

School Panel Review Report New Leadership Horace Mann Charter School Springfield, MA

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 New Leadership Horace Mann Charter 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 2-3, 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 New Leadership Horace Mann Charter 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.

New Leadership Horace Mann Charter School Profile

The New Leadership Horace Mann Charter School (NLCS) is the only Horace Mann Charter School in Springfield. The school serves students in grades 6 - 12. Over the last four years, enrollment at NLCS has increased from 226 in 2001 to 378 as of October 1 this school year. Student demographics at the school have remained fairly stable over the same time.

Between 2001 and 2004, the proportion of Black students attending NLCS ranged from a low of 73 percent (in 2004) to a high of 78 percent (in 2003), while the percentage of White students has stayed at 6 percent for the past three years. This year 20 percent of students are reported in the Hispanic subgroup, similar to the 17~18 percent reported in earlier years. Between 2001 and 2004, approximately 67 percent of NLCS' students were from low-income families (with one exception, 2003, when 76 percent were reported in this category). No students are reported as being Limited English Proficient. This 2004 school year 11 percent of students are receiving special education services, which is 1 percent higher than last year.

In 2004, NLCS registered an attendance rate of 92.4 percent, with students absent 13.5 days on average. The school's retention rate was 0 percent in 2003, the last year for which data is available. Out-of-school suspensions were reported at 13.5 percent, more than double the State's 6.1 percent average. No in-school suspensions were recorded.

Staffing

The 2004-2005 New Leadership Charter School's staffing report indicates that the school is composed of 1 administrator, 44 teachers, and 1 guidance counselor. Approximately 64 percent of educators at the school have been there for three or fewer years. Just over 51 percent of teachers are licensed in their current teaching area.

MCAS Overview

Students at the New Leadership Charter School are assessed in grades 7 and 10 in English language arts (ELA) and in grades 6, 8, and 10 in mathematics. With the exception of 2003, the school has not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in ELA since 2000. The school has not made AYP in mathematics since 2000. In the school's Cycle III End-of-Cycle AYP Report (2003-2004), the school failed to make AYP in ELA in the aggregate and for both of its reported subgroups: Free/Reduced Price Lunch and African-American/Black.¹ In mathematics, the school failed to make AYP in the aggregate and for both of the reported subgroups: Free/Reduced Price Lunch and African-American/Black. The school is currently identified for Improvement in ELA and for Corrective Action in mathematics.

Student Performance in English Language Arts

GRADE 7

Regular Education

At the grade 7 level in English language arts (ELA), the performance of regular education students improved from 2001 to 2003; in 2004, the performance of these students was worse than in the previous two years. In 2001, 13 percent of students were found Proficient, 52 percent performed at the Needs Improvement level and 36 percent were at the Warning level. By 2003,

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 NCLS in 2004 were Free/Reduced Price Lunch and African-American/Black for both ELA and mathematics.

the percentage of Proficient students increased to 32 percent, 49 percent were in Needs Improvement, and 18 percent scored in the Warning category. In the most recent administration of the MCAS test, the percentage of students who scored at the Proficient level decreased to 19 percent, while the percentage of students at the Warning level remained at 19 percent.

Special Education

Results for Special Education students in grade 7 ELA were only reported for 2004. The majority – 55 percent – of these students scored in the Warning category, while 45 percent were in Needs Improvement. This 2004 subgroup only consisted of 11 students.

Limited English Proficient

No Limited English Proficient (LEP) students were tested in grade 7 ELA.

GRADE 10

Regular Education

Results for regular education students in grade 10 ELA show a slight performance decline from 2002 to 2004. In 2002, 31 percent of students scored in the Proficient range, 54 percent in the Needs Improvement range, and 15 percent in Warning. In 2003, 20 percent were in Proficient, 65 percent in Needs Improvement, and 15 percent in Warning. In 2004, the percent Proficient climbed to 26 percent, and the percent in Warning remained at 16 percent.

Special Education

No Special Education students were assessed in grade 10 ELA.

Limited English Proficient

No LEP students were assessed in grade 10 ELA.

