

## **School Panel Review Report Forest Grove 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 has consistently not been at a level that reaches the school's Adequate Yearly Progress targets in English language arts or mathematics or both. The Forest Grove Middle School met this criterion and was one of twenty schools selected for panel review in winter, 2005. The panel review was conducted on November 14 and 15, 2005.

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

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

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

The panel's findings and conclusions on the two key questions will be forwarded to the Commissioner of Education for consideration, together with school performance data, in determining whether Forest Grove Middle School is deemed under-performing. 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 under-performing school, occurs at the next stage of the school review process.

### **Forest Grove Middle School Profile**

#### **Enrollment**

Forest Grove Middle School serves students in Grades 7 and 8. Enrollment at Forest Grove increased from 2002 to a peak of 1,006 students in 2004, and then decreased in 2005 to 961 students. Between 2002 and 2005, the proportion of student subgroups has been relatively consistent, with the exception of an increase in Low-Income students from 36 percent in 2002 to 50 percent in 2005. Proportions of Forest Grove student subgroups in 2005, as compared to state averages, are presented on the next page:

Subgroup	2005 Enrollment (%)	
	School	State
Asian	7	5
Black	10	9
Hispanic	27	12
Native American	0	0.3
White	56	74
Low-Income	50	28
First Language Not English	33	14
Limited English Proficient	6	5
Special Education	20	16

In 2005, the attendance rate at Forest Grove was 94.8 percent, with students absent 8.8 days on average. Across the state in 2005, the average attendance rate was 94.2 percent and students were absent 10.0 days on average. Forest Grove’s retention rate was 3.1 percent in 2004, the last year for which this data is available. The school’s in-school suspension rate in 2005 was 14.0 percent, while out-of-school suspensions averaged 9.7 percent.

### Staffing

The 2005-2006 Forest Grove staffing report indicates that the school is comprised of three administrators, one curriculum facilitator, 69 teachers (including 15 special education teachers, one SEI teacher and one coping room teacher), three guidance counselors, one school adjustment counselor, a 0.4 bilingual school adjustment counselor, 16 instructional aides, one nurse and one librarian. The principal has been at the school for 19 years as a teacher, assistant principal and—since 2004—as the principal. Of the teachers, approximately 34 percent have been at the school for less than five years, 24 percent between five and ten years, and 31 percent have been at the school more than ten years. Teachers’ years working in the profession, however, are significantly higher than their time at the school. Approximately four percent of the teachers have less than five years’ teaching experience, 21 percent have between five and ten years’ experience, and 57 percent have more than 10 years’ experience. Nearly 82 percent of teachers are reported as being highly qualified, and approximately 62 percent hold an advanced degree.

### MCAS Overview

Students at the Forest Grove Middle School are assessed in Grade 7 English language arts (ELA) and in Grade 8 mathematics. Forest Grove’s Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report for 2005 Mid-Cycle IV shows an accountability status of Corrective Action for mathematics and No Status for English language arts. In mathematics, Forest Grove met AYP expectations for the aggregate population in 2005, following four years of not meeting AYP for the aggregate population. The school has not made AYP for all subgroups in mathematics since 2003.<sup>1</sup> In

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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). The subgroups meeting the minimum sample size at Forest Grove Elementary School in 2005 were Limited English Proficient, Special Education, Low-Income, African American, Hispanic and White.

2005, subgroups that did not meet AYP in mathematics included Limited English Proficient (LEP), Special Education and Hispanic subgroups. In ELA, Forest Grove has met AYP expectations for the aggregate population since 1999. In 2005, several subgroups did not make AYP in ELA, including LEP, Special Education, African American and Hispanic subgroups.

