

School Panel Review Report Fairview Veterans Memorial Middle School Chicopee 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. Fairview Veterans Memorial Middle School met this criterion and was one of 21 schools selected for panel review in Fall 2005. The panel review was conducted on November 8 and 9, 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 Fairview Veterans Memorial Middle 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.

Fairview Veterans Memorial Middle School Profile

Enrollment

Fairview Veterans Memorial Middle School (FVMMS) serves students in Grades 6-8. Enrollment at FVMMS increased from 742 students in 2002 to a peak of 857 in 2004, and then decreased to 798 in 2005. Percentages of student subgroup populations also changed from 2002 to 2005, specifically among Hispanic students (six percent in 2002 to 15 percent in 2005) and White students (93 percent in 2002 to 81 percent in 2005). Increases were also seen in Low-Income (38 percent to 49 percent) and First Language Not English (nine percent to 13 percent) students. Proportions of FVMMS student subgroups in 2005, as compared to state averages, are presented on the next page:

Subgroup	2005 Enrollment (%)	
	School	State
Asian	1	5
Black	3	9
Hispanic	15	12
Native American	0	0.3
White	81	74
Low-Income	49	28
First Language Not English	13	14
Limited English Proficient	2	5
Special Education	15	16

In 2005, the attendance rate at FVMMS was 92.9 percent, with students absent 12.0 days on average. Attendance rates at FVMMS are similar to those throughout the district. Although the overall attendance rate at FVMMS is slightly lower than the state average of 94.2 percent, the average number of days absent is 2.0 days higher than the state average. Absenteeism appears to increase by grade level, with the highest rates in 8th Grade and the lowest rates in 6th Grade. There are no significant differences in attendance rates for males and females. Hispanic students, however, have the lowest attendance rate (90.3%) of all racial subgroups at the school. Similarly, Hispanic students have the highest rate of chronic absenteeism (39.7%) and the highest average number of days absent (15.2 days). The school’s retention rate was 3.5 percent in 2004, the last year for which this data is available. The school’s in-school suspension rate in 2005 was 0.0 percent, while out-of-school suspensions averaged 5.0 percent, a significant drop from 2004 in which the out-of-school suspension rate was 22.3 percent. The 2005 rate of out-of-school suspensions is well below the district average of 11.4 percent and slightly lower than the state average of 6.1 percent.

Staffing

The 2005-2006 Fairview Veterans Memorial Middle School staffing report indicates that the school is comprised of four administrators, 61 teachers, three guidance counselors, one teacher leader/curriculum facilitator and four additional staff members. The principal has been at the school for ten years in various capacities, has a total of two years of administrative experience and is in her first year as principal of this school. Of the teachers, approximately 15 percent have been at the school since it opened 11 years ago, and approximately 55 percent have been at the school for five or more years. Roughly ten percent of the teachers are new to the school this year. Fifty percent of the teachers at FMVVS have ten or more years of teaching experience, and 28 percent have less than five years teaching experience. Nearly 85 percent of teachers are reported as being highly qualified, and approximately 47 percent hold an advanced degree.

MCAS Overview

Students at Fairview Veterans Memorial Middle School are assessed in Grade 7 in English language arts (ELA) and in Grades 6 and 8 in mathematics. The school’s Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report for 2005 Mid-Cycle IV shows an accountability status of Identified for Improvement – Subgroups Only for ELA and Corrective Action for mathematics. In ELA, the school has consistently made AYP for the aggregate population, but has not done so for

subgroups since they were first reported in 2003.¹ In 2005, the Low Income subgroup did not make AYP. In mathematics, the school has not made AYP in the aggregate since 2000, with the exception of 2003, and has not made AYP for subgroups since they were first reported in 2003. In 2005, the subgroups that did not meet AYP included Special Education, Low Income and White. The Special Education and Low Income subgroups did meet their Composite Performance Index Improvement Targets in mathematics, but failed to make AYP due to attendance rates below 92 percent.

In 2005, the aggregate Composite Performance Indices (CPIs) for FVMMS are 78.3 in ELA and 52.7 in mathematics. Year-by-year aggregate CPIs are shown below:

Year	ELA	Math
2001	74.9	47.4
2002	78.8	44.2
2003	76.8	51.0
2004	78.6	49.2
2005	78.3	52.7
State Target 2005	80.5	68.7

GRADE 6

Mathematics MCAS Results

Results of the 2005 Grade 6 mathematics MCAS for students at Fairview Veterans Memorial Middle School are presented below:

2005 Math, Gr. 6	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	3	19	44	34
Regular Education	3	20	47	30
Special Education	0	4	30	67

Regular Education students have significantly outperformed Special Education students. Overall, there has been a gradual increase in student performance at FVMMS since 2002, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 6 mathematics MCAS performance presented on the next page:

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 Fairview Veterans Memorial Middle School in 2005 were Low-Income and White for ELA, and Special Education, Low-Income, Hispanic, and White for mathematics.

