

## **REPORT OF FACT FINDING REVIEW**

### **Samuel Bowles Elementary School**

### **Springfield Public Schools**

#### **Executive Summary**

Under new leadership, staff at the Samuel Bowles Elementary School has undertaken development of several sound educational initiatives. Because of the newness of the practices, however, and lack of opportunity for training and follow-up prior to and during implementation, quality of implementation varies and is inconsistent. In order to increase student performance rates, the Bowles School must focus on immediate improvement of key areas recommended below, particularly in the domain of curriculum and instruction. These efforts should be addressed with a sense of urgency and require collaboration from the entire school community.

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

The groundwork for instructional improvement has been laid out by new leadership at the Bowles School. Within this framework, there needs to be staff attention to: writing clear and specific learning objectives; learning to work with small groups within a classroom to differentiate for learning needs; developing more student-centered instructional practices; raising expectations for students to achieve above grade level; and, using language acquisition strategies with all students. The school has a newly-established assessment system that is sufficient to provide the information on student learning needs. Teachers need training in using this information to adapt and accommodate for different student learning styles and academic strengths and weaknesses.

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

The climate for learning is developing positively at the Bowles School and is marked by a predominantly supportive and respectful interaction among students, staff and leadership. However, the climate designed to create a culture for learning is not, in practice, based on high expectations for high academic achievement – particularly for ELL, special education, low-income and high academic achievers. Special education and ELL students have little opportunity to work with higher-achieving students in the primary areas of English/language arts (ELA) and/or mathematics (math). Leadership must ensure that all students are grouped with high-achieving and native English-speaking students at times during ELA and math to raise academic expectations for all. ELL, SPED and regular education teachers must be ensured time to collaborate.

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

Although several sound practices have begun at the Bowles School, the implementation of these practices and the teachers' lack of understanding of the philosophy behind them have not had the necessary impact on ensuring higher student performance. The current plan for professional development (PD) is not a transformational model that includes practice, coaching or provision for teachers to share ideas. This has resulted in inconsistency regarding implementation and the

quality of the implementation of instructional practices throughout the school. Leadership must ensure that there is practice, coaching and sharing of ideas following introduction and presentation of new practices.

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

The principal has organized teachers' assignments so that programs for ELL students are fully inclusive. Schedules offer teachers the opportunity of using their preparation time as common planning time to meet with grade level colleagues. Ways to ensure consistent and regular collaborative planning by all grade level teachers, however, need to be developed. Models of co-teaching need to be explored and shared so that potential benefits of co-teaching may be maximized. Special education service delivery needs to be more inclusive so that SPED students are provided opportunities to work with higher achieving students during both ELA and math.

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

At present, district provision – in terms of both material and human resources – is sufficient and adequate to support the ongoing improvement efforts at the Bowles School. The FF team found no specific findings for improvement in this area. It is recommended strongly that district support remain at the same level in all areas in order to support instructional improvements and academic growth at the Bowles School.

## 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.

## Samuel Bowles Elementary School Profile

### Enrollment

The Samuel Bowles School serves students in grades K-5. Enrollment at Samuel Bowles has gradually declined from 407 students in 2003, to 387 students in 2004, then to 369 students in 2005.<sup>1</sup> Student demographics have remained steady over the last four years with the exception of African American students, who fluctuated from 16 percent of the student body in 2002 to 1 percent in 2003 and returned to 16 percent in 2004.

Proportions of Samuel Bowles student subgroups in 2005, compared to state averages, are presented below:

| Subgroup                   | School's 2005<br>% Enrollment | State Average<br>% in 2005 |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Asian                      | 2                             | 5                          |
| Black                      | 17                            | 9                          |
| Hispanic                   | 58                            | 12                         |
| Native American            | 0                             | 0.3                        |
| White                      | 24                            | 74                         |
| Low-Income                 | 79                            | 28                         |
| First Language Not English | 33                            | 14                         |
| Limited English Proficient | 24                            | 5                          |
| Special Education          | 15                            | 16                         |

In 2005, the attendance rate at Samuel Bowles was 93.1 percent, with students absent (on average) 11.3 days. Across the state in 2005, the average attendance rate was 94.2 percent and students were absent (on average) 10.0 days. Although the overall absence rate is 1.3 days higher than the state average, it is 5.5 days lower than the district average. Male students are absent an average of 1.9 more days than are female students and are chronically absent 4.3 percent more often than their female counterparts. While the average number of days absent at each grade level is fairly consistent, there are significant differences in attendance rates among races. Hispanic students have the lowest attendance rate (92.0 percent) and the highest average number of days absent (13.0 days). In addition, Hispanic students have the highest rate of chronic absenteeism (31.9 percent). Asian students have the highest attendance rate (98.1 percent) and the lowest average number of days absent (3.3 days). Samuel Bowles's retention rate was

<sup>1</sup> City-wide redistricting was undertaken for the 2005-2006 school year. Enrollment at the Bowles School was reported in the School Leadership Report (prepared for the Panel Review) as 330 for October 2005. Panelists concluded this may not represent a stable number. As the principal explained, an extraordinarily high truancy rate for September-October (783) is a clear indication that many students were not yet settled in the school to which they had been assigned. Verbal reports indicated at least a 30% change in student assignment. Subgroup information reported in the School Leadership Report did not reveal significant changes in demographics for the Bowles School.

