

School Panel Review Report Brightwood School Springfield 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 Brightwood Elementary School met this criteria and was one of 15 schools selected for panel review in Fall/Winter of 2004-05. The panel review was conducted on November 30 and December 1, 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 Brightwood 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.

Brightwood School Profile

Enrollment

The Brightwood School is one of thirty-two elementary schools in Springfield. The school serves students in grades K - 5. Enrollment at the Brightwood School has decreased from 475 in 2001 to 359 as of October 1 of this school year. Student demographics have remained relatively stable, with noticeable changes evident in the Limited English Proficient and Special Education populations.

Between 2001 and 2004, the proportions of Hispanic, Black and White students attending Brightwood were stable. In 2004, 70 percent of the population was Hispanic, 24 percent were

Black and 5 percent were White. Asian students accounted for 1 percent in 2001; in subsequent years, there were no Asian students at the school. In most years between 2001 and 2004, (including 2004), 91 percent of the Brightwood School's students were from low income families. In 2004, 28 percent of the students are reported as having a primary language other than English, a decrease from the 40 percent reported in 2001. Limited English Proficient students represented 34 percent of the school's student population in 2001; in 2004, this figure is 23 percent. This school year, 15 percent of students are reported to be receiving special education services, which is a 6 percent decrease from 2003.

In 2004, the Brightwood School registered an attendance rate of 90.5 percent, with students absent 15.9 days on average. The school's retention rate was 4.7 percent in 2003, the last year for which this data is available. Out-of-school suspensions averaged 14.3 percent, more than 8 percentage points above the State's 6.1 average. The in-school suspension rate in 2003 was 6.7 percent, and 5.1 percent of the population was excluded from school for disciplinary reasons. The State's exclusion rate for the same year was 2.0 percent.

Staffing

The 2004-2005 Brightwood School's staffing report indicates that the school is composed of 1 administrator, 39 teachers, 1 guidance counselor and 1 school psychologist. Approximately 25 percent of educators at the school have been there for three or fewer years. Nearly 88 percent of teachers are reported as being licensed in their current teaching area.

MCAS Overview

Students at the Brightwood School are assessed in grades 3 and 4 in English language arts (ELA) and in grade 4 in mathematics. The school has not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in ELA since 1999, nor has it made AYP in mathematics since 2002. In the school's Cycle III End-of-Cycle (2003-2004) AYP Report, the school failed to make AYP in ELA in the aggregate and for all of the reported subgroups: Limited English Proficient, Free/Reduced Price Lunch and Hispanic.¹ In mathematics, the school failed to make AYP in the aggregate and for both of the two reported subgroups: Free/Reduced Price Lunch and Hispanic. The school is currently identified for Restructuring in ELA and for Improvement in mathematics.

¹ 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 Brightwood Elementary School in 2004 were Limited English Proficient, Free/Reduced Price Lunch, and Hispanic for ELA, and Free/Reduced Price Lunch and Hispanic for mathematics.

Student Performance in English Language Arts

GRADE 3

Regular Education

At the grade 3 level in Reading, the performance of regular education students has been variable since the test was first introduced in 2001. In 2001, 30 percent of students were found Proficient, 60 percent performed at the Needs Improvement level and 10 percent at the Warning level. In 2002, the percentage of Proficient students increased to 34 percent, Needs Improvement decreased to 47 percent and Warning increased to 19 percent. Similar results were registered for 2003. In the most recent administration of the MCAS test, the percentage of students who scored at the Proficient level decreased to 26 percent, the percentage of students at the Warning level decreased to 9 percent and the percentage of students in Needs Improvement increased to 66.

Special Education

Results for Special Education students tested in grade 3 Reading have also been variable. In 2002, 6 percent scored in the Proficient range, 75 percent were in Needs Improvement, and 19 percent in Warning. In 2003, there was a significant performance decline, with 63 percent in the Warning range and 37 percent in Needs Improvement. In 2004, results were slightly worse than those of 2002: 6 percent Proficient, 65 percent Needs Improvement and 29 percent Warning. This variation is likely linked to the small populations (16 to 19 students) tested.

