

REPORT OF FACT FINDING REVIEW

Lincoln Elementary School

Springfield Public Schools

Executive Summary

There are many aspects of sound educational practice in place at the Lincoln Elementary School. However, school improvement initiatives had not had the necessary impact for three overarching reasons: 1) lack of data-driven and differentiated instruction; 2) lack of instructional leadership; and 3) inconsistent and limited professional development. In order to increase student performance rates, the Lincoln Elementary School must focus its improvements efforts. These efforts must be addressed with a sense of urgency and require collaboration from the school community and the district.

Domain I: Curriculum and Instruction

The domain of curriculum and instruction is a strength at the Lincoln Elementary School. The Fact Finding (FF) team determined that most aspects of instruction meet the standard for good practice. The school uses comprehensive district curriculum guides that are aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Various assessment tools are in place and efforts are being made to use data to drive instruction. It is the judgment of the FF team, however, that these efforts and initiatives have not had the desired impact on student performance rates because they have fallen short in the following areas: While teaching practices at the school are sound, there are pockets of instruction that could be improved. Use of assessment information is not beginning uniformly used to differentiate instruction and/or to ensure mastery of student skills. Goals and objectives in the School Improvement Plan (SIP) could be more useful at each respective grade level.

Domain II: Climate and Culture for Learning

The Lincoln Elementary School has created an adequate culture and climate that promotes learning. Teacher collegiality and support were apparent – in particular at each grade level – and staff/ student interactions were positive and respectful. Students, in most cases, adhere to established behavioral norms and expectations. While the climate and culture for learning at the Lincoln School has a sound foundation, it can be improved through the creation of a strong shared vision. This vision needs to be built on the belief that improvement can occur within the school, despite the many issues that face students outside of the school day.

Domain III: School Leadership

Because the Lincoln Elementary School was in the midst of a change in principal during the Fact Finding visit, the team focused specifically on areas for improvement in this domain. Recommendations include: Establishing a systematic structure for overseeing, monitoring and providing feedback on instruction; focusing the efforts of the ELA and mathematics coaches on support for instruction, (as opposed to administrative responsibilities); and increasing the leadership capacity of the staff.

Domain IV: Organizational Structures and Management

The Lincoln Elementary School has some aspects of sound organizational structures and management in place. The school is rich in curriculum and human resources. Staff chooses to meet regularly to discuss teaching and learning and common preparation time has been put into the schedule. While these structures provide a sound foundation for improvement, common planning time – both horizontally and vertically – needs to be implemented and monitored. Also, professional development requires further attention to maximize the impact. As the planning of improvement efforts move forward, the Lincoln Elementary School must also assess how resources and time are managed to support the curriculum and the needs of the new limited English proficient (LEP) and special education populations.

Domain V: District Support

The district has provided support to the Lincoln Elementary School across all four domains. As improvement planning moves forward, the district priorities should be focused on providing increased support to the new principal to establish instructional leadership and decision-making capacities. The Springfield Public School District also needs to take some ownership over the increased challenges that have developed at the Lincoln Elementary School as a result of the district-initiated Boundary Plan. District personnel need to work with the school to create a new vision for the school that recognizes and embraces these challenges.

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 in which students' 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.

At the conclusion of the review process, the Review Panel's charge is to advise the Commissioner of Education 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

At the conclusion of the review process, the Fact-Finding Team's charge is to advise the Commissioner and Board of Education 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.

Lincoln Elementary School Profile

Enrollment

The Lincoln Elementary School (Lincoln Elementary) serves students in grades K-5. Enrollment at Lincoln Elementary decreased slightly each year between 2002 and 2004. Between 2004 and 2005, enrollment decreased by 40 students, which was almost double the number of students who had left in each previous year. This resulted in the school's 2005 enrollment figure of 380 students.

Between 2002 and 2005, student demographics remained fairly consistent. Proportions of Lincoln Elementary student subgroups in 2005, as compared to state averages, are presented below:

Subgroup	School's 2005 % Enrollment	State Average % in 2005
Asian	1	5
Black	31	9
Hispanic	63	12
Native American	1	0.3
White	6	74
Low-Income	86	28
First Language Not English	7	14
Limited English Proficient	2	5
Special Education	9	16

As is evident in the table above, the percentage of Low-Income students enrolled at Lincoln Elementary (86 percent) in 2005 was significantly higher than the state average enrollment (28 percent) for the same subgroup.

In 2005, the attendance rate at Lincoln Elementary was 90.3 percent, with students absent 16.2 days on average. This attendance rate was nearly 4 percent below the state average of 94.2 percent. The school's retention rate was 4.1 percent in 2004, the last year for which these data are available. Lincoln Elementary School's in-school suspension rate in 2005 was 2.9 percent, while out-of-school suspensions averaged 8.9 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 staff is comprised of 1 administrator, 39 teachers, a librarian, a school social worker/adjustment counselor, 1 school nurse and 7 paraprofessionals. Working in a leadership role for 12 years as a principal and assistant principal, the school's leader has 14 years of experience in the district. Of the teachers at Lincoln Elementary, approximately 62 percent have been at the school for five or fewer years, and 38 percent for more than five. Although most of Lincoln Elementary School's teachers have worked at the school for a short period of time, their total teaching experience – both at Lincoln Elementary and in other settings – totals ten years or more for the majority. Approximately 46 percent have taught for 15 years or more, with several teaching for more than 20 years. More than 80 percent of the teaching staff is reported as being highly qualified, with roughly half of all teachers at the school holding a Master's degree.

