

School Panel Review Report John Winthrop Elementary School Boston Public Schools

Introduction

The purpose of the School Panel Review process is to assist the Commissioner of Education in determining whether State intervention is needed to guide improvement efforts in schools where students' MCAS performance is not at a level that reaches the schools' Adequate Yearly Progress targets in English language arts or mathematics or both. John Winthrop Elementary School met this criterion and was one of five Boston schools selected for panel review in winter 2005. The panel review was conducted on February 7 and 8, 2006.

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. Is the school implementing a sound plan for improvement, and what gains have been achieved to date as a result of this implementation?
2. Do the conditions appear to be in place for successful implementation of the school's improvement plan?

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, together with school performance data, will be forwarded to the Commissioner of Education for consideration when determining whether John Winthrop Elementary 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.

John Winthrop Elementary School Profile

Enrollment

The John Winthrop Elementary School (Winthrop Elementary) serves 310 students in grades Pre-K thru five. Enrollment at Winthrop Elementary decreased from 321 students in 2002 to 310 students in 2005. There has been significant variability in the size of several student subgroups between 2002 and 2005. For example, students in the Limited English Proficient subgroup increased 16 percent from 2002 to 2003, decreased ten percent from 2003 to 2004 and increased seven percent from 2004 to 2005. Since 2002, racial subgroup percentages remained fairly stable for all reporting categories. Proportions of Winthrop Elementary student subgroups in 2005, as compared to district and state averages, are presented below:

<i>Subgroup</i>	2005 Enrollment (%)		
	School	District	State
Asian	1	9	5
Black	62	46	9
Hispanic	34	31	12
Native American	2	0.4	0.3
White	1	14	74
Low-Income	77	74	28
First Language Not English	26	37	14
Limited English Proficient	16	17	5
Special Education	17	20	16

In 2005, the attendance rate at the Winthrop Elementary was 94.0 percent, with students absent 9.6 days on average. Across the state in 2005, the average attendance rate was 94.4 percent and students were absent 10.0 days on average. Winthrop’s overall attendance rate is slightly lower than the state average, and slightly higher than the district average of 91.1 percent. Absenteeism appears greater among the primary grades, with kindergarten students having the highest average number of days absent (12.2) and preschoolers having the lowest attendance rate (91.5 percent). There is very little difference in attendance rates and chronic absenteeism between males and females. There are, however, differences in chronic absenteeism among races. Of Hispanic students, 25.6 percent are chronically absent, African American students 18.1 percent, and White students 75.0 percent (White students make up only one percent of the student population). Winthrop’s retention rate was 4.4 percent in 2004, the last year for which these data are available. The district retention rate for 2004 was 7.8 percent and the state’s rate was 2.6 percent. The school’s in-school suspension rate in 2005 was 0.0 percent, while out-of-school suspensions averaged 4.5 percent. There appears to be no significant differences in out-of-school suspension rates between males and females at Winthrop Elementary. Among racial groups, however, only African-American students received out-of-school suspensions. In addition, both in-school and out-of-school suspension rates at Winthrop Elementary are below state rates.

Staffing

The 2005-2006 Winthrop Elementary staffing report indicates that the school is comprised of one administrator, 23 teachers, five teacher aides, one library media specialist, two curriculum facilitators, eight other school-wide staff, and one nurse. The principal has been at the school for nine years and has a total of 19 years of administrative experience. Of the teachers, approximately 43 percent have been at the school for less than five years, 30 percent have been at the school between five and ten years, and 26 percent have been at the school more than ten years. Teachers’ years of experience in the profession, however, are significantly higher than their time at the school. Approximately 61 percent have more than 10 years’ experience, while 22 percent have between five and ten years experience. Ninety-two percent of teachers are reported as being highly qualified, and approximately 78 percent hold advanced degrees.

MCAS Overview

Students at Winthrop Elementary are assessed in Grade 3 reading and in Grade 4 English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. Winthrop Elementary's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report for 2005 Mid-Cycle IV shows an accountability status of Corrective Action for ELA and for mathematics.¹ The school failed to make AYP in ELA and mathematics for the aggregate population for three consecutive years (2001 –2003), made AYP in 2004, and then failed to make AYP in 2005. In addition, Winthrop Elementary failed to make AYP in ELA and mathematics for subgroups in 2003 and 2005.