3.7 percent in 2004, the last year for which these data are available. The school's in-school suspension rate in 2005 was 3.0 percent, while out-of-school suspensions averaged 10.6 percent. The 2005 rate of out-of-school suspensions is below the district average of 13.7 percent but higher than the state average of 6.1 percent.

### Staffing

The 2005-2006 Samuel Bowles staffing report indicates that the school is comprised of 1 administrator, 31 teachers, 2 curriculum facilitators, 1 librarian, 1 school adjustment counselor, 1 nurse and 6 paraprofessionals. The principal has been at the school for less than one year, has three years of administrative experience and 24 years of teaching experience. The school was under the leadership of the former principal for 19 years. Of the teachers, approximately 55 percent have been at the school for fewer than five years, 23 percent have been at the school between five and ten years, and 23 percent have been at the school for more than ten years. Teachers' years of experience in the profession, however, are significantly higher than their time at the school. Approximately 81 percent have more than 10 years' experience, 10 percent have between five and ten years' experience and 10 percent of the teachers have fewer than five years' teaching experience. Ninety-six percent of teachers are reported as being highly qualified and 35 percent hold advanced degrees.

### MCAS Overview

Students at the Samuel Bowles School are assessed in grade 3 reading and in grade 4 English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. Samuel Bowles's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report for 2005 Mid-Cycle IV shows an accountability status of Restructuring for ELA and Identified for Improvement in math.<sup>2</sup> In ELA, the school failed to make AYP for five consecutive years in the aggregate and three consecutive years for subgroups. The school made AYP in mathematics from 1999-2003 in the aggregate; however they were unable to do so for the past two years. In addition, Samuel Bowles has not made AYP in subgroups for math for three consecutive years.

### GRADE 3

#### Reading MCAS Results

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

| 2005 READING               | Percent |    |    |     |
|----------------------------|---------|----|----|-----|
|                            | A       | P  | NI | W/F |
| Aggregate                  | 0       | 36 | 46 | 18  |
| Regular Education          | 0       | 42 | 48 | 9   |
| Special Education          | 0       | 45 | 36 | 18  |
| Limited English Proficient | 0       | 8  | 50 | 42  |

Regular education and special education students at Samuel Bowles have significantly outperformed limited English proficient students in reading. There has been little progress in

<sup>2</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 Samuel Bowles Elementary School in 2005 were Low-Income and Hispanic.

student performance since 2001, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 3 MCAS performance presented below:

| <b>Aggregate<br/>READING</b> | <b>Percent</b> |          |           |            |
|------------------------------|----------------|----------|-----------|------------|
|                              | <b>A</b>       | <b>P</b> | <b>NI</b> | <b>W/F</b> |
| 2005                         | 0              | 36       | 46        | 18         |
| 2004                         | 0              | 34       | 44        | 22         |
| 2003                         | 0              | 46       | 28        | 25         |
| 2002                         | 0              | 51       | 37        | 12         |
| 2001                         | 0              | 43       | 39        | 18         |

Since 2001, Samuel Bowles has failed to produce any students scoring in the Advanced category. In addition, the percentage of students scoring in the Proficient category has decreased 15 percent from 2002. In 2001, 18 percent of students scored in the Warning/Failing category; this remains at 18 percent in 2005. Changes in student scoring Needs Improvement have increased from 39 percent in 2001 to 46 percent in 2005.

#### **GRADE 4**

##### **ELA MCAS Results**

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

| <b>2005 ELA</b>            | <b>Percent</b> |          |           |            |
|----------------------------|----------------|----------|-----------|------------|
|                            | <b>A</b>       | <b>P</b> | <b>NI</b> | <b>W/F</b> |
| Aggregate                  | 0              | 26       | 49        | 25         |
| Regular Education          | 0              | 37       | 53        | 11         |
| Special Education          | N/A            | N/A      | N/A       | N/A        |
| Limited English Proficient | N/A            | N/A      | N/A       | N/A        |

Student performance in ELA reflects a downward trend since 2001, as seen in the aggregate Grade 4 ELA MCAS performance presented below:

| <b>Aggregate<br/>ELA</b> | <b>Percent</b> |          |           |            |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------|-----------|------------|
|                          | <b>A</b>       | <b>P</b> | <b>NI</b> | <b>W/F</b> |
| 2005                     | 0              | 26       | 49        | 25         |
| 2004                     | 2              | 24       | 48        | 27         |
| 2003                     | 2              | 29       | 44        | 25         |
| 2002                     | 1              | 32       | 46        | 21         |
| 2001                     | 2              | 40       | 44        | 14         |

Students scoring in the Proficient and Advanced category have decreased from 42 percent in 2001 to 26 percent in 2005. Conversely, students scoring in the Warning/Failing category have increased from 14 percent in 2001 to 25 percent in 2005. The percentage of students scoring in the Needs Improvement categories has remained relatively stable at approximately 47 percent.

