

**Panel Report**  
**Candidate Compass School Review**  
**Merrymount Elementary School**  
**Quincy Public Schools**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **The Program**

The Commonwealth Compass Schools Program is one part of the Massachusetts School and District Accountability System. The purpose of the Compass Schools Program is to recognize and celebrate improvement in Massachusetts' schools, and to disseminate information and 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. Twenty-eight of those schools chose to apply by submitting completed applications. The applications provided written responses to three questions on the initiatives undertaken to improve student performance that school leaders and staff think have had the most positive impact on their students' performance. Four high schools, five elementary schools, and one kindergarten through eight schools were selected as finalists. Those ten 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 Merrymount School on June 9, 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

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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 Merrymount Elementary School is one of eleven elementary schools in the Quincy Public School System. Overall, the system houses 19 schools. The student population numbers have remained stable over the last three years reaching their highest level in 2001 when the number of students reported was 300. Data available as of December 30, 2003 shows that number is now 297. The population consists of 84% White students, 12% Asian, 2% Black, and 1% Hispanic. Nineteen percent of the student population receives special education services. The school is not eligible for Title I services. Eighteen percent of students are eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL). Eleven percent of the students are those whose first language is not English (FLNE). Nine percent of the population is Limited English Proficient (LEP).

A change has occurred in the number of substantially separate classrooms at the school. The Merrymount School had maintained three substantially separate classes (two developmental learning centers and one language development class) and one resource room through 2002. At present, there is one resource room that offers specialized teacher and paraprofessional support in the least restrictive environment outside the general education setting. Additionally, two substantially separate Language Development classrooms offer the district-wide population specialized instruction for students with language delays and communication disorders. A number of these LDC students receive a portion of their academic instruction in regular education classrooms with support from special educators or paraprofessionals. Hearing and visually impaired students are services in regular or special education settings (depending on IEP specifications) with support services provided by certified and trained staff.

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Merrymount Elementary School provides an ESL pull-out program and all teachers are required to provide Sheltered English instruction for language-minority students.

Attendance rates at the school have remained stable for the last three years. The lowest rate of 91.4% was reported in 2000. An improvement trend followed with rates reaching 94.6% in 2001 and 96.2% in 2002. There was a slight decline in attendance in 2003, which was reported at 95.3%. The 2003 rate is higher than both the state and district rates for the same year.

Data reveals that since the year 2000, the school has seen a small increase in its retention rate. There were no retentions reported in 2000. A rate of .7% was reported for 2001 and a decrease to .3% in 2002. For 2003, the school saw an increase to 1.8%. Again the school's 2003 rate is lower than that of the state's 2.6% and lower than the district rate of 2.2%.

The Merrymount School rate for in-school suspensions for 2003 was zero percent. By comparison the State of Massachusetts reported a 4.5% rate for similar schools for 2003. The Quincy Public School District saw a rate of 2.6% for that year. The school had a zero percent rate for the year 2000 as well (there is no data available for 2001); 2002 data indicates a .7% rate for in-school suspensions. Out-of-School suspension rates likewise are below the state and district rates. The school rate for 2003 was .7% while the state's rate was reported at 6.1%; the district rate for that year was 6.6%. In previous years the school saw rates as low as zero percent in 2000, one percent in 2001, and 1.7% in 2002.

## **Staffing**

The Merrymount Elementary School staff includes its principal, one guidance counselor, a librarian, a nurse, a school psychologist, and three special education teachers who service students with language delays, visual or hearing impairments. The remaining staff of 24 teachers includes 16 teachers with five or more years of experience at the school. Of these, there are 10 teachers who have ten or more years of experience at Merrymount Elementary.

## **MCAS Results**

Students at the Merrymount School are tested in the MCAS Reading exam in grade 3, the MCS ELA and Math exams for grade four, and the MCAS Science and Technology exam in grade five. The school has made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the aggregate in both ELA and math every year since 1999. The 2003 Mid-Cycle AYP Report for the school indicates that students in subgroups reported also made AYP.

