

School Panel Review Report Solomon Lewenberg Middle 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. The Solomon Lewenberg Middle 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 27 and 28, 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 in determining whether the Lewenberg 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.

Solomon Lewenberg Middle School Profile

Enrollment

The Lewenberg School serves students in Grades six through eight. Enrollment at Lewenberg has decreased from 593 students in 2003 to 421 students in 2005. Between 2002 and 2005, student demographics have remained relatively stable, with a slight increase in Hispanic students from nine percent in 2002 to 14 percent in 2005. Also of note, the First Language Not English and the Limited English Proficient populations have decreased since 2002 from 24 percent to 19 percent and 19 percent to three percent, respectively. Proportions of Lewenberg student subgroups in 2005, as compared to district and state averages, are presented below:

Subgroup	2005 Enrollment (%)		
	School	District	State
Asian	1	9	5
Black	83	46	9
Hispanic	14	31	12
Native American	0	0.4	0.3
White	2	14	74
Low-Income	78	74	28
First Language Not English	19	37	14
Limited English Proficient	3	17	5
Special Education	29	20	16

In 2005, the attendance rate at Lewenberg was 96.7 percent, with students absent 4.8 days on average. The attendance rate has remained stable since 2003 and is above the state attendance rate of 94.4 percent. Within Lewenberg, the sixth grade has the lowest attendance rate of 95.8 percent and 20.9 percent of the students chronically absent. This is in comparison to the seventh grade with a 97.0 attendance rate and 11.5 percent chronic absenteeism. The school’s retention rate was 2.0 percent in 2004, the last year for which this data is available. Lewenberg’s in-school suspension rate in 2005 was zero percent, while out-of-school suspensions averaged 2.9 percent. Averages in 2005 for the state were 4.5 percent for in-school suspensions and 6.1 percent for out-of-school suspensions.

Staffing

The 2005-2006 Lewenberg staffing report indicates that the school is comprised of two administrators, 36 teachers, one guidance counselor, one director of instruction, and four special education teachers. The principal has been at the school for 14 years and has a total of 14 years of administrative experience. Of the teachers, approximately 55 percent have been at the school for more than ten years. Approximately 51 percent of the teachers have been educators for more than twenty years. All teachers are reported to be highly qualified and nearly 88 percent hold a graduate degree.

MCAS Overview

Students at the Lewenberg School are assessed in Grade seven in English language arts (ELA) and in Grades six and eight in mathematics. Lewenberg’s Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report for 2005 Mid-Cycle IV shows an accountability status of Identified for Improvement—Subgroups Only for English language arts and Corrective Action for mathematics.¹ In 2005, the school failed to make AYP in ELA in the Low Income and African American subgroups, and failed to make AYP for subgroups in 2003 and 2004 as well. The aggregate population also did not make AYP in 2005 but did make AYP in 2004, 2002, and 2001. In mathematics, the school

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 (or 5% of the total number of students assessed, whichever is greater) per subgroup is required to issue a statistically sound rating or determination of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The subgroups meeting the minimum sample size at Lewenberg Middle School in 2005 were Low Income, African American, and Special Education (mathematics only).

has failed to make AYP for the aggregate since 1999 with the exception of 2003. Lewenberg has also not made AYP for subgroups in 2003, 2004, and 2005.

In 2005, the aggregate Composite Performance Indices (CPIs) for the Lewenberg School were 64.5 in ELA and 39.7 in mathematics. Year-by-year aggregate CPIs are shown below:

Year-by-Year Aggregate CPI Data Summary		
Year	ELA	Math
2001	56.2	31.8
2002	64.7	32.7
2003	68.9	37.5
2004	69.6	40.5
2005	64.5	39.7
State Target 2005	80.5	68.7

GRADE 6

Mathematics MCAS Results

Results of the 2005 Grade 6 Mathematics MCAS for students at Lewenberg are presented below:

2005 Math, Gr. 6	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	0	14	34	52
Regular Education	0	20	46	34
Special Education	0	2	12	86

No sixth grade students scored Advanced on the 2005 mathematics MCAS. The Regular Education population out-performed Special Education students with the largest percentage of students scoring Proficient (20 percent). The Special Education population had the largest percentage of students in the Warning category with 86 percent compared with the Regular Education (34 percent).

