

School Panel Review Report George H. Dunbar Elementary School New Bedford 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 George H. Dunbar Elementary School met this criterion and was one of 21 schools selected for panel review in fall 2005. The panel review was conducted on December 19 and 20, 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 Dunbar School is deemed underperforming. The panel was not asked to formulate a sound plan for school improvement where such a plan does not presently exist or to recommend a course of action to create the conditions for successful implementation of sound improvement strategies where such conditions at present do not appear to exist. Diagnostic and/or prescriptive intervention, where needed to assist an underperforming school, occurs at the next stage of the school review process.

George H. Dunbar School Profile

Enrollment

The George H. Dunbar School (Dunbar) serves students in Grades pre-kindergarten through five. Enrollment at Dunbar is currently 135 students, which is down slightly from 159 students in 2003. Between 2002 and 2005, student demographics have remained stable, with a slight decrease in the special education population from 19 percent in 2004 to ten percent in 2005. Proportions of Dunbar student subgroups in 2005, as compared to state averages, are presented on the next page:

Subgroup	2005 Enrollment (%)	
	School	State
Asian	0	5
Black	14	9
Hispanic	22	12
Native American	0	0.3
White	64	74
Low-Income	77	28
First Language Not English	16	14
Limited English Proficient	1	5
Special Education	10	16

In 2005, the attendance rate at Dunbar was 95.5 percent, with students absent 7.7 days on average. Attendance rates at Dunbar are slightly higher than the district and state averages of 93.7 percent and 94.2 respectively. Absenteeism is highest in the kindergarten, with an average of 10.8 days absent and a chronically absent rate of 22 percent. The school’s retention rate was 10.4 percent in 2004, the last year for which this data is available. This is higher than the state retention rate of 2.6 percent for that year. Dunbar’s in-school suspension rate in 2005 was zero percent, while out-of-school suspensions averaged 2.2 percent. 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 Dunbar staffing report indicates that the school is comprised of one administrator, seven teachers, and one guidance counselor. This is the first year the principal has been at the school and is her first year as an administrator. Of the teachers, approximately 20 percent have been at the school for ten or more years, none between five and ten years, and 80 percent less than five years. All of the teachers are reported as highly qualified and 30 percent hold an advanced degree.

MCAS Overview

Students at the Dunbar School are assessed in Grade 3 in reading and Grade 4 in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. Dunbar’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 in 2005, and from 2001 through 2003.¹ Dunbar did make AYP in the aggregate in ELA in 2004. In mathematics, the school made AYP in 2003 and 2004, and the population was too small in 2005 to be reported.

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 per subgroup (or 5% of the total number of students assessed, whichever is greater) is required to issue a statistically sound rating or determination of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). There are no subgroups meeting the minimum sample size at George H. Dunbar Elementary School in 2005 for ELA. The school does not have enough students tested for mathematics in 2005 to calculate AYP for the aggregate population or any subgroups.

In 2005, the aggregate Composite Performance Indices (CPIs) for the Dunbar School was 64.3 in ELA. Year-by-year aggregate CPIs are shown below:

Year-by-Year Aggregate CPI Data Summary		
Year	ELA	Math
2001	68.9	43.9
2002	71.6	44.2
2003	66.0	59.0
2004	69.1	38.8
2005	64.3	N/A
State Target 2005	80.5	68.7

GRADE 3

Reading MCAS Results

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

2005 Reading, Gr. 3	Percent		
	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	32	63	5
Regular Education	35	59	6

The Special Education and Limited English Proficient populations are too small to be reported. As the chart above shows, there is not a significant difference in performance between the Aggregate and Regular Education populations.

