

School Panel Review Report Sullivan 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. Sullivan Middle School met this criterion and was one of 21 schools selected for panel review in fall 2005. The panel review was conducted on December 6 and 7, 2005.

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

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

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

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

Sullivan Middle School Profile

Enrollment

Sullivan Middle School serves students in Grades 7 and 8. Enrollment at Sullivan increased from 2002 to a peak of 1,089 in 2003, and then decreased to a low of 1,031 in 2005. Between 2002 and 2005, student demographics changed slightly. The percentage of White students decreased from 48 percent in 2002 to 42 percent in 2005, while all minority subgroups rose between 1 and 4 percent over that same time period. Minor changes also occurred in the student subgroups of First Language Not English (3 percent rise) and Limited English Proficient (5 percent drop), while Special Education remained stable. Most significantly, the percentage of Low-Income students rose from 54 percent in 2002 to 71 percent in 2005. Proportions of Sullivan student subgroups in 2005, as compared to state averages, are presented next:

Subgroup	2005 Enrollment (%)	
	School	State
Asian	10	5
Black	13	9
Hispanic	35	12
Native American	1	0.3
White	42	74
Low-Income	71	28
First Language Not English	45	14
Limited English Proficient	12	5
Special Education	23	16

In 2005, the attendance rate at Sullivan Middle was 93.3 percent, with students absent 11.2 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. Absenteeism was slightly higher in this school than in the district overall, slightly higher in Grade 8 than in Grade 7, and slightly higher for males than for females in both grades. Hispanic and Native American students had the highest rates of absenteeism within the school. The school’s retention rate was 5.1 percent in 2004, the last year for which these data are available. Sullivan Middle School’s in-school suspension rate in 2005 was 1.2 percent, while out-of-school suspensions averaged 17.7 percent. Averages in 2005 for the state were 4.5 percent for in-school suspensions and 6.1 percent for out-of-school suspensions.

Staffing

The 2005-2006 Sullivan Middle School staffing report indicates that the school is comprised of four administrators, 75 teachers, three guidance counselors, one school psychologist, one school social worker, and one librarian. The principal was appointed in July 2005, following three years as an assistant principal at the school. Of the teachers, approximately 30 percent have been at the school for more than ten years, and approximately 42 percent have been at the school for less than five years. Roughly eight percent are new to the school this year. Approximately 83 percent of teachers are reported as highly qualified, and about 63 percent hold an advanced degree.

MCAS Overview

Students at Sullivan Middle School are assessed in Grade 7 in English language arts (ELA) and in Grade 8 in mathematics. Sullivan Middle School’s Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report for 2005 Mid-Cycle IV shows an accountability status of Identified for Improvement-Subgroups Only for English language arts (ELA) and Restructuring for mathematics.¹ The school failed to

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 percent 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 Sullivan Middle School in 2005 were Limited English Proficient, Special Education, Low-Income, African-American/Black, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and White.

make AYP in ELA in 2005 in the aggregate and for the following reported subgroups: Limited English Proficient, Special Education, Low-Income, Hispanic, and White. The year 2005 is the first year in which the school did not make AYP in the aggregate. However, the school has not made AYP for subgroups since subgroups were first reported in 2003. In mathematics, the school failed to make AYP in 2005 in the aggregate and for the following reported subgroups: Limited English Proficient, Special Education, Low-Income, African-American/Black, Hispanic, and White. The school has not made AYP in the aggregate from 2001 to 2005 and has not made AYP in subgroups since they were first reported in 2003.

In 2005, the aggregate Composite Performance Indices (CPIs) for Sullivan Middle School were 70.4 in ELA and 44.1 in mathematics. Year-by-year aggregate CPIs are shown below:

Year-by-Year Aggregate CPI Data Summary		
Year	ELA	Math
2001	54.7	39.2
2002	63.6	43.5
2003	67.1	40.3
2004	72.6	41.4
2005	70.4	44.1
State Target 2005	80.5	68.7

GRADE 7

ELA MCAS Results

Results of the 2005 Grade 7 ELA MCAS for students at Sullivan Middle School are presented below:

2005 ELA	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	4	32	44	21
Regular Education	6	45	42	8
Special Education	0	8	46	46
Limited English Proficient	0	3	53	44

Regular Education students have significantly outperformed Special Education and Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in ELA.

