

## **School Panel Review Report Maurice J. Tobin K-8 School Boston Public Schools**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the School Panel Review Process is to assist the Commissioner of Education in determining whether State intervention is needed to guide improvement efforts in schools where students' MCAS performance is not at a level that reaches the school's Adequate Yearly Progress targets in English language arts or mathematics or both. The Maurice J. Tobin K-8 School met this criterion and was one of 15 schools selected for panel review in Fall/Winter of 2004-05. The panel review was conducted on December 14 and 15, 2004.

The review panel's charge was to analyze data and written information on the school's performance and improvement efforts, visit the school, and meet with school and district officials in order to advise the Commissioner on the answers to the following two key questions:

1. Does the school have a sound plan for improving student performance?
2. Are the conditions in place for the successful implementation of the school's improvement plan(s)?

The panel's responses to the two key questions that defined the scope of its review are included in this report. These findings and conclusions are the product of the panel's analysis, discussion, and observation, based on the evidence available to it. A list of panel members who participated in the review is provided in Appendix A. A detailed schedule of the panel's activities is provided in Appendix B.

The panel's findings and conclusions on the two key questions will be forwarded to the Commissioner of Education for consideration, together with school performance data, in determining whether the Maurice J. Tobin K-8 School is deemed under-performing. The panel was not asked to formulate a sound plan for school improvement where such a plan does not presently exist or to recommend a course of action to create the conditions for successful implementation of sound improvement strategies where such conditions at present do not appear to exist. Diagnostic and/or prescriptive intervention, where needed to assist an under-performing school, occurs at the next stage of the school review process.

### **Maurice J. Tobin K-8 School Profile**

#### **Enrollment**

The Maurice J. Tobin School is one of eight combined elementary/middle schools in Boston. The school serves students in grades K – 8. Enrollment at the Tobin School has fluctuated over the last four years, ranging from a high of 506 in 2002 to a low of 402 in 2004. There have also been small, yet noticeable, changes in student demographics.

Between 2001 and 2004, the proportions of Hispanic, Black, Asian, and White students attending the Tobin School have remained stable. In 2004, 65 percent of the Tobin School's students are Hispanic, 33 percent are Black, and 1 percent is Asian. No White students are reported as

attending the school in 2004. In previous years, up to 1 percent of the population was White. In 2004, 93 percent of the Tobin School's students were from low income families; in previous years, this percentage ranged from 84 to 92 percent. In 2004, 48 percent of the students are reported as having a primary language other than English. This represents a decrease from 60 percent in 2003. Twenty-six percent of students were reported as being Limited English Proficient in 2004; in 2001, this figure was 40.3 percent. In 2004, 12 percent of students are receiving special education services, which is a 1 percent increase from last year.

In 2004, the Tobin School registered an attendance rate of 94 percent, with students absent 9.9 days on average. The school's retention rate was 8.3 percent in 2003, the last year for which this data are available. This figure is more than three times the State's 2.6 percent average. Out-of-school suspensions averaged 12.4 percent, more than twice the State average of 6.1 percent. No in-school suspensions or exclusions were reported.

### **Staffing**

The 2004-2005 Tobin School's staffing report indicates that the school is composed of 2 administrators, 38 teachers, and 1 guidance counselor. Approximately 7 percent of educators at the school have been there for three or fewer years. Seventy-six percent of teachers are reported as being licensed in their current teaching area.

### **MCAS Overview**

Students at the Maurice J. Tobin School are assessed in grades 3, 4 and 7 in English language arts (ELA) and in grades 4, 6 and 8 in mathematics. The school has made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in ELA for the last two years. In mathematics, the school has not made AYP since determinations were first issued in 1999. In the school's Cycle III End-of-Cycle (2003-2004) AYP Report, the school made AYP in ELA in the aggregate and for its four reported subgroups: Limited English Proficient, Free/Reduced Price Lunch, African-American/Black, and Hispanic.<sup>1</sup> In mathematics, the school did not make AYP in the aggregate or for two of its three reported subgroups: Free/Reduced Price Lunch and Hispanic. The school is currently identified for Restructuring in mathematics, and has no accountability status in English language arts.