There has been a gradual increase in student performance since 2001, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 3 Reading MCAS performance presented below:

Aggregate Reading, Gr. 3	Percent		
	P	NI	W/F
2005	32	63	5
2004	37	53	11
2003	27	54	19
2002	46	46	8
2001	37	48	15

The percentage of students scoring in the Warning category has decreased from 15 percent in 2001 to five percent in 2005. The percentage of students scoring in the Needs Improvement category has increased from 48 to 63 percent during that same time period. The percentage of students scoring in the Proficient category has fluctuated slightly since 2001, with a high of 46 percent in 2002.

GRADE 4

ELA MCAS Results

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

2005 ELA, Gr. 4	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	0	5	79	16
Regular Education	0	8	77	15

As noted in the third grade reading MCAS results, there is not a significant difference in performance between the Aggregate and Regular Education populations, due to small numbers of Special Education and Limited English Proficient students at Dunbar.

Student performance since 2001 has been mixed, as reflected in the aggregate grade 4 ELA MCAS performance presented below:

Aggregate ELA, Gr. 4	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	0	5	79	16
2004	0	33	48	19
2003	0	19	73	8
2002	0	14	68	18
2001	0	22	67	11

Since 2001, the percentage of students scoring in the Warning category has increased from 11 percent to 16 percent. The percentage of students scoring Needs Improvement has also increased from 67 percent in 2001 to 79 percent in 2005. The Proficient category has seen some changes since 2001, when 22 percent of the aggregate scored in this category. This percentage then decreased the following year and then saw a two-year increase to a high of 33 percent in 2004. In 2005, there was a large drop in this category, with only five percent of the students scoring Proficient. Since 2001, no students have scored in the Advanced category.

GRADE 4

Mathematics MCAS Results

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

2005 Mathematics, Gr. 4	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	0	0	63	37
Regular Education	0	0	77	23

As the table above demonstrates, the Regular Education population performed slightly better on the fourth grade mathematics MCAS exam than did the Aggregate population.

There has not been a significant trend in student performance since 2001, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 4 Mathematics MCAS performance presented below:

Aggregate Mathematics, Gr. 4	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	0	0	63	37
2004	0	0	48	52
2003	0	19	52	30
2002	0	11	43	46
2001	0	0	67	33

Since 2001, the percentage of students scoring in the Warning category has fluctuated from a high percentage of 52 in 2004 to a low of 30 percent in 2003. This is similar to the trend in the Needs Improvement category as well, with 67 percent of students scoring in this category in 2001 and 63 percent in 2005. There has been a decrease in the Proficient category since 2003—from 19 percent to zero percent in 2004 and 2005. Since 2001, no students have scored in the Advanced category.

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 George H. Dunbar Elementary School’s 2004-2006 School Improvement Plan (SIP) was rated unsound by the Department of Education and the Panel Review (PR) team and is not being implemented at the school. A new School Improvement Plan, in the process of being developed and implemented, was presented to the panel on the first day of the review. At this time, no substantive student achievement gains can be attributed to either plan.

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.

A review team from the Department of Education determined that the 2004-2006 School Improvement Plan submitted by the George H. Dunbar School is not a sound plan. Evidence to support this conclusion included the following:

- There is no summary of the most important problems identified, the major approaches to solving these problems or why these approaches were chosen.
- The goals cited are not rigorous. The English language arts (ELA) goal for 2004 would not have allowed the school to make AYP. The mathematics goal does not aim to move any more students into Proficient. Although they note that the majority of their students are in the Needs Improvement category, both goals focus on moving more students into Needs Improvement, rather than into Proficient.
- Goals were not updated for the 2004-2005 or 2005-2006 school years.
- In ELA, the student learning objectives group several unrelated skills that do not correlate with the weaknesses in student skills identified in data analysis.
- The school identified causes of poor student performance but the causes did not identify specific problems in instruction, curriculum or school infrastructure. The causes cited under ELA mainly restated students' lack of skills. The causes cited under mathematics referred to general deficiencies in instruction regarding the skills but did not specify why instruction was inadequate in these areas.
- The school did not consider causes that would have a broad effect across multiple skills. Although they refer in the school profile to a number of problems (i.e., poor attendance, teacher turnover, and a permanent sub in the kindergarten), none of these potential causes of low student achievement are addressed in the plan.
- The mathematics strategies are overly simplistic, vague and repeated for a number of objectives. The mathematics plan does not give a sense of what will be different from past practice or why it will be different. For example, "Teachers will model problem solving and provide opportunities for students to practice problem solving." Did these activities not occur in the past? What will be different about the quality of these activities?
- The strategies in ELA are more specific and provide a good description of the activities teachers should be doing in the classroom. Neither the mathematics nor the ELA plan, however, includes significant changes to the infrastructure of the school or support to teachers. If teachers are going to improve their instructional techniques in the areas identified, what training and support will they receive to allow this to take place?
- Although the plan includes action plans, they do not describe the steps that need to be taken to get the strategies up and running in the school.
- The plan appears to have been written in the 2003-2004 school year. There are no signs that it was updated, except for a note regarding data analysis that took place on August 30, 2005.