Limited English Proficient

As in the Special Education subgroup, results for Limited English Proficient (LEP) students vary over the years, with the worst performance registered in 2003 and 2004. In 2004, 10 percent of students scored in Proficient, 43 percent in Needs Improvement and 48 percent in Warning. In 2003, zero percent scored in Proficient, 13 percent scored in Needs Improvement and 88 percent scored in Warning. In 2002, 53 percent scored in Proficient, 35 percent scored in Needs Improvement and 12 percent were in Warning. Populations for this student group ranged from 16 to 25 students.

GRADE 4

Regular Education

Results for regular education students in grade 4 English language arts are variable between 2001 and 2004. In 2001, no students scored in the Advanced range, 13 percent in Proficient, 58 percent in Needs Improvement and 30 percent in Warning. The year 2002 results represent improvement: 3 percent of students scored in the Advanced range, 12 percent were Proficient, 76 percent were in Needs Improvement and 9 percent were in Warning. In 2004, results more closely resembled the 2001 results. No students were Advanced, 6 percent were Proficient, 75 percent were in Needs Improvement and 19 percent were in Warning.

Special Education

Scores for Special Education students in grade 4 ELA have remained consistently low, with a slight increase in the percentage of students scoring in the Proficient categories in the last two years. In 2004, 6 percent of Special Education students scored in the Proficient range, 38 percent in Needs Improvement and 56 percent in Warning. In 2003, the percentage in Warning was 76. In 2002, no students were Proficient, 58 percent were in Needs Improvement and 42 percent were in Warning. Assessed populations ranged from 16 to 19 students in these years.

Limited English Proficient

Scores for LEP students in the grade 4 ELA test have been consistently low, though an improvement trend is evident between 2001 and 2004. In 2001, 100 percent of the students in this category scored in the Warning range. By 2003, this percentage had decreased to 79, with the remaining 21 percent scoring in Needs Improvement. In 2004, 4 percent of students scored in the Proficient range, 35 percent in Needs Improvement and 62 percent in Warning.

Student Performance in Mathematics

GRADE 4

Regular Education

The performance of regular education students in grade 4 mathematics at this school has been variable, with a slight performance decline evident between 2002 and 2004. In 2002, 3 percent of students scored in the Advanced range, 21 percent in Proficient, 56 percent in Needs Improvement and 21 percent in Warning. In 2003, 2 percent of students were Advanced, 5 percent scored in the Proficient range, 49 percent were in Needs Improvement and 44 percent were in Warning. In 2004, no students were Advanced, the percentage of Proficient students increased to 10 and the percentage of students in the Warning category was 42.

Special Education

Scores for Special Education students in grade 4 mathematics have remained consistently low. Between 2001 and 2004, the percentage scoring in the Warning category range between 50 and 89 percent for the 16 - 20 students assessed in the different years. In 2003, 88 percent were in Warning and 12 percent were in Needs Improvement. In 2004, 6 percent were Proficient, 25 percent were in Needs Improvement and 69 percent were in Warning.

Limited English Proficient

Data for LEP students is available for 2003 only, due to the small number of students tested. In that year, 100 percent of the 17 students assessed scored in the Warning category.

PANEL RESPONSES TO THE KEY QUESTIONS

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

No. Although the current plan adequately describes viable action steps and strategies that may, if fully implemented, have the intended effect of raising student performance, it is the judgment of the Panel Review Team that insufficient data analysis and weak faculty support in the development of the plan are critical flaws that will prevent the plan from being an effective roadmap for improving student performance.

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

No. Although the Brightwood staff has identified determinants for student performance gaps that focus on testing and a review of program and instructional information, they are just at the initial stage of adequately utilizing varied forms of assessment data to provide an in-depth understanding of those gaps.

The Springfield School District mandates formative assessments in all subjects at particular grades throughout the year. These assessments are designed to help schools monitor both student performance and program quality. The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) is administered periodically to ascertain K-3 reading proficiency. District-developed mathematics, English-language arts (ELA) and writing assessments are given to selected grades at various intervals. This year, as part of the Step-Up Springfield initiative, the district is crafting MCAS-type exams in ELA and math to be implemented in all schools in fourth grade and some buildings for third grade as well. Performance is additionally gauged by unit comprehension tests for the Harcourt reading program, Running Records and the Addison-Wesley math series. These assessment tools are indicated in the Brightwood SIP as methods for collecting student performance information. There was, however, insufficient evidence provided to the panel in school documents or interviews to indicate that these data were systematically analyzed in establishing priorities to improve student achievement.

