

REPORT OF FACT FINDING REVIEW Massachusetts Department of Education

Normandin Middle School New Bedford Public Schools

Executive Summary

A Fact Finding (FF) team assembled by the Massachusetts Department of Education spent three days at the Normandin Middle School in New Bedford (March 2 & 3, 2005 and March 11, 2005), conducting classroom observations and interviews with district and school personnel. The task of the FF team was to determine the reasons for low levels of performance at Normandin and analyze the prospects for improvement. As first identified in the school's Panel Review report and further corroborated by the Fact Finding team, improvement planning at Normandin has been unsuccessful in identifying the root causes for low student achievement. Because instruction and teaching methodologies are at the core of sound educational practices and are directly linked to student learning outcomes, Normandin Middle School must focus on these areas of critical priority. As a result, the predominant focus of this report (and its recommendations across the four domains) is on developing instructional strategies and building a climate and school structure centered on teaching and learning,

I. Curriculum and Instruction

The Fact Finding team observed 31 classrooms during the three-day visit to Normandin. Team members found that the majority of the classrooms lacked academic rigor, exemplary instruction and high expectations for students. Based on these observations and a thorough review of school documents, the FF team concluded these deficiencies in instruction were a result of:

- A lack of a common understanding of academic rigor and excellence among the staff, which impacts their ability to raise expectations for Normandin students;
- School leaders' inability to use data analysis to accurately determine students' learning gaps and map instructional strategies to address them;
- Poor instruction that does not engage students, is not differentiated, and is often not grade appropriate; and,
- Inadequate professional development to build teachers' capacity to implement effective instructional strategies in their classrooms.

In order to improve student achievement at Normandin, the FF team recommends that the school, with district support, consider:

- Using common planning time to explore effective teaching strategies and define intellectual rigor at Normandin;
- Training teachers and school leaders to conduct in-depth data analysis; and,
- Creating more opportunities for the Curriculum Supervisors to visit classrooms to model best practices designed to address the specific gaps in student learning.

Although the FF team found inadequacies in instruction at the Normandin, the team did find areas of strength within the building that can be used to build its capacity in teaching and learning:

- There is consistency in the way lessons are structured across the school because teachers use a common lesson plan template;
- Common planning time is already a part of the schedule with weekly pod and content-area meetings for teachers. The intent is that teachers will use these meeting times to engage in discussions about their instructional practice;
- There are pockets of exemplary practice in the building that should be identified and used as models for other instructors; and,
- Classrooms and the school building as a whole are neat and attractive.

II. School Climate

The Normandin is located in a brand new facility that is warm, welcoming, and rich in resources. Team members observed that students were orderly and well-behaved and, for the most part, had positive interactions with their teachers. The faculty and students reported that they feel safe in the building. They attribute this to the small class size as well as the success of the School Climate Committee that has made behavior management a priority in the school. Since the Normandin is committed to providing students with rich learning experiences, school leaders have a variety of extracurricular activities designed to bolster students' social and emotional growth. This has made it possible for many students to develop a strong school identity and internalize the core values of the school.

Despite these strengths, the climate at the Normandin does not promote high achievement among students. This is evident in the fact that many teachers inconsistently apply the discipline policy in their classrooms and do not engage students in activities that are intellectually challenging. In terms of the professional climate at the school, teachers reported that they do not have the opportunity to visit each other's classrooms as a way of sharing and learning best practices, which they feel would serve to reinforce the topics they discuss in pod and content area meetings. Members of the FF team also noted that many teachers do not seem to understand their role in the improvement planning process.

In order to establish a culture of achievement at the Normandin, the team recommends that administrators and teachers:

- Use content area and pod meetings to look at student work. This will make it possible for them to establish clear grade level benchmarks for student performance as well as the criteria for exemplary student work.
- Provide professional development designed to build teachers' capacity to create classroom environments that are rigorous and focused on raising student achievement.
- Use whole faculty meetings to review the School Improvement Plan (SIP). This will help the faculty to better understand its role in the improvement planning process as well as monitor the progress it has made in terms of strengthening the instructional program at the school.