In 2005, the aggregate Composite Performance Indices (CPIs) for Winthrop Elementary were 58.0 in ELA and 45.9 in mathematics. Year-by-year aggregate CPIs are shown below:

Year-by-Year Aggregate CPI Data Summary		
Year	ELA	Mathematics
2001	53.1	33.9
2002	63.9	48.6
2003	56.1	38.9
2004	62.1	51.4
2005	58.0	45.9
State Target 2005	80.5	68.7

GRADE 3

Reading MCAS Results

Results of the 2005 Grade 3 Reading MCAS for students at Winthrop Elementary are presented below:

2005 Reading	Percent		
	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	25	47	27
Regular Education	34	47	19
Special Education	8	38	54

While there are not enough students in the Limited English Proficient (LEP) category at Winthrop Elementary to report as a separate subgroup, LEP students are reflected in the aggregate MCAS results. In 2005, regular education students significantly out-performed special education students, as evidenced by 35 percent more special education students scoring in the

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, Low-Income, African-American/Black, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Native American and White. A minimum of 40 students per subgroup (or 5% of the total number of students assessed, whichever is greater) is required to issue a statistically sound rating or determination of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The subgroups meeting the minimum sample size at John Winthrop Elementary School in 2005 were Low-Income, African American and Hispanic for ELA and Low-Income for mathematics.

Warning/Failing category than their regular education peers. Student performance since 2001 is stagnant, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 3 MCAS performance presented below:

Aggregate Reading	Percent		
	P	NI	W/F
2005	25	47	27
2004	36	40	24
2003	22	53	24
2002	33	46	21
2001	22	58	20

From 2004 to 2005, the percent of students scoring in the Proficient category decreased by 11 percent. From 2001 to 2005, the percent of students scoring Warning/Failing has increased by 7 percent. In 2005, Winthrop Elementary had 6 percent fewer students scoring Proficient in reading than did the district, and 6 percent more students scoring in the Warning/Failing category.

GRADE 4

ELA MCAS Results

Presented below are results of the 2005 Grade 4 ELA MCAS for students at Winthrop Elementary:

2005 ELA	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	0	15	47	38
Regular Education	0	24	56	21
Special Education	0	0	29	71

In 2005, regular education students significantly out-performed special education students, as evidenced by 50 percent more special education students scoring in the Warning/Failing category than their regular education peers. In addition, 24 percent of regular education students scored Proficient, compared to zero percent Proficient for special education students. Student performance in ELA reflects a downward trend since 2002, as seen in the aggregate Grade 4 ELA MCAS performance presented below:

Aggregate ELA	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	0	15	47	38
2004	3	20	47	29
2003	2	19	49	30
2002	2	27	42	29
2001	0	11	33	56

Winthrop Elementary had zero percent of students scoring in the Advanced category in 2005, which is a three percent decrease from 2004. Students scoring Proficient decreased from

27 percent in 2002 to 15 percent in 2005. Conversely, students scoring in the Warning category have increased from a low of 29 percent in 2004 to 38 percent in 2005. The percentage of students scoring in the Needs Improvement category has increased from 33 percent in 2001 to 47 percent in 2005.

GRADE 4

Mathematics MCAS Results

Student performance on 2005 Grade 4 Mathematics MCAS for students at Winthrop Elementary are presented below:

2005 Mathematics	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	0	6	53	42
Regular Education	0	9	65	26
Special Education	0	0	29	71

In 2005, regular education students significantly out-performed special education students, as evidenced by 45 percent more special education students scoring in the Warning/Failing category than their regular education peers. In addition, nine percent of regular education students scored Proficient, compared to zero percent Proficient for special education students. Student performance in mathematics appears to be heading in a downward trend since 2002, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 4 Mathematics MCAS performance presented below:

Aggregate Mathematics	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	0	6	53	42
2004	7	8	47	37
2003	0	9	40	51
2002	4	13	37	46
2001	0	4	22	73

Students scoring in the Advanced category have decreased from seven percent in 2004 to zero percent in 2005. In addition, Winthrop Elementary students went from 13 percent Proficient in mathematics in 2002 to six percent Proficient in 2005. Students scoring in the Needs Improvement category are at a five-year high since 2001.

PANEL RESPONSES TO THE KEY QUESTIONS

KEY QUESTION 1: IS THE SCHOOL IMPLEMENTING A SOUND PLAN FOR IMPROVEMENT AND WHAT GAINS HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED TO DATE AS A RESULT OF THIS IMPLEMENTATION?

It is the judgment of the Panel Review (PR) Team that Winthrop Elementary is not implementing a sound plan for improvement, as data analyses lack the depth to identify specific areas of student skill weakness. Students have not met the achievement outcomes on the MCAS that are stated in the Whole School Improvement Plan (WSIP). The school does, however, have an effective and thorough process in place to support successful implementation of an improvement plan. Winthrop Elementary staff members are actively working to employ and refine strategies in the classroom that are aligned with the WSIP.

A. Are the school's written improvement planning documents (including action plans) clear and specific enough to guide the implementation of planned improvement initiatives?

