

School Panel Review Report Elias Brookings 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 Elias Brookings School met these 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 [Name of School] is deemed under-performing. The panel was not asked to formulate a sound plan for school improvement where such a plan does not presently exist or to recommend a course of action to create the conditions for successful implementation of sound improvement strategies where such conditions at present do not appear to exist. Diagnostic and/or prescriptive intervention, where needed to assist an under-performing school, occurs at the next stage of the school review process.

Elias Brookings School Profile

Enrollment

The Elias Brookings School is the only school in Springfield serving students in grades K – 8. It is, however, one of 41 schools in the district serving students in the elementary or middle grades. Enrollment at the Brookings School has decreased substantially from 709 in 2001 to 482 as of October 1 of this school year. There also have noticeable changes in the school's demographics.

From 2001 to 2004, the Brookings School's Hispanic population increased from 41 to 53 percent. During the same time period, the school's Black population decreased from 39 to 35 percent and its White population decreased from 18 to 10 percent. Asian students accounted for 1 percent in each of the years between 2001 and 2004. In 2004, 93 percent of the Brookings School's students were from low-income families. Previous years' percentages ranged from 82 to 92 percent. In 2004, 8 percent of the students are reported as having a primary language other than English. This represents a decrease from 28 percent in 2001. Limited English Proficient students represented 8.3 percent of the school's student population in 2001; in 2004, this figure is 2 percent. This school year, 18 percent of students are reported to be receiving special education services – the same percentage as last year.

In 2004, the Brookings School registered an attendance rate of 90.7 percent, with students absent 15.3 days on average. The school's retention rate was 5.0 percent in 2003, the last year for which this data are available. Out-of-school suspensions averaged 30.9 percent, more than five times the State's 6.1 percent average. The in-school suspension rate in 2003 was reported as 0 percent, and 20.7 percent of the population were excluded from school for disciplinary reasons. The State's exclusion rate for the same year was 2.0 percent.

Staffing

The 2004-2005 Brookings School's staffing report indicates that the school is composed of 2 administrators, 47 teachers, and 2 guidance personnel. Approximately 22 percent of educators at the school have been there for three or fewer years. Approximately 91 percent of teachers are reported as being licensed in their current teaching area.

MCAS Overview

Students at the Elias Brookings School are assessed in grades 3, 4 and 7 in English language arts (ELA) and in grades 4, 6 and 8 in mathematics. The school has not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in ELA since 2002, nor has it made AYP in mathematics since determinations were first made in 1999. 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 three of the reported subgroups: Free/Reduced Price Lunch, African-American/Black, and Hispanic.¹ In mathematics, the school failed to make AYP in the aggregate and for three of the four reported subgroups: Special Education, Free/Reduced Price Lunch, African-American/Black, and Hispanic. The school is currently identified for Improvement in ELA and for Restructuring 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 Elias Brookings School in 2004 were Free/Reduced Price Lunch, African-American/Black, and Hispanic for ELA, and Special Education, Free/Reduced Price Lunch, African-American/Black, 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 declined since 2002. In 2002, 26 percent of students were found Proficient, 74 percent performed at the Needs Improvement level and 0 percent were at the Warning level. In 2003, the percentage of Proficient students increased to 31 percent, Needs Improvement decreased to 59 percent and Warning increased to 10 percent. In the most recent administration of the MCAS test, the percentage of students who scored at the Proficient level decreased to 19 percent, the percentage of students at the Warning level was 9 percent and the percentage of students in Needs Improvement increased to 69.

Special Education

Due to the small populations assessed, results for Special Education students in grade 3 Reading are available for 2003 only. In that year, 36 percent of the 14 students assessed were Proficient, 50 percent were in Needs Improvement and 14 percent were in Warning.

Limited English Proficient

Due to the small populations assessed, results for Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in grade 3 Reading are available for 2003 only. In that year, 100 percent of the students assessed were in Needs Improvement.

GRADE 4

Regular Education

Results for regular education students in grade 4 English language arts show a performance decline between 2002 and 2004. In 2002, 2 percent of students scored in the Advanced range, 19 percent in Proficient, 63 percent in Needs Improvement and 17 percent in Warning. In 2003, no students scored in the Advanced range, 18 percent were Proficient, 62 percent were in Needs Improvement and 21 percent were in Warning. In 2004, results showed a further decline. No students were Advanced, 9 percent were Proficient, 62 percent were in Needs Improvement and 29 percent were in Warning.