In 2005, the aggregate CPI scores for Forest Grove Middle School were 77.9 in ELA and 54.3 in mathematics. Year-by-year aggregate CPI values are shown below:

<b>Year-by-Year Aggregate CPI Data Summary</b>		
<b>Year</b>	<b>ELA</b>	<b>Math</b>
2001	73.1	51.1
2002	68.2	39.9
2003	76.3	46.4
2004	74.4	51.6
2005	77.9	54.3
State Target 2005	80.5	68.7

**GRADE 7**

**ELA MCAS Results**

Results of the 2005 Grade 7 ELA MCAS for students at Forest Grove are presented below:

<b>2005 ELA</b>	<b>Percent</b>			
	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W/F</b>
Aggregate	3	44	37	16
Regular Education	4	57	32	7
Special Education	0	6	52	42
Limited English Proficient	0	17	50	33

Regular Education students have significantly outperformed Special Education and LEP students in ELA. There has been a gradual increase in student performance since 2001, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 7 ELA MCAS performance presented below:

<b>Aggregate ELA</b>	<b>Percent</b>			
	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W/F</b>
2005	3	44	37	16
2004	4	39	38	19
2003	3	42	43	12
2002	3	34	43	20
2001	2	27	42	29

Students scoring in Proficient or Advanced have increased from 29 percent in 2001 to 47 percent in 2005. Correspondingly, the percentage of students in Warning/Failing has decreased from 29 percent in 2001 to 16 percent in 2005. Special Education students have also experienced some

improvement, although this is generally limited to more students scoring in Needs Improvement. In 2001, two percent of Special Education students scored Proficient or Advanced, which increased to six percent in 2005. Students scoring Needs Improvement has increased from 33 percent in 2001 to 52 percent in 2005.

**GRADE 8**

**Mathematics MCAS Results**

Results of the 2005 Grade 8 Mathematics MCAS for students at Forest Grove are presented below:

2005 Mathematics	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	6	20	27	47
Regular Education	8	24	31	36
Special Education	0	1	9	90
Limited English Proficient	0	15	20	65

Regular Education students have outperformed Special Education and LEP students in mathematics, specifically in regard to the number of students scoring Warning/Failing. Aggregate MCAS performance has seen a slight increase since 2001. Students scoring Advanced or Proficient increased from 18 percent in 2001 to 26 percent in 2005, while students scoring Warning/Failing changed from 48 percent in 2001 to 47 percent in 2005. These aggregate values reflect a slightly higher improvement by Regular Education students and a slight decline by Special Education students since 2001, as reflected below:

Regular Education Mathematics	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	8	24	31	36
2004	5	18	38	39
2003	4	13	37	46
2002	1	11	34	53
2001	5	16	36	43

Special Education Mathematics	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	0	1	9	90
2004	0	4	13	84
2003	1	2	19	78
2002	0	0	8	92
2001	0	4	13	84

The percentage of Regular Education students scoring in Proficient or Advanced has increased from 21 percent in 2001 to 32 percent in 2005. The percentage of Regular Education students in Warning/Failing has decreased from 43 percent in 2001 to 36 percent in 2005. The decline in

performance of Special Education students is evidenced by a decline in students scoring Proficient or Advanced (four percent in 2001 to one percent in 2005) and an increase in students scoring Warning/Failing (84 percent in 2001 to 90 percent in 2005).

## **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 Forest Grove Middle School (FGMS) does not have a sound plan for improvement but the school is implementing a number of change strategies. The School Improvement Plans (SIPs) are not clear and specific enough to guide implementation of planned improvement initiatives. Though efforts have been made to develop SIP documents through a more inclusive process, FGMS does not have a system in place for evaluating the effectiveness of SIP initiatives. Although the school staff is engaged in implementing a variety of instructional strategies, it is unclear how these strategies connect to each other or how they each affect student performance in a measurable way.

#### **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 (see Appendix C). 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 by district administrators on a rolling basis.

The School Improvement Plans submitted to the Department of Education (DOE) by the seven Worcester schools in October 2005 in preparation for School Panel Reviews are the spring 2005 updates of the 2004-2006 document (Plans 1 and 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, 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 used the summary rubric to inform their discussion of the written plan that 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 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 had been approved by the Worcester Public Schools at the time of the review, was considered by the Panel as part of the evidence gathered during their on-site review. Schools may or may not have had new strategies from these plans in evidence in the school by the time of the visit. This plan was 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 Forest Grove Middle School's improvement planning documents and action plans are not clear and specific enough to guide the implementation of planned improvement initiatives. School leaders did not thoroughly disaggregate student performance data by subgroups. The school's primary focus on literacy as the chronic factor for students' failure to achieve mathematics proficiency (rather than analyzing other possibilities) is another weakness in the plan. The school gave no evidence that it made efforts to determine or consider other potential obstacles to improved student mathematics performance. The '04-'06 SIP (Plan 1) and the '04-'05 SIP Addendum (Plan 2), therefore, lacks distinct strategies for raising the overall performance of various subgroups in the school. While the '04-'05 Addendum improved the plan's clarity of purpose, it was still inadequate to guide school improvement.