Student performance at Sullivan Middle School has been variable since 2001, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 7 ELA MCAS performance data presented next:

Aggregate ELA	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	4	32	44	21
2004	5	35	37	23
2003	3	27	45	25
2002	3	32	39	27
2001	3	27	37	34

The percentage of students scoring Proficient or Advanced has varied between 30 and 40 percent between 2001 and 2005. Additionally, the percentage of students scoring Warning/Failing has decreased each year, from 34 percent in 2001 to 21 percent in 2005. This indicates that steady movement from Warning/Failing to Needs Improvement has been occurring. An overall decline in students scoring Warning/Failing has also occurred for the Special Education subgroup, as seen below:

Special Education ELA	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	0	8	46	46
2004	0	15	31	54
2003	0	7	37	56
2002	0	0	17	83
2001	0	4	25	71

In 2002, a high of 83 percent of students scored Warning/Failing, but this number has decreased each subsequent year, reaching a low of 46 percent in 2005. Small gains have been seen in the percentage of Special Education students scoring Proficient, as well, indicating some additional movement from Needs Improvement to Proficient. In 2004, a high of 15 percent of Special Education students scored Proficient, up from a low of zero percent in 2002.

Greater variability is seen in the performance of Limited English Proficient students, as shown below (data not available before 2003):

Limited English Proficient ELA	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	0	3	53	44
2004	0	25	36	39
2003	0	0	13	87

Significant improvement was made from 2003 to 2004, when the percentage of LEP students scoring Proficient increased by 25 percent, and the percentage of students scoring Warning/Failing decreased by 48 percent. These gains were not, however, entirely retained in 2005.

GRADE 8

Mathematics MCAS Results

Results of the 2005 Grade 8 Mathematics MCAS for students at Sullivan Middle School are presented below:

2005 Mathematics	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
Aggregate	5	11	23	62
Regular Education	7	15	31	47
Special Education	0	0	4	96
Limited English Proficient	0	6	9	86

Regular Education students have significantly outperformed Special Education and LEP students in mathematics. Despite some variability, there has been an overall increase in student performance since 2001, as reflected in the aggregate Grade 8 Mathematics MCAS performance shown here:

Aggregate Mathematics	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	5	11	23	62
2004	3	9	26	63
2003	2	8	24	65
2002	2	10	29	59
2001	2	8	28	62

The percentage of students scoring Proficient or Advanced has increased from a low of 10 percent in 2001 and 2003 to a high of 16 percent in 2005. Similarly, the percentage of students scoring Needs Improvement has decreased from a high of 29 percent in 2002 to a low of 23 percent in 2005. However, the percentage of students scoring Warning/Failing has remained between 59 and 65 percent, indicating that most movement has been out of Needs Improvement.

The performance of Special Education students over time has stayed relatively stable, with the vast majority of students scoring in Warning/Failing, as displayed below:

Special Education Mathematics	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	0	0	4	96
2004	0	0	5	95
2003	0	2	12	86
2002	0	0	6	94
2001	0	0	3	97

The performance of LEP students has been variable since 2001:

Limited English Proficient Mathematics	Percent			
	A	P	NI	W/F
2005	0	6	9	86
2004	2	6	20	72
2003	0	0	16	84
2002	0	7	32	61
2001	0	0	21	79

A peak of 8 percent of LEP students scored Proficient or Advanced in 2004, up from zero percent in 2003 and 2001. A peak of 86 percent of students scoring in Warning/Failing occurred in 2005, up from a low of 61 percent in 2002.

PANEL RESPONSES TO THE KEY QUESTIONS

KEY QUESTION 1: DOES THE SCHOOL HAVE A SOUND PLAN FOR IMPROVING STUDENT PERFORMANCE?

The Sullivan Middle School has written an Addendum to its original School Improvement Plan (SIP). This Addendum has some elements of a well-written plan. It is much more specific about learning objectives and strategies than the original SIP. However, the Panel Review (PR) team found that it does not present a clear link between data analysis and a selection of strategies. It also lacks a process to monitor its implementation. Based on interviews, it has not been well-communicated to the staff. The faculty is attempting to implement strategies in the plan, but these initiatives are not understood as a part of a cohesive improvement plan. They are understood as district initiatives.

A. Is the school implementing a sound plan for improvement, and what gains have been achieved to date as a result of this implementation?