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

### **GRADE 3**

#### **Regular Education**

At the grade 3 level in Reading, the performance of regular education students shows improvement between 2002 and 2004. In 2002, 22 percent of students performed at the Proficient level, 52 percent were at the Needs Improvement level and 26 percent were in

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the federal No Child Left Behind Act passed in 2001, student performance is disaggregated by the following subgroups: Limited English Proficient, Special Education, Free/Reduced Price Lunch, African-American/Black, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Native American, and White. A minimum of 40 students (or 5% of the total number of students assessed, whichever is greater) per subgroup is required to issue a statistically sound rating or determination of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The subgroups meeting the minimum sample size at Maurice J. Tobin School in 2004 were Limited English Proficient, Free/Reduced Price Lunch, African-American/Black, and Hispanic for ELA, and Limited English Proficient, Free/Reduced Price Lunch, and Hispanic for mathematics.

Warning. In 2003, the percentage of Proficient students remained stable, while the percentage of Warning students decreased to 14 percent. In 2004, 30 percent were Proficient, 61 percent were in Needs Improvement and 9 percent were in Warning.

### **Special Education**

Results for Special Education students in grade 3 Reading are available for 2001 and 2003 only; in other years, the populations were too small for the reporting of aggregated results. In 2001, 0 percent of the 10 students assessed were Proficient, 40 percent were in Needs Improvement and 60 percent were in Warning. In 2003, 67 percent were in Needs Improvement and 33 percent were in Warning.

### **Limited English Proficient**

Results for Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in grade 3 Reading have been variable. In 2002, 75 percent were Proficient, 11 percent scored in Needs Improvement and 14 percent were in Warning. In 2003, 3 percent were at the Proficient level, 60 percent were in Needs Improvement and 37 percent were in Warning. In 2004, 70 percent of the 20 students assessed were in Needs Improvement; the remaining 30 percent were in Warning.

## **GRADE 4**

### **Regular Education**

Results for regular education students at the grade 4 level in ELA show a slight improvement trend between 2001 and 2004. In 2001, 8 percent of students scored in the Proficient range, 60 percent in Needs Improvement and 32 percent in Warning. In 2003, 2 percent scored in the Advanced range, 11 percent were Proficient, 62 percent were in Needs Improvement and 24 percent were in Warning. The year 2004 saw a slight increase in the percent Proficient and a similar decrease in the percent in Warning. In that year, 0 percent were Advanced, 14 percent were Proficient, 67 percent scored in Needs Improvement and 19 percent were in Warning.

### **Special Education**

Due to the small Special Education population at this grade level, data is available for 2003 only. In that year, 40 percent of the 15 students assessed were in Needs Improvement and 60 percent were in Warning.

### **Limited English Proficient**

Data for this subgroup is available for the years between 2000 and 2003; scores between these years were variable. In 2000, 45 percent of the 25 students assessed were in Needs Improvement and 55 percent were in Warning. In 2002, 80 percent of the 20 students assessed were in Needs Improvement and the remaining students were in Warning. In 2003, 15 percent of the 20 students assessed were in Needs Improvement and 85 percent were in Warning.

## **GRADE 7**

### **Regular Education**

Results for regular education students in grade 7 ELA indicate a general improvement trend, with more students scoring in the Proficient range and fewer scoring in the Warning range. In 2004, 4 percent of students were Advanced, 60 percent of students scored in the Proficient range, 27 percent were in Needs Improvement and no students scored in Warning. In 2002, 58 percent were Proficient, 31 percent were in Needs Improvement and 12 percent scored in Warning.

### **Special Education**

Fewer than 10 Special Education students were assessed in the grade 7 ELA test; as such, no aggregated results are reported for this subgroup.

### **Limited English Proficient**

Fewer than 10 LEP students were assessed in the grade 7 ELA test; as such, no aggregated results are reported for this subgroup.

## **Student Performance in Mathematics**

## **GRADE 4**

### **Regular Education**

At the grade 4 level in mathematics, scores for regular education students have remained fairly stable between 2001 and 2004, with a slight decline in both the percent Proficient and in Warning. In 2001, 4 percent of students were Proficient, 52 percent were in Needs Improvement and 44 percent were in Warning. In 2003, the percentage in Warning decreased to 40 percent and the percentage Proficient decreased to 2 percent. In 2004, no students were Proficient, 60 percent were in Needs Improvement and 40 percent were in Warning.

### **Special Education**

In 2003, 20 percent of the 15 Special Education students assessed in grade 4 mathematics were in Needs Improvement and 80 percent scored at the Warning level. In other years, no aggregated results are available due to fewer than 10 students being assessed.

### **Limited English Proficient**

Aggregated results for LEP students in grade 4 mathematics are available for 2003 only. In that year, 18 percent of the 22 students assessed scored in Needs Improvement and 82 percent were in Warning.