Special Education

Scores for Special Education students in grade 4 ELA are available for the last two years only. In 2004, 8 percent of the 13 students assessed scored in the Proficient range, 38 percent were in Needs Improvement and 54 percent were in Warning. In 2003, 18 percent of the 11 students assessed were Proficient, 45 percent were in Needs Improvement and 36 percent were in Warning. Assessed populations were small, with 13 students in 2004 and 11 students in 2003.

Limited English Proficient

Fewer than 10 LEP students were assessed in the grade 4 ELA test; as such, no results are reported for this subgroup.

GRADE 7

Regular Education

Results for regular education students in grade 7 English language arts show improvement between 2002 and 2004. In 2002, no students scored in the Advanced range, 27 percent in Proficient, 41 percent in Needs Improvement and 32 percent in Warning. In 2003, 2 percent were Advanced, 36 percent were Proficient, 56 percent were in Needs Improvement and 7 percent were in Warning. In 2004, results showed a further increase in Proficient students and decrease in Warning students. No students were Advanced, 44 percent were Proficient, 52 percent were in Needs Improvement and 4 percent were in Warning.

Special Education

Scores for Special Education students in grade 4 ELA show slight improvement from 2003 to 2004. In 2004, 9 percent of the 11 students assessed scored in the Proficient range, 55 percent were in Needs Improvement and 36 percent were in Warning. In 2003, 40 percent were in Needs Improvement and 60 percent were in Warning. Assessed populations were small, with 11 students in 2004 and 15 students in 2003.

Limited English Proficient

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

Student Performance in Mathematics

GRADE 4

Regular Education

The performance of regular education students in grade 4 mathematics at this school has shown an improvement trend from 2002 to 2004. In 2002, no students scored in the Advanced range, 4 percent in Proficient, 42 percent in Needs Improvement and 54 percent in Warning. In 2003, no students were Advanced, 15 percent scored in the Proficient range, 53 percent were in Needs Improvement and 32 percent were in Warning. In 2004, 3 percent of students were Advanced, 14 percent were Proficient, 50 percent were in Needs Improvement and 33 percent were in Warning.

Special Education

Scores for Special Education students in grade 4 mathematics are available for 2003 and 2004 only. In 2004, 21 percent of the 14 students assessed were in Needs Improvement and the remainder were in Warning. In 2003, 18 percent of the 11 students assessed were Proficient, 36 percent were in Needs Improvement and 45 percent were in Warning.

Limited English Proficient

Fewer than 10 LEP students were assessed in the grade 4 mathematics test; as such, no results are reported for this subgroup.

GRADE 6

Regular Education

The performance of regular education students in grade 6 mathematics at this school has improved between 2001 and 2004. In 2001, 2 percent of students scored in the Proficient range, 27 percent in Needs Improvement and 71 percent in Warning. In 2003, 5 percent scored in the Proficient range, 35 percent were in Needs Improvement and 60 percent were in Warning. In 2004, 2 percent of students were Advanced, the percentage of Proficient students increased to 10 percent, 42 percent were in Needs Improvement and the percentage of students in the Warning category decreased to 46 percent.

Special Education

Scores for Special Education students in grade 4 mathematics show some improvement over time. In 2001, the percentage scoring in the Warning category was 94. In 2004, this percentage decreased to 47. In the same years, the percentage in Needs Improvement increased from 6 percent in 2001 to 53 percent in 2004. Only 16 - 17 students were assessed in these years.

Limited English Proficient

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

GRADE 8

Regular Education

The performance of regular education students in grade 8 mathematics at this school has stayed relatively stable, with the exception of 2003, which represented an increase in Warning students. In 2001, 2 percent of students scored in the Advanced range, 10 percent in Proficient, 31 percent in Needs Improvement and 56 percent in Warning. In 2003, 3 percent of students were Advanced, 10 percent scored in the Proficient range, 20 percent were in Needs Improvement and 67 percent were in Warning. In 2004, 2 percent of students were Advanced, 10 percent scored in the Proficient range, 39 percent were in Needs Improvement and 49 percent were in Warning.

