

## **School Panel Review Report Westfield South Middle School Westfield Public Schools**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the School Panel Review process is to assist the Commissioner of Education in determining whether State intervention is needed to guide improvement efforts in schools where students' MCAS performance has consistently not been at a level that reaches the schools' Adequate Yearly Progress targets in English language arts or mathematics or both. The Westfield South Middle School met this criterion and was one of 21 schools selected for panel review in Fall 2005. The panel review was conducted on December 6 and 7, 2005.

The review panel's charge was to analyze data and written information on the school's performance and improvement efforts, visit the school and meet with school and district officials in order to advise the Commissioner on the answers to the following two key questions:

1. Is the school implementing a sound plan for improvement, and what gains have been achieved to date as a result of this implementation?
2. Do the conditions appear to be in place for successful implementation of the school's improvement plan?

The panel's responses to the two key questions that defined the scope of its review are included in this report. These findings and conclusions are the product of the panel's analysis, discussion and observation, based on the evidence available to it. A list of panel members who participated in the review is provided in Appendix A. A detailed schedule of the panel's activities is provided in Appendix B.

The panel's findings and conclusions on the two key questions will be forwarded to the Commissioner of Education for consideration, together with school performance data, in determining whether Westfield South Middle School is deemed underperforming. The panel was not asked to formulate a sound plan for school improvement where such a plan does not presently exist or to recommend a course of action to create the conditions for successful implementation of sound improvement strategies where such conditions at present do not appear to exist. Diagnostic and/or prescriptive intervention, where needed to assist an underperforming school, occurs at the next stage of the school review process.

### **South Middle School Profile**

#### **Enrollment**

Westfield South Middle School serves students in Grades 6 through 8. Enrollment at Westfield South has dropped slightly over the past several years, decreasing by 29 students between 2002 and 2003, 43 students between 2003 and 2004 and 20 students between 2004 and 2005. In 2005, enrollment at the school is 701 students in total. Between 2002 and 2005, student demographics have been stable, with percentages of student subgroups changing little from year to year. Proportions of Westfield South Middle School student subgroups in 2005, as compared to state averages, are presented on the next page:

Subgroup	2005 Enrollment (%)	
	School	State
Asian	1	5
Black	2	9
Hispanic	11	12
Native American	0	0.3
White	85	74
Low-Income	41	28
First Language Not English	15	14
Limited English Proficient	5	5
Special Education	19	16

In 2005, the attendance rate at Westfield South was 95.1 percent, with students absent 8.3 days on average. This attendance rate is slightly better than the state average of 94.2 percent. The school’s retention rate was 1.0 percent in 2004, the last year for which this data is available. Westfield South’s in-school suspension rate in 2005 was 4.0 percent, while out-of-school suspensions averaged 5.3 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 Westfield South staffing report indicates that the school is comprised of three administrators (one principal, one assistant principal, a .5 FTE assistant principal and a special education supervisor), 67 teachers, two guidance counselors, a part-time librarian, a nurse, a school psychologist, seven support staff members (including an adjustment counselor) and two long-term substitutes. The principal has been at the school for 18 years, all of which have been in an administrative role. Of the teachers, approximately 52 percent have been at the school for five or fewer years, while roughly 15 percent have worked at Westfield South for ten or more years. The majority of teachers (approximately 73 percent) hold a master’s degree, with several teachers holding more than one post-baccalaureate degree and with one teacher holding a doctorate.

**MCAS Overview**

Students at the Westfield South Middle School are assessed in Grade 7 in English language arts (ELA) and in Grades 6 and 8 in mathematics. Westfield South’s Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report for 2005 Mid-Cycle IV shows an accountability status of Identified for Improvement – Subgroups Only for ELA and Corrective Action for mathematics. In 2005, the school made AYP in ELA in the aggregate, but it failed to make AYP for its subgroups of special education and low-income students.<sup>1</sup> Each year from 1999 to 2005, the school made AYP in ELA in the aggregate. In 2003, it also made AYP in ELA for subgroups, but this changed in the past two years. In 2005, the school did not make AYP in mathematics in the

---

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

aggregate or for any of its reported subgroups (Special Education, Low-Income, Hispanic and White) except the Limited English Proficient subgroup, which met its Participation, Improvement and Attendance targets. In 2004, the school did not make AYP in mathematics in the aggregate or for subgroups, but it did make AYP in the aggregate (but not for all subgroups) in 2003. Prior to that, it did not make AYP in mathematics in 2001 and 2002, but in 1999 and 2000, it did make AYP.

