

**Panel Report**  
**Candidate Compass School Review**  
**Franklin Avenue School**  
**Westfield Public Schools**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **The Program**

The Commonwealth Compass Schools Program is one part of the Massachusetts School and District Accountability System. The purpose of the Compass Schools Program is to recognize and celebrate improvement in Massachusetts' schools, and to disseminate information and encourage networking and sharing of ideas, effective practices, and models for success. The program is intended to provide a means for the schools to share their expertise with other schools in the state.

In 2005, 197 schools that made AYP during the last two years and exceeded their improvement targets for both ELA and mathematics in the aggregate and/or for all reported subgroups were invited to apply to the program. Eighty of those schools chose to apply by submitting completed applications. The applications provided written responses to three questions on the initiatives undertaken to improve student performance that school leaders and staff think have had the most positive impact on their students' performance. Six high schools, six elementary schools, one middle school, one kindergarten through grade 8 school, one grade 7 through 12 regional school, and one charter school were selected as finalists. Those 16 schools were scheduled for a panel review to learn more about their highlighted programs and to determine willingness and capacity to serve in the program. Data and information gathered from the application and review processes of these schools will be published in a report this fall.

The Commissioner will designate up to 16 schools to serve as 2005 Commonwealth Compass Schools. Compass Schools receive special recognition and a \$10,000 grant to support the participation of their administrators and staff in information sharing and dissemination activities over the next year.

### **The Report**

This report summarizes the findings and analyses of a small team of education professionals during a one-day visit to the Franklin Avenue School on June 2, 2005. The report will assist the Commissioner in determining which schools from among those visited will be designated to serve as 2005 Commonwealth Compass Schools.

The panel evaluated data and written information on the school's performance and improvement efforts, including the school's Compass School application. Panelists then visited the school to meet with school leaders, staff, parents, and students, and to visit classrooms in order to answer the following two key questions:

1. Is this school using effective improvement initiatives that could be replicated in other similarly profiled schools?
2. Are the conditions in place for this school to serve as a model of effective practices and successful improvement initiatives?

The panel's responses to these two questions frame the report. In the process of answering these questions, the report focuses primarily on the initiatives that the school identified in its application as having had the most positive impact on student performance.

The findings and conclusions presented here are the product of analysis, discussion, and observation, and are based on the evidence made available to the panel before and during its visit. A list of panel members who participated in the school panel review is provided in Appendix A. A detailed schedule of the panel's activities is provided in Appendix B.

### **School Profile**

The Franklin Avenue School is one of fourteen schools in Westfield and one of eight elementary schools. The school has a school-wide Title I program that serves students in grades Pre-K through 4. Enrollment over the past three years has declined slightly from 236 in 2002 to 214 in 2005. Fifty-nine percent of the students are White, 39% are Hispanic, and 1% are Black. Eighty-one percent receive free and reduced lunch (FRL), 18% are designated as limited English Proficient (LEP). English is not the first language (FLNE) for 27% of the students, consistent at the school over the past few years. Nineteen percent of the students are currently on Individual Education Plans; this is only slightly above the district average of 18% and the state average of 16%.

The daily attendance rate has held fairly steady, and at 94.8% in 2004 stands very close to state and district averages, with the average number of days absent at 8.2% last year. Retentions averaged 0.4%, with a three-year average rate of 1.9%. In 2003, 7 out-of-school suspensions and 5 in-school suspensions were reported.

### **Staffing**

The school administration includes one principal, who has been an administrator for 17 years, and in her current position for sixteen years. There is one school-wide adjustment counselor and a fulltime library/media specialist. In addition to the librarian, there are 25 full time teachers. With the exception of one math teacher and an ESL teacher, all are certified in the areas in which they are teaching. Nine teachers have been in the building five years or less, and three of those have three years or less of teaching experience. Thirteen of the teachers have been in the building between ten and fifteen years.

Many teachers have multiple certifications, including five reading specialists and two certified in special needs.

