



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

July 2009

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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 Holyoke Public Schools was conducted from April 27 – May 4, 2009. The DPSI review included visits to the following district schools: E.N. White School (K-8), Kelly School (K-8), McMahon School (K-8), Morgan School (K-8), and the Center for Excellence (middle school only). 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 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>.

Holyoke Public Schools

District Profile

The Holyoke Public Schools (HPS) is currently under the leadership of Dr. Eduardo Carballo, who has served as the district’s superintendent since 2002. Dr. Carballo will retire in 2010; his successor has not been announced. Although there has been relatively little turnover in the district leadership, the current special education director is the fifth person to hold this position in four years.

Currently, the enrollment of the Holyoke Public Schools (HPS) is 6,025 students. The district has seen a steady decline since 2002, when its enrollment was 7,255. Student demographic and subgroup information for the 2008-2009 school year is provided in Table 1.

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

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Percent of Total	Selected Populations	Percent of Total
African American	3.3%	First Language not English	51.0%
Asian	0.9%	Limited English Proficient	24.2%
Hispanic or Latino	76.4%	From low-income families	76.3%
Native American	0.0%	Special Education	25.0%
White	19.3%	Free-lunch	70.3%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.0%	Reduced-price lunch	6.0%
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	0.1%	Homeless	5.5%

Students with limited English proficiency represent 24.2 percent of the district’s student body. A quarter of the students in the district have special education needs. The district is intent on hiring teachers who meet state licensure requirements to work with these student populations—a critical staffing need—but has difficulty attracting candidates with either specialization.

The district’s students are enrolled in 11 schools: seven K-8 schools; two high schools (9-12); one preschool (pre-K); and, one K-12 school that provides an alternative placement for some of the district’s students. Citing declining enrollment and the desire to increase the number of neighborhood schools, Holyoke Public Schools made significant changes to its school configuration and zoning in the past year. These changes have resulted in student enrollment shifts, as well as leadership changes, at some schools.

The H.B. Lawrence School and John J. Lynch Middle School were closed at the end of the 2007-2008 academic year. Students from both schools were assigned to the Dr. William R. Peck School to form a new K-8 school. The principal of the newly-configured Peck School is the former principal of Lynch Middle School. The MacMahon School also has a new principal as of the 2008-2009 school year—the former principal of the Lawrence School. The Morgan School added two grades this year to become a K-8 school and now houses district Latency classes (i.e., substantially separate classes for students with disabilities). The Kelly School enrollment increased by 140 students. The Holyoke Alternative Program, which served students in grades 6

through 8, is now part of the newly-created Center for Excellence—an alternative education site for students in kindergarten through grade 12.

Student Performance

In 2008, the Holyoke Public Schools made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the aggregate in English language arts (ELA). The district currently has a No Child Left Behind (NCLB) status of Corrective Action in the aggregate for ELA and mathematics.

Table 2: HPS Adequate Yearly Progress History

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

Although the district made AYP in ELA in the aggregate in 2008, none of the schools included in the DPSI review process made AYP in ELA in the aggregate or for subgroups. In mathematics, neither the district nor the schools included in this review process made AYP in the aggregate or for subgroups.

Table 3: 2008 District and School AYP Status

		ELA					Mathematics				
District/School	Enroll	Status 08	CPI 08	CPI Chg 07-08	AYP Agg	AYP Sub	Status 08	CPI 08	CPI Chg 07-08	AYP Agg	AYP Sub
Holyoke	6,121	CA-A	61.6	-1.7	Yes	No	CA-A	50.4	-0.4	No	No
Morgan ES	495	RST2-A	39.2	-2.5	No	No	RST1-A	30.5	0.2	No	No
Kelly K-8	452	RST2-A	51.1	-1.0	No	No	RST2-A	40.9	4.3	No	No
McMahon ES	370	RST2-A	66.8	-6.0	No	No	None	59.3	-1.3	No	No
White K-8	497	RST1-A	62.6	-4.5	No	No	RST2-A	52.1	1.0	No	No

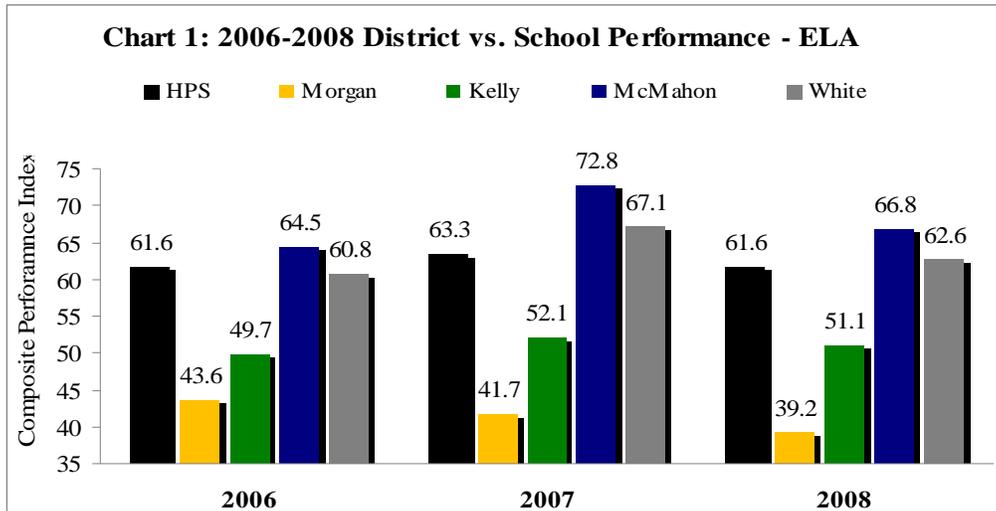
Notes:

A or Agg = Aggregate; CA = Corrective Action; CPI = Composite Performance Index; RST1 = Restructuring year 1;

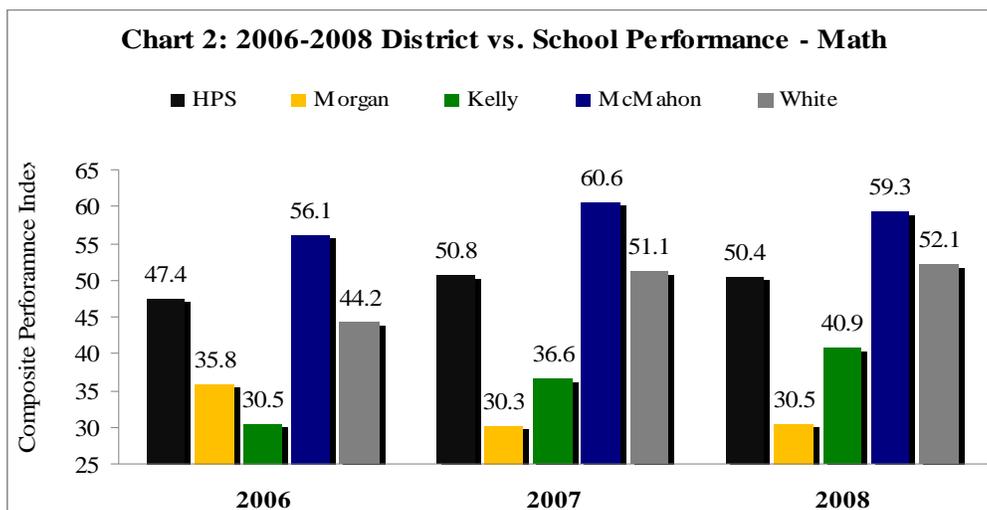
RST2 = Restructuring year 2; Sub = Subgroups

Since it is newly configured and does not have data from 2007 or 2008, the Center for Excellence is not included in the data analysis.

The district's Composite Performance index (CPI) in ELA has remained stable over the past three years. The McMahon School outperformed the district in ELA over those three years, although the school's CPI decreased from 2007 to 2008. The White School performed slightly below the district in 2006 and, despite having a lower CPI in 2008 than 2007, outperformed the district in both 2007 and 2008. Both the Kelly School and the Morgan School performed below the district in all of these years.



In mathematics, the district CPI increased by 3.4 points from 2006 to 2007 but decreased slightly from 2007 to 2008. The McMahon School also showed variability in performance across these MCAS administrations but has consistently outperformed the district in mathematics. The White School and the Kelly School have shown continuous improvement from year to year, though the Kelly School's performance has been below the district's each year. The Morgan School, also performing below the district, experienced a decline in CPI from 2006 to 2007 and a slight increase from 2007 to 2008.



The district has the unusual challenge of serving a relatively high concentration of students with critical needs (e.g., ELL students, high-mobility populations, special education students); district leaders believe that this adversely affects standardized test scores. In order to get a better understanding of whether and to what extent the high rate of student mobility has had an impact on student performance, the district commissioned a study of student MCAS trends in the past five years. According to this analysis, there is evidence that mobility has a negative impact on MCAS scores, and that stable cohorts generally outperform their mobile peers. This study also concluded that the mobile subgroups—namely, Latino, special education, and limited English proficient (LEP) students—did not perform as well as the district’s stable subgroups.

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?

In the 2008-2009 academic year, Holyoke Public Schools enacted a series of measures to improve instruction and student performance across the district. These include the following priorities outlined in the District’s Plan for School Intervention (DPSI): developing specialized courses, interventions, and safety nets for English language learner (ELL) students; supporting the improvement of teacher’s pedagogical and content knowledge through professional development; and, recruiting, retaining, and supporting highly qualified teachers for specialized groups. The implementation of these improvement strategies was evident throughout the district’s Commonwealth Priority Schools (CPSs). Some strategies are in the earlier stages of implementation.

The review team examined evidence pertaining to other improvement strategies not outlined in the DPSI, including monitoring instruction, analyzing student assessment data, evaluating the effectiveness of district improvement initiatives, and providing guidance to school leaders in support of improvement efforts. There was evidence that the district is in the initial phases of monitoring standards-based instruction, but does not have formalized expectations that principals frequently monitor instruction or provide feedback to teachers. The district and its schools are at the early stages of analyzing and using data to understand student learning and change instruction, while the district is working to establish data systems to evaluate its initiatives. The district provides guidance to school leaders through principals’ network meetings that build on Department-supported leadership training (i.e., NISL) and enhance their capacity to improve instruction and achievement.