## **GRADE 6**

### **Regular Education**

Results for regular education students in grade 6 mathematics indicate a decrease in the percentage of students scoring in the Proficient and Warning ranges. In 2002, 14 percent of students were Proficient, 36 percent were in Needs Improvement and 50 percent were in Warning. The year 2003 saw 6 percent score in Proficient and 44 percent score in Warning. In 2004, 9 percent were Proficient, 57 percent were in Needs Improvement and 35 percent scored in Warning.

### **Special Education**

Fewer than 10 Special Education students were assessed in the grade 6 mathematics test; as such, no aggregated results are reported for this subgroup.

### **Limited English Proficient**

Fewer than 10 LEP students were assessed in the grade 6 mathematics test; as such, no aggregated results are reported for this subgroup.

## **GRADE 8**

### **Regular Education**

At the grade 8 level in mathematics, results for regular education students indicate a three-year trend of increasing numbers of students scoring at the Proficient level. In 2002, no students scored in the Advanced range, 5 percent were Proficient, 48 percent were in Needs Improvement and 48 percent were in Warning. In 2003, the percentage Proficient increased to 13 percent, 35 percent were in Needs Improvement and 52 percent were in Warning. In 2004, 6 percent of the students were in the Advanced range, 17 percent were Proficient, 44 percent were in Needs Improvement and 33 percent were in Warning.

### **Special Education**

Fewer than 10 Special Education students were assessed in the grade 8 mathematics test; as such, no aggregated results are reported for this subgroup.

### **Limited English Proficient**

Fewer than 10 LEP students were assessed in the grade 8 mathematics test; as such, no aggregated results are reported for this subgroup.

## **PANEL REPOSES TO THE KEY QUESTIONS**

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

Yes. The Maurice J. Tobin K-8 School has created a Whole School Improvement Plan (WSIP) that is likely to guide school-wide improvement efforts and raise student achievement. School staff has analyzed data from various sources in an attempt to identify student learning needs and areas of programmatic weakness. The WSIP has objectives that appear to be grounded in causes for poor student performance and instructional strategies that are targeted to those root causes. The 2004-06 WSIP is being developed collaboratively among the Tobin School Community.

Among the documents submitted for the Panel Review were two WSIPs: One written in the spring of 2003 and a current draft 2004-2006 WSIP that is due to the Boston Public Schools (BPS) in January 2005. The Panel reviewed the 2003 WSIP for context but has based its conclusions upon the current 2004-06 WSIP for several reasons. First, the current school leadership came to the school after submission of the 2003 WSIP; thus, the Panel was able to make judgments about the current leadership's influence solely on the current draft plan. Second, the 2004-06 WSIP contains sufficient detail to allow judgments regarding its likelihood for improving student performance. Third, staff involvement in the 2003 plan was limited due to the Boston Teachers Union's "Work to Fairness" rule. In contrast, there is a high level of staff input in the current plan.

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

Yes. Staff at the Tobin school has used a variety of assessment data to inform the 2004-06 WSIP, specifically to identify gaps in student performance in math and literacy and to recognize likely root causes for those gaps. In addition, the school has considered the effectiveness of its instructional and non-academic programs in order to identify the extent of their contribution to student success. The 2004-06 WSIP does not yet include subgroup-specific analysis, though school and district staff identified the necessity of such analysis and indicated that it will be undertaken.

As described in the principal's leadership report, the 2004-06 WSIP and staff interviews, the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), administrators and teachers have been working on the 2004-2006 WSIP since October 2004. Initially data analysis was conducted by the school data team and the 15-member ILT. More recently, the entire teaching staff has collaborated significantly on developing aspects of the new plan (see Key Question 1 E for evidence of staff collaboration).

Under the new school administration, the team began by looking at MCAS data assisted by data analysis tools available through Boston Public Schools' *MyBPS* website. They reviewed MCAS data analysis and root causes from the 2003 WSIP that included data on all students and subgroups of students, including English language learners, Special Education, African American and Hispanic students. The following is an example of MCAS data analysis and

subsequent root causes from the 2003 WSIP: In grades 4 and 6 Math, more than 50% of the students scored in the warning category. However, grade 4 students had the highest percentage of correct scores in number sense. Thus, in 2003, the school concluded that one of the root causes for students doing poorly in math was that they were not able to transfer these skills to multi-step problems. Adding MCAS data from 2004, the team found that 96 percent of all students did not attempt to answer short questions. According to the principal's leadership report, the team concluded that some students are not able to transfer mathematical skills to word problems or unfamiliar test formats.