There has been a gradual increase in student performance since 2001, as reflected in the Aggregate Grade 6 Mathematics MCAS performance presented below:

Aggregate Math, Gr. 6	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	0	14	34	52
2004	2	10	29	59
2003	1	7	31	60
2002	0	7	23	70
2001	0	5	23	72

The percentage of students scoring in the Warning category has decreased from 72 percent in 2001 to 52 percent in 2005. While the Advanced category has changed little over time, there has

been an increase in the percentage of students scoring Proficient, from five percent in 2001 to 14 percent in 2005, and in Needs Improvement, from 23 percent in 2001 to 34 percent in 2005.

GRADE 7

ELA MCAS Results

Results of the 2005 Grade 7 ELA MCAS for students at Lewenberg are presented below:

2005 ELA, Gr. 7	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	1	25	51	24
Regular Education	1	35	53	11
Special Education	0	2	44	53

On the 2005 Grade seven ELA exam, few students at Lewenberg scored in the Advanced category. The Special Education population scored significantly lower than the Regular Education population. For example, while two percent of the Special Education population scored Proficient, 35 percent of the Regular Education scored in this category. Also, the percentage of Special Education students scoring Warning (53 percent) was significantly higher than Regular Education population (11 percent).

There has been a gradual increase in student performance since 2001, as reflected in the Aggregate Grade 7 ELA MCAS performance presented below:

Aggregate ELA, Gr. 7	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	1	25	51	24
2004	0	34	46	20
2003	0	29	57	13
2002	1	26	51	23
2001	0	13	45	42

From 2001 to 2004, there has been an increase in the percentage of students scoring Proficient and a decrease in students scoring Warning. For example, in 2001, 13 percent of students scored Proficient and in 2004 this increased to 34 percent. Also, the percentage of students scoring Warning decreased from 42 percent in 2001 to 20 percent in 2004. In 2005, there was a slight decrease in performance in comparison to the gains of 2004. Few students scored Advanced on the seventh grade ELA exam.

GRADE 8

Mathematics MCAS Results

Results of the 2005 Grade 8 Mathematics MCAS for students at Lewenberg are presented below:

2005 Math, Gr. 8	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	1	4	26	70
Regular Education	1	5	34	60
Special Education	0	0	8	92

There is a significant difference in performance between the Special Education and Regular Education populations. For example, where 92 percent of the Special Education students scored in the Warning category, 60 percent of the Regular Education students scored in this category. No Special Education students scored Advanced or Proficient on the 2005 eighth grade mathematics MCAS exam. The Regular Education students scored slightly higher on this exam in comparison to the Aggregate population.

There has been only slight improvement in student performance since 2001, as reflected in the Aggregate Grade 8 Mathematics MCAS performance presented below:

Aggregate Math, Gr. 8	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	1	4	26	70
2004	2	7	28	63
2003	0	7	23	71
2002	1	4	25	71
2001	0	1	18	79

The percentage of students scoring in the various categories has changed only slightly since 2001. The percentage of students scoring in the Warning category improved from 79 percent in 2001 to 63 percent in 2004 but then increased to 70 percent in 2005. The Needs Improvement category has seen a small improvement since 2001 when 18 percent scored in this category in comparison to 26 percent in 2005. The Advanced and Proficient categories has seen the least amount of change 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?

Certain aspects of the Solomon Lewenberg Middle School (SLMS) written plan are clear and specific. Strident efforts to develop and implement the Whole School Improvement Plan (WSIP) have resulted in many positive school changes. However, it is the judgment of the Panel Review (PR) team that critical aspects of the WSIP lack clarity, rigor and specificity, which prevent the plan from serving as a comprehensive tool for impacting and measuring gains in student achievement.