## MCAS Overview

Students at the Franklin Avenue School are assessed in grades 3 and 4 in English language arts (ELA) and in grades 4 and 6 in mathematics. In the school's Cycle III End-of-Cycle AYP Report (2003-2004), the school made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the aggregate for both ELA and mathematics in 2003 and 2004. The school made AYP in ELA in the aggregate and for its reported subgroup: Free/Reduced Price Lunch.<sup>1</sup>

Composite Proficiency Index (CPI) increases were substantial in both content areas: 26.6 in ELA and 24.6 in mathematics.

## MCAS Results

Students at Franklin Avenue School are tested in the MCAS in grade 3 in reading. In grade 4, students are tested in English language arts (ELA) and in mathematics. In both Cycle II (2001-2002), and Cycle III (2003-2004), the school was found to have made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in both ELA and mathematics in the aggregate for each of its reported subgroups.

### *Student Performance in English Language Arts*

In Cycle III, Franklin Avenue School received a performance rating of *High* for its Composite Proficiency Index (CPI) of 89.7 in ELA. Its 26.6-point improvement over Cycle II (2001-2002) CPI of 63.1 was rated *Above Target*. Participation rates in the ELA test in Cycle III were 100 percent.

In Cycle III, Franklin Avenue School saw its students make significant gains in the proportions scoring at the Proficient levels of performance as well as a significant decline in the proportions scoring at the Warning level as follows.

### GRADE 3 READING

The 28% of third graders scoring in Proficient in 2001 rose steadily to 97% by 2004, while the 22% of students scoring in the Warning level in 2001 declined in the next year to zero for all students. Ninety-one percent of special education students were Proficient in 2004; the first year numbers exceeded the minimum reporting requirements.

### GRADE 4 ELA

The 34% students scoring in the Warning category in 2001 rose slightly in 2002 to 38%, and then declined to zero by 2004. During that same period, 12% of students scored at the Proficient level in 2001 increased to 73% for all students in 2004, with the remaining 27% scoring in Needs Improvement.

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

### *Student Performance in Mathematics*

In Cycle III, Franklin Avenue School received a performance rating of Moderate for its aggregate Performance Index (CPI) of 74. For its 24.6-point increase over Cycle II (2001-2002) CPI of 49.4, the school received an improvement rating of Above Target. The school's participation rates in the mathematics portion of the MCAS test in Cycle III were 100% in 2003 and 97% in 2004.

#### **GRADE 4 MATH**

In 2001, 14% of all students performed at the Proficient level, 51% were at Needs Improvement, and 35% at Warning. By 2004, 44% scored at Proficient, 56% in Needs Improvement, and 0% Warning.

In both ELA and math, Franklin Avenue students continue to surpass both the district and the state, with significantly lower numbers of students at Franklin scoring at the Warning level. The number of students scoring at the Proficient level continues to rise. The numbers of students scoring in the Advanced level is below district and state levels in both content areas.

#### **Key Question 1: Is this school using effective improvement initiatives that could be adapted in other similarly profiled school?**

Yes. Similar schools could adopt the strategy of the multiple instructional interventions used at Franklin Avenue and the assessment and management processes that enable these. This includes:

- Having available a range of instructional programs in reading and ELA to ensure that all students' learning needs are met
- Scheduling and organizing the school and school day for more focused instruction
- Arranging professional development opportunities so that they meet planned purposes and goals determined by analysis of student performance data
- Scheduling regular "intervention" meetings to assess student progress and determine their curriculum needs
- Involving all staff in professional 'cadres' to research and develop new interventions to meet student needs
- A true sense of instructional leadership driven by the conviction held by all staff that obstacles to learning could be overcome with the appropriate intervention.

**A. Which improvement initiatives have had the greatest positive impact on student performance results?**

The school points to a number of initiatives that have impacted positively on student learning. These initiatives started the growth process – about six years ago – with the adoption of “The Accelerated Schools Project.” From this grew a commitment to seek, adopt, and refine multiple reading intervention strategies so that the school could meet the literacy learning needs of all its students. In the light of these developments the principal consciously adopted the role of facilitator, allowing faculty members to become instructional leaders in professional cadres. Each cadre now holds responsibility for the management, review, and professional development associated with student learning. In order to ensure that student needs are being met, intervention meetings are convened monthly at which classroom teachers and reading specialists discuss the progress of students one by one, paying close attention to progress in relation to the program or programs being followed by the student. Even the students are aware of the choice of interventions and how they can impact on their learning, so that there is a common language of “reading-driven learning” at the school. The school recognizes the need to engage parents more in this dialogue and in actively supporting the intervention strategies selected for their children.