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

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

| <b>2005 Mathematics</b>    | <b>Percent</b> |          |           |            |
|----------------------------|----------------|----------|-----------|------------|
|                            | <b>A</b>       | <b>P</b> | <b>NI</b> | <b>W/F</b> |
| Aggregate                  | 2              | 11       | 56        | 32         |
| Regular Education          | 3              | 16       | 66        | 16         |
| Special Education          | N/A            | N/A      | N/A       | N/A        |
| Limited English Proficient | N/A            | N/A      | N/A       | N/A        |

Student performance in math appears to be heading in a downward trend since 2001, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 4 Mathematics MCAS performance presented below:

| <b>Aggregate Mathematics</b> | <b>Percent</b> |          |           |            |
|------------------------------|----------------|----------|-----------|------------|
|                              | <b>A</b>       | <b>P</b> | <b>NI</b> | <b>W/F</b> |
| 2005                         | 2              | 11       | 56        | 32         |
| 2004                         | 2              | 14       | 61        | 23         |
| 2003                         | 2              | 20       | 43        | 36         |
| 2002                         | 3              | 16       | 45        | 36         |
| 2001                         | 1              | 15       | 56        | 27         |

Students scoring in the Proficient and Advanced category have decreased from 16 percent in 2001 to 13 percent in 2005 (after reaching a high of 22 percent in 2003). Students scoring in the Warning/Failing category have increased from 27 percent in 2001 to 32 percent in 2005 (a slight reduction from a high of 36 percent in 2002 and 2003). The percentage of students scoring in Needs Improvement for 2005 has returned to the 56 percent level of 2001.

## **Key Domains of Inquiry**

The Samuel Bowles Elementary School has undertaken development of several sound educational initiatives under new leadership this school year. However, many practices are new and, as a result, the quality of implementation varies and is inconsistent – especially in the area of curriculum and instruction. In order to increase student performance rates, the Bowles School must focus on immediate improvement of key areas recommended below, with a specific focus on training opportunities and follow-up, prior to and during implementation.

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

Since the new principal arrived in July 2005, many positive changes have been made at the Bowles School to address areas in need of improvement in the domain of curriculum and instruction. The Fact Finding (FF) team concluded, however, that there are still some priority areas that need to be addressed before increases in student academic performance can be ensured. Standards-based lesson planning and teaching are not always evident, as lesson objectives are not clearly written nor consistently explained to students. The reorganization of classrooms into a center-based model has not yet resulted in a decrease in the level of teacher-directed instruction or in an increase in the level of differentiated instruction. The use of assessments to inform instructional practice is not leading to differentiated instruction. There is inadequate focus on the implementation of strategies to address the needs of higher-achieving students.

In only a short time as the school leader, the principal of the Bowles School has implemented a number of initiatives to begin to address necessary improvements at the school. Daily ELA and math periods have been restructured to reflect the district standards – 150 minutes dedicated to ELA and 90 minutes to math. All teachers are consistently using the District Reading Program (DRP), which includes Harcourt Trophies Reading Series and the district Math Instructional Guide (MIG). As funds allow, outdated books and other instructional materials have been replaced with new materials that support the district programs. Instructional practices have focused on the explicit presentation of learning objectives and the institution of center-based teaching in all classrooms. A new School Leadership Team (SLT) – which includes the principal, the ELA and math Collaborative Professional Development Teachers (CPDTs), a Title 1 teacher and three classroom teachers – has been established to rewrite the School Improvement Plan (SIP). The SLT is in the process of writing additional student learning objectives in all content areas, as well as the school's subgroup populations (English-language learners [ELL], special education, and low-income students). This has laid the groundwork for positive change and instructional improvement at the Bowles School.

The Fact Finding team (FF team) conducted 46 observations (35 minutes each) over two days in 24 classrooms across content areas and grade levels, including services for special education and ELL students. Through the use of an observation form, the team rated various standards of classroom practice on a tiered scale. Many instructional practices observed at the Bowles School met standards of effective instructional practices. There was a variance in rigor, however, among these practices – particularly those concerning higher-level thinking and performance. The following chart indicates the percentages of effective instructional practices observed in classrooms.

| <b>Standards of classroom practice</b>      | <b>Does not meet the standard</b> | <b>Meets the standard</b> | <b>Exceeds the standard</b> |
|---|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Lesson objectives posted                    | <b>38%</b>                        | <b>58%</b>                | <b>4%</b>                   |
| Lesson objectives clearly explained         | <b>44%*</b>                       | <b>56%</b>                | <b>2%</b>                   |
| Use of questions to check for understanding | <b>22%</b>                        | <b>59%</b>                | <b>23%</b>                  |
| Use of higher-order questions               | <b>50%</b>                        | <b>30%</b>                | <b>20%</b>                  |
| Rigor of classroom lessons is appropriate   | <b>26%</b>                        | <b>58%</b>                | <b>2%</b>                   |
| Pace of classroom lessons is appropriate    | <b>41%</b>                        | <b>43%</b>                | <b>16%</b>                  |

\*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.

