



Gerena Montessori Community School
Springfield Public Schools
SCHOOL REVIEW

September 2009

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Overview

To meet state accountability requirements,¹ schools in restructuring are being reviewed for the purpose of providing a progress report to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. These schools will be visited for two days to ensure that the review team has sufficient time to be able to describe improvement efforts (including district supports) and conditions at the school.

This report, by a review team of contracted Department of Elementary and Secondary Education consultants, profiles the trends in student achievement at the Gerena Montessori Community School over the last three years and responds to two overarching key questions based on evidence collected while on site.

Key Question 1: To what extent have the school and the district demonstrated the capacity to improve student achievement?

Key Question 2: Are the conditions in place to continue to support student achievement?

The visit to the Gerena Montessori Community School is also part of the District Plan for School Intervention (DPSI) review for the Springfield Public Schools. The purpose of the DPSI review, being conducted in certain urban school districts, is to assess district efforts to support school intervention, including strategic decisions made to support ongoing school improvement. It also seeks to assess the impact of support given by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) for improvement efforts. DPSI reviews also carry out requirements for state audits of districts.²

The visit to Gerena Montessori Community School was conducted from June 3-4, 2009. Further information about the review and the schedule can be found in Appendix B; information about the members of the review team can be found in Appendix A.

¹ Under 603 CMR 2.00.

² See Mass. Gen. Laws c. 15, § 55A, as amended by St. 2008, c. 311, § 3, effective August 14, 2008.

Gerena Montessori Community School

School Profile

Gerena Montessori Community School (Gerena), then K-8, was one of the open schools constructed in the 1970's. In 1998 – due to district opening of a 1,500-seat middle school across the street – Gerena faced changes that resulted in enrollment reductions. In the 2005-2006 school year – as a result of district boundary changes – Gerena's student population shifted once again.

In September 2006, in an effort to address these challenges, the former superintendent reassigned the principal of the district's first and only public Montessori school to the Gerena School. The intent was to transform Gerena from the original Arts-Through-Technology magnet school to a Montessori magnet school. As a result of the reorganization and contract issues in the district, nearly 100 percent of the school's staff changed at this time.

Gerena Montessori Community School currently serves pre-kindergarten through grade five students. The school has experienced fluctuating enrollment the past four years, increasing from 648 students in the 2004-2005 school year to 710 students in 2006-2007 and then decreasing to 639 students in 2007-2008. In the fall of the 2008-2009 school year, Gerena enrolled 760 students. In June 2009, enrollment had increased to 809 students. During 2008-2009, Gerena experienced significant student mobility: 333 students entered the school after September, and 225 had left Gerena from the beginning of the school year to the time of the site visit.

The school serves a large population of English language learners. Nearly 25 percent of the school's students have limited English proficiency, compared to 13 percent in the Springfield Public Schools. Gerena also serves a large percentage of students with special needs (20.8 percent), including students with severe disabilities from across the district in life skills, Apraxic, and developmental programs.

Student demographic and sub group information for the 2008-2009 academic year is provided in the following table (reported October 1, 2008).

Table 1: Gerena Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Selected Populations 2008-2009

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Percent of Total	Selected Populations	Percent of Total
African American	11.3%	First language not English	35.4%
Asian	0.5%	Limited English proficient	24.5%
Hispanic or Latino	79.7%	From low-income families	83.2%
Native American	0%	Special education	20.8%
White	9.0%	Free-lunch	78.6%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0%	Reduced-price lunch	4.6%
Multi-race, Non-Hispanic	5.6%	Homeless	6.4%

