

## **School Panel Review Report Harriet T. Healy Elementary School Fall River 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 Harriet T. Healy Elementary School met this criterion and was one of 21 schools selected for panel review in fall 2005. The panel review was conducted on November 21 and 22, 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 Harriet T. Healy Elementary School is deemed under-performing. The panel was not asked to formulate a sound plan for school improvement where such a plan does not presently exist or to recommend a course of action to create the conditions for successful implementation of sound improvement strategies where such conditions at present do not appear to exist. Diagnostic and/or prescriptive intervention, where needed to assist an under-performing school, occurs at the next stage of the school review process.

### **Harriet T. Healy Elementary School Profile**

#### **Enrollment**

The Harriet T. Healy Elementary School serves students in Grades K-5. Enrollment at Healy has decreased for two years in a row, from a peak of 233 students in 2003 to a low of 203 students in 2005. Between 2002 and 2005, student demographics have changed slightly. The percentages of Asian and White students have dropped by three percent each, while the percentages of Black and Hispanic students have risen four percent and two percent, respectively. The percentages Low-Income and Limited English Proficient students have both risen by five percent since 2002, while the percentage of First Language Not English students has risen by four percent and the percentage of Special Education students has dropped by two percent. The 2005 percentages of Hispanic, Low-Income, First Language Not English, and Limited English Proficient students are

significantly higher than state averages. Proportions of Healy student subgroups in 2005, as compared to state averages, are presented below:

Subgroup	2005 Enrollment (%)	
	School	State
Asian	0	5
Black	11	9
Hispanic	49	12
Native American	0	0.3
White	39	74
Low-Income	90	28
First Language Not English	53	14
Limited English Proficient	37	5
Special Education	8	16

In 2005, the attendance rate at the Healy School was 92.5 percent, with students absent 12.4 days on average, demonstrating absenteeism rates that are lower than the district but higher than the state averages. Absenteeism at Healy is highest in the younger grades and lowest in the upper grades. Hispanic students have the highest rate of absenteeism within the school, averaging 14.7 days absent and 36.8 percent chronically absent (absent more than 10% of days enrolled in the school). The school's retention rate was 6.0 percent in 2004, the last year for which this data is available. Healy's in-school suspension rate in 2005 was 0.0 percent, while out-of-school suspensions averaged 3.9 percent, a drop from previous years. 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 Harriet T. Healy School staffing report indicates that the school is comprised of one administrator, 18 teachers, two guidance counselors, one teacher leader/curriculum facilitator, nine teacher aides and two other staff members. The principal has been at the school for five years and has a total of five years of administrative experience. Of the teachers, nearly 58 percent have been at the school for less than five years, and almost 32 percent (6 teachers) are new to the school this year. All but three teachers have been at the school for less than ten years. However, the staff averages close to 19 years of teaching experience, and approximately half of the teachers have more than 25 years of teaching experience. Nearly 94 percent of teachers are reported as highly qualified, and approximately 47 percent hold an advanced degree.

### MCAS Overview

Students at the Healy School are assessed in Grades 3 and 4 in English language arts (ELA) and in Grade 4 in mathematics. Healy's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report for 2005 Mid-Cycle IV shows an accountability status of Corrective Action for ELA and No Status for mathematics. The school failed to make AYP in ELA in 2005 for the aggregate population and for its only reported subgroup, Low-Income.<sup>1</sup> The school did not make AYP for ELA in 2001 and 2002 and

<sup>1</sup> 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

then made AYP for the aggregate only in 2003. The school has not made AYP in ELA for the last two years in either the aggregate or for the Low-Income subgroup. In mathematics, the school has made AYP since 1999 with the exception of 2004.

In 2005, the aggregate Composite Performance Indices (CPIs) for the Healy School were 72.0 in ELA and 72.5 in mathematics. Year-by-year aggregate CPIs are shown below:

<b>Year-by-Year Aggregate CPI Data Summary</b>		
<b>Year</b>	<b>ELA</b>	<b>Math</b>
2001	75.9	54.3
2002	69.0	64.1
2003	78.9	77.3
2004	76.4	59.2
2005	72.0	72.5
State Target 2005	80.5	68.7

### **GRADE 3**

#### **Reading MCAS Results**

Results of the 2005 Grade 3 Reading MCAS for students at the Healy School are presented below:

<b>2005 Reading</b>	<b>Percent</b>		
	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W/F</b>
Aggregate	29	48	23
Regular Education	47	47	6
Limited English Proficient	8	46	46

Due to its small overall size and low percentage of Special Education students, this subgroup is too small in number or percentage to be reported as a subgroup, although these students are represented in the school. This, along with the reported performance of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in Grade 3, is reflected in differences between aggregate and Regular Education performance. As seen in the chart above, eight percent of LEP students scored Proficient as compared to 47 percent of Regular Education students. Overall, there has been a gradual decline in student performance since 2001, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 3 Reading MCAS performance shown on the next page:

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determination of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The subgroup meeting the minimum sample size at the Harriet T. Healy School in 2005 was Low-Income for ELA only. No subgroups met the minimum sample size for mathematics.

Aggregate Reading	Percent		
	P	NI	W/F
2005	29	48	23
2004	33	55	12
2003	39	42	18
2002	42	48	9
2001	44	47	9

Although the percentage of students scoring Needs Improvement has remained fairly steady, the percentage of students scoring Advanced or Proficient has decreased steadily since 2001, from 44 percent to 29 percent in 2005. Correspondingly, the percentage of students scoring Warning/Failing has increased from nine percent in 2001 to 23 percent in 2005. This indicates movement from Proficient to Needs Improvement and from Needs Improvement to Warning/Failing. Data for Limited English Proficient students are available only for 2003 and 2005, with little change between the two years.

**GRADE 4**

**ELA MCAS Results**

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

2005 ELA	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	5	48	43	5
Regular Education	6	47	41	6

Limited English proficient scores are not reported for Grade 4 due to low student numbers. Overall, there was a gradual increase in student performance from 2001 to 2004, and then a slight decrease in 2005, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 4 ELA MCAS performance shown below:

Aggregate ELA	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	5	48	43	5
2004	5	50	36	9
2003	0	50	38	12
2002	6	39	27	27
2001	0	30	65	4

The percentage of students scoring Advanced or Proficient rose from a low of 30 percent in 2001 to a high of 55 percent in 2004, and then slightly declined to 52 percent in 2005. The percentages of students scoring Needs Improvement and Warning/Failing have varied a bit more, but still show some improvement over time, particularly from 2002 to 2005.

**GRADE 4**

**Mathematics MCAS Results**

Results of the 2005 Grade 4 Mathematics MCAS for students at the Healy School are presented below:

<b>2005 Mathematics</b>	<b>Percent</b>			
	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W/F</b>
Aggregate	14	24	48	14
Regular Education	12	24	53	12

Overall, there was a gradual increase in student performance from 2001 to 2005, with a dip in performance in 2004, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 4 Mathematics MCAS performance shown below:

<b>Aggregate Mathematics</b>	<b>Percent</b>			
	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W/F</b>
2005	14	24	48	14
2004	5	18	50	27
2003	8	27	50	15
2002	9	21	42	27
2001	0	0	78	22

The percentage of students scoring Advanced or Proficient rose significantly from a low of zero percent in 2001 to 35 percent in 2003, declined to 23 percent in 2004, then rose to a high of 38 percent in 2005. With some variability from 2001 to 2005, percentages of students scoring Needs Improvement and Warning/Failing have decreased by 30 percent and eight percent, respectively. Data for Regular Education students show slightly wider variability from year to year, but still exhibits overall improvements in performance. Due to low student numbers in Grade 4, Limited English Proficient and Special Education scores are not reported.

## PANEL RESPONSES TO THE KEY QUESTIONS

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

The staff at the Harriet T. Healy Elementary School has implemented a plan for improvement closely linked with its implementation of specific core academic programs in reading and mathematics. However, the plan is not sound because it fails to identify the specific needs of its substantial English language learner population. The school does not have evidence to demonstrate that schoolwide gains in student performance rates can be attributed to implementation of the school's improvement plan initiatives.

#### **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 (SIPs) 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 Harriet T. Healy Elementary School Improvement Plan is clear in its format and layout and it focuses on the instructional causes of poor student performance. However, the plan is not specific enough to guide needed improvement efforts because of its omission of key elements and its insufficient depth of analysis of available data. A major weakness of the plan is its failure to specify strategies to serve the substantial number (37%) of limited English proficient students at the school. School planners did not undertake an analysis of a variety of data sources and did not specify how teachers were to implement the strategies in the plan. Coupled with its omissions, the plan is flawed also in the depth of analysis of MCAS items and the weak logical connection between data about student learning gaps, the choice of identified strategies and the training of teachers to implement the strategies.