Schools under review in Boston submitted Whole School Improvement Plans (WSIPs) in October 2005 in preparation for School Panel Reviews scheduled in February 2006. Teams of three Department staff members reviewed the written plans and completed summary assessments of their soundness, based on a Department rubric with specific indicators for five central components: overall clarity and coherence of the plan; identifying and prioritizing problems (based on multiple sources of data); analyzing the causes of weakness in student performance; establishing improvement objectives and selecting strategies; and establishing benchmarks for implementation and outcomes. The judgment on the soundness of these written document(s) provided in the summary rubric is based solely on a close reading of the written documents submitted and is not a final determination. The Panels used the summary rubric to inform their discussion of the written plan that each panelist had reviewed individually prior to the review, and to help focus their time in the school on finding evidence of implementation of the planned strategies. Final judgment of the soundness of the school's plan – and the Panel's overall response to Key Question 1 in the Panel Review protocol – depended on further information about the development of the plan and evidence of the plan's implementation gathered by the Panel during on-site interviews, focus groups and observations.

The written improvement planning documents at Winthrop Elementary are not clear and specific enough to guide the implementation of planned improvement initiatives. Though the school has used multiple forms of data to gain information on student performance, data analyses do not target specific student skill weaknesses. As a result, root causes are not related to student skill deficits but, rather, cite the absence of teaching practices. Though instructional strategies are matched to the root causes, it is unclear whether their implementation will have the necessary impact on student performance. The Winthrop WSIP does not contain an executive summary to provide a rationale for the plan or an explanation of how this document should be used.

Winthrop Elementary used multiple forms of data to assess student performance. Included in the WSIP is student performance information and related analyses on the Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA) and the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI). The plan also includes an examination of MCAS items in which Winthrop Elementary student performance was compared

to the state and areas in which gaps existed. However, the analysis is not deep enough to identify specific skill areas that might have caused students to answer the questions incorrectly. For example, the WSIP states, “*required an analysis of figurative language...*,” “*complex directions...*” and “*math word problem*” as “skills and knowledge [students] need to answer the question.” The knowledge that students lack, however, is not specified. Neither are the skills. The analysis does not report why students could not respond to questions that required figurative analysis or that contained complex directions. Was it the vocabulary in the question or the content? Students could incorrectly answer a mathematics word problem for a variety of reasons. Was it the vocabulary in the mathematics word problem that precluded students from answering correctly? Or was it a calculations error that caused students to respond incorrectly?

Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) are aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Because analyses of student performance information do not target specific skills, however, SLOs are broad and contain a large number of skills that students may need to improve to increase achievement levels. For example, see below (2005 WSIP revision):

- **In ELA:** “*Students will write with a clear focus, coherent organization and sufficient detail in different genres for different purposes.*”
- **In mathematics:** “*Students will identify what problems are asking, will formulate and execute efficient strategies to solve problems, will judge the reasonableness of answers, and will explain their thinking in everyday language using mathematics vocabulary.*”

Root causes in the WSIP cite the absence of teaching practices. Instructional objectives and strategies align with the root causes (see below for example, 2005 WSIP revision).

- **Root cause:** “*Teachers do not consistently provide sufficient and modeled instruction for students to express their mathematical thinking orally and in writing.*”
- **Strategy:** “*Teachers will consistently present and model math problems to students in various, complex ways using math language.*”

However, because the WSIP does not identify specific skills that students must possess in order to increase performance, it is not clear how – or if – selected strategies will target areas in which students must improve. Furthermore, an explanation for why these teaching practices have not been occurring was not provided.

Lastly, the 2004-2007 Winthrop Elementary WSIP does not contain an executive summary. As a result, the plan lacks an explanation of its rationale for improvement initiatives or the inclusion/exclusion of the school’s subgroup populations. It is unclear, for example, why special education students were disaggregated and limited English proficient (LEP) students were not, when they comprise a similar percentage of the school’s population. Furthermore, the absence of an executive summary makes this large document challenging to navigate and difficult to understand.

In summary, because data analyses do not target specific areas of student skill weakness, it is not clear that identified root causes and related instructional strategies will address the necessary areas in which Winthrop Elementary students must improve to increase achievement levels. It is the judgment of the PR Team that the written school improvement planning documents are not clear and specific enough to guide the implementation of improvement efforts.

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

Winthrop Elementary improvement planning documents were developed through a process that is likely to support successful implementation. A representative group of school staff was involved in the development of the 2004-2007 WSIP. A collaborative process exists at Winthrop Elementary to ensure that communications and teacher input regarding improvement initiatives are ongoing. As a result of this collaboration, a revised WSIP action plan was developed in the fall of 2005.

The process used to develop the WSIP was spearheaded by the school's Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) and included input from all Winthrop Elementary faculty and staff. The following process is described in the school's Leadership Report and was corroborated in interviews with the principal, ILT, Math Leadership Team (MLT) and Winthrop Elementary staff. In the fall of 2004, the staff participated in a 3 hour professional development session dedicated to analyzing scorers' comments and determining student strengths and weaknesses on the Grade 4 MCAS Long Composition questions. As a result, the ILT produced writing goals and corresponding rubrics to measure progress, which staff were trained to use during an all day professional development session. Plan development followed a three-day training (attended by the principal and one member of the ILT) provided by the Boston Public Schools (BPS) in November of 2004. These training days were designed to orient school leaders with the Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) process.