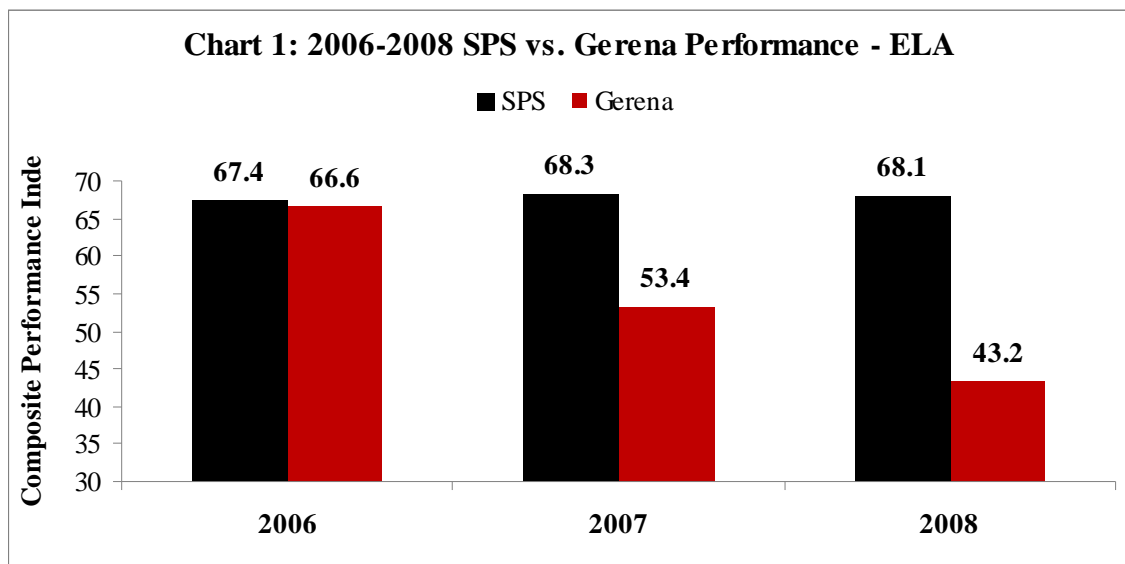
Student Performance

In 2008, Gerena did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in English language arts (ELA) or mathematics. This is the fourth year since 2003 that the school did not make AYP in the aggregate or in subgroups in ELA and mathematics. The school currently has an NCLB (No Child Left Behind) status of Restructuring Year 2 in both ELA and mathematics. Historical details are included in the following table.

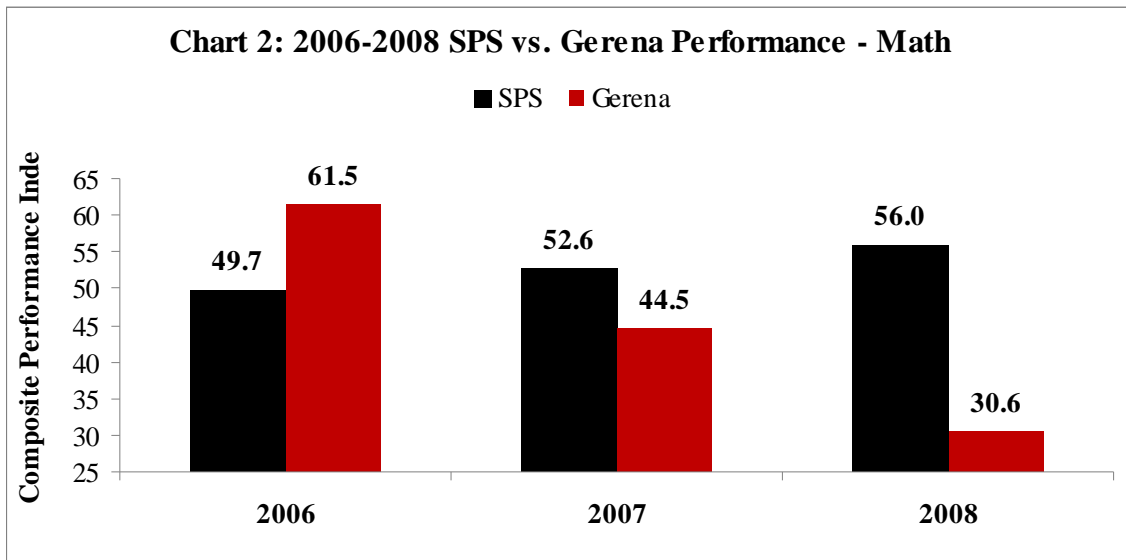
Table 2: Gerena Adequate Yearly Progress History

		2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	NCLB Accountability Status
ELA	Aggregate	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Restructuring Year 2
	All Subgroups	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	
Math	Aggregate	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Restructuring Year 2
	All Subgroups	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	

From 2006 to 2008, the performance of Gerena students on the ELA MCAS declined in each consecutive year. The composite performance index (CPI) decreased from 66.6 in 2006 to 43.2 in 2008. In each year, the gap between Gerena students and Springfield Public Schools' students continued to widen. The district's CPI in ELA remained relatively stable over the three years.