Based on the written SIP documents, it is not clear that a complete analysis of MCAS data was conducted, especially in relation to the school's subgroups. Of a total student population of 961 students, FGMS enrolls approximately 190 students (20%) with special education needs, 5.5% who are limited English proficient (LEP), and an approximate count of 317 students (33%) whose first language is not English (FLNE). These students account for a significant proportion of the school's total population, whose specialized learning needs are not directly accounted for in SIP documents.

Data analysis completed at FGMS points to literacy as the primary problem at the school. That is, reading skills are cited as the primary deficiency of FGMS students, which has resulted in low student performance rates in both English language arts and mathematics. Though this might be an important problem, there might be other related factors that have not been considered, such as the delivery of mathematics content instruction.

As a result, root causes listed in the SIP documents state overarching causal factors but are not specific to content area instruction or to the school's subgroup populations. For example, causes stated in the SIP include the lack of an aligned curriculum, the lack of differentiated instruction and a lack of focus on vocabulary in mathematics. Limited analysis was completed to determine why these strategies were not implemented or how they related precisely to low student performance at FGMS. One member of the instructional leadership team (ILT) noted that data collection was the weakest part of the SIP.

Though the '04-'05 SIP Addendum is clearer than the original '04-'06 SIP, it also does not address subgroup populations. The Addendum cites vocabulary in mathematics as the primary performance obstacle for students at FGMS. In addition, the two documents are different in format, which makes them difficult to use in conjunction with each other. Information gathered during focus groups indicated that teachers also felt '04-'06 SIP and '04-'05 Addendum were poorly developed and that they are not always easy to use.

Based on the a review of the school's improvement planning documents by the Panel Review (PR) team and the DOE as well as reports by teachers, it was determined that the improvement

planning documents and action plans are not clear and specific enough to guide improvement efforts. The lack of clarity in the plan resulted from the school's failure to conduct an in-depth analysis of student performance data or root causes for low student performance. The written plan does not outline strategies that are specifically designed to resolve the underlying issues that negatively impact student performance at FGMS, specifically for the school's subgroup populations.

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

The '04-'06 School Improvement Plan (Plan 1) was not developed through a process that is likely to support its successful implementation. School leadership reports that this document was constructed via a top-down process. Work on the '04-'05 Addendum (Plan 2) was more inclusive, resulting in a feeling of ownership by school staff over the plan. However, FGMS does not have a process for conducting ongoing evaluation of the SIP's implementation or for making necessary adjustments as a result of evaluation.

The '04-'05 SIP Addendum was developed by the principal as well as a representative group of FGMS teachers. In interviews set up by the principal with the PR team, staff members confirmed their participation. One teacher said, "The principal developed focus groups so everyone would be involved in SIP." Another teacher stated, "All [teachers] were involved in creating the School Improvement Plan. It is not a top-down document."

As a result of this inclusive process, FGMS staff expressed an increased feeling of ownership over newer school improvement planning documents. Two interviews conducted with the principal and the ILT indicated that the school's stakeholders are regularly updated on the school's SIP initiatives. Faculty meetings, individual meetings with department chairs and monthly department meetings are the usual venues for providing the staff with updates about the School Improvement Plan. An interview with the Turning Points team indicated however, that this team has more extensive ownership over the process than FGMS staff members perceive. "We [Turning Points Team] are the spokespeople and communicators of information from a variety of planning meetings. We convey information from all organized planning and decision-making groups in the school." According to Turning Points team members, they developed the implementation plan for some aspects of the SIP (e.g., Sustained Silent Reading program, home work policy). This discrepancy indicates that the process might not have been as inclusive as teachers perceived and/or stated.

FGMS does not have a process in place to evaluate implementation of the SIP. The principal indicated that little monitoring has taken place, stating, "Baby steps toward monitoring are taking place now." For example, teachers' weekly lesson plans and yearly goals must now reference the SIP. The principal, however, recognizes this need as an important element moving forward.