Student Performance in Mathematics

GRADE 6

Regular Education

The performance of regular education students in grade 6 mathematics has improved from 2001 to 2004, with the largest gains shown from 2003 to 2004. In 2001, 0 percent of students scored in the Advanced range, 2 percent in Proficient, 23 percent in Needs Improvement, and 75 percent in Warning. These figures stayed relatively stable until 2003. In 2004, 1 percent were Advanced, 5 percent scored in the Proficient range, 40 percent were in Needs Improvement, and 54 percent were in Warning.

Special Education

Scores for Special Education students in grade 6 mathematics evidence improvement from 2003 to 2004. In 2002 and 2003, 100 percent of Special Education students scored in Warning. In 2004, 14 percent had moved to Needs Improvement.

Limited English Proficient

No LEP students were assessed in grade 6 mathematics.

GRADE 8

Regular Education

The scores of regular education students on the grade 8 mathematics tests have improved somewhat between 2001 and 2004, with the largest gains shown between 2003 and 2004. In 2001, 14 percent of students scored in Needs Improvement and 86 percent scored in Warning. In 2003, 2 percent scored in Proficient, 17 percent in Needs Improvement, and 81 percent in Warning. In 2004, the percent Proficient increased to 4, the percentage in Needs Improvement increased to 39, and the percentage in Warning decreased to 57.

Special Education

Between 2000 and 2004, 10 Special Education students or fewer were assessed in each year. For the two years in which data was reported – 2000 and 2002 – 90 to 100 percent of the students scored in the Warning range.

Limited English Proficient

No LEP students were assessed in grade 8 mathematics.

GRADE 10

Regular Education

Three years of grade 10 mathematics data are available. Data from 2002 and 2004 are similar, with 5 percent scoring in Advanced, 15 percent in Proficient, 55 percent in Needs Improvement, and 25 percent in Warning in 2004. In 2003, however, 15 percent scored in Needs Improvement and 85 percent scored in Warning.

Special Education

Fewer than 10 Special Education students were assessed in grade 10 mathematics; as such, no assessment data is reported.

Limited English Proficient

No LEP students were assessed in grade 10 mathematics.

PANEL RESPONSES TO THE KEY QUESTIONS

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

No. The School Improvement Plan (SIP) that is being used to drive the improvement initiatives at New Leadership Charter School (NLCS) lacks the clarity and specificity that teachers, most of whom are novices, need to help them raise student achievement across the school. The lack of clarity and specificity in the SIP can be attributed to the school's failure to perform a systematic analysis of appropriate school data to accurately identify the underlying factors that impact student achievement in the school. Consequently, school leaders were unable to craft improvement goals and objectives that are rigorous, credible and aligned to specific student outcomes that would effectively address "root causes" of student low performance. Finally, the development of the improvement plan was not a school-wide endeavor, as evidenced by the fact that many teachers (and several members of the school's leadership) were only vaguely aware of its content. Some teachers did not know that the school has an SIP. This has resulted in the general lack of understanding among the staff of what needs to be done to significantly increase the number of students achieving proficiency on school and statewide assessments.

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. Panel members concluded that the leadership at NLCS failed to conduct a systematic and in-depth analysis of appropriate student and school performance data to develop the School Improvement Plan that is being used to guide the school's improvement initiatives. Both teachers and administrators at NLCS reported that the school uses the MCAS as the primary data source to identify priority areas for the SIP. A thorough review of the 2003-2005 SIP by panel members indicated, however, that the school's analysis of the MCAS was superficial and made it difficult for them to accurately isolate the root causes for poor student performance across the school. In addition, the purpose and consistency with which they used other measures of student achievement reported was unclear and at times contradictory.

Both the Director and members of the Fostering Achievement Through Excellence (F.A.T.E.) team stated that the school uses the TestWiz software to conduct an item analysis of the MCAS. According to them, NLCS – by performing an item analysis – is able to identify the strengths and weaknesses in overall student performance. Teachers are then provided with this information to help guide their instructional practice. Although NLCS uses the TestWiz software to conduct MCAS item analyses, team members questioned the depth of analysis of the reports that are being generated from the software, since neither the teachers nor the administrators who participated in panel interviews could clearly articulate the particular skills and knowledge that are aligned with the state learning standards that students need to acquire in order to improve their overall performance. (The two members of the administrative team responsible for utilization of TestWiz stated that their understanding of and comfort with the uses of this software were at a beginner's level). The standard response given to panel members during interviews with the faculty at NLCS was, "The MCAS shows that students are weak in reading and math." When asked to elaborate, faculty members were unable to refine their response to

show their understanding of the root causes for low student performance. This type of response is also reflected in the SIP, in which the authors made the general statement that math and reading are priority areas for the school with no reference to the root causes. Additionally, they did not break out the priority areas by grade level and/or align them to the learning standards in the curriculum frameworks.