*Does the data support the school’s reported impact in the area intended?*

Yes. The effective implementation of intervention strategies to raise achievement in literacy and ELA has had a marked effect on all student groups. Last year, (2004) 100% of regular education students achieved in the proficient category in grade 3 ELA MCAS, and 91% of special education students achieved in the same category. In 4th grade ELA MCAS, during the period 2001 to 2004 the number of regular education students in the warning category has reduced from 27% to zero and in the needs improvement category from 58% to 17%. The number of regular education students in the proficient category has increased over the same period from 15% to 83%. For special education students over this period the number in the warning category reduced from 80% to 9% and the number in needs improvement increased from 20% to 91%. This very strong progress needs to be seen against the aggregate district performance that has shown no significant gains over the same period, and against an increase in the low-income subgroup at the school of 23% between 2002 and 2004. The school has shown decreases in the number of students in the warning category in grade 4th mathematics MCAS during the same period, with a reduction of 35% to zero in the aggregate. The school attributes the gains in mathematics to students’ increased literacy skills, instruction and the start of math interventions.

**B. How did the school plan its improvement initiatives and put them into practice?**

In 1995 Franklin Avenue School won a Davis Foundation grant in order to focus on school improvement and selected the Accelerated Schools Project as a comprehensive approach to school change. The project, from The National Center for the Accelerated Schools Project at Stanford University, was selected because of its success in other elementary schools in transforming cultures internally by involving all stakeholders in the reform process. This provided the starting point for developing a school culture where instructional leadership was

devolved by the principal to cadres of professional staff, each responsible for researching, establishing, and refining instructional practices, including intervention programs for all learners.

In 2001, the school joined the Literacy Collaborative at Leslie University and began to focus the Accelerated Schools methodology on literacy. Readers and Writers Workshop was established as a way to engage students in improving their writing by understanding writing through reading. This initiative also helped create a common language for teachers and students to communicate about reading and writing. As a result, attitudes to reading and writing changed, and the staff became increasingly aware of the need for new and specific interventions to address obstacles to learning.

Since 2002, teachers have been active in researching new programs based on their personal research and a close analysis of student need. When a cadre of staff researches an instructional practice or intervention program because of its potential suitability for the building, it is presented to the wider faculty and a decision is made as to its actual suitability for adoption. All faculty members have the opportunity to join a cadre, and some are members of more than one cadre.

As a result of this work by Franklin Avenue staff over the past four years, the following intervention programs are in place:

- ERI (Early Reading Intervention) - A daily, half-hour small group intervention focusing on phonological awareness, alphabetic understanding, writing, and spelling
- Reading Recovery - A daily, half-hour, one-to-one tutoring for low achieving first-graders
- LIPS (Lindamood Phonemic Sequencing Program) - A daily, half-hour, small group, intensive intervention reserved for students with severe learning disabilities in reading
- Road to Code - A four times per week, 20 minute, small group lesson focusing on phoneme segmentation, letter names and sounds, and phonological awareness
- Read Naturally - A 3-5 times per week, 30 minute program designed to develop speed, accuracy, and proper expression for beginning to adult readers
- Phonographics - A daily, structured, systematic, multi-sensory reading and spelling program based on phonemic awareness and alphabetic code, designed for struggling readers in grades 1-5
- Language First - A supplemental reading program designed to build vocabulary for English and non-English speaking students in grades 1-5
- Leap Track - A supplemental, computer based program designed for K-5 students in reading, language arts, vocabulary, and math

- Great Leaps - A daily, supplemental reading program with emphasis on building fluency
- Merry-Go-Round - A daily and monthly program of assessment and instruction on spelling principles and memorization and application
- An unusual enrichment program for reluctant readers, Read to Rover is a program organized by a non-profit therapeutic group that uses dogs to encourage engagement in reading. The students enjoy reading to Rover, and certainly in the 1:1 sessions we visited, Rover also seemed engaged in the story!

