

Panel Report
Candidate Compass School Review
Lawrence W. Pingree School
Weymouth 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 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) during the last two years and exceeded their improvement targets for both English language arts (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, 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 their willingness and capacity to serve in the program. Data and information gathered from the applications and reviews 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 Lawrence W. Pingree School on May 31, 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 products 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

Enrollment

The Weymouth Public Schools consists of one early childhood center, eight schools serving students through Grade 4, two middle schools, and one high school. The Lawrence W. Pingree School, with a total 2004-2005 enrollment of 257 students in Grades Kindergarten through 4, serves a student population that is 92.2 percent White, 0.8 percent Asian, 2.3 percent Hispanic, 1.2 percent Black, and 3.5 percent Native American. Of the total student population, 14.4 percent receive Special Education services, 3.1 percent are identified as having a First Language Not English, 13.2 percent are Low Income, and 0.4 percent are Limited English Proficient.

The school's 2004 student attendance rate was 95.3 percent, which surpassed the state average of 94.2 percent and was a 0.2 percent decrease from the school's attendance rate from the previous year. In 2004, 0.4 percent of the student population was retained, 1.1 percent received out-of-school suspensions, and 0.0 percent received in-school suspensions. No students were excluded between the years of 2001 and 2003, the three years for which data are available. The retention, suspension, and exclusion rates are all lower than state averages for the same years.

Staffing

The 2004-2005 Pingree School's staffing report indicates that the school is composed of one administrator, 25 teachers, one school psychologist, and one school nurse. The principal has nine years of administrative experience, all of which have been spent as principal of the Pingree School. More than 60 percent of the educators at the school have been there for five years or longer; 35 percent have been at the school for ten years or longer. All core academic teachers are identified as Highly Qualified, and 100 percent of teachers are reported as being licensed in their current teaching area. The school's student-to-teacher ratio is 13.3:1, which is equivalent to the state average.

MCAS Overview

The Pingree School has made Adequate Yearly Progress for the past six years and attained Cycle III Performance Ratings of *High* in both English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, scoring 14.0 points above the State Performance Target in ELA and 20.7 points above the State Performance Target in math. In Cycle III, the school achieved Composite Performance Index (CPI) gains of 4.1 points in ELA and 15.5 points in mathematics for students in the aggregate.

Student Performance in English Language Arts

GRADE 3

In the Grade 3 Reading tests, 62 to 74 percent of students have scored in the Proficient range in each year since the test was first introduced in 2001. In 2001, 64 percent of students were found Proficient, 35 percent performed at the Needs Improvement level, and 2 percent were at the Warning level. In 2002, the percentage of Proficient students increased to 74 percent, Needs Improvement decreased to 24 percent, and Warning remained stable at 3 percent. The school's 2003 results were similar to those of 2001. In the 2004 administration of the MCAS test, the percentage of students scoring at the Proficient level increased to 73 percent, 23 percent of students scored in Needs Improvement, and 4 percent were in Warning.

One hundred percent of students were assessed; however, the Special Education and Limited English Proficient populations in the tested grade have been too small to render subgroup results between 2001 and 2004.

GRADE 4

Student performance in the Grade 4 English language arts tests shows improvement between 2001-2002 and 2003-2004. In 2001, 1 percent of students were Advanced, 43 percent were Proficient, 44 percent were in Needs Improvement, and 12 percent scored in the Warning range. By 2003, 14 percent were Advanced, 59 percent were Proficient, 25 percent scored in Needs Improvement, and 2 percent scored in Warning. Similar results were registered in 2004, with 15 percent Advanced, 60 percent Proficient, 19 percent in Needs Improvement, and 6 percent in Warning.

In 2001, 2003, and 2004, 100 percent of students were assessed. In 2002, 98 percent of the Grade 4 population was assessed. However, the Special Education and Limited English Proficient populations in the tested grade have been too small to render subgroup results between 2002 and 2004.

Student Performance in Mathematics

GRADE 4

Student performance in the Grade 4 mathematics tests shows substantial improvement between 2001-2002 and 2003-2004. In 2001, 3 percent of students were Advanced, 25 percent were Proficient, 43 percent were in Needs Improvement, and 29 percent scored in the Warning range.