Gerena Montessori Community School's CPI in mathematics decreased in each of the two consecutive years after 2006, when the school's performance was significantly higher than the district's. The total CPI decrease from 2006 to 2008 for Gerena was 30.9 points. In 2008, the school's performance was significantly lower than the district's in mathematics. The Springfield Public Schools' CPI increased from 2006 to 2008 in mathematics.



Key Question 1: To what extent have the school and the district demonstrated the capacity to improve student achievement?

Improving student achievement through implementation of Montessori programming is a major focus at Gerena, a task that school leaders indicated takes several years to successfully complete. Because the Montessori model is the primary improvement initiative being used to turn around performance at the school, its implementation will be the focus of this report.

Gerena has a well-articulated school improvement plan (SIP). The recent addendum addresses changes being made to implement the Montessori model, as well as key areas of focus for improving student achievement. Processes for monitoring improvement strategies in the classroom have focused primarily on the fidelity of implementation of the Montessori model and less on other SIP goals. There have been extensive efforts to implement literacy interventions. The Gerena program has been well-supported by the district.

Findings under Key Question 1

Implementation of the Montessori model has been a primary improvement initiative at the school in the last two years.

Gerena is in the process of phasing in the Montessori program. Planning began during the 2006-2007 school year and rollout occurred in the 2007-2008 school year at the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten levels (children's house). Grades 1-3 (elementary 1) began implementation in 2008-2009 and the school planned to introduce the model in grades 4-5 (elementary 2) in 2009-2010.

The school has put significant effort into implementation of the Montessori model in the last two years. In addition to the principal, several key instructional leaders with experience in the Montessori model were brought to the school. These individuals serve in instructional leadership specialist (ILS)/Montessori resource specialist positions. The school has targeted each of the ILSs to support implementation at a specific grade span (i.e., pre-kindergarten-kindergarten, grades 1-3, grades 4-5) with the ILS for grades 4-5 focusing on Montessori implementation during 2009-2010.

Introducing key components of the Montessori model has been central at the school: for example, implementation and organization of the "great work period," which is an approximately three-hour-long morning block dedicated to academic instruction and independent student work and practice. There has also been a significant focus on establishing a classroom environment that suits the Montessori model and ensuring availability of materials for teachers' and students' use.

Extensive professional development has been committed to this model. Teachers in grades where Montessori had been implemented (pre-kindergarten-grade 3 in 2008-2009) reported receiving intensive professional development through the Center for Contemporary Montessori Programs (CCMP) at the College of St. Catherine. Successful completion of the training (including class work and observations) leads to a master's degree. All Gerena teachers who teach in the Montessori classrooms have earned or are in the process of earning Montessori certification and

a master's degree. Seventeen teachers attended the national Montessori conference, which in focus groups attendees reported demonstrated the leadership's support of the model. Teachers also reported ongoing work to ensure that classrooms have Montessori materials and that they are being used effectively. As a result of professional development and the school's Montessori focus, a school leader stated, "There is now a lot of leadership rising in the teachers." There is a strong belief that the school is improving as a result of implementation of this model.

Gerena has a well-articulated SIP that was collaboratively developed and is subject to quarterly review. It centers on effective implementation of the Montessori model and improving student skills.

Implementation of the Montessori model is a key improvement initiative and is a strategy identified in the SIP as central to increasing student achievement. Gerena has also identified areas of student skill weakness that require improvement. Gerena's SIP includes specific improvement objectives, strategies, and outcomes.

Administrators and teachers described a collaborative process for creating the original SIP and the addendum, developed in the November 2008 at the request of the new superintendent. Content-area teams including administrators and teachers reviewed MCAS data and developed goals to address student learning needs in ELA (non-fiction text and writing), mathematics (number sense and place value) and science (Earth and space). In focus groups, teachers in the various grades spoke to the specific action steps that their grade was taking to progress toward the SIP goals. For example, pre-kindergarten-kindergarten teachers reported that they promoted Montessori materials that focus on numeracy and place value. Fourth and fifth grade teachers (non-Montessori) suggested that the Writers' Express training that they received in 2008-2009 was very effective and said that they liked being able to implement single lessons in a flexible manner, depending on the needs of the student.

In addition to objectives, strategies, and outcomes, the recently written SIP addendum also lists professional development goals and plans for monitoring student performance, as well as methods to support teachers' improved instructional practice. In focus groups, Gerena teachers reported receiving professional development centered on ELA, mathematics, and science goals. Teachers described asking for professional development during the year that focused on guided reading and non-fiction texts. Two weeks later on a Saturday, the principal had arranged for district-level professional development to be held at Gerena on these topics. Teachers also cited ongoing work to ensure that Montessori materials and resources, especially in mathematics and science, address SIP goals.