The ILT and the MLT further conducted analyses of MCAS data and other formative assessments to determine priority needs in reading and mathematics. Grade-level clusters conducted similar analyses, which corroborated the priority needs identified by the ILT and MLT. As a result of the information collected through these processes, the ILT assembled the 2004-2007 Winthrop Elementary WSIP. The plan was approved by the Triad's deputy superintendent.

Following the initial development of the WSIP, faculty and staff at Winthrop Elementary have continued to participate in collaborative processes to ensure that the WSIP is meeting the needs of the school's students. As one teacher stated, "We all helped to create it [the WSIP]." Looking at Student Work (LASW) groups meet weekly to – among other tasks – discuss student performance and analyze test results. LASW groups are composed of grade-level clusters (i.e., grades K-1, grade 2-3, and grade 4-5) that also include special education teachers and a member of the ILT. The principal also participates in weekly LASW meetings for each cluster. Interviews with teachers, the principal and members of the ILT, as well as a review meeting agenda and minutes, confirmed that these processes are in place. In addition, Winthrop Elementary has pulse-taking meetings for the entire faculty that occur at least once a month. The purpose of the pulse-taking meeting is to discuss the improvement initiatives and their implementation. As stated by one teacher, "Everyone has a voice and is expected to participate."

As a result of ongoing collaboration, Winthrop Elementary developed a revised action plan in the fall of 2005, which is the document that is currently used by teachers to guide their practices. The revised action plan is a prioritized document and is considered the living school improvement plan. Its development is the output of a cycle of analysis and actions, which includes input through all teachers via LASW and pulse-taking meetings, the ILT and MLT. One faculty member described this as a "percolating up and percolating down process." The content

in this document parallels that in the 2004-2007 WSIP. As stated by one member of the ILT, the revision process ensured that "...[staff] is actually doing what they are supposed to be doing. It refines the language." Interviews with teachers indicated that they feel the revised action plan is clearer and more user-friendly.

In summary, there is an ongoing and collaborative process in place that has supported the implementation of the WSIP, as well as revisions to the document. It is the judgment of the PR Team that Winthrop Elementary has effective and efficient processes in place to support the implementation of an improvement plan.

C. To what extent is the school's staff actually implementing the plan?

The faculty and staff at Winthrop Elementary are implementing the strategies listed in the WSIP, as evidenced by classroom observations and interviews. Professional development is related to the goals and objectives stated in the improvement plan.

During classroom observation and interviews, strong evidence was gathered to indicate teachers are implementing strategies cited in the WSIP. The PR Team conducted ten classroom observations, consisting of five ELA lessons and five mathematics lessons, and found the following evidence of strategies listed in the 2004-2007 WSIP and/or the fall 2005 revised action plan:

ELA

- *Readers/Writers Workshop* (5 out of 5 classes – 100%)
- *Mini-lessons* (4 out of 5 classes – 80%)
- *Notebooks/journals* (5 out of 5 classes – 100%)
- *Lecture discussions* (4 out of 5 classes – 80%)
- *'Turn and Talk'* (4 out of 5 classes – 80%)

Math

- *TERC investigations* (5 out of 5 classes – 100%)
- *Teachers modeling mathematics problems* (4 out of 5 classes – 80%)
- *Use of mathematics vocabulary* (5 out of 5 classes – 100%)
- *Mathematics discourse* (5 out of 5 classes – 100%)
- *'Turn and Talk'* (4 out of 5 classes – 80%)

In addition, the PR Team noted posted student work, a reading resource library, co-anchored charts, graphic organizers and teacher-student conferencing during some classroom observations. All of the strategies listed in the Winthrop Elementary WSIP documents were evident in at least one, if not more, of the classrooms observed. It is the judgment of the PR Team that this is strong evidence indicating that the faculty and staff members are implementing the improvement initiatives.

Professional development at Winthrop Elementary is linked to the improvement strategies in the WSIP. BPS mandates 33 hours of professional development (PD) during the school year. Though content is at the discretion of the school leadership, the principal stated that PD must be "aligned with the WSIP." The principal reported that PD during the 2004-2005 school year focused on strategies to improve student writing, as a result of data analyses that identified Long Composition as an area of student weakness. Professional development for the current school year is dedicated to mathematics discourse. In addition to school-based professional

development in mathematics, BPS offers workshops in *Investigations* at the beginning of each unit. A review of the PD calendar for the 2005-2006 school year revealed a balance of PD across mathematics and literacy, as well as training in “Race and Achievement” – another current Winthrop Elementary initiative.