Special Education

Scores for Special Education students in grade 8 mathematics have remained consistently low. Between 2001 and 2004 the percent scoring in the Warning category ranged between 75 and 91 percent for the 11 - 36 students assessed in the different years. In 2003, 75 percent were in Warning and 25 percent were in Needs Improvement. In 2004, only 9 percent were in Needs Improvement and 91 percent were in Warning.

Limited English Proficient

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

PANEL RESPONSES TO KEY QUESTIONS

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

Yes. Through a two-year process characterized by strong support and guidance from key members of Springfield's central office in concert with the commitment and energy of a majority of administrators and faculty, a sound 2004 –2005 School Improvement Plan (SIP) has been created by the Elias Brookings School (EBS). The process was well structured and collaborative, involved most, if not all, of the school's faculty and staff, and continues today in the implementation phase. Examination of a variety of assessment data successfully identified gaps in student performance and concerted effort was made to identify the reasons for those gaps. The improvement goals and objectives stated in the plan are clear and specific and are grounded in the school's analysis of the reasons for low student performance. In the opinion of the review panel, the School Improvement Plan provides adequate documentation to successfully drive instruction towards improved student performance.

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

Yes. In the judgment of the review panel, the school improvement effort of the Elias Brookings School community included sufficient attention to the analysis of data and programs to enable them to accurately identify weaknesses in student achievement and identify reasons why the weaknesses exist.

Guided and supported by district specialists, members of the EBS Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) moved through the initial phases of data analysis process to begin to pinpoint specific areas of weakness for individual students, grade level groups and the school as a whole. Several members of the ILT became familiar with district's excel spreadsheet as a means to examine MCAS data. Though the school's MCAS results served as the primary data source in their analysis, their findings were checked for consistency against results from other forms of assessment – primarily the Stanford 9 and Mid-Year District Assessments patterned after the MCAS. Other forms of data that informed their analysis, depending on content and grade level, included the Developmental Reading Assessment, Read 180, examination of student work and teacher surveys. This information was confirmed in three separate meetings with three separate groups, the Brookings ILT, central office leadership (Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, and two district learning specialists) and the district's curriculum directors.

Through the planning process, the entire faculty was effectively engaged in data analysis that helped familiarize them with the meaning of "data-driven instruction". Using data, they worked to determine the root causes of low student performance from an instructional point of view. They prioritized and established student learning objectives and chose appropriate instructional strategies and activities to address each learning objective. An example of the alignment contained in the plan is as follows: One of three reasons given for poor performance of 4th graders on the MCAS "open response" items was due to the "lack of consistent protocol for use in open response questions." Both the teacher- and student-centered strategies to close this

learning gap was that teachers will agree to use a common open-response protocol and consistently require students to use it. Much of this work was formally accomplished during extended Tuesday workshops that take place an hour and one half each Tuesday afternoon, but also through a variety of other formal and informal means that include grade level meetings, content area meetings and teacher talk.

Limited attention was given to disaggregating data by subgroups and the plan makes no provisions or distinctions for the disparate performance between groups. For example, White students performed significantly better on both the math and ELA portions of the MCAS than all other groups – that is, Hispanics, Blacks, Special Needs etc. – but no mention was given to these gaps in the plan. The district leadership seemed to have made a conscious decision in this regard, their rationale being that, by and large, low student performance in math, reading and language arts was a significant school-wide problem. While panel members understand the district’s “big net” approach, they were still concerned that by not disaggregating the data for each subgroup, school leaders and district personnel might have overlooked additional factors that negatively impact the performance of students in each underperforming subgroup.

Noticeably absent in the review of data and programs were the school’s challenges with issues of discipline and attendance. Both of these issues were raised as concerns by the panel as a result of their pre-visit review of school profile material supplied by the Department of Education (DOE). These issues were also raised as concerns by the principal, several teachers and a few parents during the panel review. Average daily attendance rates have hovered around 90 percent for the last four years (3-5 percent below AYP standards) and in the last two years, the out-of-school suspension rates have been six times the state average and two times the Springfield district average.

Out-of-School Suspension Rates*

	2002	2003
Elias Brookings School	31.4	30.9
Springfield School District	11.2	13.7
State	6.4	6.1

* Suspension rates represent the percentage of students suspended one or more times during the school year.

This concern was further supported by results on the staff survey data that indicated that the most commonly selected area of need for professional development was in the area of effective behavior management (65 percent if those surveyed included it in their “top 3”).