Aggregate Math, Gr. 6	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	3	19	44	34
2004	4	15	34	47
2003	4	9	34	53
2002	1	10	36	53
2001	3	14	32	51

The percentage of students scoring in Proficient or Advanced has increased from a low of 11 percent in 2002 to 22 percent in 2005. Correspondingly, the percentage of students in Warning/Failing has decreased from 53 percent in 2002 to 34 percent in 2005. Special Education students have also experienced some improvement, although this is generally limited to more students scoring in Needs Improvement. In 2001, zero percent of Special Education students scored Proficient or Advanced, which increased to four percent in 2005. Changes in students scoring Needs Improvement has increased from a low of seven percent in 2002 to 30 percent in 2005.

GRADE 7

ELA MCAS Results

Results of the 2005 Grade 7 ELA MCAS for students at Fairview Veterans Memorial Middle School are presented below:

2005 ELA	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	3	44	40	13
Regular Education	4	50	40	6
Special Education	0	10	41	49

Regular Education students at FVMMS have significantly outperformed Special Education students. Overall, performance in ELA has been mixed since 2001, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 7 ELA MCAS performance presented below:

Aggregate ELA	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	3	44	40	13
2004	1	46	41	11
2003	2	46	39	13
2002	1	52	35	12
2001	0	38	39	23

Performance was lowest in 2001, when 38 percent of students scored Proficient or Advanced, and 23 percent of students scored Warning/Failing. Performance then peaked in 2002, when 53 percent of students scored Proficient or Advanced, and 12 percent of students scored Warning/Failing. From 2003 to 2005, the percentage of students scoring Proficient or Advanced declined to 47 percent, while the percentage of students scoring Warning/Failing raised slightly to 13 percent. Performance for Regular Education and Special Education students showed similar trends, with lowest performance in 2001, a peak in 2002 and decline from 2003 to 2005.

However, the 2005 performance of students in all categories does show an overall increase from 2001.

GRADE 8

Mathematics MCAS Results

Results of the 2005 Grade 8 mathematics MCAS for students at Fairview Veterans Memorial Middle School are presented below:

2005 Math, Gr. 8	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	3	13	30	54
Regular Education	4	15	37	44
Special Education	0	2	7	91

Similar to the Grade 6 mathematics results, Regular Education students have significantly outperformed Special Education students at FVMMS. Overall, student performance has declined 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	3	13	30	54
2004	2	12	34	52
2003	5	15	38	42
2002	1	9	40	50
2001	2	15	39	45

In 2001, 17 percent of students scored Proficient or Advanced. This decreased to a low of 10 percent in 2002, and then averaged 16 percent from 2003 to 2005. There has been similar variability in students scoring Needs Improvement and Warning/Failing, with a slight decrease from 39 percent Needs Improvement in 2001 to 30 percent in 2005 and a slight increase from 45 percent in 2001 to 54 percent in Warning/Failing. For Regular Education students, performance in 2005 was relatively similar to performance in 2001, with some variability in between. Despite corresponding variability from year to year, Special Education students' performance overall has increased modestly since 2001, when 100 percent of students scored Warning/Failing.

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

It is the determination of the Panel Review (PR) Team that the Fairview Veterans Memorial Middle School is not currently implementing a sound plan for improving student performance or an adequate system for documenting gains outlined in the plan. The current School Improvement Plan (SIP) initiatives at Fairview Veterans Memorial Middle School (FVMMS) are not clear and specific enough to guide the implementation of instructional changes that would ensure increases in student achievement in mathematics and English language arts (ELA). The present SIP is a three-year plan, spanning the 2003-04 to 2005-06 school years. Interviews with administrators, teachers and parents suggest there was limited participation among stakeholders in writing the SIP. Evidence that the plan was developed with sufficient data analysis to determine student weaknesses, the causes of these weaknesses and a connection to strategies being implemented at the classroom level is lacking. Though many aspects of the SIP have been implemented at some level throughout the school, there is no evidence of a systematic process currently in place for monitoring initiatives in order to ensure full and consistent implementation of these practices and programs.

School leadership and staff describe recent ongoing efforts to revise the current SIP through staff participation in the Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) process. In addition, during interviews with the Panel Review team, the school principal expressed general awareness of weaknesses in the current plan and her intention to lead improvements to the plan. Results from the 2005 MCAS administration show some gains in student performance, most notably in Grade 6 mathematics. However, the PR team and school staff were unable to conclusively link these gains to initiatives identified in the SIP.

