

School Panel Review Report Newton Elementary School Greenfield 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. Newton 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 15 and 16, 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 Newton 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.

Newton Elementary School Profile

Enrollment

The Newton School serves students in Grades K-5. Enrollment at Newton School has decreased steadily from 231 students in 2002 to 182 students in 2005. Between 2002 and 2005, the proportion of student subgroups has been relatively consistent, with the exception of an increase in Low-Income students from 58 percent in 2002 to 68 percent in 2005. Proportions of Newton School student subgroups in 2005, as compared to state averages, are presented on the next page.

Subgroup	2005 Enrollment (%)	
	School	State
Asian	6	5
Black	7	9
Hispanic	9	12
Native American	0	0.3
White	79	74
Low-Income	68	28
First Language Not English	4	14
Limited English Proficient	4	5
Special Education	15	16

In 2005, the attendance rate at Newton School was 94.8 percent, with students absent 8.8 days on average. Across the state in 2005, the average attendance rate was 94.2 percent and students were absent 10.0 days on average. The school’s retention rate was 2.5 percent in 2004, the last year for which this data is available. Newton School’s in-school and out-of-school suspension rates in 2005 were both zero percent. Suspension 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 Newton School staffing report indicates that the school is comprised of one administrator, 22 teachers, one school psychologist, one nurse, one teacher leader/curriculum facilitator and one speech therapist. The principal is new to the school this year and has a total of 5 years of administrative experience. Of the teachers, approximately 36 percent have been at the school for five or more years, and 27 percent are new to the school this year. Approximately 68 percent of the teachers have 10 or more years of teaching experience. The school reports 100 percent of teachers are highly qualified and approximately 68 percent hold an advanced degree.

MCAS Overview

Students at the Newton School are assessed in Grades 3 and 4 in English language arts (ELA) and in Grade 4 in mathematics. Newton School’s Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report for 2005 Mid-Cycle IV shows an accountability status of Corrective Action for English language arts and No Status for mathematics. The school failed to make AYP in ELA in the aggregate and for the only reported subgroup, White.¹ The school has not made AYP for the aggregate since 2001 or its single subgroup in 2003 and 2005. In 2004, the school made AYP in ELA for both the aggregate and White populations. In mathematics, the school has made AYP for the aggregate until 2005. No subgroups were reported in mathematics. 2005 is the first year that Newton School has failed to make AYP in this subject area.

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 subgroup meeting the minimum sample size at Newton School for ELA in 2005 was White. No subgroups met the minimum sample size in mathematics.

In 2005, the aggregate Composite Performance Indices (CPIs) for the Newton School are 76.5 in ELA and 57.0 in mathematics. Year-by-year aggregate CPIs are shown below:

Year-by-Year Aggregate CPI Data Summary		
Year	ELA	Math
2001	76.9	60.8
2002	76.1	56.6
2003	75.0	65.2
2004	79.0	59.9
2005	76.5	57.0
State Target 2005	80.5	68.7

GRADE 3

Reading MCAS Results

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

2005 Reading	Percent		
	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	44	56	0
Regular Education	55	45	0

Due to its small overall size, Special Education and Limited English Proficient students at Newton School are too small in number or percentage to be reported as subgroups, although these students are represented in the school. This is reflected in differences between Aggregate and Regular Education performance in Grades three and four. Overall, there has been a decrease in student performance since 2001, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 3 Reading MCAS performance shown below:

Aggregate Reading	Percent		
	P	NI	W/F
2005	44	56	0
2004	48	44	7
2003	41	54	5
2002	68	26	6
2001	60	40	0

The percentage of students scoring Proficient decreased from a high of 68 percent in 2002 to 44 percent in 2005. Correspondingly, the percentage of students scoring Needs Improvement has increased from a low of 26 percent in 2002 to a high of 56 percent in 2005. However, 2005 is the first year since 2001 that no students have scored Warning/Failing, indicating that some movement from Warning/Failing into Needs Improvement has occurred. Similar trends occurred in the scores for Regular Education students.