The district has begun to implement a quarterly review process to monitor implementation of SIP strategies and progress towards goals. In response to this, Gerena administered a survey to help the school reflect on the implementation of improvement initiatives. The survey was administered quarterly this year. In focus groups, teachers and administrators indicated that they participated in this process. Survey results from the third quarter indicated that interventions in ELA were being implemented to some extent or were being fully implemented (80% of respondents). This is an increase from the end of the first quarter, where only 50% of

respondents answered affirmatively. In response to the question, “What SIP strategy has been done well?”, one respondent noted, “A collegial community of dedicated teachers willing to work on goals has been created.”

Processes to monitor improvement in classroom practice have focused primarily on the Montessori model and less on strategies to address student learning weaknesses outlined in the SIP.

Data review and analyses conducted to inform the SIP pointed teachers toward areas in which student performance required improvement (e.g., non-fiction text and writing, number sense and place). This has provided the school with some focus on content and skills assessed by the state test. School improvement work, however, has revolved mainly around monitoring implementation of the Montessori model and less around implementation of strategies to improve student skills.

Professional development time at the beginning of the 2008-2009 school year was used to focus on the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and the most tested standards. Upon identification of the most tested standards, teachers reported that they identified Montessori resources available in classrooms that could be used to target them. Based on this list, two walk-throughs were conducted later in the year that focused on the resources that were available and used in pre-kindergarten-grade 3 classrooms.

In focus groups, school leaders and teachers reported that regular classroom walk-throughs take place in pre-kindergarten through grade 3, primarily designed to review implementation of the Montessori model. Teachers also participate in walk-throughs, a practice implemented so that teachers can learn from each other. This has been particularly important since some Gerena teachers have been implementing the Montessori model longer than others. Walk-throughs have focused on implementation of morning meetings and presentations (mini lessons), structure of the great work period and accessibility of resources. In addition, pre-kindergarten through grade 3 teachers reported that they receive feedback on observations through master’s degree coursework and that the ILSs conduct weekly and, sometimes, daily visits to classrooms, providing both written and oral feedback on practices.

At the upper grades (grades 4-5), teachers reported receiving only two formal observations a year, as part of the standard evaluation process, unless they reach out to leadership and request an observation and feedback. The only formalized feedback upper-grade teachers have received is from two district learning walks conducted in the fall of 2008. The results were reported in the form of trends and did not provide individual feedback to improve teaching and learning.

In focus groups, teachers indicated that there has not been an explicit or concentrated focus on the implementation of SIP goals. While non-fiction text is the literacy area identified as a priority in the SIP, elementary 1 teachers reported receiving only one schoolwide training in this area, which, per teacher request, occurred in the winter. Children’s house teachers reported in a focus group that two team meetings in the fall centered on non-fiction text but that since then, the focus has been on mathematics through understanding and use of Montessori materials. Schoolwide,

teachers also indicated that feedback from classroom observations has not been targeted to the non-fiction text SIP goal. A teacher noted in the quarterly SIP review that, “PD for ELA implementation needs to be aligned to goals—especially non-fiction text.”

Currently, the school’s primary task is implementation of the Montessori model. Many practices, which are working well, have been established to ensure fidelity of implementation to the model. As a result, Gerena has focused less on specific state standards: that is, content or student skill areas where students have been determined to need improvement.

The district has provided resources, personnel, and training support to assist with improvement efforts.

Many programs at Gerena have been supported by the district. The school’s Montessori program has been realized through magnet funds—a federal grant that was written on behalf of the school by the district. This grant supports many of the school’s current improvement initiatives, funding staff training in the Montessori model, additional personnel to support the Montessori program, and a range of resources necessary to implement the model.

Through magnet funds and Title I funds, as well as other district and community resources, Gerena has been able to provide after-school learning opportunities for students. From September through December 2008, 100 grade 1-5 students received additional core mathematics and ELA support in after-school programs two days a week. Learn It, funded by the district, ran twelve weeks in the winter for 3rd-to-5th grade students. Parallel to this program, the school tapped into community resources and engaged Smith College students to conduct an enrichment program (i.e., garden club, newspaper, book club and visual arts) that was overseen by Gerena teachers. This combination of programs enabled students to participate in after-school learning consistently, five days a week.