In 2005, the aggregate Composite Performance Indices (CPIs) for South Middle School were 81.8 in ELA and 61.2 in mathematics. Year-by-year aggregate CPIs are shown below:

<b>Year-by-Year Aggregate CPI Data Summary</b>		
<b>Year</b>	<b>ELA</b>	<b>Math</b>
2001	76.8	55.7
2002	76.6	52.2
2003	81.8	58.5
2004	82.9	58.9
2005	81.8	61.2
State Target 2005	80.5	68.7

## **GRADE 6**

### **Mathematics MCAS Results**

Results of the 2005 Grade 6 mathematics MCAS for students at Westfield South are presented below:

<b>2005 Mathematics, Gr. 6</b>	<b>Percent</b>			
	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W/F</b>
Aggregate	11	26	35	28
Regular Education	14	33	39	14
Special Education	2	8	24	67
Limited English Proficient	7	7	29	57

On the 2005 Grade 6 mathematics MCAS, 91 percent of Special Education students and 86 percent of Limited English Proficient students scored in the Needs Improvement and Warning/Failing categories combined, and 53 percent of Regular Education students scored in the same categories.

There has been little change in student performance since 2001. This is reflected in the aggregate Grade 6 mathematics MCAS results presented next:

<b>Aggregate Mathematics, Gr. 6</b>	<b>Percent</b>			
	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W/F</b>
2005	11	26	35	28
2004	10	23	38	30
2003	11	22	38	29
2002	7	30	31	31
2001	7	27	36	31

Although modest improvements in the Advanced and Warning/Failing categories were made, there was little change in the other categories. Percentages of students scoring at each level stayed basically the same in the aggregate and for Regular Education students. More substantial gains in performance were made over the past several years by students receiving Special Education services. Specifically, the Advanced category for Special Education students on the 2005 Grade 6 mathematics MCAS grew by two percent between 2004 and 2005, and between 2001 and 2005, a 22 percent decrease in Special Education students scoring in the Warning/Failing category was achieved.

**GRADE 7**

**ELA MCAS Results**

Results of the 2005 Grade 7 ELA MCAS for the school are presented here:

<b>2005 ELA, Gr. 7</b>	<b>Percent</b>			
	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W/F</b>
Aggregate	8	51	31	11
Regular Education	10	64	24	2
Special Education	0	14	51	35
Limited English Proficient	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

On the Grade 7 ELA MCAS, 86 percent of Special Education students in 2005 and 82 percent of Limited English Proficient students in 2004 (the last year in which these percentages were calculated for the LEP subgroup at Westfield South Middle School) scored in the Needs Improvement and Warning/Failing categories, while 26 percent of Regular Education students scored at the same levels. While the majority (74 percent) of Regular Education students scored Proficient and Advanced, 14 percent of Special Education students scored Proficient and no students in that subgroup had scores that exceeded that level. Over the years from 2001 to 2005 for students in the aggregate, the school made improvements in the Advanced category and slightly more modest improvements in the other MCAS performance categories, as is evident in the data shown next:

Aggregate ELA, Gr. 7	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	8	51	31	11
2004	5	56	31	8
2003	3	55	33	10
2002	2	51	37	11
2001	4	48	36	12

## GRADE 8

### Mathematics MCAS Results

Westfield South's 2005 Grade 8 Mathematics MCAS results are as follows:

2005 Mathematics, Gr. 8	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	5	20	37	39
Regular Education	6	24	44	26
Special Education	2	4	10	84
Limited English Proficient	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