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 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 determined that the Fairview Veterans Memorial Middle School (FVMMS) school improvement plan (SIP) is neither clear nor specific enough to effectively guide the

implementation of planned improvement initiatives. The SIP does not clearly document precise gaps in student performance, specific causes for performance gaps or alignment of performance gaps with the instructional objectives listed in the SIP. While the SIP describes certain instructional change objectives, it does not identify specific student learning objectives. Progress indicators for improved student learning are cited in the SIP, but they lack the specificity needed to assess and document evidence of student growth as instructional changes are implemented. The SIP does indicate planned professional development training, but does not describe follow-up training to ensure proper implementation of new instructional practices.

Though performance goals outlined in the plan appear to be aligned with federal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements and are expressed in terms of increases in the percentage of students scoring Advanced/ Proficient and decreases in Warning/Failure on the MCAS, the SIP does not clearly identify precise gaps in student performance or root causes to account for achievement gaps in both ELA and Math. As a result, instructional change objectives for improved student performance are based on MCAS results rather than an analysis of why students have achieved these results. The PR team found no documented evidence that the school has examined its educational practices as related to instruction, curriculum or assessment in order to articulate reasons for poor student performance in the current SIP. The principal's School Leadership Report indicates that 2004 MCAS results were analyzed last year (after the writing of the SIP); however, the plan has not been revised to include this information.

Most of the strategies for improvement in the current FVMMS SIP are broad-based, referencing lesson design, the increased use of established practices and the use of computer-assisted programs rather than specific instructional objectives for the classroom. While the SIP action plans describe the implementation of specific instructional strategies over a 2-3 year time frame, related activities are not sequenced in a way that would aid full implementation of these strategies. Furthermore, it is not clear when staff will be fully trained to implement stated practices. General progress indicators for improved student learning are cited in the SIP, but they lack the specificity needed to assess student growth as instructional changes are implemented. For example, the SIP describes pre- and post-test activities related to math goals for certain strategies, but it does not document the expected incremental increases in student performance. A key follow-up action to the strategy, "Create additional math programs to enhance student curriculum" is to "...implement in all classrooms" with corresponding progress indicators articulated in the plan as "ongoing program analysis" (*FVMMS SIP, Progress Indicators for Goal 2A*). There is no specific description of plans for analysis, either in terms of teacher implementation of instructional initiatives or for measuring student gains as a result of the respective program or strategy.

Though the district has offered professional development training for initiatives identified in the SIP, follow-up training to ensure the effective implementation of these new instructional approaches is not described. The SIP lists professional development activities to support new instructional approaches, but it lacks the corresponding statements of how and when these practices will be implemented or how their effectiveness will be assessed. Timelines for completion of some training are noted, but there are not methods to monitor the impact on classroom instruction as a result of professional development and how these changes are improving student achievement.

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

It is the determination of the PR team that the current SIP was not developed through a process likely to yield successful implementation. Through interviews and document review, the PR team determined that there was limited participation among stakeholders in the writing of the present SIP. Furthermore, there is not a process in place to ensure proper implementation and evaluation of instructional practices according to SIP guidelines. The current SIP was developed by the school council, with little input from teaching staff. There is no documented, systematic process for monitoring and evaluating the plan's implementation in order to make adjustments and revisions to the SIP as needed. Though some mandated training was offered by the district to support the planned initiatives, other training opportunities were voluntary. The majority of staff members interviewed expressed general awareness of the plan's existence, but many were unable to clearly articulate changes to their teaching tied to specific strategies identified in the plan.

The current district superintendent was principal of FVMMS at the time the SIP was written. According to the superintendent, the SIP was written by members of the School Council (3 FVMMS staff and 3 parents) with little support from the district. Due to time constraints, the principal did not solicit feedback and support from staff members and other stakeholders as originally planned. The superintendent and School Committee approved the plan for implementation beginning in 2003.

The PR team found no clear evidence of a systematic process to be used for monitoring and evaluating the plan's implementation. According to the current principal, informal classroom "walk-throughs" conducted by the principal, vice-principals, superintendent and assistant superintendent are used to monitor aspects of the plan that are in place; however there is not a consistent plan to collect data for on-going evaluation as a result of this walk-through process. The Curriculum Team Leaders (CTLs) are given information and directives by the principal as a result of walk-throughs, but have no authority to mandate or monitor implementation of these within their teams. Thus, it is up to individual teachers to oversee that changes are implemented. There are neither benchmarks nor consistent assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of these practices in increasing student achievement.