GRADE 4

ELA MCAS Results

Results of the 2005 Grade 4 ELA MCAS for students at Newton School are shown below:

2005 ELA	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	0	30	59	11
Regular Education	0	33	61	6

Overall, there has been a slight increase in student performance since 2001, but a significant decrease from 2004, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 4 ELA MCAS performance presented below:

Aggregate ELA	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	0	30	59	11
2004	5	43	45	8
2003	3	30	55	12
2002	5	20	63	13
2001	4	22	57	18

The percentage of students scoring Proficient or Advanced increased from a low of 25 percent in 2002 to a high of 48 percent in 2004, then decreased to 30 percent in 2005. The percentage of students scoring Warning/Failing decreased from a high of 18 percent in 2001 to a low of eight percent in 2004, then rose slightly to 11 percent in 2005. Similar trends occurred in the scores for Regular Education students.

GRADE 4

Mathematics MCAS Results

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

2005 Math	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	4	15	44	37
Regular Education	0	17	56	28

Performance has been variable since 2001, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 4 ELA MCAS performance shown on the next page.

Aggregate Math	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	4	15	44	37
2004	5	23	40	33
2003	0	18	64	18
2002	5	20	35	40
2001	4	16	53	27

The percentage of students scoring Proficient or Advanced reached a low of 18 percent in 2003, immediately followed by a high of 28 percent in 2004. However, the 2001 and 2005 percentages (20 and 19 percent respectively) are almost identical. The percentage of students scoring Warning/Failing peaked at 40 percent in 2002, immediately followed by a low of 18 percent in 2003. Most notably, the percentage of students scoring Warning/Failing in 2005 (37 percent) is significantly higher than in 2001 (27 percent). Similar trends occurred in the scores for Regular Education students.

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 Newton School is implementing a sound plan for improvement. Causes for low student performance are linked to teaching and learning and improvement strategies listed in the School Improvement Plan (SIP) are within the school's control. The process through which the SIP is being implemented has been communicated school-wide and ensures that all staff understands the improvement initiatives. Newton School faculty has made significant strides in implementing the strategies identified in the SIP. The SIP does not include clear benchmarks, which prevented the Panel Review (PR) team from coming to conclusion on student performance gains related the Plan's implementation. However, the Newton School has begun to install systematic methods of collecting and analyzing information on student learning and considers the current SIP a solid "working draft."

A. Are the school's written improvement planning documents (including action plans) clear and specific enough to guide the implementation of planned improvement initiatives?

School Improvement Plans were submitted in preparation for School Panel Reviews scheduled in November and December 2005. Teams of three Department of Education (DOE) staff members reviewed the written plans and completed summary assessments of their soundness, based on a Department rubric with specific indicators for five central components: overall clarity and coherence of the plan, identifying and prioritizing problems based on multiple sources of data, analyzing the causes of weakness in student performance, establishing improvement objectives and selecting strategies, and establishing benchmarks for implementation and outcomes. The judgment on the soundness of these written documents provided in the summary rubric was based solely on a close reading of the written documents submitted. It was not a final determination. The panelists used the summary rubric to inform their discussion of the written plan each panelist had read individually prior to the review, and to help focus their time in the school on the implementation of the planned strategies. Final judgment on the soundness of the school's plan—and the panel's overall response to Key Question 1 in the Panel Review Protocol—depended upon further information about the development of the plan and evidence of the plan's implementation that was gathered by the panel during on-site interviews, focus groups and observations.

The written School Improvement Plan is on its way to being a clear and specific roadmap that is likely to guide the ongoing implementation of improvement initiatives at the Newton School. The Newton SIP identifies a set of causes for low student performance that are within the school's control. Student learning objectives are specific and aligned with the state standards. Instructional change objectives in ELA and mathematics are clearly defined and linked to the identified causes for low student achievement. In its written form, the Newton SIP does not include timelines for achieving objectives or benchmarks to measure the level of implementation of action plans or the effectiveness of specified strategies once they are in place.