Interventions are selected for individual students at a monthly intervention meeting. The visiting team was able to observe an intervention meeting and saw how each student's improvement in reading was discussed in the context of the intervention programs selected for that student. In some cases, intervention programs were dropped and replaced with an alternative intervention strategy, in others it was decided that program(s) were having success and were to be continued. Case studies of individual student intervention schedules are provided as a special Appendix C.

The programs themselves are monitored directly in relation to their success in helping students' reading improve. The team was told that if a program proved ineffective with a number of students selected as recipients, then it would be dropped. The ERI program was cited as an example of an intervention that had shown some success at first grade but, after discussion between the cadre and the teaching team, was offered in kindergarten for even greater learning impact.

Professional development is an important part of the intervention strategy. All relevant staff are trained in professional development in order to use a program to its fullest advantage. In some cases, as for example with the Phonographics program, such training is vital because of the program's specific processes and complexities.

The Franklin Avenue team will continue to research new programs as they become available. At the time of the visit, for example, they were reviewing Vocabulary in a Flash, and deliberating on its adoption. They will also continue to develop the availability of existing programs – like Read to Rover, which at present is available only on a limited basis. The team is also thinking differently about existing programs – looking carefully at the skills improved with each intervention. For example, Reading Recovery has proven very effective for first graders with a specific skills gap. The Franklin Avenue team is considering using components of the Reading Recovery program with second and third graders who have similar skills gaps. The team will continue to hold its intervention meetings to assess student progress and monitor program intervention effectiveness. Finally, the school now wishes to find mathematics intervention programs so that the same approach can be applied to the math curriculum.

**C. Does the school think these initiatives can be successfully used in similar schools. Why?**

The intervention strategy approach has been developed through well-researched and documented strategies and it could be adopted by a variety of schools. Two schools locally, the Abner Gibbs and Paper Mill Elementary, have already worked with Franklin Avenue to learn about the

approach and are considering adopting it. Any school with a commitment to radical change could also adopt this approach. It would mean a commitment to shared instructional leadership and confidence in a reading-driven curriculum. At Franklin Avenue, 2.5 hours a day are spent in reading related activities and for “at risk” students this figure rises to 3.5 hours. The results of this radical approach not only in ELA but also in mathematics speak for themselves.

## **Key Question 2: Are the conditions in place for the school to serve as a model of effective practices and successful improvement initiatives?**

Yes. The leadership and staff at the school are working together towards common goals that have been well established as a result of the Accelerated Schools Project. They are guided by a clear, school-wide plan for improving student learning through intervention strategies. The teachers are experienced in working together to this end and work effectively in instructional leadership cadres.

### **A. Do leadership and staff have a shared understanding and use a common language to describe the changes/initiatives that have led to improvements in teaching and learning?**

There is continuous dialogue between leadership and staff about what needs to be done to address student and teacher learning needs. The cadre and the intervention team meetings provide the core process that guides the selection of appropriate interventions for students. Outside this formal structure of meetings the Franklin Avenue staff is in constant touch with each other about the work going on in classrooms and about individual students who may be underperforming.

The teachers interviewed and the administrators responsible for planning reiterated the importance of shared instructional leadership with the intervention meeting as the hub of communication and decision making about student needs.

In talking about intervention strategies for improving reading, the administrators and staff at Franklin Avenue talk with the common tongue of the Literacy Collaborative language. It is a language of high expectation and considerable expertise in achieving results. As a staff, they are also reflective of their practice and mindful of interventions that may not be appropriate at particular grade levels or in certain circumstances.

### **B. How effectively do the leadership and staff articulate the connections between the specific changes and improvement initiatives they have implemented, and the gains made in student achievement?**

The teachers and administrators talk fluently of the history of school reform and program development at Franklin Avenue. The importance of The Accelerated Schools Project and the work of the Literacy Collaborative are consistently mentioned as important in connecting initiatives with performance gains. They all give testimony to the imaginative leadership of the principal who has allowed responsibility to be devolved to the cadres. In turn, they all lay great store on the work of the cadres in the selection of appropriate management, review, and professional development strategies as the key to raising student achievement.

