



Worcester Public Schools
DISTRICT PLAN FOR SCHOOL INTERVENTION (DPSI)
REVIEW

July 2009

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
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Overview of the District Plan for School Intervention (DPSI) Review

The purpose of the eight DPSI reviews is to assess district efforts to support school intervention, including strategic decisions made to support ongoing school improvement. These reviews also seek 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.¹

The review is designed around the District Plan for School Intervention (DPSI) approved by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in June 2008 for each of the urban school districts being reviewed. The DPSI, which serves as the guiding document to support and hold accountable Commonwealth Priority Schools (CPSs), is unique to each district and its schools. The DPSI serves as the foundation for the review, ensuring that each district's unique priorities, current improvement strategies, and key decisions are central to the review. In addition, the review considers other key documents, processes, and initiatives that have been central to the development and implementation of district intervention strategies and Department support efforts in recent years. These include, for example, the District Leadership Report on the Essential Conditions, the State Review Panel report, and the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the district and the state.

The review places a team of contracted Department consultants in the district and its schools to collect and analyze evidence about district efforts to support school intervention, the evolution and current status of school intervention and improvement strategies, and the impact of Department efforts to support the district. This evidence includes documentation provided by the district and by the Department, interviews with Department staff, and focus groups and interviews at the central office level, as well as visits to Commonwealth Priority Schools. In some districts, reviews also include visits to schools in restructuring.² While on site at schools, the review team reviews school documents, conducts focus groups, and visits classrooms.

The review places a value on engaging the district in understanding its own performance.

The DPSI review to the Worcester Public Schools was conducted from April 27 – May 8, 2009. The DPSI review included visits to the following district schools: Canterbury School (PK-6), Roosevelt School (PK-6), Goddard School of Science and Technology (PK-6), Woodland Academy (PK-6), Claremont Academy (7-12), and Worcester East Middle School (7-8). Note that the team has also produced separate reports for reviews of Woodland Academy, Claremont Academy and Worcester East Middle School. Further information about the review and its

¹ See Mass. Gen. Laws c. 15, § 55A, as amended by St. 2008, c. 311, § 3, effective August 14, 2008.

² With respect to Commonwealth Priority Schools and schools in restructuring, see 603 CMR 2.00, available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr2.html?section=all>.

schedule can be found in Appendix B; information about the members of the review team can be found in Appendix A.

Worcester Public Schools

District Profile

The Worcester Public Schools (WPS) has experienced many transitions and will continue to experience significant changes in leadership in 2009-2010. An interim superintendent assumed district leadership during the 2008-2009 school year. A new superintendent has been hired and has already participated in district discussions regarding district improvement plans. Several other members of the district leadership team are leaving WPS at the end of this school year: the deputy superintendent, the manager for governmental relations and elementary initiatives, and one of the two quadrant managers (managers of the four groups of schools into which WPS is divided). Each of these persons has served multiple roles within WPS for 22 to 32 years.

In the 2008-2009 school year, WPS enrolled 23,109 students. This represents a slight decrease in total enrollment from four years ago (2005-2006), when the student population was 24,023. Student demographic and subgroup information for 2008-2009 is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: WPS Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity, Selected Populations 2008-2009

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Percent of Total	Selected Populations	Percent of Total
African American	13.6%	First Language not English	40.8%
Asian	7.9%	Limited English Proficient	24.3%
Hispanic or Latino	36.4%	From low-income families	65.8%
Native American	0.4%	Special Education	20.3%
White	39.0%	Free-lunch	57.6%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.0%	Reduced-price lunch	8.2%
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	2.6%		

The district's students are enrolled in 44 schools across the district: 33 elementary schools (PK/K-6); 4 middle schools (7-8); 5 high schools (9-12) and 2 middle/high school combinations (7-12). The student populations of the four elementary schools included in this DPSI review ranged from 338 to 719 students. The populations of the two secondary schools ranged from 364 to 571 students.

The configuration of two of the schools included in this DPSI review changed in 2006-2007. Woodland Academy (PK-6) and Claremont Academy (7-12) previously existed as one school – the Accelerated Learning Laboratory (ALL), serving students from Pre-K through grade twelve. The ALL was initially designed as a multi-aged, project-driven magnet school with students from all over the city grouped into learning teams (PK-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12). It underwent several reviews to examine the root causes that led to underperformance. The district decided to divide the school into two enrollment centers in the building with separate school leaders and faculty for the elementary and secondary grades. This decision also aligned the school's structure with

the primary/secondary structure used throughout WPS. In 2008-2009, the two enrollment centers were made into separate schools, named Woodland Academy and Claremont Academy.

Student Performance

Since 2006, WPS has made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the aggregate, but not for subgroups, in English Language Arts (ELA). The district has not made AYP for ELA subgroups since 2003 and currently has an ELA No Child Left Behind (NCLB) status of Corrective Action for subgroups. The district made AYP in mathematics in the aggregate in 2006 and 2007, but did not make AYP in 2008. The district has not made AYP for subgroups in mathematics for the past six years. It currently has a mathematics NCLB status of Corrective Action for subgroups. See Table 2.

Table 2: NBPS Adequate Yearly Progress History

		2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	NCLB Accountability Status
ELA	Aggregate	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Corrective Action - Subgroups
	All Subgroups	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	
Math	Aggregate	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Corrective Action - Subgroups
	All Subgroups	No	No	No	No	No	No	