The School Leadership Report did highlight MCAS content analysis and question type weaknesses at the school for math and ELA. The principal's testing binder included MCAS results, Test Wiz, DRA and Stanford material, but did not include a description of the school's analysis or conclusions that led them to identify particular performance gaps. To better understand the SIP Team's considerations and analysis as they explored student performance needs and formulated school improvement goals, the panelists asked district and school leaders for the supporting documentation that the district expects to accompany plan drafts. This paperwork could not be located and so the panel was unable to obtain a written statement of how the planning team progressively articulated priority problems.

Individual and teacher focus group interviews emphasized the need to address the specific learning needs of special education students and English language learners (ELLs). The Department of Education survey completed by teachers cited professional development in reaching diverse learners as a critical priority. The Hispanic population represents three-fourths of the school's students. The principal's Leadership Report indicates that the general teaching population needs effective strategies for second language learners. Nonetheless, the School Improvement Plan does not provide any disaggregated data for ELL or special education students and does not incorporate any improvement goals, student learning objectives or strategies for these groups. The Superintendent and district leaders told the panel that if schools follow the district ELL plan and are faithful to all curriculum initiatives, the needs of ELL students should be well-served, and that all plans are written to create equality of expectations. The panel was unable to reconcile this observation with the statement from some school leaders that the district wanted sub-groups accounted for in the SIP. The majority of teachers interviewed felt inadequately prepared to satisfy the demands of many of their second language

learners and questioned the deployment and qualifications of some staff assigned to the one Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) class on each grade.

Interviews with teachers, the principal, School Support Specialist, district personnel and Collaborative Professional Development Teachers (CPDTs) for English language arts and math produced a common view that the school has gaps in its capacity to develop a more methodical approach to data analysis. Bimonthly grade level meetings aimed at discussing and interpreting Test Wiz information have been infrequent this year. The district allocates two CPDT positions as its job-embedded coaching model, representing the chief professional development resource for schools in need of improvement. In conjunction with teachers, CPDTs monitor DRA, Running Records and writing assessments (as well as perform an array of additional functions). Interviews suggest the school has not yet created systematic procedures for individual teacher evaluation of student performance to be productively merged to establish focus and direction beyond the current superficial level of data analysis.

The principal has been at the school for one year. Before her arrival, there had been three other principals over a two-year period. Staff and district leaders identify the discontinuity of leadership as one of the contributing factors to poor school performance. Interviews and written documentation from teachers and school leaders further attribute and link the leadership roadblocks and school performance weaknesses to factors such as the school schedule, an ineffective School Centered Decision Making Team (SCDM), incomplete implementation of the district's Math and Reading Plans, low morale and continuing student discipline and attendance issues. Although discipline is cited by staff and school leadership as impacting student achievement and a deportment teacher was hired this year, the issue itself was not integrated into the SIP.

District supervisors and directors work with all schools in Springfield supplying guidance, resources and oversight as school improvement plans evolve. Several iterations of the SIP were returned by the district for the school to rework. District leaders reported to the Review Team that they encouraged the Brightwood planning team to look beyond MCAS tests in isolating root causes for student performance gaps. While the school was somewhat successful in shifting its prior emphasis from inadequate student skills to exploring instructional practice and curriculum coverage issues, they did not comprehensively "triangulate" evidence from multiple data sources in response to district recommendations.

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, for the most part. In contrast to previous plans that set student performance goals to satisfy a particular series of sub-skills, the present SIP specifically identifies increases in student performance over a three-year period of time linked to proficiency index targets of Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). They do so by providing baseline information from 2003 and tie student MCAS performance goals for third grade ELA and fourth grade ELA and math to increasing the percentage of students at the Proficient level and reducing the numbers of students performing in the Warning category. Although the AYP targets are not integrated into the language of the student performance goals themselves, the school includes in its SIP clear and measurable tables

that show the annual distribution of student performance starting in Cycle II and demonstrates how projected, progressive performance gains would successfully bring the school close to or at its Proficiency targets.