Causes for low student performance in the Newton SIP are related to teaching and learning in ELA and math. For example, the Newton Elementary School *School Improvement Plan 2006-2008* identifies the following causes of "student's lack of knowledge and skills" in ELA:

“Limited vocabulary content in school ELA curriculum, limited time devoted to explicit instruction in vocabulary and limited practice applying vocabulary skills” (*ELA, pg. 3*). In mathematics, the SIP identifies “insufficient scope and sequence for teaching problem solving strategies across the grades” (*Mathematics, pg. 3*).

Related to these causal factors, the SIP possesses student learning objectives that are aligned with the identified causal factors and state standards. In ELA, one student learning objective states, “All students will interpret and use appropriately rich vocabulary, including literacy terms, in writing and text interpretation” (*ELA Standard 4, pg. 2*). Related to the above broad goal in mathematics, the student learning objective states that, “All students will know and be able to read, solve and explain, and apply solutions for multi-step, multicomputational problems including MCAS Short Answer and Open Response Questions” (*Guiding Philosophy, Mathematics pg. 2*).

The Newton SIP specifies clearly defined instructional change objectives that are linked to the identified causes for low student achievement. In ELA for example, “All teachers will model and use appropriate vocabulary in daily guided reading, guided writing and comprehension lessons in the Scott Foresman’s Reading Street” (*ELA, pg. 3*). In mathematics the SIP states, “All teachers will use a scope and sequence and targeted instruction of problem solving strategies with an emphasis on systematic review and scaffolding” (*Mathematics, pg. 3*).

In its written form, the Newton SIP does not include specific timelines for achieving improvement objectives or benchmarks to measure the implementation or the effectiveness of these activities once they are in place. All timelines are specified as “ongoing 2005-2006” and do not indicate goals for implementation. Because the plan does not indicate overarching goals for implementation, the SIP also lacks benchmarks to indicate progress towards partial implementation. In interviews, both the Superintendent and Director of Curriculum and Instruction for the district indicated that more specific benchmarks in the written SIP are needed.

In summary, the Newton SIP identifies a set of causes for low student performance that possess student learning objectives that are aligned with the state standards. Instructional change objectives are linked to the identified causes for low student achievement. However, in its written form, the Newton SIP does not include timelines or benchmarks for achieving student learning or instructional objectives.

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

The Newton School currently has a process in place that is likely to support the SIP’s implementation. Staff members contributed during the initial phase of analysis, but when the school was notified that there would be a panel review conducted in November, the principal quickly completed the initial draft of the written plan. As a result, teachers were only involved in the initial data analysis. However, there is a school-wide process in place that ensures faculty understanding of the SIP initiatives and that prioritizes the school’s plans for improvement. This will likely yield the successful implementation of the SIP.

The principal indicated, and teachers corroborated that they were involved in the initial phases of data analysis. This included a review of MCAS data and preliminary efforts to identify root causes for low student performance. Because the school was identified by the state as “potentially underperforming,” the principal had to fast track the development of the written SIP,

relying primarily on feedback from district personnel. The principal stated, “This is not at all the process I had intended.” In interviews with the Panel Review (PR) Team, the principal reported that she considers the current SIP “a draft,” which will continue to be revised, based on the needs of the school’s student body and feedback from staff about the successes and difficulties they experienced implementing the plan. In addition, the *Leadership Report* indicates that because of the timeline, leadership had to “narrow the range of participants to prepare a draft for the SIP, but we intend to continue to devote further staff meetings and in-service meetings to revise the School Improvement Plan.” There is evidence to suggest that this has already occurred. For example, following the submission of the original SIP, Newton added a supplement to the plan as a result of teacher input on other areas that should be addressed to help increase student performance. The SIP supplement points to “insufficient participation in homework to support daily classroom instruction” and a “high rate of student absences and tardies” as areas for attention (*Newton SIP Supplement*).

