

School Panel Review Report John M. Tobin School Cambridge 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 John M. Tobin School met this criterion and was one of 21 schools selected for panel review in fall 2005. The panel review was conducted on December 13 and 14, 2005.

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 Tobin school is deemed underperforming. 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 underperforming school, occurs at the next stage of the school review process.

John M. Tobin School Profile

Enrollment

The John M. Tobin School serves students in Grades pre-Kindergarten through 8. Enrollment at Tobin has remained relatively stable between 2003 and 2005, with a current enrollment of 412 students. There was a drop in enrollment between 2002 and 2003, with 495 students enrolled in 2002 and 410 students enrolled in 2003. Between 2002 and 2005, student demographics have changed slightly. While the Asian population has seen a small increase from 13 percent in 2002 to 19 percent in 2005, the African American population also increased from 45 percent in 2002 to 51 percent in 2005. The White population has decreased from 31 percent in 2002 to 19 percent in 2005. The Low-Income percentages increased slightly (from 53 percent to 59 percent) between 2002 and 2005. The First Language Not English population has increased from

26 percent in 2002 to 40 percent in 2005, as has the Limited English Proficient population (from nine percent in 2002 to 19 percent in 2005). The Hispanic, Native American and Special Education percentages have remained stable.

Proportions of Tobin school student subgroups in 2005, as compared to state averages, are presented below:

Subgroup	2005 Enrollment (%)	
	School	State
Asian	19	5
Black	51	9
Hispanic	11	12
Native American	1	0.3
White	19	74
Low-Income	59	28
First Language Not English	40	14
Limited English Proficient	19	5
Special Education	17	16

In 2005, the attendance rate at Tobin was 94.0 percent, with students absent 8.8 days on average. The district attendance rate is 93.2 percent, which is slightly lower than the state attendance rate of 94.4 percent. At Tobin, the percentage of students chronically absent has risen dramatically from 9.1 percent in 2003 to 23.9 percent in 2005. Hispanic students have the highest rate of average days absent (13.5 days), while the largest subgroup that is chronically absent is White (with 35.4 percent). Pre-Kindergarten students on average are absent more than other grades, with an average rate of 20 days and 45.5 percent of pre-kindergarten students as chronically absent. The fourth and fifth grades have the least number of average days absent, while the third grade has the lowest percentage of chronically absent students. The school's retention rate was 3.0 percent in 2004, the last year for which this data is available. In 2005, there were no in-school or out-of-school suspensions at the Tobin School. 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 Tobin staffing report indicates that the school is comprised of two administrators, 48 teachers, one guidance counselor, one school psychologist, and six other staff. The principal, appointed acting principal in September of 2004 and principal in September of 2005, has been at the Tobin School for 6 years and has a total of 15 years of supervisory/administrative experience. Of the teachers, approximately 35 percent have been at the school for less than five years while approximately 46 percent of the teachers have worked at Tobin for more than 15 years with six teachers having taught at this school for 30 years or more. Of the 17 teachers who have taught at Tobin for less than five years, almost 60 percent have more than 14 years of total teaching experience. Nearly 85 percent of teachers are reported as holding graduate degrees.

MCAS Overview

Students at the Tobin School are assessed in Grade 3 in reading, Grades 4 and 7 in English language arts (ELA) and in Grades 4, 6 and 8 in mathematics. Tobin's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report for 2005 Mid-Cycle IV shows an accountability status of No Status for English

language arts and Restructuring for mathematics. The school failed to make AYP in ELA in the aggregate in 2005 but made AYP in all reported subgroups.¹ Tobin made AYP for the aggregate and subgroups in 2003 and 2004. In mathematics, the school failed to make AYP in the aggregate and subgroups in 2004 and 2005 and has not made AYP in the aggregate since 2000.