Teachers at Winthrop Elementary also participate in Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL) – a BPS initiative designed to increase focus and conversation on WSIP priorities. Grade-level clusters at Winthrop Elementary are actively engaged in CCL, focused on priority areas for improvement identified by each cluster. As indicated by one teacher, “Professional development helps to drive instruction.”

In summary, there is strong evidence to indicate that staff members are implementing the strategies listed in the WSIP. Professional development is being used to support these initiatives.

D. What gains, if any, have been achieved relative to SIP goals or benchmarks, through implementation of the plan?

As previously noted in Key Question 1C, teachers are actively engaged in putting into practice and refining many of the strategies in the WSIP and, therefore, Winthrop Elementary has met many of the plan’s implementation benchmarks. Many formative assessments are being used to measure and assess student performance. Students, however, have not achieved stated goals for 2005 on the MCAS. Because improvement initiatives are ultimately intended to increase student performance, the PR Team concluded that Winthrop Elementary has not achieved the necessary gains relative to WSIP implementation.

Root causes identified in the WSIP cite a lack of instructional practices as the predominate reason for low student performance. The implementation of teaching strategies, which are aligned with root causes, has been the focus of improvement efforts at Winthrop Elementary. As a result, the school has met implementation benchmarks related to instruction. For example (2004-2007 Winthrop Elementary WSIP):

- *By January 2006, 100% of teachers will be providing daily lessons that introduce and/or reinforce explicit math language and vocabulary.*
- *By January 2005, teachers will have had school-wide PD that focused on writing.*
- *By September 2005, 100% of teachers will be implementing writer’s workshop within their classroom and will be monitored for adherence to best practices by principal.*

Classroom observation and interviews conducted by the PR Team provided evidence that these goals have been achieved at Winthrop Elementary.

Implementation of WSIP strategies at the classroom level is monitored through daily visits by the school principal. In interviews, teachers corroborated that the principal is frequently in the classroom. The principal stated that she is the vehicle for monitoring and that she provides oral feedback to teachers. She does not, however, provide written documentation following informal classroom visits. During this school year, Winthrop Elementary has begun to institute “Learning Walks” to monitor the implementation of WSIP strategies. Learning Walks are conducted by the principal and the ILT and, to date, have focused on writing only. The school, though, has plans to implement future Learning Walks for reading and mathematics.

In addition to the MCAS, Winthrop Elementary is administering a number of formative assessments to measure student performance. Assessment information available at the school

includes: the DRA, the SRI, the Comprehensive Assessment of Reading Strategies (CARS), Writing Prompts and the BPS Mid- and End-of-Year Mathematics Assessments. Use of the Formative Assessment of Students' Thinking in Reading (FAST-R) provides teachers with color-coded graphs of student performance for the whole class and for individual students.

Although Winthrop Elementary is using a number of assessments to measure student performance and processes for sharing information and analyzing data are in place (see Key Question 1B), analyses of student achievement data have not targeted specific student skill deficits (see Key Question 1A). When asked in interviews and focus groups why MCAS scores decreased from 2004 to 2005, district personnel, the principal, nor staff members could articulate a clear reason. Nonetheless, students have not achieved projected outcomes stated in the WSIP on the MCAS in ELA or mathematics in 2005. The school reports increases on the Long Compositions section of the MCAS.

ELA

- *Proficiency index for MCAS Spring 2005 in both grades 3 and 4 will show that 70% of ALL STUDENTS scored level 2 or better.*
- *Proficiency index for MCAS Spring 2005 in both grades 3 and 4 will show that 30% of ALL STUDENTS scored level 3 or better.*

Although 72% of grade 3 students in the aggregate scored level 2 (Needs Improvement) or better on the 2005 reading MCAS, only 62% of grade 4 students scored level 2 or better in ELA in 2005. Twenty-five percent of grade 3 students scored level 3 (Proficient) and 15% only of grade 4 students scored in the Proficient category on the 2005 MCAS. Neither grade 3 nor grade 4 students met this goal in the aggregate.

Math

- *Proficiency index for MCAS Math of Spring 2005 will have 70% of ALL STUDENTS at level 2 or better.*
- *Proficiency index for MCAS Math of Spring 2005 will have that 15% of ALL STUDENTS at level 3 or better.*

Fifty-nine percent of grade 4 students scored at or above level 2 (Needs Improvement) on the 2005 mathematics MCAS. Six percent of grade 4 students scored in the Proficient (level 3) category on the 2005 mathematics MCAS.

Writing

- *Proficiency index for the MCAS Long Composition from Spring 2005 will have increased.*

The principal and staff at Winthrop Elementary report student gains on the Long Composition section of the MCAS, which surpassed students in the Boston Public Schools. Writing was a primary focus at the school during the 2004-2005 school year.

In summary, although Winthrop Elementary has met many of its implementation benchmarks, students have not achieved the stated outcomes. As a result, it is the judgment of the PR Team that the school has not made the necessary gains as a result of WSIP implementation.

