between 2001 and 2003 after some fluctuation, with a dip in 2002 to 29% from 41% the previous year.

The school has consistently outperformed the district in math at the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and in ELA at the 7<sup>th</sup> grade since 2001. In 2003, 68% of the 25 7<sup>th</sup> graders tested in ELA performed at the Proficient level, 4% at Advanced, 28% scored in the Needs Improvement level, and zero at the Warning level. Warning rates for all students tested in 6<sup>th</sup> grade math dropped from 40% in 2001 to 25% in 2003; half of the 51% district Warning rate for 6<sup>th</sup> grade math. During the same period, the 16% of students scoring in Proficient went up to 25%, although the 7% Advanced in 2001 and 2003 took a dip to zero in 2002.

## Panel Responses to the Key Questions

### **KEY QUESTION 1: Is this school using effective improvement initiatives that could be adapted in other similarly profiled schools?**

Yes. Similar schools could adapt several specific pieces of a strong instructional program in which curriculum and instruction, assessment, and professional development are well integrated. These include:

- A K-8 approach to *literacy* developed and enhanced over the past several years.
- Collaborative process by which the math leadership and grade level teams worked to *implement the math program(s)* (TERC Investigations and Connected Math) *consistently* in all classrooms.
- Focused and ongoing in-house *professional development*—through the Collaborative Coaching and Learning Model (CCL)—that directly supports the whole school improvement goals, and builds staff leadership and instructional capacity.

- How *teachers use data and performance information* to drive both whole school improvement goals, and to guide their work in the classroom every day.
- Organizational structure that facilitates *weekly meeting time for grade level teams* to focus on student needs and instructional issues, and the regular and ongoing sharing of information between and among teams.

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

The school points to a number of initiatives and changes over the past few years to improve student learning. Key among them has been a professional culture of collaboration and commitment among teachers encouraged and reinforced through daily time to work together on instructional issues, coupled with a high level of expectation and accountability. District-driven changes in the schedule and curriculum and instruction—including an increase in instructional time in ELA (Writer’s and Reader’s Workshop) and mathematics (TERC Investigations and Connected Math)—provided clear and consistent curricula, helping set the stage for the transition to a standards-based instructional program. The effective, incremental implementation of those programs across the school has been facilitated by extensive and ongoing in-house teacher training over the past three years, using the Collaborative Coaching and Learning Model to support teachers as they put change into practice. Teachers use a rich assortment of assessment and performance data gathered regularly throughout the school year help guide them as they refine and enhance curriculum and instruction at the grade and classroom level. Based on both formative and summative student assessments teachers write Smart Goals for their own classes each year in reading, writing, math, and climate.

1. Does the available data support the school’s reported impact in the area intended?  
Yes. The effective implementation of a language-rich math program and the reported focus on literacy, with attention to the learning needs of a primarily Hispanic population for whom English is not the first language (89%), is supported by the school’s improvement profile over the past three years. Significant improvement in student performance in Cycle II in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics was sustained at Mid-Cycle III in 2003, with an additional 13 point increase in the CPI in ELA and an 8.4 point increase in mathematics.

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

The current instructional program is the result of organizational and schedule changes at the school-wide level and the steady and incremental incorporation of new curricula and instructional methods over time at the classroom level. The Principal arrived at the school in 1998 to find four separate programs in place for special education, English language learners, Bilingual Spanish, and regular education. The school was divided into a large K-5 elementary and a small middle school, serving two classes each of grades 6-8. The school is now unified into a K-8 building in which all teachers participate in data analysis and improvement planning.

*Literacy/English language arts*

Beginning with the introduction of guided reading in 1998, a literacy leadership team including teachers and the coach researched various models to determine what would be the most effective

combination of components for their students. The result is a coherent and consistent approach to literacy, what some teachers refer to as the McKay model, that has been refined over time; and that has fostered significant strides in English language arts by the school's primarily Hispanic student population.

Since 2002, the school has had a full time literacy coach. The institution of the Collaborative Coaching and Learning model of staff development "opened the doors" of the school's classrooms. Education consultant Carl Anderson conducted a daylong workshop with the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade teachers on teaching writing and the Writer's Workshop model. This included modeling lessons and then followed-up during the school during the year. Writers Workshop emphasizes the needs of individual students, stressing conferencing with students and sharing with others. In the Primary Grades, the stress has been on fluency and mechanics in writing, and genres and themes in literature. The school also uses Fontas and Pinella phonics kits to address a lack that emerged in analysis of the performance data. Reader's Workshop is now being implemented more fully, with an emphasis over the past year on non-fiction and the incorporation of the Make It Real Video series.