As outlined in the previous question, although the panel did not see a thorough analysis of written data, the fourth grade MCAS scores in math and ELA illustrated strong and obvious problems for students handling both open response and short answer questions in the 2003 and 2004 exams. Interviews with the CPDT for English language arts, the newly hired writing resource teacher and staff confirmed an outstanding weakness in student writing skills. The Department of Education survey revealed that professional development targeting the improvement of student writing competencies was the prevailing request of teachers at the school. The two fourth grade ELA student learning objectives of preparing students to: 1) understand and use operative words in open-ended questions and prompts, and 2) develop the skill to use appropriate graphic organizers to respond to open-ended questions were both associated with specific standards from the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Similarly, the most evident math performance need across all five strands was to know and be able to successfully complete multi-step math problems in an open response format. In addition to hearing the CPDTs describe the importance and role of internal, formative assessments in greater detail (heightened training in and use of Running Records for flexible grouping purposes) than existed in the SIP, the panel secured a copy of an earlier plan draft returned to the school by the district to be streamlined.

The instructional change objectives provide a direct link between the identified student performance deficits, key student learning objectives (SLOs), instructional methodologies and planned professional development activities. For example, the SLO of expanding the grasp of knowledge, purpose and use of operative words in the writing process represents a straight line to professional development initiative of adopting a school-wide protocol for answering open-ended questions and dedicating an hour of the 2½-hour Literacy Block to modeled writing lessons, shared writing, developmental writing groups and teacher conferencing. The plan does provide more of a focus on teaching and learning in its statements about which facets of the writing curriculum have not been properly covered compared with previous, generalized “time on task” references.

While this plan did have to be distilled from its first iteration, it omitted elements that were important according to all stakeholders. Neither instructional strategies for students of differentiated language skills in general, nor grouping approaches for students in English Immersion classes specifically, surfaced in the final version of the SIP.

The CPDT for English language arts and the writing resource teachers capably described for the panel explicit student comprehension and writing deficiencies. In its effort to merge student performance needs into common umbrella terms in the revised plan, crucial skills such as identifying main idea, providing supporting detail, topic sentence and editing mechanics were not transferred and incorporated into the SIP.

Similarly, the primary student learning math objective was established as completing multi-step math problems in an open response format for all math strands. Although this goal was selected

in response to poor results in short answer/open response sections of MCAS across the five math categories, the plan included very little with respect to the inherent difficulties in the strands themselves. The principal and math CPDT indicated to the panel that they still had no solid grasp about why these weaknesses exist.

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

Yes. As designed, the Brightwood SIP incorporates a number of focused strategies which, if implemented consistently, appear likely to contribute to improved student performance. The panel's review of the content and format of prior plans noted a preponderance of student skill deficits in an unfocused presentation, making it difficult to identify teaching and learning priorities. During interviews, teachers indicated that while not all of the current plan's initiatives, approaches and strategies were new, this plan is a more defined representation of key learning needs and concrete strategies structured to deal with those concerns.

The third grade student learning objective is to have students be able to utilize the "3 Cueing System" to accurately read and construct meaning on an instructional level. Tied to a specific state standard, the School Leadership Team (SLT) members informed the review panel that previous instruction over-emphasized visual and decoding strategies and did not provide adequate attention to comprehension strategies. The concept behind this strategy of using syntax, structure and context to strengthen understanding was endorsed by the SLT and seemed supported by teachers. It promotes student cross-checking, monitoring and self-correction when reading and fits well into DRA assessments, Running Records, independent reading and group work. Teachers expressed the caution that the success of this process hinges on more intensive professional development than they have received to date. Additionally, the school is just at the preliminary phase of understanding how to systematize and coordinate data from varied sources and why it is important to do so.