As shown earlier, the majority (76 percent) of Grade 8 students in the aggregate scored at the two lowest levels of MCAS performance, while only 25 percent scored Proficient or Advanced. Performance has stayed relatively stable during the past several years, with little change at each level of MCAS performance. The data table provided below shows details of this:

Aggregate Mathematics, Gr. 8	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	5	20	37	39
2004	5	20	38	37
2003	6	17	37	40
2002	2	17	37	44
2001	5	16	41	37

While the school has basically maintained its percentage of grade 8 students in the aggregate scoring Advanced and has made a modest improvement in the Proficient category for the same students, little change in the Needs Improvement and Warning/Failing categories has been achieved. For students in the Special Education subgroup, although the Warning/Failing category increased by six percent between 2004 and 2005 to 84 percent of students in the subgroup, both the Proficient and Advanced categories grew by two percent. While improvements in the Proficient and Advanced categories were made by Special Education students, similar gains in these ranges were not achieved by Regular Education students.

## **PANEL RESPONSES TO THE KEY QUESTIONS**

### **KEY QUESTION 1: IS THE SCHOOL IMPLEMENTING A SOUND PLAN FOR IMPROVEMENT, AND WHAT GAINS HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED TO DATE AS A RESULT OF THIS IMPLEMENTATION?**

The school does not have a sound plan for improvement, although a number of elements embedded in daily practice have the potential to result in improved student achievement. The district and school are gathering data on student performance. They have not, however, made clear and informative connections between the data and improvement initiatives.

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

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

The Department reviewers determined that the School Improvement Plan submitted by Westfield South Middle School is not a sound plan. Evidence to support this conclusion included the following:

- The plan does not explain the analysis the school performed or how the school prioritized issues. The linkages between the various parts of the plan are not clear.
- The plan does not address the performance of subgroups.
- Although the plan references PIM work that the school has performed, there is no description of data analysis or evidence that the decisions made were based on data analysis.
- The plan does not include measurable goals for raising student achievement.
- The plan does not identify specific weaknesses in student skills to be targeted.
- The plan does not state any causes of low student achievement that will be addressed.
- Because the plan does not include an analysis of weaknesses in student skills or the causes of low student achievement, it is impossible to determine if the strategies listed are appropriate for solving the school's problems.

- Although the plan includes action plans, the activities listed are large enough in scale to be strategies, (e.g., “provide extended year program” and “provide supplemental courses in reading and math”), and there is no detailed plan for carrying out these strategies.
- The plan does not include any measures for tracking implementation or outcomes.

The panel concurred with the Department’s analysis of the plan and noted additional weaknesses as well as one area of strength. The weaknesses include having target dates for accomplishment of strategies that are too broad. In addition, strategies in the plan do not show how teaching will change, what students will learn or how they will progress. As the Department noted, the plan was written for students in the aggregate and does not provide a rationale for not addressing subgroups. A strength identified by the panel is that the plan goes beyond academics and includes goals for improving school climate, parental involvement and technology.

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

The panel judged that the Westfield South Middle School Improvement Plan that currently exists was not developed through a sound and focused process that involved all teachers in a needs assessment and in the development of strategies to address the identified needs. The plan consists of multiple documents that were compiled by the principal and approved by the School Council. These documents include a Mathematics Improvement Plan that stems from the efforts of the mathematics PIM team attempting to implement the Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) process, the district NCLB Consolidated Plan and parts of the previous year’s School Improvement Plan. The PIM work of an English language arts team is not yet complete.

The panel learned in interviews with the mathematics PIM team that it was first convened in August 2003 to begin the PIM process. The ELA team began its work with the PIM process in August 2004. All of the school’s mathematics teachers and the special education supervisor are on the mathematics team; the ELA team is representative. Members of the mathematics team reported that they spent 50-60 hours in developing the plan over the past two years. They also told the panel that they attempted to analyze data but did not have training in data analysis and at times felt bogged down in the PIM process. The school’s principal told the panel that he did not direct the PIM process, although the team’s progress was reported to him.