Observations by the FF team indicated that lesson objectives were not clearly written, posted or explained in many classrooms. Although lesson objectives were either posted or explained in 78% percent of lessons (25/46), very few objectives were formulated clearly to ensure that students understood the desired learning outcome. This matched the principal's estimation that teachers are consistently explaining lesson objectives to students in about 60 percent of classes. Observers noted, moreover, that the objectives themselves tended to describe activities, "We will practice reading words..." or were too general for students to understand what learning outcome was expected – for example, "Exploring division" or "Learn about subtraction." Under the present leadership, teachers are required to submit lesson plans monthly with the purpose of encouraging consistent use of lesson objectives and student learning outcomes. Some teachers use a template – a way to encourage more consistency of practice in this area – to write their lesson plans. However, lesson objectives still lacked the necessary specificity. Although the habit of writing and explaining objectives is developing, the current quality of lesson objectives is not up to best practice standards at this point. It is noteworthy, however, that since the Panel Review visit in the fall of 2005, there has been clear improvement in teachers' posting and explaining of lesson objectives to students.

Classrooms at the Bowles School were organized to incorporate center-based teaching in the fall of 2005. Teachers repeatedly expressed that they are committed to this model of teaching and learning. Classroom observations indicated that students in all classrooms were seated in small groups. However, the center-based organization of classrooms has not resulted in adequate reduction of teacher-directed instruction or increased differentiation of instruction – both of which were primary intentions of the center-based model.

The primary mode of instruction being used at the Bowles School is teacher-directed/teacher-led, which can be characterized by very few instances of students learning through interactions with other students. Within 46 classroom observations, the FF team saw only 8 instances in which students were working directly with each other, which consisted primarily of reading aloud in pairs. Students were not observed in discussions with each other or collaborating to solve problems together in the small groups. Although students were seated in small groups across classrooms, the lesson was being directed by the teacher in a whole group format, or students were working independently on the same assignment without student interaction. This is not differentiated instruction.

Extensive use of teacher-directed instruction was also related to the level of student engagement. Although FF observers noted high levels of student engagement in most classrooms – 80 percent and higher – most of this engagement was not active learning. While students were paying attention, compliant and not off-task, they were seldom actively engaged with the curriculum.

Teacher-directed instruction also relied heavily on teachers' asking questions and the students responding. As a result, the FF team observed instances in which students repeatedly raised their hands to respond to questions but who were ignored while other students took their turns, since this was the only mode of student participation. Observers saw a few students stop trying to respond because they had to wait too long to speak. Although in 79 percent (37/46) of the classes observed, teachers used frequent questioning to check for understanding, higher-order questions were asked in only 50 percent (23/46) of the classes. Students – many of whom need extra practice expressing (i.e., ELL, special education students) – were given few opportunities to engage in dialogue or create more complex thoughts..

Differentiated instruction was not a common practice at the Bowles School. Use of varied strategies that would challenge all students was seldom observed. Teachers made efforts to attend to students' different learning needs by altering the pacing or the use of leveled readers, especially for students performing below grade levels. During teacher focus groups, very few teachers indicated use of instructional modifications or curriculum adaptations to address the specific needs of different learners (other than using leveled readers for lower-performing students and some pacing adjustments). Teachers do not have a common language to talk about differentiating their instruction.

In addition to the school's lower-performing students, the FF team found inadequate use of differentiated instruction for higher-performing students. Fact finders did not see evidence of instructional modes and learning activities to address the needs of more advanced learners. A teacher inadvertently lowered the expectations for students by responding to a student's question about a rubric, indicating "Oh, you can't do that. It is a very high score." The FF team saw no instances of instruction or learning activities for students who quickly completed grade-level work and needed further challenge. These students either sat quietly and unengaged at their seats or became involved in some off-task behaviors, such as talking or getting out of their seats. One teacher expressed frustration that it is easy to run out of ideas for centers and for advanced learners, particularly because of lack of materials at more challenging levels. Observers noted that, although the ELA classes are leveled according to reading performance, those students in the higher levels do not have groupings for instruction or adequate materials for above-grade-level work. These observations of inadequate challenge for higher-performing students are corroborated by MCAS scores: except for 2 percent of students in math in 2005, Bowles students are not scoring in Advanced levels in the MCAS.