In interviews with panel members, both teachers and school administrators reported that students at NLCS made “significant gains” on the MCAS. An in-depth review of the school’s MCAS data revealed that this occurred *only* on the 10th grade mathematics MCAS assessment in 2004. NLCS was successful in reducing the number of students performing in the Warning/Failing category (87% in 2003 to 26% in 2004), while increasing the number of students performing in the Needs Improvement category (13% in 2003 to 57% in 2004). There was also a significant jump in the percentage of students scoring in the combined Advanced and Proficient categories—from 0% in 2003 to 17% in 2004. (See table below).

Table 1: Grade 10 Mathematics MCAS

	Advance %	Proficient %	Needs Improvement %	Warning/Failing %
2004	4	13	57	26
2003	0	0	13	87
2002	0	14	57	29

It was clear to panel members that the school attributed its success on the MCAS to the fact that it had greatly reduced the percentage of students scoring in the Warning/Failing category while increasing the percentage of those in the Needs Improvement category. (See table below. It is important to note that this reflects a similar trend for student performance on the seventh grade ELA MCAS and the eighth grade mathematics MCAS assessments. There was no change in student performance on the tenth grade ELA MCAS.)

Table 2: Grade 6 Mathematics MCAS

	Advanced %	Proficient %	Needs Improvement %	Warning/Failing %
2004	1	4	37	58
2003	0	4	19	77
2002	0	7	20	74

While it is commendable that NLCS was able to significantly reduce the number of students performing in the Warning category on the MCAS across the school, panel members questioned the staff’s understanding of the State and federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements for student achievement. It was clear from team members’ conversations with the staff that the emphasis throughout the school was helping students, especially tenth graders, *pass* the MCAS to fulfill the state graduation requirement. There was less talk about helping students achieve proficiency, the bedrock of the state and NCLB accountability systems. This was particularly evident when the staff appeared surprised to learn that moving students from Warning into

Needs Improvement was not enough to satisfy the requirements for making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP); however teachers do recognize Needs Improvement as a benchmark on the way to Proficiency.

A review of the SIP and Leadership Report revealed that NLCS did not disaggregate the MCAS results by subgroups. This is particularly noteworthy because students with special needs perform the lowest on the state assessment, with the majority scoring in the Warning and Needs Improvement categories across all tested grade levels. Additionally, school leaders did not disaggregate the data by school—that is, by middle and high school. (NLCS spans grades 6 through 12). When asked about this, members of the F.A.T.E. team stated that reading and math are priority areas at all grade levels. Again, they failed to analyze the data to see if there are particular trends and patterns in student performance in these two subject areas within each school and by grade level.

The School Director noted that the school has used or is using other assessment instruments to monitor student achievement. He reported that in the past, the school administered the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) but ended its use in 2003 when the Springfield Public School District made the decision to do so. School leaders reported that they administer a modified version of the reading assessment of the Woodcock-Johnson Test of Achievement to incoming sixth graders. It was not clear to panel members how the school uses this information to guide the development of the SIP. School leaders, nevertheless, reported that the results of the Woodcock-Johnson Assessment provide them with a baseline assessment of students' reading skills and indicate that incoming students perform at least two grades below their grade level. From interviews with teachers, panel members learned that the Woodcock-Johnson is used simply as a placement test and that teachers never revisit it to track student progress. Also, the results from the assessment are not translated into programmatic applications within the school's reading program, as evidenced by every student being given the same support to improve their reading skills—that is, access to Read 180 software and oral reading.

Members of the F.A.T.E. team reported that teachers administer teacher-made math assessments to incoming sixth graders. This is not aligned with what is written in the school's accountability plan. In its accountability plan, NLCS clearly stated that it would administer the KeyMath assessment to incoming students. This was not mentioned by either teachers or administrators or noted in other documents reviewed by team members. In addition to the teacher-made math assessments, teachers reported that they use other internal assessments to monitor student progress. Again, it is not clear how data from these assessment tools are used to inform the school improvement initiatives at NLCS.

