

Fact Finding Review – Fall 2006
Fall River Public Schools
William S. Greene Elementary School
Harriet T. Healy Elementary School

Introduction

The diagnostic fact finding review at under-performing Schools is a cooperative process designed to provide objective, constructive feedback about the adequacy, appropriateness, and effectiveness of teaching and learning in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics at the School, and the enabling elements that make instructional improvement possible.

Beginning with the District and School’s understanding of the most pressing needs in four key areas; and their working hypotheses regarding the primary reasons for low student performance, the fact finders examine those key areas independently to verify, clarify, and deepen those understandings. At the same time, the fact finders will examine instructional leadership at the District and School levels to identify strengths to build on, and diagnose weaknesses that may be impeding District and School improvement efforts.

The resulting Fact Finding Report offers clear findings and priority recommendations for action at the District level and for each School. District and School leadership teams will use the recommendations from the report to complete a final District intervention plan for the School. This plan will be submitted to the Commissioner and the state Board of Education.

Overview of Report Structure

The Fact Finding Report opens with findings and recommendations at the district level that are related to the reasons and conditions in place that have contributed to the low levels of student performance in mathematics and English language arts. This Executive Summary answers the question, “What are the systemic reasons for the low levels of student performance in the district?” The Executive Summary summarizes the district analysis of reasons for underperformance, as presented in the District Plan for School Intervention and the trends across all schools in relation to the fact finding team findings.

The report also contains information specific to the team’s findings at each school. The school reports are organized around the four key areas of inquiry: standards-based teaching and learning; informing practice with data; time for teachers and students; and, leadership for instructional improvement. Under each key area of inquiry, the report contains findings, supported by data and evidence collected through document review, focus group interviews and classroom visits. Linked to these findings are recommendations for improvement.

In the Fall River Public Schools, two underperforming schools were visited. The William S. Greene Elementary School was visited on October 30 and 31, 2006. The Harriet T. Healy Elementary School was visited on November 2 and 3, 2006.

Executive Summary – District Level

Systemic reasons for the low levels of student performance in Mathematics and English Language Arts

The following tables show MCAS performance in ELA and Mathematics between 2004 and 2006 at the William S. Greene School, with District comparisons and trends.

Grade 3 ELA Reading

	2004		2005			2006		
	School	District	School	Change From '04	District	School	Change From '05	District
Proficient Plus	0	0	0		0	9		7
Proficient	33	48	54	+21	48	33	-21	33
Needs Improvement	54	43	39	-15	40	50	+11	48
Warning/Failing	13	9	7	-6	11	7	=	13

Grade 4 ELA

	2004		2005			2006		
	School	District	School	Change From '04	District	School	Change From '05	District
Advanced	0	4	1	+1	4	0	-1	2
Proficient	24	36	21	-3	31	27	+6	31
Needs Improvement	51	47	49	-2	53	48	-1	51
Warning/Failing	26	13	29	+3	12	25	-4	16

Grade 4 ELA Special Education

	2004		2005			2006		
	School	District	School	Change From '04	District	School	Change From '05	District
Advanced	0	5	4	+4	3	0	-4	4
Proficient	48	39	30	+18	27	4	-26	20
Needs Improvement	22	41	26	+4	51	31	+5	34
Warning/Failing	30	16	41	+9	20	65	+24	42

Grade 4 ELA Limited English Proficient

	2004		2005			2006		
	School	District	School	Change From '04	District	School	Change From '05	District
Advanced	N/A	4	0		0	N/A		0
Proficient	N/A	4	9		7	N/A		10
Needs Improvement	N/A	42	18		48	N/A		43
Warning/Failing	N/A	50	73		44	N/A		48

Grade 4 Math

	2004		2005			2006		
	School	District	School	Change From '04	District	School	Change From '05	District
Advanced	3	8		-3	4	5	+5	8
Proficient	7	21	6	-1	14	14	+8	17
Needs Improvement	50	55	46	-4	58	55	+9	54
Warning/Failing	39	16	48	+9	24	22	-26	21