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 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 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 by seven Worcester schools in October 2005 in preparation for School Panel Reviews are the spring 2005 updates of the 2004-2006 document incorporated into Plan 1 (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 documents in the summary rubric was

based solely on a close reading of the written documents submitted. It was 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 on 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 that had been approved this fall 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 that visit. These plans were 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 administrator of the Sullivan School explained the existence of these three official documents. The complete School Improvement Plan (SIP) was developed by the former administrator for the period 2004-2006, with an Addendum in the spring of 2005. The present principal and a team of staff members wrote Addendum 2005-2006 in fall 2005.

Although the new Addendum has some strengths, which are noted below, the PR team found the major weakness in the document to be the connection between data analysis, root causes, and strategies. In its discussion of data, the plan states:

Disaggregating our data by subgroups (Limited English Proficient [29% Math/44.5% ELA], Disabled [17.7% Math/48.9%ELA] and Regular [51.9% Math/81.1ELA] proficiency rating), by race, and by socio-economic status revealed patterns of disparity in achievement in both English Language Arts and Mathematics. Two groups are of particular interest and concern; disabled students and Hispanic students.

However, the basic strategy for improvement is to support all students in a similar manner in order to move 10 percent of the student population into Proficient or Advanced status. The PR team could not see a clear rationale for this choice, given the disparity of performance across subgroups. During interviews and in an anonymous teacher survey, there were many comments in the open response section concerning bilingual students. Teachers attribute bilingual students' low performance to language barriers and socio-economic issues. And yet, with a minority population of 45 percent, the SIP does not specifically address the needs of ELL students.

The plan also lists root causes in table format. No explanation is given as to how these causes were determined. It was not evident to the PR team why this set of root causes was selected. Another weakness in the plan is the lack of clear benchmarks to measure its implementation. The document has a column called "Method of Collecting Information on Implementation," but the methods listed therein are too numerous to be practically completed; the methods are also very general in nature. The principal was not able to provide specific evidence of having monitored the plan from the start of the 2005 school year to the time of the panel review.

There are some significant improvements to the new document in comparison with past plans. The new Addendum contains clearer student learning objectives:

Students will continue to implement the five-step problem-solving process in math and read and understand directions.

This and similar objectives begin to spell out in detail what student performance should look like if the plan is successfully implemented.

Teacher objectives are also improved over those in past plans:

Teachers will implement an ELA block schedule that will increase the opportunities for differentiated instruction.

They begin to spell out how instruction must change to address students' learning needs.

In spite of the fact that the Addendum of 2005-2006 is an improved document, the PR team concluded that it is not a sound plan because it lacks a clear link between the data, which show disparity among subgroups, and its chosen strategies, which are aimed at all students. Statistical information on subgroups is presented in the narrative, but the review team heard no evidence during interviews that discussions and reflections on curriculum and assessment took place regarding subgroups. Staff members and administrators confirmed that analyses of data did not occur on any widespread basis. The processes included in the plan for benchmarking progress are very general and are too numerous. In fact, benchmarking of progress has not occurred this year for this version or previous versions of the plan.

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

Although the Sullivan Middle School Addendum 2005-2006 is an improvement over the 2004-2006 School Improvement Plan, the plan was not developed by a representative group and it was not well-communicated to the school community. Professional development, however, shows linkage to the goals of the plan.

The current principal was not initially involved with the writing of the plan last year, but he did work with a small nucleus of individuals to craft the Addendum this fall. Through its interviews, the PR team could not find evidence that the faculty had been widely involved in providing feedback to develop the plan. The school received district support to aid in developing the plan. After the administration was informed that the plan was unacceptable in its early draft form, the principal collaborated with the school support specialist and other district personnel. The principal described the process as one in which he made corrections and then sent the revised plan to the central office, where it was once again returned to him for additional corrections. This back and forth process occurred two to three times.

The principal explained to the review team that a summary of the plan, along with many other documents, was included in the opening day packet of information for staff members. Additionally, he presented a general overview of MCAS scores on an overhead. According to the school leadership, a complete SIP was distributed to academy heads who, in turn, were to collaborate with department chairs. The PR team was told that anyone who wanted a complete document could request one from the office. There was no evidence, however, to suggest that the

administrators in the various academies all dedicated time to reviewing the plan with their respective staffs. Teachers confirmed during interviews that this did not take place in most academies. In response to the statement on the DOE *Instructional Staff Survey*, “Our school has a well-defined plan for reaching student performance goals,” 25 percent of staff “strongly agreed,” and 50 percent “agreed.” Although the Sullivan staff is aware of the school’s plans for improvement, it was not clear to the PR team that staff members possess an in-depth understanding of SIP initiatives. As a result, it is unlikely that there will be sufficient buy-in to result in successful plan implementation.