There is an ongoing, communicative process in place that reflects a school-wide understanding of Newton’s plans for improvement. Many Newton staff members reported that they engage in continuous discussion about school improvement, which they stated is the primary factor guiding the implementation and monitoring of the current initiatives. When asked in interviews by the PR Team, “What is done to make sure the SIP is implemented according to the plan?”—staff members stated, for example, “We continue to talk about how it’s implemented” and “We look at other classrooms.” In addition, most of the Newton staff believes the SIP is a living document. One teacher stated, “It’s (the SIP) out there, now it’s actually there.” Though most teachers report they are just beginning to use the written SIP as a point of reference, verbally they are very articulate about the role of improvement initiatives at the school and in their classrooms. Though discussions of the SIP seem to be the primary guide in implementing the current improvement process at Newton, what is being implemented is consistent with the written SIP.

Although the Newton school has not yet established clear, written benchmarks or timelines for implementation, evidence collected by the PR Team suggests the Newton staff have a unified understanding of the current and future improvement initiatives. Because the plan is in its initial phases of implementation and the process used to develop the SIP was expedited, school and district leadership report timelines and benchmarks will be established during further revisions. The PR team unanimously agreed with the Principal’s statement that the SIP is likely to continue to serve as a “road map to where we’re [the school is] going.”

In summary, although it was the intention of the principal to develop the plan through a collaborative process, the urgency of the situation precluded this from happening. However, opportunities have been created to include teacher input, such as frequent communications about SIP initiatives and the effectiveness of the Plan’s implementation. This process is likely to support the plan’s successful implementation.

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

It is the judgment of the PR Team that since the start of the school year staff members at the Newton School have made significant strides in implementing the targeted strategies identified in the SIP. Teachers are able to clearly articulate the current initiatives and acknowledge future plans for school improvement. Implementation of SIP action plans was evident in interviews and classrooms school-wide. Professional development is aligned with the improvement efforts.

Nearly all members of the Newton faculty and staff are able to articulate the current school improvement plans, as well as the SIP's future goals. When asked if staff knew what they were expected to do to improve student performance according to the school's improvement plan on the *DOE Instructional Staff Survey*, 85 percent (17/20) identified a strategy cited in the SIP. In interviews, nearly all teachers cited, "the core (reading) program" and "small group instruction" as the current initiatives being implemented to increase student performance. This is consistent with the Principal's report that these two initiatives were of "enormously immediate" need at the Newton School. When asked about the greatest future need at the school, teachers unanimously indicated "the math program." Math goals and associated strategies have not been the focus of improvement efforts at the Newton School to date. Teachers and the principal report this subject area will be the school's focus in the coming months.

There is ample evidence to show that teachers are implementing the SIP strategies. Because of the school's status of "corrective action" in English language arts, and because improvement efforts have focused on strategies associated with increasing student performance in ELA at the Newton School, the PR Team focused on strategies outlined in this area of the SIP. Below is a summary of strategies listed in the Newton Elementary *School Improvement Plan 2006-2008* of evidenced during the Team's visit.

In interviews with district personnel, school leadership and teachers the PR team heard that consistent implementation of Scott Foresman's Reading Street was a key improvement strategy at the Newton School. Classroom observations corroborated use of this instructional program. In 100 percent (10/10) of the classrooms visited during the ELA block, Scott Foresman's Reading Street was being implemented. The PR team also observed state standards posted in classrooms school-wide. Vocabulary word walls and Collins Writing rubrics were noted in most classrooms—these are all strategies outlined in the SIP.

The Newton SIP states the following key action: "Arrange schedule to accommodate at least a 150 minute ELA block with 120 minutes of small group instruction" (*SIP, ELA, pg. 6*). The principal reports and the school day schedule shows that morning ELA blocks are in place. The PR team noted small group instruction in ELA was occurring in 80 percent (8/10) of classes observed during this block.