### *MCAS ELA*

In ELA for 2003, the school's Composite Proficiency Index (CPI) rate was 93.6, which is a 13.8-point increase over its Cycle II total. For its special education population, the school scored a

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CPI score of 87.5. This, too, is a significant increase of 18.7 points over the Cycle II results. The school is not required to provide data for its other subgroups, as the number of students in these groups is less than twenty.

In 2003 the school saw 28% of its grade four, regular education students reach the Advanced category of MCAS results in ELA; sixty-four percent of these students finished in the Proficient category; 8% were in Needs Improvement and there were no students in Warning. By way of comparison, in 2002 grade four, regular education students finished with 10% in the Advanced category, 63% in Proficient, 23% in Needs Improvement and 3% in Warning.

The results for grade four, special education students mirrored that of their peers in general education with 14% in Advanced, 57% in Proficient, 29% in Needs Improvement, and zero percent in Warning.

Grade 3, regular education classrooms finished with 87% of their students in the Proficient category while 10% were in Needs Improvement and 3% in Warning. These results reflect an improvement over the 2002 ELA test scores for the same population. In that year 76% of grade 3, regular education students finished in the Proficient category, 20% in Needs Improvement and four percent in Warning. Special education students, however, dipped in 2003 to 43% in Proficient (down from 60% in 2002), and 57% in Needs Improvement (up from 40% the year before). Zero percent of special education students fell into the Warning category in either 2002 or 2003.

### *MCAS Math*

The 2003 Mid-Cycle III AYP Report shows that students at the Merrymount School made a significant increase from scores reported in Cycle II. In the aggregate, student results were 28.5 points higher than the previous cycle scores. This brought the school's CPI to 92.9. Regular education students in grade four finished at 16% in the Advanced category, 56% in Proficient, 28% in Needs Improvement and zero percent in Warning. Less than 20 special education students were assessed in math in 2003. However, those tested finished with 14% in Advanced, 50% in Proficient; 36% in Needs Improvement and zero percent in Warning.

## **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 Review Panel concluded that the Merrymount Elementary School is using effective improvement initiatives that could be replicated in similarly profiled schools. The centerpiece of the school's improvement effort is the implementation a writing program that is anchored by the

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Four Square approach to writing. Supporting this approach are strategies culled from the John Collins Writing Program. Finally, the staff has adapted the MCAS writing rubric to assist both teachers and students at every grade level in assessing and improving their work. The Panel heard much about this approach in interviews conducted with the principal, teachers, students, paraprofessionals, and parents. Furthermore, the Review Panel members visited classrooms where instruction in the Four Square approach was evident. Documentation in the form of templates, rubrics, and student work provided more evidence that this method is in use throughout the school.

This approach provides students with a graphic organizer that assists them in arranging their ideas into clear and coherent paragraphs. District and school administrators, teachers and students laud the organizer as a unifying factor in their work as well as the central element for producing an increase in student test scores. However, the Panel determined that as much as the Four Square approach serves as the hub for improvements in instruction and student results, there are a number of additional factors that have contributed to the success of the Merrymount School.

The Panel took notice of the high degree of organization that exists within the school. Furthermore, the Panel was impressed with the sense of collegiality and pleasant atmosphere in the building. The Panel gathered evidence that demonstrates the organizational expertise of the school administration and staff, which chronicles their initiatives and the progress gained. Furthermore, the building's collegial environment was clearly the result of mutual respect between and among administrators and staff as well as a commitment to becoming better professionals. Review Panel members were told on several occasions that it is not unusual for one teacher to observe a lesson being taught in another teacher's classroom. The Panel also found documentation that showed teachers sharing instructional tools of their own design with their colleagues. These examples led the Panel to conclude that this faculty provides an exceptional model of how educators can and should learn from one another.