Findings under Key Question 1

Findings on priorities outlined in the DPSI:

The district has implemented specialized classes to support ELL students at the beginning stages of English proficiency.

In the 2008-2009 academic year, the district introduced an English Language Development (ELD I) course. ELD I was designed for students in the beginning and early intermediate stages of English proficiency. The course combines an ESL approach with the language arts curriculum and is taught in the readers’ and writers’ workshop format. ELD I classes are currently offered to students in grades 6, 7, and 8 in order to help ELL students in these grades master complex reading and writing skills. The district plans to expand ELD I classes to lower grades. The district also introduced Mathematics for Second Language Learners (MSL)—a course that develops mathematical understanding while addressing English language development. MSL is taught in the workshop format and is currently offered to students in grades 4 through 8.

The ELD I and MSL courses use district curricula. Curriculum maps were developed at the district level to outline grade-level work for students in ELD and MSL courses. The courses are aligned to *Massachusetts English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes* (ELPBO), as well as the English language arts and mathematics frameworks, respectively. The district

mathematics team opted to cover fewer Connected Mathematics Program (CMP) and Investigations units in MSL, selecting those with essential concepts and vocabulary that will help ELL students meet state standards.

The review team observed ELD I and MSL classes whenever they were offered at the schools visited. In general, teachers were observed using appropriate ELD strategies and implementing lessons in a manner consistent with the ELD I and MSL course descriptions. In one MSL class, for example, the teacher was using a series of visual representations (e.g., number lines, pie charts) to facilitate a lesson on fractions and mixed numerals. During the lesson, the teacher asked a series of questions that pushed the students to comprehend the relationship between fractions and whole numbers and to understand why certain fractions are equivalent to one another. The conversation moved fluidly between Spanish and English; students were able to express their ideas in the way that came most easily to them. In an ELD I class at another school, students worked in small groups to compare and contrast elements of two biographies of famous Latina women. During the lesson, the teacher reviewed vocabulary from each text and asked a series of clarifying questions to check for understanding. At the end of the work period, students posted their findings on the board and discussed them.

Sheltered English instructional strategies to support English language development are evident across the district's Commonwealth Priority Schools, with varying degrees of implementation from classroom to classroom.

In order to support the language needs of ELL students, the district has implemented a series of measures to make sheltered English instruction available in all classrooms.

The district hired two full-time ELL coaches this year to work with all the K-8 schools (although they spend a greater portion of their time at the district's Commonwealth Priority Schools). District ELL coaches provide training in the required categories of ELL professional development to teachers and school administrators.

In January and March of 2009, ELD focus walks were conducted at the White, Kelly, Morgan and McMahan schools. District administrators, school leaders, and coaches visited classrooms in which English as a Second Language instruction is conducted as a stand-alone (ELD I) or push-in (sheltered) model. The purpose of these walks was to monitor the implementation of district initiatives to support ELL students. Criteria for the focus walks included: the use of word walls (i.e., Do they include visuals and native language translations?); teaching charts (i.e., Are they current, readable, and accessible?); artifacts (i.e., Do posted artifacts include work in progress or models?); and classroom libraries (i.e., Do they represent varied reading levels that reflect the range of students' reading abilities?). Reports prepared by the district outlined whether and to what degree these four elements were implemented across the classrooms visited. For example, one of the reports described how classroom libraries represented many interests and reading levels, with texts appropriate for the current unit of study.

Examination of the focus walk reports by the review team indicated a range of effectiveness in teachers' implementation of sheltered English strategies. Classroom visits conducted by the

review team found strong evidence (61 percent (n=35)) that the presentation of content was within students' English proficiency and developmental level. In one grade 7 class, for example, a teacher was conducting a Read Aloud, Think Aloud. The teacher paused at specific points of the story to review the plot and discuss the characters. The teacher also prompted students to practice making inferences—a skill they had previously learned—and encouraged students to make connections between the story being read and a poem students had recently read. The strategies the teacher used were consistent with those outlined in the grades 6-8 sheltered ELA curriculum map. In 26 percent (n=15) of the classrooms visited, the review team found partial evidence that the content was within students' English proficiency and developmental level. For example, in one grade 3 mathematics class, a teacher had students work with a partner to develop a series of arrays—or rectangular arrangements of objects in equal rows and columns – in order to demonstrate different ways to represent certain numbers (e.g., $28 = 2 \times 14$, 4×7 , 28×1). Students could confer with their partner. The process of creating and displaying arrays on posters made abstract multiplication concepts more accessible to ELL students. The teacher, however, did not discuss the lesson's main concepts before sending students to work in pairs. As a result, there were students who had the correct answer but were unable to explain why the answer was correct.