Other changes were made to the Newton school day schedule, in accordance with SIP strategies. Teacher prep time was adjusted to allow for grade level meetings to be used for "looking at data to drive instruction" (*SIP, ELA, pg. 9*). Interviews with school leadership and teaching staff indicate team meetings occur regularly and focus on data-driven instruction. The Newton SIP states the following key action: "Teachers will meet at least three times monthly to review scores on the GRADE, DIBELS and Scott Foresman unit tests to determine instructional support needs and instructional groups" (*SIP, ELA, pg. 9*). The Principal, school Literacy Coordinator and teachers indicate that meetings were occurring to discuss assessment results. The school maintains a binder titled *ELA Assessments 2005-06* that includes student assessment results from both the GRADE and the DIBELS. School personnel further indicate that this student assessment information is being used to group students based on their instructional levels, as stated in the SIP.

Additionally, Title I and special education support staff school day schedules have been reorganized to provide "participation in grade level meetings... and co-teaching with grade level classroom teachers" to increase student engagement in instruction (*SIP, ELA, pg. 9*). Interviews

with school leadership, teachers and Title I and special education support staff suggest this is occurring. One staff member stated, "Before I would have done my own thing. Now I go in and do inclusion and intervention." The PR team observed additional adults in some classrooms, but not all of them.

Professional development (PD) at the Newton School is aligned with SIP goals and the current improvement efforts. The 2005-2006 *Professional Development and Parent Conference Calendar* provided by the district indicates PD at the elementary level in the Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) process, Scott Foresman trainings and one session on the DIBELS. When asked about PD in interviews, teachers indicated that they had received training on the PIM process and several sessions work with a Scott Foresman consultant.

Faculty and staff at the Newton school are successfully implementing a number of strategies in accordance with the SIP. The fact that the Newton school is currently focusing on building students' skills in ELA, while planning to address math in the near future, is indicative of leadership's ability to prioritize the improvement efforts. As the principal indicated, "[she] is trying not to make staff tackle all things at once; but just one thing at a time." If the school's staff can maintain the focus and current rigor that is currently being applied to practices at Newton, it is the judgment of the PR team that the school is likely to continue to experience success.

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

Because the Newton SIP does not identify clear benchmarks to measure the effectiveness of strategies, it is difficult to clearly identify what improvement gains have been made relative to the SIP's "Key Actions" beyond the level of implementation. However, Newton has successfully implemented a number of SIP strategies that have changed classroom practices. In addition, the SIP identifies a variety of assessments that are being used by the school to measure student achievement. Information from ELA assessments is being used to measure student learning and inform instruction. Though it is too early to document current gains in relation to Student Performance Goals in the SIP, data being collected is on track to be a useful measure of student achievement in the future.

As described in Key Question 1C, the Newton School has implemented a number of improvement strategies, or key actions, as identified in the SIP. Because the SIP does not contain precise timelines or benchmarks to measure the success of these actions, it is difficult to draw specific conclusions about improvement gains as related to these strategies beyond the implementation. It is clear however, that changes in school and classroom practices have occurred as a result of the implementation of SIP strategies.

The school is utilizing a variety of assessments in both ELA and math to measure student skill acquisition and inform instructional practices. In ELA, the Newton School is currently using the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE), the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy (DIBELS), the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and Scott Foresman baseline and unit assessments to measure student learning. In Math, Mad Minutes, unit assessments and MCAS release questions with daily MCAS problems of the day are used to assess student learning.

The Newton School is systematically tracking student performance based on the GRADE and the DIBELS. A binder titled *ELA Assessments 2005-06* includes student assessment results from the GRADE and the DIBELS. The GRADE is administered three times a year and is used to assess student vocabulary and comprehension, based on stanine scores. The DIBELS, a reading fluency measure, is given three times per year for students that are performing at benchmark levels. For those students performing at lower levels, the school is conducting progress monitoring every two weeks.