Though the professional development provided has been linked to several of the goals and objectives in the SIP, there has not been follow-up to ensure that classroom practices are changing as a result of this training. The SIP describes several professional development opportunities to support the instructional initiatives in the SIP. Progress indicators for the implementation of these initiatives are general, stating that teachers will "use.... curriculum and assessment 90% of the time by 12/22/04" (*under Goal #1 in the SIP*). Again, there is no mention in the plan for the follow-up support for this training or a plan for monitoring the respective instructional changes expected.

In past efforts to communicate the contents of the SIP, staff members received copies of the plan during curriculum team meetings. Curriculum team leaders (CTL) reportedly handed out the Plan again this year for all staff to read. In both the School Council and Parent Focus groups, parents stated that prior to the Panel Review process they were not aware of the plan or any of the specific initiatives, indicating that little information about the SIP was disseminated to stakeholders outside of the school faculty.

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

While most of the initiatives in the SIP have been implemented at some level throughout the school, there is not evidence of an adequate system of monitoring specific initiatives (nor a plan to do so) to ensure full and consistent implementation of these practices and programs. The majority of staff members state that they understand their roles and responsibilities in implementing the SIP action plans. However, many actions and strategies in the plan have been implemented at different levels in different classrooms without a specific accountability plan for implementing these changes. Teachers have had training opportunities in most areas of professional development mentioned in the plan, but though some training opportunities were mandated, others have been on a voluntary basis without sufficient or consistent follow-up and support to ensure school-wide implementation of the practices.

While staff members state that they understand their roles and responsibilities for implementation of actions in the SIP, articulation of specific strategies was not forthcoming. In response to the *Department of Education (DOE) Instructional Staff Survey*, over 92 percent of the staff agreed or strongly agreed that the school has a well-defined plan for addressing achievement gaps in ELA and math and that they are well-informed by school leadership as to what these are. In teacher focus groups, staff members consistently stated that they were satisfied with the SIP and understand what they have to do to implement the initiatives. In written responses, however, on the *DOE Instructional Staff Survey* to the question, "Do you know what you are expected to do to improve student performance according to the SIP?" over 80 percent of the staff cited generic goals for change such as "improve student performance" and "teach to diverse needs" and did not describe specific strategies for doing this. Only five of the 56 (9%) respondents to this question actually cited specific initiatives from the plan.

Certain actions and strategies outlined in the plan have been implemented at some level in different classrooms, but without a specific plan for monitoring the implementation of these changes. For example, during focus groups, the principal, CTLs and several teachers described the use of standards-based lesson (SBL) design as one of the primary instructional changes targeted in the SIP. The principal has estimated that approximately 50 - 60 percent of teachers currently write lessons to reflect a more standards-based approach to planning and are using these lessons more frequently in their classrooms. When asked to describe a SBL, the principal and staff members gave varied descriptions, ranging from a complete list of the main components of a SBL to a more vague response, such as "students work in groups." The PR team was told in a focus group that there is more than one format used to write a SBL and some teachers "don't write [SBL] lessons because they are too detailed." Teachers have been offered several professional development opportunities mentioned in the SIP, some of which have been mandated, but others that have been voluntary, without adequate follow-up and support to ensure the school-wide implementation of the practices. SBL training was offered three times in past years during district professional development days, so a number of teachers could attend. According to the principal, the majority of the teachers were trained in SBL, yet there was no mandate for using SBL to support the goal of 90 percent implementation by December 2004 (*under Goal #1 in the SIP*). Teachers have not been given adequate support and feedback as they teach SBLs in their classrooms. As a result, the PR team concluded that there are varied understandings among teachers as to what a true SBL looks like in practice. In classroom observations, panel members saw aspects of SBL in 3 out of 10 classrooms visited.

Another focused initiative in the FVMMS SIP is the use of SmartBoards in math classrooms. Because of technological problems, Smart-Boards were not installed in all math classrooms until April 2005. Teachers have been retrained to use these tools, but according to responses in teacher focus groups and classroom observations, not all math teachers are using the SmartBoards at this point. Though teachers and administration expressed enthusiasm for this tool because it encourages, “more positive student engagement and enthusiasm in participation,” there is no formative plan to assess whether or not the use of SmartBoards will measurably improve students’ math performance. The math support specialist, who provides math support to teachers across the school, is trained in the use of SmartBoards and is expected to provide on-going support for its implementation. The principal states that it is up to individual teachers to request support from the math support specialist. There is no evidence of a specific plan or schedule to ensure that all teachers have this support for effective and consistent use of this classroom teaching tool. During one observation, the teacher using the SmartBoard seemed at ease with it and had it connected to the Internet; in another classroom it was used as an interactive white board. SmartBoards were not being used in the other math classes observed that day by Panel members.