The major weakness of the Harriet T. Healy School Improvement Plan is its omission of strategies for its large population of limited English proficient students. The school serves as a magnet school for limited English proficient (LEP) students in grades K-3. Currently, 37 percent of the population is classified by limited proficiency in English, a proportion that has not

changed substantially over the preceding three years. Members of the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT)—the group primarily responsible for writing the SIP—understood district guidelines that required them to write strategies *only* for the school as a whole, not for any subgroups. When probed, at least one member of the ILT offered that, if they had their choice to re-write the plan, they would certainly have developed strategies directly addressing the needs of the LEP students in grades K-3. Confusion on this aspect of plan development, coupled with other misunderstandings of district guidelines, demonstrates weaknesses in the planning process.

A second omission in the plan is the analysis of data on student performance from a variety of sources. Confusion over plan development guidelines led the ILT to use only 2004 MCAS data to develop their plan. One member commented that the team realized they did not have enough data, particularly since the school has a small number of students taking the tests (33 third graders and 22 fourth graders in 2004). Panelists agreed with the ILT's recognition that MCAS data are insufficient for the development of a sound plan. One piece of data omitted from the planner's analysis was student attendance. Failure to meet student attendance targets resulted in the Healy school not attaining Adequate Yearly Progress for 2004. The school's 2004 plan does not identify attendance as an area of need – an omission that further weakens the plan's effectiveness as a guide to improvement.

In addition to the gaps in the plan, the school's analysis of MCAS lacks detail. The connections between student learning needs and the strategies to address those needs are unclear. The ELA data analysis section of the Healy SIP declares that one area of student learning needs is “the elements and themes of drama” (Learning Standard 17). In conversation with ILT members, this area of need was based on identification of two MCAS items in which Healy students performed poorly. While poor performance in a particular strand of the curriculum frameworks is an indicator of a gap in student skill or knowledge, the ILT's analysis did not probe further into the details of the learning standard (Learning Standard 17: “Students will identify, analyze, and apply knowledge of the themes, structure, and elements of drama and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding.”) to identify which aspect of dramatic literature was a particular problem for Healy students. Without a precise identification of student learning gaps, the school's improvement initiatives may or may not meet the students' needs.

Connections between the learning gaps and improvement strategies are the core components of a school improvement plan. In the Healy SIP, these links are vague or missing. As one example, Student Learning Objective 1.1 proposes that students will “identify, analyze, and apply knowledge of the purposes, structure and elements of nonfiction.” One major strategy to address that objective says, “Teacher will use nonfiction books as read-alouds.” It is unclear how the strategy of reading aloud using nonfiction books will lead to improved student skill in applying, analyzing, or identifying elements of nonfiction materials. In subsequent pages, the plan lists “read-alouds” in discussing Instructional Change Objective 1.1, but does not explain how teachers will obtain the training or support necessary to help them become skilled at implementing this improvement strategy.

In mathematics, Student Learning Objective 1.1 indicates that Healy students must “be able to select and use appropriate operations to solve problems, including money.” To address this learning need, the Healy document lists the “cause” to be: “Teachers have not provided adequate exposure to math vocabulary on a regular basis,” a statement that does not explain how operations and vocabulary connect. Further, the Instructional Change Objective associated with that learning objective and cause states: “All teachers will model and provide examples to

facilitate discussion of problem solving techniques.” Major strategies designed to accomplish that change objective include: “Teachers in K-5 will provide daily opportunities to review and apply math vocabulary;” and “Teachers will refer to posted math vocabulary.” The lack of logical connection between skill with operations, problem solving and vocabulary demonstrate a significant weakness in the Healy SIP.

The Healy Plan was reviewed by the Review Panel, by a team of readers at the Department of Education and by several district staff members. Additional flaws that keep the plan from being an effective guide were noted. In the academic areas of the plan, specific outcome benchmarks are scattered throughout the document, with vague definitions of the measurable targets to be met that will represent effective implementation. For example, plan books will be examined for evidence of read-alouds, but there is no measure of the impact of the read-aloud on student learning of nonfiction skills.

