

## **REPORT OF FACT FINDING REVIEW**

### **Abraham Lincoln Elementary School**

### **New Bedford Public Schools**

#### **Executive Summary**

There are many aspects of sound educational practice in place at the Abraham Lincoln Elementary (Lincoln Elementary) School. Initiatives have not had the necessary impact, however, because the school has not had a clear and specific plan to guide for improvement. In order to increase student performance rates, Lincoln Elementary must focus its improvement efforts. These efforts should be addressed with a sense of urgency and require collaboration from the entire school community.

#### **Domain I: Curriculum and Instruction**

The domain for curriculum and instruction is a strength of Lincoln Elementary. The Fact Finding (FF) team determined that most aspects of instruction meet the standard for best practice. The school has a newly established assessment system that is sufficient to provide the information on student learning needs. This will be beneficial as the school continues improvement planning. Sound curriculum documents that are aligned with state standards and good instructional practices have not had the necessary impact on performance rates at Lincoln Elementary because efforts have not been focused on specific areas of student skill weakness at each grade level.

#### **Domain II: Climate and Culture for Learning**

The climate and culture for learning is a significant strength of Lincoln Elementary. It is marked by positive, supportive and respectful interactions between students, staff and leadership. Student behavior is a non-issue. The climate has been purposefully designed to create a culture for learning. There are no recommendations for improvement in this domain.

#### **Domain III: School Leadership**

A number of sound practices occur at Lincoln Elementary. However, they have not had the necessary impact on student performance because they have not focused on the most critical areas for improvement. This includes the benefits of instructional leadership and sound teaching practices. Central to this issue is the lack of a clear and specific School Improvement Plan (SIP). In order to increase student performance, prioritized improvement planning must be met with a sense of urgency by school leadership and in collaboration with the whole school community.

#### **Domain IV: Organizational Structures and Management**

The Lincoln Elementary School is well-managed. Common planning time and weekly grade level meetings exist, which ensure communication and collaboration among school staff and leadership. Professional development activities occur regularly. In the absence of a clear and specific SIP, however, the school has not received the full benefit of these planning and training resources. Once the school has determined the focus for improvement efforts, meeting agenda and professional development should be used to directly support improvement initiatives. This will ensure that teachers (and students) receive the full benefit of these activities.

#### **Domain V: District Support**

Lincoln Elementary does not have a clear and specific plan to guide its improvement efforts. Although the district provided training and some guidance, this has not been sufficient to result in a sound plan or effective improvement efforts at the school. Focused improvement planning is the critical next step for the school. The district must make Lincoln Elementary a priority and assert its presence at the school, both in SIP development and the implementation of initiatives. This requires a sense of urgency, collaboration and a focus on the common goal of increasing student learning and performance.

## Fact Finding Review Process

The Fact-Finding Review is the third stage in the process used to assess school performance under the Massachusetts School and District Accountability System. At the first stage of the process, a school's performance and improvement on state MCAS tests is rated. Schools that perform in the lowest School Performance Rating categories (very high percentage of students with failing MCAS performance; low percentage proficient and advanced) may be referred for a Panel Review.

The Panel Review process constitutes the second stage of the School and District Accountability System. Panel Reviews are conducted to assist the Commissioner of Education in determining whether state intervention is needed to guide improvement efforts in schools where student's MCAS performance is critically low and no trend toward improved student performance is evident from MCAS data. Panels consisting of 5 - 8 members review data and written information on the school's performance and improvement efforts and spend two days visiting the school and meeting with school and district leaders.

The Review Panel's charge is to advise the Commissioner of Education, at the conclusion of the review process, of its judgment on two questions:

- Does the school under review have a sound plan for improving student performance?
- Are the conditions in place for the successful implementation of the school's improvement plan?

If the answer to either or both of these questions is no, the Commissioner may declare the school to be underperforming.

Schools that are declared to be underperforming enter the third stage in the School and District Accountability System and undergo an in-depth diagnostic Fact-Finding Review.

The purposes of the Fact-Finding Review are to:

- Provide an in-depth diagnosis of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, including specific causal analysis.
- Use extensive observation (school and classroom) to build a knowledge base for the school's planning work.
- Make specific recommendations for the development of the school's improvement plan.

The Fact-Finding Team's charge is to advise the Commissioner and Board of Education, at the conclusion of the review process, of its judgment on two key questions:

1. What are the reasons for the low levels of student performance in ELA and mathematics at this school?
2. What are the prospects for improved student performance at this school?

The Fact-Finding Team answers the key questions based on evidence collected through observations of teaching and learning, interviews of faculty, students, administrators, district personnel and other school stakeholders and through the review of documents, including the school improvement plan, student assessment information, curriculum documents and student work. The team's judgments must be robust and fully supported by evidence.

The Fact-Finding Team's judgments are guided by a protocol that requires the team to respond to the key questions in each of the following domains: curriculum and instruction; culture and climate for learning, school leadership, organizational structures and management, and district support. The Fact-Finding Team uses its professional judgment to focus on domains that reveal key strengths and areas for improvement in the school.

## **Abraham Lincoln Elementary School Profile**

### **Enrollment**

The Abraham Lincoln Elementary School serves students in kindergarten through grade 5. Enrollment at Lincoln Elementary changed little between 2004 and 2005. Between 2003 and 2004, enrollment dropped by 38 students, partially because the school's grade 6 classes moved to the middle school. The school's 2005 enrollment was 292 students.