Other initiatives in the SIP that teachers claim to be implementing include the continuation of Math Problem of the Week and Math Word of the Week (WOW). These practices were first introduced in all sixth grade classes. According to the principal, they are now part of instructional practice in all math classes. Math Word of the Week is supported throughout the school by public announcements of the new math WOW and the expectation that this word will be used in some way across all classes. Panel members saw the WOW posted in a few classrooms. At this time, there is no process in place to monitor the consistency of these math practices in individual classrooms or resulting gains in student achievement.

FVMMS math teachers (except those new this year) have taken part in math training from the Massachusetts Math Institute (MMI) (*Key Action in SIP under Goal #1*), but there is no clear evidence as to how the training has changed teaching in math classes. The principal suggested that as a result of MMI training, observers should notice the use of manipulatives and of cooperative groups in math classes. The PR team observed students working in groups in some classrooms, including use of manipulatives (Geo Boards) in one classroom observed. There were no other indicators mentioned in focus group discussions of how MMI has impacted classroom practice or how it tied to standards-based lessons. There also was no direct evidence to suggest that student learning has increased as a result of MMI approaches. As directed in the SIP, a coach from Mass Insight will visit 16 times this year (at least once a month) to give support to all math teachers at the school. It was not clear from any interviews with either administration or staff that there is a schedule to visit individual teachers or how this math coach will give specific help to teachers as they implement these classroom instructional practices.

According to the principal, the superintendent and teachers, there has been an increase in writing in ELA classes and in the practice of answering open-response questions as cited in the SIP. They all confirmed that this conclusion was based on anecdotal evidence, as there are no required portfolios of writing to be collected and shared among teachers and administrators. When asked, one of the teachers interviewed said that ELA teachers have “a file of writing prompts” available from social science teachers (as indicated in the SIP) to practice in their classes, but their use is not required. Teachers report that there is more frequent use of rubrics for both students and teachers to evaluate writing, yet they claim that there is neither a system to

monitor use in any classes nor a formative way to measure student's progress as a result of this practice. Individual teachers determine the extent to which these practices are implemented and students' growth is monitored. It was mentioned during teacher interviews and teacher focus groups that some staff are doing more writing with students than others, yet there is no way to monitor or document this.

In summation, there is evidence from multiple sources that the school has implemented a number of the SIP initiatives to some degree in most classrooms. However, there is no consistent system of accountability, monitoring of implementation, or assessment of how these practices are improving student performance.

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

The FVMMS SIP does not have clear evidence that directly connects student gains to the specific initiatives listed in the plan. In the winter of 2005, the Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) Team and principal analyzed the 2004 MCAS results in the aggregate by content area and across grade levels to assess students' gains and to identify weaknesses and root causes for poor student achievement in ELA and math. The staff received verbal information regarding this analysis as well as aggregate MCAS results for both ELA and math for their content area and grade level to analyze on their own. No data apart from MCAS scores and anecdotal results of student progress from individual teachers have been used to benchmark and analyze student achievement as it relates to changes in instructional practices. The description of changes in classroom practices and the resulting effect on student improvement are varied and often specific to individual teachers or teaching teams.

During their 2004 MCAS result analysis, Curriculum Team Leaders (CTLs) identified the top five questions with highest results and the five questions with the poorest results. Other than in the principal's report, Panel members did not see any written documentation of these results at the time of the visit, and the SIP has not been revised to include these partial findings.

Staff reported that these analyzed MCAS results were discussed at faculty meetings and the aggregate MCAS results for both ELA and mathematics were distributed to grade level teachers. Teachers analyzed MCAS results in their grade and content area with their teams or by themselves if they so chose.

Other methods used to assess student gains included anecdotal results of student progress from individual teachers. Teachers rely on their own informal testing and observations of student behavior to measure student improvement. There is no other consistent feedback system established as yet to measure student progress and improvement in any other areas. According to the superintendent and the principal, as of 2005 the school is piloting the Assessment Technology, Incorporated (ATI) Galileo Management System to collect data. This fall, the school will administer the math pre-test to all students for the first time. Teachers report that they are looking forward to having this additional resource in place.