The Merrymount School Principal, Marcia McCarthy, credited much of the success at the school to the faculty. She cited the willingness of teachers to analyze student test data with a focus on informing and improving instruction as being a vital factor in maintaining continuous improvement. Many teachers now serve on the school's Assessment Team. The team was trained in data analysis through funding from a local grant. The team now meets regularly to examine data and to determine how that can be utilized to inform and support instructional practices school-wide. Data analysis is also used to identify the needs of individual learners. Prior to the institution of the Assessment Team, the faculty was already taking a hard look at their practices and making appropriate change in response to assessed weaknesses.

This is best evidenced as follows. The Quincy School Department adopted the John Collins Writing Program in the mid-90s. Teachers had attended professional development in the program and it was implemented across the district. As will be discussed below, Merrymount Elementary

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faculty members decided to supplement the Collins program with Four-Square. In addition, teachers at every grade level produced rubrics that have provided students with clear expectations of their work. The rubrics are based on the MCAS rubric for writing. Panel members saw that these rubrics were developmentally appropriate for each grade while still maintaining high standards.

In brief, the Merrymount Elementary school staff, through attention to data and through discussion, has aligned the assessment standards of the state, as well as the program mandates of the district, to identify and develop a methodology that brought structure to the teaching of writing while also simplifying the writing process for young learners. This generation of ideas and commitment to hard work are key factors in the continuous improvement of programs and results at the school.

The Merrymount School staff has also implemented several math initiatives that could be replicated in similar schools and communities. First of these is Math Utopia. This is a program initiated by Principal McCarthy that engaged grade level teachers in a dialogue that was aimed at identifying the prerequisite math skills necessary for students in order to succeed at a particular grade. Grade 5 teachers were asked to list a “Utopian” set of skills that students should bring with them into that grade level. Likewise, classroom teachers in preceding grades were charged with developing similar lists. The result was a set of lists that establish clear expectations for teachers and students in the instruction and study of math. The staff began to clarify their curriculum by bringing it into alignment with the district and state standards. Most importantly, the faculty realized that all teachers, regardless of grade level, share responsibility for MCAS success.

Another key initiative is the Merrymount Mathletics program. The program is founded upon the school’s assertion that the “key ingredient in any area of the curriculum...is the student’s belief in her/himself.” The program is comprised of three major pieces that include the Math-A-Thon, Merrymount Math Masters, and the Mathlete Summer Olympics.

The Math-A-Thon takes place early in March. Parents are notified that the Math-A-Thon Booklet will be coming home with their children. The booklet contains pages of math problems similar to those that will be found on MCAS. Math-A-Thon lasts two weeks. During this time students are encouraged to work on two pages each night until the booklet is completed. Parents sign each page upon completion (an answer key is provided). To encourage full participation in Math-A-Thon, a “Problem of the Day” school-wide contest is held. Students at both primary and intermediate grades are encouraged to respond to the daily questions. At the end of each day, responses are pulled from a jar and if the student has completed the problem accurately, her/his name is announced over the PA and prizes are given. At the end of Math-A-Thon, an awards assembly is held and students receive special certificates for completing their booklets.

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Math Masters is a school-wide initiative that recognizes the importance of fast, accurate and consistent fact recall in every grade. Teachers are required to administer weekly fact tests and when students have scored 100% on three consecutive tests, they are inducted into the Math Masters Hall of Fame. Math Masters ribbons are presented to these students and their names are announced over the PA and posted on a special Math Masters bulletin board.

The Mathlete Summer Olympics encourages students, with the support of their parents, to maintain the skills over the course of a summer that they have gained from the previous school year. The development of the math initiatives and the preparation and maintenance of materials are time-consuming tasks. However, the staff at Merrymount has put these initiatives into place and they continue to flourish. An outstanding example of this growth is the Math-A-Thon. The program was initially developed as a method of assisting students prepare for the MCAS math examination. It has now grown to beyond its original purpose and has become a major fund raising program for the school. Profits from Math-A-Thon are utilized to purchase instructional materials to enrich mathematics instruction at the school.