Because the school does not have a system in place for evaluating SIP implementation, it is not possible to make critical adjustments to the plan based on areas of weakness. The principal acknowledged that school leadership has not instituted a system for returning to the School Improvement Plan to make adjustments. Focus groups conducted with FGMS staff members corroborated this suggestion. Faculty members indicated that current changes cited in the newest SIP update—October 2005 (Plan 3)—were motivated by newly acquired MCAS data and not by data acquired through an institutionalized system of school data monitoring.

In summary, SIP planning processes at FGMS are more inclusive than in past years. However, an overarching system for gathering information on the implementation of the SIP, which can be used to adjust improvement practices accordingly, is not in place at the school.

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

Forest Grove staff members are implementing the strategies in the school improvement plans that have been presented to them. Staff members understand their roles and responsibilities for implementing the plan's initiatives, which is evidenced by implementation. Professional development opportunities support the goals included in the SIP.

Based on staff reports in interviews and focus groups conducted with the PR team, FGMS staff members understand their role and responsibilities for implementing the SIP. PR team observations also revealed evidence that the school's staff is implementing the strategies outlined in the '04-'06 SIP and the related '04-'05 SIP Addendum. Turning Points, Word Walls and the Connected Mathematics Program (CMP) instructional program are key elements of the Forest Grove SIP. In one interview a teacher stated, "When going through stories, I do a lot of Turning Points, helping students make connections." All team members who visited classrooms reported the presence of a word wall and use of CMP in mathematics classes observed. A focus group discussion with students revealed that students routinely experience many elements of the Forest Grove Middle School's SIP. Students identified word walls, helpful teachers and different ways to learn things as features they liked about being students at the Grove School. Note-taking skills and after-school MCAS help were also on the students' lists of regular events at the school, which is consistent with strategies listed in the SIP.

Panel Review team members also observed teachers making an effort to differentiate instruction in their classes—another SIP strategy. The principal informed the PR team members that *Assistments*, a computer-based mathematics test-preparation program, was recently implemented to provide students an opportunity to learn how to approach mathematics MCAS items. Members of the review team observed students using this program for the second time this year.

The special education staff reported that the school implements Sustained Silent Reading for 25 minutes each day in order to address literacy issues, which are a primary focus in the school's improvement planning documents. Teachers and administrators reported that the Teacher Assistance Team is an essential element of the school's special education pre-referral program.

District and school administrators, as well as teachers, referred to adjustments that were made in the school schedule. This year, the school moved to a rotating schedule to accommodate the time blocks required by the new Connected Mathematics Program. In addition, this restructuring has been used to accommodate the needs of struggling learners at the school. One commonly referenced scheduling adjustment was called "double dosing," which involves providing targeted students an extra mathematics class every seven days.

Professional development conducted to date is directly connected to the goals and objectives listed in the school's SIP. District administrators stated, "all principals must specifically state the link to their schools SIP as part of every application for district professional development support." In an interview, the principal stated that the teachers' lesson plans are required to include connections to the SIP. A review of lesson planning documents revealed that teachers complete the SIP Strategy section and that strategies included in the column are aligned with

those outlined in the SIP. The principal also indicated that administrator evaluations link directly to the School Improvement Plan.

A district administrator reported that the district-wide professional development plan does include CMP and Turning Points training to support the school's efforts. Professional development was provided for all staff, including special education teachers and school administrators. The school's department heads and teachers also confirmed receiving professional development in these areas—both initiatives stated in the SIP. Staff members not only acknowledged participating in professional development that targeted SIP initiatives but also talked about their efforts to implement these initiatives. In addition, the Worcester Public Schools spring, summer and autumn 2005 Professional Development Catalogues list training opportunities that are applicable to the professional development needs noted in the school's improvement planning documents.

Staff members at FGMS are implementing the strategies indicated in the school's improvement planning documents. In addition, the district has provided related professional development opportunities. However, because the PR team determined that there are serious flaws in FGMS SIP, it is unclear how successful the implementation of the plan's strategies might be in addressing the low student performance rates at the school.