Between 2002 and 2005, student demographics stayed relatively stable. Proportions of Lincoln Elementary student subgroups in 2005, as compared to state averages, are presented next:

<b>Subgroup</b>	<b>School's 2005 % Enrollment</b>	<b>State Average % in 2005</b>
Asian	0	5
Black	5	9
Hispanic	11	12
Native American	1	0.3
White	84	74
Low-Income	63	28
First Language Not English	11	14
Limited English Proficient	1	5
Special Education	11	16

In 2005, the attendance rate at Lincoln Elementary was 97.2 percent, with students absent 4.8 days on average. Lincoln Elementary School's 2005 attendance rate is 3.0 percent better than the state average for 2005, with attendance for students in grades 2 through 5 being slightly better than attendance for grade 1 and kindergarten students. Chronically absent students accounted for 3.5 percent of the student population in 2005. The school's retention rate was 4.3 percent in 2004, the last year for which the data are available. At the time that the panel review was conducted, Lincoln Elementary had had no in-school suspensions in 2005, while out-of-school suspensions averaged 2.4 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 Lincoln Elementary School staffing report indicates that the school is comprised of 1 administrator, 14 teachers, 2 coaches, 1 school social worker/adjustment counselor and 1 school secretary. The principal has been at the school for 18 years and has a total of 19 years of administrative experience. Of the teachers, approximately 71 percent have been at the school for five or more years and 21 percent for ten or more years. Two of the 17 teachers at Lincoln Elementary hold a Master's degree and all are certified in General Elementary Education.

## MCAS Overview

Students at the Lincoln Elementary School are assessed in grade 3 in reading and in grade 4 in both English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. Lincoln Elementary School's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report for 2005 Mid-Cycle IV shows that the school is in Corrective Action for English language arts (ELA) and has no accountability status for mathematics. The school failed to make AYP in ELA in 2004 and 2005 in the aggregate and for its reported subgroups of Low-Income and White students.<sup>1</sup> In mathematics in 2005, the school did not make AYP in the aggregate. In mathematics, Lincoln Elementary School's subgroups were not of sufficient size to be reported. In the aggregate, the school made AYP in mathematics in 2003 and 2004, but not from 1999 through 2002.

## GRADE 3

### Reading MCAS Results

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

2005 Reading	Percent		
	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	28	62	11
Regular Education	29	60	11

As the data above indicates, the majority (73 percent) of Lincoln Elementary School's grade 3 students in the aggregate scored in the Needs Improvement and Warning/Failing categories combined, while 28 percent scored Proficient. Over the years since 2001, the percentage of students scoring Proficient dropped (most significantly, between 2003 and 2004) and both of its lower categories grew.

Aggregate Reading	Percent		
	P	NI	W/F
2005	28	62	11
2004	26	58	16
2003	50	42	8
2002	37	51	11
2001	43	50	7

The school did, however, make slight progress between 2004 and 2005 in terms of moving students from Warning/Failing to Needs Improvement and in increasing its Proficient category.

<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the federal No Child Left Behind Act passed in 2001, student performance is disaggregated by the following subgroups: Limited English Proficient, Special Education, Low-Income, African-American/Black, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Native American and White. A minimum of 40 students 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). The subgroups meeting the minimum sample size at Lincoln Elementary in 2005 were Low-Income and White for ELA. No subgroups were of sufficient size to be reported in mathematics.

**GRADE 4****ELA MCAS Results**

Lincoln Elementary School's results from the 2005 Grade 4 ELA MCAS are presented next:

<b>2005 ELA</b>	<b>Percent</b>			
	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W/F</b>
Aggregate	0	20	68	12
Regular Education	0	21	68	11

In ELA, 80 percent of Lincoln Elementary School's grade 4 students scored in the low categories of MCAS, while only 20 percent scored Proficient and no students scored Advanced. Reviewing the school's 2005 data in comparison to ELA MCAS performance data from the past four years, it can be noted that there have been reductions in the Warning/Failing category, accompanied by reductions in the Proficient category between 2003 and 2005. Between 2004 and 2005, there was also a decrease from 5 percent of students scoring Advanced to no students scoring at that level. Aggregate ELA data from 2001 to 2005 is presented next:

<b>Aggregate ELA</b>	<b>Percent</b>			
	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W/F</b>
2005	0	20	68	12
2004	5	29	59	7
2003	0	33	36	31
2002	0	17	52	30
2001	0	17	56	27

**GRADE 4****Mathematics MCAS Results**

Mathematics MCAS results for Lincoln Elementary School in 2005 are shown below:

<b>2005 Mathematics</b>	<b>Percent</b>			
	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W/F</b>
Aggregate	0	12	68	20
Regular Education	0	13	68	18

While 88 percent of grade 4 students scored in the Warning/Failing and Needs Improvement range, 12 percent scored Proficient and no students earned an Advanced score. Mathematics MCAS data from 2001 to 2005 is presented in the following table:

<b>Aggregate Mathematics</b>	<b>Percent</b>			
	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W/F</b>
2005	0	12	68	20
2004	7	22	51	20
2003	0	14	49	38
2002	2	2	51	45
2001	0	10	59	32

The school reduced its Warning/Failing category between 2001 and 2005, moving students into the Needs Improvement category. Its Proficient and Advanced categories fluctuated during the same time period. Between 2004 and 2005, however, students scoring in the upper categories (Proficient and Advanced) declined from 29 percent to 12 percent.

