

School Panel Review Report Chandler Elementary Community School Worcester Public Schools

Introduction

The purpose of the School Panel Review process is to assist the Commissioner of Education in determining whether State intervention is needed to guide improvement efforts in schools where students' MCAS performance is not at a level that reaches the schools' Adequate Yearly Progress targets in English language arts or mathematics or both. Chandler Elementary Community School (CECS) met this criterion and was one of 21 schools selected for panel review in fall 2005. The panel review was conducted on December 13 and 14, 2005.

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

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

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

The panel's findings and conclusions on the two key questions, together with school performance data, will be forwarded to the Commissioner of Education for consideration in determining whether Chandler Elementary Community 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.

Chandler Elementary Community School Profile

Enrollment

The CECS serves students in grades preschool through six. Enrollment at CECS has decreased almost 20 percent from 2002 to 2005. During this time span, students in the Limited English Proficient subgroup increased by five percent, First Language Not English students decreased by two percent and Low-Income students increased by five percent. Since 2002, racial subgroup percentages have declined for all reporting categories, with the exception of Hispanic, who increased by ten percent. Proportions of CECS student subgroups in 2005, as compared to state averages, are presented below:

<i>Subgroup</i>	School's 2005 % Enrollment	State Average % in 2005
Asian	11	5
Black	8	9
Hispanic	50	12
Native American	0	0.3
White	31	74
Low-Income	90	28
First Language Not English	49	14
Limited English Proficient	25	5
Special Education	14	16

In 2005, the attendance rate at CECS was 92.8 percent, with students absent 11.4 days on average. Across the state in 2005, the average attendance rate was 94.2 percent and students were absent an average of 10.0 days. CECS's overall attendance rate is slightly lower than the state average and slightly lower than the district average of 93.7 percent. Absenteeism appears greater among the primary grades, with preschoolers having the highest average number of days absent (16.9) and lowest attendance rate (89.7 percent). Attendance rates improve at each subsequent grade. Likewise, chronic absenteeism is greatest among the primary grades and declines steadily from grades pre-K through five (38.6 and 10.5 percent respectively). There are slight differences in attendance rates and chronic absenteeism between males and females, with males absent an average of 2.6 more days than females and chronically absent 6.3 percent more often than their female counterparts. There are significant differences in attendance rates among races. Hispanic students have the lowest attendance rate (91.2 percent) and highest average number of days absent (13.8 days). In addition, Hispanic students have the highest rate of chronic absenteeism (19.9 percent). This is 7.8 percent higher than the subsequent racial subgroup category (African American). CECS's retention rate was 2.3 percent in 2004, the last year for which this data is available. The school's in-school suspension rate in 2005 was 0.3 percent, while out-of-school suspensions averaged 2.0 percent – both of which are significantly below the state rates of 4.5 and 6.0 respectively. There appear to be significant differences in out-of school suspension rates between gender and race at CECS. Male students were suspended 3.6 times more often than female students. In addition, the suspension rate for African American students in 2005 was more than six times the next closest subgroup (Hispanic).

Staffing

The 2005-2006 CECS staffing report indicates that the school is comprised of two administrators, 23 teachers, one guidance counselor, one school psychologist, five teacher aides, one school nurse and one curriculum facilitator. The principal is starting his second year as principal of CECS and has a total of 12 years of administrative experience. The assistant principal has been at the school for 18 years and has nine years of administrative experience. Of the teachers, approximately 35 percent have been at the school for less than five years, 26 percent have been at the school between five and 10 years, and 39 percent have been at the school for more than 10 years. Teachers' years of experience in the profession, however, are significantly higher than their time at the school. Approximately 65 percent have more than 10

years experience, while 35 percent have between five and 10 years experience. Ninety percent of teachers are reported as being highly qualified and approximately 43 percent hold advanced degrees.

MCAS Overview

Students at the CECS are assessed in Grade 3 reading, in Grade 4 English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, and Grade 6 mathematics. CECS's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report for 2005 Mid-Cycle IV shows an accountability status of Corrective Action for mathematics and Identified for Improvement in ELA.¹ The school failed to make AYP in ELA for the aggregate population for two consecutive years (1999-2000), made AYP in 2001-2002, and then failed to make AYP for an additional three consecutive years (2003-2005). The school made AYP in the aggregate for mathematics in 2003, failed to make AYP in 1999-2002 and again in 2004-2005. Reported subgroup performance mirrors that of the aggregate in both ELA and mathematics in 2003 and 2005.