According to the principal's leadership report, 2004-06 WSIP and interviews with the ILT, the school is in the process of analyzing data from the 2004 MCAS. Following the Department of Education Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) protocol, the Tobin School identified the five lowest items in ELA and math and discussed root causes. The following is an example of 2004 MCAS data analysis and subsequent root causes for poor student performance in English language arts (ELA): While the percent of grade 4 students in the proficiency category doubled from 2003 to 2004, 88 percent of the students remain in the needs improvement or failing category. An item analysis revealed that students have difficulty answering reading comprehension questions. The school concluded that the root causes include: students do not fully comprehend what they are being asked to do and where to find answers in the text; and, students have not had enough practice reading in various genres.

In the 2004-06 WSIP, the school has yet to disaggregate MCAS data by subgroup and discuss root causes for these groups. During interviews, school leadership and district support personnel indicated that the school's substantial population of English language learners face particular challenges, and that the 2004-06 WSIP must address the needs of these students. At this point, it is unclear how this level of data analysis will address the needs and potentially alter the instructional strategies in place for these students. It is essential, however, that the school staff engages in such analysis.

In addition to MCAS analysis, the school's Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) is examining such formative assessments as The Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA), The Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), school wide writing prompts, and end-of-unit tests for math. Additionally, administrative walk-through data is discussed and evaluated. The ILT and the school data team have reviewed this data for the development of the 2004-06 WSIP. Teachers and administrators continue to review this data during grade group meetings, Literacy Leadership Team (LLT) meetings, Math Leadership Team (MLT) meetings and school-wide professional development meetings.

In order to gauge the effectiveness of the Tobin's instructional programs, the ILT has looked at administrative walk-through and teacher survey data. According to the leadership report and interviews with school-based coaches and teachers, there has been improvement in the implementation of the Readers' and Writers' Workshops in the grades that have participated in the Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL) cycle. On the other hand, teacher survey and walk-through data suggest that teachers have not implemented the math program with integrity. This appears to be one of the causes for the increase in the numbers of students in the failing category in grade 4 math MCAS.

The Tobin School has a number of external partners whose programs aim to reduce the non-academic barriers to student success. Some of these partnerships include: The Bell Foundation, Peace Games, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Emmanuel College, Generations, Inc, Boston Connects and OrigiNations. Academic support provided by these partners is weighted towards addressing the literacy needs of the school's students. At this point, external support for mathematics is limited. During interviews with representatives of these organizations, the Panel learned that, while each organization does an internal evaluation of program effectiveness, there has never been an external review of how these organizations contribute to the students' overall school and social success. The Tobin School administrative team is making plans to evaluate the partners in the coming school year.

The Tobin School has analyzed student performance data and instructional data, as well as some non-academic program data. This analysis provides the foundation for the development of learning objectives and strategies in the 2004-06 WSIP that, if fully implemented, are likely to lead to improved student success.

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

Yes, the Maurice J. Tobin K-8 School has specified student performance goals based on desired MCAS results. The student learning and instructional objectives are grounded in reasons for poor student performance, focus on teaching and learning and appear to be both achievable and measurable.

The 2004-06 WSIP has six MCAS performance goals. While the goals for 2005 may be ambitious, they are aligned with the requirements of making adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal legislation. Analysis of MCAS results and other assessments suggest that Tobin students had difficulty in a number of academic skills, such as reading for meaning, identifying elements of genre, understanding and applying math vocabulary and algebraic skills across grade levels. According to interviews with the ILT, content-area coaches and some teachers, the school went through a process for prioritizing the areas of weaknesses that included listing the areas of weaknesses to see if there were commonalities across grades. This process led to the development of three student learning objectives in math and three student learning objectives in ELA that represent academic difficulties for most students across grade levels. These objectives provide the focus of the WSIP.

The student learning objectives are tied to areas of student weakness, focus on teaching and learning, are connected to instructional change objectives and are achievable and measurable. The following example for ELA from the 2004-2006 WSIP (p. 6) shows the connection between the learning objective and the instructional change objective.

*Student Learning Objective*

Students will apply a variety of strategies when reading independently

*Instructional Change Objective*

Students will have frequent opportunities to practice and demonstrate their understanding of sequential and consistently taught reading strategies.