## Key Domains of Inquiry

The Abraham Lincoln Elementary School has many aspects of sound practice in place. Current improvement efforts, however, have included a large range of initiatives as opposed to targeting specific student needs. The school has not previously had a clear road map to guide and assist in the prioritization of these efforts. The resounding theme of this report reflects the school's need to prioritize and focus its improvement goals to ensure that students receive the full impact of these efforts. In order to be successful, there must be collaboration from the entire Lincoln Elementary School community. This must be addressed with a sense of urgency.

## I: Curriculum and Instruction

The domain of curriculum and instruction is a strength of Lincoln Elementary. Most elements of classroom instruction meet the standard for best practice. Teachers use varied modes of instruction to deliver lessons. The curriculum is aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. The school has an assessment system that is providing sufficient data to monitor and analyze student learning in place. Teachers, though, are just beginning to use assessments to inform instruction. Sound curricula and solid instructional practices at Lincoln Elementary have not had the necessary impact on student performance because the school has yet to focus its efforts on specific areas of student skill weakness at each grade level.

The FF team conducted 24 observations (35 minutes each) of 14 classrooms at all grade levels. Observations included services to the special education population, most of whom are served in the regular classroom via an inclusion model. There are two substantially separate classrooms that were also visited by the FF team. Through use of an observation form, the team rated various standards of classroom practice on a tiered scale. The majority of instructional practices observed at Lincoln Elementary are consistent with standards of best practice. Instruction in some classrooms was less rigorous than others, which were marked by the absence of higher-order questions. The results of 24 classroom observations are summarized in the table below and described in the text following.

Standards of classroom practice	Does not meet the standard	Meets the standard	Exceeds the standard
Lesson objectives clearly explained	2/24* (8%)	20/24 (84%)	2/24 (8%)
Use of questions to check for understanding	2/24 (8%)	19/24 (79%)	3/24 (13%)
Use of higher order questions	12/24 (50%)	10/24 (42%)	2/24 (8%)
Rigor of classroom lessons is appropriate	8/24 (33%)	12/24 (50%)	3/24 (13%)
Pace of classroom lessons is appropriate	5/24 (21%)	17/24 (71%)	2/24 (8%)

\*In some instances, the observer entered the classroom after the start of the lesson and might not have had the opportunity to hear the objective explained.

In 20 out of 24 classrooms (84%) observed at Lincoln Elementary, the lesson objective was clearly explained so that students understood the lesson's purpose, as well as the desired learning outcome. In instances in which lesson objectives were judged as exceeding the standard, the FF team witnessed multiple objectives stated for students at varied learning levels or who were asked to complete different tasks. School leadership and teachers report that an explanation of lesson objectives has been a focus for classroom instruction this year.

The FF team observed frequent use of questions to check for student understanding in 19 of 24 (79%) of the classrooms. Examples included asking students to "define" vocabulary words, "describe" what they just read, "recall" facts from the text or "explain how" they got an answer.

Both leadership and teachers reported that use of higher-order questions has been an area of focus for classroom instruction this school year. The principal indicated that "some teachers are doing it [using higher-order questions] better than others." This is consistent with observations conducted by the FF team, who noted use of higher-order questions in 42 percent of Lincoln Elementary classrooms. Examples included asking students to make "predictions," "differentiate between a problem and a question," make "inferences" or find "clues" based on what they read and "analyze" a problem. In the opinion of the FF team, higher-order questions were effective at challenging students in those classrooms in which they were being used.

The FF team noted a correlation between question type and the rigor of the classroom lessons, which was also evidenced by the type of feedback students received. Higher-order questions presented greater challenge to students and inherently elicited discussion and feedback on student responses. Knowledge and comprehension questions were used primarily to assess for student understanding. In classrooms judged to be less rigorous (33%), the FF team noted some instances in which Lincoln Elementary teachers moved on to the next question without addressing incorrect student responses or ensuring that all students understood the content. That is, only the student who responded to the question received feedback.

Varied types of instruction are used across Lincoln Elementary classrooms. In 58 percent (14/24) of classrooms, the FF team observed the implementation of at least two of the following modes of instruction: teacher-led, student-led, small group and/or independent work. In 29 percent (7/24) of classrooms, three of these instructional modes were observed. In three classrooms, the FF team saw all four instructional modes used during the 35-minute observation. A detailed breakdown of instructional modes occurring across all 24 classrooms observed (including examples), is listed below.

- *Teacher-led instruction:* 96% of classes (23/24). Examples included: Lectures to introduce a topic, read-aloud, content delivery to the whole group via the overhead.
- *Student-led instruction:* 21% of classes (5/24). Examples included: Students making choices, initiating the learning tasks.
- *Small Groups:* 58% of classes (14/24). Examples included: Varied center-based activities, pair and share.
- *Independent Work:* 46% of classes (11/24). Examples included: Computer-based tasks, worksheets.