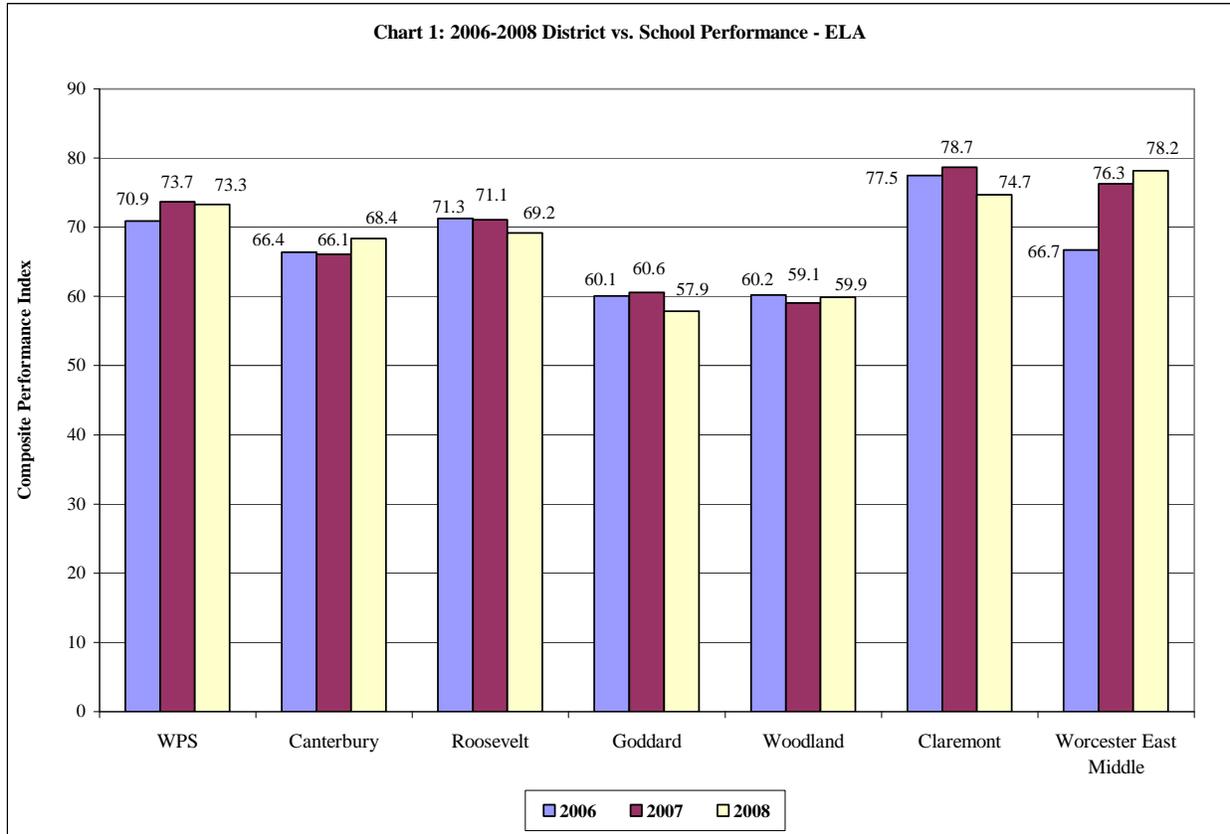
In 2008, two of the six Commonwealth Priority Schools included in the DPSI review made AYP in ELA in the aggregate. None of the schools made AYP for subgroups. In mathematics, two of the six schools met AYP in the aggregate, and one of these schools also made AYP for subgroups. See Table 3.

Table 3: 2007-08 District and School AYP Status

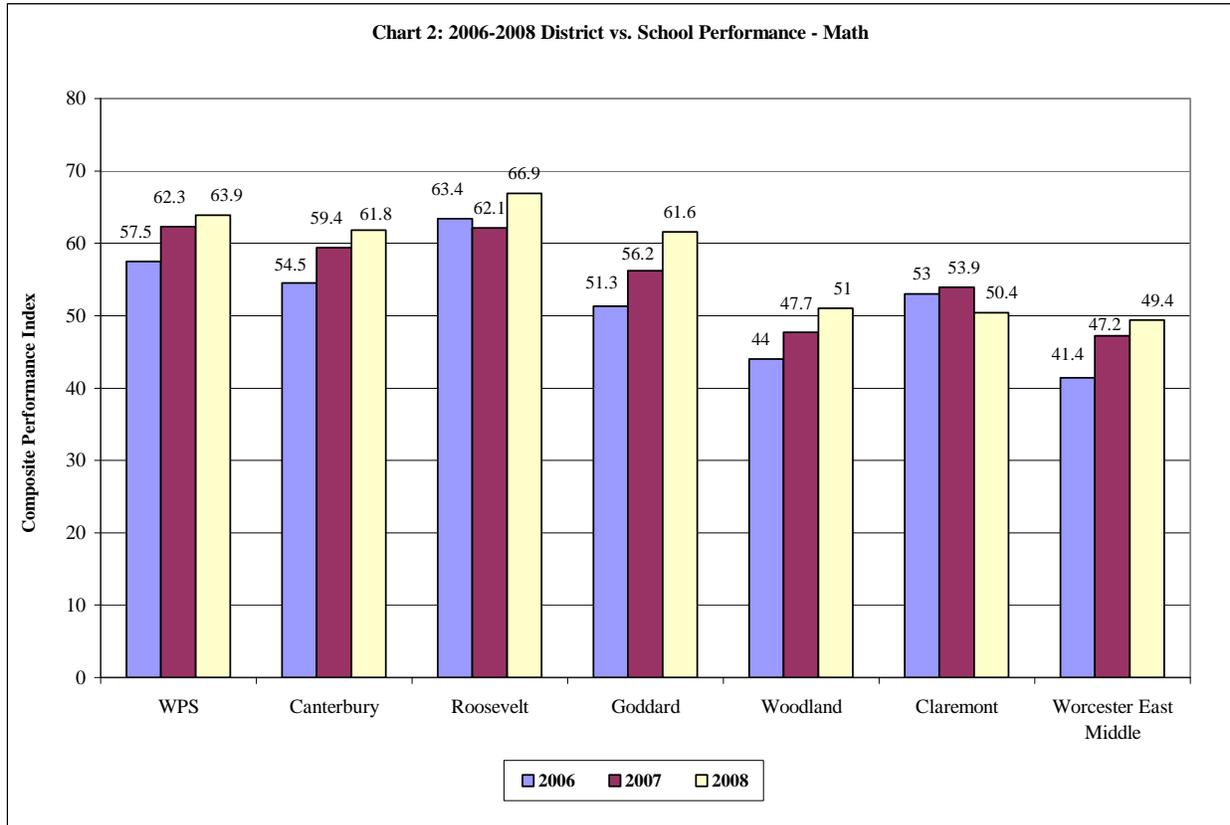
District/School	Enroll	ELA					Math				
		Status 08	CPI 08	CPI Chg 07-08	AYP Agg	AYP Sub	Status 08	CPI 08	CPI Chg 07-08	AYP Agg	AYP Sub
Worcester	22,876	CA-S	73.3		Yes	No	CA-S	63.9		No	No
Canterbury	338	RST1-A	68.4	2.3	Yes	No	CA-A	61.8	2.4	No	No
Goddard	649	RST1-A	57.9	-2.7	No	No	CA-S	61.6	5.4	Yes	Yes
Roosevelt	719	RST2-A	69.2	-1.9	No	No	RST1-A	66.9	4.8	Yes	No
Woodland Academy	417	RST2-A	59.9	.8	No	No	RST2-A	51.0	3.3	No	No
Claremont Academy	364	RST2-A	74.7	-4.0	No	No	RST2-A	50.4	-3.5	No	No
Worcester East	571	RST2-A	78.2	1.9	Yes	No	RST2-A	49.4	2.2	No	No