In 2005, the aggregate Composite Performance Indices (CPIs) for the Tobin School were 79.6 in ELA and 59.9 in mathematics. Year-by-year aggregate CPIs are shown below:

Year-by-Year Aggregate CPI Data Summary		
Year	ELA	Math
2001	73.0	48.2
2002	68.3	57.4
2003	82.5	55.1
2004	80.3	61.5
2005	79.6	59.9
State Target 2005	80.5	68.7

GRADE 3

Reading MCAS Results

Results of the 2005 Grade 3 reading MCAS for students at Tobin are presented below:

2005 Reading, Gr. 3	Percent		
	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	49	38	14
Regular Education	57	37	7
Special Education	NA	NA	NA

While the special education population in Grade 3 is too small to report data, there is a significant difference in performance between the regular education students and the aggregate population. Seven percent of the regular education students scored in the Warning category, while 14 percent of the aggregate population scored in this category. Also, slightly more regular education students scored Proficient (57 percent) in comparison to the aggregate (49 percent.)

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 John M. Tobin in 2005 were Low-Income and African-American/Black.

There has been a small change in student performance since 2001, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 3 ELA MCAS performance presented below:

Aggregate Reading, Gr. 3	Percent		
	P	NI	W/F
2005	49	38	14
2004	46	49	5
2003	62	31	8
2002	50	38	12
2001	49	44	7

The percentage of students scoring Proficient on the Grade 3 ELA MCAS has fluctuated slightly since 2001, with a high of 62 percent in 2003 and a current 49 percent in 2005. The percentage of students scoring in the Needs Improvement category have changed slightly since 2001 when 44 percent of the students scored in this category and 38 percent in 2005. The percentage of students scoring in Warning has actually double (from seven percent to 14 percent) since 2001.

GRADE 4

ELA MCAS Results

Results of the 2005 Grade 4 ELA MCAS for students at Tobin are presented below:

2005 ELA, Gr. 4	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	7	43	34	16
Regular Education	7	57	32	4
Special Education	7	21	36	36

As noted in the Grade 4 ELA MCAS results, seven percent of the aggregate, regular and special education populations scored Advanced on the 2005 exam. And while 57 percent of the regular education population scored Proficient, only 21 percent of the special education population scored Proficient. The percentage of students scoring in the Warning category is also worth noting. Where 36 percent of the special education students scored Warning, only four percent of the regular education students scored in this category.

There has been a gradual increase in student performance since 2001, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 4 ELA MCAS performance presented below:

Aggregate ELA, Gr. 4	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	7	43	34	16
2004	11	27	49	14
2003	3	33	54	10
2002	0	33	47	20
2001	0	33	46	21

Since 2001, the percentage of students scoring Advanced has increased from zero to seven percent, with a high of 11 percent scoring Advanced in 2004. The percentage of students scoring Proficient has also increased from 33 percent in 2001 to 43 percent in 2005. Likewise, the percentage of students scoring in the Needs Improvement and Warning categories has decreased since 2001 from 46 to 34 percent and 21 to 16 percent respectively.

GRADE 4

Mathematics MCAS Results

Results of the 2005 Grade 4 mathematics MCAS for students at Tobin are presented below:

2005 Mathematics, Gr. 4	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	7	25	48	20
Regular Education	7	32	57	4
Special Education	7	14	29	50

As noted in the Grade 4 mathematics MCAS results, seven percent of the aggregate, regular and special education populations scored Advanced on the 2005 exam. The special education subgroup had the highest percentage of students scoring in the Warning category, with 50 percent compared with just four percent of the regular education students scoring in this category.

There has been a gradual increase in student performance since 2001, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 4 mathematics MCAS performance presented below:

Aggregate Mathematics, Gr. 4	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	7	25	48	20
2004	3	22	51	24
2003	3	18	54	26
2002	7	9	48	35
2001	3	10	52	34

The percentage of students scoring Advanced has increased from three percent in 2001 to seven percent in 2005, as has the percentage of students scoring Proficient, which has increased from 10 percent in 2001 to 25 percent in 2005. In 2001, 52 percent of the fourth grade students scored in the Needs Improvement category, which (in 2005) is now 48 percent. The Warning category has also seen a decrease in students from 34 percent of the students scoring in 2001 to 20 percent in 2005.

GRADE 6

Mathematics MCAS Results

Results of the 2005 Grade 6 mathematics MCAS for students at Tobin are presented below:

2005 Mathematics, Gr. 6	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	3	13	32	52
Regular Education	7	21	57	14
Special Education	0	8	15	77

As noted earlier, there is a significant difference in performance between the special and regular education population. Whereas only 14 percent of regular education students scored in the Warning category, 77 percent of the special education population scored Warning. Also, only 15 percent of the special education students scored Needs Improvement in comparison to 57 percent of the regular education population. Only eight percent of the special education students scored Proficient and no students scored Advanced.