MCAS Overview

Students at Lincoln Elementary are assessed in reading in grade 3. In grade 4, they are assessed in both English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. Lincoln's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report for 2005 Mid-Cycle IV shows that the school is identified for Improvement in ELA and is in Corrective Action for mathematics. In ELA, the school failed to make AYP in the aggregate and for its Low-Income and Hispanic subgroups.¹ In mathematics, the school did not make AYP in the aggregate or for its Low-Income subgroup – the only subgroup of sufficient size to be reported. Although the school had made AYP for both content areas in the aggregate in 2003, it did not achieve the same results in 2004. For the past three cycles, the school has not made AYP for all subgroups.

GRADE 3

Reading MCAS Results

On the 2005 Grade 3 Reading MCAS, almost 80 percent of the aggregate student population scored in the Needs Improvement and Warning/Failing categories. Only 22 percent of students demonstrated proficiency in ELA, while no student scored Advanced. Between 2004 and 2005, the school achieved a 14 percent decrease in students in the aggregate who scored in Warning/Failing by helping many to shift into the Needs Improvement category. However, there was little change in the percentage of Proficient students between those two years. The percentage of Proficient students dropped from 46 to 20 between 2003 and 2004 and improved by only two percentage points in 2005. Aggregate data for the past five years follows:

¹ In accordance with the federal No Child Left Behind Act passed in 2001, student performance is disaggregated by the following subgroups: Limited English Proficient, Special Education, Low-Income, African-American/Black, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Native American, and White. A minimum of 40 students per subgroup (or 5% of the total number of students assessed, whichever is greater) is required to issue a statistically sound rating or determination of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The subgroups meeting the minimum sample size at Lincoln Elementary School in 2005 were Low-Income (ELA and mathematics) and Hispanic (ELA).

Aggregate Reading	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	0	22	60	18
2004	0	20	48	32
2003	0	46	43	11
2002	0	42	46	13
2001	0	43	40	17

GRADE 4

ELA MCAS Results

Results for Lincoln Elementary School students on the 2005 Grade 4 ELA MCAS indicate that 90 percent of students taking the test scored in the Needs Improvement and Warning/Failing categories, while only 10 percent of students demonstrated Proficiency in ELA. Although the school showed gradual improvement in student performance between 2001 and 2003, there was a decline in performance during the two years that followed. A five-year summary of aggregate ELA MCAS data is presented below:

Aggregate ELA	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	0	10	55	35
2004	2	17	55	27
2003	5	29	51	15
2002	1	20	52	27
2001	0	18	62	20

Between 2004 and 2005, the Warning/Failing category grew by eight percent for students taking the Grade 4 ELA MCAS at Lincoln Elementary. The Proficient category decreased by seven percentage points and the Advanced category, by two. In 2005, none of Lincoln Elementary School's students scored Advanced on the Grade 4 ELA MCAS.

GRADE 4

Mathematics MCAS Results

On the 2005 Grade 4 Mathematics MCAS, aggregate results for Lincoln Elementary are as follows: 0 percent Advanced, 14 percent Proficient, 43 percent Needs Improvement, and 42 percent Warning/Failing. Despite the fact that the 2005 aggregate results are slightly better than those for 2004, the percentage of students scoring in the Needs Improvement and Warning/Failing categories in 2005 (85 percent) far exceeded the percentage scoring Advanced and Proficient (14 percent). This is reflected in the following aggregate Grade 4 Mathematics MCAS performance data:

Aggregate Mathematics	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	0	14	43	42
2004	2	11	44	44
2003	1	12	51	36
2002	4	12	43	41
2001	0	7	52	41

During the past five testing cycles, a predominance of Lincoln Elementary School's students scored in the Needs Improvement and Warning/Failing categories on the mathematics MCAS. High percentages persisted in these categories, while only modest growth in the Proficient category was achieved.

Key Domains of Inquiry

The Lincoln Elementary School has many aspects of sound educational practice in place, specifically in the domain of curriculum and instruction. As the new principal takes over, instructional leadership that is assertive and provides consistent, timely and constructive feedback must be established. As an initial step in the improvement planning process, a school-wide vision should be created to move everyone in a unified and systematic direction, with a focus on academic success.

It is important to note that the implementation of the district-wide Boundary Plan this school year has added an additional layer to the improvement efforts. The Boundary Plan resulted in a shift in demographics at Lincoln Elementary for the 2005-2006 school year – most noticeably in an increase of the limited English proficient (LEP) population from 2% to 19% and an increase in the special education population (which includes the addition of two Social-Emotional Behavior (SEB) classrooms) from 7% to 13%. These changes have impacted the school's educational program during this current school year and will continue to require attention of school and district personnel as improvement efforts move forward. The FF team did not consider the school's new demographics a cause for past underperformance. It was, however, outlined as an additional focus area and challenge to be considered as part of improvement planning.

I: Curriculum and Instruction

The domain of curriculum and instruction is a strength at Lincoln Elementary. Most elements of classroom instruction meet the standard for good practice. Teachers are using district curriculum guides that are aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. These guides provide a detailed scope and sequence that directs and paces instruction. There are a variety of assessment tools in use at Lincoln Elementary that provide the most frequent feedback on student achievement. The use of data to inform instruction in a systematic manner, however, is less clear. Lincoln Elementary staff members are aware of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and its goals. The plan, however, lacks sufficient clarity of the skills students require and specific

strategies to address these areas of weakness at each grade level. Although many aspects of sound practice are in place, some of the school's efforts and initiatives have not had the necessary impact on student performance for two primary reasons: 1) The pressure to keep pace with the curriculum guides, and 2) The lack of a systematic use of assessments that can guide instruction on a daily basis.