The district has supported Gerena’s service team program, designed to problem-solve specific student needs and design interventions before referral for additional support services. In 2007-2008, the district provided funding for consulting services to assist the school in implementing the program by providing monthly support and ensuring the effectiveness of meetings and the process. Monies also provided additional compensation for teachers to attend uninterrupted meetings before or after school. In 2008-2009, the program was only partially funded by the district, but because of its commitment to the program, Gerena identified additional school-based funds and was able to run the program fully. In focus groups, administrators and teachers reported that the service team program had increased their knowledge and capacity to support a diverse student population and that it has had a positive impact. Data shared by the school’s leadership team revealed that in 2008-2009, of the 150 students brought up in the service team meetings, only one student was referred for special education services.

Because the school is a Montessori magnet, the district has worked with Gerena’s principal on unique staffing allocations. District-supported ILSs also assume some responsibilities for the magnet program. The district was to provide the school with three ILS positions for the 2009-2010 school year to provide support for the program in each of three grade-cluster houses (pre-

kindergarten-kindergarten, grades 1 to 3, grades 4 and 5). This staffing configuration aligns best with the Montessori approach and with the Montessori training offered for those different grade clusters.

Gerena teachers and administrators spoke highly of the professional development offered by the district, including Project LEAD, Second Step, Responsive Classroom, Writers' Express, English Language Learner (ELL) training in the categories mandated by the Department, and a guided reading workshop provided by a district employee at the request of Gerena teachers. In addition to these trainings, the district has offered a two-day summer institute, in which staff members choose sessions that are specific to their interests from a large number of offerings. Several teachers new to Gerena spoke positively about this institute.

Key Question 2: Are the conditions in place to continue to support student achievement?

The school has a strong leadership team with extensive experience in the Montessori model. Gerena has done significant and effective work to create a collaborative culture around the Montessori program and to build staff capacity to implement the model with fidelity. At the time of the review, the Montessori model was in only its second year of implementation and, by design, had yet to be rolled out at the upper grades. At least two years of data are needed to understand the impact of the Montessori model, the school's key improvement strategy, on the Gerena population.

The school has begun to use data to understand school needs and student achievement. A data management system is being rolled out to ensure that teachers have a range of student information to use to individualize programming. Gerena has established a range of literacy interventions that are being used to support student skill development. However, the school has no clearly defined approach to delivering literacy and reading instruction at the classroom level. The rigor of instruction varies across Gerena classrooms.

It is not yet clear how well implementation of the Montessori model will meet the needs of Gerena's student population.

There are differences between the Gerena Montessori Community School and the district's other Montessori program. The other district Montessori program has been successful. As a full magnet program, the other school enrolls students from throughout the city who choose a Montessori education. On the contrary, Gerena is predominantly a neighborhood school, with a small portion of magnet seats. While the magnet seats can be filled by students citywide, most students who enroll at Gerena have opted into its Montessori program based on the area of the city in which they live.

Gerena enrolls a diverse student population. Nearly 25 percent of the school's students are English language learners and 20 percent require special education services. Furthermore, student mobility at Gerena has consistently been high. During 2008-2009, for example, Gerena received 333 new students and lost 225 students.

A key component of the Montessori model is to build students' independence and excitement over their learning. These are typically taught in the early grades, with students gaining self-discipline by the middle elementary grades. These are attributes that are built; students who enter Gerena in the later elementary school years may not have them. The school is planning to have a transition room for each grade cluster to ease the transition of new students to the Montessori model and to conduct initial assessments of students' academic levels. This transition plan may yield positive results for students entering Gerena, but it will not have an impact on students moving from Gerena to other district schools, where there will likely be notable differences in the instructional approach.

While internal assessment data (district benchmark and school-based assessments) have shown progress for students during 2008-2009, it is not yet clear if the Montessori model will lead to increased achievement for Gerena and its students over time. As the school continues to

implement the Montessori model, it will be important for both the school and the district to track multiple data sources to ensure that increased achievement, making modifications as necessary.

The school has taken some steps to use data to understand school needs and student achievement. Systems to advance data use in accordance with the Montessori model are being established.

The school uses a range of data to understand student performance. Teachers receive class profile and student MCAS data in the fall, as well as information from the district benchmark assessments in mathematics and ELA. These data are reviewed quarterly to reflect on student performance and achievement of SIP goals. School leaders also use this information to inform professional development and make determinations about what materials to purchase and how best to allocate resources.