There has been a gradual decrease in student performance since 2001, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 6 mathematics MCAS performance presented below:

Aggregate Mathematics, Gr. 6	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	3	13	32	52
2004	8	10	48	33
2003	7	25	41	27
2002	10	22	39	29
2001	11	11	29	49

Since 2001, the percentage of students scoring Advanced has decreased and the percentage of students scoring Warning has increased. In 2001, 11 percent of the students scored Advanced, while in 2005, only three percent of the students scored Advanced. With respect to the Proficient category, there was an increase in student performance from 2001 to 2003, which then declined in 2004.

GRADE 7

ELA MCAS Results

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

2005 ELA, Gr. 7	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	2	51	39	7
Regular Education	3	66	31	0
Special Education	NA	NA	NA	NA

Overall, the regular education students scored slightly higher than the aggregate population on the 2005 seventh grade ELA MCAS exam.

There has been a slight 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	2	51	39	7
2004	0	60	33	6
2003	0	52	43	4
2002	4	29	46	21
2001	0	43	44	13

With the exception of the scores in 2002, the percentage of students scoring Warning and Needs Improvement have decreased since 2001. Percentage of students scoring Proficient have increased from 43 percent in 2001 to 60 percent in 2004 but then declined to 51 percent in 2005.

GRADE 8

Mathematics MCAS Results

Results of the 2005 Grade 8 mathematics MCAS for students at Tobin are presented below:

2005 Mathematics, Gr. 8	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	4	24	40	31
Regular Education	0	29	52	19
Special Education	NA	NA	NA	NA

While no regular education students scored Advanced on the 2005 eighth grade mathematics MCAS exam, regular education students overall performed slightly better than the aggregate population.

There has been a gradual increase in student performance from 2001 to 2004, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 8 mathematics MCAS performance presented below:

Aggregate Mathematics, Gr. 8	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	4	24	40	31
2004	9	32	36	23
2003	2	13	27	59
2002	8	21	39	32
2001	0	14	35	51

In 2004, the Grade 8 students scored the highest over the years 2001 through 2005. In 2005, scores dropped slightly. In 2004, for example, 41 percent of the eighth graders scored Advanced and Proficient, while in 2005, only 28 percent of the population did so. Also, the percentage of students scoring Needs Improvement and Warning increased between 2004 and 2005 from 36 to 40 percent and 23 to 31 respectively.

PANEL RESPONSE TO 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?

In the judgment of the Panel Review (PR) team, Tobin's School Improvement Plan (SIP) provides a good framework upon which to build future improvement efforts. Although elements of the plan lack clarity, specificity and a student outcome focus, the document contains the essential elements upon which to build a sound strategic plan and is well organized and easy to follow. The effort to improve student performance in mathematics is currently happening, and rapidly and steadily evolving. The PR team found clear evidence of an ongoing planning and development process that is logical, rigorous and solidly supported. As well, the PR team found faculty efforts to implement the plan in its present form to be determined and consistent. Due in part to the rapid evolution of the plan, however, and the intensity of the effort to keep up with the accountability requirements, the school has not yet been able to document convincing evidence that points to gains in mathematics 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?

School Improvement Plans were submitted in preparation for School Panel Reviews scheduled in November and December 2005. Teams of three Department of Education (DOE) 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 documents provided in the summary rubric was based solely on a close reading of the written documents submitted. It was not a final determination. The panelists used the summary rubric to inform their discussion of the written plan each panelist had read individually prior to the review, and to help focus their time in the school on the implementation of the planned strategies. Final judgment on 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 that was gathered by the panel during on-site interviews, focus groups and observations.

The PR team finds Tobin's 2004-06 SIP to be well-organized and easy to follow. Although many of the elements consistent with the Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) framework are evident, key pieces of a sound plan are either not present at all, or lack the specificity and focus to serve as a clear map to guide the process of accomplishing the desired student outcomes. The PR team shared concerns noted in the DOE evaluation rubric about two key issues: 1) The SIP's heavy focus on math literacy (e.g. reading, vocabulary, written and oral language) and its limited focus on the knowledge and skills specifically related to mathematics content (number sense, geometry, operations etc.); 2) The plan does not target the needs of English language learners

(ELL) and special education students, when mathematics achievement scores of these subgroups are very low.