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, 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 Panel 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 upon 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 Solomon Lewenberg Middle School (SLMS) 05-07 WSIP contains some aspects of a sound written plan, however, in the panel's judgment, the plan lacks sufficient specificity and depth in key areas to serve as a comprehensive guide for school improvement. Two solid aspects of the plan include the incorporation of multiple pages of data and information that document important steps in the planning process. The objectives and strategies in the instructional action plan are fairly clear, and in general, logically connected to the learning objectives and the identified root causes. Areas of concern include: unclear language to describe two of the three English language arts (ELA) student learning objectives; the physical organization and presentation of the plan; and of most concern, is the lack of specificity in the WSIP to identify how progress implementing teaching strategies will be monitored and evaluated and how the accomplishment of learning objectives will be measured.

The first twenty-five pages of Lewenberg's 05-07 WSIP provide evidence that data analysis had been used as the foundation for the plan's development. The documentation contained within these pages, supported by evidence obtained through interviews, indicate that a process of data analysis had been used to; identify the areas of strength and weakness in student performance; to

establish the overarching ELA and Math Performance Goals; to assist in the process of connecting the findings to Massachusetts standards and to facilitate school-wide conversations about the “root causes” of low student performance (See Table 1).

Table 1: WSIP Data Analysis Documentation

4 pages	MCAS Performance Data: 2002-03, 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years. Presents proficiency levels by grade, by sub group and by subject (ELA and Math).
10 pages	Performance Goals Worksheet: detail the proficiency index targets for Cycles III-IV and the projected distribution of student performance through 2007 for each grade and each content area (ELA and Math).
1 page	Student Performance Goals: Lists measurable goals for ELA (3) and Math (3) in terms of both proficiency indices and proficiency levels. (E.g. <i>Increase the percent of all students who score Proficient or Advanced on the grade 7 ELA MCAS test from 39% in 2004 to 44% in 2005, to 48% in 2006, and to 51% in 2007. The Proficiency Index (PI) for all grade 7 students in ELA will increase from 67.6 at the end of Cycle III to 76.1 in 2005, to 78.4 in 2006, and to 83.9 in 2007</i>)
7 pages	Item Analyses: Compares SLMS students to the State with regard to success of MCAS item responses. Data broken out by grade and subject, question type, standard or strand, required skill and knowledge and be subject (Math and ELA on MCAS items)
1 page	Additional Assessments: assessment data by grade in ELA and Math for 03-04 and 04-05.
2 pages	Strengths and Weaknesses: ELA and Math weaknesses as determined from analysis of four assessments (MCAS, SRI, EOY and BPS).
2 pages	Student Learning Objective Worksheet: Connects content area skill area weakness to SLO.

The “Student Learning Objective”, “Root Causes” and “Strategies” components of the Instructional Action Plans were, for the most part, clearly written and logically connected to each other. The PR team determined that in most cases these elements held the potential to provide an adequate tool to guide practice (See Table 2).

Table 2: Instructional Action Plan Example (partial text from one page of the 05-07 WSIP)

Student Learning Objective (Math all students): Students will demonstrate an understanding of rational numbers and compare, order, estimate and be able to operate with integers, fractions, mixed numbers, decimals and percents. (Number sense standards 6.N.1 and 8.N.1)
Root Causes (of student weakness): Teachers do not consistently differentiate instruction to meet the individual learning needs.
<p>Classroom Strategies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teachers will utilize supplemental materials and games to enhance math understanding and improve basic skills. 2. Teachers will consistently use the workshop model with small cooperative student groups to further learning <p>School wide Strategies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All teachers will participate in a CCL cycle for differentiated instruction. 2. Problem of the week will be continued with at least one problem of a month focused on number sense.

The PR team found two concerns that contribute to the lack of clarity in the SLMS WSIP. First, two of the ELA learning objectives are unclear. The WSIP states students will “build stamina in reading” and “increase their ability to focus.” Members of the PR team were unsure how these behaviors were being defined and how they would be measured. When teachers were asked to explain these behaviors during interviews, there seemed to be a common understanding of how

these terms were defined, but it was not clear how progress toward achieving “stamina” and “focus” would be monitored and measured.