Note: A or Agg = Aggregate; CA = Corrective Action; CPI = Composite Performance Index; RST1 = Restructuring year 1; RST2 = Restructuring year 2; S or Sub = Subgroups

Although the district made AYP in ELA in the aggregate in 2008, only one of the six Commonwealth Priority Schools included in this DPSI review—Worcester East Middle School—shows a consistent upward trend in its Composite Performance Index (CPI) in ELA over the past three years (2006-2008). (See Chart 1). It surpasses the district in its ELA CPI by nearly five points. Although the district has made progress during the past three years with students’ mathematics performance (see Chart 2), it has shown little growth in ELA performance; the WPS 2008-09 DPSI shows a strategic focus on ELA.



Although WPS did not make AYP in mathematics in 2008, the district has shown a slight upward trend in its mathematics CPI over the past three years. This trend has also been reflected in five of the six Commonwealth Priority Schools included in this DPSI review. Only one of these six schools – Roosevelt Elementary School – is currently outperforming the district in mathematics results. Only the Worcester East Middle School has shown an upward trend in both its ELA and mathematics CPI, although its mathematics CPI is still below the district.



Key Question 1: What capacity to support school intervention efforts has the district demonstrated to date? To what extent have these efforts impacted student achievement?

Worcester Public Schools (WPS) has developed a clearly articulated plan for improving teaching and learning and leadership capacity within and across schools. The district DPSI and six reviewed Commonwealth Priority School (CPS) improvement plans are closely aligned and provide a concentrated focus on instituting best practices in English language arts (ELA) instruction. In partnership with Focus on Results (FOR), the district has begun to institute structures and practices that support the implementation of its initiatives. Also, it has successfully sustained its focus on a manageable number of initiatives. While preliminary results are encouraging, several district systems are currently underdeveloped. The district's assessment of the impact of its improvement initiatives is limited, as is the use of such assessment to inform adjustments to the initiatives. The district lacks a professional development plan for ensuring that all teachers have the skills and knowledge to sustain instructional improvements. In addition, several practices in support of DPSI initiatives are less evident at the two secondary schools observed during this review than at the four elementary schools.

Findings

The district is implementing three of the four key strategies outlined in the DPSI.

The WPS DPSI outlines four key strategies for improving teaching and learning: 1) Implementation of a schoolwide instructional focus in all aspects of ELA/literacy; 2) Provision of targeted training in the area of differentiated instruction to ensure that teachers meet the needs of all students; 3) Analysis of data to improve student achievement through regularly scheduled school-based meetings; and 4) Provision of training and support to build instructional leadership capacity among principals.

In partnership with Focus on Results (FOR), the district facilitated a process whereby each CPS school analyzed data to establish a specific instructional focus and then identified a limited set of related best practices to drive improvements. (This process was later extended to all WPS schools.) These areas of focus were clearly articulated during focus groups with school administrators and faculty members across all six schools participating in the district review. School leaders used somewhat different means for identifying the area of focus for their school's current two-year School Improvement Plan (SIP). For example, at Goddard School of Science and Technology, the instructional leadership team (ILT) prepared information for a faculty discussion of critical needs in the school. The ILT subsequently sorted through all of the discussion notes, categorized main areas of concern and brought a list of items back for a staff vote to determine the areas of focus for the school. Alternatively, at Claremont Academy, the ILT was the main architect of the SIP. ILT members showed the plan to department heads and shared it with teachers. To support their ELA focus, both elementary and secondary schools in this review have developed schedules to ensure that students receive considerable daily literacy instruction. Across the elementary schools, students participate in at least 120 minutes of daily ELA instruction. At the secondary level, most students are enrolled in both reading and English

classes, totaling two 48-minute periods per day – slightly less than the 120 minutes specified in the DPSI.

In 2008-2009, the district made a strategic decision to discontinue an explicit professional development focus on differentiated instruction (DI). All WPS teachers and administrators had participated in a 10-hour book study group on DI. With the commitment to focus more narrowly on school-specific professional development to improve ELA/literacy instruction, district leaders decided that further discussion of differentiation should be embedded within each school's literacy focus, as opposed to standing as an entirely separate theme for districtwide professional development. The SIPs reviewed at each school indicated that differentiated instruction is included within the ELA improvement plans.

The district has firmly embedded the practice of using assessments to inform teachers of student learning needs. In addition to the MCAS, the elementary schools use Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). In focus groups, teachers described examining assessment results during regularly scheduled grade-level meetings, faculty meetings, and ILT meetings. At the secondary school level, teachers described two forms of systematic assessments – MCAS and MAP. District leaders indicated plans to work on the development of common assessments to be used more regularly during the year to monitor student progress in meeting state learning standards. Teacher focus groups at the secondary level echoed the need for district-level work on such assessments.

The district has developed a system of training and support to develop leadership capacity among school and district leaders. An important component of this has been the involvement of district leaders and all WPS principals in National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) training. In focus groups, school and district leaders consistently described the positive impact of the training, citing an important emphasis on instructional leadership, balancing management and instructional leadership, and developing a common language to discuss teaching and learning. Quadrant managers have reinforced this leadership training by bringing principals together monthly to discuss using data to set school improvement goals and to share best practices. In addition, FOR consultants facilitate monthly meetings with ILT representatives and school principals. In focus groups, school leaders indicated that these meetings and interactions with other ILTs throughout the district help to strengthen their understanding of instructional leadership and the importance of providing both pressure and support.