The principal was able to utilize her budget and deploy the CPDT and writing teacher to double the number of students serviced for remedial reading support (from 16 to 32) and to participate in the school's Reading Recovery program. The highly structured District Reading Plan outlines components of the writing program as part of the balanced literacy instructional block which align with the school's SIP strategies to give "students the daily opportunities to respond to open-ended questions and prompts requiring explanations, comparisons, descriptions and recounts across the curriculum." The plan also calls for students to compare their writing against student-generated and city-wide rubrics at all grade levels.

Although based on only nine classroom visits, the panel observed the use of rubrics and vocabulary posted in classrooms and utilized in ELA and math. There was a conscious attention to reading strategies with which students appeared comfortable and graphic organizers were employed as a tool to consolidate student understanding of a reading passage and as a pre-writing exercise. The caveat for the panel was that instruction was generally conducted at a very basic level with little evidence of higher order challenges to students.

The plan offers reasonable measures for collecting implementation data based on varied forms of student work samples, submission of teacher planning, instruction and assessment tools, CPDT logs and grade level meetings' minutes. Student outcome benchmarks are articulated in terms of progressive improvement criteria but in several instances ("60% of students can select an appropriate graphic organizer to answer open response questions"), the panel questioned whether the standard was rigorous enough.

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

Yes. The staff of the school had received a copy of the SIP only two weeks prior to the visit of the Panel Review Team. According to district leaders, this was one of several schools whose final plans had recently been approved. The key elements of the plan are clear and explicit and generally perceived by staff as a document capable of guiding the instructional program toward improved student outcomes. With the intervention of the school's CPDT and full acquisition of Harcourt materials, teachers are beginning to receive more training in DRA assessment, Running Records and making better use of the evaluation resources for both the math and reading programs used in the district. The instructional change objectives are linked to the assorted action plans. Required resources rely almost exclusively on internal (school and district) personnel and materials and are, therefore, respectful of the district's current budget difficulties. While the timelines are specific and appear realistic, teachers reiterated that follow-through on professional development is essential to the plan's success.

Individual and teacher focus group interviews indicated strong satisfaction with district curriculum documents as supports that clarify content, instructional objectives, methodology and assessment techniques. The interviews affirmed the results obtained from the Department of Education instructional staff survey that curriculum guidance, teaching resources and professional development were adequate and available at the school. The panel's scrutiny of the district math and reading plans, Math Instructional Guide (MIG), Pupil Progression Plan, and ELA Scope and Sequence and its alignment with Harcourt, substantiates teacher perceptions that there is a certainty of curriculum and goals that enhances the improvement planning process at the school.

Implementation benchmarks noted in the SIP are specific and attached to a timeline, resources, strategies and an action plan. For example, "Student generated rubrics will be displayed in all classrooms with student copies in writing folders." With some exceptions, student performance benchmarks are largely measured within the framework of school-based assessments (writing rubrics, math journals, teacher observations, homework) and are not closely tied to district testing initiatives. The district's present array of assessment instruments offer tools for the school to use as benchmarks of progress. At this point in time, they have not capitalized on those options. The Springfield-Step Up initiative will increase the opportunities as quarterly MCAS-related tests are gradually introduced.

The Brightwood School Leadership Team is composed of the two CPDTs, the school's ELL Coordinator and the Writing Resource Teacher. Along with the principal, they are the core change agents at the school and will be charged with implementing the major professional

development challenges detailed in the SIP. A significant part of the Step-Up work is training from The Efficacy Institute for administrators and selected teachers. The cornerstone of this work is the Self-Directed Improvement System (SDIS), aimed at aligning personnel, resources and data to bring students to levels of proficiency. One fifth grade teacher is being trained now with a third and fourth grade teacher starting in December. Grade level meetings are the intended forum for representatives to work with their colleagues on a data/feedback /strategy system, analyzing specific student knowledge and competencies as they work together to create proficiency targets. The one teacher now involved in the training reported to the panel that this initiative is the sort of intense professional development needed to elevate the quality of data analysis at the school.

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

No. The initial SIP Team had four teacher members, the writing resource teacher (a teacher at the time), the two CPDTs and the principal. After the initial draft was returned for major revision, the school planning team reduced its number to four in an effort to make the process less cumbersome. The district found the original plan to be misaligned to its rubric, unrealistic and in need of sharper definition. Four representatives (a fourth grade teacher, the ESL teacher and two special education teachers) were omitted from the second planning group. The remaining working group left to create the SIP was the current School Leadership Team selected by the principal. As described to the Panel Review Team, the ELL Coordinator, writing resource teacher and CPDT were the primary writers of the plan, with input from the principal.