While the 2004-06 WSIP has specific student learning objectives for the general population, the plan lacks explicit learning and instructional objectives for English language learners. According to the 2004-06 WSIP and interviews with school leaders, a deeper analysis of English language learners' performance and a discussion of root causes have not yet taken place. Approximately 25 percent of the students at the Tobin School are English language learners. In order to reduce performance gaps, it is critical that future planning include data analysis, discussion of root causes, the possible development of learning objectives for these students and increased professional development that goes beyond introductory workshops around the needs of English language learners.

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

Yes. Overall, the 2004-06 WSIP includes strategies that are linked to causes of poor student performance and matched with student learning objectives. Many of the strategies are sufficiently specific to guide implementation efforts, while others need more specificity. In addition to strategies that are specifically linked to classroom practice, the school is using teacher and instructional support strategies that are likely to contribute to improved student results.

The 2004-06 WSIP contains instructional strategies that are guided by student learning objectives. Many of the strategies are specific enough to guide implementation. The following is an example student learning objective for math: "Students will be able to successfully solve multi-step problems relating to their own experience and other real life situations." One instructional strategy that is aligned with this objective includes implementing a school-wide problem-solving strategy – Read, Understand, Solve, & Look Back (RUSL) – that teachers are either familiar with or are scheduled to learn about in professional development. (WSIP 2004-06, p.11)

On the other hand, some instructional strategies need more specificity. The following is an example student learning objective for ELA: "Students will be able to apply a variety of strategies when reading independently." The instructional strategies aligned with this objective include: "Teachers will explicitly teach and model reading strategies" and "Students will practice and demonstrate understanding of strategies" (WSIP 2004-06, p. 6). While the plan indicates that the Literacy Leadership Team (LLT) and ILT will create a school-wide list of sequential reading strategies, this has yet to be done. Naming the strategies is essential, as it will provide the necessary specificity to guide teachers.

In addition to strategies that focus directly on instruction, the Tobin School has employed strategies in the area of teacher and instructional support. According to the leadership report and interviews with teachers, Tobin teachers are required to maintain an assessment binder for each of their classes. Each binder is supposed to have an assessment summary sheet that provides a snapshot of student performance on standardized and performance test data, in addition to class work, student progress reports, conferring sheets, report cards and parent outreach logs. Classroom observations and teacher interviews indicate that, while all teachers have assessment binders, the quality of data included and teachers' ability to use the data varies. In interviews, administrators were not surprised by this variation as they monitor teachers' use of the assessment binders. According to the principal, variation is expected since this is the first year that teachers are required to keep assessment data. The principal noted, "I am committed to learning how to make assessment data more useful to teachers." The assessment binder is the first step.

There is ample evidence that teachers are implementing certain whole-school strategies articulated in the 2003 WSIP and carried over to the 2004-06 WSIP. During observations of 10 classrooms, panelists observed 10 classrooms with word walls to enable content specific vocabulary development; nine classrooms with libraries to increase student exposure to specific genre; nine classrooms with language and content objectives to support English language learners – although the quality of these objectives varied greatly; and 10 classrooms with assessment binders to assist teachers in tracking individual student performance data.

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

Yes. Although the written version of the 2004-06 WSIP is in draft form, there is sufficient evidence that the written plan will guide implementation of the planned improvement objectives. The plan identifies MCAS performance goals, student learning objectives, root causes, instructional change objectives, instructional strategies, methods for collecting information, evidence of quality implementation, student outcomes, a timeline and persons responsible. Interviews with faculty indicated that the majority were familiar with the plan and understood their role in implementing the strategies outlined within it.

As noted, MCAS student performance goals are tied to AYP projections. The student learning objectives and instructional change objectives are based in the identification of gaps in student performance, primarily on the MCAS but supplemented by other formative assessments such as the DRA, SRI and end-of-chapter tests. The instructional strategies are guided by the student learning objectives and, while many are specific enough to guide implementation, some strategies need more specificity. Most important, the strategies are school-wide; that is, all teachers are expected to employ them, resulting in consistency across and among grades regarding classroom practice.

According to the leadership report and interviews with administrative staff, the ILT and some teachers, the 2004-06 WSIP is a stronger document than the 2003 WSIP. According to the principal:

The revised plan clearly identifies root causes and instructional strategies that are, and will be, put in place to better meet the needs of our students. There are more teachers modeling, more chances for student discussion, more specific mini lessons, and more time for student practice ... The revised plan identifies more concrete steps rather than process strategies. Our plan specifies exactly what one should see in our school, rather than merely things we will put in place. Our plan speaks to concrete changes that need to be made in each class to lay the foundation for more advanced work ... It should be noted that our WSIP is a living document. (Leadership report, p. 4-5).