III. Organizational Structure and Management

The Fact Finding team found the organizational structure of the school to be sufficient to address the learning needs of the community. There is adequate personnel and ample time for teachers and leaders to carry out their responsibilities during the course of the school day. However, there are significant areas for concern which directly contribute to the quality of instruction at Normandin:

- Despite some promising practices, the supervision of instruction is not yet effective enough to directly impact instructional practices across the school.
- The quality of teacher evaluations is severely limited and does not provide teachers with precise feedback or in-depth comments that can assist them in examining and changing their practice.
- There are 10 committees responsible for improving the climate and curriculum in the school. There does not appear to be a clear prioritization of needs to guide the work of these committees.

The FF team recommends that school leaders work with the staff to prioritize the key issues impacting student performance in the school. By doing so, they can better utilize the resources that they have available to significantly bolster the instructional program at the school. Efforts should be made to create an Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) as a way of getting teachers more involved in making decisions about teaching and learning. This would make it possible for the administrators to get more staff buy-in for school improvement initiatives. Finally, it would have a positive impact on the professional culture at the school because members of the ILT would help the curriculum supervisors facilitate discussions about effective practice in both the pod and content area meetings.

IV. Leadership and Planning

The leadership at the Normandin Middle Schools has a number of strengths. These include:

- A visible and approachable leadership team (according to interview data)
- Some promising new practices, such as common lesson planning templates and walk-throughs, to improve instruction
- Good access to materials and community resources

To build upon the existing strengths, leadership must continue to invest its efforts in some of its promising practices. In particular, the capacity of curriculum supervisors and assistant principals needs to be built further so that they can effectively provide formative feedback on support on instruction.

The leadership must also improve the school's use of data to drive instructional decisions. The FF team recommends that the school work with the district's School Support Specialist to build their knowledge of effective data analysis and presentation.

Fact Finding Review Process

The Fact Finding Review is the third stage in the process used to assess school performance under the Massachusetts School and District Accountability System. At the first stage of the process, a school's performance and improvement on state MCAS tests is rated. Schools that perform in the lowest School Performance Rating categories (very high percentage of students with failing MCAS performance; low percentage proficient and advanced) may be referred for a Panel Review.

The Panel Review process constitutes the second stage of the School and District Accountability System. Panel Reviews are conducted to assist the Commissioner of Education in determining whether state intervention is needed to guide improvement efforts in schools where students' MCAS performance is critically low and no trend toward improved student performance is evident from MCAS data. Panels consisting of 5-8 members review data and written information on the school's performance and improvement efforts and spend two days visiting the school and meeting with school and district leaders.

The Review Panel's charge is to advise the Commissioner of Education, at the conclusion of the review process, of its judgment on two questions:

- Does the school under review have a sound plan for improving student performance?
- Are the conditions in place for the successful implementation of the school's improvement plan?

If the answer to either or both of these questions is no, the Commissioner may declare the school to be under-performing.

Schools that are declared to be under-performing enter the third stage in the School and District Accountability System and undergo an in-depth diagnostic Fact-Finding Review.

The purposes of the Fact-Finding Review are to:

- Provide an in-depth diagnosis of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, including specific causal analysis.
- Use extensive observation (school and classroom) to build a knowledge base for the school's planning work.
- Make specific recommendations for the development of the school's improvement plan

The Fact Finding Team's charge is to advise the Commissioner and Board of Education, at the conclusion of the review process, of its judgment on two key questions:

1. What are the reasons for the low levels of student performance in ELA and mathematics at this school?
2. What are the prospects for improved student performance at this school?

The Fact Finding Team answers the key questions based on evidence collected through observations of teaching and learning, interviews of faculty, students, administrators, district personnel and other school stakeholders and through the review of documents, including the school improvement plan, student assessment information, curriculum documents, and student work. The team's judgments must be robust and fully supported by evidence.