GRADE 3

Reading MCAS Results

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

2005 READING	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	N/A	15	38	47
Regular Education	N/A	15	30	55

While there are not enough students in Special Education or Limited English Proficient (LEP) categories at CECS to report as separate subgroups, these students are reflected in the aggregate scores. Student performance in reading reflects a downward trend since 2001, as seen in the aggregate Grade 3 Reading MCAS performance presented below:

Aggregate READING	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	N/A	15	38	47
2004	N/A	8	58	34
2003	N/A	29	55	16
2002	N/A	41	50	9
2001	N/A	23	60	17

From 2002 to 2005, the percentage of students scoring in the Warning category has increased from nine percent to 47 percent. Conversely, the percentage of students scoring in the Proficient category has decreased from 41 percent to 15 percent. In 2005, fewer CECS students scored

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 (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 subgroup meeting the minimum sample size at CECS in 2005 was Low-Income.

Proficient in reading than the district (39 percent) and more students scored in the Warning category than for the district (15 percent).

GRADE 4

ELA MCAS Results

Presented below are results of the 2005 Grade 4 ELA MCAS for students at CECS:

2005 ELA	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	0	0	31	69
Regular Education	0	0	44	56

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

Aggregate ELA	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	0	0	31	69
2004	0	22	33	44
2003	0	15	63	23
2002	0	17	69	14
2001	0	9	58	33

CECS has had no students scoring in the Advanced category from 2001 to 2005. In 2005, no students scored in either the Advanced or Proficient categories – a decrease from 22 percent in 2004. Conversely, students scoring in the Warning category have increased from a low of 14 percent in 2002 to a high of 69 percent in 2005. In addition, CECS students scored below the district in the Advanced category (three percent in 2005) and significantly below the district in the Proficient category (24 percent in 2005).

GRADE 4

Mathematics MCAS Results

Student performance on 2005 Grade 4 Mathematics MCAS for students at CECS are presented below:

2005 Mathematics, Gr. 4	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	0	0	21	79
Regular Education	0	0	25	75

Student performance in mathematics appears to be heading in a downward trend since 2002, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 4 Mathematics MCAS performance presented below:

Aggregate Mathematics, Gr. 4	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	0	0	21	79
2004	0	11	26	63
2003	0	15	63	23
2002	0	11	49	41
2001	0	0	40	60

CECS has failed to produce any students scoring in the Advanced category between 2001 and 2005. In addition, CECS student performance dropped from a high of 15 percent Proficient in mathematics in 2003, to zero percent Proficient in 2005. From 2001 to 2005, students scoring in the Warning category have increased from 60 percent to 79 percent. There are significant discrepancies between Grade 4 district mathematics results and those of CECS. District-wide, students scored six percent Advanced and 17 percent Proficient in Grade 4 mathematics, whereas CECS students scored zero percent Advanced and zero percent Proficient.

GRADE 6

Mathematics MCAS Results

Results of the 2005 Grade 6 Mathematics MCAS for students at CECS are presented below:

2005 Mathematics, Gr. 6	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	0	21	29	50
Regular Education	0	26	35	39

Student performance in mathematics reflects mixed progress in the aggregate since 2001, as seen in the aggregate Grade 6 Mathematics MCAS performance presented below:

Aggregate Mathematics, Gr. 6	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	0	21	29	50
2004	3	0	34	62
2003	6	20	49	26
2002	0	11	64	24
2001	0	0	23	77

From 2004 to 2005, students scoring in the Proficient category have increased from zero percent to 21 percent, a score similar to the performance of students in 2003. However, students scoring in the Advanced category have decreased six percent since 2003. Those scoring in the Warning/Failing category have fluctuated from a high of 77 percent (2001) to a low of 24 percent (2002), back up to 50 percent in 2005. In 2005, half of the CECS students scored in the Warning/Failing category compared to 34 percent at the district level.