NLCS is an active participant in Step Up Springfield, a district-wide initiative designed to enhance student performance by building a school's capacity to effectively implement data-driven decision making as a part of its improvement initiatives. The Director reported that although NLCS participated in Step Up Springfield last school year, they did not receive the reports from the quarterly assessments. According to him, he plans to use the reports from this year's quarterly assessments to drive instruction as well as inform the development of the SIP.

School leaders at NLCS did not conduct an analysis of student enrollment data. A review of the school enrollment data revealed that there was a change in the demographic make up of the school. In 2004, for example, Hispanic students made up 20 percent of the student body, compared to 14 percent in 2003. Conversely, there was a slight decline in the percentage of African American students enrolled in the school—from 78 percent in 2003 to 73 percent in 2004. Panel members also noted that there was a change in the percentage of low-income students attending NLCS – that is, 67 percent of students were identified as being low income in 2004, compared to 76 percent in 2003. Finally, although there was an increase in the number of students enrolled in the school, there was a decline in the attendance rate. In 2001, 226 students were enrolled in the school; this number increased to 378 in 2004. This is attributed to the school adding a grade each year as it expands to become a grade 6-12 program. During that time period, the attendance rate went from 94.9 percent in 2001 to 92.4 percent in 2004. In other words, in 2001, students were absent an average of 9.2 days and, in 2004, 13.5 days. The data also revealed that there was a significant decline in the number of students enrolled in grade six, compared to the number of students in grade seven. During the 2003-2004 school year, 98 students were enrolled in grade six and 81 in grade seven.

This information was not mentioned in the SIP, Leadership Report, or in conversations with school personnel. The panel members, therefore, concluded that as a result of the school's failure to analyze this data, it was unable to identify environmental factors that are impacting student performance at New Leadership Charter School.

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

No. The School Improvement Plan developed by the leadership team at NLCS does not have specific improvement objectives that are grounded in the school's analysis of the root causes for poor student performance. The improvement objectives outlined in the SIP are vague, not measurable, and not explicitly linked to specific student outcomes. In other words, the improvement objectives do not reflect the skills and knowledge that students at NLCS need to acquire in order to bolster overall student achievement. For example, the improvement objectives for mathematics are, "Students will see the importance and purpose of math. Students will increase their math performance over a three-year period." In some instances, the improvement objectives simply reflect strategies the school leaders want teachers to use with students. The improvement objective for reading states, "Students will be taught by teachers using differentiated teaching strategies and the Read 180 reading program." Moreover, as evident in the math and reading goals of the SIP, the leadership team at NLCS has not targeted any particular group of students whose needs may be part of the root cause of student performance.

The improvement objectives outlined in the School Improvement Plan are linked to the school's overall improvement goals. Panel members concluded that the school's failure to conduct an in-depth examination of student performance data resulted in its development of goals that are rigorous, but not credible. For instance, the goal for reading is "95% of our students are at grade level by 2007, 90% by 2006, 80% by 2005, and 75% by 2004." The school did not meet its target in 2004 because 16 percent of seventh graders only and 23 percent of tenth graders achieved

proficiency in 2004. It was clear to panel members that school administrators and staff did not use student performance data to revise and update the SIP to construct improvement goals and objectives that are rigorous and reflect the current performance of students in the school.

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

No. The strategies outlined in the SIP are not likely to improve student achievement at NLCS because they are too general and not designed to address the root causes that impact student performance. In addition, they are not explicitly linked to clear, measurable student outcomes that school leaders can use to monitor their efficacy in raising student achievement.

As stated in the SIP, strategies to improve student performance in math would include the implementation of the Connected Math Program (CMP) and the Integrated Math Program (IMP); the integration of MCAS questions in lesson planning; and, the implementation of double blocks of math. The majority of teachers and administrators expressed firm belief that these changes will positively benefit student achievement in math. However, it is not clear how the implementation of these strategies will help the school achieve its stated objectives of getting “Students to see the importance and the purpose of math [and] increase their math performance over a three-year period.” This represents a clear disconnect between the identified areas of weakness and the strategies selected by the school to achieve its overarching goal of raising student performance. In addition, although school leaders noted in the School Improvement Plan that they would use student work samples, administration observations, and student assessments to monitor the quality of the implementation of strategies, they did not articulate (either in writing or in interviews) the criteria they would use to evaluate the impact of these strategies on student learning.