The Fact Finding Team's judgments are guided by a protocol that requires the team to respond to the key questions in each of the following domains: curriculum and instruction; school climate; organizational structures and management; leadership and planning. The Fact Finding Team uses its professional judgment to focus on domains that reveal key strengths and areas for improvement in the school.

School Profile

The Normandin Middle School is one of three middle schools in New Bedford. At the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year, the school expanded its population by adding grade 6. The school now serves students in grades 6-8. Accordingly, enrollment at Normandin Middle School has increased from 880 in 2001 to 907 in 2003 and 1,334 as of October 1 this school year. Student demographics at the school have remained fairly stable over the same time, with several small, but notable, changes.

Between 2001 and 2004, the proportions of Asian and Black students attending Normandin Middle School have remained at 0 - 1 and 8 - 9 percent, respectively. The percentage of Hispanic students has increased from 13 to 16 percent, while the percentage of White students has decreased from 79 to 75 percent over the same period. In 2004, 60 percent of Normandin Middle School's students were from low income families. This proportion is similar to previous years, with the exception of 2002, when 54 percent were reported in this category. In 2004, 18 percent of students are reported as having a first language other than English, which is a slight decrease from the 20 percent reported in 2003. No students were reported in the Limited English Proficient category between 2002 and 2004. This school year, 16 percent of students are receiving special education services, which is the same percentage as in 2003.

In 2004, Normandin Middle School registered an attendance rate of 93.5 percent, with students absent 11.3 days on average. The school's retention rate was 4.1 percent in 2003, the last year for which this data are available. Out-of-school suspensions were reported at 13.2 percent, more than twice the state's 6.1 average. No in-school suspensions or exclusions were reported in 2003; though in 2002, the in-school suspension rate was 24.2 percent.

Staffing

The 2004-2005 Normandin Middle School School's staffing report indicates that the school is composed of 4 administrators, 102 teachers and 4 guidance staff. Approximately 58 percent of educators at the school have been there for three or fewer years. More than 88 percent of the Normandin Middle School's teachers are licensed in their current teaching area.

MCAS Results

Students at the Normandin Middle School are assessed in grade 7 in English language arts (ELA) and in grades 6 and 8 in mathematics. The school has not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in ELA since 2002. The school has not made AYP in mathematics since AYP determinations were first issued in 1999. In the school's Cycle III End-of-Cycle Report (2003-2004), the school did not make AYP in ELA in the aggregate or for two of its four reported subgroups: Special Education and White¹. In mathematics, the school failed to make AYP in the aggregate and for all of its five reported subgroups: Special Education, Free/Reduced Price Lunch, African-American/Black, Hispanic and White. The school is currently identified for Improvement in ELA and Restructuring in mathematics.

Student Performance in English Language Arts**GRADE 7****Regular Education**

Results for regular education students in grade 7 ELA show a slight performance improvement trend between 2001 and 2004. In 2001, 1 percent of students scored in the Advanced range, 31 percent in the Proficient range, 47 percent in the Needs Improvement range and 20 percent in Warning. In 2003, 1 percent were Advanced, 36 percent were Proficient, 51 percent were in Needs Improvement and 11 percent were in Warning. In 2004, the percentage Proficient climbed to 40 percent, the percentage of students in Needs Improvement decreased to 48 and the percentage in Warning was 12 percent.

Special Education

Results for Special Education students in grade 7 ELA show improvement from 2001 to 2002, since 2002 results show a slight performance decline. In 2001, 1 percent of students were Proficient, 9 percent were in Needs Improvement and 89 percent were in the Warning range. In 2002, 8 percent of students were Proficient, 52 percent were in Needs Improvement and 41 percent were in Warning. In 2004, 10 percent were Proficient, 44 percent were in Needs Improvement and 46 percent were in the Warning range.