The development of the School Improvement Plan does not appear to have been accompanied by a sense of urgency by either the school principal or the central office, as evidenced by the fact that it was more than two years in the making and does not yet include ELA. At the start of the PIM process for mathematics, the district did hire a consultant who provided some training to the mathematics team. However, the district did not prioritize funds to continue the training and pay stipends to participating teachers; the process languished for several months. The curriculum director, two of the district’s supervisors (the Title I and reading supervisors) and the school’s assistant principal were also trained at the outset by the Massachusetts Department of Education. However, the assistant principal has since become the high school principal, and the supervisors have multiple core (Title I and reading) responsibilities in addition to PIM-related responsibilities in Westfield’s seven schools. The supervisors admitted in interviews that they were not able to sufficiently monitor the plan’s development. Without focused leadership devoted to development of the plan by either the school principal or the central office, the resulting product does not provide a clear guide for instructional improvement that can address

the learning needs of students at the school. A new half-time assistant principal has been receiving PIM training. It is anticipated that he will eventually become responsible for PIM leadership at the school. The principal is now aware of the Department's assessment of the plan as unsound and expressed the desire to "make it right." The superintendent also noted that awareness is key and assured the panel that an effort would be made to improve the plan.

As stated above, the plan that was submitted does not identify the learning gaps of students receiving Special Education services or of Low-Income students and English Language Learners. The rationale, according to the superintendent, is that these students are part of the entire student body and, for that reason, were not differentiated in the plan. He indicated that the philosophy of the district is to provide the best instruction for all students. This belief runs counter to accepted educational theory that subgroups of students may have differentiated educational needs that should be met.

Some of the professional development for the current year has been linked to the plan's goal of improving the academic achievement of all South Middle School students. The plan calls for training teachers in strategies for developing assessment aligned with curriculum objectives; providing professional development on data-based decision making; and fostering mathematics assessment literacy. This training is to be accomplished on district professional development days and in staff and departmental meetings (when teachers meet with their supervisors for one hour every three weeks). Despite these efforts, some teachers believe that district budget cuts have impacted the amount of professional development that is available. They stated that they need more training in content areas, as well as in differentiated instruction.

Both teachers and parents told the panel that the plan was disseminated to them at the start of the school year. However, because the plan, for the most part, is non-specific with respect to teaching strategies, teachers stated that they are guided in their instruction by the school's curriculum documents that are focused on the standards of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. There is still a sense among the faculty, principal and district leaders that the plan presented for the panel review is, as yet, unfinished and needs tweaking—particularly in terms of including more specifics for English Language Learners and for those in the Special Education subgroup.

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

The panel noted, through observations and interviews, that the mathematics strategies prescribed in the plan are, indeed, being implemented. For example, Larson's Math Software, which provides students with drill and practice, is being used widely as a supplement to the curriculum. Students have access both at home and in school to Study Island, an online MCAS preparation program. This software is installed on every computer in all classrooms at the school and is used widely during an Academic Support period. A Math Skills Checklist was developed and is being used this year in Grade 6. The Grade 6 mathematics teachers are tracking student mastery of the skills in the Checklist; however, these data are not being used in a benchmarking process. In addition, the Grade 6 math teachers told the panel that this Checklist will be phased in at the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade levels over the next two years.

The panel observed teachers using a number of strategies not mentioned in the plan that have the potential to increase student achievement. The panel saw teachers using the vocabulary of mathematics, referencing and posting specific student objectives in both mathematics and ELA

and providing MCAS warm-up exercises. The panel noted mathematics word walls, posters and samples of student work posted in classrooms. Teachers are using ELA rubrics for scoring written work, including ratings for content, organization, mechanics, vocabulary, sentence fluency and voice. Writing handbooks for each grade (6, 7 and 8) have been developed at the district level, and copies are provided to all teachers. The handbooks include rubrics and samples of writing that demonstrate various levels of achievement: proficient, satisfactory, needs improvement and unacceptable. These rubrics are tied to the state standards for composition. In ELA, although teachers use rubrics for writing, there is no consistent writing curriculum that is being followed by all teachers. Some use the John Collins approach and others use *Pathways*. Students have a reading period and an English class that, combined, provide them with 90 minutes of language arts daily. They have just 45 minutes daily for mathematics.