In addition to varied modes of instruction, the FF team also observed differentiated activities that were designed to meet the needs of students of diverse abilities. For example, of the 14 classrooms in which the FF team saw small groups, 11 lessons had students engaged in different learning tasks. These classrooms were also judged by the FF team to be more rigorous (i.e., presented greater challenge and higher expectations) and better paced (activities were tailored to the students, who could move through lesson activities at their own speed).

Use of differentiated instructional modes and learning activities was not evident in all Lincoln Elementary classrooms. The FF team observed 10 classrooms (42%) in which teacher-led instruction was the only method of content delivery. In focus groups with the FF team, teachers indicated varied levels of understanding of differentiated instruction. All teachers report grouping students by ability but teaching practices did not always address varied student learning needs. For example, the FF team observed students divided into small groups but content delivery was in a whole-group format at one instructional level.

An additional strength at Lincoln Elementary is use of mathematics and ELA curricula that are aligned to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. In conjunction with curriculum guides provided by the New Bedford Public Schools, teachers use the Frameworks to guide content delivery. The district has also provided curriculum maps in mathematics, which teachers report are useful. To deliver instruction, the school uses the SRA McGraw-Hill mathematics program and the Open Court reading program. The SRA Corrective Reading program has been recently adopted to help remediate struggling learners. In focus groups conducted with FF team, teachers reported a uniform understanding of how to use instructional programs and curriculum documents to deliver instruction. This ensures that Lincoln Elementary students are receiving grade-level content according to state standards.

The Lincoln Elementary School has an assessment system that provides sufficient information on student performance in place. The primary assessments used to measure student learning are the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), the SRA Oral Reading Fluency test, the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE) and the Comprehensive Math Assessment. The principal, coaches and teachers all report that this is the first year they have had a formative assessment system that they feel is supplying the information needed to accurately assess student skills.

Assessments currently serve two primary functions at Lincoln Elementary: 1) to measure student performance, and 2) to group students into three ability levels: Benchmark, Strategic and Intervention. This was evidenced by DIBELS results provided to the FF team, which included individual student reports from baseline and mid-year assessments, as well as a summarized report of student gains. DIBELS progress monitoring reports were also made available. Staff report that these more frequent measures are used for the school's struggling (Intensive) students. Leadership and teachers indicate that use of assessments has helped them focus on students of all ability levels, not just students with the greatest learning needs. Beyond flexible student groupings and some differentiated practices previously described, a systematic use of data to adjust classroom instruction based on assessment information was not in evidence.

There are many strong elements in place at Lincoln Elementary in the domain of curriculum and instruction. The gaps identified by the FF team in some aspects of practice are also recognized by Lincoln Elementary staff and leadership. In order to see increases in student performance rates, the FF team prioritized the following next steps for the Lincoln Elementary School.

- **Use varied assessment sources to identify and prioritize specific student skill weaknesses or causes of low student performance.** The establishment of an assessment system has begun to provide the school with data on student strengths and weaknesses in different skill areas. Analyses of assessment information should be used to focus improvement efforts on areas of greatest concern for students at each grade level. This should be documented and used to set goals and benchmarks in the next iteration of the School Improvement Plan.
- **Select instructional strategies to address the needs of students at different grade levels.** Based on the data, strategies should be selected to address specific student learning needs at each grade level. If assessment information does not reveal improvements, instructional strategies may need modification.

## II: Culture and Climate for Learning

Lincoln Elementary School staff and leadership have purposefully created an environment that sets the stage for student learning to occur. The climate is respectful, behavioral standards are clear and student-staff interactions are positive and supportive.

Across the 24 observations conducted by the FF team, behavioral expectations either met or exceeded the standard across classrooms. This was also true of student-staff interactions. The FF team rated these aspects of school climate on the same tiered scale described in Domain I. The results are summarized in the table below.

Standards of classroom practice	Does not meet the standard	Meets the standard	Exceeds the standard
Clear expectations for student behavior	0	18/24 (75%)	6/24 (25%)
Positive student-staff interactions	0	16/24 (67%)	8/24 (33%)

The FF team did not see evidence of any disciplinary problems across classroom observations. Focus groups conducted with teachers indicated that behavior is “not an issue” at the school. Because student behavior requires minimal attention, teachers are able to maximize instructional time. In 87 percent (21/24) of the classrooms observed, the FF team rated teacher use of instructional time as either meeting or exceeding the standard of best practice.

Student and staff interactions at Lincoln Elementary are positive and supportive. Teachers frequently praised student academic work and behavior; for example, “That’s excellent!” “You have really impressed me.” “I am very proud of you.” The school has an incentive program (B.U.G.s - Bringing Up Grades) that was created to reward individual student accomplishments and responsible behavior. In one classroom, a teacher indicated that students who work collaboratively as a team will receive B.U.G.s. This is another example of the positive climate at the school. The FF team also witnessed positive and respectful behavior in the hallways, as students frequently greeted staff and stopped to hold the door for others to pass through.

As stated in the Abraham Lincoln Elementary School Handbook, one of the school’s guiding principles is, “To develop desirable personal and interpersonal behaviors and skills, particularly as they bear on learning.” The positive learning culture that exists at the school is purposeful and a significant strength. Reasons for low levels of student performance cannot be attributed to the school’s climate. There are no recommendations for improvement in this domain.