The Panel concluded that staff members demonstrate familiarity and commitment to the Healy SIP and view it as clear and easy to use. As written, however, the plan suffers from serious weaknesses in key areas: identification of priority student groups, accurate identification of student learning needs, evidence of detailed analysis of a variety of sources of information on student learning needs, and clear linkage between learning problems, strategies and training for teachers to improve their skill in order to implement the strategies in the plan.

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

For the most part, the Healy School Improvement Plan was developed through a process that will support its successful implementation. Wide representation of school staff on the ILT, who developed the SIP, fosters widespread support for the plan. In addition, the plan is distributed widely to inform stakeholders of the plan’s initiatives. However, the process of identifying methods for ongoing evaluation and revision of the plan are informal and, as a result, unlikely to provide meaningful information to make ongoing adjustments to the SIP as necessary.

The Healy SIP was developed by a core group who represents the interests of faculty at the school. Teachers of English language learners represent one important subgroup in the school. In grades K-3, students at Healy are assigned to regular classrooms or to sheltered English immersion (SEI) classes. The needs of SEI teachers and students differ from the needs of regular classroom teachers and students; an experienced SEI teacher serves on the ILT. Grades 4 and 5 at Healy consist of only one classroom each, and the fourth grade teacher represents the interests of those grades on the ILT. All but one of the members of the ILT has served with the planning group for several years. The small size of the school staff (n=10) allows this small ILT to represent the range of interests and needs across the school.

The process for development of the Healy SIP involved a small core group but the plan is communicated widely. The ILT members are the major contributors to the construction of the plan. The School Council, which includes two ILT members, was not involved in developing or approving the plan. Paraprofessionals were not part of the ILT but received information during regular staff meetings and in continuing professional development meetings as the plan evolved. Final versions of the plan were distributed to parents in the fall, but parents were not part of the development process. District staff offered training in the planning process and provided guidance on plan components through the winter and spring of 2005.

Communication of the plan to all stakeholders improves the likelihood of the plan's successful implementation. As noted previously, parents received copies of the plan in fall 2005. Despite the absence of district approval for the 2005-2007 SIP, staff members received information about the plan at faculty meetings during spring 2005 while the plan was in development and again when it was finalized in September 2005.

Missing from the planning process is a systematic way to gather and analyze data to evaluate the plan's implementation and to revise the plan based on new information. According to the principal, "We sit and talk about the plan, discuss what's not working and what is," but these conversations do not make use of evidence about the plan's implementation to guide decisions to make adjustments. Recently the principal constructed a walk-through instrument to collect information on the plan's strategies in classrooms. However, little information has been collected and the information that is available is not sufficient to document school-wide trends and make necessary adjustments to instruction and related improvement practices.

In summary, the Harriet T. Healy School SIP was developed by a representative group and disseminated to a large majority of the school's stakeholders. However, the school does not have an adequate process in place for tracking the implementation of plan initiatives, which is critical to the ongoing success of improvement efforts.

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

Many of the strategies specific to the SIP are widely implemented at the Healy Elementary School, including the core academic programs (Reading First/Harcourt *Trophies* and *Investigations*). Staff members understand the expectations for implementation of the strategies in the plan and panelists saw many of the SIP activities in the classes they visited. Professional development to date has focused on the core academic programs in the SIP to ensure that teachers are receiving the training needed to implement the strategies.

Staff members who responded to the *DOE Instructional Staff Survey* and who were interviewed during the panel review restated the SIP strategies when describing what they were expected to do to improve student performance. Responses to the DOE survey question 12—"Do you know what you are expected to do to improve student performance according to your school's improvement plan?"—are directly linked to the instructional change objectives (ICOs) in the plan. For example: "use assessments to individualize instruction;" "use assessments to group students for individualized instruction;" and "use assessments to assign students to the appropriate interventions." ICO 1.3 states: "All teachers K-5 . . . will use the results of approved assessments . . . to engage below grade level readers in small group instruction that targets specific deficits" (SIP p 2-3). Other survey responses capture elements of other ICOs as well. For example: "differentiate instruction; provide small group instruction; use manipulatives; daily opportunities to apply math vocabulary; use nonfiction as read-alouds; implement Reading First." Teachers, paraprofessionals and interventionists repeated the survey responses when interviewed. There is widespread awareness of the specific expectations documented in the Healy SIP.