Limited English Proficient

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

Student Performance in Mathematics**GRADE 6****Regular Education**

As a result of the school's grade expansion, only one year of data are available for regular education students in grade 6 mathematics. In 2004, 4 percent of students were Advanced, 18 percent were Proficient, 40 percent were in Needs Improvement and 38 percent were in Warning.

Special Education

As a result of the school's grade expansion, only one year of data are available for Special Education students in grade 6 mathematics. In 2004, 7 percent of students scored in Needs Improvement and the remaining 93 percent were in the Warning range.

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**

Scores for regular education students in grade 8 mathematics have remained fairly stable between 2001 and 2004, with a gradual decrease in the percentage of students in the Warning category evident in 2004. In 2001, 2 percent of students scored in the Advanced range, 9 percent in Proficient, 37 percent in Needs Improvement and 52 percent in Warning. In 2003, results were similar, with 2 percent Advanced, 10 percent Proficient, 35 percent in Needs Improvement and 53 percent in Warning. In 2004, 2 percent were Advanced, 12 percent were Proficient, 38 percent were in Needs Improvement and 48 percent were in Warning.

Special Education

From 2001 to 2004, the percentage of Special Education students scoring in the Warning category in grade 8 mathematics was 90 - 97 percent. In 2004, 10 percent scored in the Needs Improvement range and the remaining 90 percent were in Warning.

Limited English Proficient

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

¹In 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 Normandin Middle School in 2004 were Free/Reduced Price Lunch in ELA, and Limited English Proficient, Special Education, Free/Reduced Price Lunch, Asian or Pacific Islander, and White in mathematics.

Key Domains of Inquiry

I: Curriculum and Instruction

Fact Finding team members concluded that there are several key factors in the domain of curriculum and instruction that are impacting learning at Normandin. First, there is no common understanding of academic rigor or excellence among the staff. In teacher interviews, staff had difficulty defining rigor at Normandin. Some comments included:

- “Don’t know.”
- “Respecting the Core Values of the school.”
- “Not playtime.”

The lack of rigor was also apparent in the classrooms where team members observed many lessons that were below grade level or in which teachers did not push students to think more deeply about the material being discussed. For example, team members observed a sixth grade literacy class in which students were reading Dr. Seuss’s *The Lorax*. Students were then told to plant seeds and write on how their seeds change the world. The teacher did not provide students with any explicit directions for the writing process. Students were told they could pick another Dr. Seuss text to read when they were done writing. Although Dr. Seuss’s works are often used as instructional texts, *The Lorax* is well below grade level for a sixth grade class. The directions and reasons for the writing were unclear, as were the connections between planting the seeds, the themes of the story and the writing exercise. In an eighth grade ELA class, students were observed completing a vocabulary assignment and a word search. The teacher did not provide students with a context for the words or reason for the word search nor asked them to apply their vocabulary to a class discussion or to a reading text. Examples of below grade level work and assignments that did not require students to apply new knowledge (e.g., vocabulary) to new situations were prevalent across the FF team’s classroom observations.

The fact that many teachers gave students assignments that could be deemed as being below grade level led team members to conclude that instruction is not in alignment with the district-wide middle school curricula. A review of the district’s ELA curriculum for middle school shows that students should be engaged in lessons and activities that build their higher order thinking skills as well as boost their comprehension of very sophisticated and complex materials.

Instructional time was not effectively used by many teachers. In many of the classes visited, students were off task either because they were bored with the lesson or did not understand the directions that were being provided by the teachers. This problem was further compounded by the fact that many teachers did not diligently check students’ understanding of the lesson. Their failure to check students’ understanding of the lesson objectives made it difficult for them to modify their instructional strategies so that they could address the specific gaps in students’ skills and knowledge.

Team members also observed that Special Education (SPED) students are not adequately supported within the inclusion classroom. School administrators and teachers reported that the school uses a consult model to provide special education services. In the consult model, the regular education teacher meets with the special education teacher to discuss strategies for supporting students with special needs in the classroom. In addition, some students receive one-

on-one support from a paraprofessional who is assigned to their class. During the Fact Finding visit to the Normandin, team members became aware of the limitations of the consult model as presently implemented.