Second, the PR team found the order and presentation of the various sections of the 05-07 WSIP to be cumbersome. Due to the absence of page numbers, lack of coding of goals and objectives and lack of explicit labeling and explanation of contents of the many pages of data, the PR Team found the document to be difficult to navigate and consequently questioned whether its lack of “user friendliness” might detract from its value as a guide for teachers.

The issue of most concern in regard to the soundness of the WSIP related to aspects of the plan that involved monitoring and evaluating the progress toward the implementation of teaching strategies and accomplishment of student learning objectives. In the view of the PR team, the WSIP’s action plan pages were generally adequate in regard to classroom and school-wide strategies but weakened from there (e.g. *Methods of Collecting Information, Evidence of Quality Implementation, Student Outcomes, Timeline, Person(s) Responsible*). Though outcomes and strategies were fairly clear, the plan failed to rigorously specify protocols and procedures that defined ‘who, what, where and when’ of the implementation and outcome benchmarks. It seemed that the desired ends were clear enough (e.g. the learning objectives and student, teacher and school actions), but the means to achieve accountability in these ends were not given the same careful attention required of a sound plan. When questioned about the lack of benchmarks in this plan, one staff member who was involved with the WSIP planning process conceded that the pressure of the January 2005 WSIP submission deadline forced the school to expedite its planning efforts and stated “We just had to end the process somewhere.” As a result, the benchmarking and monitoring pieces of the plan were not given the thoughtful attention they deserved

In conclusion, though the Solomon Lewenberg Middle School’s 05-07 WSIP was created by the protocols and procedures prescribed in the Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) process, as well as by those of the Boston Public Schools, in the panel’s view, the plan still lacks sufficient depth and clarity to serve as a reliable “road map” that will lead the school to the desired improvements specified in the plan. Without specific systems in place to monitor and measure the plan’s effectiveness, its impact cannot be determined.

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

With the exceptions outlined in the previous section, the process of developing the plan was relatively successful, and in the panel’s judgment, the process has moved the school closer to understanding what needs to happen to improve student performance. Through the fall of 2004, the principal and the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), with the active support and guidance of Boston Public School (BPS) central office personnel, moved the entire SLMS school staff and key stakeholders through a rigorous process of investigation and planning.

During the late summer of 2004, the principal and her Change Coach participated in a multi-day training that focused on the WSIP development process and the utilization of the data contained in the My BPS Information System. The training was conducted by members of the BPS leadership staff (Deputy Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent and the School Support Specialist) and was viewed by the principal as a very valuable and informative experience.

The training was thorough in that it involved sessions that demonstrated how to align the improvement planning effort with the requirements of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. The training utilized methods and procedures prescribed by the PIM process, in conjunction with expectations of the district office. Following the training, the principal brought the procedural information to the ILT and empowered them to take an active role in leading this effort. Through the fall, the ILT met at least twice monthly as a group and between meetings they worked in subcommittees that focused on their specialty areas (e.g. Math, ELA and Special Education). Ultimately, each ILT member brought discussion and related challenges to their respective weekly teacher cluster meetings - groups to which all SLMS staff are assigned. Toward the end of the process, the School Council and the Parent Council were engaged in the process. Both councils were given opportunities to review the plan and offer their input. Both councils ultimately gave the plan their approval.

The bulk of the work involved the analysis of multiple sources of ELA and Math performance data (MCAS, Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) and BPS Assessments) to determine not only strengths and weaknesses in student achievement, but also the gaps in performance between subgroups. Conversations among a large and representative group of stakeholders also involved a root-cause-analysis of the history of low student achievement at the school, with particular focus on the contribution of weaknesses in instructional strategy and practice. Consistent with the BPS and PIM planning models, the results of all the analysis and conversation yielded all the elements that comprise the Instructional Action Plan pages in the WSIP.