In mathematics, the school uses an internally-developed assessment in the lower grades focused on Montessori materials; this assessment will be expanded with the model. In focus groups, teachers reported also using observation and anecdotal records to understand student learning. The school uses multiple literacy assessments as progress monitoring tools, including: Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) three times per year and the Words Their Way spelling inventory.

Results from these assessments are reviewed bi-weekly during team meetings. In focus groups, teachers reported reviewing student performance data and identifying trends in student achievement. The school, for example, has noted growth in student proficiency rates in ELA based on district and school-based assessment results. In addition to understanding student performance, data are used primarily to identify students' intervention needs (see page 12).

Because Gerena is in the process of implementing the Montessori model, use of the Montessori Express (MEx), a type of data warehouse and management system, is being phased in. MEx is a vehicle teachers use to write and store lesson plans (called presentations), to select appropriate Montessori materials for students' instruction, and to track student learning and mastery of presentations. Data from MEx include the presentations each student has received (i.e., the content delivered to different individuals), which stay in the MEx system. This allows all Gerena teachers access to each of their students' instructional histories. In future years, this will include complete student profiles and data histories, including MCAS, to provide teachers with knowledge of their incoming students. This is central to the Montessori approach to individualizing student learning. Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers were trained in the use of MEx in 2008-2009 and received laptops to facilitate its use. The other grade clusters will receive similar training, with 1st-to-3rd grade teachers starting with MEx in 2009-2010 and 4th and 5th grade teachers in 2010-2011.

Gerena has initiated the process of reviewing and using data to understand both school improvement and individual student achievement. The MEx system will increase capacity to use data at the school and holds promise for the future, but at the time of the review the system was in use only for the school's youngest students.

Gerena has established a variety of interventions to support students’ literacy development.

Implementation of ELA interventions has been a key initiative across grades. In 2008-2009, the administrators and teachers at Gerena Montessori Community School took an all-hands-on-deck approach and organized a range of ELA interventions intended to increase literacy skills for all students. Staff participate in supporting this improvement initiative schoolwide.

Core academic instruction in Montessori classrooms is delivered each morning during the great work period. Montessori classrooms are organized so that half are ELL inclusion and half are special education inclusion. This enables each class to have at least one teaching assistant, thus increasing individualized instruction and attention to student needs throughout the day. In addition to the instruction provided during the great work period, students receive instruction on the basis of their skill and grade level.

All kindergarten students receive an additional literacy block each afternoon, while the pre-kindergarten students have “encore” (or specials classes) and a nap. During this time, the teachers conduct an hour of guided reading with their kindergarten students and provide them with an hour of writers’ workshop instruction, sometimes combining classes and co-teaching with another kindergarten teacher.

In first grade, students with weak phonics skills participate in the literacy boost program, which provides them with developmentally appropriate, direct instruction literacy lessons by allowing them to participate in lessons with kindergarten students. In focus groups, teachers and school leaders spoke about the positive impact this intervention has been having on student achievement, as well as on student confidence.

Students in the lower grades may be partnered with a 4th or 5th grade struggling reader who reads aloud to them at lunch. This practice, teachers reported, has had the dual benefit of boosting the older students’ basic reading skills and confidence, while exposing the younger students to quality literature read aloud.

Students in grades 2 through 5 who are struggling readers receive interventions by the encore (or specials) teachers, who push in to the great work period two to three times a week. The encore teachers were trained to provide this literacy intervention by the ELA ILS and reported success with the model. Beyond these three programs for intervention, individual students may receive interventions through the literacy support teachers or the reading recovery teacher through Lexia, Sonday, Read Naturally, Read Well or Reading by the Rules.

In focus groups, school leaders reported that initial results indicate that students’ literacy skills are developing, attributing much of the improvement to intervention. Additional adults in Gerena classrooms and targeted intervention programs provide increased opportunities for direct and explicit instruction to occur, often the most effective assistance for students who are struggling.

There is no clear approach to literacy or reading instruction in the classroom.

By design, the Montessori model provides teachers with the flexibility to decide, on the basis of individual student needs, how and when to deliver instruction. During focus groups, school

administrators confirmed that teachers have flexibility in instructional delivery. Teachers may structure the great work period so that alternating days focus on mathematics and literacy instruction. During 22 classroom visits during the great work period, the review team found more mathematics than literacy instruction and noted only a few explicit reading lessons. The evidence of students participating in reading activities showed them reading primarily independently, rather than being engaged in explicit instruction to develop reading skills.