Strategies to address gaps in student achievement include a daily Academic Support period when students who do not take foreign language can access additional assistance. This period includes an emphasis on developing higher-order thinking skills, completing activities specified in individual student support plans and mentoring bilingual students. Teachers said that extra time for mathematics instruction is provided for students through Title I during specialist periods, during the daily Academic Support period and in an after-school program that will take place from January to April 2005. Students interviewed told the panel that teachers provide extra assistance in a weekly after-school help class. The school principal said that the school is examining the schedule for the 2006-2007 school year to determine if it can be revised to provide additional time for mathematics instruction for all students.

Parents interviewed reported that there is frequent communication with teachers through e-mail, progress reports, open houses, conferences and report cards. Parents are also required to sign off on student work daily, weekly or at less-frequent intervals that are determined by each teacher. Parents are generally pleased with the opportunities offered at the school for after-school activities and for extra support. They noted the need for programming for gifted students and indicated that not all students are being held to high expectations and challenged at the level at which they can achieve.

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

Neither the school nor the district was able to point to quantitative improvement gains that could be attributed to implementation of the plan. Although there is a great deal of data available from assessments and checklists, the data have not been used as benchmarks to measure gains to date. Assessment data that could be used include results of GRADE, G-MADE and Math Mates testing; the district's checklist of objectives mastered; CAT5 scores and work samples collected by content area supervisors who are under the direction of the curriculum director. Although teachers stated that they assess progress at the classroom level, the results are not used to determine gains that could be attributed to implementation of the plan. Within a grade, teachers of the same subject each create their own tests, thereby making it difficult to use classroom assessments for benchmarking.

Anecdotally, teachers and administrators could point to a number of achievements that have resulted from plan implementation. Reports from Westfield staff members and leaders include the following achievements:

- The staff is more accepting of ELL and Special Education students.
- The faculty is engaged more than previously in communication and collaboration surrounding student needs.
- Specialist teachers (including teachers of art, physical education, foreign language and applied technology) describe how they are attempting to integrate mathematics and language arts into their curricula.
- Teachers and students are more comfortable with testing.
- Teachers are more aware of language issues in working with ELL students.
- Teachers are more skilled at delivering the curriculum.
- The school's leaders (principal and assistant principals) see the staff as committed and willing to change.

Both the principal and the superintendent indicated that the school has been making gains on MCAS over the past two years, though not sufficient to make AYP. The superintendent also expressed the belief that academic gains currently being made in the elementary schools (where mathematics is now taught for a longer block of 60 minutes each day and where students have moved out of In Need of Improvement status) would soon be filtering up to the middle school as students enter the middle grades more prepared to succeed with the curriculum.

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

The school's leaders and staff have the capacity to implement a sound improvement plan. However, the district did not allocate sufficient resources and personnel to the school to develop an effective plan in a timely manner.

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

The school's principal, who has been in his position since 1993, sees himself as a manager more than an instructional leader. He stated that he envisions creating an educational environment that is conducive to educating all students and relies on the district supervisors for instructional leadership to support district initiatives. The principal expressed confidence in the school's teachers. Teachers, in turn, told the panel that the principal encourages them to stretch beyond what is expected. Teachers reported that they feel supported and that the principal fosters collegiality and a positive and safe school climate. The principal supports the district initiatives, but it is the content area supervisors who have the closest instructional contact with the teachers. There appears to be high morale among staff members. Teachers report clear behavioral expectations for students. Results from an anonymous survey showed that 100 percent of the 91 teachers who responded support the principal. In interviews, staff members consistently expressed support for the principal's leadership and capacity to turn the school around.

The district supervisors are responsible for conducting the evaluations of teachers in their content areas. They follow the Research for Better Teaching model. Examination of a sample of evaluations shows that the principal has signed off on some, but not all, of these evaluations. Teachers report that the assistant principals occasionally observe their classes and provide

instructive written feedback. The principal conducts short walkthroughs of classrooms once or twice a month with no written feedback.