The FF team conducted 40 observations (35 minutes each) of 18 classrooms (3 at each grade level) from kindergarten through fifth grade, including the two SEB classrooms. Each grade level is comprised of three sections of students who are grouped according to ability and need. One teacher on the grade level team has "average" to "high average" students whom the school hopes to move into the Proficient or Advanced level on the MCAS. The second teacher on the grade level team has a mix of "low average" to "average" students, along with the majority of the LEP students. The third teacher on the grade level team has a mix of "low" to "average" students, including students with special needs. Through the use of an observation form, the team rated various standards of classroom practice on a 3-tiered scale. The majority of the instructional practices observed at Lincoln Elementary met the standard for good practice. Within that standard, however, there was a range from just meeting the standard to almost exceeding the standard. There were also some pockets of excellent instruction observed, as well as some elements that were not meeting the standard. The results of the 40 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 objective is posted	15/40 (38%)	19/40 (48%)	3/40 (8%)
Lesson objectives clearly explained	8/40 (20%)	28/40 (70%)	2/40 (5%)
Lesson content is appropriate/rigorous	10/40 (25%)	25/40 (63%)	4/40 (10%)
Frequent questioning to check for understanding	6/40 (15%)	27/40 (68%)	3/40 (8%)
Use of higher order questions is evident	9/40 (23%)	25/40 (63%)	3/40 (8%)
Pace of instruction moves at appropriate speed	10/40 (25%)	27/40 (68%)	2/40 (5%)
Transitions are fluid; maximizes instructional time	8/40 (20%)	22/40 (55%)	3/40 (8%)
Sufficient resources to implement curriculum	3/40 (8%)	21/40 (53%)	15/40 (38%)

Note: In each category there were a percentage of responses that were *Not Applicable*. The observer may not have had a chance to fully judge this criterion because of the type of lesson or timing of the observation. As a result, the number of observations does not add up to 40, nor do the total percentages add up to 100%.

More than half of the classrooms at Lincoln Elementary are meeting or exceeding the standard in all practices observed. For the most part, the FF team saw good teaching and pockets of excellent teaching. Focus groups with teachers indicated that there has been a focus on standards-based lesson planning and teaching, especially in ELA and mathematics. Teachers are expected to post and explain the standard in ELA and mathematics each day. While some teachers are posting the standard and while others are providing an explanation of the lesson's objective, it is not in a consistent format. In 15 out of 40 classrooms (38%), there was not a posted objective. In 8 out of 40 classrooms (20%), the teacher went right into the lesson without an explanation of its purpose. In some classes, the daily schedule only was posted. In other classes, the objective and

the explanation were posted, detailed and clearly explained. This is an important practice. It provides students a clear picture of what is to be accomplished and learned during the lesson.

The FF team found the pace and rigor of instruction to be another aspect of good practice at Lincoln Elementary. Within this standard; however, there was a range from just meeting the standard to almost exceeding the standard. The FF team characterized classrooms with good to excellent pace and rigor as those with extensive student engagement, use of higher-order questions, activities differentiated to meet the needs of the varied learners in the classroom and minimal transition time. Seventy-three percent of teachers were providing both an appropriate lesson pace and sufficient rigor for students – for example, students answering all verbal and nonverbal prompts in complete sentences, frequent use of figurative language and use of challenging vocabulary. The FF team witnessed use of higher-order questions in more than half of the classrooms observed. For example, students in one mathematics class were asked to talk about specific mathematical strategies and why they chose to use them. In a reading lesson, students were asked to summarize and predict the conclusion, backing up their answers with evidence as to why they came to the conclusion.

Varied types of instruction are used across Lincoln Elementary classrooms. Observers were asked to note any time they witnessed one of the following modes of instruction during their 35-minute observation: teacher-led, student-led, small group and/or independent work. Of the 40 observations, the use of all four modes of instruction was witnessed in one observation (2.5%). Three modes were observed in 7 observations (17.5%), two modes in 25 observations (62.5%) and one mode in 7 observations (17.5%). Most instruction tended to begin with teaching to the whole group and then moving into independent work or small group work. As a result of classroom observations and interviews conducted with staff, the FF team concluded differentiated instruction relied heavily upon the division of students into groups. This was particularly evident in classrooms that contained LEP and special education students, in which groups were comprised mostly of these students working as a unit. LEP students typically worked with an ESL teacher. Special education students worked with a special education teacher or an instructional aide. Although students were working in small groups, activities were often based on the same material as the rest of the class – in some instances, in a slightly modified form. While grouping students is an initial step toward differentiation, instructors should consider presenting different activities at varying levels of challenge across classrooms to ensure teaching practices are meeting the diverse needs of Lincoln Elementary students.

Lincoln Elementary has detailed and useful curriculum guides, which are provided by the Springfield Public Schools, for all content areas. Guides provide a scope and sequence for teachers that are aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and are used by Lincoln Elementary staff to plan and determine the pace of instruction. In focus groups conducted with the FF team, teachers all agree that the guides are comprehensive and useful. The teachers also indicated, however, that the rigorous pace of these documents often possess more content than can be covered adequately in the designated time. This was especially true of the Math Instructional Guide (MIG) that staff described as “jam-packed.” One teacher said, “There is too much to teach to mastery. We do it all but we are not doing it well.” Although staff report re-teaching some material through practices such as “problem of the day” –as well as use of

remediation components outlined in the texts – it is not sufficient. Teachers feel pressure to continue to progress through the district curriculum guides. As a result, many teachers report moving on, even though they are aware that not all students have mastered the necessary content. It is the judgment of the FF team that this may be producing additional gaps in student learning, which have likely contributed to the school's low student performance rates.