The district adopted a strategic framework to organize its work on school intervention.

After WPS began working with FOR in December 2007, it adopted a school improvement framework to guide the alignment of systems and efforts across all Commonwealth Priority Schools. Previously, WPS had multiple and (in some cases) competing initiatives driving improvement. To increase focus, the district, in collaboration with the Department, determined it would be beneficial to have a single partner assist with coordination of improvement efforts. The school improvement expectations outlined in the district's adopted improvement framework include:

1. Identify and implement a school-wide instructional focus;
2. Develop professional collaboration teams to improve teaching and learning for all students;
3. Identify, learn, and use effective evidence-based teaching practices to meet the needs of each student;
4. Create a targeted professional development plan that builds expertise in selected evidence-based practices;
5. Re-align resources (people, time, talent, energy, and money) to support the instructional focus;
6. Engage families and the community in supporting the instructional focus of the school; and
7. Create an internal accountability system growing out of student learning goals that promotes measurable gains in learning for every student and eliminates achievement gaps.

All of these expectations align with or strengthen/expand on the DPSI. During interviews, district leaders indicated that this strategic framework is now being implemented across all district schools. Interviews with district and school leaders, as well as classroom observations across six schools, indicated that these expectations are in their initial stages of implementation.

A schoolwide instructional focus within ELA is clearly articulated in each of the reviewed school's SIPs, formally adopted and approved in February 2009. In focus groups, school leaders and teachers described their area of focus and ways in which their school is beginning to address the focus through professional development, coaching, team planning, and supervision. At one school, for example, the professional development schedule for the year indicated that substantial time throughout the year was devoted to training on guided reading across the grades. At another school, professional development consistently addressed the SIP's ELA goals, such as providing differentiated instruction in Houghton Mifflin reading centers and analyzing guided reading lessons. One district staff member affirmed, "We don't expect them [schools] to focus on everything," – a stance that was reiterated by a principal who indicated they now have permission to say no to initiatives that do not align with their instructional focus.

New school-based collaborative teams, such as the ILT, have been created or expanded and charged with the mission to focus their school's discussion and goal setting on improving teaching and learning. Site visits and focus groups confirmed that ILTs exist in each of the six schools visited and that they received training through FOR on how to establish an instructional focus, expectations, and practices for school improvement.

All schools identified instructional or programmatic practices that align with their ELA improvement focus. These include instructional practices such as guided reading, think-pair-share, and reader's response journals, as well as programmatic practices such as Everybody Reads at Home, Seven Strategies for Comprehension, and Six Traits of Writing. During focus groups, ILT members indicated that most professional development is school-based and is organized through the work of the ILT, school administrators, and coaches.

Resources in the district and schools have been re-aligned to focus on instructional improvement efforts. Principals have found various ways to schedule common planning time (CPT) for teacher

teams, although the structures for these meetings and their frequency vary across the schools visited. In focus groups, teachers and school leaders indicated that representatives from grade-level teams or departments commonly serve on their ILTs and assume varied leadership roles and responsibilities. ILT members, for example, described assuming leadership for identifying and supporting professional development needs within the school and facilitating faculty and grade-level meetings. Professional development time and resources have been devoted to improving ELA instructional practices. At the elementary level, for example, both literacy and mathematics coaches focus on language-arts-related skill development (e.g., vocabulary, comprehension). Similarly, at Worcester East Middle School, the literacy coach was observed in a self-contained special education class conducting a lesson on understanding the language in a sample MCAS mathematics question.

All of the schools' SIPs include goals for engaging families and community in supporting the school's instructional focus. Most strategies focus on improving communication between home and school, helping parents with supporting their child's learning at home, and improving relationships with social services agencies in order to help families receive needed support.

There is evidence of the initial development of internal accountability systems—ways in which teachers and principals hold one another accountable for their work. This year, SMARTe (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely – for everyone) goals were included in each school's SIP. The goals, based on MCAS and MAP data, reflect an effort to advance the learning of all WPS students. For example, one school's SMARTe goal stated, "One hundred percent of our students will show improvement in reading as demonstrated by the administration of the MCAS. No less than 20% of students will show growth to the next performance level. The remaining 80% will show growth within their performance level. Our goal is to have 30% at proficient or above in Reading in 2009." As one district-level staff member commented, "We want to put everyone on an upward trajectory." FOR has worked with the ILT in each school to oversee and monitor progress on these goals. Teacher grade-level teams meet on a regular schedule. School leaders described their expectation that teachers use this time to focus on instructional improvement. They expect to see meeting minutes, as well as to have the opportunity to review and respond to them. Additionally, data walls in the elementary schools provide visual evidence of ways that schools are involving students, teachers, and parents in monitoring student progress. While there is variability in fidelity to these routines from school to school, the district has begun to build and support these internal accountability systems at the school level.

The district is using four key principles to guide the development of instructional leadership capacity: build expertise, change practice, monitor student performance, and communicate relentlessly.

Building school-based expertise has been a central focus within the district. A range of structures and meetings support this effort. The district has allowed principals and ILTs the discretion to implement differentiated, site-based professional development to address school-specific areas of focus within ELA. In addition to facilitating monthly meetings with principals and ILT

representatives across the district to share best practices, FOR meets with CPS ILTs in their respective schools once a month to discuss their needs and to make progress in analyzing data and moving forward with school improvement efforts. (Other district schools receive occasional on-site coaching and problem-solving as needed, at least two times per year). Representatives from CPSs make site visits to other WPS schools to observe best practices in action—using leadership strengths existent within WPS. Across all district schools, the elementary coaches meet every Friday with district leadership to develop their coaching skills and content area expertise. Department heads at the secondary level meet monthly with district leadership and principals meet together monthly with their assigned quadrant manager.