From interviews with students and parents, it appears that the school could be doing more to foster high expectations. Although the parents interviewed have confidence in the school and the principal, they expressed a desire to see more opportunities for gifted students. Students interviewed generally think the work is too easy or just right but that it could be more challenging. They do not get homework from every subject every day and they reported that homework takes from 20 minutes to one hour to complete. They see themselves as responsible for getting their schoolwork and homework done and maintaining a structured binder and assignment notebook.

Although grade-level content area teachers share a common planning period, there is no mandate that they meet to collaboratively plan instruction or examine student work. However, teachers reported that they do meet on a voluntary basis, both with other content area counterparts and with their teams. They follow the middle school model in which one team of content area teachers works with the same group of students. There is a monthly common planning meeting for each team with the assistant principals and guidance counselors. Because students are in their special classes during the common planning time, the specialists (art, foreign language, physical education, etc.) have no common planning time with the core subject area grade-level teachers.

The School Council, which meets four to five times a year, is led by the principal and is comprised of two parents who also work in the district, the technology teacher, a community member and the half-time assistant principal. Although the Council approved the School Improvement Plan, it did not have input into the PIM process. The Council told the panel that it supports the plan primarily through the budget process and in its review of school policies. Much of the instructional decision-making at the school appears to come from the district in terms of mandates for instruction and leadership in planning. This is reflective of the principal's role as a manager rather than an instructional leader.

#### **B. Is there evidence that the school's faculty supports the planned improvement efforts?**

Many individuals interviewed could identify (in both mathematics and in ELA) student achievement gaps such as: students' inability to respond to open-ended questions; lack of conceptual understanding in mathematics; skill gaps in fractions, decimals, geometry, measurement and basic operations; and gaps in vocabulary in the content areas, in comprehension, in the understanding of genres and topic sentence development. They identified student needs for differentiated instruction and test-taking skills, as well as achievement differentials between male and female students. However, strategies for addressing these needs were not reflected in the written plan.

In the staff survey, only two teachers cited possible instructional causes for low achievement: lack of knowledge base on the part of teachers and lack of differentiated instruction for subgroups. Other reasons for low achievement were attributed to the school's population, limited parental involvement, large numbers of bilingual students, diversity of students in classrooms, transience, differences in the self-perceptions of students at the North and South Middle Schools and feeder schools in need of improvement.

The school's faculty does support the school's improvement efforts by following the curriculum objectives in day-to-day teaching. This was confirmed by the content supervisors who regularly review and assess the effectiveness of the curriculum. They reported that when they visit classrooms, they are looking for a standards-based environment with written objectives, active teacher involvement, engaged students and differentiated instruction. This was evident from the panel's review of randomly selected teacher evaluations for the past year. In mathematics, the supervisor noted posted objectives, MCAS warm-ups, mathematics vocabulary, real-life problems, scaffolded instruction through presenting concepts and problems of increasing difficulty, higher-order thinking skills and students on task from "bell to bell." In ELA, the supervisor reported teaching to objectives, story maps, sequencing, identifying main idea, comprehension, vocabulary, literature circles and questioning about character, plot and theme. These evaluations were supported by the panel's observations, as described in Section 1C above.

Teachers and supervisors reported that they are in the process of continuing to align assessment with instruction and are making efforts to vertically align the curriculum across all grade levels from the elementary school through the middle school. They have not yet developed uniform formative assessments across grades and subjects. Teachers continue to create and deliver their own assessments. As one of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics teachers indicated in an interview, although he and his counterpart are teaching identical content, they each develop their own assessments.

Specialist teachers noted that they are trying to make cross-curricular connections by incorporating mathematics and ELA into their lessons. For example, the foreign language teacher incorporates mathematics by having students do multiplication tables in the language they are learning. In the writing lab, the teacher follows the 6<sup>th</sup> grade ELA curriculum and regularly incorporates MCAS writing prompts into lessons. In applied technology, students regularly apply mathematics concepts. The art teacher has students engage in Internet research and write five-paragraph essays about cultural mask projects, in addition to using different kinds of measurements. The health teacher uses mathematics to help students see how much money could be saved by not smoking. Content area teachers of social studies and science also reported that they are using cross-curricular work, such as graphs and open-response questions, to reinforce the School Improvement Plan. Despite all these connections, one teacher noted that "we certainly could be more intentional about developing cross-curricular learning experiences for students" and including these strategies in the plan.