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

As noted above, the Four Square approach to writing serves as the focal point for the improvement in student performance at the Merrymount School. Four Square provides students with a simplified and step-by-step method for collecting ideas when writing. As observed in one classroom, a writing project begins with a general theme (in this case the theme was, “What Would You Tell and In-Comeing Student About Fifth Grade?”). Once the students understand the theme, the classroom teacher will conduct a brainstorming session. Students volunteer ideas that may serve as topic sentences for paragraphs. The teacher captures these thoughts in one of four squares that are either drawn on the board or an overhead projector. The teacher plots student responses in one of four squares on the screen or board. The boxes become areas where student ideas are stored until it is time to transpose them into paragraph form. Following the discussion of topic sentences, students are asked to provide detail sentences in support of these main ideas. Each box must contain enough information for three detail sentences. To conclude the brainstorming session, as well as this part of the lesson, the teacher takes suggestions for a concluding or summary paragraph and enters that information into the appropriate box on the screen. Students then begin to write their essays. The organizational effort that has already occurred assists students in keeping their writing focused on the original theme. This use of Four Square, supported by elements of the Collin’s Writing program and through sound teaching strategies and modeling pave the way for students to grow as independent writers.

On the surface the Four Square method appears to be highly constrictive and likely to inhibit the creativity of young writers. However, teachers interviewed stated that students are free to compose sentences of their own and are not confined to the Four Square model that may be on the board or overhead. Teachers also indicated that they have witnessed great leaps in creative

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imagination on the part of their students. They credit the organizational aspect of Four Square for this growth. Four Square allows more time for students to experiment and find more descriptive words to bring vitality to their work.

Four Square is evident in every classroom in the building. Every teacher has been trained in its use. In addition, all teachers in Grades 2-5 have been trained in the John Collins Writing Program. Finally all teachers have been trained in the use of the grade-level rubrics discussed earlier. The Four Square approach has even found its way into math, science and social studies classes where students use the squares to organize their thinking as they solve problems or respond to open-ended questions.

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

Very early in her tenure, Mrs. McCarthy modeled MCAS item analysis techniques to the staff. She and several staff members then engaged in an analysis of MCAS ELA test results. Student test scores in the long composition and open-ended response questions clearly indicated that immediate attention to this area was warranted. Mrs. McCarthy saw an opportunity to institute a new initiative that would address the issue of poor writing skills among students while simultaneously introducing a school wide program. Long a proponent of character education in schools, the principal asked that all teachers commit to a curriculum that focused on issues of personal character. A character education series was purchased and teachers conducted lessons and discussions around various topics. Each month students were asked to compose an essay that would define or explain their thoughts on a particular aspect of character.

As mentioned above, teachers in Quincy had received training in the John Collins Writing Program. This program was valuable in assisting students with certain aspects of their writing. However, staff members were running into difficulty in directing students to achieve focus and clarity in their essays. One member of the staff had researched the Four Square approach and was interested in learning more about it. With support from Mrs. McCarthy, she received training in the use of Four Square. In time, she became a trainer within the school and teachers were adopting the method in their classes. Teachers became more enthusiastic about the program as they began to see improvement in the writing skills of their students.

Assessment still proposed a challenge for teachers. The Collins program use of Focus Correction Areas (FCA) was helpful in targeting those elements of student writing that required practice. However, Merrymount faculty found that additional assessment tools were necessary to provide students with improvement targets and to provide more consistency in grading among the staff. The teachers received assistance from the Department of Education and developed grade-level rubrics for writing. Panel members saw evidence of all aspects of the writing program including teachers instructing students in the use of Collin's FCAs. Four Square models were evident in every classroom and clearly a part of student work. Panel members were provided with samples of the range of rubrics used at the school.