KEY QUESTION 2: DO THE CONDITIONS APPEAR TO BE IN PLACE FOR THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SCHOOL'S IMPROVEMENT PLAN?

Winthrop Elementary has dedicated and competent leadership and staff who provide the school with the necessary conditions to successfully implement improvement initiatives. Although the district has supplied the school with material, training and human resources needed to implement the WSIP, support and guidance on the plan's development was insufficient.

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

It is the judgment of the PR Team that Winthrop Elementary has effective leadership and sound management. Winthrop Elementary faculty and staff have confidence in the principal as a leader and the commitment to improvement. The principal has fostered a school culture that is focused on high expectations for academic achievement and parental involvement. The principal is highly visible and has facilitated distributive leadership in the school.

Teachers at Winthrop Elementary express confidence in the principal as a leader of the school, as well as the improvement efforts that have been established to increase student achievement. The principal is not only the leader of many of the school's initiatives, but also a participant. The principal attends all weekly LASW meetings for grade level clusters, is a member of the ILT, organizes monthly pulse-taking meetings and spearheads a large number of professional development trainings at the school. In addition to participation in district PD for principals and instructional leaders, the principal has voluntarily attended trainings to increase her knowledge of data. One teacher stated, "She sought out training on data. This makes a point." The principal sets an example for Winthrop Elementary staff.

On the *DOE Instructional Staff Survey*, 94 percent (n=32) of staff either strongly agree (66%) or agree (28%) that the principal provides effective leadership to support staff efforts to improve the academic performance of students at Winthrop Elementary. In interviews with the PR Team, teachers said the following in support of the principal's leadership:

- "[The principal] is a strong advocate for teachers and students."
- "She has the vision to turn the school around. We're chipping away."
- "[The principal] knows teachers' strengths and weaknesses and alerts us [teachers] to take PD."
- "She is an instructional leader."

In addition, district personnel express confidence in the leadership at Winthrop Elementary. The deputy superintendent stated, "The school has the leadership to turn this place around."

The principal has fostered a school culture that is focused on high expectations for academic achievement and parental involvement. When asked about her vision for the school in an interview with the PR Team, the principal summarized the speech that was given to Winthrop Elementary staff at the beginning of the school year. Central to this vision is the critical need for "increasingly high expectations... how to equip students to live in a world with others who are more advantaged." In addition, the principal shared her strong belief in parent participation and goal to "...engage parents in being substantive partners in their children's education."

The principal has supported this vision through a number of initiatives that have been implemented at the school to promote high expectations and opportunities for student and parent involvement – both within and outside of the school day – that are also included in the WSIP. Staff at Winthrop Elementary is currently participating in PD on Race and Achievement. The overarching purpose of this initiative is to raise expectations for Winthrop Elementary students through activities such as “Dream Day” – to assist students and parents in realizing their dreams and setting goals to achieve them. Efforts to further engage parents in the school have been facilitated through activities such as mathematics and MCAS nights and family field trips. A focus group conducted during the PR visit with a small cohort of parents indicated overwhelming support for the school and its programs. Winthrop Elementary parents believe that they have “the best school in Boston... [They] are a part of their child’s education.” Another parent stated, “The school is very family-oriented. It recognizes each child for who they are.”

Winthrop Elementary also offers three after-school programs for students: homework support, Supplemental Education Services (SES) and enrichment activities. A fourth program, Partners for Student Success Pilot Initiative, which will further increase opportunities for student participation in after-school programming, will be implemented in the fall of 2006.

Although the principal is clearly the leader of Winthrop Elementary, the structure is distributive, allowing opportunities for staff to assume leadership responsibilities. The ILT and the MLT are also considered instructional leaders in the school. Newly-initiated Learning Walks are not only conducted by the principal but also by members of the ILT. At the initiative of the deputy superintendent, there are plans for Learning Walks to be conducted by all members of Winthrop Elementary staff to both facilitate staff learning and ownership over the school’s efforts. The school has a mathematics coach to assist with the implementation of TERC Investigations through classroom support and professional development, as well as a Risk and Achievement Coach to facilitate activities associated with this initiative.

A crisis team was created during the 2004-2005 school year to assist with student behavior problems and, therefore, minimize disruptions to classroom instruction. In a focus group with the PR Team, the crisis team indicated that there has been “...about a 50% reduction in serious incidents” since the team’s installation. This is another example of the distributive leadership at Winthrop Elementary, allowing staff to take the initiative for reducing behavior problems, so that the principal can focus on academic and instructional priorities.

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

There is clear evidence to indicate that Winthrop Elementary faculty supports the improvement efforts at the school. Teachers clearly understand their roles and responsibilities associated with the WSIP and are committed to its successful implementation.