**C. Is there a school-wide focus on, and sufficient investment in, continued improvement of student performance?**

The idea of continuous improvement is an integral part of the daily professional work of the school, as interventions are informally reviewed and discussed by staff. Continuing review of student performance supports the decisions at intervention meetings about the instructional program for individual students.

The results of MCAS testing are systematically analyzed and the information is used to guide school improvement planning on an on-going basis within the context of the Accelerated School Project.

The principal and staff stress the importance of collaboration and good communication. While communication with parents is good, the principal and staff are aware of the need to involve parents more in decisions about student interventions. Teachers at Franklin Avenue commit much more time than that allocated to both collaboration and to program review and development. With respect to their professional development, the principal provides close and structured supervision of their professional learning needs and teachers are very responsive. Some staff reported that professional development was not, however, consistently available.

High expectations for student work were evidenced in classrooms, the library, and in displays of student work throughout the school. In response, students observed in classrooms and interviewed in focus groups were eager learners, articulate, and reflective.

**D. Does the school appear to have the capacity to host site visits and to participate in various activities to share effective strategies and practices with other schools in the state? Do the school leader and involved staff communicate effectively both orally and in writing how and why the school carried out its strategies for improvement?**

Yes. The school has already hosted two other elementary schools in the district that were keen to find out how Franklin Avenue was achieving its remarkable success. In the case of one school, the Franklin Avenue team has worked with staff to plan intervention meetings. The principal and staff have worked together over a number of years at establishing their unique approach. They are very clear in describing the history of education reform at Franklin Avenue and the adoption of the various strategies.

The school is small and seemed relatively congested, but the panel was in no doubt that the principal and staff would make appropriate arrangements for visiting teams from other schools, as they did for the Compass determination visit.

If there is a shortcoming, it is the absence of a handbook to describe the work in writing. It would have such a title as: “The Work of Cadres at The Franklin Avenue School – a Guide to the Selection and Application of Intervention and Improvement Strategies.” It is a handbook waiting to be written in order to help guide other schools in the good work.

**E. Does the panel recommend that this school be designated to serve as a Commonwealth Compass School?**

Yes. The culture of collaboration and the shared instructional leadership are supported by a strong structure of cadre and grade-level meetings. Cyclical intervention meetings ensure that every student's progress is regularly reviewed, and the effectiveness of instructional programs is monitored. The teacher team and administration have a clear sense of their roles within the school, and good communication is fostered among all stakeholders: teachers, paraprofessionals, parents, and students. The organizational structure and the direction determined by The Accelerated Schools Project offer a sustainable model for the development of the school as a high-achieving learning community.

## **Appendix A**

### **Panel Members**

**Peter Davies**, Chair/Writer, President, Class Measures Limited

**Chad Mazza**, Consultant, Pittsfield, MA

**Catherine Carney**, School Support Specialist, Boston Public Schools

## Appendix B Candidate Compass School Panel Review Schedule

**All activities take place at the school.**

*7:15-8:00 a.m.* Panel meets to prepare for the day.

*8:00 – 8:30 a.m.* Panelists meet with the Principal, Assistant Principal, Curriculum Consultant, Superintendent, and a School Counselor.

*8:30 – 9:00 a.m.* Panelists meet with four focus groups.

Panelist A	Panelist B	Panelist C	Panelist D
Title I Teachers	Parent Focus Group	Compass School Team	Specialists

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

	Panelist A	Panelist B	Panelist C	Panelist D
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.
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.

*11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.* 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 focus groups.\*

	Panelist A	Panelist B	Panelist C	Panelist D
<i>1:00-1:30</i>	Teacher Focus Group 1		Teacher Focus Group 3	
<i>1:30-2:00</i>	Teacher Focus Group 2		Teacher Focus Group 4	

*2:00 – 2:30 p.m.* Chair and panelists meet briefly with Principal, Assistant Principal, and Curriculum Consultant. They then organize and collate notes from focus groups.

*2:30 – 5:00 p.m.* Panelists deliberate, document evidence, and form conclusion.