It is noteworthy that teachers continue to have difficulty adhering to the recommended pacing, even though Lincoln Elementary is following the district-mandated instructional blocks of 2.5 hours of literacy instruction (90 minutes for reading and 60 minutes for writing) and 90 minutes of mathematics.

Lincoln Elementary uses a variety of assessments throughout the year to track student performance and to inform the School Improvement Plan, as outlined below:

- ***District Formative Assessment (Math & ELA)***: Fall, Winter, Spring – Grades 3-5
- ***District Math Assessment***: Fall, Winter, Spring – Mandatory for grade 5; principal opted to include grade 1
- ***District Writing Assessment-Long Composition***: February – Grades 1-5
- ***Stanford 9***: Fall & Spring (Just started in Fall 2005) – Grades K-2
- ***Math Instructional Guide Assessments***: Monthly – Grades 1-5
- ***Open Court Unit Assessment***: Monthly – Grades 1-5
- ***Main Idea Assessments***: Monthly – Grades 1-5
- ***School-wide Writing Sample***: Monthly – Grades 1-5
- ***Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA)***: Two administrations/year – Grades K-2; Required third administration for students identified as “At Risk”

As reported by Lincoln Elementary teachers, the monthly mathematics benchmark assessments and *Open Court* unit assessments provide teachers with the information that is most useful in the classroom. These assessments are used to measure student achievement and/or progress on the skills prescribed for the month. Although this is useful information for monitoring progress, it is not clear that this provides frequent enough feedback to impact the daily planning and implementation of truly differentiated instruction that will enable ongoing mastery of skills for students at all levels. In addition to monthly assessments, teachers use informal observation to monitor student learning. The FF team observed instances of teachers assessing understanding as they walked around the room to check student responses. In many of the classrooms, there were two to three adults present. In these classrooms, teachers are provided the opportunity to check in with students more frequently and work with them in a one-to-one ratio.

The Springfield Public Schools provides Lincoln Elementary with assessment results and related analyses from district tests. Analyses of information from school-based assessments are completed by the school's two Collaborative Professional Development Teachers (CPDTs). Teachers are provided assessment results and analyses from each of the above assessments. The CPDTs reported that they plan to meet weekly with each grade level team to distribute and discuss assessment results. However, these meetings do not always happen as scheduled. Teachers and the CPDTs both reported that this is typically due to lack of time.

Analyses of student performance information at Lincoln Elementary have not moved beyond the level of item analysis. Information provided by both the district and the CPDTs indicate trends in student performance, such as question types with which students had difficulty. Although information on question type is one step in understanding student struggles, it does not identify the specific skills with which students are having difficulty. For example, incorrect responses on Main Idea questions could be the result of comprehension weaknesses or difficult vocabulary. As a result, the range of high quality assessments being used by the school may not be providing information that is in-depth enough to target specific areas of student weakness.

Teachers at Lincoln Elementary are aware of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and its goals. While the SIP has many sound aspects, it lacks specific grade-level goals and explicit areas of student skill weakness to effectively act as a road map for improvement. The FF team expressed some concern about the lack of a systematic breakdown by grade level to indicate what skills students need to achieve to meet the SIP goal. Also, there are no benchmarks to measure student progress. This is likely parallel to the level of data analysis being done at the school, which stops with a review of specific items. While a SIP is not necessarily to be used as a daily teaching guide, staff should be aware of the skills that students need to achieve the end goal. And further, once these skills are mastered, what the next step is. In its current form, the SIP cannot guide the teaching staff without additional guidance from the instructional leadership team.

At the time of the FF visit, a revision of the SIP had just been completed. The revised plan did not address the broadness or vagueness of the goals, although it does begin to address the addition of the new LEP population and the increase in special education students.

There are many strong elements in place at Lincoln Elementary in the domain of curriculum and instruction. In order to see increases in student performance rates, the FF team prioritized the following next steps for Lincoln Elementary.

- **Move instruction from “Good” to “Great”.** Most of the instruction at Lincoln Elementary meets an acceptable standard. However, the observers saw a broad range of practices within this standard. There were also pockets of teaching that did not meet the standard. Because of the low performance rates, Lincoln Elementary cannot afford to have mediocre or poor teaching. The school must work toward improving all teaching. This can be accomplished through setting goals to systematize instruction and sharing best practices school-wide. Feedback on instructional practices will also be important.
- **Identify and use meaningful, frequent and timely assessments to identify areas of student skill strength and weakness. Use this information to plan, deliver and differentiate instruction to ensure mastery of student learning.** There are many assessments being used. The information, however, is not being used in a manner that can truly inform instruction. Teachers are checking for understanding informally throughout many of the classes and report that this informs instruction. The content and pace of the instructional guides – not always student skill mastery – are the driving force behind delivery of instruction. Teachers, in collaboration with school leadership, need to gather information and to differentiate instruction on an ongoing basis. It is critical to ensure that students are moving forward with the necessary skill mastery.

- **Revise the SIP so the goals are explicit, useful for every grade level and address entire school population.** As improvement planning begins, the school should review the current SIP. The plan should not serve as a teaching guide; however, each grade level team must know their specific benchmarks that will move students toward the final goal. Grade-level benchmarks will enable all teachers to have ownership of the goals and school-wide student achievement. The SIP team should also make sure the revised plan takes into account an analysis of skills and teaching strategies needed to address the school's subgroup populations, particularly in light of the shift in demographics.