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 Panel Review (PR) team found that the 2004-2006 School Improvement Plan (SIP), the 2004-2005 Addendum (Plan 2) and the 2005-2006 Addendum (Plan 3) do not provide adequate guidance for sustained improvement in student achievement. Concerns of the PR team focused on inadequate analysis of root causes of low student achievement, failure to address needs for improved instructional practice and limited attention to strategies to support the learning of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students.

The Chandler Elementary Community School (CECS) does not have a process in place to support the successful implementation of SIP initiatives. Because the process for developing the SIP documents was unclear, the PR team is not confident that the planning process will support successful implementation of improvement over the long term. However, processes for monitoring implementation of the plans and professional development that is designed to support implementation appear to be in place. The school is focused on implementing the district's ELA and mathematics curricula – the plans' primary initiative – but common planning time and small group instruction have not yet been implemented well. Lastly, minimal gains have been noted in MCAS scores but gains, although in two areas only, were seen in the most recent testing. Teachers are using MCAS and a variety of other assessments to inform what they teach, but not how they teach.

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

In spring 2004, Worcester Public Schools instituted a two-year school improvement planning process. Using data from the 2003 MCAS tests, schools developed improvement plans for 2004-2006 – Plan 1. In late spring of 2005, schools updated the 2004-2006 School Improvement Plans, based on analysis of their 2004 MCAS test results – Plan 2. In October 2005, schools were directed to again update, via an addendum, their 2004-2006 plans, based on the 2005 MCAS results – Plan 3. Those updated plans are currently being reviewed and approved on a rolling basis by district administrators.

The School Improvement Plans submitted to the Department of Education in preparation for School Panel Reviews by the seven Worcester schools currently under review are the spring 2005 updates (Plan 2) of the 2004-2006 document incorporated into Plan 1. Teams of three Department 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 document(s) in the summary rubric is based solely on a close reading of the written documents submitted and is not a final determination. The panels use the summary rubric to inform their discussion of the written plan each panelist had reviewed individually, and to help focus their time in the school on the implementation of the planned strategies. Final judgment of the soundness of the school's

plan – and the panel’s 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.

Plan 3 – including the latest updates to the written 2004-2006 School Improvement Plans this fall that have been approved by the Worcester Public Schools at the time of the review – will be considered by the panel as part of the evidence gathered during the on-site review. Schools may or may not have new strategies from these plans in evidence in the school. The plans will be reviewed primarily in relation to Key Question 2, as evidence that the conditions are in place at the school to continue to implement plans for improving student performance and for the capacity to adjust and refine plans based on results.

The written school improvement planning documents at CECS are not clear and specific enough to guide implementation of improvement efforts. Though SIP documents are based on curriculum and assessment, how instructional practices will change as a result of plan initiatives is not clearly articulated. The root causes for poor student performance are related to external factors, as opposed to efforts within the school’s control. Further, SIP documents fail to sufficiently address the needs of the school’s Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, who make up 25 percent of the CECS population.

Though SIP documents cite implementation of instructional programs as a strategy, there is not a clear indication how these programs will result in teaching and learning to increase student performance at CECS. Major strategies in Plan 2, for example, call for full implementation of the district’s reading and mathematics programs, Success For All (SFA) and Everyday Math. The following year, Plan 3 (page 2) expands the reading program: “Teachers will continue to implement the SFA reading program, while coordinating this with the Houghton Mifflin and Making Meaning reading programs.” Planning documents, particularly Plan 3, describe assessment programs and indicate that assessment will drive instruction but do not describe how instructional practice will change or how the district-mandated curriculum will be used to address specific needs of the CECS population of learners.

Root causes for poor performance have been attributed chiefly to factors beyond the control of the school. Causes that relate to instruction were not presented in the original plan. Plan 3, written this year, however, shows improved analysis of internal issues impacting students’ learning. For example, in mathematics (page 16): “Many teachers are not utilizing a full 90 minutes math block and are having difficulty moving on to the next skill when mastery had not occurred on an emergent or developing skill,” and, “Limited exposure and practice in multi-step word problems.” For ELA, a cause is stated as “a lack of additional classroom strategies/ practices to enhance students’ vocabulary and comprehension skills” (page 11).