Ten classes were visited during the school's literacy block. Team members saw evidence of many of the SIP strategies across the school. Small group instruction and the assignment of students to interventions were seen in eight of the classes. Differentiation of content with small groups during their time with the teacher was clear in three classes. Eight of the ten teachers

described their strategies for using assessment results to assign students to small groups or interventions. Additional evidence of the implementation of assessment-based student groupings, showing the results of the first DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy) administration as well as assignment of students and interventionists for targeted language support, was posted in the panelists' workroom by the principal.

The panel did not observe mathematics classes during the visit. Seven classrooms had posted mathematics "word walls" in clear view, and teachers reported intentionally reviewing mathematics vocabulary each day. Manipulatives associated with the *Investigations* mathematics program were present, though in at least one classroom, mathematics materials remained in a sealed box.

The professional development activities at Healy, though not specified in detail in the SIP, are likely to support the plan's goals and objectives through their linkage to the core academic programs, Reading First (Harcourt *Trophies* and associated materials) and *Investigations* (mathematics). According to the calendar for the start of the 2005-2006 school year, ELA and reading-focused training sessions have been delivered on DIBELS (a Reading First assessment), Project Read (one of the Reading First interventions alluded to in the SIP), and Early Reading Intervention (ERI—another intervention referenced in the SIP). Training in the mathematics program, *Investigations*, occurred before the school year in August, and more sessions are scheduled by the district every other month. Additional trainings for teachers in Developing Mathematical Ideas (DMI) are on the calendar continuing from last year. Paraprofessionals at Healy, who are the primary providers of many of the intervention programs associated with Reading First, attend the training sessions along with the teachers—a critical decision, given the importance placed on the intervention programs in the Healy SIP. While there are no professional development sessions specifically citing the student needs in the SIP (identify and use basic facts and main ideas; identify, analyze and apply elements of nonfiction and elements of drama; using operations to solve problems, etc.), the Reading First training sessions incorporate many of the school's identified targets.

From the survey and interview evidence, corroborated by class visits, panelists concluded that the plan's strategies for ELA are widely implemented across the school. Strategies in mathematics are reportedly in place. Despite their widespread implementation, the issue remains of whether the strategies identified in the plan are addressing the priority needs of Healy students so that gains in achievement are likely to be forthcoming.

#### **D. What improvement gains relative to SIP goals or benchmarks have been achieved through implementation of the plan?**

While individual student assessments are regularly used by teachers at the Healy School, the data are not suited to evaluating the direct impact of the plan's strategies on student achievement. Teachers report changes in their instructional practice as a result of implementation of the core academic programs and the SIP strategies but there is no evidence of school-wide gains relative to SIP goals as a result of the plan's implementation. As a result, it is not possible to link gains in student achievement to the school's SIP strategies or to report on the quality of implementation of the plan's strategies.

Teachers' descriptions of their changing instructional practices link closely with their work on the Reading First initiative, now in its third year. Teachers of Grades K-3 have been trained to

use DIBELS assessment results to group students by level of risk. The homogeneous groups become an organizing tool for structuring teacher's lessons. One teacher explained, "Before, my grouping was really subjective. Now I know what each student needs." The DIBELS assessment identifies the specific fluency need for the individual students, who are then assigned by the school's Reading Specialist to small groups for intervention. Teachers in Grades 4 and 5 have less access to data and intervention support, though they recently received training in DIBELS. However, DIBELS measures language fluency—only one of the literacy skills intermediate students are expected to master on the Grade 4 ELA MCAS. It is unclear whether DIBELS assessments will help teachers make instructional decisions across a broad range of language arts skills and knowledge.

The school's Reading First consultant and the district Teacher in Charge of Elementary Reading cited evidence from the DIBELS to assert evidence of gains resulting from the Reading First initiative, as specified in the SIP. The Reading First review of the Fall River School District conducted by the Department of Education's Division of Reading in spring 2005 cites evidence from the Donahue Institute of a correlation between performance on the oral reading fluency (ORF) subtest of DIBELS and Grade 3 MCAS performance. Healy results on DIBELS from 2003 to spring 2005 show improving performance among students in Grades K, 1 and 2 on some DIBELS subtests. For Grade 3, however, only 28 percent of Healy students "met benchmark" in spring 2005, a precursor to their MCAS performance, in which only 29 percent of third graders scored in the Proficient range. According to the Reading First support providers, fall 2005 DIBELS results for the current third graders at Healy point toward similar results on the 2006 MCAS.