- While implementation benchmarks are appropriate, the measures used in the outcome benchmarks are not always suitable for measuring the targeted skills.

The PR team concurred with the Department's analysis of the 2004-2006 SIP and noted, as well, that the ELA objectives were too broad and did not contain sufficient focus.

The PR team noted that the plan now under development at the school has the potential, once it is completed, to be a sound plan. More so than the previous plan, this SIP is more narrowly focused on a few key areas of weakness in both ELA and mathematics. As yet, however, it does not contain timelines, benchmarking information or plans for ongoing evaluation and modification, which are necessary components of a sound school improvement plan.

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

The 2004-2006 SIP was not developed through a process that yielded an effective plan for successful implementation. The development of this plan appeared to include a representative group but many of the staff members no longer remain at the Dunbar school. As a result, the SIP has not been a driving force in the improvement efforts at the school. The SIP that is currently being developed is supported by the school's faculty but, because this document is not yet complete, it is difficult to know if the process being used will have the desired impact.

The Dunbar Elementary School has had more than 60 percent turnover in staff, including the school principal, since the 2004-2006 School Improvement Plan was developed during the 2003-2004 school year. Only two teachers and the literacy coach currently on staff have been at the school for more than two years. At the time the plan was formulated, the school leadership and school improvement teams (as listed in the plan) apparently consisted of the entire faculty but because of the staffing changes, it is difficult to know the extent of the involvement of individual teachers, the process by which the plan was developed or the amount of district support provided. This plan did not have a process for ongoing evaluation of implementation or making adjustments when needed and has not been updated since 2004. The professional development indicated in the plan was limited to the mathematics and literacy coaches modeling strategies and conducting demonstration lessons for teachers. No other district-based or school-based professional development was described in the plan for teachers, coaches or the school principal. The extent to which this plan was communicated to all stakeholders is also unknown.

The plan currently under development involves the entire faculty divided into groups for mathematics and English language arts and that are led by the mathematics and literacy coaches, respectively. The new principal—who was appointed in July 2005—is overseeing and coordinating the entire process by using the Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) steps. The principal informed the PR team that the school is now at Step 4 in the process. The teachers and the principal reported to the panel that the process of developing the new plan began in a professional development session in August. Work on the plan also took place on an additional day of professional development in November and at approximately ten Friday meetings, when teachers voluntarily stayed late to work on the plan. At the August meeting, teachers reviewed the results of the 2005 MCAS for Grade 3 (reading). The Grade 4 results in English language arts and mathematics were examined in November, after they were returned by the state, with guidance from the district school support specialist.

Teachers have now identified areas in which students' performance needed improvement to meet state averages and examined items to identify which standards were being assessed. Those with the highest frequency were chosen as areas of student weakness. At a follow-up session (also in November), the school support specialist trained teachers in the use of data from Test Wiz. A third professional development day scheduled for January will continue the focus on development of reading and mathematics strategies. Also scheduled for that day is a faculty study group that will reflect on effective classroom practices as described in *The Skillful Teacher*. Training is also planned by the literacy coach in use of the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE) and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy (DIBELS) tests for flexible grouping at the classroom level.