Teachers shared many samples of student work that reflected the use of Four Square. More importantly, teachers were able to provide examples of student improvement in writing. One such sample came from a student who spoke and wrote little English in September of this school year. Early writing pieces from this student were nearly illegible. Writing samples completed by this same student later in the year were focused and very clearly written. The teacher pointed to the Four Square approach and the supporting elements of the school's writing program as being greatly responsible for this individual improvement.

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

Yes. Members of the Merrymount School community believe that the initiatives undertaken at the school can be used in similarly profiled schools. This is due in large part to the district's supportive and proactive approach to providing for professional development for teachers for new initiatives. In an interview with the Superintendent of Schools, the Panel learned of the district's efforts to research and select new strategies while simultaneously planning for the professional development activities that will be necessary to carry out an initiative. Similarly, Principal McCarthy also provides organized and thoughtful opportunities for professional development for Merrymount teachers. Panel members saw the school's Professional Development Plan as evidence of this care and attention to teacher needs. In each case, the provision of training of teachers is well within the purview of district and school administrators and could be used successfully elsewhere. Quincy Superintendent of Schools, Richard De Christopher and Director of Curriculum, Frank Moffett provided further evidence of the level of success of professional development activities at the school. Each offered the similar evidence that, as the result of professional development and the work of teachers at the Merrymount School, teachers from the school were invited to provide workshops and training sessions to other teachers across the district. The demand became so great that the training had to be pared back and now Merrymount teachers present and train at a district wide Sharing Practice Day.

Teachers at the Merrymount do not have common planning time. The Quincy School Department does provide for early release-days on Tuesdays. It is during this time that improvement work can be done. For the most part, Merrymount teachers use their preparation, lunch, and after school time to look at student work and to discuss classroom practices.

Many elementary school teachers work under such tight time constraints. Despite the limits on their time, the faculty at the school has produced an enormous amount of work and documentation that supports that work. The Panel concluded that the work of the administration and staff is exemplary but with planning and a supportive environment, similarly profiled schools can replicate their efforts.

**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 Review Panel concluded that the conditions for the Merrymount School to serve as a model of effective practices and successful improvement initiatives are in place. The Principal is energetic and proactive in her work. The faculty is 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 well maintained and 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 Merrymount 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. Throughout the interviews with district leaders, school administration, teachers, paraprofessionals, parents or students, it was abundantly clear to the Panel that all members of the Merrymount School community were familiar and supportive of the Four Square approach to writing as well as the utilization of elements from the John Collins Writing Program to supplement the approach. In addition, all teachers and learners were conversant and knowledgeable of the writing rubrics that have been developed to assess progress in writing at the various grade levels. The degree of implementation and the use of common language to describe the writing initiative are evident in every section of the building.

Furthermore, district personnel and Merrymount teachers are willing and able to articulate the feeling of school pride that exists within the building. More importantly, they are ready to discuss the sense of empowerment and ownership that teachers enjoy within their classrooms. One teacher interviewed stated that although the state Frameworks and district curriculums exist, and that Four-Square can be seen as a restrictive model for teaching writing, she feels completely at ease in using methodologies of her own choice. She states further that Mrs. McCarthy encourages the staff to take risks and to experiment. Several other teachers echoed this sentiment in both private and group interview settings.

A great deal of the credit for the positive feeling and working environment is given to Principal, Marcia McCarthy. Many individuals directly pointed to her tireless work and infectious energy as a revitalization component to their own professionalism.

**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?**

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The administrative staff and faculty members agree that the adoption of the Four Square writing approach and the supplemental programs and tools utilized for its support, are at the core of the improvement initiatives at the school. Teacher after teacher in interviews provided examples of student writing, student self-assessment rubrics and additional anecdotal evidence of the positive impact that the focus on writing has had in their classrooms. In addition, the Panel witnessed a staff that is so well versed in Four Square, Collins and the writer's workshop approach that they are able to apply that its tenets to other areas of study.