There was also variation in the implementation of strategies to support ELL students in developing vocabulary—a new ELL focus throughout the district. In one grade 1 classroom, a teacher had students generate a list of terms covered in a current fossils unit, which were recorded on chart paper and also posted on a word wall (e.g., paleontologist). Students used these words to create a glossary, with an illustration for each word they listed. By providing students with multiple and varied opportunities to practice using new vocabulary, the teacher helped ELL students assimilate unfamiliar terms. In a grade 5 classroom, a teacher posted and referred to a long list of character traits and provided each student with a handout containing the same list. The teacher defined each word out loud. She did not include definitions in the handout or customize the list with visuals, native language translations, or any other support to facilitate comprehension. In some classrooms, the district's recommended ELL strategies (e.g., sentence stems, interactive word walls, language objectives) were not observed.

A variety of interventions are available to K-3 ELL and special education students. However, there are limited interventions available for ELL and special education students in the upper grades and in all grades in mathematics.

In focus groups, teachers and leaders across Commonwealth Priority Schools reported using multiple early literacy interventions, including ZipZoom (a computer program that supports language development in the district's grade 1 to 3 classrooms); Read Naturally (a program to promote fluency in grades 1 to 3); and Early Reading Intervention (ERI), which the district uses in kindergarten and grade 3 classes. Schools across the district receive funding from either the Reading First or John Silber grants. These grants fund coaches and training and expire at the end of the 2008-2009 academic year.

Some literacy interventions are available for students in grades 4 to 8. Lindamood-Bell reading interventions are in place for kindergarten to grade 8 special education students; Wilson Reading is provided to some of the district's grade 3 to 5 classrooms; the My Sidewalks program is administered to students in grades 1 to 5; and the Read 180 intervention is used in all schools. Read 180 is designed for students one to two years below grade level. Teachers reported that there are many students who are three to four years below grade level for whom Read 180 is not appropriate. The district is planning to purchase the Systems 44 reading intervention program to meet the needs of these students.

There are fewer mathematics interventions available across grades. School staff members reported the need for more targeted mathematics interventions in all grades. Currently, the district uses the Larson math program for students in grades 3 to 8. The Assessment and Learning Knowledge Spaces (ALEKS) mathematics laboratory is available at all five schools in this review; it is offered to students in grades 4 to 8 based on need.

In focus groups, teachers and administrators reported the need for more personnel to implement interventions and to provide targeted assistance to ELL and special education students in the upper grades. In several schools, teachers reported that ELL teachers provide support in ELA but not in mathematics. In at least one school, other adults (in addition to the one certified teacher) were added to a special education classroom to meet class size requirements. These additional adults, however, were not specifically trained to support students with special needs.

The district has made significant progress in improving support to ELL students and recognizes that support for special education students needs to improve. According to district leaders, HPS must first address compliance issues before it can focus on the programmatic components of special education. District administrators reported that they need to continue to improve the process of identifying the district's special education students and their disabilities. In focus groups, teachers reported that there is a backlog in the district's referral and testing process. Under the leadership of the new director of special education, the district has made progress in improving its support for special education students. The district started by correcting the instances of noncompliance found by the latest Department Coordinated Program Review; according to district leaders, most of the instances of special education noncompliance found have been corrected. The district has also worked to ensure that special education teachers attend mathematics and ELA training sessions and that they are trained to use the workshop model. Issues with teacher retention have complicated training issues. For example, now only 20 percent of the district's teachers are trained in Lindamood-Bell, whereas previously it was 90 percent. The district plans to offer Lindamood-Bell training in the future. In order to continue to improve its capacity to track and monitor special education students, the district has acquired the Eutactics program and is training teachers to use it.

As of this review, the district has not yet completed a strategic professional development plan focused on improving teachers' skills and content knowledge.

Holyoke's DPSI states that district and school administrators, coaches, and school-based staff will develop a strategic professional development plan focused on improving teachers' skills and

knowledge. According to the DPSI, the plan will outline training opportunities and identify outcome measures for participants. At the time of this review, the district had not yet completed this plan. The strategic professional development plan was to be finished later in the spring of 2009 and was to outline professional development for the next three to five years.

While the strategic professional development plan is being created, professional development to improve teachers' pedagogical and content knowledge is evident.

District literacy and mathematics coaches, with training and support from America's Choice (AC) coaches, are responsible for facilitating the district's teacher professional development and monitoring its implementation across classrooms. The district hired half-time mathematics and literacy coaches in the 2006-2007 academic year. In 2008-2009, the positions were increased to full time.

During the school year, AC coaches train district coaches through monthly professional development workshops. These sessions reinforce coaches' content expertise and knowledge of effective ELL strategies. During the district visit, the review team observed the AC mathematics coach providing professional development to the district mathematics coaches. District coaches provide direct support to teachers at the school level. In focus groups, district coaches reported conducting joint teacher observations and co-teaching and debriefing with the AC coaches.

Every month, district mathematics coaches provide professional development sessions for teachers. Trainings are focused on enhancing teachers' content knowledge in mathematics and implementation of Investigations; the new version is currently being phased in.