This SIP draft does include some promising elements, such as plans for professional development in ELA related to the student learning objectives. As an example, for the objective, "Students will identify basic facts and main idea in a text and use them as the basis for interpretation," teachers are slated to receive professional development in comprehension and main idea, as well as strategies to improve reading fluency and decoding skills. Some professional development has already taken place, including vocabulary training (in response to the student learning objective to develop and apply new vocabulary) and training in the use of the Palm Pilot with the DIBELS assessment. As an indicator of teacher support for the current initiatives, the vocabulary training was held after school; attendance was voluntary and the whole staff attended. However, it appears that the plan does not yet contain implementation timelines, measurable benchmarks or a process to monitor implementation and make adjustments as needed.

In an interview with the five members of the School Council (four of whom are new this year), participants told the PR team that they had received draft copies of the new SIP and were conversant with the needs that were identified—three for ELA (identification of main idea; use of non-fiction genre; and strategies to use the application of new vocabulary) and three for mathematics (basic operations; fractions and decimals; and mathematics vocabulary).

However, because the draft of this new SIP was presented to the PR team on the first day of the review and has not yet been fully implemented at the school, it is difficult to assess whether the process to develop the plan will result in successful implementation.

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

Although the staff claims that it is not using the 2004-2006 SIP to guide instruction this year, some of the instructional strategies that are suggested in this plan were observed by the PR team during literacy period classroom visits. These strategies included: guided reading with flexible grouping; a modeled writing process, as well as writing process charts posted in classrooms; vocabulary development; the use of a Venn diagram (graphic organizer); retelling stories including a beginning, middle and end; students answering open-response questions; and, use of MCAS-type vocabulary words (e.g., *antonyms* and *adjectives*) to help students prepare for future testing. Although there was one brief mathematics observation only, work toward mathematics fact mastery and use of mathematics vocabulary was seen.

The principal, in consultation with faculty, reviewed the 2004-2006 SIP to determine which of the strategies were in progress, which have been implemented and which were not. Those that were implemented in ELA included:

- Modeling and practice retelling
- Using graphic organizers, such as Venn diagrams and KWL charts
- Providing students opportunities to read books at their independent levels
- Modeling writing process for compositions
- Modeling writing and providing practice in response to specific genres
- Collaboratively reviewing monthly writing prompts
- Displaying active word walls
- Modeling graphic organizers to assist the ability to answer open-response type test questions

In mathematics, the accomplished strategies from the 2004-2006 SIP were:

- Modeling of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division
- Weekly facts assessment

Although the new plan is still in draft form (first draft dated 12/05), the PR team learned—through observations and interviews—that all teachers in the school are working to implement the strategies they have been formulating to address the identified student needs. The PR team saw objectives and agendas posted in all classrooms observed, as well as in learning centers and observed instruction in nonfiction genre, vocabulary and main idea/details, which are the three identified student learning gaps for English language arts. In the area of mathematics, panelists saw journals, manipulatives, a computer learning program, fact sheets and a vocabulary list. Within the classroom and in teacher plan books, there was evidence that mathematics facts and mathematics vocabulary are being taught. These strategies appear to be addressing two of the identified student learning needs: correct usage of mathematics vocabulary and fluency with basic mathematical facts.

With respect to the draft plan, according to district supervisory staff, the school is “taking first steps in implementing a sound plan” (Title I director) and “teachers are all speaking the same language” (assistant superintendent for English language arts).