Classroom visits and focus groups also indicated the lack of a common approach to reading instruction (e.g., using the Montessori Literacy Curriculum or using guided reading). While the review team observed Montessori materials for teaching students about letters, sounds, and reading fundamentals, little evidence of direct instruction in vocabulary development or other elements of reading was noted. In focus groups, teachers were not able to articulate a clear, schoolwide progression for teaching reading to students. Some teachers cited mini-lessons (presentations), while others cited worksheets as the primary method for delivering reading instruction. In the lower grades, where the Montessori model is the focus, teachers had varying degrees of knowledge of guided reading as an instructional practice—a strategy that is key to developing reading skills in young children, in particular those who are not reading at grade level.

At the time of the site visit, the non-Montessori grades four and five used a guided reading model. While increased evidence of direct reading instruction was observed in these classrooms, focus groups with these teachers also revealed varied methods of teaching reading. Some teachers indicated that it was a daily practice and others, weekly. Some teachers described rotating to provide instruction during students' independent reading. Other teachers reported that reading instruction was accomplished through the use of leveled books and corresponding worksheets to practice learned skills. During classroom visits, however, the review team noted only two instances of teachers using guided reading to support students' literacy development.

The school focused many of its training efforts in 2008-2009 on literacy. The survey completed by teachers in January 2009 indicated that 89 percent had received training in the Montessori Literacy Curriculum, 78 percent in Writer's Workshop, and 85 percent in Writers' Express. Professional development has also focused on literacy interventions (the school lists ten training sessions in 2008-2009 on literacy interventions). However, there has been little focus on literacy content, such as genre or non-fiction, the literacy area in which improving student achievement was described as a priority in the school's SIP (see page 7). In focus groups, teachers cited non-fiction as an area in which increased training and follow-through is needed.

The school described processes to begin to align Montessori programming with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks through the development of exit standards in grades 1-3. This work may help increase focus at the school on standards-based literacy instruction.

Now, however, the primary method of providing direct reading and ELA instruction to students is through interventions (see page 12). While the use of multiple interventions is evident and the school reported that as a result students' performance on internal assessments had improved, it is unclear how literacy fundamentals are taught during the great work period—the school's core

instructional period. This is of particular concern since student performance on the MCAS in ELA declined significantly from 2006 to 2008, indicating that students are performing below grade level. In addition to interventions, a consistent approach to teaching reading and literacy to students through direct classroom instruction may help to improve performance.

The rigor of instruction varied across Gerena classrooms.

A key component of the Montessori approach is to build students' independence and excitement over learning. Also inherent to the Montessori model is flexibility through its student-centered approach. During great work time, students engage in independent work individualized to their specific learning needs. While some students work with a peer on mathematics concepts, others could be working individually to practice literacy skills. Evidence of students independently engaging in learning tasks varied from classroom to classroom.

The review team conducted visits to 22 classrooms across content areas and grades. The use of supplemental materials aligned with students' developmental level and/or level of English proficiency was noted as a strength of the school. In 84 percent of classrooms visited, the review team noted solid evidence of differentiated materials. Students were observed using bead chains and tactile grids for mathematics lessons, as well as shapes and symbols for grammar lessons. Students were also observed using the same materials in a differentiated manner. While pre-kindergarten students were observed counting beads, kindergarten students were observed making patterns of five and counting by fives. In almost every Gerena classroom, the review team also noted more than one adult. This allowed for increased differentiation and individualization of learning tasks.

The review team observed inconsistency in the rigor of instructional practice; that is, rigorous instruction was detected in some, but not all, classrooms. Rigor was defined by means of the following indicators: (1) questions requiring students to engage in a process of application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation; (2) opportunities for students to apply new knowledge and content; (3) students articulating their thinking and reasoning; and, (4) students inquiring, exploring, or problem-solving together, in pairs or in small groups.

The review team found no classrooms where there was solid evidence of questions that required students to engage in a process of application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Partial evidence of this indicator was observed in 23 percent (n=22) of the classrooms (e.g., a teacher was observed asking a combination of inference and recall-based questions about a read-aloud), while no evidence of this indicator was found in 77 percent of the classrooms. As to students articulating their thinking, the review team found solid evidence in 9 percent of the classrooms in the context of small reading groups (e.g., a teacher asked students to give the evidence in the text for their opinions on plot and characters). In 50 percent of the classrooms, the review team did not see any evidence of students articulating thinking and reasoning.