According to the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) and others interviewed, there is evidence that professional development opportunities are connected to some of the strategies in the SIP. Consultants for the school stated that they continue to work with the staff in the implementation of the *Connected Math Program (CMP)*. Training for a group of teachers and the principal in MCAS and MAP analysis is scheduled for January. A Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) consultant is also available to meet with the staff. These are indications that some aspects of the SIP are being implemented. Most of these activities are district initiatives and are viewed as such by the faculty. It remains to be made clear through a widely understood SIP how these initiatives link directly to the needs of students. The PR team does not doubt that a clear link can be described, but teachers implementing the SIP need a deeper knowledge of how the planned steps stand to improve results.

In summary, a core group of central office personnel, school administrators, and a small nucleus of teachers are the main authors of the 2005 Addendum. The plan has been briefly introduced to all faculty members amidst the opening days of school but has not been widely discussed by the whole faculty or within each academy. Although most teachers are not aware of the links to the SIP, many initiatives in the plan are being implemented as part of district-wide efforts to improve teaching and learning.

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

The PR team concluded that the staff is attempting to implement the SIP with varying degrees of success. The PR team’s observations of classrooms confirmed the use of some of the strategies identified in the SIP. The school is implementing the *Connected Math Program (CMP)* this year; professional development has focused on this.

The first *CMP* workshop took place last June, with two follow-up sessions this year provided by the publishing company. As a way to support the implementation of *CMP*, the district is providing mathematics coaches who are available to provide feedback, collaborate with teachers, share strategies, and observe classes. Members of the PR team met with the coaches who provided them with a schedule indicating that the coaches will be at the school for a total of 30 sessions between October 25 and May 2. However, because meetings are not mandatory, some teachers have not taken advantage of the opportunity to sign up for a consult. The coaches indicated that, depending on teachers’ level of understanding of the program, the implementation process may be slow without more widespread training and support.

There was evidence that some faculty members are implementing a number of strategies from the Sullivan SIP, but observations by the PR team revealed inconsistencies. The team visited a total of 14 classrooms, eight of which were math classes. In 5/8 of those classrooms, teachers appeared to be following the format of *CMP* lessons, beginning with the launch, moving to

exploration, and ending with the summary. Students in one class engaged in a data collection exercise and then analyzed their results.

It was apparent from the PR team's observations that the protocols were not being implemented in a similar fashion across classrooms. For example, it was obvious that students in some classrooms were familiar with the launch/explore/summarize lesson structure. As one teacher was telling the group they "could ask their buddies for help," students looked perplexed and asked, "Does that mean we can talk?" In another room, a teacher solved a problem on the board himself and did not ask students for their responses. In another class, a teacher simply stated, "Open your books and begin." This inconsistent implementation of *CMP* is not unexpected, given that the school is in an early phase of implementation.

The five-step problem-solving process was posted in 7/14 of the rooms the team visited. Except in two rooms, there was little evidence of TELL training initiatives. In at least one ELA classroom, the teacher was using MCAS exemplars with students. There was also evidence in several rooms that students were answering practice questions from the MCAS.

The PR team found there was not a sufficient school-wide monitoring process to ensure that all students will benefit from current initiatives. The school is divided into five academies, or learning communities, with one bilingual section. Teacher focus groups and administrators stated that all academies are responsible for the SIP but have flexibility in its implementation. For example, some utilize the PBIS program, while others have not begun implementation. A key strategy in the SIP is to provide more time for mathematics and English language arts, but what this actually means in terms of schedules varies widely from one academy to the next. Translating a plan into action across five academies in which each interprets the plan differently creates a complicated picture for leadership to monitor.

There is evidence that the staff is implementing some strategies from the SIP. Because the school is in Restructuring for mathematics, professional development is focused on the successful implementation of *CMP*, but it may need to expand its focus to provide for more widespread training and support. There is no evidence that a school-wide process exists to monitor practices and programs across the five academies. Academies are not held accountable enough for implementing the SIP.