Changes in instructional practice are reported for mathematics teaching, though they were not directly observed by the panel. According to staff at the school, the *Investigations* program emphasizes concrete experiences with mathematics, with fewer worksheets and homework than traditional mathematics curricula. While several primary teachers reminded the panelists that manipulatives were always a central part of early mathematics experiences and not much new in their teaching repertoire, some upper grade teachers reported they are "still struggling" with this new instructional approach. The panel did not observe mathematics classes directly to assess whether the mathematics vocabulary strategies or focus on number sense are evident in classrooms. *Investigations* is a new mathematics program at Healy this year, so no evidence has been gathered to assess its impact on student achievement.

Benchmark data to assess the school's SIP strategies were not available during the development of the SIP and little new data has been gathered to identify any gains attributed to the SIP strategies. The principal recently constructed a walk-through instrument to monitor the implementation of strategies, but data from the walk-throughs are sparse and not collated to provide an overview of school-wide instructional changes or their impact on student learning.

The Fall River School District recently initiated a self-assessment process for principals to evaluate their school's SIP implementation. The Monthly Benchmark Report from the Healy principal has been submitted for September and October 2005. The report asks for a rating from 0 to 4 for each of the school's instructional change objectives (ICOs) and student learning objectives (SLOs).

The principal’s ratings in October for ELA are shown here:

0 = not begun 1 = just starting 2 = implementing with difficulty 3 = implementing with some success 4 = implementing with success

	Objective	Score	Objective	Score	Objective	Score
ICOs	1.1 (nonfiction)	3	1.2 (drama)	1	1.3 (assessments guide instruction )	Dib, 4; CBM, 4; NWEA, 1
SLOs	1.1 (nonfiction)	2	1.2 (drama)	1	1.3 (facts and main ideas)	3

Anecdotal reports of walk-throughs serve as evidence for the principal’s ratings with no additional objective performance results to corroborate the principal’s judgment. It is unclear how these benchmarks will be used by either the school or the district to assess the effectiveness of the school’s implementation of its SIP strategies or to monitor the impact of the school’s initiatives on student achievement.

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

While the staff is working diligently to implement the school’s core academic programs and to incorporate SIP goals, the instructional leadership at both the district and the school are insufficient to guide their work toward the priority needs of the students at Healy. The level of commitment among the staff to the students is commendable and evident throughout the school. However, without direction and guidance from district and building leaders, the work of the staff is not likely to lead to sufficient gains in student achievement to meet the high standards expected of all children.

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

The Healy School is led by effective managers who communicate well, nurture a positive climate and foster strong morale. Staff express confidence in the leadership of the Healy School and describe a school climate conducive to positive change. However, instructional leadership at both the school and district levels is insufficient to guide improvement efforts. Instructional changes at the Healy School are guided by the adopted core academic programs with little direction from the school leaders.

Staff members at the Healy School express strong confidence in the ability of the school leader. On the *DOE Instructional Staff Survey*, 89 percent of respondents strongly agree and 11 percent agree with the statement, “Our school principal provides effective leadership to guide and support staff efforts to improve the academic performance of our students.” In interviews conducted during the panel review, paraprofessionals describe the principal as fair and supportive. One declared, “She gives us wings,” indicating the principal demonstrates respect for the paraprofessionals and allows them the freedom to make professional decisions.

Teachers at Healy declare that the positive professional climate at Healy is a powerful indicator of the school’s potential for success. One teacher explained the interactions between teachers by saying, “Because we all feed off one another and we all share our best with each other, we’re going to succeed. I’ve been in other schools where asking for help or ideas isn’t appreciated.” The school climate is praised by parents as well, one of whom declared, “I wouldn’t put my kids

anywhere else!” Specifically, parents identified the teachers as reasons for their trust that the school will succeed: “Teachers here are wonderful!” and continue to explain the frequent communication with the home as one reason for their praise. They describe a welcoming atmosphere for parents at Healy as an important factor in their support of the school. Taken together, the teachers’ confidence in school leaders, parent’s confidence in teachers and supportive collegial relationships describe a climate and culture that encourages a belief in the potential for the school.