In 2002, the percentages scoring Advanced and Proficient increased slightly, to 6 and 29 percent respectively. The percentage in Needs Improvement increased to 54, and 12 percent of students scored in the Warning range. In 2003, 13 percent of students were Advanced, 37 percent were Proficient, 48 percent were in Needs Improvement, and 3 percent were in Warning. In 2004, 25 percent were Advanced, 25 percent were Proficient, 48 percent were in Needs Improvement, and 2 percent were in Warning.

In 2001, 2003, and 2004, 100 percent of students were assessed. In 2002, 98 percent of the Grade 4 population was assessed. However, the Special Education and Limited English Proficient populations in the tested grade have been too small to render subgroup results between 2002 and 2004.

PANEL RESPONSES TO THE KEY QUESTIONS

Key Question 1: Is this school using effective improvement initiatives that could be replicated in other similarly profiled schools?

Yes. The panel review team believes that several improvement initiatives underway at the Lawrence W. Pingree School have been effective in improving student achievement and could be replicated in other similarly profiled schools.

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

Based on input from leadership, faculty, and parents, it is the judgment of the panel review team that the improvement initiatives that have had the greatest positive impact on student achievement at the Lawrence W. Pingree School are as follows:

- Use and analysis of data to inform programs and instruction;
- Creation of math and literacy study groups for teachers;
- Intentional fostering of a positive school community, including parental involvement.

In its Compass School application, the Pingree School specifically noted staff participation in a state-run Mathematics Content Institute, the subsequent development of a math action plan, and teacher training in the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) as being initiatives central towards increased student achievement at the school. Other specifics noted by teachers included the development and use of daily math journals for students at all grades, and the creation of 'Reading Buddy' groups. The panel has subsumed these specifics under the more general label 'use and analysis of data to inform programs and instruction;' it was examination of and reflection on student performance data that prompted, for example, participation in the Content Institute, training in the DRA, and the creation of math journals.

Use and analysis of data to inform programs and instruction

Guided by the school principal and instructional coaches, staff at the Pingree School have learned to analyze student performance data and use the analysis to modify the way services are provided to the school's students. Data analysis began in earnest in the early 2000s. In 2000 and 2001, student MCAS scores were substantially below the district average in both English language arts and mathematics and showed particular weakness in reading comprehension. As a result, the principal increased instructional time in ELA schoolwide, and used grant monies to hire a literacy coach, train teachers in the DRA, and establish a library of leveled readers. In subsequent years, as scores in ELA began to rise, the staff shifted the focus to mathematics. Analysis showing student weakness in math open response questions led to the establishment, for example, of student math journals to increase students' writing about math and the use of state-wide rubrics to help students practice answering open response questions. To counter a potential focus on overall weakness in math, the staff chose to raise expectations for student performance by participation in the *Continental Mathematics League* contest, which requires students to demonstrate skill in solving challenging math problems. Simultaneously, the daily schedule was adjusted to allow an increase in math instructional time to 90 minutes per day. Currently, one focus of discussion during monthly staff meetings and weekly grade-level meetings is analysis of student writing and ways to improve it school-wide.

Creation of math and literacy study groups for teachers

The hiring of a literacy coach at the start of the 2002-2003 school year allowed teachers to begin having focused, guided discussions with one another regarding teaching, learning, and student work. Since that year, teachers have participated in math and literacy study groups in which they focus on increasing their own content knowledge, investigating ways to transmit that knowledge to students, and examining student work as evidence of student learning. During the first half of the 2002-2003 school year, these study groups met during the workday. Since the middle of that year, however, the groups have met weekly on their own time. Participation is voluntary, but is estimated by staff to be 85~90%. The math study group is currently led by a district-based math coach, while the literacy study group is led by a classroom teacher at the Pingree School. These study groups have given teachers the opportunity to read and discuss professional articles related to their practice; they have also provided a forum for teachers to learn about other teachers' practice and begin examining student work, within and across grade levels.