Grade 4 Math Special Education

	2004		2005			2006		
	School	District	School	Change From '04	District	School	Change From '05	District
Advanced	9	11	0	-9	2	0	=	5
Proficient	13	16	4	-9	10	4	=	14
Needs Improvement	39	54	30	-9	49	50	+20	39
Warning/Failing	39	19	67	+28	39	46	-21	42

Grade 4 Math Limited English Proficient

	2004		2005			2006		
	School	District	School	Change From '04	District	School	Change From '05	District
Advanced	0	4	0	=	0	0	=	0
Proficient	0	0	0	=	0	0	=	7
Needs Improvement	57	58	18	-39	26	20	+2	46
Warning/Failing	43	38	82	+39	70	80	-2	46

Summary Trend Analysis

The data shows that in Grade 3 ELA, between 2004 – 2006 the school saw an increase, followed by a decrease of students scoring in the Proficient Plus/Proficient categories: '04: 33% to '05: 54% to '06: 42%. However, in 2006 the significant increase from 2004 to 2005 of 21% of students scoring in the Proficient performance category was lost with the total percentage of students achieving Proficiency reverting to 2004 levels. While this decline occurred the number of students in the Warning/Failing performance category remained stable. Grade 4 ELA MCAS scores indicate the percentage of students scoring in the Advanced/Proficient performance categories to consistently be below the District scores, though there is a slight increase in students with Advanced/Proficient scores 2006; up by 5% (6 students) from 2005. Students scoring in the Warning/Failing performance categories averaging 26.6% for the past three years are

nearly double the Warning/Failing average for the district at 13.6%. It is also important to note that in 2006 the Greene School include a GATE (Gifted and Talented) class in its demographic for Grade 4 data. This class of 15 students is reported to have been chosen from the highest ability students throughout the city of Fall River. While the numbers of students scoring in the Advanced/Proficient performance categories increased by 5% in 2005, the GATE class represented 16% of the student body and all members of that class scored in the Advanced or Proficient category. Scores of Special Needs students in the Proficient category have consistently declined over the past three years to a low of 4% in 2006. While Proficiency rates have been declining for this group, Warning/Failure rates have been increasing with a high in 2006 of 65%. This is an increase of 24% from 2005. A total of 96% of Special Needs students failed to reach Proficiency. These failure rates are 23% higher than the district. LEP students in Grade 4 at the Greene School do not have posted ELA scores for 2006.

Students at the Greene school made progress in MCAS math achievement in 2006. Students scoring in the Advanced/Proficient performance categories totaled 13%; up from 6% in 2005. Students scoring in the Warning/Failing performance category decreased by 26% from 48% to 22% in 2005. The percentage of Special Needs students scoring Advanced or Proficient remained even from 2005-2006. Breaking the trend from 2005 where Special Needs students in the Warning/Failing performance category increased by 29% to 67%, 2006 data shows a decrease of 21% to 46% for these students in this category. The Grade 4 Math scores indicate that no LEP students reached mastery.

The following tables show MCAS performance in ELA and Mathematics between 2004 and 2006 at the Harriet T. Healy School, with District comparisons and trends.

Grade 3 ELA Reading

	2004		2005			2006		
	School	District	School	Change From '04	District	School	Change From '05	District
Proficient Plus	0	0	0		0	0		7
Proficient	33	48	29	-4	48	11	-18	33
Needs Improvement	55	43	48	-7	40	44	-4	48
Warning/Failing	12	9	23	+11	11	44	+21	13

Grade 3 ELA Reading - Limited English Proficient

	2004		2005			2006		
	School	District	School	Change From '04	District	School	Change From '05	District
Proficient Plus	N/A	0	0		0	0		7
Proficient	N/A	48	8		48	11	+3	33
Needs Improvement	N/A	43	46		40	28	+18	48
Warning/Failing	N/A	9	46		11	61	+16	13