The PR team believes that this inclusive process was valuable, productive and moved the school further along in the evolution of school improvement planning and school reform.

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

Although there is widespread agreement among the entire school community that the WSIP is important, and that the planning and implementation processes is positively affecting professional practice and school climate, the PR team concluded that the school staff has not yet been able to consistently translate their understanding of the WSIP into meaningful practice – particularly with regard to mathematics. It became apparent to the PR team that the school's intense efforts to address its 2003 NCLB status of “corrective action” in ELA, and its resulting school-wide emphasis on reading and literacy, is likely to have overshadowed its need to address the chronic history of low performance in math. It was also apparent that no concerted effort was given to assessing progress and making revisions in the WSIP in the year that followed the plan's submission. This was of concern to the PR team, particularly in light of the fact that low math performance on the MCAS in the spring 2004 resulted in a “corrective action” designation.

Individual and focus group interviews revealed that the entire school community, including BPS personnel, believed that the SLMS was working toward implementing the 05-07 WSIP. A number of veteran staff members spoke enthusiastically about the positive changes they had witnessed both in themselves and in the school as a result of the school improvement initiatives. One teacher described the difference as “day and night,” further indicating that the biggest difference was that “there is now a common focus for everyone... unlike a few years ago, teachers can no longer close their doors and do their own thing.” Most staff members expressed an appreciation for the increased opportunities for collegial interaction through professional development activities, Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL) and grade cluster meetings. In addition, much praise was given to the math and ELA coaches for their work in helping

teachers learn new strategies and how to incorporate them into practice. Students in a focus group were also positive regarding the changes happening in the school. One stated that the school was “warm and welcoming” and had a “family-like feeling.” One student reported that she noticed a significant “increase in the expectations of all teachers... They are asking a lot more questions in class.” The sentiments expressed above were reinforced in interviews with school and district leadership. It was clear to the PR team that the SLMS was in the midst of positive change directed at improving instructional practice and student performance.

Although there are many positive changes happening throughout the school, the PR team found that successful implementation of the WSIP is being threatened by two important factors. First, insufficient school-wide focus on improving math performance and secondly, the lack of a rigorous system for monitoring and evaluating progress toward goals and making necessary adjustments to the 05-07 WSIP.

The PR team concluded that there is a lack of school-wide urgency to bring about improvements in math performance, as there had been in improving ELA performance. Though the panel was in full agreement with the commonly expressed claim that “improvement in literacy and reading skills were essential to math reasoning and problem solving,” it was evident that the staff’s ability to understand and implement math strategies did not go beyond this rudimentary claim. In short, it appeared that the school’s ‘content comfort zone’ and expertise was higher in ELA than in math, and consequently, more energy has been directed towards literacy. A number of factors helped reinforce the PR team’s claim. The principal made it very clear that her most deeply held professional passion and priority was in improving reading and literacy. A poll of the fifteen-member ILT revealed a significant imbalance in ELA representation over math (approximately a 5:1 ratio). Comments both from the principal, deputy superintendent and director of instruction acknowledged that the school had struggled in recent years to successfully acquire and/or train sufficient numbers of qualified math teachers, a factor that they believed had slowed down efforts to give sufficient focus to low student performance in math.

The second factor inhibiting the staff’s ability to successfully implement the plan relates back to weaknesses highlighted in Key Question 1A: monitoring, evaluating and modifying the WSIP. As the review process deepened, it became increasingly clear to the panel that this void was severely dampening prospects for success.

In summary, although many positive practices have occurred at SLMS as a result of improvement planning efforts, it is the judgment of the PR team that the emphasis on mathematics has been limited.

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

Since no systematic effort to analyze and report performance gains has been employed, it is impossible to make a judgment in relation to the affect of the WSIP on improvement. However, the review process did ascertain that sufficient data was readily available to accomplish these tasks. In addition, a recently formed school team (Reading Leadership Team) has begun meeting to answer the many questions related to developing effective processes for collecting and utilizing performance data.