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

The PR team cannot determine, nor has the school assessed, whether gains were made as a result of the implementation of the School Improvement Plan. The lack of specific measurable goals related to the strategies cited in the plan prevented panel members from forming conclusions about the relationship between the implementation of the plan and student performance. Though the district and the school are confident that the initiatives in place will result in gains in student performance, the information to support this is anecdotal.

ILT members expressed confidence that the initiatives being implemented by the school are helping to improve student performance. They referred to the most recent MCAS data. The SIP specifically states, "The systematized study of data from the standardized MCAS and two Turning Points surveys have allowed the staff to identify students' critical weaknesses in language arts and mathematics, pinpoint the needs of students and develop action steps for the SIP." However, the ILT could not provide the team with substantive evidence of improved student performance in relation to this initiative. The Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment has been newly instituted at FGMS this year and baseline testing has been completed. The school and the district believe this test will provide them with increased information on student performance but its impact cannot be assessed at this time.

According to the members of the ILT, "[students'] MCAS test taking anxiety is reduced." They attribute this to the success of the school's MCAS Open Response Homework Program, which provides MCAS practice every Tuesday and Friday. While reduced anxiety may help increase student achievement on the state tests, the PR team concluded that there were limited data on which to base a definitive conclusion about the impact of the improvement strategies on student performance.

District personnel report increases in MCAS ELA performance at the school in the past as evidence for the effectiveness of improvement initiatives (see Profile, above). However, it

remains unclear to the PR team how school improvement efforts (and which initiatives) are linked to these increases in student achievement. The review of the FGMS SIP provided by the Department of Education corroborated these findings, suggesting that—although student performance did improve slightly—there is little evidence that this improvement can be sustained or replicated because there is no obvious link to the improvement initiatives. The PR team agreed with this finding.

In summary, the PR team could not definitively conclude that any gains in student performance are a result of the initiatives in school improvement planning documents.

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

The conditions to ensure the successful implementation of a Forest Grove improvement plan are in place. The principal demonstrates effective leadership and sound management. There is sufficient evidence to show that the faculty is implementing the school's improvement efforts. The school receives adequate implementation support from district staff.

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

It is the judgment of the PR team that FGMS appears to have effective leadership and sound management. School staff members express confidence in their school leader and perceive the principal as being competent, respected and stabilizing. Teachers reported that the principal is committed to creating opportunities for them to get involved in the decision-making process at the school. As such, they feel empowered and they frequently volunteered to take on additional responsibilities in the school.

The principal maintains an open-door policy and encourages staff to email her to create a forum for generating ideas, which she believes are positive steps toward building a more collaborative environment. This was confirmed by all key stakeholders (i.e., the school council, teachers and parents) who reported that the principal maintains an open line of communication. Staff members believe that the principal displays good listening skills. The department chairs meet weekly with the principal instead of once or twice a year (as had historically been the case). The principal indicated that the ultimate message she is trying to convey to staff is that her priorities begin and end with "What's best for kids." In a focus group with special education staff, it was stated, "With this principal's background, she will turn this building around." According to another staff member, "[The principal] gets things done without having to give orders." In addition, 75 percent of staff members who responded to the *DOE Instructional Staff Survey* either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the statement, "School principal provides effective leadership to guide and support staff efforts to improve the academic performance of our students."

Teachers are frequently informed about key school-wide initiatives in staff and department meetings. The implementation of the Turning Points initiative plays an important role in helping the principal promote a school environment that is more inclusive and collaborative. Funding from the Turning Points initiative provided the school with a coach for the past three years. This year, the principal opted to continue funding for this coach with school resources. As noted earlier, members of the Turning Points team are perceived as liaison between the principal and the other teachers in the school. For example, three Turning Points teachers are on the School Improvement Planning Committee.

As the head of the school, the principal has taken on the role of the instructional leader of the school. This is evident in the fact that she expects the staff to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners, incorporate the learning standards into their lessons and implement the improvement strategies in their classes. Interviews with staff members confirmed that school leaders—including the department heads, assistant principal, and ILT members—are constantly encouraging them to incorporate the SIP strategies and goals into their lessons. A teacher stated “We cannot escape SIP getting into our lessons.”