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

Although it provides curricular guidance for the school and is aware of the school's needs, the district did not provide sufficient leadership for the school to develop a sound improvement plan. The superintendent did indicate that he would like to see the school plans mirror the district plan and be tied to increased student achievement. However, the district did not provide the school with a model, or template, to follow in developing its plan.

The district has, however, demonstrated capacity for plan development, as evidenced by the fact that Westfield's comprehensive NCLB Consolidated Plan was one of the first to be approved by the Massachusetts Department of Education. This plan contains a needs assessment, objectives, strategies and measurable outcomes that provide clear guidance and objectives to schools throughout the district. Although these would have been worthy starting points from which to

build a school plan, the South Middle School did not extract the relevant parts of the NCLB Plan and fine-tune them to meet the specific improvement needs of the school. Because the NCLB Plan is too cumbersome to be used at the classroom level and is, in fact, not provided to most teachers, the presence of this guiding document has not affected school-based actions or classroom outcomes. The district does have a data collection schedule for its NCLB Plan that calls for the periodic gathering of data, such as long writing samples, audits of objectives taught for mastery, use of higher-order questions, use of descriptive or figurative language in writing and use of MCAS or MCAS-type questions. Well-defined plans for the use of these data to inform the School Improvement Plan at the South Middle School have not yet been made.

The district has shown leadership in other ways. For example, the curriculum for every subject area is aligned with the Frameworks. Also, checklists are being developed and implemented to monitor student attainment of key knowledge related to curricular objectives. All staff members attend meetings to look at MCAS questions and examine the data. The district is providing training for principals to help them improve their instructional leadership skills. This training is in TestWiz, assessment literacy, curriculum interpretation and data analysis. A second Title I mathematics teacher was hired to provide extra mathematics support at the South Middle School. The district is collaborating (via grant funding) with Elms College, which is providing free ELL training and coursework that can be used to help fill requirements for advanced degrees for Westfield teachers.

The superintendent meets formally with the principal four times each year. The principal is required to set personal, professional and school improvement goals. Progress toward meeting the goals is discussed at these meetings. The superintendent and principal are in frequent telephone contact, and the superintendent visits each school once a month. He also meets bi-weekly with his administrative team and monthly with subject area supervisors.

In efforts to maintain moderately low class size, the district has had to make several fiscal choices, including reducing two assistant principals at the school to one and a half; staffing the school library only two days per week; and reducing funding for substitutes and professional development. An after-school MCAS review class was also eliminated due to budget cuts. As one administrator put it, "People are stretched thin."

The superintendent is attempting to hire more certified mathematics teachers for the South Middle School. Some teachers who moved up from Grade 6 at the elementary school when the school began to serve Grades 6-8 are certified as elementary teachers without a mathematics credential. The superintendent is aware that feeder schools may not have had sufficient mathematics instruction, so he is now mandating 60 minutes per day for mathematics at the elementary level, as well as providing increased professional development. The superintendent indicated that the Grade 4 test scores have improved as a result of this intervention, and he hopes that will be reflected as that cohort of students moves up through the middle school grades. The school and district are looking at ways to change the schedule for the next school year (2006-2007) to increase mathematics time at the middle school level.

## **CONCLUSION**

The panel concluded that, although the Westfield South Middle School is currently lacking a sound School Improvement Plan, the staff and the school and district leaders are currently making efforts to improve student achievement. A more focused and intentional effort to formulate an effective School Improvement Plan, supported by district resources and the principal's leadership, is required to target and address student weaknesses with effective improvement strategies and to monitor progress. This effort includes the use and interpretation of the data that the school and district are gathering, the need to address subgroup achievement, and the delineation of consistent instructional strategies and benchmarking within and across grade levels in both mathematics and English language arts. Addressing the weaknesses noted in the current plan would be a good starting point.