### III: School Leadership

There are several positive elements, which increase the likelihood of success, in place at the Lincoln Elementary School. However, the school does not have a clear and specific School Improvement Plan (SIP). As a result, it is not receiving the full benefit of its instructional leadership capacities from the principal and coaches, nor from the efforts of teachers. In order to impact student performance, prioritized improvement planning requires the immediate focus of school leadership, with input and collaboration from the whole school community.

As identified in the December 2005 Panel Review (PR) report, the current operating SIP at Lincoln Elementary is “neither clear nor specific enough to guide the implementation of planned improvement efforts” (p. 6). The PR report identified broad causes, non-specific strategies and an absence of benchmarks as the primary weaknesses in the Lincoln Elementary SIP. Since the Panel Review, Lincoln Elementary has created a new 2006-2008 SIP, which is currently in draft form. It has been reviewed by the district. The school recently received feedback, which has not yet been incorporated. Although the draft 2006-2008 SIP document possesses greater clarity in some areas, it is the judgment of the FF team that the plan still lacks the specificity to guide and focus improvement efforts. In ELA, for example, the plan references “lack of practice” as a cause, but it is unclear what students lack practice with. Because causes are not specific, it is impossible to know if the identified strategies will address areas of student skill deficit. Although assessments (e.g., DIBELS) that would provide the school with student achievement results are identified, it is not clear that these results will provide information in relation to SIP goals. This is worth noting so that the extensive efforts of Lincoln Elementary do not continue to result in low student performance rates.

In the absence of a clear and specific improvement plan, Lincoln Elementary has not received the full benefit or hard work of its instructional leadership capacities. This includes instructional oversight and feedback provided by the principal, the impact of two content area coaches and efforts of faculty and staff.

School leadership has cultivated a culture for learning at the school (see Domain II) and guided staff efforts to employ sound instructional practices (see Domain I). The principal reported that she gives frequent feedback to staff on teaching practices. This was corroborated in focus groups with teachers, who indicated that they receive feedback on instruction at least once a week and that feedback can be both positive and constructive. As stated by one teacher, “It [feedback from the principal] isn’t always, ‘you’re doing great.’” Oversight and monitoring provided by the principal, however, has focused on a large range of improvement initiatives. When asked in an interview if feedback to teachers targeted one or two aspects of instruction, the principal replied, “It depends... the basic constructs are always required.” These efforts would have greater impact if they were focused on clear and specific improvement goals.

The Lincoln Elementary School has two full-time content area coaches (a district initiative across elementary schools) – one for ELA and one for mathematics. The coaches summarize their roles and responsibilities as: “Completing analyses of student performance data, attending weekly grade level meetings, participating in weekly meetings with the principal, presenting ‘demo’ lessons for staff and providing direct instruction to students three days per week.” In addition, coaches attend content-specific trainings provided by the district and are expected to convey this information to staff through professional development workshops and lesson demonstrations. In focus groups with the FF team, teachers indicated that they get “a lot of

feedback from the coaches.” These efforts would have greater impact if they were focused on clear and specific improvement goals.

The capabilities of teachers at Lincoln Elementary were well-established in Domain I, which indicated the majority of classroom instruction meets the standard for best practice. Teachers report that they are “working hard” and the principal corroborated that Lincoln Elementary staff is “very dedicated.” Leadership and teachers report spending uncompensated time after school and on the weekends, working to perfect the large range of school improvement initiatives. These efforts would have greater impact if they were focused on clear and specific improvement goals.

As Lincoln Elementary re-focuses its improvement planning efforts, there are several strengths that can be built upon. It is the belief of the FF team that these factors increase the school’s likelihood of success and the prospects for student improvement.

1. The school has sufficient personnel in instructional leadership roles to guide improvement efforts. This includes the principal, the coaches and the leadership team.
2. The curriculum is aligned with the Massachusetts Frameworks, which ensures students’ access to content required by the state.
3. Classroom instruction at the school is sound.
4. Although the school’s improvement efforts have lacked clear focus, leadership and staff have implemented a large number of the initiatives. This speaks to capacity and capability.
5. A focus group conducted with the school’s leadership team indicated an understanding of the need to prioritize improvement efforts, as well as some possible methods for doing so.
6. School leadership has created a vision of high expectations for student behavior and academic success, which is shared by staff. This includes ownership and responsibility for improvement.

In focus groups conducted by the FF team, teachers emphasized the leadership of the principal and the collegiality of the school environment. In reference to the principal, one teacher stated, “She’s not just an administrator. She’s a teacher, too.” Other staff indicated that there is “a supportive team throughout the building.” Teachers believe that they are all responsible for improvement, “We work as a team – to integrate.” Both leadership and staff express frustration at their lack of success improving student performance rates but remain dedicated to the task. As stated by one teacher and reiterated by others: “Tell us what to do and we’ll do it.”

Although there are several promising practices occurring at the school, student achievement on the MCAS (specifically in ELA) has remained low. In order to see increases in student performance rates, the FF team prioritized the following next steps for the Lincoln Elementary School in the domain of school leadership.

