

## **School Panel Review Report Burncoat Middle 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. The Burncoat Middle School (Burncoat MS) 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 the Burncoat MS 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.

### **Burncoat Middle School Profile**

#### **Enrollment**

The Burncoat Middle School (Burncoat MS) serves students in grades 7 – 8. Enrollment at Burncoat MS has ranged between 709 students in 2002 and 2005 to 749 students in 2004. The school's various subgroup populations have remained fairly stable over the past four years. In 2005, the Hispanic subgroup represents 37 percent of the total population, an increase of 3 percentage points over 2004. The school's Special Education population has remained at 20 percent over the past two years. Proportions of Burncoat Middle student subgroups in 2005, as compared to state averages, are presented below:

Subgroup	2005 Enrollment (%)	
	School	State
Asian	3	5
Black	12	9
Hispanic	37	12
Native American	1	0.3
White	47	74
Low-Income	61	28
First Language Not English	33	14
Limited English Proficient	10	5
Special Education	20	16

In 2005, the attendance rate at Burncoat MS was 94.7 percent, with students absent 9.1 days on average. This rate is one percentage point higher than the Worcester District rate, and slightly above the state average of 94.4 percent. The school’s retention rate was 5.1 percent in 2004, the last year for which these data are available. Burncoat Middle School’s in-school suspension rate in 2005 was 17.2 percent, while out-of-school suspensions averaged 9.3 percent. The school’s retention and in-school suspension rates are higher than district rates. Averages in 2005 for the state were 4.5 percent for in-school suspensions, 6.1 percent for out-of-school suspensions and – in 2004 – 2.6 percent for retentions. Hispanic students show lower attendance (93.2 percent in 2005) and higher retentions (9.8 percent in 2004) than other student groups.

**Staffing**

The 2005-2006 Burncoat MS staffing report indicates that the school is comprised of 3 administrators, 54 teachers, 3 guidance counselors, 1 school psychologist, and 9 para-professionals. The principal has been at the school for 13 years and has a total of 5 years of administrative experience. Of the teachers, approximately 35 percent have been at the school for three or fewer years and 26 percent have been at the school for 10 or more years. Ninety percent of teachers are reported as highly qualified. Nearly two-thirds of the teaching staff holds an advanced degree.

**MCAS Overview**

Students at the Burncoat MS are assessed in grade 7 in English language arts (ELA) and in grade 8 in mathematics. Burncoat Middle School’s Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report for 2005 Mid-Cycle IV shows the school Identified for Improvement - Subgroups Only for English language arts and Restructuring for mathematics. In 2005, the school failed to make AYP for students in the aggregate and three of the school’s four reported subgroups in mathematics.<sup>1</sup> The school made AYP in ELA in 2005 for students in the aggregate and for four of the school’s five

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<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). Five subgroups met the minimum sample size at Burncoat Middle School in 2005 in ELA: Limited English Proficient, Special Education, Low Income, Hispanic, and White. Of these, the Special Education subgroup did not make AYP in 2005. Four subgroups met the minimum sample size in 2005 in mathematics: Special Education, Low Income, Hispanic, and White. In mathematics in 2005, the White subgroup made AYP, while the Special Education, Low Income, and Hispanic subgroups did not.

reported subgroups. In 2004, the school failed to make AYP for students in the aggregate and the Special Education and Hispanic subgroups in ELA; in mathematics, no student groups made AYP.

**GRADE SEVEN**

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (ELA) MCAS Results**

Results of the 2005 grade 7 ELA MCAS for students at Burncoat MS are presented below:

2005 Grade 7 ELA	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W
Aggregate	2	38	41	19
Regular Education	3	49	42	6
Special Education	0	10	33	57
Limited English Proficient	0	5	55	40

Student performance in grade 7 ELA has been fairly consistent since 2001, as reflected in the aggregate MCAS data presented below:

Grade 7 ELA Aggregate Results	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W
2005	2	38	41	19
2004	1	32	44	23
2003	0	38	42	19
2002	2	37	43	19
2001	1	34	32	32

The percentage of students scoring in the Advanced and Proficient performance levels range from a low of 33 percent (2004) to a high of 40 percent (2005). The percentage of students scoring in the Warning performance level in 2005 was 19, down from 23 percent in 2004. The populations assessed have ranged from approximately 250 to 300 per year.