During an interview, the PR team was given a revised version (fall 05 plan) of Tobin’s SIP that had been completed in the days just prior to the team’s arrival. It was developed with the consideration of the most recent MCAS information received from the DOE. Since the DOE’s evaluation and the panel’s preparation focused on the plan revised in the spring of 2005 (spring 05 plan), the bulk of the commentary in this report will focus on the earlier version. However, the fall 05 plan has been reviewed by the PR team and will be referenced in this report.

Each of the three major iterations of Tobin’s 2004-06 SIP (fall 04, spring 05 and fall 05) followed the PIM format and is logically organized and clear to follow. District goals are included and are clearly aligned with Tobin’s mission, as well as with English and language arts and mathematics improvement objectives. Prioritized causes for low performance and improvement objects are predominantly displayed, as are important data related to school demographics and MCAS performance.

The SIP under review contains action step pages for each improvement objective, both in the broad fall 04 version as well as in pages from the more detailed spring 05 version. Though the spring 05 plan is more detailed than the fall 04 plan, both the panel review and the DOE review teams agreed that each version lacked the clarity and specificity necessary to provide a clear guide to achieving the expected student outcomes (e.g., lack of specificity with benchmarks, methods and timelines for assessment, and roles and responsibilities). This conclusion was supported by the fact that nearly all the mathematics accomplishments, evidences of success and strategies identified were not connected to measurable student learning outcomes. Instead, nearly all of the focus was on instruction and teacher behavior outcomes, rather than on student learning outcomes (see Tables 1 and 2 below).

Table 1: SIP Accomplishments in Mathematics 2004-2005 (Spring 05 Plan, p. 16B)

Improvement Objective #2: Students at the Tobin School will benefit from instruction that explicitly teaches effective reading strategies for reading, understanding and solving math problems.		
Grade Level	Accomplishments	Evidence of Success
5/6	Increased use of released MCAS open response questions for student practice.	- All 5/6 teachers and specialists used MCAS open response questions to practice math writing. - Observational evidence shows improvement in students’ organization of written responses.

Note: Though this page represents an example of the 5/6 grade cluster, it is representative of other pages from other clusters.

Table 2: Tobin School SIP 2004-06 (Spring 05 Plan, p. 16F)

Plan to Improve Student Performance in Mathematics	Grade Levels 5-6
Improvement Objective #2: Students at the Tobin School will benefit from instruction that explicitly teaches effective reading strategies for reading understanding and solving word problems.	

Strategy to Achieve Improvement	Information Collection Method	Dates to be Reviewed	Professional Development	Resources Needed	Specific Timeline	Person Responsible	Funding	
							Sip	PdGf Oth
While working with existing curriculum, teachers will identify and share word problems that extend or enhance skills or strategies that fit the current unit.	Keep folders for both grades. Folders will be labeled by unit name and kept in central location. (teachers' room)	November 05 February 06 April 06	CPS Math Investigations and CMP workshops	-common cluster time -hole punch -three ring binders	ongoing	CPS Math Dept. In house math coach. Classroom teachers.		X

Note: Though this page represents an example of the 5/6 grade cluster, it is representative of other pages from other clusters.

The plan's lack of student focus was due to the school's choice of improvement objectives. Three of the four mathematics improvement objectives cited in the plan used the language, "Students at the Tobin School will benefit from instruction that...". It was not clear to the PR team why the school had not used the four "Student Learning Objectives" included in the plan ("Students will know/be able to..."). However, it is important to note that the revised fall 05 plan does include corrections in this regard. This fall 05 plan, which is now the plan of record at the school, includes language for its mathematics improvement objectives focused on student outcomes. For example, "Students at the Tobin School will learn effective strategies for reading, understanding and solving mathematical word problems." Despite these changes, however, inspection of the revised document revealed that the action steps that followed the objectives mostly mimic the steps in the spring 05 plan. Consequently, the concerns already expressed above remain. The plan contains gaps in the specifics of *how* the student outcomes will be accomplished, what benchmarks are targeted and how student progress will be monitored and measured.