Grade 4 ELA

	2004		2005			2006		
	School	District	School	Change From '04	District	School	Change From '05	District
Advanced	5	4	5	+0	4	0	-5	2
Proficient	50	36	48	-2	31	44	-4	31
Needs Improvement	36	47	43	+7	53	50	+7	51
Warning/Failing	9	13	5	-4	12	6	+1	16

Grade 4 Math

	2004		2005			2006		
	School	District	School	Change From '04	District	School	Change From '05	District
Advanced	5	8	14	+9	4	6	-8	8
Proficient	18	21	24	+6	14	12	-12	17
Needs Improvement	50	55	48	-2	58	62	+14	54
Warning/Failing	27	16	14	-13	24	19	+5	21

Summary Trend Analysis

An examination of Grade 3 ELA data at the Healy School between 2004 - 2006, shows a continuous decline in the numbers of students reaching proficiency. In 2006 no students achieved Proficient Plus and 11% of students achieved Proficient. Needs Improvement scores declined over this same time period by 11%. There was thus an increase in the number of students in the Warning/Failing category from 32% in 2004 to 44% in 2006. The scores at Healy are lower than the District scores in 2006 where 40% of students reached proficiency and 13% of students scored in the Warning/Failing performance category. Scores for LEP students at Grade 3 ELA show a slight increase in proficiency of 3% between 2005 – 2006 to 11%. However, over the same period the number of students in the Warning/Failing category increased by 16% to 61%.

The demographics of the Healy school have changed; as of September 2006 there are no ELL classrooms. As the data for Grade 4 ELA shows, in 2006 the school decreased in the Advanced and Proficient performance categories by 9% and since 2004 the overall decrease has been 11% from 55% to 44%. There has not been any significant change in the numbers of students scoring in the Warning/Failing performance category over the same period.

In Grade 4 Math in 2006 18 % of students at Healy achieved proficiency, a 20% decline from 2005. This is compared to the districts proficiency rates increasing from 18% to 25%. Students in the Needs Improvement and Warning/Failure categories increased by 14% at the school compared with 5% in the district overall.

Reasons for Underperformance

The District has been faced with managing a deficit budget (\$4m FY 2005-2006). The review team learned that the district has successfully managed this shortfall by enforcing fiscal stringency. It was not clear, however, from interviewing the central administrative staff that economies made were part of a strategic plan predicated on student achievement data. The District has reduced the spending on professional development and the deployment of paraprofessionals and other key staff. Though the position has not been eliminated, there is currently no School Support Specialist. The position of District Director for mathematics has been eliminated and a consultant has been engaged on a 0.8 FTE contract. Where there is a critical need for instructional support in schools and, in particular, guidance and direction in the teaching of mathematics, the current lack of full time, committed personnel in these key positions is questionable.

The reduction in classroom paraprofessional support was referred to widely and in both schools as a loss. Reduction in professional development support – especially in math -

was drawn to the attention of the review team by teachers in both schools. District personnel, however, referred to professional development to support ELA initiatives. Teacher Reading Academies have been provided for teachers and principals have received professional development in Reading First practices. At the same time, District personnel acknowledged a shortfall in the provision of training in math content and pedagogy. Teachers interviewed referred to professional development in using Math Investigations as only minimally meeting their needs. The team also noted that the number of teachers trained in Guided Reading has reduced at William Greene School, yet Guided Reading remains the dominant reading instructional method at the school.

In interviews with parents and teachers the team learned that the final decision regarding the closure of the existing Slade School and the re-distribution of student populations had been unsettling for the school community. Where there had already been uncertainty, the final decision about school amalgamation appeared sudden, was disrupting for students and their families, and impacted on the integrity of the professional community at the Harriet Healy School.

While the District has made good decisions in placing strong instructional leaders at both schools, the decision in the case of the Harriet Healy was not made when the opportunity presented itself four years ago. It was not clear what criteria had guided that decision but the team were informed by district personnel that it had not been predicated on the need for strong instructional leadership.