Though the panel recognized that EBS could have done more in-depth data analysis, the panel was unanimous in concluding that the academic focus of the SIP was grounded in an adequate review of available data to support the instructional focus of the SIP.

B Does the plan set out clear improvement goals with specific objectives that are grounded in the school’s analysis of the reasons for poor student performance?

Yes. The panel concluded that the improvement goals and objectives were clear and specific enough to improve student performance at EBS going forward.

Under the guidance and direction of the Springfield District Office, the Brookings School Improvement Plan followed the Department of Education’s Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) template and process. The panel concluded that this decision helped to ensure that the written plan would contain clear goals and specific objectives grounded in the school’s causal analysis. The evidence contained within the written plan, confirmed by observations and interviews during the panel visit, indicates that the goals and objectives in the plan adequately meet the commonly known “SMART Goal Test.” The goals, objectives and actions are:

1) Specific enough to leave no doubt about the standards of performance expected and strategies to be employed; 2) Measurable, numerically where possible, and able to identify the conditions that must be met to lead to accomplishment; 3) Attainable. They offer a challenge yet ensure a better than 50 percent chance of success with outstanding effort, despite potential roadblocks; 4) Results-oriented; that is, they are based upon observable results from pre-established benchmarks; 5) Time-phased, in that they include both short- and long-term activities with clear beginning and end points.

A typical example of the alignment and specificity within the document is displayed below, taken from p. 53 of Appendix 14 in the Brookings SIP.

Student Performance Goal: Increase the percent of all students proficient from 17% (8 students) to 21.3% (approximately 10 students) in 2005 and 26.7% (approximately 12 students) in 2006 and decrease the percent of all students in warning from 29.8% (14 students) to 19.1% (approximately 9 students) in 2005 and to 13.3% (approximately 6 students) in 2006.

Student Learning Objective: All students will know and be able to choose appropriate strategies to solve multi-step word problems in an open response format in all strands across the grades.

Instructional Change Objective: Intervention math and classroom teachers will provide specific math vocabulary on word walls and model its appropriate use.

Student Activities (from Appendix 13)	Targeted Students	Assessment Tools	Assessment Dates	Desired Performance	Person Responsible
1. All students will utilize specific math vocabulary orally and in written form.	All Elementary	1. Teacher generated tests. 2. District Assessments. 3. Step-Up-Springfield tests.	1. monthly 2. quarterly 3. mid-year 4. end year	70% or better	Classroom and intervention teachers.

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

Yes. In the panel's judgment, the strategies connected to each student learning objective are based on well accepted best professional practice.

The example in Section B above is a good example of how strategies are selected and target the objective. Under this same objective, two other strategies are specified: "All students will analyze word problems through modeling, discussion, and shared writing practice or various problem solving strategies," and, "All students will practice and evaluate their own and each other's open response word problems according to the rubric." This is representative of the specificity and alignment of strategies to learning objectives throughout the SIP.

The research and selection of the strategies and practices attached to each student learning objective was accomplished through the systematic SIP process described in this report. Substantial effort was made to ensure that all faculty had adequate opportunity to offer their ideas and opinions about the strategies and activities outlined in this plan. Support from district content and learning specialists helped to ensure that these strategies were educationally sound and likely to lead to improved student performance.

In the 2004-2005 Elias Brookings School Improvement Plan, each Desired Student Learning Experience and each associated Instructional Change Objective is accurately grounded in the identified cause for low student performance and is accurately aligned with all corresponding steps in the action plan. The panel believes that if the strategies and actions specified in the plan are successfully employed, improved student performance will follow.

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

Yes. The panel concluded that the planning documents were clear and specific enough to drive improvement initiatives.

A standard five-appendix format offered by the DOE divided the Brookings SIP into discrete sections. Directed by one or more guiding questions found at the top of the page, each section added more depth and specificity to the last. The written plan moves the reader very logically from the general (Student Performance Goals and Student Learning Objectives) to the specific (Action Plan and Outcome Benchmarks), though comprehensive understanding of the document comes only after careful, highly focused and repeated attention.