First, both regular and special education teachers reported that they do not have sufficient time to meet and plan lessons together. This is because each special education teacher is assigned to two pods, which limits the amount of time they have to engage in lesson planning with their regular education colleagues. As a result, instruction is not always differentiated or adapted to meet the learning needs of all students with special needs.

Second, it is not evident that paraprofessionals provide adequate one-on-one support to students. Team members noticed that some paraprofessionals usually sit at the front of the class or off to the side and rarely interacted with the students who they are supposed to be supporting. When asked about this, school leaders informed team members that the paraprofessionals usually do this when they want students to participate in more independent work. While this is a good idea, it can be problematic. In order for students to engage in independent work, they must first understand the content and concepts that are being covered in the class. Team members did not observe the paraprofessionals working with students to make sure that they understood the lesson and the assignment before allowing them to work on their own.

A review of school documents shows that school leaders are aware of the deficiencies in instruction that exist at the school. The principal compiled the data gathered from walk-throughs to create an Observation Report that documents the best practices that are being implemented in the school, as well as the weaknesses in instruction that were observed in many classrooms. In the Observation Report the principal noted that:

- No evidence of rubric or other devices to set a standard;”
- “Single style of teaching used;”
- “Primarily board work, too much ‘pushing on,’ poor pace to lesson (teacher did not allow students time to process and answer);” and,
- “Teacher provides answers to own questions.”

Although the faculty and administrators were trained to use a software program designed to generate individual and class profiles/reports based on student performance data, there was very little evidence that they were using this information to drive instruction in the school. In interviews with team members, teachers did not mention using data to identify the specific gaps in students’ skills and knowledge so that they could adjust their teaching strategies to better support them. This was confirmed during class observations. Team members noted that the majority of teachers engaged in teacher-directed whole school instruction and provided limited opportunities for students to work in pairs or teams. In addition, the teachers did not use a variety of assessments to monitor student progress.

School leaders are making efforts to improve teaching. For example, teachers are required to use a common lesson plan template for planning, and this has led to a consistent approach to structuring lessons across the school. The principal and curriculum supervisors use a common protocol for conducting regular walk-throughs in the school. Information from the completed protocol is then used to provide teachers with feedback about their practice. Team members

concluded that this procedure is beginning to have a positive effect on the professional culture at the school because it makes it possible for some teachers to become more reflective about their delivery of instruction.

The use of a common lesson plan template, common planning time and walk-throughs are all strengths that school leaders can build on as they move forward with the improvement planning process in the school. In order for these practices to have meaningful impact on teaching and learning at the Normandin, effort should be made to increase the capacity of the curriculum supervisors and assistant principals to function as instructional leaders. Team members learned during the Fact Finding visit that the roles of both the curriculum supervisors and the assistant principals are evolving in the school. District personnel and teachers informed team members that – in previous years – the curriculum supervisors served as instructional coaches in school, but at the start of the current school year, they took on a more directive role in the formative assessment of instruction. The same is also true for the assistant principals who in the past were primarily responsible for discipline, but who now have a key role to play in supporting teaching and learning.

Conversations with school administrators and teachers revealed that the assistant principals and curriculum supervisors are still in the process of becoming more comfortable with their newly defined roles. The team, therefore, recommends that both groups continue to receive professional development from the district to build their skills as instructional leaders. As instructional leaders, they need to learn how to give teachers specific and meaningful feedback about their practice. A review of completed walk-through protocols and formal evaluations shows that teachers do not always receive immediate and detailed feedback that is designed to help them improve their practice. Most teachers simply receive a checklist with comments that primarily address the mechanics of the lesson or classroom management: “Agenda book referred to and used by students” and “Students out of seat yelling...I will conference with (name of teacher) at a later date.”