### *Mathematics*

In 1999, the school began implementation of the TERC Investigations math program. A math leadership team was trained over the summer to introduce four units from the TERC curriculum in their classrooms during that school year, with follow-up support from a math coach for that process. The following year, all teachers in grades 1 through 5 began to implement the program, using the members of the math leadership team as trainers during their weekly grade level team meetings. The Collaborative Coaching and Learning model (CCL) of professional development has been instrumental in ensuring that teachers get the training and classroom support they need to implement the programs effectively.

By 2003, the math program was in full implementation at the school, with Connected Math in grades 6-8. As evidence of the successful operation of the TERC program, the school is finishing up its second year as one of six Math Learning Sites selected by the district to model the program in the classroom for groups of teachers from other schools in the process of implementing the program. McKay teachers model TERC math instruction for the visitors and answer questions in a debriefing session after the lesson, following the CCL approach.

The Reader's and Writer's Workshops and the TERC Investigations math program were initiated by the Boston Public Schools. However, the administrators and staff at the McKay have worked together to maximize the effectiveness of those programs at the classroom level in this large school. Collaboration and communication have enabled and facilitated the hard work of the staff over time and fostered consistency across grade levels and classrooms. With four classes at each grade level from K-5, and one team for the middle grades, the grade level team meetings are the place where ongoing analysis of student performance data informs discussion and decisions about any changes or refinements to curriculum and instruction that might be necessary. The facilitator of each of the grade level teams is also on the Instructional Leadership Team, ensuring a direct line of consistent communication about instructional issues throughout the school. This structure has been encouraged and reinforced through teachers' increasing use data and performance information to make decisions that guide their work and the school.

The development of the Whole School Improvement Plans (WSIP) that guide work at the school level relies on the analysis of each of the grade level teams who use weekly team time to analyze assessments and look at student work throughout the year to determine “what do they [the students] need? The annual process of formulating the WSIP and the implementation of initiatives to improve student performance is a collaborative effort at the school. A representative Instructional Leadership Team that includes the team facilitator from each of the grade levels, special education, ESL/English language learner, and specialists works with the Principal and the grade level teams to analyze student needs and formulate changes and additions to the school improvement plan, and track the effectiveness of the initiatives already in place.

### *Monitoring*

Assessment is varied and ongoing at the school. Teachers utilize a rich array of assessment results throughout the school year to drive decision-making at all levels. District assessments are administered in October, Jan and May in math and ELA. The BPS “math tasks” are aligned with the TERC pacing guide. Teachers also give a math problem of the day (ten minute math) throughout the school. Math notebooks in use in every grade help ensure that students are writing about math, and allow teachers to track student progress on this identified problem area.

In English language arts, the DRA is administered in October, January, May to all grades K-8. Ongoing Running Records are kept on primary students. The school is also piloting an MCAS practice test developed by the Boston Plan for Excellence. Teachers are always assessing in the classroom with decoding assessments from Fontas and Pinnell, conference logs, writing rubrics and student notebooks. Results from any and all of these assessments, along with looking at student work, form the basis of discussion at weekly grade level team meetings. In interviews and focus groups most teachers reported spending a lot of time outside this official 45-minute weekly meeting talking about students and instructional issues.

At the administrative level, notes kept at each grade level team meeting are reviewed by the Principal to coordinate the work and rich discussion that takes place in grade level team meetings at the broader school-wide level. The Student Support Team also meets twice monthly and provides feedback to teachers and grade levels to better coordinate available services and safety nets. The Principal or one of the school’s two Assistant Principals participates in the Collaborative Teaching and Learning Cycles, including observing model lessons and participating in the follow-up discussions after those lessons. The Principal reports that one or the other of the administrators visits seven to eight classrooms a week.

Most importantly, the information gathered from assessments conducted throughout the school year and from administrator’s visits is well-coordinated and integrated in a clear and systematic way that facilitates and supports teachers’ work in the classroom every day.