Performance results for Special Education and Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in grade 7 ELA indicate higher rates in the Warning category than for Regular Education students. In 2005, 57 percent of the 70 Special Education students and 40 percent of the 20 LEP students assessed scored in the Warning category. The performance of Special Education students declined from 2002 and 2003 to 2004. The year 2005 performance data indicate slight improvement from 2004 to 2005 for this subgroup. The performance of LEP students has improved since 2003 – the first year aggregate data are available for this subgroup.

**GRADE EIGHT**

**MATHEMATICS MCAS Results**

Results of the 2005 grade 8 mathematics MCAS for students at Burncoat MS are presented below:

<b>2005 Grade 8 Mathematics</b>	<b>Percent</b>			
	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W</b>
Aggregate	4	13	25	58
Regular Education	6	16	32	46
Special Education	0	0	6	94
Limited English Proficient	0	12	0	88

Student performance in grade 8 mathematics has remained poor since 2001, with more than half of the students tested continuing to score in the Warning performance level:

<b>Grade 8 Mathematics Aggregate Results</b>	<b>Percent</b>			
	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W</b>
2005	4	13	25	58
2004	2	6	32	60
2003	3	13	23	60
2002	3	13	31	53
2001	4	13	23	60

The percentage of students scoring in the Advanced and Proficient performance levels ranges from a low of 8 (2004) to a high of 17 (2001 and 2005). In 2005, 58 percent of the 246 students assessed scored in the Warning performance level. In 2004, 2003 and 2001, sixty percent of students scored in Warning.

Performance results for Special Education and Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in grade 8 mathematics indicate significantly higher rates in the Warning category than for Regular Education students. In 2005, 94 percent of the 64 Special Education students and 88 percent of the 17 LEP students assessed scored in the Warning category. The performance of Special Education students has declined since 2002, while the performance of the LEP subgroup reflects the consistently low performance of the aggregate group.

## **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 determined that the written 04-06 SIP and addendum at Burncoat Middle School are not clear and specific enough to guide the implementation of improvement initiatives. While a new 2005-06 plan addendum was recently approved by the district, that plan is not yet being implemented at the school and, thus, was considered as evidence gathered only during the PR team's on-site review. The PR team found evidence through interviews and classroom observations of an evolving approach to school improvement. Staff members are currently implementing many strategies that demonstrate their commitment to improvement but these are not all reflected in the written improvement documents created by the school. Written SIP documents fail to clearly state benchmarks and specific timelines to monitor the effectiveness of steps taken to address improvement.

#### **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 2005, schools updated the 2004-2006 School Improvement Plans, based on an analysis of their 2004 MCAS test results (Plan 2). In October 2005, schools were directed to again update their 2004-2006 plans, based on the 2005 MCAS results (Plan 3). Those updated plans are currently being reviewed and are approved by district administrators on a rolling basis.

The School Improvement Plans (SIPs) 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 of the 2004-2006 document (Plan 2). 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, which each panelist has 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, in focus group discussions and through classroom observations.

Plan 3, including the latest updates to the written 2004-2006 School Improvement Plans this fall that has been approved by the Worcester Public Schools, will be considered by the panel as part of the evidence gathered during their on-site review. Schools may or may not have new strategies from these plans in evidence in the school. Plan 3 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 that appear to be sound and for the capacity to adjust and refine plans based on results.

It is the judgment of the PR team that Burncoat MS SIP documents are not clear and specific enough to guide the implementation of improvement efforts or to assess gains in student performance. Few sources of data were utilized to evaluate student weaknesses and actions to address such weaknesses are not clearly defined, nor detailed for specific student subgroups.

Student skill weaknesses in the School Improvement Plan (SIP) were identified based on the use of MCAS results. The school did not, however, utilize any additional assessments to gather information on student performance. Root causes identified throughout the plan were not addressed in subsequent action steps and do not appear to be linked to the limited data analysis that was completed. For example, "large class size" was listed as a cause (SIP 04-06 p. 14). However, the SIP does not demonstrate how large class sizes have resulted in low student performance at the school, nor does it include strategies to reduce class size. On page 11 of the 04-06 SIP, "students have below level reading skills" is an identified cause for low student performance – but the SIP does not indicate how this cause was determined. *Why*, for example, are students reading below grade level?