At the time of the Panel Review visit (more than one year since the adoption of the plan), gains in student achievement could not be readily or concisely communicated to the team. In fact, the

spaces in the Formative Assessment Goal pages of the WSIP for the reporting the 2005 MCAS percent proficiency results against the plan's proficiency projections were left blank. Similarly, the PR team did not find written documentation or evidence of a systematic process for monitoring the "Evidence of Quality Implementation" listed in the plan. The PR team concluded that these shortcomings could likely be traced back to the lack of attention to the benchmarking and monitoring aspects of the plan's development. The PR team discovered that it was not for lack of availability of such data. The school has collected a large three ring binder filled with data that could easily be used to determine progress toward the six *student performance goals* and thirteen of the fourteen *student outcomes*. The required data was also embedded in the data tables contained within the first few pages of the WSIP.

It was reassuring to the PR team that the "Reading Leadership Team" had begun meeting for the purpose of establishing an efficient system for helping teachers to "access and utilize assessment data." The Reading Leadership Team is funded by a DOE grant and is reportedly composed of a balanced mix of 12 ELA and math staff members and is facilitated by the Change Coach (the school's data expert). The PR team viewed this as a positive step toward strengthening the accountability aspects of the plan. It is noteworthy however, that the team's name again suggested a focus only on reading and not on math (see Key Question 1C).

In summary, because the SLMS WSIP does not have implementation benchmarks or clear student assessment goals, it is not possible to measure improvements in teaching or learning relative to implementation of the plan.

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

Based on the evidence acquired during the site visit, the PR team was sufficiently convinced that the conditions for successful implementation of a school-wide improvement plan are largely in place at the SLMS. The principal is an experienced and respected instructional leader. The school's management structures and practices appear to be effective enough to move the school improvement agenda forward. Teacher leadership and professional collegial relationships directed at school improvement seem to be very important elements of the school's culture. There is a widespread belief that the process of planning and implementing the WSIP is making a positive difference in teaching and learning at the school. Though support and guidance from the district office is perceived as generous, helpful and readily available, the PR team determined that a large share of the gaps and weaknesses in monitoring and measuring the plan's effectiveness could be ascribed to the BPS office.

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

The PR team found sufficient evidence to indicate that the school's leadership, management structures and practices are sound enough to continue to advance the school improvement process.

The principal at the SLMS is well-experienced in matters of curriculum and instruction; she is proud of her school and cares deeply for her students. The principal communicates high expectations for all members of the school community and provides them with the time, resources and support they need to move the improvement agenda forward. She is highly visible within the school, a regular classroom visitor and communicates openly and honestly with both

praise and constructive feedback. The principal encourages and empowers teachers and fellow administrators to become leaders and appears to be doing everything in her power to help the school improve. Virtually all stakeholders (teachers, parents, students and central office personnel) interviewed respected and expressed confidence in the principal's ability as a leader. This near unanimous response was reflected in the *Department of Education (DOE) Instructional Staff Survey*, where 96% of staff either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, "Our school principal provides effective leadership to guide and support staff efforts to improve the academic performance of our students." The leadership report contained in the Panel Review binder served as a very helpful resource to the PR team; its clarity, accuracy and thoroughness served as a source of evidence that the principal was fully engaged in the WSIP process and that she was fully aware of the strengths, weaknesses and needs of the school.

In terms of WSIP planning and implementation, information is effectively passed from the district leaders to the principal (and school administration) and then to the faculty and staff. Many people at the school have a hand in leading the improvement agenda. The 15 members of the faculty and staff who make up the ILT meet regularly as a group (2 times per month) and serve as leaders within their respective teacher clusters. This appears to be an effective leadership vehicle to advance conversations and actions that will lead to improved instruction and student performance. The math and ELA coaches are key members of this ILT and are assuming important and influential leadership roles in making the WSIP a living document. Another recently formed school leadership team (Reading Leadership Team) is meeting regularly to discuss and make recommendations about how best to manage and utilize the multiple sources of achievement data being collected. The Change Coach, described by the principal as her "right hand" with regard to providing expertise in collecting, managing and analyzing school achievement data, facilitates this group. Finally, the principal's leadership team, which is composed of the assistant principal, the Director of Instruction and the Director of the L/AB, are actively involved in leading and managing the day-to-day operations within their respective areas. This helps to help ensure a smooth and effective school operation. These leaders also assume the responsibility for supervising and evaluating teachers in addition to the principal.