- **Prioritize focused improvement planning.** This begins with the written School Improvement Plan and includes: An analysis of critical (and prioritized) student skill weakness at each grade level, based on assessment information; identification of related and specific causes for low student performance; alignment of strategies that clearly address the identified weaknesses; establishment of goals and benchmarks in the areas in which improvement is needed; selection of a measurement system that can inform progress (at

benchmarks) toward the goal; and, consideration of mid-course corrections if student performance is not meeting the benchmarks.

- **Align the efforts of instructional leadership and teachers with the prioritized areas for improvement.** Once improvement initiatives have been prioritized, use school personnel to specifically focus their efforts on areas for improvement. This includes instructional oversight and feedback, workshops and demonstrations provided by the content coaches and the implementation of instructional strategies in the classroom.
- **To have the greatest impact, improvement planning efforts require the focus of the whole Lincoln Elementary School community.** Although the implementation of efforts that directly impact Lincoln Elementary students will occur primarily at the school level, collaborative improvement planning and oversight is also required from the district and other members of the New Bedford Public Schools community. The sole focus should be on increasing student learning and performance.

#### **IV: Organizational Structures and Management**

The Lincoln Elementary School has sound organizational management. The structure of the school day allows for some teacher common planning time and weekly grade-level meetings, which include instructional leadership. Professional development activities are occurring at the school, but there is not a specific calendar of topics to guide school-based trainings. In the absence of a clear and specific SIP, the school has not received the full benefit of these instructional resources, similar to human resources described previously (Domain III). Once the school has determined the focus of improvement efforts, common planning time, grade-level meetings and professional development trainings should be used to directly support improvement initiatives.

Evidence indicates that Lincoln Elementary has sound organizational management. Every teacher in the school has a “bible,” or large three-ring-binder, that is provided by the principal. This includes school procedures, staff roles and responsibilities, and staff and student contact information, as well as goals, schedules and calendars. Teachers report that they reference their bibles regularly. In addition, paraprofessionals also have bibles that contain information specific to their duties in the school. The roles and responsibilities of leadership, teachers and staff are clearly defined. The faculty and paraprofessionals uniformly identify the principal as the instructional leader. As stated by one staff member, “Everything pretty much starts with [the principal].” In addition to instructional obligations, teachers also have roles on various committees (e.g., leadership team, technology team) and assume ancillary responsibilities (such as lunch duty), which follow a specific structure established by school leadership. A schedule board is available for paraprofessionals to check their classroom assignment each day. In addition, the climate and culture for learning (see Domain II) that has purposefully been established at Lincoln Elementary is further evidence of sound organizational management.

The school day schedule has been arranged to include common planning time (CPT) two times per week. The purpose of CPT is to provide time for collaboration between grade-level teachers. In focus groups with the FF team, teachers indicated that they use CPT to discuss instructional practices, lesson plans and to ensure proper pacing and alignment with the Massachusetts standards. The principal and teachers report that the occurrence of CPT is variable because it is contingent upon the attendance of all staff members.

There are weekly meetings for each grade-level team with the principal and the two content area coaches. Teachers report that, this school year, these meetings have been used to focus on student assessment results and identification of specific strategies to address varying student needs (Benchmark, Strategic and Intensive groups). Grade-level meetings also focus on an “essential question” posed by the principal that is intended to elicit continued discussion around student improvement.

Common planning time and weekly grade-level meetings have ensured ongoing collaboration around school improvement among staff, and with leadership. The school and its students, however, have not received the full impact of these efforts because the focus has been on broad improvement initiatives, rather than on areas of prioritized need. This is also true of school-based professional development activities. Although trainings are occurring regularly, there has not been a clear focus. Some professional development is determined by the principal based on student achievement data, grade level meetings and classroom observations. Other trainings are based on staff input and requests through monthly reports submitted to the principal. The content area coaches also conduct professional development workshops based on trainings received from the district. Because professional development activities have not had a specific focus, it is the judgment of the FF team that teachers – and, therefore, students – are not receiving the full benefit of these efforts.

The occurrence of CPT, grade-level meetings and professional development trainings are strengths of Lincoln Elementary. These activities, however, could have greater impact on student performance. The FF team prioritized the following next steps for the Lincoln Elementary School in the domain of organizational structures and management.

- **Once improvement goals have been identified, use CPT and weekly grade-level meetings to focus specifically on the prioritized initiatives.** Regular meetings should have an agenda to ensure focus on priority areas for improvement across grade levels. The school should also consider vertical alignment for common planning time to ensure cross-grade level collaboration.
- **Include professional development activities in the School Improvement Plan to directly support the focus of improvement efforts.** Trainings conducted by the school, the district and the content area coaches should focus on priority areas in need of improvement at Lincoln Elementary. This will help to ensure consistent and targeted efforts across the school’s community. Professional development activities should be cited in the SIP.

## V: District Support

In combination with the findings above for the Lincoln Elementary School, the FF team has identified the following strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations for the district in the domains of curriculum and instruction; culture and climate for learning; school leadership; and, organizational structures and management.

The overarching theme of this report cites the need for the school to prioritize its efforts, focusing all improvement initiatives on the areas of greatest student need. In collaboration with the school, the district must also prioritize its focus and assert its presence at the Lincoln Elementary School in order to address low student performance rates.