II: Culture and Climate for Learning

The Lincoln Elementary School has created an adequate culture and climate that promotes learning. There is a sense of support and camaraderie. Most student/teacher interactions were positive and promoted engagement and enthusiasm for learning. There is a climate of mutual respect with behavioral norms that students understand. However, there were pockets where lack of student engagement and excitement for learning was noted. Though this pocket is small, the FF believes that it could have a significant impact on climate and culture. In addition, teachers at Lincoln Elementary frequently cite external factors – e.g., parental involvement, poverty, and mobility – as reasons for low student performance. Attendance and discipline, as well, were cited. Lincoln Elementary must continue working to establish the belief that improvement can occur within the school, despite the many issues that face students outside of the school day.

During the 40 observations that were conducted, observers were looking at two examples for practice in the domain of culture and climate for learning: clear expectations for student behavior and positive student-staff interactions. Observers rated practices on a three-tiered scale. The results are outlined below.

Standards of classroom practice	Does not meet the standard	Meets the standard	Exceeds the standard
Student/staff interactions are positive & respectful	6/40 (15%)	28/40 (70%)	6/40 (15%)
Clear behavioral expectations are evident*	6/40 (15%)	30/40 (75%)	2/40 (5%)

* 5% fell into the N/A category.

Most interactions between Lincoln Elementary students and staff were judged by the FF team to be positive and respectful. Most teachers exhibited a firm, yet comfortable, demeanor. It was clear that they were in charge of the room and had set up an atmosphere of mutual respect, which included high behavioral expectations. For example, students immediately responded with posted behavioral expectations in many instances: 1) Eyes, 2) Quiet, 3) Be Still, 4) Hands Free, and 5) Listen. Teachers frequently used terms of endearment to address students, such as “honey” and “sweetie” or “Give me five” for a correct response. These types of expression tended to relay a calmer, more intimate atmosphere for learning.

In 6 out of 40 (15%) classrooms, there were interactions and behavioral expectations that did not meet the standard. While this number is limited, the observers felt that the tone of the classroom could stifle the desire to perform. Teachers were overly controlling and there was a lack of

positive reinforcement for good behavior or correct student responses. This resulted in increased redirections and less time on task, as well as a less positive climate for learning.

Overall ratings of student engagement across Lincoln Elementary indicate some variability. Based on professional judgment, the FF team indicated the average percentage of time students were engaged in the learning activity throughout the 35 minute observation. Engagement percentages are outlined in the following table.

Percent of Student Engagement across Classroom Observations at the Lincoln School			
Percentage of engagement	Student Engagement in Lincoln Classes	Percentage of engagement	Student Engagement in Lincoln Classes
100	7/40 (17.5%)	50	6/40 (15%)
90	16/40 (40%)	40	1/40 (2.5%)
80	4/40 (10%)	30	1/40 (2.5%)
70	2/40 (5%)	20	1/40 (2.5%)
60	1/40 (2.5%)	10	1/40 (2.5%)

The FF team considered engagement rates of 80% or higher effective. Teaching practices and activities effectively engaged students in approximately two-thirds (27/40) of Lincoln Elementary classrooms. In the remaining third, student engagement was lower than 80% across the 35-minute observation. In addition to sound teaching activities, the FF team also noted teacher enthusiasm to be a key factor in engagement. Overall, a positive culture and climate for learning was more common than not. These classrooms had clear behavioral norms and expectations, respectful interactions and charismatic, energetic teachers.

Another factor limiting the climate and culture for learning at Lincoln Elementary is the belief that low student performance is a result of external factors. When asked during focus groups, “What are the reasons for low student performance at the school?,” teachers predominately responded issues of poverty, lack of parental involvement and high rates of transience. Teachers rarely indicated issues related to teaching and learning or factors that can be controlled within the school. The creation of the Boundary Plan also added another layer of challenge, with a 17% increase in the LEP population and the addition of two SEB classrooms. These are issues that have affected and will continue to affect Lincoln Elementary. The school will need to think proactively about how to deal with these challenges.

Discipline and behavior management were also highlighted by many staff members as factors affecting student achievement. Interviews with teaching and support staff indicated that behavior problems were present in some classrooms. Across grade-level focus groups, the FF team found behavior to be a problem in only some classrooms. Typically, one classroom presented the majority of problems with student behavior. Teachers would identify one class with behavior problems. For example, “I [teacher] don’t have any problems this year. [Teacher] has the problems.” The primary mode of behavior management in use at Lincoln Elementary is the color card system with standardized consequences, which become more severe based on the number of infractions. Some teachers indicate that they use it; others do not. Most teachers do not feel that the system is effectively addressing student behavior because there is a lack of administrative support and follow-through to ensure consistent consequences. It is important to note that the FF

team did not witness any major problems with behavior management or discipline, either in the classrooms or in general, throughout the day. Lincoln Elementary needs to evaluate if discipline truly is a factor affecting student achievement. If so, this is another layer the school will need to add to the school improvement efforts.

Some teachers also identified poor student attendance rates as a factor influencing low student performance. The attendance rates at Lincoln Elementary have shown a decreasing trend over the last three years – from 91.3% in the 2002-03 to 90.4% in 2004-05. These rates make it impossible for Lincoln Elementary to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), regardless of student achievement scores on MCAS. This year, the school (under the leadership of the principal) has put some initiatives and incentives in place to boost attendance rates. These include: publication of quarterly “Perfect Attendance” reports; student certificates for good attendance; and, school-sponsored popcorn and movie parties. The adjustment counselor is also helping with attendance. Attendance rates are an issue across the Springfield Public Schools and, as a result, the district has provided an attendance officer who focuses on all of the elementary schools. As a result of these efforts, Lincoln Elementary has seen improvements in the attendance rates this school year. At the end of March 2006, Lincoln Elementary School’s average attendance rate was 92.6%. Continued focus on student attendance at the school is imperative for the school to make AYP.