The Panel Review Team saw ample evidence that the above quote is representative of the current situation in the school. In interviews, many teachers described the ways in which they are using the WSIP action plans to guide instruction. For example, one teacher says that she uses the action plans in the beginning of the year to help guide her overarching goals for the year. Other teachers mentioned that they periodically refer to the action plans to make sure that they are using the school-wide strategies. Other teachers reported that it is not uncommon to refer to WSIP action plans in grade-group, ILT, Math Leadership Team (MLT) and whole-school meetings.

The 2004-06 WSIP shows improvement over the 2003 WSIP in terms of linking student learning objectives to establish the quality of implementation, to establish benchmarks and to systematically evaluate the effectiveness of instruction and non-academic programs. According to the principal, the Reading First Grant has assisted her and her staff in formatively evaluating both literacy program effectiveness and student performance through the use of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment. In interviews, some teachers talked about how they use the data “to group children and guide instruction.” As noted previously (Key Question 1), teacher survey data and administrative walk-throughs provided evidence that the Collaborative Coaching Learning (CCL) cycle is having an impact on participating teachers’ practice.

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

Yes. The 2004-06 WSIP is being developed in a way that will support successful implementation. The development of the plan involved a representative group, previous improvement plans were considered and the structure of the school has allowed for communication about the plan to be disseminated to a variety of stakeholders. During the site visit, the Panel Review Team consistently heard from faculty, ILT, coaches and administrators that “we are all on the same page.”

According to the leadership report and focus group interviews with the ILT, the faculty had an essential role in the development of the 2003 WSIP. At that time, more than 30 percent of the faculty was represented on the ILT. Faculty members reviewed the WSIP during grade level

meetings and professional development sessions. Due to the Boston Teachers' Union "Work to Fairness" ruling, however, revisions to the 2003 WSIP were limited.

Beginning in October 2004, the ILT and the school data team began working on the 2004-06 WSIP by looking at student performance data. This data analysis was then presented to the staff during two whole-school faculty meetings: first, to brainstorm root causes of poor student performance and then to discuss a draft WSIP. As noted previously in this report, the school realized that they lacked fully articulated whole-school strategies to help students improve their problem solving and reading comprehension skills.

The new administration has built upon faculty involvement from the 2003 WSIP and made changes in the school's administrative structure to facilitate greater involvement. The ILT is open to all staff and meets twice monthly. During the WSIP development, however, the ILT met weekly. ILT members follow up with their grade-level colleagues during grade-group, LLT, MLT and Language Acquisition Team meetings. According to interviews with the ILT and some teachers, the information flow is two-way: ILT members take current WSIP plans to the meetings, teachers provide feedback during those meetings and then the ILT representatives take teachers' input back to the full ILT. Moreover, Tobin teachers meet as a whole school for a full Saturday once every other month to revisit the WSIP action plans, look at data and discuss school climate issues. When asked how the development of the 2004-06 WSIP differed from the development of the 2003 plan, one teacher said, "We weren't ready for the process with the old plan, we wanted to do it all ... Now we look for the most effective strategies ... This one (plan) is more data-driven."

The key priorities in the WSIP have been communicated to the partner organizations that support the school. Although the partners did not assist in the development of the plan, they are aware of the priorities in the plan. During interviews, representatives from each organization were able to discuss (in general terms) the academic weaknesses that were addressed in the WSIP and how their program was working towards student success.

The current administrative team is taking concrete steps to build parent involvement. According to interviews, administrators decided to abandon the School Site Council last year because there was little parent involvement and the Council itself was ineffective. This year, leadership has started to rebuild the School Site Council by first strengthening parent involvement. Leadership created a Parent Council this year and, thus far, this group has met three times – each time with more parents in attendance. The School Site Council is scheduled to meet for the first time in January, 2005, and parents will be part of that body. During interviews, the principal indicated her vision for the School Site Council, stating that "the vision is to have this group be the authoritative body" in the school.

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

Yes. The conditions are in place to facilitate successful implementation of the WSIP. In the judgment of the Panel Review Team, the school has effective leadership and sound management. Interviews with school faculty indicate that they clearly support the planned improvement efforts and the school's administration. In addition, the district is adequately providing essential guidance and support to the school. There is a need to strengthen professional development activities to fully support teachers' implementation of strategies outlined in the school's improvement plan.

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

Yes. The school appears to have effective leadership and sound management. School leaders hold – and communicate – high expectations for students and staff and guide improvement efforts with confidence and energy. The faculty and other key stakeholders express confidence and support for the school leadership.