Panel members made the same observations about the strategies that are outlined for reading and the other priority areas in the SIP. The strategies outlined for reading included the use of the Read 180 Program, phonographics as an instructional practice, data analysis and quarterly assessments. During the visit, panel members learned that the Read 180 Program is currently not being used in the school because they do not have all the necessary software licenses to support student use. Again, there is a strong belief that once the software is installed on the computers in the school, students will benefit from it.

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

No. The SIP is not clear and specific enough to guide the school’s implementation of its planned improvement initiatives. As noted earlier in this report, the improvement objectives are not grounded in meaningful data analysis and so are not linked to specific student outcomes. Furthermore, the improvement strategies outlined in the plan do not target the factors responsible for low student achievement.

A review of the Teacher Survey showed that of the twenty-two teachers who responded to the question, “Do you know what you are expected to do to improve student performance according to your school’s improvement plan?” fourteen answered negatively. Panel members got mixed responses from teachers when they asked this question—some teachers could articulate the strategies outlined in the SIP while others could not. (As a matter of fact, some teachers reported that they received a copy of the SIP the day before panel members arrived at the school). The Director also noted that “the [SIP] is a working document that could be refined and clarified, especially for new teachers.”

While the SIP does not have benchmarks that the school needs to meet for each priority area, school leaders set clear timelines as to when certain key improvement activities should take place as well as identifying the person(s) responsible for monitoring the implementation of these activities.

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

No. There was conflicting information about the development of the School Improvement Plan. Some teachers reported that they played a role in its development, while others stated that they were not aware the school had a plan for raising student performance. This was revealed in teacher interviews as well as in the Teacher Survey.

The Director reported that he inherited the SIP but that he made revisions to it based on the school’s analysis of more current student performance data. He also stated that teachers played an active role in the revision of the improvement plan by developing the strategies necessary for strengthening student performance. This was confirmed by members of the F.A.T.E. team, as well as some teachers in the school.

As noted earlier, some teachers reported that they did not have input in the development of the SIP. Even some of the teachers who did participate in its development noted that the SIP is not a living document in the school. This was evident to panel members when each teacher interviewed cited different reasons for low student performance. In some instances, teachers reported that students are not meeting school and state academic standards because they are performing below grade level in reading and math while others stated that students’ lack of motivation and poor parental involvement hinder student success at NLCS. Panel members concluded that by not making the SIP an integral part of the school’s planning process, school leaders failed to help teachers arrive at a common understanding of the factors impacting student learning as well as the strategies they need to undertake to raise student performance levels.

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

No. Although teachers and Board members are very supportive of the work that is being done in the school, school leaders have not been entirely successful in creating the conditions that are conducive for the effective implementation of the school's improvement initiatives. This is evident in the fact that there is inconsistent monitoring of the programs and policies that are being instituted in the school. The absence of a curriculum coordinator for more than a year also hinders the school's ability to build the capacity of its staff, most of whom are new to the profession, to enhance teaching and learning at New Leadership Charter School.

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

No. While school leaders have a general understanding of the work that needs to be done to enhance student performance, they have not been successful in ensuring the consistent implementation of programs and policies that would enhance student achievement throughout the school. This can be attributed to school leaders' inability to monitor the effectiveness and the quality of the initiatives they are putting in place across the school.

According to the Director, curriculum development is a key component of New Leadership Charter School's three-year improvement plan. He reported that both teachers and administrators participated in extensive professional development based on Grant Wiggins' theory of backwards planning to build their capacity to create curriculum that is linked to assessments designed to monitor students' acquisition of expected skills and knowledge. The end result of this work is the development of school-wide curricula in the three core content areas. (Teachers reported that they use the proposed scope and sequence described in the CMP and IMP textbooks as their curriculum guide for mathematics.)

A review of the curriculum documents revealed that while teachers made an effort to align the units in the curricula to the state learning standards, they did not consistently highlight the expected skills and knowledge that students need to acquire in order to meet grade level expectations. School-wide curricula are also not designed to address the deficiency or gaps in students' skills and knowledge as a result of the school's failure to conduct an in-depth item analysis. School leaders reported that they focus on backwards planning at the school, but there was limited evidence of this. Although teachers clearly identified the assessments—tests, quizzes, research papers, etc.—they would administer at the end of each unit, they did not overtly connect them to the skills and knowledge that are embedded in the state learning standards. Furthermore, teachers are not consistently using a common rubric in assessing student performance on the state standards or on the skills and knowledge evaluated.