The panel agreed that the 74-page SIP document is a bit daunting. This was confirmed by administrators, district leadership and faculty, who made statements such as: "The plan is not user friendly," "There is too much in the plan," and "The plan is too complicated for the average teacher." In recognition of the complexity of the SIP, school leaders have made efforts to simplify the plan for teacher consumption by separating the goals, objectives and action plans into one-page grade and content specific summaries that can be easily accessed for quick

reference. Several teachers on the ILT believed these condensed documents were helpful, but it was not clear how many teachers were actually making use of them.

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

Yes. Three key factors led to the success of the planning process. First, the intense guidance and support from Springfield's school district leadership and school support specialists throughout the process. Second, the hard work and commitment of the EBS Instructional Leadership Team comprised of the principal, the assistant principal and eight representative members from the K-8 faculty. Finally, the willingness with which a solid majority of EBS faculty and staff worked together to examine the curriculum, instruction and assessment practices at their school in order to get to the root causes of poor student performance.

Much of the organization and planning of the entire SIP data gathering, analysis and organization process was accomplished by core groups of professionals, composed of District Department Heads, District Learning Support Specialists, Collaborative Professional Development Teachers (CPDT), the Brookings Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) and other representatives of the school community. However, to ensure that all members of the faculty and staff had an opportunity to help interpret the data and become active contributors in the challenging effort, a weekly "extended day" was created. In 2003 –2004, fifteen of these 1½ hour "Tuesday extensions" served as key opportunities for the entire school to be involved in the process of identifying and clarifying the problem areas in student performance, ascertaining root causes, establishing performance goals (SPG), student learning objectives (SLO) and instructional change objectives (ICO), and ultimately, creating action plans and instructional change benchmarks (ICB). In the words of one of the Brookings faculty: "The SIP plan really comes to life in the work we do in the extended days." The extended day initiative continues in the 2004 – 2005 school year and remains focused on the School Improvement Plan process.

The involvement of the Brookings professional community in the SIP data gathering, interpretation and implementation process goes well beyond the extended days. This was evidenced by frequent reports from ILT members, CPDTs, individual teachers, the principal and assistant principal and district personnel of formal and informal SIP-related meetings experienced by all parties involved – for example, formal and informal conferences and interaction between and among CPDTs, school administrators, district specialists, ILT members, and vertical and grade level teams. As one teacher put it, "We are constantly talking about the School Improvement Plan."

KEY QUESTION 2: ARE THE CONDITIONS IN PLACE FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN?

Yes. Despite the fact that the panel concluded that only two of the three conditions essential for the successful implementation of the plan currently exist in the Elias Brookings School community, it still concluded that the response to Key Question 2 should be affirmative.

The two-day inquiry uncovered evidence that the school is receiving adequate guidance and support from the district leadership and that a solid core of faculty and staff support the planned improvement efforts. However, with regard to the effectiveness of leadership and soundness of school management, the panel found enough conflicting evidence to warrant a “no” response to the following subsidiary question A.

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

No. After careful review of the data collected during the visit, the panel concluded that the standard of school-based instructional leadership needed to successfully sustain the school improvement planning efforts and fully implement the actions of the plan is not currently in place at the Elias Brookings School.

While the principal actively participated in the development of the SIP, most of the impetus and direction for the initial improvement planning efforts at the EBS, in the panel’s judgment, came from the direction and support of the district office (see following Section C). Two sources of evidence led the panel to question whether the current leadership was positioned to advance the SIP: 1) a lack of confidence in the school’s leadership from a core group of faculty and the district leadership; and 2) the lack of a coherent school-based leadership structure to monitor and advance the school’s improvement efforts.

The staff survey data collected in October of 2004 indicated that 25 percent of the respondents were unsure, and 45 percent disagreed, on the item that asked if the school had effective leadership to guide and support efforts to improve student achievement. In interviews with panel members, some teachers expressed concerns that some school leaders do not always demonstrate follow-through on key decisions and policies. Most teachers believe that school leaders are committed to the improvement initiatives outlined in the SIP; however, they are doubtful that both the principal and assistant principal will stay focused on the task of improving teaching and learning and not be distracted by the day-to-day management of the school. District personnel shared this view. As a result, the district requires the principal and assistant principal to conduct daily Learning Walks as a way of monitoring the quality of instruction at EBS as defined by the School Improvement Plan.