Processes for monitoring the implementation of SIP strategies are only in their initial phases at FGMS. The introduction of the MAP assessments this year and the purchase of portable laptop computer stations—an investment made by the district—might result in richer student performance data directly linked to the MCAS. In addition, the school’s adoption of the Larson Pre-Algebra Software in 2004 and the *Assistments*—a student performance analysis program—appear to be steps that would enhance school administrators’ capacity to become more proficient data gatherers, analysts and instructional leaders. The principal recognizes that, to date, the school has been limited in its implementation of many of these strategies. According to her, “the school is in the fledgling stages of differentiating instruction and looking at student work.” When asked about data analysis, the principal also stated that they “...are at the beginning of examining what [they] do.” Leadership reports the use of future walkthrough protocols to monitor the implementation of SIP strategies at the classroom level but these are not yet in place. Department chairs have some responsibility for conducting classroom observations but, at this time, this process does not appear to be conducted through a systematic process. Furthermore, the lack of clarity of implementation benchmarks in the SIP makes it difficult to assess progress of the implementation of specified strategies.

The Panel Review team concluded that the current school administration has the capacity to continue the maintenance of a positive environment to improve classroom instruction but needs to establish better monitoring and data systems to do so effectively.

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

There is evidence that the school’s faculty supports the planned improvement efforts. Staff members at FGMS understand the current improvement initiatives documented in the school’s plans and believe that implementation will lead to increases in student performance rates.

Individual teacher interviews and ILT interviews indicated that Forest Grove staff members are knowledgeable about the content and use of initiatives in the SIP. During classroom observations, PR team members reported seeing word walls in classrooms and observing teachers referencing them as part of their lessons. The seven Turning Points strategies were posted in classrooms and offices around the school. One mathematics teacher identified the school’s “focus on literacy across the curriculum” as one of the reasons he enjoys teaching at FGMS. Interviews and classroom observations revealed that the faculty at Forest Grove is very knowledgeable of the strategies outlined in the SIP.

FGMS staff members believe that the initiatives in the SIP, if followed, will lead to school improvement and increased student achievement. Responses to the anonymous *DOE Instructional Staff Survey* indicated that 75 percent of respondents (n=39) agreed with the statement, “I am well informed about the initiatives that are undertaken by our school leadership and staff to improve student performance.” In a focus group with department chairs, participants

noted that they voluntarily meet with the principal, which is evidence of their dedication to improvement. In interviews, teachers stated that they voluntarily use preparation time to work together for planning and training around the school improvement initiatives. PR team members consistently heard faculty members refer to the SIP strategies as important. One teacher declared, “The School Improvement Plan is our bible. It is an important document.”

The PR team determined that the FGMS faculty supports and is faithfully implementing school improvement initiatives as stated in the SIP. However, because the improvement planning documents and related evaluation processes were judged to be unsound by the PR Team, it is unclear whether faculty support and implementation of these particular SIP strategies are sufficient to increase student performance at the school.

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

It is the judgment of the PR team that Forest Grove Middle School is receiving adequate support from the district leadership. District leaders are providing support for the school’s academic programs—both in the form of physical and personnel resources. The district also is well informed of the improvement needs at FGMS. However, the school’s written improvement planning documents, which the district reviewed, are not sufficient to guide improvement efforts.

The district is providing adequate personnel resources to support the school improvement efforts at Forest Grove Middle School. In an interview with the district office, the PR team was told that the district has two PIM experts on staff to support SIP planning and implementation efforts. A middle school task force, which was formed to discuss root causes of weaknesses in student performance through the use of multiple sources of assessment data, exists. As a result, a new literacy curriculum has been established to improve instruction in this area at the middle school level. In addition, the district has continued to fund a Mathematics Inquiry Group—a teacher group that meets biweekly to examine data and best practices, although private funding for the initiative has expired.

The district has also provided FGMS with adequate physical and program resources. The newly instituted MAP assessments and the purchase of portable laptop computer stations are both district-level initiatives that are likely to provide increased information on student performance to assist schools with more in-depth data analysis. FGMS has been provided with all the necessary materials to fully implement the Connected Mathematics Program this year. There are new science and history programs at the middle school level that have also been well supplied by the district. In addition, the district supports the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program to support 50 students identified “in the middle” to receive extra support to increase the likelihood that they could succeed in a rigorous (high school preparation) curriculum.