The PR team found that changes in classroom practices and tracking of student improvement are varied and specific to individual teachers or teaching teams. The 2005 MCAS results indicate a reduction in the percentage of students scoring in the Warning performance level for Grade 6 math students as compared to previous groups of sixth graders in both the aggregate and subgroups. Additionally, Grade 7 ELA students have made AYP in the aggregate since 1999. In

teacher focus groups, teachers repeatedly attributed part of the Grade 6 gains in math to the consistent use of Math Problem of the Week and Math Word of the Week, as well as the increased practice of MCAS style open-response and open-ended questions introduced in Grade 6 classrooms last year and to be implemented in all math classes this year. As teachers noted, assessments of student improvement are anecdotal from a variety of sources such as quizzes, the checking of daily work, and on-going observation of student progress. Teachers acknowledge that because individuals use different methods of assessment, they cannot attribute student improvement to any one intervention. There are no grade level benchmarks or cumulative measurements to assess their effectiveness in improving student math performance.

In teacher focus groups, ELA teachers attributed sustained MCAS performance to increased writing in all classes and to the use of rubrics by both teachers and students to score writing, both SIP goals (*under Goal #2B in the SIP*). Teachers are not required to keep portfolios of student writing and MCAS scores are not disaggregated to match specific teacher or grade level team practices with gains for these students. It is up to teams and teachers to analyze their own scores for their own purposes. Again these observations are anecdotal and are not measured in any consistent way as to document these gains.

Grade 8 math MCAS scores dropped for students in the aggregate and the special education subgroup in particular. Teachers report discouragement and frustration with the lower student performance results. “We work hard, but we don’t work smart!” “We don’t know what else to do!” Both the principal and teachers claim that transitions within the math staff have had a negative impact on student performance. Teachers further stated that there was a lack of meeting time to discuss proposed SIP changes in instructional practices and how these would improve student performance. In focus groups, teachers claimed that students who attended the after-school remediation program and, in particular, the Title I summer program, had made noticeable gains, particularly in math. This was based on pre-and post-test results specifically tied to the summer program, but as yet, there is no disaggregated analysis of MCAS results to document these same gains on the MCAS tests. During interviews and focus group discussions, teachers expressed a wish that both in-school and after-school support programs be mandated and that students remain in these programs until their performance has improved.

In conclusion, though there is improvement in some areas of MCAS testing, there is no evidence that these gains are a result of any specific SIP initiatives. The school intends to implement the ATI Galileo Assessment system and pre-test students in math in late fall 2005 to address some of the above issues regarding assessing student improvement relative to SIP initiatives.

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

The Panel Review Team has determined that some elements of strong leadership are in place at FVMMS—specifically in the areas of communication and management—and at the district level in regard to providing resources to the school. To date, however, the school has lacked adequate instructional leadership and systematic monitoring and review of the SIP at either the school or district level. School staff generally supports the improvement efforts, particularly new initiatives that are now underway.

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

The PR team believes that FVMMS has sound leadership in regard to communication and management, as well as the ability to build collegiality and morale and to run a safe and secure school. However, the team questions the availability of adequate instructional leadership necessary for the successful monitoring and evaluation of SIP instructional initiatives. The PR team has strong evidence from multiple sources that the new principal is well respected and has established a variety of ways to communicate with the staff. Teachers express support and confidence in the new principal to effectively manage the school and to build the morale needed to guide the implementation of the SIP. However, in the opinion of the Panel Review Team, the principal and new PIM team have yet to exhibit similar strength in terms of the instructional leadership needed to support the consistent implementation of classroom instructional initiatives and to monitor and evaluate these to meet SIP goals for student academic improvement.

The panel gathered strong evidence that suggests that the new principal is well respected and has established consistent ways to communicate with the staff. There are monthly faculty meetings in which the staff is informed of the principal's mission and any planned initiatives and goals for the school. The principal meets regularly with Curriculum Team Leaders (CTLs), who in turn disseminate information and directives to their respective teams. Each team has daily team planning time, and though this time is often taken up with parent conferences, CTLs disseminate information, discuss new initiatives and "catch up" new teachers during this time. The principal plans to attend individual team meetings when she can, and meet regularly with the PIM Team to revise the SIP.

Teachers express support and confidence in the new principal to effectively manage the school and to build the morale needed to effect positive change. During teacher focus group discussions, the PR team heard such comments as, "The principal has good intentions!" "We are coming together!" "...She can do the job!" In response to the *DOE Instructional Staff Survey*, 91 percent of the staff agreed with the statement, "Our school principal provides effective leadership to guide and support staff efforts to improve student academic performance of our students." During discussions in focus groups, teachers expressed optimism and confidence in the new principal and the PIM team and their ability to work on more deeply analyzing student's needs to lead to continuous changes for improvement. Guidance personnel stated that morale seems high despite the dismay when MCAS scores did not improve as expected. The School Council parent representatives (all three new this year) said they strongly support the principal and are ready to try to get more parents involved. They expressed an appreciation for some of the programs already being used to inspire students to work harder and to bring more parents into the school. With this evidence, the Panel Review Team determined that in a short time the principal has rallied support for her leadership in the areas of management and communication.