Changing instructional practice occurs in multiple ways. District quadrant managers work with school principals to facilitate Learning Walks at least twice yearly. These walks include personnel from beyond the specific school (e.g., department heads, district liaisons, curriculum facilitators, coaches, managers, principals) and provide big-picture feedback to principals regarding the implementation of effective classroom practices (e.g., positive climate, posted objectives, differentiation of instruction, level of teacher questioning, student engagement). The principal shares these schoolwide trends with school staff. Individual feedback may also be shared with those teachers who request the information. In focus groups, principals and teachers described the positive impact of both inter-school and out-of-district visits (e.g., visits to schools in California as part of an FOR conference), some noting that observing successful instructional practices in schools with similar demographics influenced their beliefs as to whether certain changes could actually be tackled in their own schools. In focus groups, principals also described their participation in NISL in very positive terms. While some of the principals were already familiar with certain topics or materials presented by NISL, others described feeling that the discussions among school administrators generated an increased sense of urgency to change practices to ensure student growth and achievement.

FOR's major focus has been to help principals and leadership teams make better use of data to monitor student performance. Within the four elementary schools visited, the ILTs spearhead the focus on data-based results and discuss progress toward meeting SIP goals. At Woodland Academy, for example, the ILT organized a data wall walk during a faculty meeting to bring everyone's attention to the ways in which teachers were displaying data and helping students to understand their assessment results. Student results on MCAS, MAP, and DIBELS at the elementary level are posted in public areas for both staff and students to review. At some schools, principals and coaches meet regularly to discuss the coaching focus. At Woodland Academy, for example, the principal meets every Monday with the literacy and mathematics coaches to set the schedule and focus for the week. The SMARTe goals in each school's SIP provide benchmarks for measuring how well a school is improving achievement.

Frequent communication between district- and school-level personnel and among personnel within schools is evident in many ways. The two district quadrant managers send weekly newsletters (*Quadrant Voice*) to school leaders to maintain a positive instructional focus across the district. Review of these newsletters showed that news items range from business items (dates for upcoming Learning Walks) to best practices occurring in different WPS schools to

compliments to schools that have met particular goals. In focus groups, school leaders explained that information—such as consensus charts from Learning Walks and dates and agendas for ILTs—also flows from the schools to the quadrant managers. Within some elementary schools, ILT members reported sending meeting minutes to their faculty members regularly. Grade-level teams and secondary teams often noted that they send meeting minutes to the principal. These instructionally-focused communications have encouraged teachers and school leaders to learn from one another. Across multiple schools, principals and ILT members (in focus groups) described a clear shift in how professionals within their schools are collaborating around instructional practices, sharing resources, and exposing their data to their colleagues and students. As one district-level staff member said, “Isolation has come down. People are open to working together.”

The implementation of practices supporting DPSI initiatives is more evident at the four elementary schools than at the two secondary schools in certain areas: specificity of ELA instructional focus, effective use of the ILT, instructional coaching, and assessment resources.

The impact on classroom instruction of focused literacy goals and professional development varied across the schools visited. During elementary-level classroom visits and focus group discussions, there was evidence of school-identified instructional practices that promote the development of student skills and concepts in ELA. For instance, site visit team members noted examples of guided reading groups, reader’s response journals, and center-based instruction.

There appeared to be more frequent use of an instructional strategy across classrooms when the strategy (as outlined in the school’s SIP) is very specific. For example, at the Canterbury School, an elementary school, the think-pair-share comprehension strategy articulated in its SIP was being used during nearly all classroom visits. In addition, teachers in focus groups described staff discussions about how this instructional strategy may become more sophisticated at higher grade levels, suggesting that teachers are pursuing depth of understanding in relation to this single, specific instructional strategy. Similar observations were made at Goddard School of Science and Technology, another elementary school. Teachers in focus groups at the secondary level, however, described their areas of focus in more general or topic-based terms (e.g., teaching vocabulary) or framed their focus in relation to MCAS preparation skills (e.g., open response writing). There was less evidence that teachers are developing specific, common instructional practices across classrooms that would address their ELA goals or that they are exploring specific instructional strategies in depth with grade-level or department colleagues.

Instructional leadership teams have not been as effectively integrated into the two observed middle schools as they have been into the observed elementary schools. Within the elementary schools, ILT members clearly articulated a mission to spearhead their school’s focus on data results, discuss progress toward meeting SIP goals, and assume varied roles and responsibilities for improvement. As mentioned above, members of the ILT at Woodland Academy described organizing a data wall walk during a faculty meeting to bring everyone’s attention to the ways in which teachers were displaying data and helping students to understand assessment results. At

the secondary level, however, school leaders described the ILT as an additional leadership component to pre-existing leadership groups, such as administrative teams (principal, assistant principals, literacy coach), department head groups, and middle school teacher teams. The role and responsibilities of the ILT in relation to these other leadership groups have not been clearly articulated.

The district's secondary school coaching model is not as effective as its elementary school model. The district has provided literacy (1.5 FTE) and mathematics (.5 or 1.0 FTE) coaches who are used effectively in the elementary CPSs. The district requires that all literacy coaches complete their certification as reading specialists in order to hold these positions. In focus groups, elementary coaches reported spending all of their time in schools conducting demonstration lessons, consulting with teachers, researching and providing new teaching resources, providing differentiated materials for use by ELL students, and assisting teachers with data analysis in their content area. The district provides elementary coaches with one full day per week of professional development. In focus groups, coaches reported that the ongoing support is valuable. Teachers and principals shared their perception that the impact of coaches varies somewhat by school, depending on the coach's experience, expertise, and his or her working relationship with teachers and principals. Nonetheless, teachers often reported that their coaches are the "go-to" people when they need support with data analysis and instructional practice.

Coaches, teachers, and principals at the secondary level, however, described several challenges with their coaching model. Coaches and department heads explained that there is one full-time literacy coach in each school, along with a department head for each subject area. While the literacy coach has no assigned teaching responsibilities, the individuals in this role described having other responsibilities that make it difficult to focus specifically on instructional improvement. (At one school, for example, the literacy coach also had responsibilities as interim special education department head.) The department heads teach one fewer class than other teachers in their department. This one period per day is allocated for coaching responsibilities. In focus groups, principals, coaches, and department heads described several problems with this model. First, they noted that the time is inadequate for coaching teachers in any substantive way and that available periods for coaching are often inflexible. Second, department heads indicated that they have insufficient time to develop skills and knowledge of current best practices in order to serve as resources to others. Department heads meet once a month with district leaders, whereas elementary coaches meet one day per week with district leaders to hone their coaching skills and content knowledge. Third, since department heads evaluate teachers, it is challenging for them in their role as coaches to develop relationships with teachers that encourage consultation and experimentation.