Other recommendations by the FF team include:

- Use common planning times to engage in discussions about effective teaching strategies. This would make it possible for the staff to develop a common understanding of what good instruction should look like at the school. The curriculum supervisors could model these effective strategies until teachers become proficient in them;
- Evaluate the efficacy of school-wide initiatives to see if they are having the desired impact on student learning. For example, school leaders, with district support, should examine the literacy model that is currently being implemented in the school. Currently, the school has separate classes for writing and reading instruction. Class observations, however, show that many teachers are not able to effectively teach each subject area in isolation.

II: School Climate

School leaders have employed a variety of strategies to create a positive school climate. First, they organized a School Climate Committee that has made behavior management a priority in the school. The School Climate Committee works with school leaders to reinforce the school-wide discipline policy and recognize students who display positive behaviors in the school. According to school leaders and teachers, each week students are recognized during lunch for modeling the school's Core Values of "Respect Yourself, Respect Others, and Respect Your School." They also reported that the school hosts a monthly dinner, "Navigators' Night," for the families of the fifty students who are recognized for their exemplary behavior in the school. The students who were recognized in the previous months, along with their families, are also invited to the dinners.

Second, school leaders have established and sustained partnerships with organizations such as the Community Police Officer and Communities and Schools for Career Success (CS²) to provide extracurricular activities designed to enrich the learning experiences of students in the school. The interview with the community police officer and CS² representative revealed that as a result of the Panel Review, both parties have been meeting biweekly with the parent liaison to discuss and collaborate on ideas for providing students and teachers better access to community resources. They also use this time to evaluate the quality and types of after-school programs that are available in the school so they can better address the needs to students. The community police officer, parent liaison and CS² informed members of the FF team that since this collaboration is in its infancy, they have not invited other members of the school community to their meetings. According to them, they would like to use their initial meetings to clearly define the purpose and roles and responsibilities of this group before opening it up to new members.

Teachers and students consistently said that they feel safe in the school. They attribute this to the success of the School Climate Committee as well as school leaders' decision to assign each grade level to a different floor in the building. According to students, the fact that each grade level has its own assigned floor serves to minimize bullying by older students in the school. The fact that school leaders have broken each grade level into four learning pods has served to create small learning communities that make it possible for students to receive the personalized attention they need from the faculty.

While safety needs appear to be addressed, the climate at the Normandin does not promote high achievement among students. This is evident in the fact that many teachers inconsistently apply the discipline policy in their classrooms and do not engage students in activities that are intellectually challenging. During the FF visit, team members observed that many teachers relied heavily on worksheets and vocabulary assignments for instruction. Many teachers excessively used Round Robin reading in their classes and did not encourage students to participate in independent reading or analysis of texts to discover deeper meanings. These teachers also accepted the first response they got from students and did not ask probing questions that would get students to think more deeply about what they are learning in the classroom.

In terms of the professional climate at the school, teachers reported that they do not have the opportunity to visit each other's classroom as a way of sharing and learning best practices, which they feel would serve to reinforce the topics they discuss in pod and content area meetings. Members of the FF team also noted that many teachers do not seem to understand their role in the improvement planning process at the school. Although there are teachers who are members of the PIMS (Performance Improvement Mapping System)/SIP Committee, many teachers, when interviewed, were not familiar with the SIP and its objectives. They also did not remember having input in its development.

In order to establish a culture of achievement at the Normandin the team recommends that administrators and teachers:

- Use content area and pod meetings to look at student work. This will make it possible for them to establish clear grade level benchmarks for student performance as well as the criteria for exemplary student work.
- Provide professional development designed to build teachers' capacity to create classroom environments that are student-centered and focused on raising student achievement.
- Integrate MCAS preparation into daily lessons. Teachers should use this opportunity to be clear with students about the MCAS skills they are learning and show them how they can apply them to the exam.
- Use whole faculty meetings to review the School Improvement Plan (SIP). This will help the faculty to better understand its role in the improvement planning process as well as monitor the progress it has made in terms of strengthening the instructional program at the school.