Mathematics and literacy coaches also play an active role in supporting the professional development of teachers at each school. Once a month, coaches lead teachers' weekly grade-level meetings, providing professional development on content, the use of data, and ELD strategies. Teachers also develop common assessment standards and look at student work during this time. This year, coaches have facilitated monthly professional learning communities (PLCs) to discuss readings and share ideas. K-2 teachers at the White School are reading *Words Their Way*, while teachers at the Morgan School are reading *Learning Words Inside Out*. The PLC sessions are voluntary and teachers who participate receive a stipend. Coaches reported that the majority of teachers in each school attend these monthly meetings.

Coaches monitor the implementation of strategies presented in professional development sessions. In addition to participating in the district focus walks, coaches observe teacher practice and provide feedback, co-teach lessons and model instruction. The review team observed one mathematics coach helping a teacher facilitate the closing section of a lesson on distribution and division. The coach asked a series of focused questions, guiding a student to communicate his reasoning process to the class.

The district has developed systems for local recruitment of teachers.

The district has taken several steps to recruit teachers locally. The district advertises in local newspapers and has moved from advertising positions as they become available to keeping permanent postings. The district has partnerships with teacher preparation programs, namely:

University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Elms College in Chicopee, and Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley. The district works with the local unemployment office and has a trial membership with Youschools.org, a teacher recruitment website.

In its efforts to fill high-need areas, the district hires teachers with prerequisite skills for teaching ELL and special education students and helps them meet state licensure requirements. The district secured a grant (which expired in April 2009) to help pay for MTEL preparation through the Hampshire Educational Collaborative. The district has also given teachers access to ALEKS—one of the district’s mathematics interventions—to help them review for the exam.

Findings on additional improvement initiatives:

The district has developed an induction program and provided mentors to support new teachers, but does not give them formalized support beyond this.

One way the district is addressing the issue of teacher retention is by providing new teachers with additional support. In the 2008-2009 academic year, the district welcomed 45 new teachers, 24 of whom were new to the teaching profession. The district’s induction program is a two-day session in August. Also, the district’s policy is that all new teachers to the district (including teachers who start in December) are assigned a mentor during their first year of teaching in the district. According to district leaders, they are, this year, the closest they have been to pairing every teacher with an appropriate mentor. In order to qualify as a mentor, veteran teachers must hold certification, have professional status in the district, and participate in a district training program for mentors. Teachers are paired with mentors according to content area rather than teaching location, which can result in a cross-district assignment.

The district reported that although there is no formalized expectation for support of new teachers beyond the induction program and the mentors, coaches support new teachers in the implementation of the curriculum, co-plan with new teachers, and model lessons for them. However, there is no district requirement that coaches spend a certain percentage of time with new hires. Some principals reported that they conduct informal observations and provide new teachers with feedback. Some new teachers reported they had been observed two to three times this school year.

The district reported that it groups new teachers together during some workshops, which are differentiated for them, but that it does not offer a separate set of professional development sessions focused on the identified needs of new teachers (e.g., classroom management, discipline, parent-teacher conferences). Nor is there evidence of an explicit district expectation to monitor new teachers’ performance. There are no systems to ensure that principals and assistant principals are monitoring the performance of new teaching staff to investigate whether trainings provided and the support provided by the mentoring relationship are having an impact at the classroom level.

In order to improve the quality of its instructional program, the district developed a teacher evaluation system that documents a teacher’s performance and provides a process for corrective action.

In order to enhance the quality of its staff, the district hired an external consulting group to develop a teacher evaluation and corrective action process for school leaders. School administrators used the evaluation tool for the first time in the 2008-2009 academic year. In order to increase inter-rater reliability, principals and assistant principals were trained on how to use this tool. Principals annually conduct two formal observations and write one evaluation for all teachers without professional status. Every two years, principals conduct one formal observation and then write one evaluation for teachers with professional status. The district instructed principals on how to use a corrective action plan when necessary. By developing the evaluation tool and corrective action process, the district has chosen to take more definitive steps to avoid the practice of transferring teachers from one district school to another who consistently fail to meet the standards of effective practice.

The district conducts focus walks to look for evidence that the classroom environment is standards-based and has just begun to use these walks to focus on elements of standards-based instruction.

The district conducts focus walks with a tool developed with the assistance from America’s Choice. District administrators, principals, coaches, and leadership team members participate in these walks. The district has conducted a number of focus walks in the 2008-2009 academic year, some in collaboration with the Department and some independently, covering the areas of mathematics, ELA, and English language development (ELD) (see above finding on instructional strategies to support English language development).

During each focus walk, district and school staff members look for evidence of a standards-based classroom—the presence of student work, word walls, teaching charts, and classroom libraries. A standard reporting format was developed. Each report describes the focus of the visit, a summary of trends (e.g., percentage of classrooms that implemented each focus walk criterion) and the next steps (e.g., professional development topics to address areas that need additional support). Teachers are informed of the walk’s focus areas and are provided with rubrics in advance. They also receive a copy of the report. Focus walk trends give the district a sense of how teachers are implementing training they have received and what areas require follow-up. For example, ELL coaches stated that in upcoming trainings they will focus on how to make word walls more interactive.