Although differentiated instructional practices were not the norm at the Bowles School, excellent models of differentiated instruction were noted in a few classrooms. For example, students were observed working at different kinds of activities in small groups; some teachers were using multi-sensory strategies to teach a concept to the whole class. These practices reach students with various learning styles and levels of development.

Although recent analyses of assessment results are driving review and re-teaching in identified areas – particularly in math – assessment results have not significantly resulted in changing the mode of instruction or strategies. The CPDTs have worked hard to analyze the results of district formative and summative assessments in both ELA and math, and to provide the results to teachers to inform instruction. Teachers indicated they are regrouping students at times for either reading or mathematics within their classroom as a result of this data analysis and their own classroom assessments. But materials and instructional approaches, with the exception of lesson pacing, are not changed. When asked if the instructional approach or materials changed after review of assessment results, teachers reported that they went over the same materials again – using the same mode of instruction – but did not mention accommodations or adaptations in instructional approaches to reach diverse learners. The CPDTs have been focused primarily on analyzing results of assessments for teachers to use to inform their instruction, but not as much on ways to change instructional approaches to accommodate different learning styles and needs. The use of assessments to inform instructional practice is not leading to sufficient differentiated instruction at the Bowles School.

Many effective changes in curriculum and instruction at the Bowles School have the potential to improve student performance. Areas identified by the FF team that require further attention have also been acknowledged and recognized by the Bowles leadership and district personnel as priority needs. In order to see increases in student performance rates, the FF team prioritized the following next steps at the Bowles School in the domain of curriculum and instruction.

- **Increase teachers' ability to develop and use lesson objectives that express student learning outcomes.** Use of student learning and lesson objectives are an important practice because they prepare, motivate and orient students to the lesson's intent and establish expectations for learning. The habit of writing and expressing learning objectives before each lesson is already developing throughout the school. There are several options that the school should consider to ensure prominent and proper use of learning objectives, namely: professional development opportunities to practice writing clear objectives and to share exemplar models of learning objectives in both ELA and math to promote improvement; school-wide use of a template for writing lessons plans until consistency of practice is established; and/or, bimonthly collection and feedback on lesson objectives to ensure consistency and ongoing development of this area.
- **Provide opportunities for teachers to share, design and practice different instructional approaches, including student-centered learning and small group work.** Such approaches allow children to take more responsibility for leading and interacting with each other and in the learning process. For example, teachers might have children solve a particular problem together or respond to a series of questions around an assignment in a collaborative way that encourages discussion and higher-level thinking. Students must be taught to work in small groups: taking turns, leading discussion, taking notes, speaking in soft voices, etc. Identify volunteers, along with the CPDTs, to take a professional development day to observe exemplars of this model and to receive coaching. Include in the SIP a goal for increasing student-centered instruction.

- **Develop a common language about a repertoire of instructional strategies that includes ways to address different learning styles and the specific needs of ELL, special education, low-income students and advanced learners.** This includes teachers' understanding of language acquisition and specific instructional practices to support, for example, ELL and special education students. Use pockets of expertise throughout the school as exemplars of these instructional strategies. Provide opportunities for teachers to take a leadership role in specific areas of this differentiation of instruction. Ensure that there are ELA and math materials that are challenging to meet students' particular needs and enable them to achieve above grade level.

## II: Climate and Culture for Learning

With the change of administration at the Bowles School, positive changes have occurred in the school's climate and culture. The facility has been improved. Teachers report that they were pleased to see that the building had been cleaned and old materials moved out before the new 2005-06 school year began. Expectations for behavior have increased to the extent that student behavior is not a serious issue at the school. Staff members indicated that behavioral issues were promptly and consistently addressed and that general student behavior has improved throughout the school. In addition, Second Step – an effective student behavior program – is being introduced in all classes by the physical education teacher. A parent facilitator has been hired to work with parents regarding attendance and homework issues. Interactions between teachers and students within the classrooms are generally positive. These elements, however, make up partial components of a school's climate. While these areas do not require the focused attention of the Bowles School, further emphasis on high academic expectations for all students served by the school is necessary to establish a culture for learning. Students are homogeneously grouped by performance levels, resulting in limited opportunities for students to engage with students of varied achievement levels. Pull-out services for special education students may not be the most efficient or effective model.

The FF team found further evidence during classroom observations to support the more positive climate that has been instilled during this school year at the Bowles School. Across the 46 observations conducted by the FF team, behavioral expectations either met or exceeded expectations within 83 percent of the classrooms and positive student/staff interactions were seen in 75 percent of classes observed. In 24% of the classrooms in which the interactions were not as positive, there were instances where teachers made negative comments to students such as, "Did you go to bed late? I know you don't want to be here." Another observer saw students wandering about the classroom, ignoring the teacher as she taught.