Intentional fostering of a positive school community

By creating structures that facilitate communication among staff members, such as formal meeting time devoted to data analysis and teacher schedules adjusted to allow for common planning time, the principal began to lay the groundwork for a positive school culture that reaches out to all regular staff, students, district-based specialist staff, and parents/guardians. The panel review team found substantial evidence of this positive community. Teachers and

specialist staff reported to the panel that over the past four to five years, “classroom doors have opened” and “everyone now feels responsible for every child” (Teacher interviews, May 2005). In response to a survey question about the source of improvement in student performance, nearly half of the 22 respondents identified “collaboration,” “working together,” or “team effort” as being central to the gains in student performance. One parent member of the School Council noted the increase in teacher communication and collaboration, stating that all teachers are now “on the same team” (School Council interview, May 2005). Parents drew particular attention to outreach activities in math, such as the math newsletter and parent math nights, at which parents are introduced to the math curricula. An additional source of evidence of this positive community focused on improvement is volunteer participation in the 2004-2005 math and literacy study groups, estimated by staff to be 85~90%.

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

Yes. Reading ELA scores increased substantially between 2001-2002 and 2003-2004. More substantial gains are evident in the school’s math scores, which increased 15.5 Composite Performance Index (CPI) points between 2001 and 2004. These score increases follow the timeline of ongoing initiatives detailed in this report. Further, research on school effectiveness clearly points to the benefits of using data to inform instruction, having embedded, adaptive professional development – such as that evidenced by teacher study groups – parental involvement, and the existence of positive school culture, including such aspects as shared vision and a safe, orderly environment. Supporting evidence for these aspects can be found in the low teacher turnover and student suspension and exclusion rates at the Pingree School.

Certain conditions have invariably contributed to the increased student performance at the Pingree School. The principal and veteran staff noted the establishment of district-wide curricular standards and guides that are aligned with state standards and assessments. Additionally, having a small faculty may have facilitated the implementation of school-wide initiatives and made it easier to encourage everyone to be “on board.”

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

After the 2000-2001 academic year, the administration and staff of the Pingree School began to institutionalize the analysis of student performance data. Analysis of student performance data subsequently became the basis of curricular and other programmatic decision-making, and is thus at the root of the other improvement initiatives detailed in this report.

Guided by the principal, the staff analyzed 2001 MCAS and IOWA student test results. Based on this analysis, the staff identified reading comprehension and responding to open response questions as particular areas of need for the Pingree School’s students. The investigation of student performance data was enhanced in the fall of 2002, when teachers began using *TestWiz* software to more carefully investigate student MCAS performance. A state-funded literacy grant the same year allowed the school to hire a literacy coach to work directly with teachers on their teaching of literacy skills. Although the grant was cut short, resulting in the loss of the literacy

coach in early 2003, three significant outcomes remained. First, classroom teachers were trained in the use of the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), which enabled them to carefully track the reading progress of students in the lower grades and begin differentiating instruction accordingly. Second, teachers were able to create a guided 'reading closet,' containing books leveled for classroom use at all grades. Third, and perhaps most importantly, classroom doors had been opened; teachers had been provided time and guided opportunities to discuss teaching and learning with their colleagues.

Also during the 2002-2003 school year, the principal and teachers made adjustments to the school-day schedule to increase the mathematics block to 90 minutes per day. The literacy block had been increased to the same 90 minutes several years earlier. Four teachers in Grades 3 and 4 participated in an action research project focused on collaboratively looking at student writing in mathematics. As part of a district initiative, students in Grades 2 through 4 participated for the first time in the *Continental Mathematics League* contest; this contest requires students to demonstrate high-level skills and knowledge, and can be seen as an example of raised expectations for mathematics achievement.

The increased focus on literacy skills and mathematics was reflected in increased student MCAS scores in the spring of 2003. During the summer of that year, the principal participated in a state-run Content Institute in Mathematics. One product of the Curriculum Institute was a 2003-2004 action plan for mathematics, developed in consultation with Pingree staff, and aimed at further increasing the mathematical knowledge of teachers, students, and parents. Specifically, the action plan called for the establishment of a teacher math study group, student math journals, and parent outreach activities such as a math newsletter and events to train parents in the math curricula and provide fun activities to enable them to help their children learn.

In addition to these activities in 2003-2004, Title I funds were used to support the hiring of a literacy coach and a math coach who worked directly with teachers throughout the year. The school's principal, having participated in the summer Content Institute, led the math study group with the assistance of the math coach. The literacy coach began a literacy study group for teachers. Study groups met outside of the workday, with volunteer participation.