## **Domain I: Curriculum and Instruction**

The curriculum and instructional practices being implemented are strengths at Lincoln Elementary. The district has provided the school with curriculum guides across grade levels in both mathematics and ELA, which are aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum. Some teachers report referencing the district curriculum guides when planning instruction. In addition, the district has provided curriculum maps in mathematics and report that work is currently underway to produce curriculum maps in ELA. Observations conducted by the FF team indicated that, at the time of the visit, sufficient materials were available to implement the curriculum in all Lincoln Elementary classrooms. For example, the FF team noted texts, manipulatives, computers and libraries across classes.

The Lincoln Elementary School must focus instruction on areas of critical student need in order to maximize the impact of the sound practices that are occurring. To increase the likelihood of success, collaboration is required from the district. This includes assistance with analyses of assessment results, identification of causes for low student performance and the selection of appropriate strategies to address prioritized areas of concern.

## **Domain II: Climate and Culture for Learning**

The climate and culture for learning is a significant strength of Lincoln Elementary. There is not a finding for the district in this domain.

## **Domain III: School Leadership**

A clear and specific School Improvement Plan (SIP) is not in place at the Lincoln Elementary School. Although the district has provided training on the development of the SIP, guidance and oversight has not been sufficient to result in a sound plan or effective improvement efforts at the school. Prioritized improvement planning is a critical next step for the school. The district must increase urgency and focus its efforts toward the Lincoln Elementary School to assist in improvement planning and implementation.

During the 2002-03 school year, the district provided mandatory training for principals (The Lincoln Elementary principal attended.) in the Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) process. This was a hands-on, multi-session training that walked principals through each step of the PIM process, using information from their respective schools. The outcome was a completed SIP document. During the 2003-04 school year, the district offered three voluntary “drive-in” trainings on various steps of the PIM process. These were made available to school leadership who desired further guidance on the creation of their school improvement plan. The district reported that the Lincoln Elementary principal and coaches attended some of the voluntary drive-ins. This SIP, completed at the end of the 2003-04 school year for implementation during the 2004-05 school year, is the current operating plan at the Lincoln Elementary School.<sup>2</sup> In a focus group with the FF team, the district reported that they did not provide feedback on the Lincoln Elementary School’s current operating plan.

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<sup>2</sup> As a result of a shift in district policy (a change in submission deadlines from June to January), a new SIP was not submitted by Lincoln Elementary before the start of the 2005-06 school year. A new plan was developed and submitted in January 2006 and the district has provided feedback on this plan (see Domain III) just prior to the FF visit, which has not yet been incorporated in the draft plan.

During the 2004-05 school year, district guidance was provided via an on-site review of the implementation of the Lincoln Elementary SIP (similar to the Panel Review process). This review was conducted by a team of consultants hired by the New Bedford Public Schools. Although the report concluded that Lincoln Elementary has “a sound plan in place for improving student performance,” the report also indicated two noteworthy areas of concern. 1) “The SIP Team must be able to document possible causes of why targeted students haven’t learned the necessary skills and knowledge acquired by other students” (p.2); and 2) “The School must continue to develop a system to monitor the implementation of the Improvement Plan initiatives and track the school’s progress toward accomplishing the objectives set out in the Plan (p.2).” These are the same gaps in the written Lincoln Elementary SIP identified by the Panel Review team the following year (December 2005).

District guidance and oversight on the current operating SIP (produced for the 2004-05 school year) at Lincoln Elementary was not sufficient to assist the school in formulating a clear and focused plan for improvement. The district indicated that support and assistance is always available at the request of a school principal. However, the district did not assert its presence at Lincoln Elementary to ensure that the SIP was effectively guiding improvement efforts. This indicates a lack of urgency, since the Lincoln Elementary School had been “identified for improvement” according to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and state regulations for three years, before moving to a status of “corrective action” in the 2005-06 school year.

Since notice of the Panel Review to the Lincoln Elementary School and following the school’s designation of “underperforming,” the New Bedford Public Schools (NBPS) has taken several steps to increase district accountability and support school improvement. This includes the establishment of a district-based Accountability and Targeted Assistance Team to ensure review of school improvement plans and to increase support and oversight of NBPS schools in need of improvement. Telephone and site-visit logs are being kept by the School Support Specialist to document assistance provided to district schools.

Focused improvement planning, which requires input and support from the New Bedford Public Schools, is a critical next step for the school. In order to see necessary improvements, the district must prioritize its efforts and focus on the Lincoln Elementary School. This requires a sense of urgency, collaboration by the whole school community and a common goal of increasing student learning and performance.

#### **Domain IV: Organizational Structures and Management**

The district has provided Lincoln Elementary with some professional development support. Once the focus of improvements efforts has been identified, the district should re-assess its support to the Lincoln Elementary School to ensure that it is having the greatest impact on student performance.