The plan's heavy focus on mathematics literacy over mathematics content and the lack of attention to low performing subgroups were additional issues of concern for both the PR and the DOE teams. Based on data and causal analyses that occurred at Tobin in the summer of 2004—and then again in the fall of 04, the spring of 05 and the fall of 05—the Tobin School has consistently determined that there is a school-wide lack of knowledge and skill in the area of mathematics literacy (use of mathematics language and vocabulary—both spoken and written—to analyze and solve problems). And further, that this is the area most responsible for the school's history of poor mathematics performance. Focus group interviews indicated that the school does not believe their focus was due solely to the needs of the English language learners (25 percent of their population) but, rather, because of a school-wide deficiency in understanding and using the "language of mathematics." In analyzing the individual and group responses to

language-heavy items on the MCAS and Cambridge Periodic Assessments (CPA)—that is, open response and word problems—they consistently found this weakness to be common to all subgroups. And as a result, broad objectives and action steps that focused more on mathematics language than on mathematics content would raise the performance of all students regardless of subgroup. However, the PR team has doubts about the effectiveness of Tobin's broad approach. The panel did not see evidence of the data analysis that supported the school's decisions to focus on literacy versus content and to not differentiate their plan's objectives based upon the low performance of the ELL and special education subgroups.

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

The PR team determined that Tobin's 2004-2006 SIP was developed through a process that would support its successful implementation. It was clear to the PR team that, through all phases of the plan's development, key stakeholders were involved in meaningful ways and that the school's planning process is steadily evolving. Adjustments to the plan are being made on a regular basis. These adjustments are made in response to the analysis of the most recent MCAS and CPA data, as well as with teacher reports of implementation success and failure. Finally, within the last year and a half, all members of Tobin's faculty, staff and administration have profited from numerous professional development programs that were tightly aligned to Tobin's SIP objectives.

In the fall of 2004, the entire Tobin staff—with the support and guidance of a new school administration and key central office personnel—embarked on the first school-wide effort to develop a sound plan for improving student performance. The data analysis efforts and the efforts to determine the root causes of poor student performance accomplished at this time strengthened and extended the work started by a small group of teachers from the previous summer. In the spring of 2005, a concerted effort was made to evaluate strengths and weaknesses of the plan's progress and to make revisions based on that data-driven evaluation. Grade level cluster leaders, guided by school and district leadership, facilitated a process that involved all teachers and staff. The revised action plans, as well as the documentation of success, were written by the teachers and incorporated into the 2004-06 SIP. A similar process took place through the fall of 2005 and resulted in the fall 05 iteration described in Key Question 1A. The PR team sensed a strong school improvement momentum during the visit. Though, as described in response to the first question above, the plan in its present form has significant gaps to fill and weaknesses to overcome. The PR team witnessed a level of agency and resolve among the entire school community that is necessary to move the school's improvement forward. Key Questions 1C and 2B offer evidence to support this belief.

Extensive opportunities for professional development directly related to Tobin's school improvement goals have been afforded to members of the staff and administration. All of the trainings for the school's instructional programs that had been voluntary in the past are now mandated for all mathematics teachers. The Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) grant provided resources for a mathematics coach to support improvement efforts and funds, as well, for professional development. Among the teacher training opportunities provided by the grant were mini-institutes that focused on open-response questions and ways to promote higher-order thinking. According to teachers and administrators, these institutes were valuable and well attended. Several staff and the administrators received Test Wiz training that has been passed on

and utilized by grade-level cluster leaders. During the summer of 2005, 12 teachers attended a week-long geometry content workshop and the principal took part in an in-service training conducted by the superintendent on writing school improvement plans. The school began as a participant in the Lesley University Literacy Collaborative this past fall and 7th and 8th grade teachers took part in literacy training that focused on reading strategies that are being used to help students to read and solve mathematics problems. The school is also working with *Investigations* mathematics consultants from Lesley College to align mathematics concepts with the state frameworks, to plan lessons, observe colleagues and debrief lessons. The school is deriving benefit from ongoing support and training from mathematics coaches and other district personnel, as well as from the work of notable outside experts. The PR team found that the quality and quantity of human and material resources made available to the staff and administration for the express purpose of supporting their efforts to improve student achievement in mathematics to be quite remarkable.