The district’s focus walks center mostly on the elements of a standards-based classroom. The district is just beginning to examine indicators pertaining to standards-based instruction, or how teachers deliver and students respond to instruction. The district’s most recent focus walk rubric (March and April of 2009) includes an “accountable talk” indicator, (e.g., teacher is the facilitator, students present and defend their solutions, students share work with each other). However, accountable talk was not analyzed during the district’s ELD walks in 2008-2009.

District administrators indicated that the focus walk tool is a work in progress and that there is room for improvement. In one focus walk report, district staff acknowledged that, although a few focus elements were selected for this ELD walk, it did not imply that these are the only elements that need examination or that these elements are the most important. The district leadership reported that their Department liaison is testing the focus walk tool and comparing it to the Department's learning walk tool. This summer, in conjunction with the Department, the district plans to refine its tool in order to gather more specific evidence during classroom visits—such as evidence on the relationship between teacher inputs (instruction) and student performance (learning).

The district does not have a formalized expectation that principals frequently monitor classroom instruction and provide specific feedback to teachers.

Processes to monitor classroom instruction and provide feedback vary by school. At some schools, the principal visits classrooms daily and gives teachers immediate feedback, or conducts periodic walkthroughs and provides oral feedback or notes to teachers. These frequent visits allow principals to monitor the implementation of school improvement initiatives, as well as to evaluate the impact of coaching on teacher practice. In other schools, however, principals do not observe teachers, including new teachers, outside of the formal evaluation process. In these schools, there is no system to monitor the implementation of improvement initiatives, nor is there a way to determine whether a coach is providing guidance to teachers effectively.

Data is used to group students, track student progress, and target interventions. The practice of using data to inform instructional delivery is not widespread.

The district's Commonwealth Priority Schools use a variety of data to monitor student progress, including: the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment administered in the fall, winter, and spring to all students in grades 3-8; the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) fluency assessment for grades K-3; the MAZE reading assessment; the GRADE assessment to track reading comprehension and vocabulary; and the Stieglitz Informal Reading Inventory (SIRI). Teachers of kindergarten through grade 3 students use progress monitoring (e.g., running records), student notebooks and portfolios, and unit tests in mathematics and ELA to track student progress. Teachers also keep data notebooks.

At all of the schools visited in this review, coaches play an active role in helping teachers interpret student data. Grade-level teams meet weekly with the school coaches to examine assessment data. Coaches also work with teachers to examine data, look at student work, match students to appropriate interventions, and develop common assessment standards.

In general, school leaders, coaches, and teachers across Commonwealth Priority Schools reported using the assessment data to track student progress, guide flexible student grouping, and assign students to interventions. At the White School, for example, ELA teachers reported using MAP data to create guided reading groups in grades 5 and 6; students were assigned to Larson math (based on MAP data) to get support with certain skills; and teachers reported using DIBELS data to determine whether to assign students to interventions like My Sidewalks. Some

teachers reported that analyzing student data prompted changes to the curriculum map. For instance, after realizing that students did poorly on fraction questions on the MCAS, mathematics teachers reported changing the curriculum map to cover this topic earlier in the year.

For the most part, the process of using data to inform instruction is at a beginning stage. The district is at the initial stage of implementing DesCartes—a companion to the MAP assessment that provides reports with detailed information on how an individual student performed on specific skills and concepts (e.g., transformations and symmetry: identifies congruent figures). Principals are at different phases of training teachers to use the program; some schools have begun to produce and examine student DesCartes reports. At the Kelly School, school leadership and teachers reported that they are using data to make changes in lesson delivery. For example, after looking at students’ open responses, grade 4 and grade 5 teachers decided to use “accountable talk” to improve students’ ability to cite evidence.

Data systems to evaluate the effectiveness of district improvement initiatives are not yet established.

The district does not have a data warehouse or system for disseminating data or tracking the impact of initiatives being implemented at the school or district level. The district is in the process of organizing data into a central location and working to establish processes to gather data and disseminate it to the school community. Teachers now keep hard copies of student data in notebooks. The district data team has basic student demographic information available, but limited assessment information.

The district’s goal is to put into one centralized system data (e.g., grades, attendance, assessments) that currently resides in too many places. The data team reported that there is limited space (i.e., there is no room equipped with computers available during the day) to train staff on using data, which has delayed the roll-out process. The Department has recognized the work the HPS data team has put in to build systems, and the team is working to create a data tool kit for the Department’s use in other districts.

The district provides guidance to school leaders in support of school improvement efforts.

The district recognizes the importance of providing support to school leaders and hosts regular principals’ network meetings that build on the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) training funded by the Department. This year, the main topics of the principals’ network meetings have been the ELL category training and the focus walks. Other topics covered include analyzing data, developing strategic plans, reflecting on practices, and building leadership capacity in connection with budgets, teacher evaluation, and human resources.

The district has modified the budget process to help ensure equitable support to schools. Principals participate in the budget planning process and are expected to use data to make budget justifications for the current year’s and the next year’s initiatives. With this new process, the district’s goal is to become better at targeting needs and to focus money where needs are the greatest.