III. Organizational and Management

The Normandin has the organizational structure in place to strengthen teaching and learning. The principal and curriculum supervisors regularly monitor curriculum and instruction in the school. They are supported by the assistant principals who are becoming more actively involved in supporting teaching and learning, while continuing to function as the key disciplinarians in the building.

As noted earlier in the report, teachers have time in their schedules to participate in professional dialogue about teaching and learning. School leaders are working hard to implement the district's new evaluation and walk-through protocols as a way of providing teachers with feedback about their practice. There is evidence that school administrators are committed to improving the instructional program at the Normandin. They worked with teachers to establish a variety of committees that are responsible for improving key elements of the school community. Some of the committees include the Principal Leadership Team; PIMS (Performance Improvement Mapping System)/SIP, and the Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment committees.

Although these are strengths that school leaders can build on as they move the improvement planning process forward, their implementation has yet to have a positive impact on student performance. Teachers do not consistently use pods and content area meetings to discuss strategies that they can use to change and improve their practice. School leaders do not always provide teachers with meaningful feedback based on their informal observations and formal

evaluations. As a result, the teachers at the Normandin have not made significant changes to the way in which they deliver instruction.

Based on information gathered from interviews with school and district personnel, the FF team determined that there are too many committees addressing areas for improvement without sufficient coordination and prioritization of their respective efforts. Currently, there are 10 committees that do not function as a unified whole to bring about school improvement. Conversations with staff and administrators reveal that there is poor communication and coordination among the various committees in the school. Most teachers could not articulate the purpose for each committee.

The existence of many committees led FF team members to conclude that school leaders have yet to sufficiently prioritize the issues impacting teaching and learning. The team, therefore, recommends that school leaders prioritize the key issues in the school and reorganize/streamline committees to address them. In addition, efforts should be made to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of these committees.

As part of examining the current committee structure, the FF team suggests considering collapsing some committees into a single Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) that is made up of both teachers and administrators. The ILT could work collaboratively with the PIM/SIP team to strengthen the instructional program. At present, there is a Principal Leadership Team that is made up of administrators only. It is responsible for making key decisions about curriculum and instruction. The Principal Leadership Team has not always been successful in getting staff buy-in for some of its initiatives regarding teaching and learning. The creation of the ILT would serve to increase teacher participation in the decision-making process. An ILT may be able to eliminate the need for some of the other existing committees.

IV. Leadership and Planning

Student and teacher interviews indicate that school leaders are visible and accessible. They conduct frequent classroom observations and participate in pod and content area meetings. The curriculum supervisors work with teachers to ensure that they have all the materials they need to deliver instruction in their classrooms. School leaders have done an excellent job of accessing community resources to support learning as evidenced by the presence of a parent liaison and CS² representative in the building who work with the school police officer to bring more programs and resources to enrich the lives of students.

Despite this, there are some areas for improvement. For example, instructional leadership – while increasing – is not yet effective enough to meet the school’s needs. As noted earlier in this report, both the curriculum supervisors and assistant principals are learning how to provide effective oversight of teaching and learning.

Information gathered during the visit to the Normandin has led team members to conclude that the curriculum supervisors, in particular, have the content knowledge to engage teachers in meaningful dialogue about the lessons and units that are being taught in their classes. However,

they, along with the assistant principals, need to participate in professional development that would provide them with the skills necessary to manage the teachers and hold them accountable for improving their instructional practices.

Another area for improvement is the lack of data-driven decision making to drive classroom instruction and school improvement planning. During the course of the Fact Finding visit, team members did not hear school personnel speak about using student performance data to make programmatic and instructional changes to raise student achievement. This finding confirms the Panel Review report. The team recommends that the school leaders continue to work with the district School Support Specialist to build their knowledge of effective data analysis. This would enable them to identify the root causes for low student performance so that they can develop a SIP that has well-defined outcomes and strategies for student performance.