The 2004-2005 SIP addendum lacks detailed improvement objectives and related strategies. Stated action steps do not always align directly to causes. Duplication of action steps indicates that the school has not selected the most effective strategies for each of the targeted subgroups. Additionally, the addendum lacks information on timelines or where the responsibility lies for carrying out activities stated as action plans.

It is unclear in either SIP document how progress is measured. The stated measures of implementation are not specific in terms of what the school's actions steps will look like. MCAS results are the predominant source of data from which the school measures student progress or outcomes. There is no evidence of how other assessments are used at the school or what they measure. Since no baselines are included in the outcome benchmark section, it is not possible to know if the stated level of improvement is appropriate.

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

The PR team determined that the Burncoat MS SIP was developed through a process that is likely to support implementation. A representative group of school personnel were involved in developing the SIP, which has additionally been communicated to the school's community. Burncoat MS has a process for the ongoing evaluation of its plan's implementation. It is not clear, however, how the school will monitor adjustments made to the plan to ensure its successful implementation.

According to the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), the SIP was developed with participation from all segments of the faculty and administration. Faculty and department heads report working together to develop their thoughts. The school facilitator and principal gathered this

information from which the SIP was developed. In teacher interviews and ILT meetings, it was reported that teachers analyzed data from MCAS – including item analysis – and then reported their findings via their department head. This data analysis informed the development of the plan. In focus group discussions and teacher interviews, members of the staff reported that their involvement on the development of the SIP was “meaningful.”

The PR team met with several school stakeholders, who indicated that the SIP had been communicated to most of them. The staff survey, interviews and focus group discussions indicate that most teachers are aware of most improvement initiatives and are implementing them. The *Department of Education (DOE) Instructional Staff Survey* results indicate that 80% of staff believes they should be implementing the plan and most report that they are. The ILT team could articulate SIP content and how to address the goals of the plan. The ILT and principal reported that the plan was communicated to teachers and all teachers interviewed were aware of the plan. One parent had read the plan, while the other three parents interviewed were unaware of the contents of the SIP. The school council was somewhat aware of the plan but was involved in writing the parent section only. Students interviewed expressed some knowledge of the plan. The district representatives were very familiar with the contents of the school’s improvement plan.

According to the ILT, an ongoing process for making adjustments to their SIP exists. Members of the ILT reported that, once data is collected and reviewed, it is then shared with faculty and is used to begin work on the next plan. Every Monday, department heads report collecting lesson plans that note the standards being covered and the strategies being worked on from the SIP. Members of the ILT observe classes and report that they invite teachers to demonstrate exemplary strategies at department meetings. ILT members check that agendas are posted in classrooms for the day and that the lesson plan is aligned to the SIP. Data gathered from a “Vertical Slice Protocol” – a part of the Turning Points - was used by the ILT and the school’s faculty to evaluate evidence of the SIP in student work. This protocol informed the team of their need to continue to look for evidence of teaching the mechanics of writing in all areas. ILT members report meeting as a group twice every week. During preparation of a new SIP addendum, this entire meeting time is devoted to creating the plan. At other times of the year, these meetings include other work. Although the initial elements of an evaluation process are in place, there is no indication how the school will make ongoing adjustments to the plan as a result of successes and failures at the classroom level

The PR team determined that the Burncoat MS SIP was developed through a process that should support its successful implementation. Many school personnel had the opportunity to participate in the creation of the plan and all stakeholders of the school community have been informed of the plan. The additional addendum illustrates the continuity of the ongoing process of developing SIP documents but does not articulate how the plan’s implementation will be evaluated.

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

Certain aspects of the Burncoat Middle School’s strategies for improvement are being implemented successfully. Instructional practices at the school are guided predominately by district-mandated curricula, though some evidence of additional strategies from the school improvement plans exists. In addition, staff members are implementing initiatives that are not identified in current improvement planning documents.