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

In the judgment of the PR team, the entire staff at the Tobin School is working consistently and cooperatively to implement the strategies and accomplish the objectives written in its current school improvement plan. Teacher collaboration is high and the grade cluster format seems to be an excellent vehicle for dialog about teaching and learning, reviewing student work, sharing ideas and monitoring the plan. The leadership at both district and school levels are satisfied with the efforts and enthusiasm with which the staff is carrying out the plan.

During the review process, the PR team visited ten lessons, eight of which were mathematics lessons. A visual inspection of these classrooms found artifacts directly related to the plan. All rooms had word walls or, at least, posters with mathematics vocabulary words and operations listed. Evidence of the mathematics content standards was prominent in many rooms. Some had a copy of the SIP posted, as well. Evidence of student work related to mathematics problem solving was seen on classrooms walls. The recently purchased "smart boards" were seen in three of the rooms; one lesson made effective use of this technology. Children were heard explaining mathematical answers in words and talking to each other about mathematical problems. Children were seen working in small groups with mathematics manipulatives and solving problems of the day.

Focus group interviews with the grade cluster leaders and teachers revealed that professional collaboration is high and commitment to the plan is nearly unanimous. One teacher reported, "Teachers are working together more than ever before." The grade clusters meet once or twice each week and individual teachers collaborate daily. All professional staff members are assigned to a cluster and actively participate. Information from the *DOE Instructional Staff Survey* indicated that more than two-thirds of the teachers meet more than once a week to plan and coordinate lessons, discuss student work and discuss strategies and services for individual students. Within the last year, the school's schedule was adjusted for the purposes of providing common time for collaboration and to increase the time on learning in mathematics. The fact that each cluster is engaged in the data analysis and responsible for monitoring and revising the improvement plan gives added weight to their responsibilities for the plan's implementation.

The superintendent, deputy superintendent and central office personnel close to Tobin's improvement efforts all expressed confidence that the improvement process is happening at the classroom level. In addition, Tobin's principal and assistant principal are highly confident and proud of the school's progress. Walkthrough assessments conducted by members of leadership occur regularly, and their observations serve to reinforce their beliefs that the SIP is coming alive in the classrooms of the Tobin School.

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

Beyond anecdotal evidence, minimal concrete, written evidence based on careful monitoring or assessment of student performance was found to support the notion that valid and measurable gains had been made relative to SIP goals and benchmarks. The PR team heard testimony from teachers who were witnessing gains in student performance as a direct result of their efforts to implement the instructional strategies contained in the SIP. A number of successes that hinted of gains in student performance were listed in the Accomplishments pages of the SIP.

A number of examples suggest that students were improving their mathematics performance in the areas specified in the SIP. Several teachers reported that they had observed an increase in students' appropriate use of mathematics vocabulary, since instructional focus had been placed on written and oral expression of the language of mathematics. Mathematics teachers of the 7th and 8th grades reported a "decrease in the number of student complaints about not understanding the problem." The 3rd and 4th grade cluster reported that "daily work was showing improvement" and that "weekly quizzes indicate that students are making steady progress in their ability to use the Thought, Information, Number Sentence, and Solution Sentence (T.I.N.S.) process to solve problems." The 5/6 cluster reported, "Observational evidence shows improvements in students' organization of the written responses." Teachers reported to the PR team that student practice with the MCAS scoring rubric has yielded promising results and that students are able to explain data and solve mathematics problems more effectively.

In a period of one year, the staff and administration of the Tobin School have expended tremendous time and energy in an effort to create their first sound school improvement plan. The level of sophistication and understanding they have of the PIM process has increased with each revision. The fact that their plan does not yet provide clear and specific outcomes gives testimony to why, at this point in their evolution, concrete evidence of convincing gains in student performance are not available. The Tobin principal agreed that the lack of concrete evidence of performance gains is likely due to the relative newness of the school's focus on using data to drive actions, and the need for increased training and practice on how to effectively assess, record, monitor and analyze student performance data over time. She expressed confidence that, with time, her staff will develop those capabilities and that her students will demonstrate higher levels of academic proficiency.