Interviews conducted with district-level personnel indicated that they are aware of the improvement needs at FGMS. In an interview, the superintendent explained why literacy, including the relationship between literacy and mathematics, was an essential aspect of the district’s efforts. District personnel identified mathematics—the area in which the school is identified for Corrective Action—as a pressing problem at the school. District personnel provided FGMS with support in implementing the rotating schedule at the school this year to incorporate time blocks necessary to accomplish the Connected Mathematics Program (piloted at Forest Grove last year), as well as double dosing blocks for struggling learners in both ELA and

mathematics. In the Leadership Report, the principal indicated that the district “continues to be available to support the improvement processes.” In an interview, the principal further confirmed that district administrators meet with her to provide support and to stay current with the school’s needs.

The district has also provided the school with professional development opportunities related to the school’s SIP and the newly instituted instructional programs. This includes trainings in both CMP and the new science and history programs. In addition, the district offers the school the option to conduct school-based professional development. These trainings are at the discretion of the principal, although they must be approved by the district. FGMS department heads have received training (supported by the district) in the Skillful Teacher, which includes useful information on how to conduct classroom observations—a task assigned to personnel in these roles. In addition, the district provides a wide range of free, voluntary professional development opportunities for all Worcester Public Schools staff. A review of the catalogue indicates a large number of trainings related to school improvement and strategies cited in the FGMS SIP documents.

Although the district has provided a wide range of support for the school in implementing its improvement strategies, the school’s written improvement planning documents are not sufficient to guide improvement efforts. District leaders review the Forest Grove School Improvement Plan and provide feedback to the school. As reported by district leaders, the school’s improvement plan was read by at least two central office personnel. Support for writing SIP documents is available through a district-wide School Support Specialist via tutorials on the PIM process provided for principals. The principal reported she took full advantage of this training, she also stated that the School Support Specialist had been on-site at the school to offer individualized advice specific to FGMS efforts. However, because the written improvement documents are insufficient (see Question 1A), and these documents have been reviewed and approved by the district, the adequacy of guidance provided by the Worcester Public Schools in developing and drafting these documents may have been insufficient.

In summary, the district has made significant time, personnel, financial and training investments to assist FGMS in implementing improvement initiatives. The inadequacy of written improvement documents, however, caused the PR team to question the sufficiency of guidance provided by the district in drafting the school’s improvement plans.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Forest Grove Middle School does not have a sound written plan for improvement, but the school is implementing a number of change strategies. The SIP was not based on in-depth data analysis and, as such, lacks clear and specific improvement goals and objectives. The school’s failure to conduct adequate analysis of student performance data or root causes for low student performance minimizes school leaders’ ability to identify improvement strategies that are designed to address student needs. In addition, the school did not carefully examine the performance of individual subgroups and, as such, does not have a process for raising their overall academic achievement.

The Panel Review team concluded that the conditions are in place for the successful implementation of the improvement plan. The principal demonstrates strong leadership and the faculty is supportive of her. Furthermore, the staff is diligently implementing many of the strategies outlined in the improvement plan. There is also evidence that the district provides

adequate support and guidance for the school's improvement initiatives. In summary, although Forest Grove Middle School does not have a sound written improvement plan, teachers and administrators are working hard to employ strategies that they think are likely to bolster student achievement.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Team Members**

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

**Steven Leonard**, Panel Review Co-chair, SchoolWorks LLC, Beverly, MA

**Jake Foster**, Panel Review Coordinator, Massachusetts Department of Education, Malden, MA

**Joan McNeil**, Panelist, Massachusetts Department of Education, Malden, MA

**Susan Cote**, Panelist, Assistant Superintendent, East Bridgewater Public Schools, East  
Bridgewater, MA

**James Devine**, Panelist, Assistant Superintendent of Instruction and Accountability, Chicopee  
Public Schools, Chicopee, MA

**APPENDIX B**  
**Forest Grove Middle School**  
**Worcester Public Schools**  
**POTENTIALLY UNDER-PERFORMING PANEL REVIEW SCHEDULE**  
**November 15 and 16, 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.