**APPENDIX A**  
**Team Members**

**Joseph Trunk**, Panel Review Chair, SchoolWorks LLC, Beverly, MA

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

**Eve Laubner, Ed.D.**, Panel Review Coordinator, Massachusetts Department of Education,  
Malden, MA

**Diane Hatch**, Panelist, Title I Co-Coordinator/Teacher, Berkshire Hills Regional School  
District, Great Barrington, MA

**Gary Rivers**, Panelist, Principal, C.H. McCann Technical School, North Adams, MA

**Art Travis**, Panelist, Educational Technology Specialist, Southwick-Tolland Regional School  
District, Southwick, MA

**APPENDIX B**  
**Westfield South Middle School**  
**Westfield Public Schools**  
**POTENTIALLY UNDER-PERFORMING PANEL REVIEW SCHEDULE**  
**December 6 and 7, 2005**

**Day 1**

- 9:00—9:30 a.m.      **Panel Chairperson and Panel Coordinator meet at hotel** to discuss and clarify roles, prepare for the first team meeting, and review general logistics/schedule for the review.
- 9:30 a.m. —11:30 a.m.      **Team meeting # 1:** Team meets for the first time to discuss each panelist's individual analysis; team forms preliminary judgments on key questions.
- 11:30 a.m.—1 p.m.      **Lunch and travel to the school** (*NOTE: In districts undergoing multiple school reviews, superintendent interviews may be scheduled between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. at the hotel.*)
- 1:00 —2:00 p.m.      Panel meets with the school's **Instructional Leadership Team**.
- 2:00—3:00 p.m.      Panelists meet with the district **Superintendent** (and Assistant Superintendent, if appropriate).
- 3:15—4:30 p.m.      Panel meets with the **Principal** (and one other school-based individual, if appropriate).
- 4:30—6:00 p.m.      **Team meeting # 2:** Panelists synthesize interview information, further define findings, prepare questions, and develop a team strategy for Day 2 of the review.

**Day 2**

**All activities take place at the school.**

7:30—8:00 a.m. Panel meets with the Principal.

8:00—8:30 a.m. Panel meets with the School Council.

8:30—9:00 a.m. Panelists meet individually with Focus Groups. The Panel Review Coordinator and the Principal will identify participants for each Focus Group. The groups will be organized to include individuals who can respond to questions designed for parents, students (middle and high schools), classroom teachers, curriculum facilitators, content-area specialists, grade-level instructors, or other specific inquiry groups.

Panelist A	Panelist B	Panelist C	Panelist D	Panelist E
Focus Group	Focus Group	Focus Group	Focus Group	Focus Group

9:00—11:00 a.m. Classroom observations and teacher interviews

	Panelist A	Panelist B	Panelist C	Panelist D	Panelist E
9-10 a.m.	Observe Teacher 1 and Teacher 2.	Observe Teacher 3 and Teacher 4.	Observe Teacher 5 and Teacher 6.	Observe Teacher 7 and Teacher 8.	Observe Teacher 9 and Teacher 10.
10-11 a.m.	Interview Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 individually.	Interview Teacher 3 and Teacher 4 individually.	Interview Teacher 5 and Teacher 6 individually.	Interview Teacher 7 and Teacher 8 individually.	Interview Teacher 9 and Teacher 10 individually.

11 a.m.—12:30 p.m. **Team meeting # 3:** Panel meets to discuss findings so far and to plan the remainder of the day (working lunch).

12:30—1:00 p.m. Panel uses time as needed to analyze findings and to gather more information.

1:00—2:00 p.m. Panelists meet with teacher focus groups; consultant co-chair is free to work on report.

	Panelist A	Panelist B	Panelist C	Panelist D	Panelist E
1:00-1:30	Teacher Focus Group 1		Teacher Focus Group 3		Prepare report
1:30-2:00	Teacher Focus Group 2		Teacher Focus Group 4		

2:15—2:30 p.m. Chair meets with the Principal to discuss next steps in the process.

2:30—5:00 p.m. **Team meeting #4:** Panel deliberates, organizes evidence, and formulates responses to key questions.