The principal openly acknowledged that the concept of using data to drive school planning and inform instruction is a challenge for the school and is a "work in progress." However, it is the judgment of the PR team that the SLMS principal demonstrates the determination and conviction to do what is necessary to achieve success in this new arena of instructional leadership. This was evidenced by, for example, the hiring of a school change coach to guide and support her in this area. She also acknowledges the need to intensify the school-wide focus on math and expressed an equal degree of determination to accomplish that end. Her acknowledgement of the urgency of these issues, coupled with the positive advancements within the school's leadership and management processes, gave the PR team the confidence to judge that the school had sufficient leadership and management to successfully guide and support continued improvement efforts.

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

Interviews and observations conducted during the Panel Review revealed that a majority of the faculty at Solomon Lewenberg Middle School support the planned improvement efforts. Staff believes that the planning and implementation phases of the WSIP process will bring about positive changes in student performance. Though some evidence of faculty resistance or 'push

back' in regard to various elements of the plan was evident, the PR team did not feel it was significant enough to compromise the improvement process.

On the *DOE Instructional Staff Survey*, 98% of the staff either strongly agreed (38%) or agreed (60%) that the school had a well-defined improvement plan. The PR team used this statistic, in conjunction with the near unanimous confidence (96%) the faculty reported in their principal's ability to guide and support the improvement efforts, as partial evidence to suggest that school support for the plan was solid. On site interviews with well over half of the teachers (either individually or in focus groups) revealed similar sentiments with regard to the staff's belief in the plan. For example, the faculty felt that the WSIP had become "their focal point" and that it was "the engine that drives everything at the school." The faculty reported positive changes in teaching and learning at the school, which they attributed to increased collegial interactions and the guidance and support they have been receiving from the content coaches. In addition, SLMS faculty expressed optimism and hope that their efforts would bring about the desired improvements in student performance.

The principal openly expressed her belief that at least 75% of the faculty was "on-board" with the improvement planning and implementation efforts, both in terms of their beliefs and actions. She indicated that 25% remained somewhat resistant to the changes taking place in the school, but that her high visibility in classrooms, both formally and informally, as well as the strong influence of teacher leaders were helping to ensure that any "foot draggers" were being supported. This is in accordance with being held accountable for instructional changes required in the WSIP.

In summary, it is the judgment of the PR team that faculty at the SLMS support and are committed to the school's improvement efforts. Structures are in place to support and hold accountable those staff members that have shown some resistance.

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

District leadership is providing substantial human and material resources to guide and support the Solomon Lewenberg Middle School improvement efforts. This is true both in quantity and quality. However, in the view of the PR team, a few critical gaps in BPS leadership and guidance have contributed to the school's recent failure to create and execute a sound improvement plan to ensure improved student performance.

It was evident to the PR team that BPS is making a concerted effort to advance the school improvement accountability agenda. The PR team agreed that the intentions of BPS possess some urgency, which is evident through the ongoing focus on the use of the intranet portal, "MyBPS" as a valuable resource for curriculum, instruction and assessment, as well as a powerful tool to effectively create and monitor the WISP. Beyond the development and promotion of this helpful technology resource, the PR team found multiple sources of evidence to indicate BPS leaders and specialists provide substantial ongoing technical support and guidance to the SLMS administration and staff. A few examples related directly to the WSIP process include: the series of training sessions in the summer of 2004 conducted by the Deputy Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent and School Support Specialist designed to prepare the principal and her change coach for the creation of the WSIP; the school support specialist provided ongoing feedback and technical assistance to the principal and ILT; the Deputy Superintendent conducted walkthrough visits with the principal and provided helpful feedback

based on her observations; and a team of 8-10 district leaders and personnel conducted two intensive “monitoring visits” to examine the effectiveness of WSIP implementation and to offer constructive feedback.