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

As noted on the Department of Education evaluation of the Sullivan SIP, implementation benchmarks "are not specific enough to enable the leadership team to check on progress," and the outcome benchmarks "are not quantifiable in many instances." School leadership and staff talk of various assessments that are administered in the school, but there is no system or formalized process to analyze and disseminate the data, except as it relates to PBIS.

Because the SIP does not clearly identify benchmarks, it is difficult to determine if gains have been made. For example, a strategy states, "All special education students will be given a double session of math through *CMP* to better meet their learning styles." But there is no objective by which to measure student performance. Many outcome benchmarks lack desired levels of improvement, and the principal was unable to articulate any analysis of gains to date. Because the SIP does not contain precise timelines or benchmarks, it is difficult to draw conclusions about any gains.

During interviews with student support staff and administrators, the PR team heard that student behavior has improved in the school. Many attribute this to the principal and to PBIS. Two academies have implemented PBIS. A staff member said of PBIS, “This [program] has saved at least two kids that I know this year from being sent to alternative schools.” The principal made similar comments. With prompting from the PR team, the principal gathered statistics comparing out-of-school suspensions for the 2005 school year through the time of the panel review to suspensions during the same period last year. Suspensions decreased from 144 last year to 83 this year for the same time period. In the two academies utilizing PBIS, there have been substantially fewer discipline infractions: One academy had six, and the other, 8, compared to 71, 30, and 73 discipline issues in the non-PBIS learning communities. This solid evidence confirms staff members’ comments that PBIS has had a positive impact on behavior.

The school is utilizing a variety of assessments to collect data, but there is little evidence of school-wide analysis. During focus group interviews, some staff members referred to MAP and MCAS as tools for gathering data. However, this was very inconsistent across academies. One of the assistant principals shared a spreadsheet with a panel member that he “did on [his] own,” and he stated that the school “hasn’t gotten far with it.” The PR team concluded that, although the school collects data, there is not a school-wide process to analyze it. There are examples of very good use in some academies. Again, the variation from one academy to the next was a theme throughout the panel review.

In summary, the school was not able to produce data showing gains to date resulting from the SIP. The school’s staff members collect data, but without specific benchmarks and a process to analyze the information, their ability to determine any gains is limited. At the prompting of the PR team, it was discovered that suspension rates have improved dramatically this year and that PBIS academies have fewer discipline issues than non-PBIS academies. Data analysis takes place in some academies, but the process is not school-wide.

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

The PR team found mixed conditions for the successful implementation of the plan. Leadership has fostered a positive learning environment. However, the instructional leadership and the lack of clear authority to drive improvement initiatives across academies are potential issues. There have been many supports in place from the district during the development and implementation of the Addendum to the SIP, but they were not adequate to produce a high-quality plan.

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

Staff members, parents, and central office personnel are supportive of the current principal and speak favorably about his style. Panel review members found the daily management of the building and climate of the school to be positive, but they have concerns about the instructional leadership and about organization and communication across the five academies.

All groups spoke favorably about the principal’s personal approach and interactions with students. Individuals described him as “hard-working,” “enthusiastic,” and “dedicated.” They also state that he has “great energy” and is a “good listener.” In an anonymous *Instructional Staff Survey*, 75 percent either “strongly agree” or “agree” that the principal provides effective

leadership. The superintendent also stated his confidence in the principal. These strengths are important assets to the school.

The PR team concurs with the comments made by interviewees that the school climate is calm and conducive to learning, as observed during their classroom visits. Some of the academies have implemented PBIS; reviewers found the environment in the school as a whole to be positive and supportive of learning. Students were well behaved in and out of class, and reviewers noted that most were engaged in activities in the classrooms.

When asked about the top needs of the school, the principal replied that:

- “It was important for [him] to break away from the assistant principal role.”
- “Kids need to know this is a safe place.”
- He wants to “maintain the independence of academies but develop a school-wide emphasis.”

While these concerns speak to the cohesiveness within the building, they do not directly address improving student achievement. There is no emphasis on the development of sound instructional practices that bring about an increase in student performance.

MCAS data were available to the principal over the summer. The principal stated that he informed department chairs that scores were available and that he took the data to a few staff members for review. This initial review of data did not extend further to include a broad base of staff, except for a brief discussion during a fall staff meeting.

Although there are team-based structures in place such as the ILT and School Council, there are no regular and consistent meetings. The ILT has met once this year; there were no future meetings scheduled at the time of the panel review. Similarly, the Council had its first meeting during the week of December 5. Council members stated that they met monthly last year, and their next meeting was tentatively scheduled for December 15. There are no calendars or agendas for future meetings, and there are no minutes of past ones. The lack of consistent meetings with defined tasks does not foster communication across the school community.