In contrast to the sound management of school operations and a strong positive climate, leadership for the improvement of instruction is lacking at Healy and at the district. Decisions about appropriate instructional practices are defined by the district’s core academic programs (Reading First [Harcourt *Trophies*] and *Investigations*) in explicit and prescribed ways. The principal’s role is as manager of the implementation of these programs and requires monitoring to ensure their faithful implementation. To carry out her monitoring tasks, the principal recently created a checklist to track activities she observed in classrooms. The 2004-2005 form emphasized activities associated with Reading First: “Tier I Block Time—whole group, small group;” “The instruction pertained to—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, unrelated.” The revised 2005-2006 checklist tool lists items on the SIP: “explanation of nonfiction”; “discussion on drama”; and “use of approved assessment administration.” The principal’s tool allows her to record whether teachers are addressing the topics identified in the SIP, but it lacks discussion of the quality of teachers’ instruction or indicators of student learning in the classroom. Though the tool looks at important classroom elements, it does not provide a way to gather information about whether students are actively involved in the learning experience teachers have provided.

To assess instructional leadership at Healy, several teachers were asked during interviews what kind of feedback they received and whether it was helpful in improving their teaching. The two teachers responding to the question indicated the feedback they received was positive and supportive, but it did not offer much advice on ways to improve instruction. Teachers corroborated the panel’s assessment that the sources of instructional guidance are the support personnel for the Reading First initiative. Three samples of formal evaluations were provided for panelists’ review. In each of the three cases, the principal rated the staff member as “exceeding expectations” and the narrative summary offered only minor suggestions for improving the lesson observed for the evaluation. Finally, paraprofessionals who play a critical role in delivering the intervention instruction to small groups defined in the Reading First initiative and in the SIP, reported they receive no feedback or evaluation of their work except from the teacher for whom they provide support. The absence of substantive instructional feedback from the principal that focuses not just on the faithfulness of implementation but also on the impact of the instruction on students is a critical gap at Healy Elementary School.

District instructional leadership is equally lacking. As currently organized, there is no district staff member specifically “assigned” to Healy. Instead, according to the three district personnel interviewed by the panel, central office curriculum directors wait to be asked before visiting a school. As a result, Healy has received no direct support for its principal to guide instructional practices. Grant-funded personnel have been the primary source of instructional guidance, particularly the Reading First consultant from Interventions Development Education Assessment Learning (IDEAL) Consulting Services and the district Teacher in Charge of Elementary Reading. As described previously, these two individuals—along with the part-time mathematics

coach (2 days per week) and Title I teacher—monitor teachers' implementation of the core academic programs. They oversee the work of the reading specialist in administering and using the DIBELS to assign students to interventions, but they do not evaluate the quality of teaching as they circulate among the classrooms. That responsibility remains the role of the principal.

Overall, Healy Elementary School enjoys sound management and high morale—conditions that position it to make strides toward improvement. The lack of strong instructional leadership and oversight from both the principal and district leaves a gap in directing the committed staff toward the common vision of increasing student learning as a result of the implementation of their initiatives.

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

There is widespread support across the school for the improvement efforts identified in the SIP. Faculty agrees that the strategies in the plan will address the areas of weaknesses and are likely to lead to improvement in student achievement. As discussed in Question 1B, Healy staff shows widespread support for the school's improvement efforts. Staff members are actively implementing the plan's strategies and the reading specialist uses the DIBELS to periodically assess the impact of the school's strategies (Question 1C). In addition, the school's faculty maintains supportive and collegial relationships that are rooted in a belief for the school's potential. This is further evidenced by the parents' confidence in the teaching staff as discussed in Question 2A. There is clear evidence that the staff accepts the conclusions documented in the SIP and is willing to actively participate in efforts to improve student performance at the Harriet T. Healy Elementary School.

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

The Healy School has received inadequate planning guidance and implementation support from the Fall River Public Schools to develop and enact a useful plan to improve student performance. Major flaws in the Healy SIP were not identified or corrected in a timely manner by district support personnel. The district fails to provide the needed coordination and leadership for the English language learner programs at Healy and across the district. The district provides minimal support for professional development beyond grant-funded training.

District personnel assigned responsibility for supporting the development of the Healy SIP did not offer sufficient guidance and feedback to correct major flaws in the school's plan. Healy ILT representatives attended district planning meetings and understood the guidance from those sessions to require they address the needs of the school only in the aggregate and that they use only MCAS results to identify student learning needs. These major misconceptions of the planning process were not recognized nor corrected by district planning staff, resulting in a 2005-2007 SIP that has significant flaws. The Healy ILT reported receiving no written feedback on their plan while it was under development, nor after the June 2005 submission to the district.