The confluence of these planned activities under the principal's leadership has fostered the continued growth of a positive school community in which staff work together to raise the achievement of all students. With the opening of classroom doors and increased discussion about strategies to improve teaching and learning over several years, staff report that they have become more engaged and involved in school-wide attempts to raise student achievement. This development has been both intentional and organic; through the principal facilitating the creation of structures that allow teachers to discuss teaching and learning and collaboratively engage with student work, teachers have in turn become enthusiastic, and in some cases, empowered to take on additional responsibilities. One example of this empowerment can be seen in the high rates of volunteer participation in teacher study groups; additionally, a regular classroom teacher currently is the volunteer leader of the literacy study group. Another example can be found in teacher planning of parent outreach activities, such as the parent math nights and the math

newsletters. Staff commitment at the school was encapsulated in a comment by one teacher, who stated, “MCAS is not a 4th grade problem, it’s everybody’s concern” (Teacher interview, May 2005).

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

Yes. In the Pingree School’s Compass School application and staff interviews, the staff repeatedly pointed to initiatives that they believe can be used successfully in similar schools. The school staff believe that the most portable initiative is the establishment of teacher study groups. The school principal also expressed the desire to share with administrators some of the techniques she has used to encourage staff development and build the fabric of a positive school culture. Additionally, the school staff believe that they could assist similar schools in the analysis of student assessment data in math and in the development of a math action plan.

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

In the judgment of the panel review team, most of the conditions necessary for the Lawrence W. Pingree School to serve as a model of effective practices and successful improvement initiatives are in place. All staff encountered by the panel review team appeared to have the commitment, enthusiasm, and desire to continue to raise student achievement and to share the school’s improvement initiatives with other educators. The lack of a formal instructional leadership team at the Pingree School, however, may hamper its capacity to serve as a Commonwealth Compass School.

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?

As evidenced by interviews and written documents, including a staff survey, the principal and staff of the Pingree School clearly use common language to describe initiatives detailed in this report. Representative comments include, “We are using assessment to find out what our students know and what they need to know;” “The key to improvement in student performance has been teacher collaboration;” “[Increased achievement has come from such things as an] increase in parent involvement;” and “Collaboration...and study group meetings have been a driving force [in increasing student achievement]” (Staff survey, May 2005).

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

The school principal is able to articulate connections between the range of improvement initiatives and gains in student achievement, as evidenced in interviews and such written documents as a graphical representation of how the Pingree School ‘learns and grows together.’

Individual staff members articulated to the panel review team certain aspects of the changes that have been made at the school and their relation to increased student achievement, but few described the changes as being components of a systematic plan to raise student performance.

When the panel review team asked staff why student performance at the school had improved in recent years, the most common responses were around staff collaboration and team effort. Individual teacher responses included specific reference to such things as MCAS item analysis, increased ELA and math class time, the use of the DRA to track student reading comprehension, the development in 2003 of a math action plan, the use of math journals, participation in the *Continental Math League* contest, new math games, parent outreach/involvement, and the creation of a library of leveled readers. While it is likely that all of these initiatives worked toward increased student performance, it is also likely that some of the initiatives had greater impact than others. Few teachers could articulate such differences, instead attributing gains in student improvement to the general theme of staff collaboration.

Most data analysis and programmatic/curricular decisions at the Pingree School currently begin with the school principal. While the School Council appears to be an active, involved organization that includes several teachers and is responsible for the development of the annual school improvement plan, there is no formalized instructional leadership team at the school. Teacher study groups are led by a district-based coach and one regular classroom teacher. It is the opinion of the panel review team that the absence of a formal instructional leadership team is a potential impediment to full staff involvement and understanding of further changes that may be necessary to sustain improved student achievement in the school.

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

Yes, there is clearly a school-wide focus on continued improvement of student performance. This focus extended to district-based specialist staff, who expressed awareness of Pingree School initiatives and described collaboration with regular teachers. The focus also extended to parents/guardians, who spoke with enthusiasm about the positive changes at the school in recent years and the staff's continued parent outreach activities.

Staff participation in the volunteer teacher study groups, as previously described, is further evidence of staff investment in continued improvement of student achievement. Staff described writing as the focus for improvement efforts school-wide during the next academic year, as analysis of student work and assessment results has indicated the need for further attention to that area. The school-wide focus on and investment in improvement is captured by one teacher comment, "One child's problem is everybody's problem" (Teacher interview, May 2005).