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

Findings under Key Question 2

The Department’s support of America’s Choice as a turnaround partner has positively impacted the district’s improvement initiatives.

In 2005, the Department introduced the district to America’s Choice (AC)—a national school improvement organization. The district agreed to have America’s Choice serve as its turnaround partner and work collaboratively with the Holyoke Public Schools to implement a series of improvement initiatives. Those initiatives have included developing, aligning, and implementing the curriculum in ELA and mathematics; training district coaches; and assisting the district with programming for ELL students.

AC facilitated the development of the curriculum and its alignment with state standards, as well as the creation of curriculum maps. District staff and teachers participated in this process. It began in 2005 with the development of ELA and mathematics curriculum at the middle school level (i.e., grades 6-8), followed by the development of ELA and math curriculum in grades K-5 and then of science curriculum across grades. The curriculum was also aligned with the *Massachusetts English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes* (ELPBO). Sheltered English instruction and English language development maps were developed to guide instruction for ELL students in English language arts and mathematics.

The process of aligning curriculum to standards and developing curriculum maps has created a common language throughout schools and across the district. According to district coaches, teachers are speaking the same language. In focus groups, teachers reported that this alignment provides consistency for students who transfer from one district school to another. Teachers also reported that they feel more confident in delivering curriculum now and, as a result of the curriculum mapping and alignment, have higher expectations for students and are able to deliver more rigorous standards-based instruction.

Each year, AC’s involvement has been purposely reduced in scope in order to build the district’s capacity to support improvement. America’s Choice support this year is provided by AC coaches, one for ELA, who also supports ELL services, and one for mathematics. They train district coaches and provide them with technical assistance that builds their capacity to improve instruction across schools (see findings under Key Question 1, especially those on professional development, mentoring, and data). In June, district coaches attend a five-day camp facilitated by the AC coaches. The purpose of this summer training is to develop coaching skills (e.g., observing teachers and providing feedback). This year, AC coaches also provided technical assistance to coaches and teachers on examining student work and identifying grade-level standards. The AC coaches have also provided assistance to the district in support of programming for ELL students (e.g., training district coaches on ELL strategies, participating in focus walks, and attending principals’ network meetings).

In focus groups, district and school staff spoke very highly of the support provided by AC coaches. District ELL coaches reported that the AC coaches teach by example and provide useful guidance for their work in schools. According to district leaders, the AC ELA coach is “worth her weight in gold.”

Department-funded NISL training, along with the district’s leadership development efforts, has resulted in strong leadership across Commonwealth Priority Schools.

Administrators from the district’s schools and the superintendent participated in the NISL training funded by the Department. In tandem with the NISL opportunity offered to current school leaders, the district invited 22 aspiring administrators to participate in a Masters in Administration program through the University of Massachusetts. The district acquired a grant that covered all training and material costs for participants to receive a Masters degree in school administration. In return, candidates made a three-year commitment to stay in Holyoke.

As a result of the district and Department-supported leadership development efforts, principals have the capacity to develop strategic plans and use data to monitor instruction, inform instructional changes, and assess the implementation of school improvement initiatives. In focus groups, principals reported applying what they learned in NISL to their work in schools. As previously described, the district also hosts regular principals’ network meetings to build on this leadership training.

Department resources and grants are being used to support district initiatives in accordance with the memorandum of understanding (MOU).

Monies provided by the 323A grant to support the Commissioner’s Districts are being used in Holyoke to support implementation of DPSI initiatives in both Commonwealth Priority Schools and other district schools that are implementing the same initiatives.

The Commissioner's Districts Title I School Support Grant allocated \$155,300 to Holyoke to address services at five Commonwealth Priority Schools. These funds are being used to support initiatives being implemented in all of the district’s schools and are being spent primarily on professional development to improve the delivery of instruction to ELL students (i.e., category training and PLCs), curriculum maps for all ELL courses, stipends for substitute teachers, and mentor training. The district’s use of Department funding to support initiatives at all schools stems from a decision to make support equitable. According to one district leader, “what is good for one is good for all.” Furthermore, district leaders stated that the reorganization of HPS and the transfer of programs from one district school to another make it difficult to distinguish what support is specific to Commonwealth Priority Schools.

The memorandum of understanding (MOU) for fiscal year 2009, which was agreed upon by the Department and superintendent in January 2009, provides funding in support of professional development to improve the delivery of ELA and mathematics instruction, as well as instruction for ELL students. This includes professional development and technical assistance for district literacy and mathematics coaches, mathematics institutes, the development of ELD and MSL courses, and funding for the principals’ network meetings.

Additionally, the Department allocated \$400,000 in support of the district's effort to provide resources to students and families affected by mobility (the student mobility rate at HPS is 38.9 percent). Initially the district provided two transient opportunity programs (TOP), one at the elementary level and one at the middle school level. As of the 2008-2009 school year, TOP was reduced to specifically target middle school students. TOP is housed at the (K-8) Peck School, near an area where transience and homelessness rates are the highest in the district.

The Department provided \$87,000 to fund one resource development position to secure additional grant funding, provide community outreach, and establish partnerships with the business community. At the time of this review, the district had not yet filled this position.