### **C. What are the next steps for sustaining, expanding, or refining the program/practice?**

This year the school instituted Sheltered English Instruction classroom in grades K-5. Guided by Making Content Comprehensible for English Language Learners—SIOP Model, teachers are working with both the literacy and math coaches to implement best practice work for students learning a second language. Because there are now second language learners in all of the

classrooms, work is focused on teaching that insures that language objectives and content objectives are included in every lesson. They have also included phonics in K-2 for all students to address the students' need for word study. Guided reading and literature circles are being introduced in grades 6-8.

A school-level articulation of the curriculum in English language arts is underway with the creation this year of a unified curriculum map for grades K-8. The whole staff met with the literacy coach for a day in April to collate and consolidate the yearlong lesson plans teachers are currently using at each grade level. The lesson plans are similar to the pacing guides for the math curriculum. This will provide a clear scope and sequence of the curriculum throughout the school. The school also has a new librarian this year, who is working more closely with the teachers on literacy and book selection.

To support the school's efforts to provide access to the curriculum for all students, referrals to special education remain below district average for elementary schools. The Principal and teachers describe a rigorous process for referral, and a Student Support Team that meets regularly to provide support to classroom and special education teachers.

The staff will continue to refine their assessment system by focusing on the more systematic and effective use of portfolios in grades K-8. While some teachers have been piloting the use of portfolios in their classrooms, the staff would like to systematize their use across the school through more training for teachers.

The school will continue to host visitors as a Math Learning Site, and the funds they receive for those duties will go to defray the high cost of the TERC Investigations materials next year. A second part-time math coach was added this year to work with the middle school grades (6-8), along with a full-time math facilitator who supports teachers in the classroom. Coupled with teachers' ongoing inquiries and CCL cycles on specific topics in mathematics, the school is likely to continue their progress in this area.

Other planned additions for next year reported by the math coach include utilizing Select Math, an internet practice math tool to support student learning, and developing after-school workshops in math.

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

The supportive learning community at the school has been built and sustained through well-planned and well-documented structures and procedures that could be adapted to meet the needs of a variety of schools. The alignment of standards and expectations, the collaborative work of the teams, and the use of student performance data in that work could be shared and reproduced by educators in other schools.

**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 leadership and staff at the school are working together toward common goals, guided by a clear school-wide plan for improving student learning and teacher capacity; and the teachers have experience sharing data and modeling instruction with each other and with visiting teams of teachers.

**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?**

There is a running conversation among administrators and staff about what needs to be done to address student and teacher learning needs. Grade level teams provide the glue that holds the pieces of the instructional program together. Teachers reported in interviews and focus groups that in addition to the regularly scheduled weekly grade level team meetings, they are in almost constant touch about the work going on in their classrooms, and with individual students who may be struggling. This communication is accommodated by the location of classrooms in grade level groups. The grade level teams are in turn directly plugged into the ILT so that this information feeds into decision-making at the school level; and school level concerns are fed back to individual teachers through the grade level team meetings.

The six teachers interviewed individually and 30 more who met with the Panel in four focus groups talked about the grade level teams as the key to their collegiality and to the level of understanding they share about their students and their learning needs. The Collaborative Coaching and Learning model was also a key factor in helping teachers to utilize the Writer's and Reader's Workshop models and the TERC Investigations effectively in their classroom. They have also contributed to a level of consistency across grade levels K-8 that many teachers emphasized. Teachers also reported that clearer standards and better assessments allow for more in-depth analysis, and have been instrumental in their improvement efforts at the classroom level.

**B. How effectively do leadership and staff articulate the connections between the specific changes and improvement initiatives they have implemented, and the gains made in student achievement?**

The Principal and teachers point to the changes in the schedule for more time on math and ELA and the consistency of curriculum provided by the TERC math program and the yearlong lesson plans or curriculum calendars in ELA by grade level, ongoing use of student performance data, as the most important elements contributing to the improvements made to their students performance. In addition, the Collaborative Coaching and Learning cycles and inquiry groups are a powerful way to reflect on the teaching and how kids are learning and to build staff leadership capacity and opening the doors to individual classrooms to promote a shared school-wide ownership for all the students' success.

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

The concept of continuous improvement appears to be embedded in the day-to-day operations of the school and into the whole school improvement planning process. A steady stream of discussion about student performance supports a cyclical process of practice and reflection, adjustment, and practice and reflection.