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

Yes. Data analysis has become a central and vital aspect of the work of the Merrymount School administration and faculty. This constant attention to data is a powerful indicator of the school's focus on continuously improving classroom instruction in an effort to lead students to higher achievement. In an interview with the building principal, the Panel learned that data analysis became an integral element of school operation in 2001. At that time both the district and the school conducted MCAS item analysis workshops. The information gleaned from this analysis was plotted on to a chart. Records of school wide areas of success, as well as areas that still require improvement, have been maintained for the past three years. A glance at this document shows those the areas in which Merrymount students fall below the state average, those areas where they meet or slightly exceed the state, as well as those areas where Merrymount students have met proficiency or have significantly exceeded the state average for a particular MCAS item. Teachers then use the information to inform classroom instruction.

Analysis of assessment data does not end with MCAS. Each grade level has a comprehensive program of assessment that is appropriate for students at that particular grade. For example, although there is no formal assessment for students in grades K through 2, those students are continually assessed in Reading through Developmental Reading Assessment and Running records. Furthermore, teachers at these levels have created math assessments that are based on the End-of-Year Expectations in Math. Students in grade 3 are given the Stanford 10 Test in Reading and Mathematics. These students also take the MCAS Reading Exam.

The newly formed Assessment Team is also deeply involved in analysis to determine gaps in curriculum and to design methods to address these gaps. Currently, the Assessment Team is developing a school-wide program to address an identified weakness in problem-solving and mathematics vocabulary. The program is called "Cracking the Code" and will be ready for implementation in September of 2004. In addition to providing students with a systematic approach to problem solving, this program will include a parent component to encourage parental participation in the review and reinforcement of math skills taught at school.

**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. All members of the Merrymount Elementary School Community are most welcoming and accommodating to their guests. The students are polite and were often observed by the Panel exhibiting behaviors that were appropriate and thoughtful. In addition, students interviewed seemed accustomed to greeting and interacting with guests from outside of the building. They were extraordinarily willing and able to share their learning, their work and their perceptions of the school. The amount of documentation to support and explain improvement initiatives is large and is readily shared with visitors. The physical space is very well kept and there are some areas that could be utilized for meetings or presentations. The media center is spacious (and well-stocked) and has an adjacent computer laboratory that would serve nicely for discussions and presentations.

The school and faculty have gone to tremendous lengths to maintain accurate and thorough documentation. As mentioned above, visitors will find these easily accessible and readable. The compiled documentation does an outstanding job of maintaining the key products of the improvement work completed at the school. All teachers interviewed were clear and concise in their appraisal of the school initiatives and how these changes have contributed to their professional growth and to the increased achievement of student learners.

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

Yes. The Review Panel unanimously recommends that the Merrymount Elementary School be designated to serve as a Commonwealth Compass School.

**CONCLUSION**

The Panel concluded that the work of the Merrymount School in improving the delivery of instruction in writing through a process that engaged and empowered teachers is an outstanding example of shared leadership producing improved student achievement and exemplary instruction. The school enjoys the wholehearted support of the district leadership in the form of financial support for professional development and in the purchase of program materials. In turn, the school staff supports the district by giving freely of their time and talents during district professional development activities. Mutual respect and focus on professionalism mark the relationship between the school administration and staff. This support is evident in the sense of ownership and empowerment communicated to the Review Panel by the faculty. Finally, the obvious awareness of, and attention to, the needs of all stakeholders, most especially the children, make the Merrymount Elementary School a highly functioning organization that is poised for continued growth and achievement, and an ideal candidate for Commonwealth Compass status.

**Appendix A  
 Panel Members**

**James Neary**, Chair, Department of Education  
**Ellen Marie Winson**, Title I Director, Woburn Public Schools  
**Deborah Grady**, Assistant Director of Curriculum, Auburn Public Schools  
**Andre Tuite**, School Support Specialist, Boston 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 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 teacher 1 and teacher 2	Observe teacher 3 and teacher 4	Observe teacher 5 and teacher 6	Observe 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).

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- • 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.