The team agrees that leadership is making progress in the areas of managing building operations and supporting a positive school environment. However, there is not evidence to indicate that instructional leadership is currently sufficient to guide the necessary improvement efforts at Sullivan Middle School.

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

The PR team concluded that the staff is operating from an “awareness” level of the plan. Not all members are familiar with the SIP. Further, there was little evidence that the faculty has knowledge of a detailed analysis of MCAS results. In addition, the five academies operate autonomously, and there is no systemic process in place to monitor implementation of the SIP across the academies.

Many teachers indicated an awareness of the plan, but they did not have an in-depth knowledge of it. It was apparent during classroom visits that teachers are supportive of students and encourage them, but the PR team was concerned about the lack of hope for improvement expressed in the staff survey. Many open-response questions on the staff survey were negative in relation to students’ ability to succeed, given factors outside of the school. For example, teachers

tended to blame low student performance on a “transient population,” “lack of parent involvement,” “low socio-economic conditions,” and “non-parenting of students.” Teachers may not give up on students, but because of their belief system, they may not push all their students to a higher level. This attitude, combined with the lack of understanding of the SIP, does not bring about a buy-in from the staff.

Because of the autonomous nature of the academies, there is little evidence of school-wide effort to implement strategies, beginning with the dissemination of the planning document. The principal told the team that the SIP was given to assistant principals to distribute to staff in their academies. However, one assistant principal stated that it was the department heads’ responsibility to provide staff with the information and MCAS results. During a focus group, teachers stated that they had to request MCAS data from the department chairs if they wanted to see it. Aside from an item analysis and alpha list provided by central office, data were not provided to the staff based on classrooms, teams, and/or academies. As a result, interpretation of results was left to the initiatives of individual academies.

Intervention practices and the implementation of strategies also vary within the learning communities. For example, PBIS is not used in all of the academies; the same is true for after-school tutoring. In one academy, block scheduling is implemented in 90-minute sessions, while another academy “blocks off” an afternoon, when needed, for an extended science unit. Academies create their own schedules and determine how they will use the extended time for ELA and mathematics. Because there is no defined school-wide systemic process for accountability and monitoring of the plan, it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the various practices within the learning communities.

Lack of common planning is of concern to teachers. If the principal chooses to give staff his monthly meeting time of 90 minutes, they use this block of time to meet as an academy or by grade levels. However, not all staff members indicated that there are specific agendas. Without direction from the administrators, some teachers report that they discuss “fundraising” and “field trips,” which have little direct impact on student achievement. Because schedules vary among the academies, there is no consistency for meetings. Members of one team reported that they use their lunch time to collaborate. Members of another academy stated that they have no time at all to meet during the day. Another learning community’s members said that grade levels meet during their preparation period, but not all teachers are available at the same time. As a result, the staff is not able to collaborate, share strategies, and discuss instructional programs.

In summary, the PR team concluded that many staff members have only a surface understanding of the SIP. Academies have great flexibility in determining their schedules, intervention policies, and the manner by which they will implement the SIP. Because there are no defined parameters and because there is no system in place for monitoring practices, the PR team concluded that there is no evidence of a school-wide accountability system.

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

The school received planning support and guidance from the district, but it was not adequate to produce a high-quality plan. Also, there is little evidence that central office monitors the plan. The complete document of 2004-2006 was written in accordance with the Performance Improvement Mapping Process (PIM) under the leadership of the former principal and three

teachers. The present 2005-2006 Addendum is the active document, according to the principal; it was developed by the present principal and by a small team from the school, with central office support. Although central office disseminated MCAS data to the school, it was not useful as presented. There has been little training in analysis of data, so administrators and staff members have limited capacity to use it on their own.

Upon submission to the district, the school's plan was reviewed by two members of the central office. They found sections of the plan to be inadequate and, according to the principal, a process of correcting, returning, amending, and again returning the plan to them occurred two to three times. During this period, the principal met with district individuals and worked with the school support specialist to rewrite the document. The PR team believes that, ultimately, the plan was accepted by the district. Although the plan is improved over past documents, the end result does not meet the Department of Education standards for a clear and coherent SIP, as determined by the DOE plan review team (separate from the PR team).