There is less capacity for ongoing formative assessment of student growth and performance at the secondary level than at the elementary level. Four assessment tools are used in all WPS elementary schools (MCAS, MAP, DIBELS and DRA). Based on these data sources, teachers develop child-friendly data walls in many classrooms and throughout their schools. At Goddard School of Science and Technology, for example, a data wall for students showed spaceships moving along a continuum toward higher performance on the MAP; students were able to

explain their performance based on these displays. At other elementary schools, teachers, tutors, and instructional assistants reported using data walls in the coaches' rooms to gain specific information about their students' achievement. Teachers also reported discussing performance results during common planning time and with individual students.

By contrast, at the secondary level, access to common assessments is limited. Staff at the two schools visited described use of MCAS and MAP data and, sometimes, school- or teacher-developed assessments. Data walls were not evident at the secondary schools. Teachers in some focus groups reported approaches their teams have used to involve students in reflecting on data. An eighth-grade team at Claremont Academy looked at data and met with every student to set individual MAP goals. A team at Worcester East Middle School, when discussing their performance and goals, gave each of its students a wallet-sized card that outlined their MCAS results. Although there are pockets of effective data use in these two secondary schools, consistency is lacking among secondary teams on how to share student performance results and develop learning goals with students. One school leader reported that there is minimal use of data and stated that it needs to be a focus for next year. During the final district debrief, district leaders acknowledged greater success implementing some of the district initiatives at the elementary level than at the secondary level.

The district has offered training to school personnel in accessing and understanding multiple forms of data, and provides common planning time and schoolwide Learning Walks for teachers and school leaders to consider implications of data for planning instruction.

The MAP benchmark assessment is used across the district in grades 2 through 10 three times per year. All teachers were trained in its use and analysis at the time of implementation. Likewise, all primary teachers were trained in administration of the DIBELS in grades K-1 (and grades 2-3, as well, in schools where Reading First or Silber Reading is employed) and actively use Palm Pilots to record results for immediate use. The DRA reading assessment is conducted in grades K-3. ILT members, along with coaches at the elementary level, bring support to CPT, where teachers discuss assessment results. There is variation among schools as to how grade-level teams or secondary teams structure their meetings in order to discuss data. There is also variation in how frequently some teams meet. At Woodland Academy, for example, time has been scheduled for grade-level teams to meet in curriculum/data meetings twice weekly. Teacher assistants have been assigned to supervise students during breakfast and before-school work in the morning and to engage students in a read-aloud at the end of the day. This allows students to be productively engaged in purposeful activities while teachers meet during the contractual school day. At the Roosevelt School, teacher teams—in addition to voluntary CPT meetings three times per week—meet once every six weeks for two hours for data analysis. At Claremont Academy, CPT meetings take place three times per week in place of duty responsibilities teachers previously held. In focus groups, teachers across schools spoke of using their CPT to explore the implications of data in relation to their school's instructional best practices or to plan instructional units within secondary departments.

There is evidence that teacher teams are using CPT to discuss data and focus on improving ELA instruction. At Woodland Academy, for example, a review of sample agendas indicated specified roles for each member (e.g., recorder, facilitator), a specific topic for discussion, expectations (e.g., use MAP site as part of Word Work Center), outcomes (e.g., DRA test with all students by next meeting), next agenda, anything due for the next meeting (e.g., writing samples from Book Club) and questions for the principal. At the secondary level, while student performance data is discussed, CPT is less consistently structured and there is not always buy-in from teachers regarding the usefulness of the time. Teacher members of a focus group in one school stated, “I would rather have the time to myself...we’re given tasks to fill in the time.” At another secondary school, the minutes from CPT were more focused on social/emotional needs of individual students than on instructional interventions. While there is variability in how meeting routines are designed and implemented from school to school, the CPT structure has been established—creating new means for the development of improved instructional practices and internal accountability among teachers and school leaders.

The district requires and facilitates bi-annual Learning Walks at each school. Principals use data from these schoolwide 20-minute classroom observations to look at how teachers are implementing instruction. Schoolwide trends are shared with ILTs and faculties to stimulate discussion of school progress and to refine understandings of high quality teaching and learning. Although teachers may request individual feedback, this tool is not designed for principals to discuss instructional practice with individual teachers.

Since the current school improvement framework was just implemented in 2008-2009, data-based results are limited. However, preliminary indicators are positive.

While preliminary quantitative results are limited, there are indicators of the positive impact of the district’s improvement activities. For the first time, students in grades 2-7 scored within the average range on the winter 2009 MAP assessment in reading. Similarly, for the first time, students in grades 2-9 scored within the average range on the winter 2009 MAP assessment in mathematics. This year, the percentage of district K-3 students reaching DIBELS benchmarks for mid-year is 52 percent—an increase of five points from the fall. The past two years have shown similar trends in these early grades.

Qualitative evidence gathered through classroom observations, focus groups, and leadership meetings during the review indicated that teachers are trying new instructional practices and that there is improved professional collaboration within and among district schools. District personnel reported an increased transparency within WPS: schools are publicly displaying, sharing, and discussing student performance data. In former years, people were less inclined to expose the data pertaining to their respective schools and classrooms.

The district has limited systems to assess the impact of initiatives or to inform adjustments.

Student performance results from MCAS and interim MAP assessments are currently the primary means for determining the impact of initiatives within WPS. Only one assessment, used in the primary grades—DIBELS—generates formative results as frequently as every two weeks.