Planning documents provide little or no evidence that regular classroom teachers will receive assistance in addressing the needs of LEP students. Plan 1 has a separate section for the LEP subgroup, with action steps in ELA for English as a Second Language (ESL) tutors; but there was no mention of action steps or support from ESL/SEI (Sheltered English Immersion) tutors in the section on mathematics. Plan 2 and Plan 3 present one improvement objective in ELA and one in mathematics at each level (primary and intermediate). The strategies all pertain to ESL/SEI tutors providing small group service and there are no specific classroom strategies for regular education teachers. In summary, the SIP documents under implementation at CECS are not clear and specific enough, in their written form, to guide improvement efforts. Improvement

documents fail to link how the implementation of the curricula will increase student achievement. Strategies to address the needs of LEP students are not sufficient.

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

It is the judgment of the PR team that the CECS does not have a process in place to support the successful implementation of SIP documents. The process for constructing SIP documents is unclear. Teachers are being observed, however, to ensure that improvement initiatives are being implemented. Professional development appears to be well conceived to address the initiatives identified in SIP documents.

The PR team could not clearly determine that the school currently has (or has had in the past) groups of staff working together over a sustained time to serve as a SIP team, implementation committee or instructional leadership team. The exact nature of the processes used to prepare the three planning documents was unclear, as was the role of district personnel in supporting the process. Panelists met with a group identified in the panel review schedule as the Instructional Leadership Team/SIP Team but, according to those interviewed, a group with that membership had not been previously convened. Planning documents list names of individuals who developed or revised the plans as well as a different, but overlapping, group who were on implementation committees. However, the page in the SIP documents that identifies implementation team members is entitled “School Improvement Planning Team and Implementation Committee.” When teachers who were listed in the planning documents as participants were interviewed, not all said they had participated. In addition, interviews did not clarify who, for example, analyzed the MCAS scores and who was involved in writing the plans. There did seem to be clear indication that input had been sought from teachers during faculty meetings or that some review of the documents had occurred. School leaders involved parents in the development of the plan by sharing information with them about assessment results and goals.

The leadership team is organized to monitor implementation of the plans. The principal evaluates implementation through e-walks and other classroom observations; he checks teachers’ lesson plans weekly. Additionally, the ELA implementation teacher (ELAIT), math specialist and the assistant principal (in her role as the No Child Left Behind implementation teacher [NCLBIT]) frequently observe or work with teachers in their classrooms.

Three different organizational structures for professional development were described to the panel. The district offers a range of opportunities that are aligned with district goals, including training in implementing the Houghton-Mifflin reading program, which was offered during the summer. Other professional development programs are sometimes provided at CECS. And through a train-the-trainer model, the school’s facilitators – NCLBIT and ELAIT – provide on-site training, often to small groups of staff at component (grade-level) meetings.

In summary, because the process for developing the SIP documents was unclear, panelists cannot be confident that the planning process will support successful implementation of improvement over the long term. Processes for monitoring implementation of the plans (inadequate as they are), as well as professional development that is designed to support implementation, appear to be in place.

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

The primary initiative in SIP documents – implementation of the district's ELA and mathematics curricula – is being implemented. Professional development that supports implementation of the curricula is occurring. The two areas of the plans that are not being implemented well enough include use of common planning time and small group instruction.

CECS staff members appear to be consistently teaching the district's reading and mathematics curricula and following the school's established time requirements for the reading block and mathematics block. All classroom observations, several written communications and interviews with teachers indicated full implementation of the district's curricula. A 90 minute mathematics block and 120-minute reading block are improvement objectives identified in SIP documents. The reading block includes time for reading, writing and 30 minutes of independent reading. A bell signals the end of the school-wide 120-minute reading block and students return to homerooms from their homogeneous ELA class groupings. On the *DOE Instructional Staff Survey*, all but five of 27 respondents indicated understanding what they are expected to do to implement the school's improvement plan. Of those five, three had not seen the plan (The school has new teachers this year, including one who started in November.), one thought it was not all that clear and one response indicated poor understanding of the plan.

A specific point in the SIP documents not being implemented to any great extent is the use of common planning time. Most teachers reported they had none. The school has not succeeded in scheduling this for most grade levels, stating that "specials" and the reading block prevent it. Plan 2 (page 17) calls for common planning time to align mathematics skills across grade levels and to share information on moving along in Everyday Math. Plan 3 (page 12) calls for common planning time to analyze Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment data to determine students' strengths and weaknesses and align instruction.