Teachers reported little ongoing knowledge of the process and product as the plan was being framed. SIP dissemination activities, intended to take place at faculty or grade level meetings, were characterized by many teachers as uninformative and infrequent. Although the SLT talked about surveys and interviews of staff and parents helping to drive the SIP agenda, the panel heard little evidence from either group that they were meaningfully consulted in the process or that parents had any real awareness of the plan's content or goals. Most teachers interviewed stated that the plan was understood and accepted as a more precise change document than earlier improvement initiatives, but there was minimal sense of contribution or ownership observed by the Review Panel. As previously mentioned, staff members received the finalized version of the SIP two-and-a-half months into the school year, just prior to the Panel Review Team's visit.

The School Council Decision Making (SCDM) had no significant role in formulating the SIP and did not see the first draft rejected by the district. A number of long-standing SCDM members view the body as having proposed viable ideas that have been validated by group decision making and breaking down in the implementation phase. They feel that communication at all levels is flawed and are highly critical of district leaders and past and present school administrators on an assortment of issues. Among SCDM members, there is an alienation from the plan itself and questions about productivity and authority.

Full staff buy-in seems further limited by prevailing beliefs about the reasons for student performance weaknesses offered by school leaders and teachers in written reports and surveys associated with the panel review visit and during faculty interviews. For teachers, the dominant

reference point identified as a key cause of low student performance centered on some aspect of poor leadership.

Student language issues, behavior and parent disengagement were frequently mentioned factors. The School Leadership Report completed by the principal cites fourteen problematic causal elements with a concentration on incomplete staffing issues, discipline, attendance, building and maintenance challenges – most outside the school’s control. In his interview, the Superintendent talked knowledgeably about changing the culture of rationalizing poor student performance at Brightwood. He referred to a critical need for staff expectations to be raised by fostering a more honest and accurate causal diagnosis and internalizing the strategies that need to be installed and measured to improve student performance.

In the judgment of the Panel Review Team, the school relied almost exclusively on a limited source of data – MCAS – to determine student performance objectives, a practice discouraged by district leaders as indicated by feedback on early drafts of the SIP. The school’s failure to conduct and institutionalize an ongoing, systematic analysis of multiple sources of available and appropriate data undermines the school’s ability to identify key student performance gaps and the reasons those gaps exist. The limited teacher representation during the construction and writing phase and the lack of information and feedback opportunity as the plan developed precluded meaningful staff acceptance. Additionally, teachers and leadership at the school have not fully recognized and articulated the core influences of student achievement over which they have control.

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

No. All school leaders at the Brightwood School are relatively new in their assignments and acclimating to the demands of the system, the needs of students, staff, parents and the challenge of reversing a history of poor student performance at the school. In key areas, they have not yet created the environment for change that relies on the agreement of mission, development of trust and the establishment of clear and effective communication channels. District intervention procedures did not thoroughly confront issues such as the school’s limited use of available data to provide its evidence base and the school’s limited participation in the planning process. As described to the panel team, the development of the plan is not likely to promote a far-reaching embrace of the plan’s proposals on a staff that had experienced many recent leadership shifts.

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

No. The panel observed a number of management strengths at the school while most aspects of instructional leadership were lacking.

The building is clean, well decorated and maintained. Although stakeholders made discipline a core issue in written reports, surveys and interviews, the panel found students to be generally well-behaved and respectful in classrooms and common areas. During team-observed lessons, students were uniformly attentive and observant of sound classroom routines. This is the third

year of the school's involvement in the Responsive Classroom. While there is an expressed sense that the process is unevenly implemented and receives varying degrees of support among administrators, the panel saw clear evidence of the anticipated benefits of the program. The school schedule, a problem area in recent years, now incorporates sufficient time for all district curriculum and instructional mandates to be satisfied. Based on teacher observations and the composite of interviews, the Panel Review Team agreed that there exists a drive among teachers and school leaders to learn more about how children can be successful and make the best decisions possible for the school's students. Although that passion is evident, leadership and staff have been unable to coalesce around common goals and beliefs to bring into operation the steps necessary to improve student learning at the school.