Observers noted that students were polite and courteous throughout the corridors of the school as evidenced by students holding doors, showing the way to classrooms and being orderly in hallways. The results summarized in the table below illustrated improvement in these areas.

| Standards of classroom practice         | Does not meet the standard | Meets the standard | Exceeds the standard |
|---|----------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Clear expectations for student behavior | 17%                        | 59%                | 24%                  |
| Positive student-staff interactions     | 24%                        | 42%                | 33%                  |

In contrast to higher expectations for student behavior, the FF team found that students are not held to correspondingly high expectations for academic performance in many classrooms. This is particularly true for ELL and special education students.

Teachers reported that classes at the Bowles School are homogeneously grouped according to student reading levels. As a result, lower-performing students in particular have minimum opportunity to work with students performing at higher levels. Because of limited language proficiency, ELL students are grouped with both special education students and lower-performing regular education students, offering the school's neediest learners little opportunity to interact with higher-achieving, verbal, native English speakers. As a result of these groupings, teachers referred to students in terms of their ability levels and defined expectations for them in these same terms. For example, staff indicated that children in lower-performing groups cannot work particularly well in small groups without teacher direction and intervention. "I need to model for them over and over again in a large group before I can break into small groups." In another situation, it was expressed that, "The [lower performing students] do not stay on task unless an adult is with them." Another teacher stated a concern that lower-performing groups tend to have more "behavioral problems" and "attention problems." Although grouping by performance level has some advantages (e.g., concentrating staff expertise), homogeneous student groups at the Bowles School have impacted teacher perceptions and expectations for student performance. In the judgment of the FF team, this has impacted the culture for learning at the school.

An additional limit to high academic expectations for students school-wide is the primary use of a pull-out model to service special education students in both ELA and math. As a result, special education teachers feel that their students do not perform as well in a regular class. Also, some teachers expressed reluctance to engage in a fully inclusive program. Regular education teachers are uncomfortable working with students with special needs if another adult is not present to support these students. Classroom observations indicated that transitions from the regular education classroom to the pull-out (special education) setting were time-consuming. Some students were confused regarding procedures. For example, one student did not know whether to bring back unfinished work to the regular class. In some instances, time taken up with non-academic tasks was lengthy. During one observation, a class started 25 minutes beyond expectation because of organizational and administrative tasks following the transition. At present, there are no student learning objectives in the SIP for ELL and special education students. The principal and the new SLT intend to amend the SIP to address these subgroup populations. Although the principal reports that one of her future goals is a more inclusive program, this has yet to be implemented at the Bowles School.

On the other hand, teachers reported seeing improvement in the performance of special education students, which they attributed to the use of district curriculum materials. Teachers were pleased to see that by using the same materials and working on similar skills, special education students were beginning to share knowledge in regular classes. As one teacher stated, "I was surprised that our special education children could contribute to the regular class and remember what we had discussed."

In order to see increases in student performance rates, the FF team prioritized the following next steps for the Bowles School to continue to address student academic expectations and the culture for learning at the school.

- **Ensure that students are grouped in a way that exposes ELL and special education students to highly verbal native English speakers.** This is particularly important during ELA and math lessons. Use the school's more advanced students to support commitment to the belief that all students can learn to high levels.
- **Support all classroom teachers (regular, ELL and special education) to explore and develop co-teaching models and the effectiveness of inclusion.** Research has shown that the implementation of inclusion models and services of students in the least restrictive environment not only provide benefit to the student/s, but maximizes effectiveness and supports greater collegiality and collaboration among staff.

### III: School Leadership

The principal at the Bowles School is held in high regard by the staff. Under her administration, staff morale – with few exceptions – is high. Also, behavioral expectations for students have improved. The principal has instilled new confidence in teaching. She makes sure to frequently visit classrooms to give feedback about instructional practice and to offer encouragement. The new leadership team (selected by the principal) is meeting to revise and amend the SIP – specifically, to address the needs of the school's subgroup populations and to expand student learning objectives for both ELA and math. While these are positive steps in the school's improvement efforts, the school must continue to strengthen these efforts to have the necessary impact on student performance. While there are a number of professional development (PD) offerings at the school, it is the judgment of the FF team that PD must be specifically designed to support carry-over of improvement initiatives into classroom practice in order to have the necessary impact.

Since the beginning of the school year, the principal has acted as the instructional leader, spending significant time – daily – visiting classrooms to ensure that teachers are implementing the literacy and math blocks and are using the district reading and math curricula. She has also focused on teachers' explicit presentation of lesson objectives and center-based teaching in all classrooms.

Although the principal has established many facets of strong instructional leadership at the school since she took over at the beginning of the 2005-06 school year, the FF team was uncertain that teachers are currently receiving sufficiently detailed feedback about their practice. Interviews with teachers and leaders and a review of some of the written feedback given teachers from the learning walks indicated that a common language to talk about instructional practice has not yet been developed. Feedback to teachers and monitoring of practice will need to go beyond compliance with teaching the district curricula to developing a repertoire of strategies that effectively challenge each student.