Current District leaders post-date this decision, and were strident in explaining their intentions to support the schools' implementation of programs in the form of coaching positions, time and professional development. A licensed Reading Specialist, Writing Coach and Math Coach have all been provided to ensure embedded teacher training and coaching support. A District Reading Specialist and external consultant are in place once a week for direct support to staff and the Principal. Principals at both schools also have access to a coach consultant on an as needs basis. District personnel also spoke, however, of an implementation time-gap in terms of the impact of these decisions taking effect, and of their vulnerability because of current financial stringency. This is concerning given the urgency to address raising student achievement at both schools.

The District curriculum guidelines, and in particular those relating to articulating the Math Investigations Curriculum with Massachusetts State Curriculum Frameworks are not effectively communicated to schools and teachers. The Math Investigation Curriculum as it is currently taught at the Harriet Healy School lacks the pace and rigor to enable students to reach grade level mastery and proficiency on the Grade 4 math exam. At the William Greene School, however, where Math Investigations is supported by coaching, this curriculum appears to be having a marked impact on raising student achievement.

Teachers are not currently using formative assessment as an instrument to guide student learning and it was unclear what strategies the District has in place to support the

development of this important professional skill in the absence of a School Support Specialist.

The district does not provide additional instructional time for students in need of extra support who do not meet current access guidelines, and at present, only students on free or reduced priced lunch are entitled to extra support. Parents interviewed expressed particular concern that the number of students needing such support extended outside this category.

Recommendations:

- 1 The district must provide professional development and support to teachers in standards based planning and teaching.
- 2 The district must ensure that every teacher has the appropriate curriculum for all content areas taught and that this curriculum be directly aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.
- 3 The district must provide professional development in the development and use of formative assessment and assessment embedded in instruction.
- 4 The district must evaluate the content, pace and delivery of the Math Investigations Curriculum to determine the appropriate mapping, supplemental materials and support necessary to meet the standards of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.
- 5 The district must provide for all students in need of extra support through extended day and or year programs, as well as targeted time during the school day itself.
- 6 The District must ensure that adequate resources and personnel are in place to provide the direction, guidance and monitoring to ensure that the five recommendations above are fulfilled.

William S. Greene Elementary School

1. Standards based Teaching and Learning

Finding: The school is focused on eight power standards. Whilst helpful, this focus does not on a routine basis translate to development and implementation of Standards based lessons.

- In a collaborative effort of school staff and leadership facilitated by an external consultant, the school has developed eight *power standards*. The school has focused its energies on implementing curriculum, instruction and assessment to meet these standards.
- Summer study groups of school staff and leadership mapped the curriculum, developed rubrics and created assessments by grade level for each of the standards.
- The teachers' commitment to the eight power standards and achievement for students was evidenced in interviews and through the team's observations.
- There is little evidence that shows teachers' use of standards based planning, instruction and assessment for standards other than those identified as *power standards*. The team's observations revealed few Massachusetts Curriculum Framework standards made visible in classrooms. Plan books also lacked reference to standards.

Finding: There is a strong school culture and teachers are determined and hard working; but this effort and commitment have not resulted in student improvement or proficiency attainment.

- Teacher interviews and focus groups reveal a dedicated staff with strong values and high goals.
- MCAS data has not shown improvement commensurate with the efforts and intentions of staff; in particular the performance of students with special educational needs has decreased markedly.

Finding: Guided Reading prevails as a dominant strategy to bring struggling readers to a level of success, however, this strategy has not proven to support student achievement in this school.

- Guided Reading groups were observed and were identified in focus group interviews as the primary intervention for struggling readers.
- Guided Reading requires highly trained individuals in order to ensure successful implementation and see improvement in student achievement; this becomes problematic with the thirty percent turn over of staff the school has recently experienced.
- Proficiency rates on Grade 3 ELA Reading MCAS exam declined twelve points between 2005 and 2006.