It is worth noting that teachers who are proficient in curriculum development worked hard to include all the essential components of good planning in their work. A review of the ELA curriculum for the 9th-10th grades showed that the teachers identified the skills and knowledge that students will acquire at the end of each unit, described specific instructional strategies and resources that are needed to help students fulfill the learning objectives, and made the

effort to create assessments that are designed to measure students' progress towards the learning objectives.

The Director noted that the absence of a curriculum coordinator/academic dean makes it very difficult for the school to monitor the efficacy of the curricula being implemented across the school. This was confirmed by teachers who stated that by not having a curriculum coordinator, they are not always able to receive the guidance and support they need to improve their instructional practice. In other words, New Leadership Charter School does not have a well-defined process to systematically support teaching and learning across the school. This is particularly problematic, especially since the school recently instituted CMP and IMP – two rigorous mathematics programs that require a lot of support for teachers and students – as the foundation for its math program. Some teachers reported that they have not received a formal evaluation even though they have been teaching at the school for two years. Others reported that they have received both formal and informal evaluations. It was reported that the middle and high school coordinators and the Director conduct informal classroom observations.

An examination of informal written feedback to a teacher showed that there is a focus on teaching and learning at NLCS. The feedback to the teacher, however, was not specific enough to help her improve her instructional practices. It was recommended, for example, that the teacher use a variety of instructional practices to help students access the text that was being used in the classroom. While this is good feedback, it was not adequate. It did not list specific strategies that the teacher could use to address this issue in the classroom. This is particularly important because the majority of teachers at NLCS are novices. (Twenty-seven of the 45 teachers in the school have, at most, four years' teaching experience). Teachers reported that they do not have common planning time built into their schedule. They do, however, have weekly grade-level meetings in which they discuss issues related to student work. They also reported that they meet informally with their colleagues as a way of getting additional support for their work. The middle and high school coordinators informed panel members that they plan to take on some of the aspects of the curriculum coordinator's role in order to provide more support to teachers until the school hires a person to fill this position.

Both students and parents told panel members that they are concerned with what they perceive as the inconsistent implementation of the discipline policy throughout the school. According to them, this has made safety an issue in the school. Of the six students interviewed by panel members, four reported that they do not feel safe at certain times during the school day. Parents also stated that the parental contract – a strategy to increase parent involvement at New Leadership Charter School – is not being strictly enforced. They claimed that the school has not been diligent in holding parents accountable for not becoming actively involved in the life of the school. This was confirmed by teachers in interviews with panel members. They noted that the school's discipline policies are not applied uniformly and that there is limited parent involvement. According to them, this makes it difficult for them to raise student achievement across the school.

Teachers informed panel members that the after-school and Saturday programs at NLCS are not well attended by students. The after-school program, which runs from three o'clock to four o'clock in the afternoon, gives students the options to participate in extracurricular activities or tutoring. According to teachers, many students – even those who need extra academic support – choose to participate in the extracurricular activities rather than tutoring. Other than mandating that some students attend both the tutoring sessions and Saturday programs, school leaders have not articulated other strategies to increase the number of students attending these programs.

Despite school leaders' inability to effectively monitor the programs and services in the school, they have made some key decisions that have enhanced teaching and learning at New Leadership Charter School. For example, the school increased the instructional time for math from 52 minutes to 80 minutes as a way of providing students with the support they need to attain success in the subject area. The 80-minute block for mathematics is divided into two sections: a computation class and a class that is based on either CMP or IMP — at the middle and high school levels, respectively. Teachers reported that the change to the math program has been beneficial to students because it helps to build their computation skills while allowing them to acquire the necessary math concepts.

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

Yes. The faculty at NLCS reported that they are strongly supportive of the school's improvement efforts. While some of them do not think that the written SIP provides clear guidance for teachers, they believe that with support from school leaders, they will be able to achieve their goal of improving student performance. They argued that the school's commitment to providing them with quality professional development makes it possible for them to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for them to effectively implement the strategies outlined in the SIP. A review of school documents shows that teachers participate in a variety of professional development opportunities such as attending workshops on behavior management by Boys & Girls Town, CMP and IMP trainings at Northeastern University, and differentiated instruction.