However, the school currently lacks similar strength and tools in terms of the instructional leadership needed to support the consistent implementation of instructional initiatives and to monitor and evaluate these to meet SIP goals for student academic improvement. The principal and assistant principals are the only staff members with evaluative responsibilities in the school. The principal meets once a month with CTLs, who share team concerns and issues. The principal gives information and directives regarding instructional practices and expectations to be brought to the teams, and the team leaders disseminate this information. However, the CTLs are not able to mandate or monitor any implementation of these instructional changes, expectations or practices within their teams. The principal attempts to walk through classrooms at least once or, ideally, twice a day. Since she has newly started this year and has been tied up with other

pressing responsibilities, this reportedly has not happened as much as planned. She tries to meet with individual teams during CTL planning time once a week, but is finding it difficult because of other conflicts such as parent conferences during those times. There is not a set schedule to meet with each team in place to guarantee a method of over-seeing instructional changes within these curriculum teams.

Vice principals are expected to meet with their assigned curriculum teams twice a week, to check plan books to ascertain that teaching standards are written for every day, though they do not give feedback. In addition, vice principals conduct daily walk-throughs to observe members of their teams, but they are not mandated to give feedback as a result of their observations. In focus groups, teachers expressed that they received no feedback on instruction at any time from anyone, even on their summative evaluations, other than an evaluative check-off for general instruction. The PR team reviewed lesson plans and did not see any comments for instructional improvements. The principal stated that the newly-hired math support specialist will also be giving support in the implementation of both SBL and the use of the SmartBoards, but she has no evaluative responsibility in her capacity and will not be able to hold teachers accountable for practice. Once a month, a math coach from Mass Insight will come to give follow-up support for all math teachers at the school. The coaches also have no evaluative responsibilities. For both initiatives it is up to teachers themselves to solicit this support. There is no system in place for monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of these support goals or their impact on student achievement, as described by the principal and math support specialist.

From the above evidence, the review team has determined that there is not adequate instructional leadership or a systematic process currently in place at the school level to sufficiently monitor and evaluate the implementation of instructional changes and initiatives or how they affect student academic improvement.

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

Staff members generally express support for the PIM team findings of the root causes for student poor performance in both math and ELA and the improvement efforts in place to address these. Additionally, approximately half of the 65 respondents to the *Staff Instructional Survey* identified lack of parent involvement and/or student apathy toward education as being the key causes of low student performance at the school. While in interviews, most staff expressed support for the improvement efforts described in the SIP and enthusiasm was directed more toward the new PIM team's efforts to more deeply analyze causes of poor student performance in the future and to revise the SIP accordingly.

In focus groups and the staff survey, teachers often claimed that math and ELA weaknesses can be attributed to lack of early preparation in the elementary grades, student apathy particularly toward the MCAS test "which doesn't really count now," and lack of parental support in motivating student to improve academically. In response to the question on the *DOE Instructional Staff Survey*, "What is the key to lack of improved student performance in the last three years," over 50 percent of the respondents referenced parents' apathy and lack of parent involvement as the primary reason for students' low performance. Over 25 percent of the teachers cited that student apathy and, in particular, the lack of concern for the importance of MCAS testing at this point in their lives was a problem for underperformance on MCAS. Approximately 10 percent of the respondents referenced lack of earlier training, curriculum, materials or classroom practices as problems. The SIP includes goals to increase parent

participation, but staff and the School Council stated that though attempts have been made to change this, there has been no noticeable increase in parent participation, and this remains a problem. The PR team concluded that some teachers have concerns that SIP instructional change initiatives alone may not improve student performance.

While most of the staff expressed support for the improvement efforts described in the SIP, the enthusiasm was directed more toward the new PIM team in their efforts to more deeply analyze causes of poor student performance in the future and to revise the SIP accordingly. In response to the staff survey, over 92 percent of the staff agreed or strongly agreed that the school has a well-defined plan for addressing achievement gaps in ELA and math. This was verbally supported in focus groups. There is some discouragement because of low results in student MCAS performance particularly for 8th grade math. As one teacher stated, "I was so depressed and shocked that 8th Grade MCAS scores did not improve." Other teachers expressed that they worked hard and do not know where to go from here, "We've tried everything." Staff is depending on the new PIM team to lead improvement efforts and expects to be involved in the process. The staff hopes that the new standards-based curriculum guides and new textbooks in ELA and math will add additional help in improving instruction and student performance. Many expressed confidence and hope that the PIM process will further guide these efforts.