There are many strong elements in place at Lincoln Elementary in the domain of culture and climate for learning. Although there are pockets of strength, the school must work to make sure that a positive culture and climate for learning exists throughout the entire school. To address the areas in need of improvement, the FF team prioritized the following step for Lincoln Elementary.

- **Create a vision to unify the school community. The vision should focus on increasing academic achievement, celebrating diversity and recognizing success.** The staff of Lincoln Elementary is well aware that academic achievement has been low. Many staff members seem discouraged by this. The staff is also aware that the Boundary Plan has created added challenges. Currently, there is no uniform solution in place as to how to address these challenges. The staff needs to spend some time working together to create a common shared vision for the school. Use the new Boundary Plan that has created neighborhood schools as a foundation and build a neighborhood school that celebrates diversity and success.

III: School Leadership

At the time of the FF team visit, the Lincoln Elementary School, due to external circumstances, was undergoing a change in principal. The acting principal was present for the duration of the FF review and, along with the current principal, participated in the process. Due to the change in leadership at the school, the FF team focused specifically on areas for improvement in this domain, since the acting principal establishes herself as the school leader. These areas include: 1) Establish a systematic structure for overseeing, monitoring and providing feedback on instruction; 2) Focus the efforts of the ELA and mathematics CPDTs on support for instruction,

as opposed to administrative responsibilities; and 3) Increase the leadership capacity of the teaching staff.

To address the areas in need of improvement, the FF team prioritized the following next steps for Lincoln Elementary in the domain of school leadership.

- **The new principal must be an assertive instructional leader and decision maker.** Taking into consideration staff input, the new principal needs to conduct a needs assessment of initiatives and planning documents related to the Lincoln Elementary School's improvement to create and implement a prioritized road map for improvement. While it is important for staff to have ownership, the principal must also establish herself as the leader of school improvement efforts.
- **Implement a structure of regular oversight and monitoring of teaching and learning.** Along with the instructional leadership team, the principal needs to establish practices for planning, implementing and assessing instruction. These practices should be based on prioritized school improvement goals and provide teachers with consistent, timely and constructive feedback. During focus groups conducted with the FF team, teachers reported receiving limited feedback on instruction. The principal has conducted informal walkthroughs. District Learning Walks have also occurred. Teachers reported that school-based walkthroughs offered informal feedback only on some occasions. District Learning Walks provided information on instructional trends at the school but not individual feedback. Teachers relayed that they want and need consistent and timely feedback, which is the first step in this effort.
- **CPDTs efforts must be focused solely on student improvement in ELA and mathematics.** Reassess the tasks assigned to CPDTs to ensure that administrative responsibilities are limited and to ensure extensive focus on ELA and mathematics.

CPDTs are seen as a valuable resource by most of the staff and were regarded as the instructional leaders by most staff at Lincoln Elementary. The role of the CPDT, as described by the principal and the CPDTs, encompasses the following overall responsibilities: resources to classroom teachers; monthly assessment coordinators, professional development activities and coaches. These responsibilities take up approximately 80% of their time. The remaining 20% is spent providing direct service to students. CPDTs indicated that they "wear other hats," including: MCAS coordination, LEP coordination, coordination of district mentoring program for new teachers and substituting for the principal when he is out of the building. Each CPDT is scheduled to meet with grade-level teams one time per month but, as a result of other obligations, this does not consistently happen. Reports from staff indicate that "they [CPDTs] have too much on their plate," "they are overwhelmed" and that many times, "if you want something, you have to seek them out." Teachers and CPDTs also report that there are times when they do not get their monthly grade-level time due to outside responsibilities.

In order for CPDTs to have the desired and necessary impact on student achievement, their focus needs to be on ELA and mathematics only. Reassess and redefine the role of the CPDTs at Lincoln Elementary to ensure that, as improvement planning moves forward, these positions are having the greatest impact on student achievement. These efforts should focus on regular visits to classrooms to model and provide feedback on instruction, professional development activities (focused on improvement initiatives) and direct service to students. The role of the CPDTs should be explained clearly and openly with the staff so they see the CPDTs as coaches who are focused on improvement and not as evaluators.

- **The new principal should create a shared leadership structure that gives staff more ownership over improvement efforts.** The creation of grade-level or content-area lead teachers may help to incorporate greater input and involvement from teachers on a daily basis. Teachers will have a greater voice into day-to-day decisions. Communication may flow more easily and efficiently. And, this will provide greater unity in improvement efforts and planning. Most grade-level teams identified an individual as the natural leader of the team – defined by length of time working at the school, teaching and/or knowledge of the specific grade level. Support and camaraderie on grade-level teams was evident, particularly in terms of sharing material and instructional activities. Most teachers report good, supportive working relationships. Providing teachers with structured opportunities for leadership responsibilities may also lighten the load for the principal and CPDTs. This is particularly important in light of the needed improvements at the school.

IV: Organizational Structures and Management

The Lincoln Elementary School has some aspects of sound organizational structures and management in place. The school is rich in human resources. There is a range of curricular and human resources at the school. Teachers collaborate during lunch and common preparation periods. Common planning, however, is not required or structured. With the shift in demographics this school year, Lincoln Elementary has had to re-arrange its structure to serve a greater number of LEP and special education students. New staff members have been added. It is not clear, however, that there is sufficient number of personnel or that these individuals have been adequately trained. The district offers a wide range of professional development opportunities but school-based professional development is not clearly focused on specific areas in need of improvement. While these structures provide a sound foundation for improvement, teacher planning time and professional development require further attention to maximize the impact. Lincoln Elementary must also assess how resources and time are managed to support the changes in student demographics.