There is evidence to indicate that Burncoat MS staff are implementing the district mandated Connected Math Program (CMP) and other related strategies to improve student performance in mathematics. CMP is new to the district this year in grades 7 and 8, although it was piloted last year in grade 7 in one cluster. The PR team observed mathematics warm-ups, Problem of the Week and Math Minutes in use in classrooms. The “5-Step Problem-Solving Method” was posted in several classrooms. Targeted mathematics vocabulary was observed in use in several classrooms. One teacher was observed taking a moment out of a mathematics lesson to define “input” and “output” to students who were unsure of this vocabulary utilized in the problem of the day. CMP was implemented in most of the mathematics classes observed. Students were observed using the “Assistments” mathematics software during one class visit. Graphic organizers were observed in use in several classrooms. In most classrooms, the agenda for the day was posted, as were learning standards, study habits and assignments. Posted in several rooms was “Strategies Used by Effective Readers.” Open-ended questions are utilized every day in every class, according to the ILT and teacher interviews.

Evidence of implementation of several additional improvement initiatives exists, as dictated by the current SIP documents at Burncoat MS. Cluster teachers report that the “Turning Points” program continues to be implemented during weekly common planning time, which includes the “Looking at Student Work” (LASW) initiative, and other strategies related to improving teaching and instruction. Evidence of certain strategies and programs exists from classroom observations. During a one-day professional development offering last year, the school’s faculty focused on the “Vertical Slice Protocol” (VSP). As part of Turning Points, this enabled the school to capture and broadly examine ordinary student work to find what it revealed about teaching and learning. The faculty reports that this enabled them to create an action plan based on student needs.

Certain strategies being implemented to improve school performance at Burncoat MS are not reflected in the current written planning documents. Designed to provide additional training for staff, a Reading Leadership Team (RLT) was created this year, through the acquisition of a Secondary Reading Grant by the Worcester Public Schools. The RLT is working with teacher volunteers to develop particular reading strategies that are modeled in department meetings. Based on input from a Turning Points coach, a school facilitator and the assistant principal helped to develop the “The Teacher Lab.” The school continues to implement this peer observation program on a volunteer basis through two veteran teachers who have a full time schedule, but coordinate the labs in lieu of a weekly duty period. The “Advancement Via Individual Determination” (AVID) model trains teachers to utilize time management, goal setting, organizational skills and Cornell Note Taking more effectively with mid-range students. Recent schedule changes allow for “double dosing” of ELA classes for grade 7 and mathematics classes for 8th grade students.

A wide range of professional development opportunities exist for the staff at Burncoat MS. Professional development offered by the Worcester Public Schools includes CMP training and “Middle School Math and MCAS studies” during this school year. All mathematics content teachers – including ELL and special education faculty – have also participated in three days of CMP training. Additionally, a CMP coach is providing one week of further training for teachers. Staff development has also focused on developing and implementing reading initiatives and Turning Points. The entire faculty completed “Teachers of English Language Learners” (TELL)

training in 2004 and new hires are trained upon joining the faculty. Department heads have received Instructional Leadership Training as part of a district initiative.

In summary, a large number of initiatives that are designed to lead to student improvement are in place at the Burncoat MS. The PR team expressed some concern about the large number of initiatives under implementation at the school – many of which do not appear in written SIP documents.

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

Some gains have been realized relative to SIP goals at the Burncoat MS. The school has begun to analyze assessment results from a variety of sources to measure student gains. Although the school has experienced limited improvement in recent MCAS scores, the PR team was unable to draw conclusions about the change in MCAS scores relative to the implementation of the SIP.

Burncoat MS is in the initial phases of using data to inform the school about student performance. The school's faculty report having analyzed MCAS data, which includes individual item analysis, in order to gain an understanding of why their student scores are low. Teachers report having reviewed MCAS from the district in faculty, cluster and department meetings. In focus groups with parents and the school council, it was reported that MCAS data were explained during a parent night run by the principal and individual results, with an explanatory letter, were sent to parents. The school has administered and teachers report having collected and begun to use baseline results from the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment to identify student strengths and weaknesses. The ILT additionally reported use of other assessments (i.e., Connected Math Program (CMP) unit and quarterly assessments, classroom observations and student work) that will impact SIP development and analyses of student performance in the future. The principal, teachers and department chairs report that in addition to MCAS data, information gathered from LASW is used to guide classroom level instructional planning processes.