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

It is the judgment of the PR team that the conditions necessary to successfully implement a school improvement plan are solidly in place at the John M. Tobin School. In their short tenure as school leaders, the current principal and assistant principal have earned the respect and confidence of the school's stakeholders and have created a climate conducive to improvement and change. The faculty and staff have rallied their energy around efforts to improve student performance and offer their enthusiastic support for the plan. The superintendent and his staff have been steadfast and generous in their service, support and leadership of Tobin's improvement efforts.

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

The PR team found the school's leadership and management structures, practices and personnel to be sound and effective. The principal and the vice principal are widely respected by the entire school community and work well together as a team. The principal has earned the confidence and support of virtually all staff at the school and the central office. Under her leadership, she and her cadre of school leaders have begun to build a school culture that values accountability and high expectations for all.

Interviews with school stakeholders and observations conducted during the two-day panel review provided the team with convincing evidence that the current principal and assistant principal are well respected and capable of successfully moving the school improvement agenda forward. The instructional leadership team, the school council, parents, teachers and district personnel were all supportive of the current school leaders. The following words and phrases were used by teachers to describe the principal:

- "more visible than the last principal"
- "not afraid to say no"
- "will hold us accountable"
- "supportive"
- "helpful"
- "knowledgeable about instruction"
- "a good communicator"

On the *DOE Instructional Staff Survey*, 98 percent of the teachers either "strongly agreed" (65 percent) or "agreed" (33 percent) with the statement, "Our principal provides effective leadership to guide and support staff efforts to improve the academic performance of our students." And, 96 percent "strongly agreed" (70 percent) or "agreed" (26 percent) with the statement, "I am well informed about the initiatives that are undertaken by our school leadership and staff to improve school performance." The superintendent and central office personnel also expressed confidence in the school's current leadership.

During the spring and summer of 2004—and prior to becoming the school's principal—the current principal was involved at the ground level of Tobin's school improvement effort. She was among a few teachers and administrators who began the process of creating a comprehensive plan for school improvement. Her early role in this regard, as well as the respect she had gained as an educator within the school, helped build her credibility. In concert with the leadership provided by the superintendent, who is in his third year in the Cambridge Public

Schools, the principal has instilled high expectations for both teacher and student performance. The practice of teacher supervision and evaluation, which had been inconsistent and ineffective in recent years, is now happening regularly. Walkthrough assessments are being conducted by the principal and central office personnel and a revised teacher evaluation policy has been adopted. Requiring professional development for all mathematics teachers in *Investigations* and the Connected Math Program (CMP)—when it had been optional in the past—is one example of a bold tone-setting decision made by the principal.

In addition, the principal has demonstrated strong leadership by delegating a share of the leadership responsibilities for monitoring and revising the school's SIP directly to the instructional leadership team (ILT) and their grade level clusters. The PR team felt the ILT was an enthusiastic group of educators committed to the ongoing school improvement efforts and highly supportive of the current leadership—both at the school and district level.

The PR team determined that, even in her short tenure, the principal has asserted herself as a leader who values and expects a professional culture characterized by high expectations and renewed accountability for all. It was reported that in the beginning, some staff pushed back, testing her resolve as a leader, but from the panel's perspective, few, if any, resisters remain. The PR team believes that the principal has the skill and courage necessary to make the tough decisions required to move the school forward while, at the same time, demonstrating her belief in the necessity of sharing important decisions and responsibilities with the faculty and staff—particularly with regard to those issues impacting teaching, learning and the classroom.

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

As indicated throughout this report, the PR team has ample evidence to support the conclusion that the faculty at the Tobin School supports the planned improvement initiatives. Interviews with teachers, staff and administrators revealed a common theme: the faculty and staff of the Tobin School are all familiar with of the content of the plan; they have all been actively involved in the process of creating and revising the plan; and, they are fully engaged and committed to its implementation. According to the *DOE Instructional Staff Survey*, 96 percent of the staff agreed that the school's plan is well-defined. Interviews with dozens of teachers, leaders and staff revealed no strong voices of dissent. It seems apparent that, although the accountability stakes are high and the expectations for all are on the rise, a strong commitment to succeed is a prevailing attitude at Tobin—not just because of the external push for accountability, but from a strong desire to make a difference in the lives of the children they serve. There was unanimity of opinion and action around an improvement planning effort.