The Instructional Leadership Team and grade level teams are planning time to analyze the results of the end-of-year assessments in math and ELA just completed in order to begin whole school improvement planning for next year. They will adjust or revise the plans again, if necessary, based on MCAS results when they become available later this summer.

The Principal and teachers consistently stressed strong communication and collaboration. The commitment teachers make to meeting and talking about student work by all accounts goes well beyond the 45-minute grade level team meetings to permeate teacher talk throughout the school day. The Principal reviews minutes from grade level meetings and offers feedback in the way of recommending available supports and preventing duplication of effort by the teams.

In focus groups, teachers pointed to instructional strategies initiated this year and plans to expand on these efforts, including the refinement and expansion of the use of student portfolios, finishing the curriculum maps, enhancing the instruction in SEI classrooms at each grade level, and participation in an upcoming graduate course of teaching second language learners.

Each year, the Boston Whole School Improvement Plan includes a professional development calendar. In the 2003-04 WSIP, the 30 contractual hours of development included two full days in August for the whole staff, one dedicated to mini-workshops conducted by the literacy coach on vocabulary development, fluency, note-taking and Writer's Workshop and one day on math strands through the grade levels conducted by the math coach and a third grade teacher. Collaborative Coaching and Learning cycles in September, October, January, April and May covered topics such as word study and phonics, using text features and working with non-fiction, and developing literature circles. Teachers continue to devote training "cycles," workshops, and inquiries to deepening their understanding of math concepts and how to fully utilize the TERC curriculum in their classrooms.

High expectations of the students were in evidence in the level of student work displayed throughout the school and in the instruction underway in the classrooms observed by team members. A research project in a 7<sup>th</sup> grade classroom that included 3 special education students required students to provide footnote type citations from multiple sources for a seven paragraph essay. In a 1<sup>st</sup> grade reading class, students were observed working in 4 small groups re-reading the story aloud and formulating questions to ask about the story, and then writing a journal entry to summarize the story. Learning objectives for the lessons being taught were posted in the rooms visited, along with math vocabulary words, and classroom libraries.

Parents reported that tutoring is available for anyone who needs it. Teachers are approachable and make themselves available for formal and informal conferences. They reported receiving monthly newsletters at every grade level, including a monthly syllabus, translated into the family's first language. Math homework often involves games played with parents. In addition to books brought home for independent reading, parents mentioned seeing writing and reading materials in all subject areas.

**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? Does the school leader and involved staff communicate effectively both orally and in writing how and why it carried out its strategies for improvement?**

Yes. The school has already been functioning for two years as a Math Learning Site for, hosting educators from other Boston Public Schools in the process of implementing TERC Investigations.

In addition, coaches and teachers have now worked together on a number of Collaborative Coaching and Learning cycles and inquiries over the past three years. They are experienced at sharing various kinds of information, modeling lessons, and debriefing with groups of colleagues on literacy strategies.

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

Yes. The collaborative professional culture and shared leadership the panel found among teachers has been encouraged and supported with well-documented daily grade level meeting times focused on data analysis, student work, and instructional decisions, the location of grade level classrooms together to facilitate easy informal communication and visits between classrooms. In combination with a representative instructional leadership team with a clear sense of its role in school improvement planning, and an administration that promotes frequent and consistent communication at every level, the school's organizational structure offers a concrete model for building and/or sustaining an effective learning community.

## Appendix A Panel Members

**Denise Delorey, PhD** Chair, Department of Education  
**Ann Lane**, Weymouth Public Schools  
**Joanna Marcone**, School Support Specialist, Worcester Public Schools

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### 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<br>Chair           |
|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| Student Focus Group | Parent Focus Group | Focus Group<br>TBD | School Council Focus<br>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<br>teacher 1 and<br>teacher 2                   | Observe<br>teacher 3 and<br>teacher 4                   | Observe<br>teacher 5 and<br>teacher 6                   | Observe<br>teacher 7 and<br>teacher 8                   |
| 10-11 a.m. | Interview<br>teacher 1 and<br>teacher 2<br>individually | Interview<br>teacher 3 and<br>teacher 4<br>individually | Interview<br>teacher 5 and<br>teacher 6<br>individually | Interview<br>teacher 7 and<br>teacher 8<br>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

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

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. 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. 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.