As a result of the current assessment systems in place at Burncoat MS this year, some staff members report that they are beginning to make changes to classroom practices. One teacher stated, "It [the analysis of assessment results] has challenged all of us to think differently about what is teaching and learning – to raise the bar for kids – the more I expect, the more they produce." The MAP assessment, however, is new this year. Therefore, it is difficult to currently assess the overall impact this assessment system has on classroom practices school-wide. The Vertical Slice Protocol brought about another behavior change in teachers by viewing student work from another perspective. As stated by one faculty member, "It was not just a score, but a range of student work." A member of the special education department reported that students with special needs are more engaged in their work due to the "Assistments" program.

Although the base of assessment information at Burncoat MS is increasing, student data being used is primarily at the classroom level. The school does not have a systematic method in place to collect and analyze student assessment information school-wide, nor in relation to SIP documents. As stated in Key Question 1A, current SIP documents lack clear evidence of how assessments are used at the school to measure plan implementation. Although Burncoat MS has seen limited recent gains in MCAS performance, it is impossible to know – without a clear

system for linking these results to the improvement initiatives – if these gains have been a result of improvement efforts at the school.

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

The conditions appear to be in place for the successful implementation of a more clearly defined SIP. The school has effective leadership and the faculty supports the focus of improvement efforts during students' two-year stay at Burncoat MS. The district is providing support for the school in the form of resources, although the PR team has concerns about the approval of the written SIP in its current condition.

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

Burncoat Middle School appears to have effective leadership and sound management. The principal has a clear vision for the school that has been communicated to the school's stakeholders. Staff members are highly supportive of the principal and the school has well-evolved methods for instructional leadership.

Leadership at Burncoat MS is devoted to school improvement, as evidenced through its vision and communicative processes. The PR team observed the school's mission and vision statements posted in several classrooms. The principal cites Burncoat MS as being "...a fun place where kids want to come to school." She expressed confidence that the school's 95% attendance rate was a strong indicator of a support for this vision. The PR team noted that hallways were observed to be neat, orderly and free of distractions from learning. Staff and students were observed talking freely and comfortably with the principal. In a focus group with district personnel, it was stated that the principal meets with the superintendent every month and the quadrant manager twice per month. They both reported that effective communications among school leaders are shared.

Support for the leadership at Burncoat MS is school-wide. During a focus group conducted with district administrators, it was stated that the principal is "...without a doubt, the right person for the job." Additionally, the superintendent indicated that he is very pleased with the tone and goals set by this principal. The school site council and parents interviewed during the PR visit expressed support for the school's leadership, as well as for the teachers and school programs. In interviews and focus groups, teachers expressed their support of the principal's leadership skills. Results from the *DOE Instructional Staff Survey* revealed a majority of the staff are highly supportive of the work of the principal. As an example of her effort to make sure the entire community is moving together towards the same goal, she explained that she had recently removed one teacher who was not supportive of district and school goals.

The PR team also found evidence that the principal demonstrates instructional leadership. She made recent adjustments to increase opportunities for student learning (through a six-period, five day rotating schedule, which allows for longer blocks of instructional time for grade 7 ELA and grade 8 mathematics). The school day schedule was also adjusted to incorporate common planning time. The principal made changes to the enrichment program as greater support for mathematics. The special education program was departmentalized, as explained by the principal, to allow her to "play to teachers' strengths." The momentum for the Turning Points program remains at the school, despite losing funding for a full-time coach.

The Burncoat Middle School appears to have effective leadership and sound management. The community members were very satisfied with the work of the principal as a leader and felt that many steps were being taken to promote school improvement.

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

There is evidence that the Burncoat MS faculty supports the planned improvement initiatives. There is agreement that the current initiatives could result in student improvement, though staff does not uniformly concur that these efforts will be enough to increase student achievement to the degree necessary.

In interviews conducted with Burncoat MS staff, there was a clear sense of agreement with the school's assessment of identified needs. Results from the *DOE Instructional Staff Survey* indicate that 80% of the staff understand their roles in the implementation of the SIP in response to the statement, "Our school has a well-defined plan for reaching student performance goals." As evidenced in Key Question 1C, staff members at the school are actively engaged in implementing the school's improvement initiatives.