The Department's accountability reporting guidelines have not been consistent from one evaluation cycle to the next.

Various Department evaluations (e.g., state panel review, America's Choice evaluation, DPSI review) have used different required district reports and varying criteria to measure improvement. According to district leaders, shifting reporting requirements and varying standards make tracking progress and managing accountability challenging. District administrators stated that a consistent set of criteria from one evaluation cycle to the next will help HPS leaders know what comes next and what steps the district needs to take to comply with Department accountability systems over time.

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.

Provide more support for ELL and special education students in the upper grades, and in all grades in mathematics.

- Developing, identifying, and securing research-based interventions for mathematics and ELA and providing additional instructional support for students with special needs (e.g. Orton-Gillingham, Lexia) will expand and enhance the district's current coverage for ELL and special education students.
- The district should consider identifying specific instructional strategies to support special education students in self-contained and inclusion settings, providing professional development to support the implementation of these strategies in the classroom and monitoring their implementation. Similar processes increased the district's capacity to address the needs of ELL students and could serve as a foundation for programmatic improvements to the district's special education.

Expand existing teacher recruitment efforts further to meet the district's goal of hiring candidates qualified to work with Holyoke's student population.

- Expanding partnerships with teacher preparation programs to include institutions in the state's urban centers could augment the district's connections to programs that specialize in preparing urban educators and, therefore, increase its pool of highly qualified candidates.
- The district should consider publicizing employment in its schools as a way for new teachers to receive state and federal financial assistance for educators. By doing so, the district could increase incentives for skilled candidates to seek employment in HPS.
- Consider sending representatives to recruiting events and taking advantage of available resources (e.g., recruiting consortiums, regional colleges) to directly target teacher candidates with the skills and expertise needed in Holyoke's schools.
- Encourage teachers to receive dual certification in special education to address shortages and to promote more effective implementation of the inclusion services.

Develop expectations to monitor the impact of support provided to new teachers.

- The district can expand support for new teachers by establishing clear expectations for follow-up by mentors, coaches, and principals. Systems for monitoring based on established expectations will help to ensure that supports are having the intended impact

on classroom practices. Providing targeted support and clear expectations may also assist the district in retaining trained teachers.

Develop formalized expectations and tools for principals to frequently monitor teacher practice and provide specific feedback on improving instruction.

- Developing expectations for principals to frequently monitor instruction and provide teachers with specific feedback could result in more consistent implementation of district initiatives and assist in determining whether a coach is effectively providing guidance to teachers.

Build the capacity of teachers to use student achievement data to make informed instructional decisions.

- Supporting and expanding the capacity of teachers to analyze student assessment data, the district will build on current school practices of using data to track student progress, guide flexible student grouping, and assign students to interventions and, as a result, could advance improvement to instructional practice across the district.

Appendix A: DPSI Review Team Members

The review of the Holyoke Public Schools was conducted from April 27 – May 5, 2009 by a team of educators from SchoolWorks, LLC on behalf of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Gwendolyn Casazza, Consultant, SchoolWorks

Susan Kerrigan, Consultant, SchoolWorks

Anne Lane, Project Manager, SchoolWorks

Dr. Muriel Leonard, Consultant, SchoolWorks

Dr. Fred Wetzel, 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 Holyoke 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; and staff from the Literacy unit.
- The DPSI review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the Holyoke Public Schools central office administration: superintendent, executive director of finance and operations, executive director of curriculum and testing, director of special education, assistant director of human resources, ELL director, ELA academic coordinator, district mathematics specialist, district literacy coaches, and the district data team.
- The DPSI review team visited the following schools in the Holyoke Public Schools: E.N. White School (K-8), Kelly School (K-8), McMahon School (K-8), Morgan School (K-8), and the Center for Excellence (middle school only).
 - During school visits, the DPSI review team conducted interviews with school principals, assistant principals, teachers, literacy coaches, mathematics coaches, ELL coaches, and Reading First coaches.
 - The DPSI review team conducted 57 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the five schools visited.
- The DPSI review team reviewed the following documents provided by the Department:
 - The DPSI
 - The Memorandum of Understanding between the district and the Department
 - The District Leadership Report on the Essential Conditions
 - The State Panel Review Report
- The DPSI review team reviewed the following documents at the district and school levels (provided by the district or schools):
 - School Improvement Plan
 - Assessment results: Measures of Academic Progress (MAP); DesCartes; Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS).
 - Focus Walk template and reports
 - Professional development calendar and coaches’ binder (ELA and mathematics)
 - Student math journals and student writing portfolios

DPSI Review Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the DPSI review of the Holyoke Public Schools, conducted from April 27 – May 4, 2009.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
April 27 DPSI review team meeting Initial district meeting and interview	April 28 Site visit to Kelly School Site visit to E.N. White School	April 29 DPSI review team meeting Interviews and focus groups with central office administration	April 30 Site visit to Morgan School Site visit to McMahan School	May 1 Site visit to Center for Excellence (middle school only)
May 4 DPSI review team meeting Final meeting and interviews with district				