The principal referred to a need for a change in the belief system about how and what low income students can learn. In her written report and during panel interviews, she talked about the importance of developing teaching strategies to advance rigor and high expectations. However, many of her explanations for the barriers to student achievement were external attributions beyond the curriculum, assessment and instruction realm. There were few descriptions from school leaders or teachers about a common vision based on more ambitious learning standards. A teacher focus group reported to panel members that, beyond the absence of specific strategies for ELL and special education students, there are no discussions, plans or services for the school's higher performing students.

Springfield has a weekly Extended Day format allocating 75 minutes for professional development, parent/teacher conferences and grade/staff level meetings. The school's planned professional development calendar for the year includes topics directly relating to the school's Responsive Classroom process, MCAS review, reading and math strategies, graphic organizers and multi-step math problems, "3 Cueing System" and open response protocol. During interviews, many teachers described the meetings as inconsistently substantive, often starting late and evolving into "housekeeping" sessions.

The instructional staff has not been routinely exposed to data or to an evaluation of district program initiatives. Copies of internal staff notices examined by the panel focused on events and procedures. As described by teachers, there is minimal focus on instructional practice and long- or short-term goals. When asked how the dissemination of MCAS data was managed, the principal reported that she presented third grade results to staff last spring but has yet to conduct a full scale analysis of fourth grade scores with the faculty. Teachers do not see the decision making process in the school as inclusive, and the SCDM team also feel disconnected from their charge as an authoritative body.

There was a range of evaluative statements provided to the Review Panel about leadership at the school. The overall assessment expresses a lack of confidence that SIP goals can be effectively translated to practice. Teachers regularly referred to the critical link between realizing SIP goals and professional development but expressed skepticism that school leadership and district support could productively implement the training. Strong praise was heard for one of the three coach-mentors, noting frequent classroom visits, positive demonstration lessons and efficient performance as a resource provider. One of the three has been involved with the SIP and is not yet seen as a visible or supportive force in the classroom and there is staff uncertainty about the

third individual's role. The principal collects lesson plans every three or four weeks but the consensus of teachers is that they are not rigorously scrutinized. The current School Support Specialist assigned to the building has been in the position for only a month but appears to have a solid appreciation for what needs to be done at the school.

Teachers feel that supervision of instruction and feedback from the principal are infrequent and superficial. District Learning Walks have taken place with little documented feedback. The panel inspected the logs of the CPDTs and found the level of in-class teacher support varied substantially. The timelines for implementation of plan's instructional objectives are sensitive to the effective delivery of professional development initiatives. According to teachers, the 3 Cueing System training was brief and managed, thus far, in a cursory fashion.

The written teacher survey and interviews describe staffing patterns and the use of personnel by the principal as counterproductive and vexing. The panel learned from teachers individually and in focus groups that many grade assignments were changed without satisfactory explanation. Although the principal described for the panel reasons for staffing two SEI classes with teachers untrained and inexperienced in ELL procedures while others on the grade had both background and prior work history, it was not openly obvious to the panelists why this decision was made.

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

No. The staff's lack of support for the SIP appeared more attributable to process and promise than with the product itself. There was a general consensus that the plan's closer commitment to reading comprehension and formalized writing strategies reflected the critical student needs at the school. Doubts about the successful implementation of the professional development segments of the plan were based on early questions about how and when *Recipe for Reading*, *Words Their Way* and *3 Cueing System* will take place. Many teachers had some doubts and concerns about the roles and efficacy of the CPDTs. Teacher interviews suggested that grade and full faculty meetings have not been the structured, clear and productive forums they believe are necessary to make the plan a success. As indicated in previous sections of the report, objections were raised about the plan's silence on special needs and ELL issues. The clinical team of the psychologist, school counselor and evaluation team leader talked about addressing intersecting needs of special education and second language students, varied forms of accommodations and strengthening the support system for the inclusion model – elements that are missing from the current plan.