Small group instruction, also called for in the plans, is not being fully implemented. In Plan 1, for example, an Improvement Objective for mathematics states, "Teachers will provide small group instruction to below grade level students who scored below Proficient in small groups" (page 21). Observations showed that students' desks are generally placed in small groupings, but these groupings did not necessarily indicate that differentiated instruction was occurring. Panelists did not determine the extent to which students seated in small groups had their instruction differentiated, except by working with support staff (and whole class homogeneous grouping for ELA).

Professional development at the school has focused on implementing Everyday Math, SFA, Houghton-Mifflin and Making Meaning – all key strategies in the plans. A few teachers commented on how much they value the professional development in mathematics that is provided by Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) grant funding. Teachers were consistently enthusiastic about learning through the train-the-trainer model as it is imbedded in the school day (e.g., through the NCLBIT, ELAIT and mathematics specialist model teaching).

In summary, the staff at CECS is focused on implementing the district's curricula – the primary initiative in SIP documents – and the professional development to support this implementation is in place. The leadership and staff have yet to adequately address implementation of common planning time and small group instruction.

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

Minimal gains have been noted in MCAS scores. This is hopeful, however, because the gains were seen in the most recent testing (2004 to 2005) for Grade 3 reading and Grade 6 mathematics. The trend over the past four years (2001 to 2005) generally has been that higher percentages of students scored Warning/Failing. The school's use of a variety of assessments, in addition to the MCAS, appears adequate. Strategies such as measurement of student learning and teachers using assessments to guide what they teach are underway.

The gains in MCAS scores that were seen last year were in the percentage of students scoring in the Proficient category in Grade 3 reading, where scores increased from eight percent to 15 percent, and in Grade 6 mathematics, where scores increased from zero percent to 21 percent. School leaders expressed guarded optimism that these gains bode well for increasing gains in the next MCAS testing cycle. The gain in the Proficient score for third graders in reading was nevertheless lower in 2001 to 2003. The trend over the past four years (2001-2005) of increased percentages of students scoring Warning/Failing was seen in Grade 3 reading, Grade 4 ELA and Grade 4 mathematics. This trend was seen also in Grade 6 mathematics for 2001 to 2004.

The planning team hopes to meet AYP under the Safe Harbor Provision. Their goal in Plan 2 is to move 10% of the total number of students tested in both ELA and mathematics from Warning and Needs Improvement into Proficient/Advanced. SIP goals state that six more students will score at the Proficient level and seven fewer students will score at Needs Improvement and Warning/Failing levels.

According to the Leadership Report and interviews with staff, the school is using a variety of assessments to measure student performance beyond the MCAS. These include the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) – started in October 2005) – Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy (DIBELS), SFA Roots, 4Sight, MELA-0, MEPA and Everyday Math unit assessments. Teachers interviewed consistently reported that they have information about test results, including MCAS and MAP, for students in their classes.

School leaders reported that the SIP is updated yearly and that the revisions take into account benchmark data, including current MCAS scores. SIP documents indicate that other assessments have been used to corroborate specific student needs but documents that describe assessments other than MCAS and the first (October) administration of the MAP were not seen by the PR team. MAP testing was done in October and data were used to create a baseline. According to school and district staff, as more test administrations occur, data will be used to measure gains and plan instruction. In addition, the district can track students who transfer to another school in Worcester and make test data available to receiving teachers.

All teachers reported changing what they are teaching as a result of goals and strategies identified in the plans. Only a few teachers reported changing their instructional practice. Moreover, these responses were obtained in interviews only when panelists probed about changes in pedagogy or instructional strategies. The principal reported he has made a concerted effort to get teachers to concentrate less on the social/emotional needs of their students and more on their academic needs.

In summary, minimal gains have been noted in MCAS scores but these gains, although only in two areas, were seen in the most recent testing. The downward trend of higher percentages of students scoring in Warning/Failing category has not yet been reversed, except (last year) for Grade 6 mathematics. Teachers' use of assessments, in addition to MCAS to inform what they teach, is generally being implemented. Panelists did not hear of teachers using assessments to inform *how* they teach (which is beyond the scope of the current SIP documents).