When asked, “What challenges currently exist that may serve as roadblocks to the successful implementation of the EBS Improvement Plan?” district leadership responded with several concerns about the principal at EBS. They felt that the principal is very “responsive,” but needs to be more “proactive” in terms of “getting all teachers on board” and then “leading and pushing people (faculty/staff) to do what needs to be done.” Also, district leaders stated that they would like to see the principal learn “the leadership dimensions needed” to move the school’s plan to

the next level. In order to address this concern, the district assigned a School Support Specialist to work with both the principal and assistant principal to help them monitor the efficacy of the strategies outlined in the SIP. The School Support Specialist also works with school leaders to develop an accountability system designed to ensure that teachers are making every effort to improve their instructional practices by adhering to the strategies written in the improvement plan.

The Instructional Leadership Team assumed a key role in the planning and development phases of the improvement plan process. However, in the fall of 2004, responsibility for monitoring and advancing the school's improvement effort was given to the School Centered Decision Making Team (SCDM). However, members of the SCDM, the principal and the assistant principal could not clearly articulate the steps that the SCDM would take to monitor the implementation of the SIP. Furthermore, the principal could not differentiate the roles of the SCDM and the ILT. He admitted that both the ILT and SCDM needed to convene a meeting to discuss and clarify roles and responsibilities in terms of moving the school's improvement plans forward. It is worth noting that the members of the SCDM are all newly elected and did not actively participate in the planning and development of the SIP. Finally, the staff survey results indicated that 55 percent of the respondents were unsure, and 40 percent disagreed, when asked if the School Council is an active force behind improvement efforts. Based on these factors, panel members questioned the capacity of the SCDM to effectively monitor the school's improvement initiatives.

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

Yes. The panel found significant evidence to support the conclusion that the faculty supported the improvement efforts.

In interviews with individuals and groups of district leaders, the panel consistently heard that the "majority of the school staff is committed to doing what it takes to improve student performance." When the assistant principal (whose prime responsibility is as instructional leader) was asked to identify the level of faculty support and commitment to the School's Improvement Plan, she expressed confidence that 70 – 80 percent were actively engaged and that only a few were either "on the fence" with it or clearly not supporting it. The school principal also concurred with these assessments. Members of the Instructional Leadership Team, a key group in the development of the plan, also confirmed that the majority of the faculty was actively on board with the plan. A district Learning Support Specialist stated: "The school staff is committed to do what it takes to improve student performance." Eighty percent of teachers who participated in panel interviews stated that they actively support the SIP. This was further confirmed on the staff survey in which 75 percent of teachers responded positively to the statement, "The school has a well-defined plan to reach student performance goals."

When asked the question, "What conditions do you believe are in place that will ensure success with the SIP?" all the teachers interviewed by panel members gave the following responses: "The staff is committed and caring;" "Everyone wants to be successful;" "Staff collegiality and communication;" and, "Support from the district."

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

Yes. During the last two years of School Improvement Planning, the Elias Brookings School has received intense guidance and support from Springfield's district leadership. Throughout all aspects of the planning, analysis and implementation processes, the district's commitment takes the form of directed assistance with the procedural and organizational aspects of the planning process, as well as expert technical support and guidance from a variety of district personnel that includes curriculum directors and Learning Support Specialists.

Other examples of the district's support include the following: assigning Collaborative Professional Development Teachers (CPDT) in math and language arts to assist the administration in planning and conducting SIP related professional development work and to help teachers employ new instructional strategies through consultation, collaboration and modeling. District Reading Specialists are assigned to work periodically with teachers on issues related to reading instruction. Such efforts were designed to help school personnel become more comfortable and more involved with data-driven decision making. A School Support Specialist assigned to the school spends a least one day per week on site to guide and support the school's administration on issues related to the leadership and management of the SIP process.

It was clear to the panel that Springfield's District leadership, as well as a solid core of teacher leaders and administrators at the Brookings School, are determined to enact the improvement directive leveled at the school through the State's accountability system. A member of the district's leadership stated with agency and resolve, "This (developing and enacting a sound plan to improve student performance) just has to happen!"

CONCLUSIONS

The Elias Brookings School has developed a sound plan for improving student performance. The plan is based upon the analysis of appropriate data, it has specific learning objectives grounded in reasons identified for poor student performance, it contains clear and specific strategies attached to goals and objectives that will guide implementation and lead to improved student performance, and it was developed through a process that has the potential to support its successful implementation.