Additionally, the FF team found that the current professional development plan – while comprehensive and appropriately targeted to the school's needs – falls short of being a model that will transform practice. While trainings are focused on improvement strategies, there is no built-in provision for teachers to see the model, practice the model and receive coaching to ensure integration of the new practice – all of which, research indicates, are needed in order to transform practice.

From a review of the school's PD calendar and interviews with staff school-wide, the FF team concluded that teachers have been offered a wide range of PD in many areas. While Bowles School staff appreciates the range of trainings offered, they expressed frustration that, once training occurred, there was little follow-up and review to see that practices were implemented or that feedback was offered on the quality of the implementation. As one teacher expressed, "I wish I would be coached more closely." Another said she would love to have someone come in and "give feedback." Teachers have not had opportunities to observe other classrooms to see a practice in action. They indicated further that, because staff members are so accustomed to working independently, they are afraid to ask other teachers for help or to visit other classes.

Subsequent to some school-based professional development offered during the extended day training sessions, some teachers received coaching from the CPDTs. However, for different reasons, this follow-up is scattered and inconsistent. For example, teachers must request that the CPDT model lessons and work in the classroom. Secondly, CPDT time is often taken up with other tasks at the request of the district or the principal, such as the administrative duties related to district and in-school assessments. Although it is valuable for the CPDT to give teachers assessment data that have already been analyzed, this interferes with the availability of the CPDT to model lessons and offer instructional support. This is a valuable component of the CPDT model that is not being used to its greatest benefit at the Bowles School. In addition, CPDTs cannot discuss concerns about classroom practice with the principal or go into a classroom to provide support unless directed by the principal or requested by the teacher. This is another barrier to the effectiveness of the CPDTs, who are a prominent part of the school and district professional development model.

Although the principal has established several promising practices that are geared toward school improvement, professional development training and the support of CPDTs could have greater impact. The FF team prioritized the following next steps for the Bowles School in the domain of school leadership.

- **Change Bowles School professional development from a model that has focused on presentation of new practices to one that supports integration of new practices into regular and sustained classroom practice.** By changing the PD model to a transformational model and teachers' understandings and expectations regarding the nature of effective professional development, more consistent and confident implementation of different instructional strategies and approaches can be encouraged and sustained until implementation becomes common practice. Ensure that opportunities for practice, coaching and sharing experiences with colleagues follow presentation of new models. Expectations for implementation of curriculum/instruction initiatives should be included in the SIP.
- **Protect the time of the CPDTs to provide more in-class modeling and support for new instructional changes.** This can be done by reducing some of the time spent analyzing assessment information and/or completing administrative tasks. With time, training and computer-based support, teachers can play a more significant role in managing and analyzing data to inform their teaching in order to free CPDTs to spend more time in classrooms.
- **Continue to give feedback from frequent learning walks, as well as in teacher evaluations, in terms of both positive encouragement and the specific improvements in instructional practice that are required to support increased student achievement.**

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

The principal has begun to establish a sound organizational and management structure at the Bowles School. This includes: organization of teaching assignments and schedules so that programs for ELL students are inclusive and teachers have some opportunities for collaboration during the school day; assigned ELL teachers to regular classrooms so that the ELL program will be more inclusive; and, schedules that offer teachers the opportunity of using their preparation time as common planning time to meet with grade-level colleagues. Despite these positive changes, there are areas in this domain that the FF team found need to be addressed. Because teachers are not consistently engaging in collaborative planning, they have not all experienced or learned the benefits of collaboration and collegial relationships in improving classroom instruction. Models of co-teaching relationships have not been explored or defined so that pairing of professionals can maximize the potential benefits of this staffing model. Although a goal of school and district leadership has been to provide the majority of special education services in an inclusion model, this has not yet happened for a number of reasons.

There is no required common planning time during the school day. Many teachers have not had sufficient opportunities to learn the benefits of collaboration and collegial relationships in improving instructional practice. Although there are times when grade-level teachers convene during their prep periods to analyze assessment results or to meet with the CPDTs, most classroom teachers do not use this time to collaborate with their grade-level colleagues. Weekly extended day meetings are often taken up with district and administrative concerns, parent conferences and professional development, so that there are few times for grade-level meetings. Teachers have not yet had training in ways to collaborate to improve their instructional practice. Teachers at different grade levels reported that they often meet and team with a peer but not as a complete grade-level team. A new model for departmental style teaching at the fourth grade level is being piloted this year and has encouraged teacher interest in meeting for collaboration, planning and talking about student work. However, this also is informal. Whether to meet is up to the interests of individual teachers involved in this model.