Finally, school leadership should evaluate the many programs currently being implemented and determine the effectiveness of each. During interviews, the curriculum supervisors were able to identify many programs they have in the school to raise student achievement. However, there were so many programs that it was difficult for team members to evaluate which were actually helping the school achieve its goals. The FF team recommends that leadership conduct an evaluation and a resource audit of all its programs to determine if they are effectively helping to improve instructional practices.

Conclusion

The Fact Finding team found that the lack of in-depth data analysis, inadequate instructional leadership and poor instruction are the three key factors impacting student performance at the Normandin. The processes and systems to support improvement planning are in place, but they are not being well utilized by the staff to raise student achievement. Efforts must be made to:

- Use the common planning times to enhance teachers' understanding of best practices.
- Provide professional development to teachers in the form of coaching to ensure that they know how to implement best practices in their classes.
- Build the capacity of the curriculum supervisors and the assistant principals to be effective instructional leaders as they transition from being mentors to overseers of the academic program.
- Train administrators and teachers in data analysis so that they can use information on student performance to drive teaching and learning in the school.

It was clear to the Fact Finding team that the staff at the Normandin Middle School is willing to implement the necessary changes to improve students' performance. Both teachers and school leaders were eager to participate in rich discussions about the school's needs. The school has the essential leaders in place who are capable of implementing the crucial changes in teaching and learning with the appropriate professional development and support. District leaders are aware of the school's struggles and are willing to help in whatever ways necessary to ensure success.

APPENDIX A
FACT FINDING PANEL REVIEW SCHEDULE
Detailed Schedule for Fact Finding 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: Core Team Only

Core Team	
12:00- 1:00	Hotel check-in, lunch
1:00 – 5:00	Core team summarizes review of documents, panel report

Day 2: Full Team (Core Team + Practitioners)

	Core Team	Practitioners
7:30 – 8:30 AM	Introductions to principal, school tour; additional focus areas for class visits	
8:30 – 9:00 AM	Set up workspace	Meet students to be shadowed
9:00 – 12:00 AM	Meet with school leadership/ planning team	Shadow student #1
12:00 – 1:00	Lunch	Lunch with students; break
1:00 – 3:00 PM	Meet with district leaders/ support personnel	Shadow student #2
3:00 – 5:00 PM	Debrief school and district meetings, class visits; Construct responses to Domains 1 (and 2)	

Day 3: Full Team (Core Team + Practitioners)

	Core Team	Practitioners
7:30 – 8:00 AM	Review schedule, assign tasks	
8:30 – 9:30 AM	Share debrief summary with principal	Class visits as assigned
9:30 – 9:45 AM	Break	Break
9:45 – 10:45 AM	Focus Groups/ Interviews	Class visits as assigned
11:00 – 12:00 AM	Focus Groups/ Interviews	Class visits as assigned
12:00 – 1:00 P.M.	Lunch	Lunch
1:00 – 3:00 PM	Debrief school visits, focus group meetings; Practitioners depart	
3:00 – 5:00 PM	Summarize Responses to Questions for Domains 3 & 4	

Day 4: Core Team Only

Core Team	
7:30 – 8:00 AM	Arrival, review schedule of remaining interviews, class visits
8:00 – 9:00 AM	Share debrief summary with principal
9:00 – 12:00 AM	Complete any necessary class visits, interviews; finalize summary charts for all domains
12:00 – 1:00	Lunch
1:00 – 3:00 PM	Meet with school and district leaders/ support personnel to report team's responses to protocol questions

Appendix B
Team Members

Aretha Miller, Chair, SchoolWorks, Beverly, MA

Dr. Jody Price, Core Team Member, SchoolWorks, Beverly, MA

Slavojka Sheehan, Team Member, School Support Specialist, Boston Public Schools, Boston, MA

Ralph Paine, Team Member, Director, Boston Renaissance Charter School, Boston, MA

Joseph Rebello, Team Member, Math Specialist, Fall River Public Schools, Fall River, MA

James Watson, Team Member, Principal, Boston Public Schools, Boston, MA

Elizabeth Hale, Team Member, Literacy Specialist, Boston Public Schools, Boston, MA