The district has provided training for all Lincoln Elementary School staff in both ELA and mathematics. Training for the Open Court reading series was completed across grade levels in the fall of this school year. The NBPS has provided training to teachers in Rigby reading strategies, which have been aligned with the materials provided by Open Court. As reported by district personnel at the time of the FF team visit, continued training in ELA is provided through a range of consulting services to support the implementation of ELA and reading programs on-site, at the request of the school. This includes: consultants from SRA/Open Court; district personnel who have been trained in Open Court; and, a Department of Education consultant who

provides training in the Elements of Reading. Professional development in mathematics was initiated three years ago when the district adopted the SRA mathematics program. The NBPS has provided 12 days of mathematics content training to teachers during this school year to increase mathematical content skills. These trainings do not include an instructional component

The district provides regular and ongoing trainings for the two content coaches at Lincoln Elementary as part of a larger initiative across district elementary schools. As designed by the district, coaches are intended to support the professional development of school staff in both ELA and mathematics through assistance with content planning and modeling lessons.

As the Lincoln Elementary School, in collaboration with the district, identifies and prioritizes improvement goals, the New Bedford Public Schools must also assess the impact of its initiatives on school improvement and student performance. Professional development should be focused on areas in need of improvement and should be used to support these efforts. It may be beneficial to the district to communicate with Lincoln Elementary School staff and leadership about previous trainings that have had the greatest benefit and/or to collect input in regard to professional development the school thinks is needed to best assist in meeting improvement goals. Alternatively, the NBPS might choose to mandate professional development trainings to support school improvement based on district rationale. The district should monitor the impact of professional development and other training initiatives provided to the school to ensure they are having the greatest impact on teacher learning and student performance.

## **Conclusion**

The lack of a clear and specific School Improvement Plan is the critical weakness at the Abraham Lincoln Elementary School. As a result, extensive improvement efforts by school leadership and teachers have not had the necessary impact on student performance rates.

The Lincoln Elementary School has many aspects of sound educational practice in place, specifically classroom instruction and an already-established climate and culture for learning. School leadership and teachers remain committed to the task of school improvement, which is rooted in their dedication to student learning.

Focused improvement planning efforts at the Lincoln Elementary School must be met with a sense of urgency and require collaboration from the entire school community. Initial efforts must begin with the written School Improvement Plan. Once the focus of improvement goals has been identified, the school needs to align its instructional resources – human, planning and training – with the areas recognized for priority improvement. The New Bedford Public Schools also needs to ensure that district efforts and initiatives are having the intended impact on student learning and performance.

## **APPENDIX A Team Members**

**Joe Trunk**, Core Team Chair, Consultant, SchoolWorks LLC, Beverly, MA

**Megan Tupa**, Core Team Member, Project Manager, SchoolWorks LLC, Beverly, MA

**Willette Johnson**, Practitioner, School Support Specialist, Springfield Public Schools,  
Springfield, MA

**Bridget Rodriguez**, Practitioner, Former Principal, Cambridge Public Schools, Cambridge, MA

**Abraham Lincoln Elementary School  
New Bedford Public Schools  
FACT-FINDING REVIEW SCHEDULE  
April 2-5, 2006**

This is a template schedule for a Fact-Finding visit. FF schedules were designed in collaboration with school principals and modified to reflect each specific school's day.

**DAY ONE**

<b>CORE TEAM ONLY</b>	
<b>1:00</b>	Core Team arrives at hotel
<b>1:30 – 6:00</b>	Core Team meets to summarize review of documents and plan for visit

**DAY TWO**

	<b>CORE TEAM</b>	<b>PRACTITIONERS</b>
<b>7:30-7:45</b>	Team arrives at school	
<b>7:45 – 8:30</b>	Team meeting	
<b>8:30 – 8:45</b>	Team tour of school	
<b>8:45 – 9:30</b>	Focus Groups	Classroom Observations
<b>9:30 – 10:45</b>	Meeting with SCHOOL Leadership	
<b>10:45 – 12:00</b>	Focus Groups	
<b>12:00- 1:00</b>	<b>TEAM LUNCH, MID-DAY DEBRIEF</b>	
<b>1:00 – 2:30</b>	Focus Groups	Classroom Observations
<b>2:30 – 5:30</b>	<b>DOCUMENT REVIEWS, TEAM MEETING, DELIBERATIONS</b>	

**DAY THREE**

	<b>CORE TEAM</b>	<b>PRACTITIONERS</b>
<b>7:30-7:45</b>	Team arrives at school	
<b>7:45 – 8:15</b>	Feedback to School Leadership	Classroom Observations
<b>8:15 – 9:30</b>	Focus Groups	
<b>9:30 – 10:45</b>	Meeting with DISTRICT Leadership	
<b>10:45 – 12:00</b>	Focus Groups	
<b>12:00- 1:00</b>	<b>TEAM LUNCH, MID-DAY DEBRIEF</b>	
<b>1:00 – 2:30</b>	Focus Groups	<b>Classroom Observations</b>
<b>2:30 – 3:00</b>	<b>TEAM MEETING with PRACTITIONERS (Practitioners depart at 3:00)</b>	
<b>3:00 – 6:00</b>	<b>DELIBERATIONS – Core Team ONLY</b>	

**DAY FOUR**

<b>CORE TEAM ONLY</b>	
<b>7:30-7:45</b>	Team arrives at school
<b>7:45 – 8:15</b>	Feedback to School Leadership
<b>8:15 – 9:30</b>	Focus Groups, follow up as needed
<b>10:00 – 1:00</b>	<b>DELIBERATIONS</b>
<b>1:00 – 2:30</b>	<b>TEAM REPORT OUT with School and District Leadership</b>
<b>2:30</b>	Team Departs