There are an impressive number of resources – both human and curriculum – at Lincoln Elementary. The FF team often noted two (sometimes three) adults in the classroom servicing general education students – specifically in classrooms with special education students and/or LEP students. The addition of human resources is a result of the Boundary Plan and the shift in demographics at the school. There are 12 new teachers at Lincoln Elementary this year. Curriculum resources were widespread across classrooms. Classroom observations indicated a

large range of materials – manipulatives, books and supplies – to support the implementation of the curriculum guides.

There is common preparation time for grade level teachers, due to the rotation of students through one of three specials (Computers, Physical Education and Science). However, the role of grade level teams is not clearly defined. Although preparation and lunch time are often used for collaboration, common planning is not currently required, nor is there a structured agenda to guide or ensure consistent focus across grade-level teams. Although there is a regularly scheduled time for CPDTs to meet with each grade level once per month, teachers and CPDTs report that this monthly meeting, for a variety of reasons, does not always happen. In addition, common preparation time has not been made available to LEP teachers or special education teachers. Staff expressed a desire to have time to share and plan together, especially since many of these teachers are new to the school and/or the field. Some special education and LEP teachers have a common preparation time with the teachers at the grade level they serve but this is not consistent. Ensuring common planning time for all instructional staff – focused on common initiatives and guided by an agenda – will be important to consider as improvement efforts are planned.

As a result of the large number of new LEP students and the addition of two SEB classrooms, Lincoln Elementary has had to re-arrange some aspects of its structure. As previously mentioned, most grade-level teams are grouped so that one classroom contains LEP students and the other, special education students. District personnel reported that this decision was made, in part, to consolidate use of resources (i.e., concentrated LEP staff with LEP students). While new staff members have been added, it is not clear that there is sufficient number of personnel or that these individuals have been adequately trained. Several ELL teachers started after the start of the year. Some do not yet hold the proper certifications in this area. In addition, there is limited curriculum in place for ELL students. Teachers and LEP staff report using the English Language Learners section outlined in the teacher's guides for mathematics and reading to instruct LEP students in these two content areas. When asked in a focus group if there were a curriculum guide in place for the school, ELL staff replied "no." They did reference the Developing English Language Proficiency curriculum guide, provided by the district, and indicated that monthly meetings with the district LEP person are helpful. It is not clear, however, that this guidance is sufficient for the large number of new teachers and with such a large and new population of LEP students.

Special education staff, including teachers and the adjustment counselor, reported some similar concerns. Some special education teachers expressed concern that "some students are signed up for inclusion" (as dictated by their Individualized Education Plans) and they are not receiving this type of programming. Special education teachers indicated that numbers of identified students are increasing. In addition, there are a few students who are both English language learners and, as well, have special education needs. There is no clear system in place to determine which of these needs take precedence, since students are grouped (according to the current grade level structure at Lincoln Elementary) as either ELL or special education.

There a wide range of professional development (PD) opportunities offered by the district. School-based training also occurs. At this time, however, it is not clear that PD is structured to have the greatest impact on improvement. When asked about professional development provided by the Springfield Public Schools, staff was clear that it was both extensive and helpful. One teacher indicated, “No one who works for this district is ever short PDPs [Professional Development Points].” Although the school-based PD calendar is based on current school improvement goals, it is not clear that these initiatives are most important to staff development and improvement at this time. The use of a needs assessment, input from teachers and CPDTs, and classroom observations should also inform professional development. Trainings should be focused on those areas in which the school needs the greatest improvements. The principal and staff indicated that they have planned for next year’s PD to focus on instructional strategies for ELL students. Based on interviews and focus groups conducted with school personnel, this appears to be an area of need at the school.

To address the areas in need of improvement, the FF team prioritized the following next steps for Lincoln Elementary in the domain of organizational structures and management.

- **Establish structured and consistent common planning time, focused on school improvement goals.** The staff needs to build on the current dedication of the teachers (who are already meeting at their own choice) and implement structured and required common planning time. School leadership should be a part of common planning time – its oversight and the implementation of an agenda. This could include the principal, CPDTs and/or established teacher leaders (see domain III). Common planning time should focus on areas that the school identifies for priority improvement and should be related to PD. The school should consider inclusion of LEP and special education teachers, who serve a large portion of the school’s population.
- **Use whole school professional meetings and trainings to begin vertical collaboration.** In order for the school to create and unify around a shared vision of school improvement (see domain II) and for school improvement goals to be clear and delineated, the staff needs to begin to think and work vertically. This will increase ownership for whole school improvement. Currently, the extended Mondays and some staff lunch times are the only larger blocks of time when the whole staff can work together. While grade level collaboration ensures knowledge of one aspect of the school’s curriculum and students, understanding activities at various grade levels is also critically important. Staff must understand that what is happening in kindergarten and 1st grade has just as great an impact on MCAS performance as those activities in grades 3 and 4. Vertical planning time, based on improvement efforts and monitored by school leadership, also needs to be structured.
- **Maximize use of professional development time to focus on school improvement efforts.** School leadership needs to make a concerted effort to ensure that professional development time is prioritized on improvement and that it occurs as scheduled. Special attention and focus needs to be given to providing increased training for LEP and special education teachers. Ideally, all teachers would benefit from training in these areas as they work with many of the students. As identified in domain III, the CPDTs need to make sure their time is

focused solely on training and development in the areas of ELA and mathematics, in the form of whole school trainings, working with grade levels or coaching and modeling best practices for teachers.