Recommendations:

1. The Principal must monitor plan books and instructional practices to ensure that both are standards based in nature.
2. The Principal must explore additional explicit and systematic interventions programs to support struggling readers.
3. The Principal must explore explicit and systematic interventions programs to support students with special educational needs.

2. Instruction Informed by Data

Finding: Power Standards were developed based on examination of MCAS exam data. Progress in levels of achievement of the Power Standards is being monitored through the use of portfolios.

- Power Standards are visible throughout the school, posted on walls.
- Staff exhibits an understanding of these Power Standards through interviews and actual student activities that are documented in student portfolios.
- The Power Standards are also used as the starting point for looking at student work.

Finding: Benchmark testing and progress monitoring in literacy are in place using DIBELS. This assessment is used to place students identified as “at risk” in intervention groups.

- Intervention groups were observed by the team, as were binders containing DIBELS benchmark testing and progress monitoring scores. School leaders and teachers explained how DIBELS testing is used to determine intervention groups. Currently, however, DIBELS data is not used consistently to determine learning objectives within intervention groups or elsewhere.

Recommendations:

1. The school leadership team must continue to support and extend opportunities for teachers to look at student work together to gain a deeper understanding of standards of proficiency.
2. DIBELS and other, less formal testing must be used formatively to help students understand their mistakes and/or learning gaps and move forward, and to help teachers determine appropriate instructional strategies.

3. Time for Students and Teachers

Finding: Common planning time to Look at Student Work (LASW) has been implemented in small measure and is used well.

- Grade level teams of teachers were observed engaging in LASW. A formal protocol is followed with members of the group contributing different roles. Collegiality is evident.
- LASW activities are currently focused on assessments of the Math Power Standards

Finding: Professional time is not provided to allow the most advantageous planning for students receiving services from staff other than their classroom teacher.

- Staff providing support to students, SPED teachers, Title 1 teachers and paraprofessionals all identify the lack of time to adequately plan and give feedback to the classroom teacher regarding students being serviced. Without this collaboration student needs are not being met efficiently.

Finding: Though 90 minute time periods are scheduled for core instruction they are fragmented by the scheduling of interventions so that learning lacks continuity for all.

- Teachers report frustration with trying to maintain continuity of learning with the interruptions caused by the interventions of the writing coach and math coach.

Finding: The single extended day program is limited by entry requirements and does not reach all students in need of such support.

- Concern was raised by parents regarding the only after school support for students being limited to those falling into free or reduced lunch categories and the lack of services for other needy students.

Recommendations:

1. The Principal and Leadership team must explore ways to provide planning time to groups of staff servicing the same students.
2. The Principal must assess the impact of interventions and other interruptions to classrooms instruction to determine how best to use the time students are present.

4 Instructional Leadership for Improvement

Finding: The principal is strategically distributing instructional leadership. The faculty supports school leadership in efforts to focus improvements.

- Focus groups of teachers and other staff expressed their full support the Principal. They could articulate the schools focus on power standards. The teaching staff acknowledged their involvement in developing the power standards.
- Teachers reported involvement in Summer Study groups to expand the power standards by grade level specific standards, rubrics, and assessments.
- Response to the principal's instructional leadership strategy is seen in LASW activities, the use of student portfolios, and in classroom practices.

Finding: The Principal has effectively re-structured the school into four smaller learning communities, called 'houses' with house representatives.

- Focus groups of teachers and House Representatives (the leaders of the four houses) spoke very positively of the new structure.
- The house structure is creating smaller learning communities within the school with a sharper focus on pride of work. This was evidenced in interviews with House Representatives but is yet to percolate to students.

Finding: The Principal takes every opportunity to acquire advanced skills.

- The Principal is a self-expressed life long learner. She is currently participating in NISL (National Institute for School Leadership) and EFI training.