While most teachers were only vaguely familiar with the goals listed in the SIP, they said that they believe their students could achieve at higher levels. Panel members heard the following statement on many occasions, "If students just applied themselves, they would be able to demonstrate improvement." Teachers at NLCS expressed a lot of confidence in their students' ability to learn and seem to have a great deal of enthusiasm for their work. There is a strong sense of collegiality among the teachers as evidenced by their reporting that they meet at least once a week to discuss their practice and also their frequent reference to the supportive nature of their school culture.

Finally, the faculty at NLCS informed panel members that they have opportunities to take on leadership roles in the school. For example, teachers volunteer to be members of the F.A.T.E. team. These opportunities make it possible for teachers to have input in the decision-making process at the school as well as ensuring that they buy into school improvement efforts.

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

Yes. While NLCS receives limited support from the Springfield Public School District, it is governed by a Board of Trustees whose members work very hard to support the various programs and services that are being implemented by the school. The Director informed team members that the Board of Trustees is made up of members who are very committed to promoting the success of the school. According to the Board Chair, the Board is responsible for providing the resources necessary for the effective operation of the school. The members, therefore, make every effort to bring community resources to the school. For example, the Board was instrumental in developing the partnership between Step Up Springfield and NLCS. Board members also worked diligently to build the partnership between Western New England College and the school. New Leadership Charter School's partnership with Western New England College has led to the college providing professional development workshops for teachers on curriculum development, as well as sponsoring a career exploration program for students who are interested in pursuing careers in science and engineering. A professor from the college is currently a member of the Board.

Both the Director and Board Chair informed panel members that there are clear roles and responsibilities for the Board of Trustees. According to them, the Board is not involved in the day-to-day operations of the school, but provides fiscal and policy oversight. The two Board members who participated in interviews with panel members expressed confidence in the Director's ability to lead the school and stressed that the Board makes every effort to support him in his work.

The two trustees who were interviewed during the school visit reported that the Board has not done an independent evaluation of the efficacy of school's program and that they depend on the Director's monthly "State of the School" report to learn about the issues that are impacting teaching and learning. Members of the Board are aware of the SIP, but did not play an active role in its development. The Chair attributed this to the Board's reluctance to get involved in the day-to-day management of the school.

CONCLUSION

New Leadership Charter's failure to conduct a comprehensive analysis of appropriate school data made it difficult for school leaders to develop a plan that would serve as a clear road map for school improvement. The goals and objectives listed in the school's SIP are not measurable and aligned to specific learning outcomes for students – that is, they do not reflect the expected skills and knowledge that are embedded in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Because the strategies proposed in the improvement plan do not directly address the root causes that are impacting student achievement, it is not clear that they are the most efficacious in helping the school achieve its overarching goal to raise student achievement.

Although school leaders are working hard to strengthen the instructional program at New Leadership Charter School, they have not been able to create the conditions that are necessary for the successful implementation of the school's improvement efforts. For example, they have not been able to significantly build the instructional capacity of the teachers, most of whom

have limited teaching experience. Also, they have do not have a process for monitoring and/or assessing the impact of the programs and services that are provided at the school to further students' academic and social development. Consequently, they are unable to make necessary adjustments to the school's programs to enhance their ability to significantly improve student performance.

Finally, despite the challenges revealed in this report, it is clear to the panel that the school's leadership, faculty, staff and Board of Trustees are committed to their students and to their school and are willing to do whatever is necessary to make their school a viable option for families in Springfield.

APPENDIX A
Team Members

Aretha Miller – Panel Chair, Project Manager, SchoolWorks, Beverly, MA

Tom Harvey – Panel Co-Chair, Professional Vitality Associates, Marblehead, MA

Erin Furey Patterson – Panel Coordinator, Massachusetts Department of Education,
Malden, MA

Judith Siciliano – Panel Team Member, Principal, Conway Grammar School, Conway, MA

Robert Baroz – Panel Team Member, Dean of Humanities, English Teacher Grade 8,
Framingham Charter School, Framingham, MA

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

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

Day 1

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

Day 2

All activities take place in the school

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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