The Learning Walks give schools a general overview of whether certain classroom practices are being used across a school. However, these walks are infrequent and do not provide information about each school's identified best practices (e.g., use of guided reading groups, think-pair-share, vocabulary instruction). One member of a secondary ILT stated, "Learning Walks are a great model, but there's not enough teacher feedback. The staff wants more feedback. They want to know more about what they could be doing. There are missed opportunities for growth, reflection and change." Some elementary principals discussed their desire to begin a regular practice of looking at student work to add authentic assessment practices in understanding a student's performance. Although the district has implemented cross-curricular writing portfolios for secondary students, a clear process for using the portfolios to advance teachers' instruction or to engage students in improving performance is not evident.

District-level meetings between quadrant managers and principals promote discussion of the results of improvement initiatives, as do the ILT and principal meetings with FOR. But the role of the ILT in evaluating each school's success in meeting its SIP objectives is unclear. At the elementary level, principals and teachers described the work of coaches as being an essential component of instructional improvement. But there is no clear system for evaluating the impact of the coaches. Similarly, common planning time involves a great commitment of time, yet there are currently no systems for evaluating its effectiveness.

The district does not have a professional development plan that sustains attention to the development of core skills and knowledge in ELA, data analysis, and differentiated instruction.

The district plan for professional development, through a combination of three full days and monthly school-based work, entails approximately 56 hours annually. Before this year, more professional development was designed and provided by the district. Now, most of the ELA professional development is provided through instructional coaches at the elementary level and by the school leaders and the literacy coach at the secondary level. Particularly at the elementary level, professional development depends on the availability of literacy and mathematics coaches. If the coaching positions were not stable, it is not clear how the professional development program would be implemented.

Although the district has provided teachers and school leaders with initial professional development in key areas, it has not sustained this development. When the district first introduced the MAP assessments, for example, it established a MAP academy. All teachers were required to participate in training on how to access and use data for analysis of class and student performance. This training was provided three years ago. In focus groups, however, teachers reported varying levels of comfort and expertise with interpretation of the data, regardless of whether they had attended the initial training. District leaders did not describe a plan for providing ongoing professional development to new teachers or teachers who need further immersion.

When the district required all teachers to participate in training on DI, the initial plan was to prepare teacher leaders to establish model DI classrooms and serve as an ongoing resource for

other teachers in their buildings. When the district modified its approach and eliminated the district focus on DI, this professional development model was also eliminated. The district did not develop a new plan for how it would develop the skills and knowledge of teacher leaders in focus areas to supplement the work of the coaches in supporting instructional improvement. With the movement away from pursuing specific professional development on DI, it is unclear how the district plans to support the development of teachers' instructional strategies for special education and ELL students. The availability of staff members specifically trained in working with these subgroups is limited because many of them are working full-time in self-contained classrooms. Administrators did attend two ELL-related professional development sessions through the Harvard Executive Leadership Program for Educators (ExEL), with the intention that they would share ELL teaching techniques with their school's ILT members.

Key Question 2: To what extent has the work of the Department impacted and supported the district in implementing improvement initiatives?

The work of the Department has made a significant positive impact on the district's implementation of improvement initiatives. In particular, the Department recommended the district's partnership with FOR and provided funding for it. The partnership between FOR and WPS has led to the development of an improvement framework and an instructional focus for the district. District leaders have noted a shift in the role of the Department from being primarily focused on accountability and compliance to being more oriented toward assistance.

Findings

The district is effectively using Department resources to build teacher and administrator capacity for advancing an instructional focus in the district.

In focus groups, district and school leaders described significant impact from the Department having connected them with FOR. They attribute their shift to a more distributive leadership model to the ongoing relationship with FOR and the direction and support it provides. In addition to building leadership capacity, FOR has helped the district to develop improved communication practices and to bring a more specific focus to instructional improvement. WPS district- and school-level personnel described the powerful impact of attending a FOR conference in Pasadena, California. FOR has also helped coordinate different supports (e.g., NISL, ExEL, consultants from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Department liaisons) to help WPS maintain coherence within its school improvement framework.

This coordination has helped to dovetail FOR work with ExEL work. ExEL has provided another facilitated forum, in this case for district leaders to focus on improvements for English language learners. In 2008-2009, the district developed a definition of high quality teaching and learning, detailing components such as the effective organization of a classroom, instructional design and delivery, and student ownership of learning. This document provides common guidelines on what should be observed in a classroom in order for students to achieve higher performance levels and to close achievement gaps. As one principal stated, "Every principal meeting is ExEL work. ExEL helps us confront where we are."

District and school leaders indicated that the Learning Walk continuum developed by the Department has been helpful to WPS. The tool has not only enabled district leaders, principals, and teachers to get a better sense of current instructional practices and learning environments within WPS schools, but has also been a vehicle for school leaders to observe one another's schools and to discuss and share challenges and promising practices. One district leader noted, "It could have taken us years to develop such a tool."

In the 2008-2009 school year, the Department provided funding for some literacy coaches at the elementary schools has enabled schools to design and implement school-based, embedded professional development toward meeting their ELA goals. There is evidence that teachers are using this newly-established coaching assistance with greater frequency. One school's Pre-K-to-grade 3 literacy coach said that she has worked consistently with about eight teachers during the

year. The Reading First grants at two of the elementary schools and the Silber Reading grants at the other two elementary schools have served as cornerstones for beginning to implement best practices in ELA.

In support of the district's goal of promoting teacher analysis of assessment data to improve instructional practices, the Department funded stipends for substitutes to provide CPT for teacher teams above and beyond the contractual planning times.

District personnel have noted improved support, resources, and responsiveness from the Department. The district seeks continuity in these areas.

WPS district leaders reported that relations between WPS and the Department have improved considerably over the past two years. The Department has provided support while still allowing the district to own an initiative. For example, the Department provided the Learning Walk document and training on its use, then allowed the district to adapt and implement the tool and process to best meet its own needs. In focus groups, district leaders expressed appreciation of being able to make their own management decisions regarding details of implementation of Department-funded initiatives. District leaders indicated that the development of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was also a collaborative process. District administrators consistently noted a shift in the role of the Department from being focused primarily on accountability and compliance to being more assistance-oriented; they indicated that it is much easier to pick up the telephone to ask questions.