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?

The Pingree School building has the physical capacity to host site visits consisting of relatively small groups of educators. The school building is compact, with a maximum of three classes per grade, and the total staff is fewer than 30 people. The principal and representative staff members seemed willing and able to present their school's improvement initiatives during on- and off-site sharing activities. In particular, staff expressed enthusiasm about sharing their experiences in developing teacher study groups that focus on increasing teachers' professional knowledge and skills, as well as examining student work to guide instructional and curricular decisions. The principal proposed meeting with other administrators to share staff development techniques that can lead to the development of positive school communities.

Certain veteran staff interviewed by the panel review team, including the principal, were able to describe the general process that has led to a cycle of improvement at the Pingree School. In that process, the school leader and staff first acknowledged the need for improvement through analyzing and reflecting upon student assessment results. The primary focus was student literacy, and steps were taken to increase student learning in this area. Using data to guide them, the staff next focused on improving math performance. In the upcoming school year, the focus will be on student writing.

As described in an earlier section of this report, however, the majority of staff interviewed by the panel review team focused on specific elements of the improvement initiatives and the generally positive school culture, rather than clearly articulating how changes in the school fell into a systematic approach to raising student achievement. Without a formal instructional leadership team that collaborates in the ongoing collection and analysis of student and program data, and jointly charts the future course for continued improvement of student performance, and in the event of the departure of the current school principal, the panel review team questions the capacity of the school to sustain the pace of its student performance gains and to effectively share its most effective improvement initiatives.

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

Yes, the panel review team recommends that this school be designated to serve as a Commonwealth Compass School. Although the school has a small staff, its effectiveness in serving as a model site from which other schools can learn would be greatly enhanced by the establishment of a team that includes the principal and a representative group of teachers most active in the school's improvement efforts. This team should take the lead in the development and presentation of materials describing the school's improvement efforts and in hosting on-site visits by educators during the school's year of service.

CONCLUSION

Several improvement initiatives underway at the Lawrence W. Pingree School have been effective in improving student achievement and could be replicated in similarly profiled schools. Three key initiatives – use and analysis of data to inform programs and instruction, the creation of math and literacy study groups for teachers, and the intentional fostering of a positive school community, including parental involvement – correlate with the substantial improvement in student performance between 2001 and 2004, particularly in mathematics.

The school's staff and administration appear to have the commitment, enthusiasm, and desire to continue to raise student achievement and to share the school's improvement initiatives with other educators. The establishment of an instructional leadership team at the Pingree School would greatly strengthen the school's capacity for both sustaining student improvement and effectively sharing its improvement initiatives with other educators.

Appendix A Panel Members

Matthew Pakos, Chair, Massachusetts Department of Education

Cynthia McNally, Assistant to Superintendent, Brockton Public Schools

Slavojka Sheehan, School Support Specialist, Boston Public Schools

Appendix B Schedule of Site Visit

All activities took place at the school.

7:30-8:30 a.m. Panel met to prepare for the day.

8:30-9:00 a.m. Panelists met with the principal.

9:00-9:30 a.m. Panelists met with focus groups.

Panelist A	Panelist B	Panelist C
<i>Parent Focus Group</i>	<i>Study Group Leaders Focus Group</i>	<i>School Council Focus Group</i>

9:30-11:30 a.m. Classroom observations and teacher interviews

	Panelist A	Panelist B	Panelist C
9:30-10:30 a.m.	Observe Teachers 1 and 2.	Observe Teachers 3 and 4.	Observe Teachers 5 and 6.
10:30-11:30 a.m.	Interview Teachers 1 and 2.	Interview Teachers 3 and 4.	Interview Teachers 5 and 6.

11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Panelists met to discuss and analyze findings, plan the remainder of the day, and gather more information.

1:30-2:15 p.m. Panelists met with teachers in focus groups.*

	Panelists A & B	Panelist C
1:30-2:15 p.m.	Focus Group 1-Teachers	Focus Group 2- Specialist Staff

2:15—2:30 p.m. Chair met briefly with principal for exit meeting to outline next steps. Panelists organized and collated notes from focus groups.

2:30—5 p.m. Panelists deliberated, documented evidence, and formed conclusion/recommendation.