Through the use of team time, Newton School leadership and faculty discuss assessment results and concur that students are making progress. Reports by the Principal and the Literacy Coordinator indicate that a number of students are making gains and classroom practices are being adjusted based on DIBELS results. A review of recent DIBELS data by the PR Team corroborated increased scores for some students. Additionally, most Newton School teachers reported in interviews that they are seeing gains in student learning both through informal observation and use of the DIBELS. Furthermore, staff members indicate they are using this information to inform classroom practices. One staff member stated, "We see progress and tweak the program to meet the needs of the kids." School personnel also indicate that DIBELS results are being used to group students based on their instructional levels, as stated in the SIP.

Because Newton has just begun to systematically analyze student achievement data, it is too early to indicate whether identified student gains will yield improvements significant enough to meet the Student Performance Goals listed in the SIP. In its current form, the SIP does not present concise benchmarks to measure the effectiveness of strategies. Newton is in its initial phase of implementing the SIP and school leadership indicates the current plan is a "working draft." If data collection and analyses continue as planned, assessment results are likely to be a useful measure of student performance in the future.

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

It is the judgment of the PR Team that the conditions are in place at the Newton School for successful implementation of improvement initiatives. The principal has provided the Newton School with sound management and effective instructional leadership that has created a unified vision that is focused on improving student performance. The Newton faculty and staff strongly support the planned improvement efforts and have shown commitment to the initiatives that are required. The district has supplied Newton with ample support and resources to guide the school's improvement efforts. However, in order to maintain the current conditions and the success of the initiatives at the Newton school, it is the judgment of the PR team that school leadership must remain stable.

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

In only three months of operation, the principal has provided the Newton School with effective leadership and sound management that is currently guiding the successful implementation of the SIP. Several structural changes have been made to the school day to increase the quality and quantity of student learning opportunities. The principal has provided the necessary instructional oversight to ensure implementation of the improvement initiatives. Newton staff and district

personnel show overwhelming support for the principal and the unified vision she has created at the school that is focused on improving student performance.

Since the beginning of the school year, the principal had incorporated several structural changes to the school day to accommodate the implementation of SIP strategies and ensure students maximum learning time. Some of the structural changes include: the move to a six day rotating schedule designed to incorporate team time; implementation of common and extended ELA blocks; use of Title I and special education support staff to provide increased targeted instruction for students requiring more intensive learning intervention and to give special education students increased access to the general education curriculum; the gradual implementation of homogeneous grouping to ensure students are receiving instruction closely aligned to their learning needs; and the reinstatement of “specials” (e.g., art, physical education) during extended school day time so as not to eliminate any instructional time. These strategies are stated in the *Leadership Report* and implementation was corroborated through interviews with school leadership and faculty, as well as classroom observations by the PR Team.

The principal has provided the school with strong and collaborative instructional leadership. The core reading program was implemented at Newton this year and is currently the centerpiece of improvement efforts. The primary, school-wide teaching method in ELA shifted to small group, targeted instruction, as reported by the principal, teachers and observed in classroom visits. The principal, as well as the Literacy coordinator, attend team time several times per month to discuss instructional programming, student grouping and to examine data. When unable to attend team time, the principal reviews meeting notes that teachers are required to submit, which were provided to the PR Team for review. The principal conducts informal walk-throughs and provides Newton staff with verbal feedback on various aspects of classroom practice. In interviews, teachers indicated that they receive verbal feedback from walk-throughs on most occasions. One teacher reported that when the principal sees something in a classroom that is applicable to the whole school, she puts it in the morning memo, which is distributed to all staff each morning—“not just the good, but also things to watch out for.” In addition, the principal is currently participating in the rigorous *Voyager U* professional development program along with some of the school’s staff.

Newton faculty and staff strongly support the leadership of the current principal, her commitment to the initiatives and the unified vision she has created for the school that is focused on teaching, learning and school improvement. On the *DOE Instructional Staff Survey*, 95 percent (n=21) of staff either “strongly agree” (81 percent) or “agree” (14 percent) that the principal provides effective leadership to support staff efforts to improve the academic performance of students at the Newton School. In interviews with the PR Team, teachers said the following in support of the principal’s leadership:

- “Yes, yes, the principal can do this!”
- She has “flipped the school upside down – and holds people accountable.”
- “This is the first time we’ve been pulled together this way.”
- In reference to recent leadership turnover, “this principal is the only one who has had impact on the school.”
- “This is exactly what this school needs and she has the experience to support it.”
- “We [staff] work hard, but she [the principal] works harder.”