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

The CECS has sound management and support from its faculty. The district is providing resources to support implementation of improvement initiatives. District and school leaders, however, have not provided leadership that would develop instructional practice beyond what is prescribed in the district's curricula. Most of the information learned through interviews and document review led panelists to understand that school and district leaders are operating under the assumption that a repertoire of instructional strategies sufficient for high student achievement will be evident in every class, once the district's reading and mathematics curricula are fully implemented. There is no systemic, structured process to support, review or assess the effectiveness of changes in instructional practice. Instructional leadership for the school is primarily provided by the assistant principal, ELA facilitator and mathematics specialist.

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

The CECS appears to have effective leadership and sound management. Teachers perceive the principal as a leader who sets high expectations for himself and others and who is a skillful manager of school operations. Teachers and parents have confidence in his ability to effectively lead the school. Additionally, teachers value the work of the other members of the leadership team – the NCLBIT, ELAIT and mathematics specialist – whose primary focus is implementation of the district's curricula. As the school's leadership has focused on implementing the district's curricula, however, attention to developing instructional practice beyond what is specified in the curricula has been lacking. Leadership has not provided assistance to help teachers understand the relationship between their instructional practice and student learning.

Teachers have confidence in the principal's ability to effectively lead the CECS, although in interviews with teachers, some indicated they did not agree with his leadership style. All but one respondent on the *DOE Instructional Staff Survey* either "strongly agreed" or agreed" that the principal provides effective leadership. When the principal began at the CECS, teachers were given the opportunity to bid out to another school. No one opted to leave. The staff sees the principal as an effective communicator, strong disciplinarian and one who is hard working and sets high expectations for himself, faculty and students. His style is to communicate through direct contact with all members of the school community. In the context of discussing the appointment of a new principal to the school, district leaders reported that – contrary to the past – this year, no parents have submitted special permission requests to transfer their child to another school. Parents who were interviewed agreed that the reputation of the school has improved.

Teachers perceive the principal as a very skillful manager of school operations. Teachers report he was able to obtain instructional materials that they have not had before. Also, he has helped

them set up and organize their classrooms. Under his leadership, dismissal is safer and more orderly. When he began at the CECS, he also ensured that the building was clean and made more attractive with paint, new carpeting and student furniture. Teachers feel that through initiatives such as these, he has worked hard to get them the things that make a difference.

The principal expressed his vision for the school as getting everyone on board to make AYP, getting teachers to do their job to improve instruction and become a community – getting teachers to do their best. He describes himself as a “task master” who makes his expectations clear to staff and students. He takes responsibility and feels accountable for all that goes on at the school, saying “the buck stops here.” He also sees himself as the primary decision maker.

Responses from teachers in focus groups and in interviews indicated lack of a shared language by which staff and school leaders talk about instructional practice. Some teachers reported the principal does not give them feedback about their instruction. Many teachers reported the NCLBIT, ELAIT and mathematics specialist visit their classrooms regularly to provide feedback, model teach and help solve problems with challenging students. Both the NCLBIT and the ELAIT are full-time positions and the mathematics specialist, who works one day a week, provides the school with additional support after school for professional development. Teachers consistently reported they value this assistance. Panelists were uncertain how much coaching about instructional practice was part of the feedback, model teaching or problem solving provided by the instructional leaders. Interviews indicated their primary focus is helping teachers implement the prescribed practices in the curricula. This information from interviews and focus groups is consistent with SIP documents which, as reported above, do not present a clear indication of how implementation of the curriculum will result in teaching and learning to increase student performance.

School leaders are using assessments for purposes of grouping students and are working with teachers to use assessment results to identify the content areas they need to teach more or better. School leaders, however, did not report using or coaching teachers to use assessment data to improve instructional practice beyond what is prescribed in the district’s curricula – that is, to analyze which instructional practices are being successful or not successful enough.

In summary, the school leadership team is appropriately focused on supporting teachers to implement the district’s ELA and mathematics curricula. The leadership team is also using assessments as a tool for grouping students and helping teachers to identify what students have not learned well enough. But teachers have not been helped to examine the relationship of their instructional practice to student learning or to make an adequate connection between teaching, the curricula they are implementing and the assessments they are using.

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

There is evidence to suggest CECS faculty support the improvement initiatives as stated in the SIP documents. Teachers are actively working to implement the district’s mandated curricula and understand the improvement initiatives as they have been presented to them by school and district leadership. However, not all teachers are focused on the relationship between teaching and learning as causes for low student performance at the school.