According to interviews with district representatives during the panel review, a SIP feedback process is now in place but they have not had time to review all schools' plans. District personnel promised completion of its review of the most recent version of the Healy SIP in the near future. Preliminary to the written feedback, district staff describes the Healy plan as "unsound," particularly for the two reasons identified by the review panel—lack of identification of the English language learners subgroup and lack of depth in analysis of student learning needs.

A major gap revealed during the panel review occurs in leadership and guidance for the English language learners (ELL) across the district. Neither Healy staff nor the superintendent could explain the rationale for the placement of the ELL magnet program for students in Grades 1-3 at the Healy School. As it operates, students entering Fall River with limited English proficiency are assigned to Healy until Grade 3. Then if they continue to lack sufficient English proficiency, they are transferred to a different elementary school for Grades 4 and 5, where the intermediate ELL program continues. Healy teachers responsible for the ELL students describe a desperate need for a curriculum for their students that will parallel the Reading First initiative and provide the necessary additional support for language acquisition. However, the district has no administrator in charge of English learner programs. Coordination between the programs for Grades K-3 and Grades 4-5 is absent.

In addition to the absence of planning support and leadership for ELL services, the Fall River district offers little direct support for implementation of the school's strategies. As discussed previously, implementation of the core academic programs demands the attention of school staff, with the specific SIP focus areas integrated into the Harcourt *Trophies* and *Investigations* lessons. Support for personnel and material resources for the school's academic programs comes from the grant funding that brought these initiatives to the school. The Reading First grant funds the school's Reading Specialist and the services of the IDEAL consultant and the district Teacher in Charge of Elementary Reading—each of whom provides targeted training and support to teachers. Title I teachers are provided to all Title I schools throughout the district with federal funds. Grants support a part-time mathematics coach for Healy to guide teachers in the use of the *Investigations* program. Some district funding subsidized teachers' participation in mathematics content training, Developing Mathematical Ideas (DMI), which continues from last year. District personnel explained that they "wait to be asked" before coming to the school to offer assistance.

Overall, the panel concluded that the Fall River Public School district does not provide sufficient guidance to Healy staff for the development of a sound plan for improvement or adequate leadership for the implementation of the strategies necessary to raise student achievement.

## CONCLUSION

The Harriet T. Healy Elementary School Improvement Plan lacks sufficient attention to the learning needs of a major proportion of their student population, is weak in its specification of the manner in which strategies should be implemented, and is weakened by insufficient depth of analysis of a variety of data that is essential to a sound plan to improve student performance. While the plan enjoys widespread support among the faculty and staff, its weaknesses lessen the likelihood that it will lead to sufficient gains in learning. Strategies in the plan are being implemented across the school as part of the implementation of the Reading First initiative and adoption of the *Investigations* math program, but evidence of the impact of the plan on student learning is not evident. The significant drop in the performance of the 2005 third graders on the MCAS reading test has not been examined by the school's planning team to identify likely instructional causes and to modify the SIP strategies accordingly.

Instructional leadership at both the district and building are insufficient to guide the improvement efforts at Healy. Although the principal enjoys strong support and confidence among the staff, her instructional guidance focuses on implementation of strategies without considering their quality or their impact on student learning. The district's failure to provide

helpful feedback on the school's plan in a timely manner led to the adoption of a plan all agreed is unsound. The district's lack of direction for a district magnet program that assigned a significant percentage of students who are English language learners to the building puts a major segment of the school's population at a learning disadvantage.

**APPENDIX A**  
**Team Members**

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

**Jake Foster**, Panel Review Coordinator, Massachusetts Department of Education, Malden, MA

**Trent Danella**, Panelist, Principal, Dighton-Rehoboth High School, North Dighton, MA

**Jane Daly**, Panelist, Assistant Principal, Dartmouth Middle School, Dartmouth MA

**Ronald Fernandes**, Panelist, Assistant Principal, Boston Public Schools, Boston, MA

**APPENDIX B**  
**Harriet T. Healy Elementary School**  
**Fall River Public Schools**  
**POTENTIALLY UNDER-PERFORMING PANEL REVIEW SCHEDULE**  
**November 21 and 22, 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.