As noted previously, the Tobin School has a new administrative team. The principal was appointed in July 2003, the director of instruction was appointed in August 2003, and the assistant principal was appointed in August 2004. Under the principal's leadership, administrative roles and responsibilities have been clarified: The principal is responsible for the overall management of the school, the director of instruction focuses on instructional issues and the assistant principal's main responsibility is student support and discipline. According to interviews with the administrative team, school support team and some ILT members, this role clarification assists the school in managing and supporting both instructional and non-academic issues with greater efficiency and effectiveness.

School leadership holds high expectations for students and staff and communicates these expectations consistently and clearly throughout the school. The result is a positive school climate and strong staff morale. From the moment visitors enter the Tobin School, it is evident that the school community takes pride in the school and that the focus is on high social and academic expectations. Panel Review Members noted a clean school building filled with brightly colored posters and signs announcing school events, exhibiting student work and displaying the school vision, expectations and learning goals.

During interviews with teachers, parents and students, the same sentiment was heard: The new school administration is strong, accessible and very capable of leading school improvement efforts. For example, teacher survey data indicate that 80 percent of the staff feels that "the principal provides effective leadership to guide and support staff efforts to improve the academic performance of students" and 70 percent of the teachers indicate they are "well informed about the initiatives that are undertaken by school leadership and staff to improve student performance" (Staff Survey, p. 1). During interviews, parents commented on the accessibility of the principal, that she "has an open-door policy" and is available to discuss issues about the

school or their children's progress. During interviews, students reported that "expectations are realistic and there are plenty of opportunities to succeed."

High expectations for behavior are as important as high expectations for academics. During interviews, both students and school support staff talked about the Scholars Program for middle school students. The assistant principal adapted this program from another school and was instrumental in getting it started at the Tobin. The program helps students see themselves as learners – not just inside the building but at home as well. Every two weeks, students in the Middle School are assessed on academic performance and social behavior and given a status: independent scholar, supervised scholar and scholar in transition. Independent scholars are rewarded by having full privileges and responsibilities at school during the two-week cycle while students designated as supervised scholars or scholars in transition have some restrictions. Every two weeks, the Middle School has a community meeting run by students where the designations for the cycle are made public. During interviews, students report that the Scholars Program helps with behavior and that the students have ownership of the program. When asked if the Scholars Program was effective, one School Support Team Member responded, "The middle school climate in this school is ten times better than it was (before)."

Leadership holds teachers accountable for delivering effective instruction and provides support for those that need it. The school administrative team and the coaches are visible in classrooms: coaching, supporting students or doing walk-throughs. During interviews, teachers commented that the administration is accessible and that they give clear feedback and provide "constructive ideas" for improving classroom practice. Another teacher commented that expectations are clear and collegial and that they feel safe to express their opinions with the administration.

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

Yes. There is ample evidence that the school faculty supports the school improvement efforts. Staff members agree with the improvement strategies and are actively engaged with implementing the school's improvement initiatives. Professional development is provided to support teachers; however, introductory workshops for teachers with English language learners may not be sufficient to improve instruction for these students.

Many of the themes noted earlier in this report (Key Question 1D) describe the stance and commitment of the Tobin faculty towards the administration, the school improvement planning process and the WSIP. The skill and confidence within which the administrative team supports the school community and guides improvement efforts appear to contribute to the faculty's vast support for the identified initiatives. During the two-day site visit, the Panel Review Team consistently heard from faculty and staff that "we are finally all on the same page," suggesting that there is a school-wide effort to improve student performance.

As noted previously, Panel Review Members saw evidence of WSIP implementation during classroom observations, and teachers spoke of the school-wide strategies that they are using to target the school's academic priorities. During interviews, one teacher commented, "we are more

reflective then we have ever been.” Another teacher added, “because of the WSIP and the collaboration, we are doing more vertical planning.”

Finally, the administration has created more professional development for the staff. According to the leadership report and teacher interviews, the Collaborative Coaching & Learning (CCL) cycle is providing guidance and support to teachers as they improve their practice. Frequent administrative walk-throughs offer teachers opportunities for constructive feedback and new ideas for their practice. Full-day Saturday meetings give the faculty needed opportunities to discuss the implementation of the WSIP and school climate issues. These opportunities are fundamental in supporting the faculty as they implement the WSIP.