Some faculty members believe, however, that although improvement initiatives are helping, it is not clear that these efforts will result in measurable gains in student performance. During the PR team visit, many teachers expressed concern that student learning gaps are a result of transience and language issues and, as a result, whether students coming to this school with certain backgrounds and gaps in their preparation would be able to make the same progress as other groups. Some teachers indicated that, during the two years that students are here, there is significant improvement, although this "may not be long enough." One teacher stated, "If you could measure the progress of my students from the beginning to the end of one year, you would see tremendous growth." School staff perceives a problem with MCAS score comparisons because the student cohort groups are not the same: "We are comparing this year's progress against a different group of kids." While all parties agreed upon the needs of the students, belief in the ability to effectively implement improvement in student achievement levels varied.

Throughout the school, efforts to support planned improvement initiatives are evident. While teachers have faith in the plan and are actively engaged in implementing the plan, many expressed concern that issues specific to the student population and the limited time students spend at Burncoat MS might impede performance gains at the school.

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

Burncoat Middle School appears to be receiving adequate planning guidance and implementation support from the district leadership. District personnel have provided a number of resources and have supported numerous improvement initiatives to assist in SIP. The district, however, has not provided the school with adequate feedback on written SIP documents.

The district provides financial support, support staff, and leadership support for improvement efforts as outlined in the SIP. Many district initiatives are in place or in planning stages at Burncoat MS. The district created the Middle School Task Force, bringing administrators together to focus on common problems of middle schools, with current attention focused on literacy. This has also led to the development of an academic literacy course to provide training to the school's faculty, and literacy enrichment classes for students not enrolled in a magnet

program. Strategies introduced at the academic literacy training are shared in both cluster and department meetings. Central office has provided curriculum materials for three content areas this year: resources for new curriculum in mathematics, social studies and science. They have also supplied the school with a Secondary Reading Grant, to assist in the creation of a plan to improve the literacy skills of students. Along with the new mathematics curriculum, teachers were provided three professional development training sessions. As well, since the elementary schools in the district have used a version of the same curriculum for four years, the middle school teachers were given training on that curriculum in order to gain an understanding of where their students' previous learning originated. Turning Points initiatives, the MAP assessment protocol, and the AVID program also demonstrate support and guidance on the part of the school district.

Although district leaders report that they review the SIP and provide feedback to the quadrant manager who shares this information with the school staff, the PR team questioned the adequacy of this guidance. The district-approved SIP documents were found by the PR team to be insufficient (in their written form) to guide improvement efforts at the school. As a result, the PR team does not believe that the school has received sufficient guidance from the district in the development of SIP documents.

## **CONCLUSION**

Burncoat Middle School does not have a written SIP document that is clear and specific enough to guide the school's improvement efforts. The written plan is based on few sources of data and the SIP lacks benchmarks to be used to measure improvement gains. Though the school's faculty is implementing a number of strategies listed in the SIP, a variety of additional initiatives have also been initiated at Burncoat MS. This gave concern to the PR team. It is difficult to distinguish which efforts are of highest priority at the school and which are most closely linked to increasing student performance. Although use of assessments has increased at Burncoat MS and teachers report students have made gains at the classroom level, there is currently insufficient data to indicate improvement as a result of SIP implementation.

It is the judgment of the PR team that the conditions are currently in place at Burncoat MS to successfully support improvement efforts. The school has sound management and its leaders are providing instructional leadership through structural changes made to the school day. The faculty members at Burncoat MS support the planned improvement initiatives, although some teachers are unsure whether these efforts will result in student performance gains. The district is providing the school with sufficient material and human resources, as well as leadership, to support improvement at the school. It is not clear, however, that Burncoat MS received adequate guidance from the district on the development of the written SIP documents.

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

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

**Leslie Beaulieu**, Panel Review Co-chair, SchoolWorks LLC, Beverly, MA

**Matthew Pakos**, Panel Coordinator, Massachusetts Department of Education, Malden, MA

**Karen Zingarelli**, Panelist, Middle School Math Specialist, Haverhill Public Schools, Haverhill, MA

**Joanne Grenier**, Panelist, Consultant, Grenier Educational Consulting, Attleboro, MA

**Mary Fischer**, Panelist, Director of Reading/Language Arts, Arlington Public Schools, Arlington, MA

**APPENDIX B**  
**Burncoat Middle 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.

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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.**