V: District Support

In combination with the specific findings for Lincoln Elementary, 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 FF team found several strengths at Lincoln Elementary, particularly in the area of curriculum and instruction, as well as the experience, dedication and hard work of staff. With this to build on, the overarching theme of this report cites the school's need for stronger instructional leadership, creating a shared vision, prioritizing school improvement efforts and setting up structures to support these school improvement efforts. In collaboration with the school, the district must also prioritize its focus at Lincoln Elementary to support new leadership and assert its presence more in order to address low student performance rates.

Domain I: Curriculum and Instruction

A predominant finding at Lincoln Elementary is that the teaching staff is using sound instructional practices that follow district-developed curriculum guides. The school is utilizing the district-mandated 2.5 hours per day in ELA and 90 minutes in mathematics to guide instructional time in these core subject areas. The district has provided the school with sound curriculum guides to assist in the planning, delivery and pacing of instruction. Staff has been trained in how to use curriculum guides, as well as in content areas. Much of this occurs in the form of coaches. For example, the district provided ELA coaches (who periodically check in with Lincoln Elementary) for 4 to 6 straight weeks.

The FF team found that one of the potential gaps in student performance resulted from teachers moving on through the pacing guides without ensuring that all students have mastered the necessary content. Although training in use of these guides has been provided by the district and reinforced by the CPDTs, the district should consider supplementing its professional development efforts with a specific focus on pacing and differentiating instruction to ensure mastery for all students. Differentiation will allow teachers to continue moving some students along, or go deeper into concepts while, at the same time, remediating those students who are struggling.

Domain II: Climate and Culture for Learning

The Lincoln Elementary School has a good foundation on which to continue building a positive culture and climate for learning. The new Boundary Plan has required both the school and the district to respond to changes in student demographics (particularly significant at Lincoln Elementary). In order to continue working on the creation of a positive climate and culture for learning, the district needs to unite with Lincoln Elementary in creating a vision for

neighborhood schools. The district must determine how they can best support this initiative at the school, as well as throughout the Springfield Public Schools.

Domain III: School Leadership

The district has worked to support the school leadership in many ways, including the support of an assistant superintendent, program directors, school improvement officers and coaches. As new leadership takes over at Lincoln Elementary, the district must support the new principal and ensure that the top priority is instructional leadership. This must include frequent, timely and constructive feedback; holding teachers accountable for high quality performance in order to move instruction from “good” to “great;” and establishing structures at the school (e.g., common planning time) to support improvement initiatives. The district needs to collaborate in this endeavor, providing resources and support to ensure that strong instructional leadership and decision-making capabilities define the principal position at Lincoln Elementary. This requires the immediate attention of the district, since the school’s principal should establish herself as the instructional leader and decision-maker as soon as possible. This is especially true in light of the low student performance rates.

Domain IV: Organizational Structures and Management

The district is providing adequate organizational structure and management to Lincoln Elementary. There are a good number of curriculum and human resources at the school. District professional development provides extensive training to staff.

The school’s CPDTs are district funded and designed to provide schools with on-site expertise in both ELA and mathematics. The district provides training to these individuals who are, in turn, responsible for disseminating information to staff. However, in addition to content area and instructional responsibilities, CPDTs are allotted additional administrative responsibilities – some of which come from the district. Given the low student performance rates at the school, the CPDT roles needs to be prioritized to focus solely on academic areas that focus on improving student achievement.

Although the effort the district has made to provide personnel, as well as training, for ELL and special education staff is recognized, there is still the question as to whether the current supports are sufficient. The district is providing support to the school through personnel who meet with LEP staff once a month. Although Lincoln Elementary teachers and staff who work with this individual state that it is helpful, it is not clear that it is enough – given the large number of new and untrained teachers at the school. In addition, Lincoln Elementary staff members (in particular, regular education teachers) do not report knowledge of curriculum resources for LEP students, other than what the school’s instructional programs list. The assistant superintendent reported that the district has run allocation formulas and that the school has the appropriate number of staff people to serve the LEP and special education populations. While the school may have the appropriate number of staff (according to the allocation formula) to serve these populations, it would be prudent for the district, along with the principal, to take another look at it. The school year is moving toward completion. The changes in population and programming have been in place for almost a year. It is a good time to reevaluate all aspects of LEP and

special education programming so Lincoln Elementary can ensure that it is providing the best possible services (aligned with improvement efforts) to these students in the upcoming school year. Once proper resources for LEP and special education are determined, the district should ensure full provision of these resources.

Conclusion

Hard-working dedicated teachers, good teaching practices and comprehensive curriculum guides are three key strengths at Lincoln Elementary. These strengths make for a strong foundation on which to build its school improvement efforts. They have not been strong enough, however, to have the necessary impact on student performance rates.

School improvement efforts need to start with effective and assertive instructional leadership. This leadership needs to create a strong shared vision – focusing on high academic achievement for all students and the creation of a neighborhood school – with the staff. With this strong shared vision in place, the staff can prioritize improvement efforts. Common planning – both at each grade level and across grade levels – will assist with collegiality and whole school focus on improvement. Professional development needs to be prioritized around school improvement efforts in ELA and mathematics and include targeted instructional feedback. This will assist school staff in effectively working to differentiate curriculum and assess in a timely way to truly inform instructional practices. This will ensure all students access to the curriculum and mastery of necessary skills and content.

Focused improvement planning efforts at Lincoln Elementary must be met with a sense of urgency by the school and the district. This must include an increased focus on the needs of the school's new LEP and special education populations. The Springfield Public Schools should collaborate with the school in all of these efforts and make sure that district initiatives are having the intended impact on student learning and performance.

APPENDIX A Team Members

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* 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.

**Lincoln 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

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

DAY TWO

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

DAY THREE

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

DAY FOUR

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