Recommendations:

1. The principal must continue to support and extend the development of the Houses. Not only does this provide effective caretaking of student learning, it also develops teachers as leaders.
2. The Principal is advised not extend her personal professional development beyond what she has already focused on, and leave herself time to apply all she has learned.

Classroom Observation Synopsis

Fourteen lessons were observed by a combination of reviewers over two days. This was only a sampling of the classes in the school; there are thirty classrooms. The synopsis below gives a sense of effectiveness of instruction in each of the three areas reviewed: **Preparation for Instruction; Delivery of Instruction; Assessment of Learning**

1. Preparation for Instruction

In eight of the fourteen classrooms direct reference was made to the objective of the lesson and within these eight, five referred to standards or power standards and connections to prior knowledge. The remaining six classes did not demonstrate these elements of preparation.

2. Delivery of Instruction

Strong classroom management skills were present in classrooms overall, allowing for successful use of center time. During times of direct instruction the majority of students remained engaged throughout. In most instances teachers moved quickly to re-engage students. Differentiation was seen only during interventions and in inclusion and special needs classrooms. Center time routines were in place but activities were not differentiated. High expectations for student behavior and/or academic success were observed in most classes. Special Education students in inclusive settings couldn't be easily identified as differentiated expectations were in place for all students. Several teachers used cuing to help students develop their own strategies and prompt students to rely on the habits of good readers.

3. Assessment of Learning

Levels and content of feedback varied. Most feedback was related to direct answers given by students rather than checking in with the whole group. Teachers often used words of encouragement. Little formative feedback was observed, however, that related directly to the mastery of the focus of the lesson.

Harriet T. Healy Elementary School

1. Standards based Teaching and Learning

Finding: There is a lack of knowledge of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, particularly in math, and minimal use of curriculum standards in teaching.

- ELA and math instruction does not embed MCF and standards for what students should know and be able to do by grade level: generally standards are not evident in plan books or in classrooms.
- Rubrics indicating expectations for student work product and achievement are not used so students are unaware of the standard to be mastered or of their progress towards meeting proficiency expectations.

Finding: Instructional practice and the taught curriculum are insufficient in quality and scope to support students in mastering what they should know and be able to do as outlined in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

- While methodology is strong in terms of classroom management and teacher/student relationships, there is concern that the District's curriculum and instructional programs do not prepare students to meet the demands of the MCAS exams. This concern was expressed by teachers, parents and corroborated in observations by the visiting team.
- Instruction is insufficiently differentiated to meet student needs and does not target higher order cognitive development. With the exception of Reading interventions, very little attention to the needs of individual learners was seen in classrooms and strategies that challenged thinking were generally absent.

Recommendation:

1. Teachers must focus instruction and assessment on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and the standards of performance that students must know and be able to do to reach grade level proficiencies.
2. The principal must monitor the quality of standards based instruction and assessment in classrooms and, where necessary, provide coaching.

2. Informing Practice with Data

Finding: Formative and summative data is used to inform ELA instruction, but this data needs to be discussed collegially to be optimally effective.

- Reading First practices of benchmark testing and progress monitoring are in place at the Healy School.
- DIBELS Assessment is used to establish intervention groups. These groups were observed by the team and reported to be in place with consistency.
- At the time of this review, teachers have not been included in meetings to discuss the student achievement data from assessments and to be involved in planning of interventions for students.

Finding: Data from summative and formative assessment is not used to inform decisions about student learning in Math.

- During the review there was no evidence of a sufficient range of assessment or clear criteria for performance in Math either in observation or interview.

Recommendation:

- 1 The Principal and Reading First Reading Specialist must include all staff in discussions of student Benchmarks and Progress Monitoring and make data readily available to all staff.
- 2 The Principal must have staff engage in Looking at Student Work (LASW) to establish clear criteria for student performance.
- 3 The Principal, with the math consultant, must review the use of assessment in mathematics to ensure that teachers identify students who are not achieving mastery, so that remedial strategies can be provided.