In addition, district personnel are supportive of school leadership. The superintendent indicated that leadership “has really pulled them [staff] together.” Other district personnel claimed, “The leadership, creativity and resource management is an asset to the school.” The principal “does it in a way that affects teaching practice while maintaining a high level of morale.”

In summary, the principal has provided the school with sound management, effective instructional leadership and is highly supported by the Newton staff. The existing conditions at the Newton School are in place to facilitate the successful implementation of the improvement initiatives. However, it is the judgment of the PR Team that this leadership position *must* remain stable in order to maintain the current conditions, which are necessary to increase student performance rates.

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

The faculty strongly supports the planned improvement efforts. Early in the school year, Newton staff believed that change was necessary. Beyond participation in SIP implementation as previously cited in this report, Newton staff has shown commitment through the participation in additional improvement initiatives. Teachers believe that the SIP reflects both their needs and the needs of Newton students.

At the beginning of the school year, Newton staff became aware of the need for change. Some teachers indicated a review of student performance data (MCAS and DIBELS results) this year was a key factor in realizing improvement in school practices was necessary. Other teachers cited the school’s status of “corrective action” as an indicator that practices school-wide needed to change. In an interview, the principal indicated that “buy-in was not immediate, but staff committed themselves to giving the core reading program their best shot.” The superintendent indicates that “buy-in has really happened in the last three months.”

As evidenced previously in Key Question 1 of this report, clear staff support is seen through the implementation of SIP strategies, the communicative process that surrounds these initiatives and the initial use of data to assess student learning and inform instruction. Newton staff has shown additional commitment to the improvement efforts by taking on additional initiatives. Many staff members are voluntarily participating in additional professional development opportunities such as *Voyager U* and the *Teacher’s Reading Academy* (TRA). All staff members also serve on one of the newly established ELA and math committees. The task of these committees is to address changes to the scope and sequence of the curriculum in each subject area. As reported by the principal and the superintendent, instructional programs and data systems in place at the Newton School are being piloted for district-wide use. Newton leadership and faculty have shown commitment to school and district improvement by spear-heading these efforts.

Newton teachers indicate that the SIP reflects both their needs and the needs of students. As one teacher stated, “this was a hard sell, but I really like it.” Another faculty member indicated, “Our teaching is more connected to other teachers.” In relation to student performance, a Newton teacher stated, “[we are] absolutely floored with the progress of the kids.” Staff’s belief in the effectiveness of the current improvement efforts is further evidenced in the staff’s readiness to apply similar strategies to the math program. Interviews with the principal and Newton teachers suggested they are looking forward to the upcoming focus on math.

The Newton staff strongly supports the planned improvement efforts. Though the principal established the venue for the current improvement initiatives, the current and future commitment

of the school's faculty is evidence of conditions that are likely to yield successful implementation of the SIP.

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

The district has supplied the Newton School with ample guidance and support in its efforts to implement improvement initiatives. The district has provided Newton with sufficient financial, physical, personnel and training resources. Several actions by the district show further confidence and support for improvement efforts that are underway at the Newton School. The principal and the faculty show support for the district's involvement. However, in order to maintain the current direction and the success of the initiatives at this school, it is the judgment of the PR team that the district must continue to provide stable leadership for Newton School staff.