A review of student work reflected variation in instructional time and approach. The sample of student work reviewed also indicated, across grades, a lack of clear expectations for student work. A sampling of 1st graders' work had one writing entry a week that was generally three to

four sentences long, without punctuation, and without teacher feedback. Second grade samples were of a similar frequency, and the topics were all personal narratives. In third grade, only two students wrote in paragraph structure. The others wrote personal narratives of one to two sentences. The review team did not find evidence of a definition, by grade, of what quality work looks like.

Some classrooms visited by the review team possessed some characteristics of effective instruction, but other classrooms lacked the rigor necessary to continue to challenge students. The school, in accordance with the Montessori model, is providing a differentiated and individualized learning experience for most of its students, especially those in the lower grades. Instructional practice has yet to focus on higher-order thinking skills, which were observed neither in teacher questions nor student interactions. As teachers at Gerena continue to become proficient with the implementation of the Montessori model, improvement of instructional practices is the next step toward providing a rigorous learning environment.

Appendix A: Gerena Montessori Community School Review Team Members

The review of the Gerena Montessori Community School in the Springfield Public Schools was conducted from June 3 to June 4, 2009 by a team of educators from SchoolWorks, LLC on behalf of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Anne Lane, Project Manager, SchoolWorks

Katherine Graves Maycock, Consultant, SchoolWorks

Appendix B: Review Activities and Schedule

Activities conducted at the Gerena Montessori Community School

The following activities were conducted as part of the review of the Gerena Montessori Community School, Springfield Public Schools.

- The team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the Gerena Montessori Community School:
 - School leadership team, including: principal, assistant principals, magnet resource teachers, ILSs, ELA collaborative professional development teacher, arts integration specialist, school counselor, after-school coordinator, special education team leader, Montessori mentors
 - Pre-kindergarten-5th grade teachers in literacy, mathematics, social studies, and science
 - Social/emotional behavior teacher
 - Special education and ELL inclusion teachers
 - Encore teachers including general music teacher, science teacher, and librarian
 - 4th and 5th grade students
- The team conducted 22 classroom visits at the school from pre-kindergarten to grade 5 in various subjects.
- The DPSI review team reviewed the following documents at the district and school levels:
 - Gerena NCLB report card 2008-2009
 - Gerena School profile
 - Springfield Public Schools enrollment and performance data reports
 - School improvement plan, addendum, and quarterly review results
 - Samplings of: lesson plans, professional development agendas and surveys, team meeting notes from leadership, children's house, elementary 1, elementary 2, encore, and low-incidence teams
 - Professional development calendar
 - District learning walk notes
 - List of school interventions and individuals trained on them
 - Kindergarten reading assessment and reading recovery data
 - Montessori exit standards (for grades 1-3)

Schedule for review of Gerena Montessori Community School

Gerena Montessori Community School Day 1 - June 3rd, 2009, Wednesday		
Time	Team member 1	Team member 2
8:00 – 8:45	Team arrives at school; morning meeting	
8:45 – 9:30	Focus group with school leadership	
9:30 – 12:00	Classroom visits	Classroom visits
12:00 – 1:00	Lunch; mid-day meeting and team debrief	
1:00 – 1:30	Teacher focus group	
1:30 – 2:00	Focus group with school-based coaches/specialists	
2:00 – 2:30	Focus group with school leadership/improvement planning team	
2:30 – 3:00	Student focus group	
3:00 – 4:30	Team debrief; evidence sorting	
Gerena Montessori Community School Day 2 - June 4th, 2009, Thursday		
Time	Team member 1	Team member 2
8:00 – 8:45	Team arrives at school and morning meeting	
8:45 – 9:45	Document review/Follow-up with school leadership	
9:45 – 11:45	Classroom visits	Classroom visits
11:45 – 12:45	Lunch; mid-day meeting and team debrief	
12:50 – 1:35	Focus group—team time with elementary 1	
1:35 – 2:30	Team debrief; evidence sorting	
2:30 – 3:15	Focus group—team time with children’s house	
3:15 – 4:30	Team debrief; evidence sorting	
4:30 – 5:30	Team report of evidence and key learnings	