Professional development regarding the teaching of English language learners needs to be strengthened. It must be noted that the school has begun efforts to strengthen the teaching of these students through professional development in the Structured Immersion Observation Protocol (SIOP) model. The Language Acquisition Coach supports teachers as they develop language and content objectives for each lesson; however, classroom observations indicate a wide variance in teachers’ abilities to craft appropriate content and language objectives which may affect the level of instruction ELL students receive.

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

Yes. The Boston Public Schools (BPS) has adequately guided the Tobin’s school improvement efforts. District leaders are well informed of the needs of the school and district staff has been involved in the development and oversight of the plan.

According to the leadership report, the BPS Panel Review report and interviews with the administration, the school underwent a Boston Panel Review in the winter of 2003. Modeled after the Department of Education Panel Review, the purpose of the BPS Panel Review is to assist the superintendent in determining what interventions are needed to guide school improvement efforts. In January, 2004, seven educators from the Boston public school system spent two days at the Tobin School. The BPS Panel Review process resulted in specific recommendations and additional supports for the school, including an increase in math coaching from three times per month to almost two days a week; literacy coaching to three days per week; the hiring of a Language Acquisition Coach; and, continued support from the district support specialist assigned to the Tobin School. The School Support Specialist helps facilitate the work of the data team and the ILT and assists the administration in guiding improvement efforts. During this Panel Review Team’s two-day visit, it was clear to Panel Review Members that the School Support Specialist is a contributing member of the Tobin team.

During interviews, district leaders displayed knowledge of the Tobin School and the process within which the school is writing their 2004-2006 WSIP. According to interviews and the leadership report, the Deputy Superintendent and district content specialists have completed a number of walk-throughs at the Tobin School to gauge improvement efforts. In addition, the Deputy Superintendent is in close contact with the School Support Specialist to address any problems or concerns that may emerge.

The district's support is clearly influential in guiding and supporting the Tobin School's improvement efforts. Increased coaching for literacy, math and teaching English language learners, and providing a School Support Specialist who is actively involved in school improvement efforts is essential. District support is necessary for continued school improvement efforts to succeed. The Panel concludes that a failure to maintain these district supports would hamper the Tobin School's improvement efforts.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Maurice J. Tobin K-8 School has developed an improvement plan that guides school-wide improvement efforts. The WSIP contains student learning objectives that are grounded in causes for poor student performance and instructional strategies that are targeted to those root causes. The Tobin School community displays an understanding of the plan and school-wide support for it. The school's leadership has been effective in guiding improvement efforts and ensuring that students and staff understand what is expected of them. The Panel concludes that the current conditions appear to be in place for the Tobin School to make continued improvements in student performance.

**APPENDIX A**  
**Team Members**

**Nancy Clair**, Ed.D., Panel Chair, SchoolWorks, Beverly, MA.

**Matthew Pakos**, Panel Coordinator, Department of Education, Malden, MA.

**Cathie Latham**, Ed.D., Panel Member, School Support Coordinator, Lynn Public Schools, Lynn, MA.

**Ilana Ascher**, Panel Member, Teacher, Chelsea Public Schools, Chelsea, MA.

**Diane Juknavorian**, Panel Member, Teacher, Haverill Public Schools, Haverill, MA.

**APPENDIX B**  
**UNDER-PERFORMING PANEL REVIEW SCHEDULE**  
**Detailed Schedule for Review Panel School Site Visit**

**The times specified on the following schedule may be adjusted slightly to align with the daily schedule and practices in each of the schools being reviewed.**

**Day 1**

- 9:00 – 9:30 a.m.* Panel chairperson and panel coordinator meet to discuss and clarify roles, prepare for the first team meeting, and review general logistics/schedule for the review. [location: hotel]
- 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.* **Team meeting # 1:** team meets for the first time to discuss each panelist’s individual analysis; team forms preliminary judgments on key questions. [location: hotel]
- 12:00—2:00 p.m.* Panelists meet with Principal (and one other school-based individual, if appropriate). [location: the school]
- 2:00 – 3:00 p.m.* Panelists meet with School Leadership Team
- 3:00 – 4:00 p.m.* Panelists meet with the district Superintendent (and Assistant Superintendent, if appropriate). [location: school]
- 4:30 – 6:00 p.m.* **Team meeting # 2:** panelists synthesize interview information, further define findings, prepare questions, and develop a team strategy for Day 2 of the review. [location: hotel]

**Day 2**

**All activities take place in the school**

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

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

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

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

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

12:30—1:00 p.m. Panelists use time as needed to analyze findings and to gather more information.

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

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

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

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