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

It is the judgment of the PR team that the Cambridge School Department's central office, under the strong leadership of the current superintendent and deputy superintendent, are providing substantial support and guidance to the Tobin School for the expressed purpose of improving overall student performance. This support comes in the form of abundant and well-directed financial, material and human resources, as well as with readily available internal consultative services. The superintendent's sense of urgency and resolve to address the school accountability issues at Tobin, as well as his strong feelings of confidence that student performance improvement "will happen," were reflected across the Tobin School.

It is apparent that the superintendent's philosophy to conduct the central office "...as a service organization" is being actualized to the advantage of Tobin's students and staff. The school has received \$400,000 to support school improvement (approximately \$230,000 from General Funds and \$170,000 from Grant Funds). These funds appear to be well-targeted at needs that have been identified through the improvement process. Among other things, the expenditures include additional personnel (e.g., mathematics coaches and paraprofessionals), professional development (see 1B above), stipends for school improvement planning, and materials and supplies to support curriculum and instruction.

Central office personnel have been actively engaged with all aspects of the Tobin school improvement process—from both the direct service level and the guidance and support level. The 'SWAT' team, composed of members of the district's leadership team (Deputy Superintendent, Executive Director of Curriculum Development, Executive Director of Student Accountability and Achievement, and the Director for Student Accountability and Achievement), rapidly responds to the school's requests for assistance with issues related to improving student performance. They have been particularly active in supporting the data analysis and interpretation efforts. District mathematics coaches, as well as the mathematics coach funded by the CSR grant, are supportive and helpful to cluster teachers. Other district personnel who provide ongoing support and technical assistance include the Director of Title I and the assessment specialist. The PR team reviewed a number of recently produced district documents that were clearly aligned with—and in support of—Tobin's effort to improve mathematics achievement. A few of these documents include: the District Improvement Plan, a publication outlining the district's required action steps for schools responding to federal AYP designations that go beyond expectations, a binder containing the first attempt to establish measurable achievement goals and benchmarks, a summary report of the revised Teacher and Principal Evaluation Systems, and data analysis sheets that outlined the gap between the Cambridge Periodic Assessments (CPA) and the MCAS.

The PR team also learned of the development of a large district-maintained database that will include results from not only the MCAS and CPA but, also, a wide variety of other assessments conducted at the school. The database will serve as a valuable resource to assist the district office and the individual schools in the process of doing detailed tracking of student performance over time.

The PR team had few doubts about the quantity and quality of the support and guidance that the Tobin School was receiving from the Cambridge Public Schools. Teachers and administrators alike were highly appreciative and were quick to recognize the role that the central office was playing in the performance improvement work. The superintendent expressed concern about the reasonableness of the compressed timetable that accompanied the state and federal accountability expectations.

CONCLUSION

It is the judgment of the Panel Review team that the John M. Tobin School has the necessary conditions in place to successfully implement their school improvement plan. They have capable leaders and a sound management system, the faculty and staff is fully supportive and engaged in the plan's implementation and the district office is providing ample expertise, resources and guidance. The PR team found little doubt about the urgency and resolve of the administration and faculty with regard to their desire to succeed in improving student performance.

The current written plan, however, was found to have gaps and weakness that—in the opinion of the PR team—could limit the school's ability to achieve the student performance gains they are seeking. The areas of greatest weakness, which will reportedly be addressed as their improvement plan evolves, are all related to the thorough and skillful use of a variety of performance data to identify the specific areas of greatest student need; as well as the process of writing objectives, strategies and actions that lead to the ability to measure the success in meeting those needs.

APPENDIX A
Team Members

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

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

Ralph Watson, Panelist, Principal, Medford, MA

Leonard Boughton, Panelist, Retired Principal, Topsfield, MA

Robert Baroz, Panelist, Humanities Dean, Framingham, MA

APPENDIX B
John M. Tobin School
Cambridge Public Schools
POTENTIALLY UNDER-PERFORMING PANEL REVIEW SCHEDULE
December 13 and 14, 2005

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.