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

Because the school did not specifically track student progress as a result of its limited implementation of the 2004-2006 School Improvement Plan during the 03-04 and 04-05 school years, the PR team could not draw specific conclusions on gains relative to the implementation of the SIP. The panel noted that on the Grade 3 MCAS in reading, the percentage of students in the aggregate scoring in the Warning category decreased from 19 percent in 2003 to 5 percent in 2005. There was an increase in the Proficient category from 27 percent to 32 percent. These gains may be attributed to implementation of some of the strategies of the 2004-2006 SIP, although no clear connection was made by the school. It should be noted, however, that there was a decline in Proficiency and an increase in the Warning category on the fourth grade MCAS in ELA, but without a specific system for tracking, the relationship between student performance and SIP implementation cannot be determined.

This year, the school has begun to collect increased data on student achievement. However, because much of this assessment information is new, there is not currently an indication of student gains. The formative data collected since September includes:

- MCAS practice tests administered to third, fourth and fifth graders in November to collect baseline data. These practice tests will be administered again in January.
- GRADE assessment in grades K-3
- Star Math & Star Reading—computer-based pre-tests overseen by literacy and mathematics coaches and given in grades 2-5
- Quarterly district mathematics assessments
- DIBELS, given in grades K-3
- Quick Phonics Screener (similar to DIBELS) in grades 3-5
- Open Court Assessment (basal series) in the program's five components of reading
- Questioning for Understanding during daily lessons
- Mathematics facts challenges

The only assessment for which benchmarked results were available to the panel was oral reading fluency on the DIBELS. Most students in Grades 2 and 3 show progress in oral reading fluency and some are attaining their grade-level targets. For example, of 18 Grade 3 students who scored high risk on the initial administration of the DIBELS, there are now only two. Student progress on the DIBELS is discussed at team meetings. As one teacher indicated, she uses the reading assessments to “level my teaching strategies, to group for instruction, to reteach skills.” At this time, the assessment results available have been shared only internally.

In terms of changes in classroom practice as a result of implementation of the draft plan, the principal reports that she sees more evidence in classrooms on the three ELA areas targeted for improvement as evidenced by questioning of students to ensure their comprehension of written material; more print-rich classroom environments; more questioning on main idea; more guided reading of nonfiction; more emphasis on mathematics facts; more mathematics vocabulary and students explaining how they determined the answers to problems; and, use of writing rubrics. Teachers and the literacy coach told the panel that there is more instruction on main idea, more emphasis on guided reading of nonfiction material, and evidence of more vocabulary development in classroom instruction.

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

If a sound SIP is created and approved, the panel review team concluded that the George H. Dunbar School's leadership and staff are poised for its successful implementation. The district is providing some support to the school but it is not clear whether the support provided on the development and implementation of the SIP is enough to result in a written document that is likely to guide improvement efforts and increase student performance at the Dunbar School.

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

It is the judgment of the PR team that the new principal of the Dunbar School, appointed in July 2005, is proving to be a strong leader and school manager. The principal is supported by the school's staff and community and, in her tenure at the school, has shown aspects of an effective instructional leader.

The teachers interviewed during the panel review visit see the principal as a capable and strong instructional leader who is committed to turning the school around. One teacher in a focus group said, "I love this principal. She has everyone with her and she is with everyone." In turn, the principal told the panel that her staff is dedicated and enthusiastic, as demonstrated by teachers who are willing to spend extra time after school to work on the school improvement plan and to tutor individual students.

Parents interviewed reported that the principal has high expectations for students. There was general agreement that there is a positive school climate and high staff morale at the school. This was illustrated at a recent Breakfast with Santa, attended by more than 50 students and parents in Grades K-2 on a Saturday morning. The principal, teachers, a cafeteria worker and the custodian came voluntarily to make this event possible. The school's positive climate was also reflected by the physical facility. Although the building is old, it was very clean and brightly decorated. It is a small neighborhood school with no busing. All of the children walk to school or are driven by parents from the surrounding area.