Interviews with the ILT, teacher focus groups, and central office staff members confirmed that MCAS data reports were sent to the school by the district. The leadership team and principal stated that they received the state MCAS reports provided by the Department of Education, as well as an item analysis provided by the district. Although the central office views the item breakdown as a key tool, teachers and department heads expressed that it was not useful, or they were unclear about how to use it.

MCAS data are presented as an alpha list for the whole school. The task of pulling out students by academies or classes is difficult. The department heads reported that there was no one currently on staff who had good skills with Test Wiz to break the data down further. In the absence of a school-wide process, individuals have gone about data analysis in a number of ways. One teacher borrowed the list from a department head and hand-copied his students' scores. Another staff member stated that he discussed the results with another teacher. Another teacher said that the results in his academy were charted by "a teacher who is strong in data." These commendable efforts by individuals exist with an absence of school-wide practices for examining student results.

There are many district personnel in place to provide support: the quadrant manager, school support specialist, middle school coordinator of academic support, "No Child Left Behind" manager, and curriculum coordinators in mathematics and ELA. The team learned through interviews that there is a school support specialist trained by the Department of Education in the district and that she is funded from the Title I budget. Because Sullivan is not classified as a Title I school, a question exists as to how much support this person can provide to the school.

There is no evidence that there is a plan in place at the district level to consistently monitor the school plan. The district personnel report that they hear about progress indirectly from department heads. They report that they will be implementing handheld software to measure implementation of *CMP*, but the system is not yet in place. Without a clear venue for monitoring the plan, there is no process for feedback and accountability.

The superintendent reported that monitoring is a priority for the district. The staff appears to be in place to complete this work, and systems are being developed to collect data. However, the school was not able to produce any evidence that it had been gathering data on the plan's implementation. In short, there was a disconnect for the PR team between the existence of

human and other resources and the lack of evidence that the school has been gathering data regularly on its progress.

In summary, there has been guidance and support from central office, but the school did not produce a high-quality plan. While the superintendent noted the importance of monitoring, there is no evidence that this is occurring at the school level. The PR team was left with a number of inconsistencies between what it heard during school-level interviews regarding the data review and planning process and the district's expectations regarding these activities.

CONCLUSION

The principal, along with a small nucleus of staff and support from central office, wrote the SIP 2005-2006 Addendum. While it lacks clear analysis and a manageable process for benchmarking progress, the plan is a step forward from past documents. Neither the new Addendum nor any past plan was clearly communicated to the staff this year, and many staff members report being unfamiliar with the planning document. Although they are not understood as such, initiatives mentioned in the plan are being implemented. Most notably, *CMP* is being rolled out with ongoing professional development.

Parents, staff members, and district personnel spoke favorably about the principal's personal approach and good relationships with students. The PR team found the daily management of the school and climate to be positive, but the panel was concerned about the instructional leadership of the principal, as well as about the communication and accountability across the five academies. There is evidence of district support, but this support has not yet resulted in a strong benchmarking process at the school level. Only upon being prompted by the PR team was the school able to create and produce a report that showed actual progress toward one of its stated goals.

APPENDIX A
Team Members

Ledyard McFadden, Panel Review Chair, SchoolWorks LLC, Beverly, MA

Patty O'Leary, Panel Review Co-Chair, SchoolWorks LLC, Beverly, MA

Emily Finkel, Panel Review Coordinator, Massachusetts Department of Education, Malden, MA

Catherine Carney, Panelist, School Support Specialist, Boston, MA

Edward Costa, Panelist, Superintendent of Schools, East Longmeadow, MA

Pat DiPillo, Panelist, Latin Teacher, Marlboro High School, Marlboro, MA

Spencer Mullin, Panelist, Principal, Daniel Joyce Middle School, Woburn, MA

APPENDIX B
Sullivan Middle School
Worcester Public Schools
POTENTIALLY UNDER-PERFORMING PANEL REVIEW SCHEDULE
December 6 and 7, 2005

Day 1

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

Day 2

All activities take place at the school.

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

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

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

	Panelist A	Panelist B	Panelist C	Panelist D	Panelist E
9-10 <i>a.m.</i>	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 <i>a.m.</i>	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 <i>p.m.</i>	Teacher Focus Group 1		Teacher Focus Group 3		Prepare report
1:30-2:00 <i>p.m.</i>	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.

APPENDIX C