School staff is focused on implementing the school’s improvement plans. The *DOE Instructional Staff Survey* indicates that 91 percent strongly agree/agree that the school has a well-defined plan for reaching student performance goals. Teachers are teaching the district’s curricula, as called

for in the plans, and are following a schedule centered on the daily 120-minute reading block and the 90-minute mathematics block. All teachers have agreed to support the mathematics initiatives funded by the CSR grant and are participating in the Everyday Math professional development. Some CECS teachers voluntarily attended professional development offered by the district during the summer on the Houghton-Mifflin reading curriculum. They are participating in professional development on Making Meaning.

Root causes of students' low achievement are commonly understood by the staff as related to environmental factors beyond the control of the school. As a district administrator reported, CECS students have the highest mobility rates² and lowest income rates in the city's public schools. Factors related to these were identified by staff as the most significant causes of poor student performance (Staff Survey, pages 4-6). In interviews, teachers confirmed what the staff survey reveals: that the staff has not examined its instructional practices and identified these as a potential reason for poor student performance. Specifically, in answer to the survey question, "What are the most significant causes of low student performance and what needs to occur to improve student performance?" No respondent identified instructional practice as a root cause of low performance. In further response to the question, only three out of 30 identified effective instruction or the need to differentiate instruction to meet students' needs as strategies to improve student performance.³

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

The district has structures in place that would provide adequate planning guidance and implementation support, including human and financial resources, as well as materials and supplies. District leaders, however, have not provided CECS with sufficient guidance in preparing school improvement plans nor did they adequately review these documents to ensure that the plans are sound. During a focus group with the PR team, the district reported that the current focus was on "fidelity of implementation" of the district's ELA and mathematics curricula. References to improving instructional practice, instructional strategies or pedagogy – beyond what might be prescribed in the curricula – were absent from the leadership's discourse.

Panelists were concerned that the school has not received the leadership from the district that it needs to develop a shared language by which to talk about teaching and learning and to ensure that there is a plan for teachers to develop their instructional practice beyond what is specified in the district's curricula. Panelists could not discern – from the district, through the level of school leadership and on to the school staff – a system for supporting development of teaching strategies.

District leaders did not provide adequate feedback to the school about accuracy of data in Plan 3. Although similar shortcomings in Plans 1 and 2 were not noted, for Plan 3, panelists were unable to verify in other sources some figures that were quoted (page 6) for either demographics or

² In 2004-2005, with a total October 1 enrollment of 303 students, 125 new students entered the school from September to June, 55 students transferred to another school in the district and 47 left the area.

³ Note: As stated above under Key Question 1 A, Plan 3 reveals deeper understanding of the potential relationship between low student performance and instructional practices than does the staff survey. This discrepancy raises the question of how broad teachers' input was in developing Plan 3 and the extent to which their agreement was with this analysis. Plan 3 was written at approximately the same time as the staff survey was taken.

Composite Performance Index (CPI) subgroup scores. The CPI error attributed subgroup figures to Special Education instead of Low Income – an error of interest, since no assessment data have otherwise been available to the panel for subgroups other than Low Income.

In other aspects, district leaders were well-informed about the needs of the school. The deputy, Quadrant Manager, Manager of NCLB, Curriculum and Professional Development, Manager of Governmental Relations/Elementary Initiatives and the Data Accountability Specialist were all familiar with the needs of CECS students.

The district offers abundant professional development opportunities that are directly related to curriculum, instruction and assessment that align with the SIP. In addition, some of these opportunities are tuition-free and three graduate credits are offered for other trainings. District personnel reported the district's willingness to provide fiscal and human resources to schools for professional development when a principal identifies a specific need and makes a request. Trainings to develop instructional practice, such as The Skillful Teacher, are available to teachers and principals also have an extensive professional development program. Development of Mathematical Ideas (DMI) training is currently being developed as a program that will become available to teachers across the district. It is designed to provide teachers with deep mathematical understanding about the pedagogy of mathematics and mathematical concepts. On site at CECS, professional development in Everyday Math – funded by the CSR grant – occurs during bimonthly faculty meetings and the district is using a train-the-trainer model for on-site professional development that is imbedded in the school day.