Two very important elements exist in the Brookings School environment that will support the plan's successful implementation – the strong support and guidance from the district office and the support for the plan by the school's professional community. However, panel members concluded that the lack of confidence in school leaders' ability to effectively guide the improvement process and the absence of a clearly defined school-based leadership structure may hinder the execution of the improvement plan.

Despite these weaknesses in leadership, observed in late fall 2004, three factors influenced the panel to give the school the benefit of doubt in its overall judgment of Key Question 2. The first two factors are mentioned above, strong support and guidance from the district, and a solid commitment to the plan from the administration and faculty. The third factor was the evidence of activities and conditions already in place designed to remediate these weaknesses presented in the conclusion Section A (under Key Question 2) above.

The challenge for the Brookings School is to continue to find ways to create a type of school based leadership that will move their efforts to improve student performance forward.

Appendix A
Elias Brookings School
Panel Review Visiting Team

Dr. Thomas A. Harvey, Panel Chair, SchoolWorks Consultant, Beverly, MA

Erin Furey-Patterson, Panel Coordinator, Accountability and Targeted Assistance Office,
Department of Education, Malden, MA

Sally Bachofer, Panel Member, Charter School Office, Department of Education, Malden, MA

Aretha Miller, Panel Member, Project Manager, SchoolWorks, Beverly, MA

John Peron, Panel Member, Principal, Pittsfield Elementary School, MA

Wendy Woods, Panel Member, Principal, Blandford and Russell Elementary Schools, MA

Appendix B

ELIAS BROOKINGS SCHOOL SPRINGFIELD SCHOOL DISTRICT PANEL REVIEW SCHEDULE

Tuesday, November 30, 2004

- 09:30 - 10:00 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 at Holiday Inn.**
- 10:00 - 12:30 p.m.* **Panel Team Meeting # 1: Team meets to discuss panelist's individual analysis of school data; team forms preliminary judgments on key questions at Holiday Inn.**
- 01:00 - 02:00 p.m.* **Panel meets with Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) at Brookings School.**
- 02:00 - 03:00 p.m.* **Panel meets with the district Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, and School Support Specialists at Brookings School.**
- 03:30 - 04:30 p.m.* **Panel meets with Principal and Assistant Principal at Brookings School.**
- 05:00 - 06:30 p.m.* **Panel Team Meeting # 2: Panelists synthesize interview information, further define findings, prepare questions, and develop a team strategy for Day 2 of the review.**

Wednesday, December 1, 2004

All activities take place in the school

- 07:30 - 08:00 a.m.* **Panelists meet with the Principal**
- 08:00 - 08:30 a.m.* **Panelists meet with the School Council**
- 08:30 - 09:00 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.**

08:30 - 09:00 a.m **Panel Reviews**

Panelist A	Panelist B	Panelist C	Panelist D	Panelist E
Focus Group Curriculum & School Support	Focus Group Special Education	Focus Group Parents	Focus Group Students	Focus Group Mathematics

09:20—10:50 a.m. **Classroom observations and teacher interviews***

	Panelist A	Panelist B	Panelist C	Panelist D	Panelist E
9:20-10:05a.m.	Observe teacher 1 teacher 2	Observe teacher 3 teacher 4	Observe teacher 5 teacher 6	Observe teacher 7 teacher 8	Observe teacher 9 teacher 10:
10:05-10:50	Interview teacher 1 teacher 2	Interview teacher 3 teacher 4	Interview teacher 5 teacher 6	Interview teacher 7 teacher 8	Interview teacher 9 teacher 10

11 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. **PanelTeam meeting # 3: Panelists meet to discuss findings so far and to plan the remainder of the day (working lunch) in library.**

12:30 - 01:00 p.m. **Panelists use time as needed to analyze findings and to gather more information; panelists are encouraged to roam the entire school and visit classrooms not yet seen.**

01:00 - 02:00 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 3 teachers	Teacher	Focus Group 3 3 teachers	Prepare Report
1:30-2:00	Teacher	Focus Group 2 3 teachers	Teacher	Focus Group 4 3 teachers	

02:00 - 02:30 p.m.

Panel Chair and Panel Coordinator meet with the principal and assistant principal to discuss next steps.

02:30 - 05:00 p.m.

Panel Team meeting # 4: panelists deliberate and form conclusions