The school council, largely composed of new members, expressed that there is a sense of community at the school and a feeling that "we are all in this together." The school council has seen a copy of the draft plan in its current stage of development. Parents interviewed knew that they had the option, under NCLB School Choice, to send their children to other district schools, but expressed confidence in the Dunbar School and its teachers. Members of the school council told the panel reviewers that fewer than ten children actually left the school because of its Corrective Action status.

To review instructional practice and monitor implementation of the key strategies, the principal and teachers reported that the principal is conducting daily walkthroughs when possible (at least two per week) and providing both formal (written) and informal (verbal) feedback about what she observed. She collects lesson plans weekly to ensure that teachers are meeting the school's identified needs and noting lesson alignment to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks in their plan books. Student work submitted on a monthly basis includes a writing sample and mathematics and handwriting work. Teachers use a writing rubric for composition content and

grammar and students are aware of the standards of the rubric. The principal issues a daily memorandum that alerts all staff to events at the school, special moments and reminders, as well as noting best practices she has observed in classrooms.

In the Panel Review Questionnaire completed for this review, the principal articulated the vision that “The George H. Dunbar School becomes a professional learning community where all students are proficient in all academic areas and love to learn. I also foresee a learning environment where students, parents and teachers work as one to ensure student achievement.” Although she said that she involves the whole school in decision making—including the faculty, school council and instructional support team—and that, “Everyone is making the journey together,” the principal sees herself as ultimately responsible. She often used the phrase, “The buck stops here,” to describe her responsibility. The principal also indicated that the SIP currently being developed under her leadership supports her vision for student academic progress and proficiency. She said, “I am accountable for the success of the plan and the school.”

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

There is considerable evidence that the Dunbar School’s faculty supports the improvement efforts that are articulated in the new plan currently under development. All of the staff members were involved in the assessment of needs for this plan, as well as in the development of the related strategies.

In interviews, the PR team learned that all of the teachers and coaches agree with the key areas for improvement for English language arts and mathematics that have been identified as crucial for increased student achievement. They further believe that the implementation of the draft plan will result in measurable gains. During classroom observations, the PR team noted the following indicators that faculty supports the planned improvements:

- Posting of student work
- Print-rich environment
- Learning centers
- Students using Leapfrog – a computer-based reading program – to read nonfiction books
- Informal assessment of student learning was taking place as teachers were checking for understanding
- Teachers reviewing instructional objectives, ensuring that students know what they are expected to learn. An example from Grade 3: “You will be able to write words that are palindromes (words that are spelled the same forward and backward).”

Teachers are using some ongoing assessment data—the DIBELS, in particular—to drive instruction. However, there appears to be a lack of intervention support at the school for students not reaching benchmarks. For example: Although third grade students were expected to be reading 77 words per minute on the DIBELS on a recent assessment, two students were able to attain only 42 and 44 words per minute each; these students, though, are not receiving extra support. School-wide Title I funds provide the Dunbar with both a literacy and a mathematics coach. The Dunbar has no additional remedial Title I support.

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

Although there is some guidance and support from district leadership, it is the judgment of the PR team that there are areas where that support has not been adequate. The supports provided include Title I funds and a variety of district policies and programs. Areas where district support has been insufficient include resources for students with additional intervention needs and increased guidance for the development of the School Improvement Plan.

Through Title funds, the district provides the school's full-time literacy and mathematics coaches who get monthly training at the district level that they bring back to the school for teachers to use in classrooms. The principal told the panel that she gets "terrific help from the coaches" who provide classroom support for teachers in implementing the draft plan. The district, which has two Reading First schools, has provided funding to provide the same materials and assessments in all other elementary schools as at the Reading First schools. As a result of this decision, the research-based Science Research Associates (SRA) Open Court Reading Program, as well as the DIBELS and GRADE assessments, was purchased for the Dunbar School. The literacy coach has provided the accompanying training for Dunbar teachers.