In focus groups, WPS district leaders expressed hope for an ongoing alignment of priorities between the district and the Department. Along the lines of the district's decision to allow schools to focus more narrowly on ELA as a priority for instructional improvement, WPS leaders would like to engage the Department's support in promoting the district's primary goals. For example, they stated that expanded state funding for secondary coaches to support their work in developing literacy and math skills would be useful. District leaders indicated that the degree and type of support they experience varies with changes in ESE liaisons and that the Department's effectiveness in supporting the district depends on continuity and consistency in the supportive relationship. District leaders indicated they appreciate building consistent working relationships with liaisons who have real school- and district-level experience, thorough understanding of the work of WPS, and advocacy skills for gaining resources to support WPS's improvement efforts.

Recommendations

Recommendations provided in this report were developed by the review team. Recommendations reflect the areas that the review team determined should be priorities for the district in its future improvement efforts and are not intended to address every area requiring improvement. These are for the district to consider in future improvement efforts and for the Department to consider in determining support for improvement.

The Department should work with WPS to ensure a continued relationship with FOR to continue improvement efforts that exist currently.

- During this next year of substantial leadership turnover, maintaining a relationship with FOR may assist with continuity as the district continues to engage with its current improvement efforts.

Develop processes, in addition to the district's existing standardized testing, for determining the impact of improvement initiatives.

- Define what high quality initiatives look like in practice (e.g., high quality CPT, high quality ILT, high quality coaching model).
- Develop strategies for evaluating the success of initiatives (e.g., associated assessment rubrics, tools/surveys/focus groups to gather stakeholder perceptions and suggestions).

Develop a targeted professional development plan that can sustain progress over time.

- Identify the most critical areas of focus where mastery of knowledge and skills is required to actively implement a practice within a school or classroom (e.g., differentiated instruction; use of MAP results to revise instructional focus for class or individual students; use of guided reading at the elementary level; facilitating and framing a structure for CPT).
- Create a professional development plan that ensures initial training and sustained development, at district and/or school levels, especially for new staff or staff who need additional support in those identified critical areas of focus (e.g., the district could have a requirement that all new staff participate in certain PD activities within the first three years of employment).
- Identify ways in which the professional development needs of restructuring schools may be unique (e.g., due to high staff turnover, student demographics, test performance), and may require differentiated support.

Strengthen implementation of key DPSI initiatives at the secondary school level.

- Create a more effective coaching model at the secondary level that provides support commensurate with the successful elementary model (e.g., non-evaluative coaching roles; weekly professional development for building coaching and content expertise; personnel who have clear roles and sufficient time to model classroom lessons, facilitate teacher meetings, design and provide teacher professional development, and provide resources for differentiating instruction).

- Provide district-developed common assessments and associated professional development to provide more robust formative data at the secondary level.
- Assist secondary schools in integrating Instructional Leadership Teams within their current school systems and leadership structures (e.g., development of clear purposes and responsibilities in relation to other leadership groups within the school; development of communication processes among these groups).

Appendix A: DPSI Review Team Members

The review of the Worcester Public Schools was conducted from April 27 – May 8, 2009, by a team of educators from SchoolWorks, LLC on behalf of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Spencer Blasdale, Chief Executive Officer, SchoolWorks

Susan Carlson, Consultant, SchoolWorks

Candice Carpenter, Project Associate, SchoolWorks

Susan Henry, Consultant, SchoolWorks, WPS DPSI District Review Leader

Erin Patterson, Consultant, SchoolWorks

Joseph Trunk, Consultant, SchoolWorks

Megan Tupa, Chief Operating Officer, SchoolWorks

Maida Broadbent Williams, Consultant, SchoolWorks

Appendix B: DPSI Review Activities and Schedule

DPSI Review Activities

The following activities were conducted as part of the DPSI review of the Worcester Public Schools.

- The DPSI review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education: manager of and staff from the Urban and Commissioner’s Districts unit; staff from the Math, Science, Technology & Engineering unit; staff from the Literacy unit; and staff from the Office of Language Acquisition.
- The DPSI review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the Worcester Public Schools central office administration: interim superintendent; deputy superintendent; quadrant managers; manager of governmental relations and elementary initiatives; director of special education; manager of staff and curriculum development; director of English language learners programs; manager of student support services/alternative programs; lead consultant from Focus on Results.
- The DPSI review team conducted 109 classroom visits across different grade levels and subjects in the following WPS Commonwealth Priority Schools: Canterbury School (PK-6); Roosevelt School (PK-6); Goddard School of Science and Technology (PK-6); Woodland Academy (PK-6); Claremont Academy (7-12); Worcester East Middle School (7-8).
 - During school visits, the DPSI review team conducted interviews with the following personnel: school principals; assistant principals; instructional leadership teams; teachers; instructional coaches; support staff; specialists; students.
- The DPSI review team reviewed the following documents provided by the Department:
 - The Worcester Public Schools DPSI
 - The Memorandum of Understanding between the Worcester Public Schools and the Department
 - The District Leadership Report on the Essential Conditions
 - The State Panel Review Report
- The DPSI review team reviewed the following documents provided by the district, schools and FOR:
 - Description of the processes in place to monitor DPSI implementation and other intervention strategies and improvement efforts, including data reports

- Description of the formative/benchmark assessment system, including data reports
- Description of the process for monitoring instruction/conducting learning walks, including data reports
- Professional development calendars, including descriptions of professional development that has taken place to support DPSI implementation
- WPS School Improvement Strategy—Focus on Results PowerPoint presentation, April 2009
- WPS District and Commonwealth Priority Schools Plans for Improvement Priorities Update, PowerPoint presentation, April 2009
- Minutes from monthly FOR meetings with district leaders

DPSI Review Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the DPSI review of the Worcester Public Schools, conducted from April 27 – May 8, 2009.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
April 27 DPSI review team meeting Initial district meeting and interviews	April 28 Site visit to Canterbury School	April 29 Site visit to Roosevelt School	April 30 Site visit to Goddard School	May 1 DPSI review team meeting Interviews and focus groups with central office administration
May 4 Site visit to Woodland Academy Site visit to Claremont Academy	May 5 Site visit to Woodland Academy Site visit to Claremont Academy	May 6 Site visit to Worcester East Middle School	May 7 Site visit to Worcester East Middle School	May 8 DPSI review team meeting Final meeting and interviews with district