The district has provided Newton with the necessary financial, personnel, physical and training resources that have contributed to the school's ability to implement improvement efforts. In an interview, the superintendent indicated the district is helping to finance grant writing and has given the school priority in receiving grants to support programs at the Newton School. The director of curriculum and instruction and the principal corroborated the superintendent's report. The district provided the school with the funding for the Scott Foresman Reading Street program at the fourth and fifth grade levels. In addition, classroom observations school-wide indicated that teachers have adequate space and physical resources to provide a sound learning environment for Newton students. Although enrollment numbers at the Newton School decreased this year, the principal reports that the district has maintained the same number of special education support staff to enable the school to implement targeted and small group instruction, which is consistent with SIP strategies. Finally, as evidenced in the 2005-2006 *District-Wide Professional Development and Parent Conference Calendar*, and confirmed during interviews with district and school leadership and Newton teachers, the district has offered and funded professional development opportunities, such as the PIM training and Scott Foresman, which are consistent with the improvement initiatives at the Newton School.

Several actions by the district show further confidence and support for improvement efforts that are underway at the Newton School. As reported by the principal, the district allotted school leadership the flexibility to opt out of some district-wide professional development opportunities to participate in school-wide trainings that were more pertinent to the school's current initiatives. The superintendent reports the district supported the principal's desire to restructure staff in order to enable teaching that revolves around small group and targeted instruction. Additionally, both the superintendent and the principal report collaborating on improvement efforts since a district review by the state's Office of Educational Quality and Accountability placed them on watch. The superintendent stated that the Newton School has "led the path for other schools." This is indicative of clear support for the improvement efforts at the Newton School.

The principal and the faculty show support for the district's involvement. The Leadership Report documents reveal that Newton School is receiving adequate guidance from the district. In an interview with the PR Team, the principal reported the district is "supporting and sharing this vision" for improvement. The district has provided the principal with both professional and personal support in the last three months. On the *DOE Instructional Staff Survey*, 95 percent (n=21) of staff either "strongly agree" that the district has supplied adequate support for school improvement planning; Ninety-six percent of Newton staff either "strongly agree" (67 percent)

or “agree” (29 percent) that the district has provided ample professional development; and, 91 percent either “strongly agree” (62 percent) or “agree” (29 percent) that the district has provided sufficient guidance of curriculum implementation.

The Newton school has experienced a significant number of leadership changes in the last five years. The superintendent reports that he feels “this leadership will be more stable.” The district is currently providing the Newton School with sufficient resources and guidance to implement improvement efforts. In order for the school to continue its current direction and its successes implementing improvement initiatives, it is the judgment of the PR team that the district must continue to provide stable leadership to maintain the current conditions at the school.

CONCLUSION

The Newton School is implementing a sound plan for improvement. The SIP is being implemented through a process that ensures all staff understands the improvement initiatives. Causes for low student performance are linked to teaching and learning. Newton school faculty and staff are readily implementing related strategies. Although the SIP does not include clear benchmarks, the school is in an initial phase of systematically collecting and analyzing information on student achievement. Leadership and faculty alike consider the current SIP a “working draft.”

The conditions are in place at the Newton School for successful implementation of improvement initiatives. The school has a unified vision for improvement that is guided by the principal and strongly supported by Newton staff and the district. District support for improvement efforts at the Newton School is evident. To maintain these current conditions however, it is the judgment of the PR team that school leadership must remain stable.

APPENDIX A
Team Members

Megan Tupa, Panel Review Chair, SchoolWorks LLC, Beverly, MA

Emily Finkel, Panel Coordinator, Massachusetts Department of Education, Malden, MA

Linda Moriarty, Panelist, Retired Principal, Marshfield, MA

Andy Paciulli, Panelist, Principal, Glenbrook Middle School, Longmeadow MA

Wendy Woods, Panelist, Principal, Russell & Blandford Elementary Schools, Gateway
Regional School District, Huntington, MA

APPENDIX B
Newton Elementary School
Greenfield Public Schools
POTENTIALLY UNDER-PERFORMING PANEL REVIEW SCHEDULE
November 15 and 16, 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.
- 9:30*a.m.* —11:30*a.m.* **Team meeting # 1:** team meets for the first time to discuss each panelist's individual analysis; team forms preliminary judgments on key questions.
- 11:30*a.m.*—1*p.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 — 2:00*p.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—4:30*p.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.