Panelists believe the district is providing adequate human resources to support improvement efforts. Curriculum support is provided through full-time assistant principal/NCLBIT and ELAIT positions and the district has obtained other personnel under the CSR grant. At the district level, assessment tools that will benefit students at CECS are being instituted. The MAP, for example, was administered for the first time this fall. Recently, a new teacher was hired to reduce class size in grades five and six and the time for SFA tutors was increased by an extra hour per day. Neither teachers nor administrators expressed concerns about inadequate staffing.

In summary, the district is organized to provide planning guidance and implementation support and appears to be providing adequate human and fiscal resources to support improvement initiatives. District leadership, however, has not provided the kind of support that ensures development of sound improvement plans.

CONCLUSION

The CECS improvement plans do not provide adequate guidance for sustained improvement in student achievement. Three primary concerns have been identified: the root causes of students' low achievement have not been adequately analyzed; strategies for all staff to support the learning of LEP students have not been adequately identified; and, a plan for teachers to develop their instructional practice beyond what is specified in the district's curricula has not been developed. The school has effective leadership, sound management, faculty support and support from the district to support implementation of the plan. However, there is no systemic, structured process to support, review or assess the effectiveness of changes in instructional practice.

At this point in time, improvement initiatives at CECS are focused on the essential work of implementing the district's curricula, but that is not sufficient – especially for such a highly mobile and low income population.

APPENDIX A
Team Members

Ann Dinsmoor, Ed.D., Panel Review Chair, SchoolWorks LLC, Beverly, MA

Kristin Burke, Panel Review Coordinator, Massachusetts Department of Education,
Malden, MA

Traci Walker Griffith, Panelist, Assistant Principal, Mather School, Boston, MA

Dorothy Niechwadowicz, Panelist, Curriculum Director, Durfee High School, Fall River, MA

Robert Vaughan, Panelist, Principal, Morris School, Lenox, MA

APPENDIX B
Chandler Elementary Community School
Worcester Public Schools
POTENTIALLY UNDER-PERFORMING PANEL REVIEW SCHEDULE
December 13 and 14, 2005

Day 1

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

Day 2

All activities take place at the school.

- 7:30—8:00 a.m.* Panel meets with the Principal
- 8:00—8:30 a.m.* Panel meets with the School Council
- 8:30—9:00 a.m.* Panelists meet individually with Focus Groups. The Panel Review Coordinator and the Principal will identify participants for each Focus Group. The groups will be organized to include groups of individuals who can respond to questions designed for parents, students (middle and high schools), classroom teachers, curriculum facilitators, content-area specialists, grade-level instructors, or other specific inquiry groups.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Instructions for teacher observations, individual interviews, and focus groups

1. **Observations** Each panelist will observe at least two class lessons in order to obtain a representative sample of the school’s individual classrooms. The purpose of the classroom observations is to judge the quality of the learning environment, which is a critical aspect of the school’s overall conditions, and a determinant in whether or not the school will be able to successfully implement its improvement plan. The learning environment includes:
 - The physical space—lighting, size, classroom temperature, etc.
 - The classroom organization—desk arrangement, resources available to students, orderliness, etc.
 - The level of the teacher’s preparation for instruction; the students’ readiness for learning.
 - The interaction between teacher and students—the students’ level of engagement or withdrawal.
 - The level of the teacher’s expectations for student learning and performance.
 - The level and quality of instructional practice in the school. (Panelists are not evaluating individual teachers.)

2. Individual Teacher Interviews The purpose of the teacher interview that follows the observation is to:
 - Clarify the evaluator's impressions of the classroom dynamic and learning environment
 - Determine what the teacher considers to be the chief learning needs of students across the school and within his or her classroom
 - Determine the teacher's understanding of the school's plan to address those needs and to improve student performance
 - Determine the teacher's role in the overall mission and improvement plan of the school

3. Teacher Focus Groups The purpose of the teacher focus groups is to:
 - Determine what each teacher considers to be the chief learning needs of students across the school and within his or her classroom
 - Determine each teacher's understanding of the school's plan to address those needs and to improve student performance
- Determine each teacher's role in the overall mission and improvement plan of the school

Taken together, the teacher observations, interviews, and focus groups should provide a comprehensive view of the staff's understanding of, and participation and investment in, planning and implementing improvement initiatives.