Winthrop Elementary teachers have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities associated with WSIP implementation. On the *DOE Instructional Staff Survey*, 85% of respondents (n=32) either strongly agreed or agreed that they are “...well-informed about the initiatives undertaken by school leadership and staff to improve student performance.” In response to the open-ended question, “Do you know what you are expected to do to improve student performance according to your school improvement plan?” 25 out of 28 respondents (89%) cited the WSIP and/or a strategy listed in the plan. Interviews conducted with staff during the PR Team visit also corroborated teacher understanding of the improvement initiatives. Most

teachers explicitly stated strategies listed in the WSIP when asked what they needed to do to improve student performance at the school. One teacher stated, "Anything in the WSIP is included in instruction. We're really trying to make it part of practice." This is further evident in the implementation of WSIP strategies at the classroom level (see Key Question 1C).

Not only has Winthrop Elementary staff supported efforts through implementation of WSIP strategies, but through a unified commitment to initiatives and communications that surround school improvement. Teachers regularly participate in LASW and CCL sessions, pulse-taking meetings, parent engagement activities and various professional development opportunities that focus on the school's vision and improvement efforts. As stated by one member of the faculty, "Staff really shares with each other." Both the principal and parents commended the efforts of the school's staff. One parent stated, "Teachers here are really dedicated."

With the evolution of the refined WSIP action plan completed in the fall of 2005, teachers feel that the improvement initiatives are clearer. On the *DOE Instructional Staff Survey*, one staff member responded, "now that our plan has been restructured, it is clear and concise." During interviews with the PR Team, Winthrop Elementary staff indicated that the WSIP action plan is a living document. Another teacher stated, "We have seen change; not only are we more involved, but more interested."

In summary, it is evident that Winthrop Elementary faculty and staff members are dedicated to school-wide improvement and its capacity to implement the initiatives.

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

The district is supporting Winthrop Elementary with material, training and human resources to assist in the implementation of the WSIP. It is the judgment of the PR Team, however, that the Boston Public Schools did not provide adequate planning guidance or support in the development of the WSIP to ensure that Winthrop Elementary has a sound plan.

The district has provided Winthrop Elementary with adequate material and training resources to implement the strategies in the WSIP. On the *DOE Staff Instructional Survey*, 94% of staff strongly agreed or agreed that the district supplies adequate materials/resources. Observations conducted by the PR Team indicated that classrooms were well resourced and that teachers had textbooks and guides to support the implementation of instructional programs. In addition, Winthrop Elementary has Curriculum Calendars for Reading and Writing that were developed with some input from district personnel. The principal reported that BPS offers a range of professional development opportunities (most are voluntary) for Winthrop Elementary staff to support the implementation of the curriculum that is available through an on-line catalogue. According to the *DOE Staff Instructional Survey*, 88% of staff strongly agreed or agreed that the district is also providing adequate professional development. Professional development opportunities (with stipends) are available for special education teachers and other instructional leaders to participate in trainings specific to the instructional strategies that best address this population of learners. The principal also indicated that the district provides a range of PD opportunities for school leaders.

Winthrop Elementary receives the support of instructional coaches, who are provided by the district. A mathematics coach has been assigned to Winthrop Elementary for 38 days of support this year. The principal reported that the school has received some assistance from a literacy coach, although a Race and Achievement coach was substituted for the literacy coach this school

year. It was reported by both district personnel and school leadership that a language acquisition coach will be giving support to Winthrop Elementary starting this winter, to help staff specifically address the needs of limited English proficient students. Beginning in the fall of 2005, BPS has provided a school support specialist to assist with improvement planning and implementation of the WSIP.

Guidance and support from the district on the development of the school improvement plan was limited. BPS provided a three-day training session for principals and instructional leaders in the PIM process as an introduction to developing the WSIP. However, there was a significant time gap (during which the school was left to develop the WSIP without scheduled assistance or follow-up from the district) between the training and the time the plan was submitted for district approval. The principal reported that she received some help, primarily via email from the former deputy superintendent, but only if it was requested. It is the judgment of the PR Team that this is not adequate support or guidance on the part of BPS, especially considering that at the time, school leadership (by her own admission) had little experience with data analysis and plan development.

The district provides all the template documents (aligned with the state Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) process) that are used by the school to compose the WSIP. The 2004-2007 Winthrop Elementary WSIP is a large document that is difficult to navigate. It is not user-friendly, does not contain an executive summary, data analysis is not in-depth enough to identify specific areas of student skill deficits and, as a result, root causes and instructional strategies may or may not be targeting areas in which students need assistance in order to increase performance rates. In addition, the district approved the WSIP, which has been judged unsound by both the PR Team and the DOE team of reviewers. This is another indication that BPS has not provided Winthrop Elementary with sufficient support and guidance.