The PR team was made aware of many other helpful services and supports that are being provided by the district office. These include direct service and guidance on planning and conducting professional development sessions, and assisting with performance evaluations and troubleshooting the problems and challenges that arise through the improvement planning and implementation. BPS has provided material and monetary resources necessary to insure improvement in student performance. For example, the district has recognized the need for special education teacher training in math and has made plans to provide it this spring.

In spite of the substantial guidance and support being channeled to the Solomon Lewenberg Middle School from the district, a lack of constructive feedback and rigorous support in two areas has contributed significantly to the limited soundness of the WSIP as a tool to guide improved school performance. First, though the plan itself gives equal attention to ELA and math improvement objectives, it is the judgment of the PR team that the school’s balance of focus is on ELA (see Key Question 1C). In support of this concern, no apparent effort had been made to revisit the plan in response to the low math performance (MCAS spring 05) and the subsequent “corrective action” status. The second concern involves the lack of rigor and clarity in the WSIP related to establishing benchmarks and the processes for monitoring and evaluating the school’s success toward reaching them (see Key Questions 1A, 1C and 1D).

A review of the results in the rubric used by BPS to evaluate the SLMS WSIP (found at the end of SLMS’s WSIP) indicated that the district had judged the plan as “excellent” (criteria met fully and consistent) in all five categories with no substantive feedback offered in the Comments/Questions column. However, the SLMS WSIP was judged to be unsound by both the PR team and a team of DOE reviewers. In the panel’s judgment, the school would have benefited greatly had this evaluative opportunity been more rigorous.

In summary, the PR team determined that BPS is making efforts to provide the quality and quantity of support, guidance and resources to bring about marked school improvement. However, the panel expressed some concern over the feedback provided to the SLMS to ensure their improvement plan was sound.

CONCLUSION:

The PR team determined that the Solomon Lewenberg Middle School WSIP had sufficient weaknesses to cause substantial doubt about its value as a tool to guide the school’s improvement agenda. The most serious gap in the written plan had to do with the lack of sound monitoring system to ensure progress toward achieving the goals and objectives within the plan. As reflected in this report, the consequences of these gaps in the WSIP had a ripple effect across many of the questions the PR team was asked to address in this protocol. Beyond these critical gaps, the team discovered that a fairly rigorous and inclusive process has been used to create the plan and that the school’s faculty is experiencing many positive benefits as a result of the improvement efforts.

With continued perseverance and strategic technical support, it is the judgment of the PR team that the school has the capacity to fully establish the conditions necessary to improve school performance. The current principal is experienced, passionate and well-respected. She has

created a highly inclusive leadership and management structure designed to guide and support the implementation of the WSIP. The majority of the faculty and staff believe the plan is making a difference and are hopeful that it will lead to significant improvements in student performance. The Boston Public Schools are providing significant resources and technical assistance in support of the citywide school improvement initiatives. Review and guidance provided before approving the SLMS WSIP was limited, resulting in a written plan with critical gaps.

APPENDIX A
Team Members

Dr. Thomas Harvey, Panel Review Chair, SchoolWorks LLC, Beverly, MA

Karen Vigue, Panel Review Coordinator, Massachusetts Department of Education, Malden, MA

Katherine Earley, Panelist, Massachusetts Department of Education, Malden, MA

Joyce Bowen, Panelist, Massachusetts Department of Education, Malden, MA

Robert Baroz, Panelist, Humanities Dean, Framingham, MA

APPENDIX B
Solomon Lewenberg Middle School
Boston Public Schools
POTENTIALLY UNDER-PERFORMING PANEL REVIEW SCHEDULE
February 27 and 28, 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.