Other supports provided at the school by the district include:

- The district's technology specialist is frequently at the school and is now trying to network the Accelerated Reader in the school's up-to-date computer lab.
- District mandates for 120 minutes of English language arts and 90 minutes of mathematics in Grades K-3 and 90 minutes each of ELA and mathematics in Grades 4-5, in response to requests by teachers for more time on learning.
- The district has a pacing guide for mathematics and uses the Open Court pacing guide that the assistant superintendent for ELA sees as systematic and explicit and which follows the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.
- There is low class size. All classes in the school, but one, have fewer than 20 students.
- The district provided an outside consultant to help the school prepare for the panel review.
- The principal has been provided with a mentor—an experienced principal from another elementary school.
- The district provides a mandatory induction program for new teachers, which is conducted by the content area coordinators. Experienced teachers are also paid stipends to mentor new teachers.
- A full range of school- and district-based professional development opportunities is available for staff.

The superintendent reports a sense of urgency from the district for schools to improve and, as a result, changed the due date of School Improvement Plans from May to January. He also told the PR team that he appointed the new principal because he thought the previous principal had "managerial challenges." In an interview, he also reported to the PR team that he is well-informed about the needs of the school and reports that, with the new principal, there has been a culture change at the school.

The PR team noted, however, that there are limited interventions for students available at Dunbar as a school with critical academic needs. Title I services were not tailored to Dunbar's needs. It

was a district decision to fund literacy and mathematics coaches, rather than teachers, who could provide direct services to students. The assistant superintendent for student services was not familiar with special education needs at the school and could not identify any interventionists or intervention programs that were taking place. He could account only for the low numbers of special education students (10 percent) by speculating that some students in self-contained classes in other buildings may be Dunbar children who were placed elsewhere. Some students who have been identified for special education services in reading are instructed by the school's special education teacher in the Wilson Reading Program. Others receive support in the classroom.

In terms of development of the School Improvement Plan, the district's Three-Year Strategic Plan developed for the New Bedford Public Schools from 2004-2007 states (page 14) that from 2004-2007,

The district will provide schools with a rubric as well as professional development activities to support the development & implementation of School Improvement Plans as determined through the PIM process. This process facilitated by the School Support Specialist will assist in the further development of effective School Improvement Plans that define strategies to improve, based on the data collected for analysis and interpretation. (page 14)

Although this was stated in the district plan, it is the judgment of the PR team that there was not adequate guidance for the school provided by the district review or in terms of implementation support. As a result, the Dunbar 2004-2006 School Improvement Plan was deemed unsound.

The Dunbar principal told the PR team that there was some support for the development of the draft (new) plan from the school district and by the school support specialist. This training and support, however, in writing the SIP document was insufficient. In particular, the principal was not made aware that it is district policy that she should be using the Department of Education template and, to date, has been using a plan that she got from another principal as a model. Once the plan is completed, the school support specialist said that his role would be to monitor the extent to which teachers are implementing the plan and how well their efforts are working.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the PR team concluded that, although the 2004-2006 School Improvement Plan for the George Dunbar Elementary School was deemed to be unsound, a new plan now under development has the potential to be a sound plan—one that focuses on key improvement needs that were determined by student achievement data. The new principal was deemed to be a strong instructional leader who is following sound management practices and who has unqualified support from staff, students and parents. More guidance and support by the district is needed to ensure that the new plan contains all the necessary components.

APPENDIX A
Team Members

Zita M. Samuels, Panel Review Chair, SchoolWorks LLC, Beverly, MA

Joan McNeil, Panel Coordinator, Massachusetts Department of Education, Malden, MA

Maureen DeLoach, Panelist, Principal, Tisbury Elementary School, Vineyard Haven, MA

Ted Mitchell, Panelist, Principal, Daniel Webster Elementary School, Marshfield, MA

Lois Sullivan, Panelist, Educational Consultant, Cambridge, MA

APPENDIX B
George H. Dunbar Elementary School
New Bedford Public Schools
POTENTIALLY UNDER-PERFORMING PANEL REVIEW SCHEDULE
December 19 and 20, 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.