Models of co-teaching relationships have not been explored or defined so that pairing of professionals is not maximizing the potential benefits of this staffing model. There was no prior plan nor time for models of co-teaching relationships to be examined before the co-teaching model went into effect in the fall. As a result, the degree of interaction, collaboration, planning and sharing of teaching responsibility within this model varies throughout the grades levels. Teachers reported that they do not spend much time collaborating and planning for the co-teaching model. The FF team noted that some teachers have developed co-teaching responsibilities that seem to be working well. In other situations, classroom observation indicated that a teacher acted more as an instructional aide than as a co-teacher. For example, in one classroom observed, four adults were working in the room at the same time with a total of 14 students. In yet another classroom, an adult spent the whole time working with just one student while the other adult worked with the class as a whole group. Currently, the Bowles School is not maximizing the use of additional staff to support varied learning needs of its students or to differentiate instruction.

Although the goal of leadership is to provide the majority of special education services in an inclusion model, this is not occurring for a number of reasons. Many students' Individual Education Plans (IEP) specify pull-out services for ELA and math. Thus, IEPs would need to be amended. There are currently only three special education teachers at the school. Teachers

indicated that scheduling of services within regular education classrooms would not be possible because of time and scheduling constraints. Teachers – both special and regular education – have not been trained in an inclusion model. They have neither the experience nor have they expressed the belief that this is the most productive way to accommodate for children with special needs. The evaluation team leader (ETL), the district special education department and the principal are committed to changing the model of delivering special education programming. This change, though, has not been planned at this point.

- **Find ways to provide time for collaboration among staff that serves to reduce, rather than increase, their work.** This could be accomplished through more frequent grade-level meetings during extended day activities. Meetings should include a focus on improvement and prepared agendas, so that grade level collaboration is consistent throughout the school. Incorporate follow-up feedback to ensure that this time is most productive.
- **Models of co-teaching should be explored and developed so that teaching partners are intentional about maximizing their skills and effectiveness together and continuously learn from each other.** Provide opportunities for co-teachers to share teaching experiences that have been most effective in working with students. By collaborating, regular education, ESL/ELL/ESOL and special education teachers can teach each other effective strategies and approaches for addressing students' needs.
- **Pilot an inclusion model for the integration of special education services in the regular education classroom. Plan and implement it before extending it to all grade levels.** Consider amending student IEPs to reduce time for pull-out SPED services as part of this process. New student IEPs should include special education inclusion support within the regular classroom ELA and math block. Children with special needs will have more time working with higher-achieving models during their most critical subject areas – ELA and math. Regular education teachers will extend their repertoire of teaching strategies to accommodate special education needs within the regular education settings.

## V: District Support

At this time, the FF team concluded that the district support is sufficient and adequate to support the ongoing improvement of the Bowles School across the domains of curriculum and instruction; culture and climate for learning; school leadership; and, organizational structures and management.

### Domain I: Curriculum and Instruction

The FF team recommends strongly that the district, at minimum, continue the same level of support with regard to materials and human resources as begun this year – including the assistance of district-level content specialists as any new changes are implemented. As reported to the district leadership by the FF team, the Bowles School is in need of more instructional materials to challenge advance learners.

### Domain II: Climate and Culture for Learning

Many positive changes have occurred at the Bowles School with regard to the school's climate since the new principal arrived in the fall of 2005. The FF team did not identify a priority finding or recommendation for the district in this domain.

**Domain III: School Leadership**

The FF team recommends that mentoring and support for the principal continue at the same levels – particularly in the area of evaluation and in giving constructive feedback to teachers to ensure instructional change and improvement.

**Domain IV: Organizational Structures and Management**

The Panel Review report indicated that the School Improvement Plan, although well-written in structure, is limited in the range of student learning objectives (SLOs) in both ELA and math and in addressing particular subgroups. Further assistance from district personnel is needed to ensure the development of a new SIP that includes SLOs to address the needs of subgroups of students at the Bowles School.

## **APPENDIX A Team Members**

**Ann Dinsmoor**, Core Team Chair, Consultant, SchoolWorks LLC, Beverly, MA

**Linda Moriarty**, Core Team Member, Report Writer, SchoolWorks LLC, Beverly, MA

**Lois Sullivan**, Practitioner, School Support Specialist, Cambridge Public Schools, MA

**Rosalie Tashjian**, Practitioner, Principal, Winchester Public Schools, Winchester, MA

**Shirley Alvira**, Practitioner, Assistant Superintendent, Chicopee Public Schools, Chicopee, MA

**Geri O'Brien**,\* Practitioner, ELA Content Advisor, Massachusetts Department of Education, Malden, MA

\*A Department of Education content area specialist participated in this Fact-Finding review, based on identification in the Panel Review Report of a need for focus on that area. The specialist functioned in the role of practitioner, which included observing classrooms within their area of expertise and reporting findings from observations back to the Core Team. The specialist was included as part of a pilot for future diagnostic reviews.

**Samuel Bowles Elementary School  
Springfield Public Schools  
FACT-FINDING REVIEW SCHEDULE  
April 10-13, 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  | Classroom Observations |
| <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   |