CONCLUSION

The John Winthrop Elementary School does not currently have a sound, written improvement plan in place that is likely to yield the necessary gains in student performance. It is unclear whether instructional root causes and related strategies will effectively target areas in need of improvement, because data analysis does not include enough depth to identify explicit skills that students lack. Student performance on the MCAS decreased from 2004 to 2005 in most subject areas and, as a result, Winthrop Elementary students did not meet the anticipated outcomes (goals) listed in the WSIP for 2005.

Winthrop Elementary has an effective leader, who is committed to school improvement and is supported by the school's community. Faculty and staff are dedicated, competent and actively working not only to implement improvement initiatives stated in the plan, but to refine them. The processes in place at the school support the successful implementation of an improvement plan.

The district has provided Winthrop Elementary with a range of resources to assist with WSIP implementation. However, guidance on and support for the plan's development was limited.

APPENDIX A
Team Members

Megan Tupa, Panel Review Chair, SchoolWorks LLC, Beverly, MA

Kristin Burke, Panel Review Coordinator, Massachusetts Department of Education,
Malden, MA

Dr. Judy Barcelo, Panelist, Massachusetts Department of Education, Malden, MA

Erin Patterson, Panelist, Education Consultant, Lowell, MA

Anne-Marie Carr-Reardon, Panelist, Director of Student Support Services, Waltham
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APPENDIX B
John Winthrop Elementary School
Boston Public Schools
POTENTIALLY UNDER-PERFORMING PANEL REVIEW SCHEDULE
February 7 and 8, 2006

Day 1

- 9:00—9:30 a.m. **Panel chairperson and panel coordinator meet at hotel** to discuss and clarify roles, prepare for the first team meeting, and review general logistics/schedule for the review.
- 9:30a.m. —11:30a.m. **Team meeting # 1:** team meets for the first time to discuss each panelist’s individual analysis; team forms preliminary judgments on key questions.
- 11:30a.m.—1p.m. **Lunch and travel to the school** (*NOTE: In districts undergoing multiple school reviews, superintendent interviews may be scheduled between 11am and 1 pm at the hotel.*)
- 1:00 – 2:00p.m. Panel meets with the school’s **Instructional Leadership Team**.
- 2:00—3:00 p.m. Panelists meet with the district **Superintendent** (and Assistant Superintendent, if appropriate).
- 3:15—4:30p.m. Panel meets with the **Principal** (and one other school-based individual, if appropriate).
- 4:30—6:00 p.m. **Team meeting # 2:** panelists synthesize interview information, further define findings, prepare questions, and develop a team strategy for Day 2 of the review.

Day 2

All activities take place at the school.

- 7:30—8:00 a.m. Panel meets with the Principal
- 8:00—8:30 a.m. Panel meets with the School Council
- 8:30—9:00 a.m. Panelists meet individually with Focus Groups. The Panel Review Coordinator and the Principal will identify participants for each Focus Group. The groups will be organized to include groups of individuals who can respond to questions designed for parents, students (middle and high schools), 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:** panel meets to discuss findings so far and to plan the remainder of the day (working lunch).

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

1:00—2:00 p.m. Panelists meet with teacher focus 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	

2:15—2:30 p.m. Chair meets with the Principal to discuss next steps in the process.

2:30—5:00 p.m. **Team meeting # 4:** panel deliberates, organizes evidence, and formulates responses to key questions.

Instructions for teacher observations, individual interviews, and focus groups

1. **Observations** Each panelist will observe at least two class lessons in order to obtain a representative sample of the school’s individual classrooms. The purpose of the classroom observations is to judge the quality of the learning environment, which is a critical aspect of the school’s overall conditions, and a determinant in whether or not the school will be able to successfully implement its improvement plan. The learning environment includes:
 - The physical space—lighting, size, classroom temperature, etc.
 - The classroom organization—desk arrangement, resources available to students, orderliness, etc.
 - The level of the teacher’s preparation for instruction; the students’ readiness for learning.
 - The interaction between teacher and students—the students’ level of engagement or withdrawal.
 - The level of the teacher’s expectations for student learning and performance.
 - The level and quality of instructional practice in the school. (Panelists are not evaluating individual teachers.)

2. Individual Teacher Interviews The purpose of the teacher interview that follows the observation is to:
 - Clarify the evaluator's impressions of the classroom dynamic and learning environment
 - Determine what the teacher considers to be the chief learning needs of students across the school and within his or her classroom
 - Determine the teacher's understanding of the school's plan to address those needs and to improve student performance
 - Determine the teacher's role in the overall mission and improvement plan of the school

3. Teacher Focus Groups The purpose of the teacher focus groups is to:
 - Determine what each teacher considers to be the chief learning needs of students across the school and within his or her classroom
 - Determine each teacher's understanding of the school's plan to address those needs and to improve student performance
- Determine each teacher's role in the overall mission and improvement plan of the school

Taken together, the teacher observations, interviews, and focus groups should provide a comprehensive view of the staff's understanding of, and participation and investment in, planning and implementing improvement initiatives.