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

The PR team determined that the district is giving strong support to the school in the area of resources, but may not be sufficiently informed as to the specific root causes of low student performance at FVMMS. The district may also not be prepared to provide a systematic way to monitor successful implementation of the SIP to improve student performance. The district has provided both financial resources and curriculum support to help FVMMS implement the SIP. It has also provided additional personnel to support the school's improvement efforts. Despite this support, the panel found that although the district is broadly informed of the general instructional needs of the school, to date it has had neither a system for collecting data to understand the specific needs and root causes of student under-performance nor a plan for systematic review and feedback of the implementation of the FVMMS SIP.

The district has provided financial resources and curriculum support to the school to support its implementation of the SIP. SmartBoards have been purchased and placed in all math classrooms and Scholastic Read 180 and Linda MoodBell Programs are in place in the Title I academic remediation room and the resource room, respectively. The district has provided on-going professional development in all areas and has released teachers for training in MMI. The district has revised and distributed standards-based curriculum guides in both ELA and Math to the school. The district also conducted a summative evaluation of the schools' Title I Program. Through focus group discussions, the principal and staff state that the district is actively supportive of the school's efforts to improve. In the *DOE Instructional Staff Survey*, 89 percent of respondents agreed that the district gives curriculum guidance and support.

The district has provided additional personnel to support the school's improvement efforts. With the help of a Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) Grant and the superintendent's initiative, the district has provided a full-time math support specialist and 16 days of visits from Mass Insight coaches to the FVMMS to support initiatives in math. The superintendent has also offered the school the support of the assistant superintendent in charge of curriculum—up to 70% of his time. Though there was no district involvement in the writing of the present 2003-2006 SIP, the

district assistant superintendent is a member of the new PIM team and plans to be involved in the development of a revised SIP. The superintendent determined that both the superintendent and the assistant superintendent would increase the frequency of walk-throughs to monitor SIP initiatives. There is no schedule for this in writing. The superintendent is also serving as a mentor for the new principal. In addition to his professional interest, he expressed a strong, personal concern that the school meets its improvement goals.

Despite this support, the panel determined that to date, the district has lacked the capacity to clearly articulate specific student academic weaknesses and the root causes for low performance and to systematically monitor instructional initiatives to address these issues at FVMMS. The superintendent and other district personnel described the performance needs of FVMMS students in terms of their MCAS results and AYP determinations. The superintendent expressed enthusiasm about the piloting of a new assessment program, the ATI Galileo Assessment System, which will provide pre-test and post-test math data to assess student improvement as a result of instructional practices. The program has yet to be implemented, however, and thus the PR team is unable to base any judgments on it. At this time, the superintendent plans to monitor the implementation of instructional initiatives at FVMMS by increasing the number of informal walk-throughs by the superintendent and assistant superintendent as well as through his mentoring of the new principal. There is no formative and systematic plan for evaluating instructional initiatives in place as a result of these visits. There is no evidence of a plan as to what the district will be looking for to indicate that instructional practices are being implemented effectively and consistently.

While the district has provided substantial resources to the school and district and staff members express positive expectations regarding new initiatives, the panel has determined that the district may lack the capacity to adequately support the oversight and monitoring of the implementation of instructional changes and their impact on student performance at FVMMS.

CONCLUSION

Based on evidence from multiple sources, the Panel Review team concludes that the current Fairview Veterans Memorial School Improvement Plan is neither a sound plan for supporting instructional changes to improve student performance, nor that student performance gains made to date can be connected to particular instructional change initiatives. Additionally, the team has concluded that leadership is in place within the school and the district for providing a safe and secure environment and that the management resources exist for supporting the changes needed to take place. However, adequate instructional leadership for systematic monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of improvement plans as they relate to student gains in achievement at either the school or the district level is currently lacking.

APPENDIX A
Team Members

Karen Laba, Panel Review Chair, SchoolWorks LLC, Beverly, MA

Linda Moriarty, Panel Review Co-chair, SchoolWorks LLC, Beverly, MA

Matthew Pakos, Panel Coordinator, Massachusetts Department of Education, Malden, MA

Emily Finkel, Panelist, Massachusetts Department of Education, Malden, MA

Karen Vigue, Panelist, Massachusetts Department of Education, Malden, MA

Douglas Greer, Panelist, Principal, Robert M. Hughes Academy Charter School, Springfield,
MA

Steven Leonard, Panelist, Consultant, Boston, MA

Sandra Esterson, Panelist, Retired Curriculum Director, Bellingham, MA

APPENDIX B

Fairview Veterans Memorial Middle School Chicopee Public Schools POTENTIALLY UNDER-PERFORMING PANEL REVIEW SCHEDULE November 8 and 9, 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.