3. Time for Teachers and Students

Finding: Teacher common planning time is used to exchange instructional strategies and support embedded professional development.

- Teachers have four planning periods a week with one of the four allocated for common grade level planning. There is an agreed agenda, and professional learning goals for the use of this time.

- There was evidence of professional development provided by the Reading First Reading Specialist during the common planning time observed.

Finding: If the Math Investigations curriculum is followed as designed there is insufficient math instructional time to meet all math learning standards.

- Through classroom activities observed, the team determined that the pace and content of Math Investigations was inadequate to ensure students reach the mastery of grade level standards by the end of Grade 4. This view was borne out in teacher interviews.

Finding: Strategic learning interventions in literacy are in place at all grades to enable students to become competent readers, however these strategies are not in place for other content areas.

- Students are seen for intervention daily; explicit and systematic instruction is provided in a small group setting.
- Harcourt as a Core program is used along with center time and teacher led small group instruction using a variety of strategies.
- There was no evidence of interventions being in place for any other content area.

Recommendations:

1. The Principal must find ways to build on the established successful professional meetings, e.g. teacher common planning time.
2. The principal, with the math consultant, must review the need for interventions in math and plan for implementation of these implementations.
3. The Principal must find ways to provide small group skills based support for students in need.

4. **Leadership for Instructional Improvement**

Finding: Until very recently, August 2006, the school lacked instructional leadership.

- A new Principal has been in place since Mid-August 2006, replacing a Principal reported widely as having management skills but not the skills of an instructional leader.

Finding: The new Principal is focused on being an instructional leader.

- The Principal has a background in school support work in curriculum, instruction and assessment.
- The Principal is a strong presence in classrooms and provides regular feedback to teachers and has the confidence of parents interviewed.
- Together with the literacy team the Principal has already focused the faculty energy on progress in literacy.
- The Principal described management teams teachers will be asked to join to begin to share leadership.

Recommendations

1. The principal should build on strong beginnings to provide instructional leadership that includes frequent monitoring of instruction and coaching where necessary.
2. The Principal must move forward with his plans to involve the staff in discussions to bring about meaningful change to improve achievement of students.

Classroom Observation Synopsis

Over the two days of review at the Harriet Healy School all classrooms were visited for a total of twenty observations. These observations varied in length and concentration area. The majority of observations were of ELA and Math lessons. To enable the team to view the different features of the ELA program some classrooms were visited more than once. Whole group, small group and Interventions were observed. The synopsis below gives a sense of the effectiveness of instruction in each of three areas reviewed:

Preparation for Instruction; Delivery of Instruction; Assessment of Learning

Preparation for Instruction:

Minimal reference to standards and objectives were present in observations. Even in classes where objectives were identified they were not tied to standards. Connecting lessons to prior learning was only rarely observed. Most lessons did not demonstrate adequate preparation for instruction.

Delivery of Instruction:

Students participating in small groups intervention time as well as center time were generally engaged in their learning. Whole class instruction was more didactic. The success of these lessons depended on the individual teacher. Classroom management skills in general were adequate and time was not wasted in managing student behavior. Routines for transitions and group work created a positive learning environment. Thoughtfully designed behavior management programs were evident in two classrooms and used with excellent results. Differentiation other than in ELA interventions was not seen. Teachers vary in their use of questioning that prompts higher order thinking. The majority of questions observed required answers only indicating comprehension. Student praise is the dominant form of feedback. Little formative feedback was observed relating directly to the mastery of the focus of the lesson.

Assessment of Learning:

Teachers use DIBELS progress monitoring to adjust their instruction for individual students. During group time teachers were observed monitoring groups for completion of task and in some instances conferencing with students in the writing center.

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The Review was conducted and Report compiled on behalf of The Massachusetts Department of Education by staff from Class Measures Limited, chaired by Peter Davies, Lead Consultant District and School Accountability www.calsmeasures.com