The favorable view of the district's role in generating strong and valuable curriculum material was mitigated by the feeling that over the years the school's teachers have been "let down" by the district failure to address the leadership issue at a school that regularly underperformed. Although no supporting data was apparent, there is a staff perception that Brightwood is a school in the district that few parents want their children to attend and that the higher performing students are leaving. The panel received a contrasting picture from the Superintendent, principal and teachers about the full impact of staff cuts this year, but some teachers see the reductions as detrimental to any plan for improvement. A segment of the faculty was grateful to have a permanent principal in place and seemed poised to work diligently toward school solutions while others were less patient. Teachers received the SIP less than two weeks before the panel's visit

and felt fundamentally uninvolved during its development. The rift was aggravated by the reconfiguration from the larger SIP team of five teachers to the SLT writing the plan with little staff representation.

The Panel Review Team considered low morale, the current failure to unite behind school leadership, an absence of broad based decision-making and the continuing inclination to ascribe low student performance results to external circumstances as obstacles to faculty support of the plan.

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

No. Notwithstanding the SIP training conducted for principals, bimonthly mentoring of CPDT and effective curriculum guidance resources, the review panel determined that the district has not provided adequate support for the Brightwood School. District leaders acknowledged that turnover in administration has caused philosophical changes as well as changes in programming. The current principal and teachers reported that there had been inconsistent use of core curriculum materials and incomplete implementation of the reading and math plans. They cited a discrepancy between the amount of math instruction provided by the school last year and the 90-minute district mandate. For nearly a year the school was without a permanently assigned principal. Because of continuing low student performance, Brightwood was classified in Corrective Action by the Department of Education. The Brightwood School had been reviewed two years earlier by a panel team with a judgment of underperformance deferred. However, it was unclear to the panel that the district has exercised diligent oversight at the school, was aware of issues of noncompliance or had adopted strong measures to address the leadership gap and a staff characterized as deflecting ownership of student performance results.

District leaders informed the Panel that the original plan was targeted for large-scale revision because it did not meet the standards of the district rubric in many areas. They identified plan weaknesses as shallow data analysis of factors beyond MCAS and a failure to articulate root cause determinations of student performance by presenting a triangulation of evidence. Student learning objectives in the SIP remain minimally supported by multiple sources of achievement data that should be readily available through school and district assessment mechanisms. While the district indicates that appendices to the plan are expected to include any additional material to bolster school findings, none were available for inspection by the panel. The panel was also unable to ascertain the nature and level of feedback provided by district Learning Walks, a procedure to monitor a school's implementation of the learning priorities outlined in the SIP. During the panel's interview, some of the district leaders seemed generally unfamiliar with the SIP. One of the directors had not read the plan and another could not speak to a staffing question that fell within the scope of his supervision. The school describes receiving help from the district's writing supervisor with the plan's language and format but district personnel did not demonstrate to the Panel Review Team that its intervention function was specific, consistent and rigorous.

CONCLUSION

Although a number of the structural components of a sound school improvement plan are in place, the Brightwood School has not capitalized on the range of available resources and information to form a complete view of student learning needs. The combination of curriculum-embedded assessment instruments and district administered tests are used by individual teachers. However, they have not been managed as unifying sources of data to present both big picture needs and specific achievement gaps to clearly underscore student performance deficits at the school. Leadership changes over the last three years have made it a challenge to foster a common approach to effective data use and to build a stable learning community.

In its oversight role of guiding the school plan to consolidate many of its student learning objectives, district leaders bypassed specific areas of examination, including a closer look at math strands, insistence on a broader application of data and integrating strategies for sub-groups, particularly its ELL students.

APPENDIX A
Team Members

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Joe Jacovino, Panel Member, Project Manager, SchoolWorks, Beverly, MA

Anne Lane, Panel Member, Principal, Weymouth Public Schools, Weymouth, MA

Jane Daly, Panel Member, Assistant Principal, Dartmouth Public Schools, Dartmouth, MA

Robin Thorpe, Panel Member, Teacher, Fall River Public Schools, 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.
- 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.
- 12:00—2:00 p.m.* Panelists meet with Principal (and one other school-based individual, if appropriate).
- 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).
- 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.

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