



New Bedford Public Schools
DISTRICT PLAN FOR SCHOOL INTERVENTION
(DPSI) REVIEW

June 2009

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148-4906
Phone 781-338-3000 TTY: N.E.T. Relay 800-439-2370
www.doe.mass.edu



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Center for School and District Accountability of the
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D
Commissioner

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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 New Bedford Public Schools was conducted from April 6-15, 2009. The DPSI review included visits to the following district schools: Thomas R. Rodman School (K-5); Charles S. Ashley School (K-5); Keith Middle School (6-8); and Normandin Middle School (6-8). Note that the team has also produced a separate report for its review of Normandin Middle School. Further information about the review and its 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>.

New Bedford Public Schools

District Profile

The New Bedford Public Schools (NBPS) is in transition. The district has experienced significant changes in senior leadership in the past 10 months. The former superintendent of the NBPS retired in June 2008. Two assistant superintendents also retired and, as well, the unexpected passing of another has resulted in significant changes to leadership at this level of the district. Three of four assistant superintendents are new to the position this year.

The current superintendent – the first individual hired from outside the district in 34 years – came to NBPS to lead the district beginning in the 2008-2009 school year. In the first six months in the district, the superintendent created a strategic plan that is designed to be the primary operating plan for the New Bedford Public Schools.

In the 2008-2009 school year, the NBPS enrolled 12,609 students; the enrollment has declined slightly each year from the 2005-06 school year, when 13,441 students were enrolled. Student demographic and subgroup information for the 2008-2009 school year is provided below in Table 1.

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

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Percent of Total	Selected Populations	Percent of Total
African American	11.8%	First Language not English	22.1%
Asian	1.1%	Limited English Proficient	4.4%
Hispanic or Latino	27.4%	From low-income families	69.5%
Native American	1.0%	Special Education	19.0%
White	51.4%	Free-lunch	59.1%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.7%	Reduced-price lunch	10.4%
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	6.6%		

The district's students are enrolled in 27 schools across the district: twenty-two elementary schools (PK/K-5); three middle schools (6-8); one high school (9-12); and, one Jr/Sr school (6-12) that provides an alternative placement for some of the district's students.

The district has made several changes in its school configuration over the last several years. All grade 6 students are now served in one of the district's three middle schools. This change has affected two of the schools included in the DPSI review.

Keith Middle School, previously serving only students in grades 7 and 8, began enrolling grade 6 students in the 2007-2008 school year. As a result, student enrollment at Keith Middle School grew from 661 in the 2006-2007 school year to more than 1,000 students in the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years. Prior to the 2007-2008 school year, the Rodman School served grade six students; it now serves grades K-5. The Rodman School is one of only a few, small single-track elementary schools that remain in the district.

The principal of Keith Middle School is new this year and the principal of the Rodman School is in her second year. Leadership at both the Ashley School and Normandin Middle School has been stable for several years.

As of the 2008-2009 school year, the middle school program for English language learners (ELLs) is housed at Roosevelt Middle School. Neither Keith Middle School nor Normandin Middle School has specific ELL programs. Students are transitioned back into their home middle school when ELL services are no longer required.

Over the past two years, the NBPS has made a concerted effort to increase services for students with special needs and to improve the inclusion model in the district. District administrators reported that the percentage of students with special needs served in the regular education setting is approximately 65 percent, compared with approximately 40 percent two years ago.

Student Performance

In 2008, the New Bedford Public Schools did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the aggregate or for subgroups in English language arts (ELA). The district currently has an ELA NCLB status of Corrective Action in the aggregate. The district has a mathematics NCLB status of Corrective Action for subgroups only.

Table 2: NBPS Adequate Yearly Progress History

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

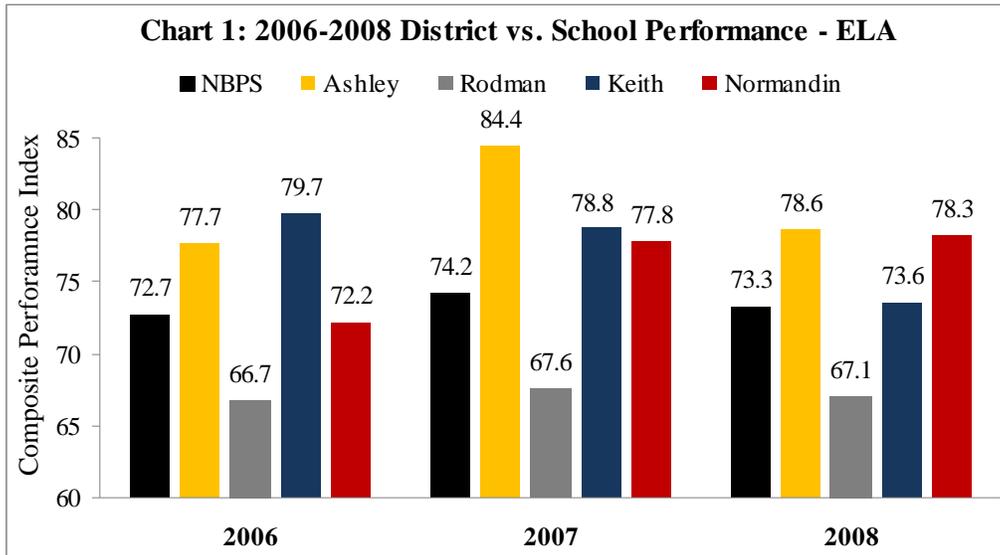
In 2008, none of the schools included in this review made AYP in ELA in the aggregate or for subgroups. Ashley Elementary School made AYP in mathematics in the both the aggregate and for subgroups in 2008. Normandin Middle School also made AYP in the aggregate for mathematics.

Table 3: 2008 District and School AYP Status

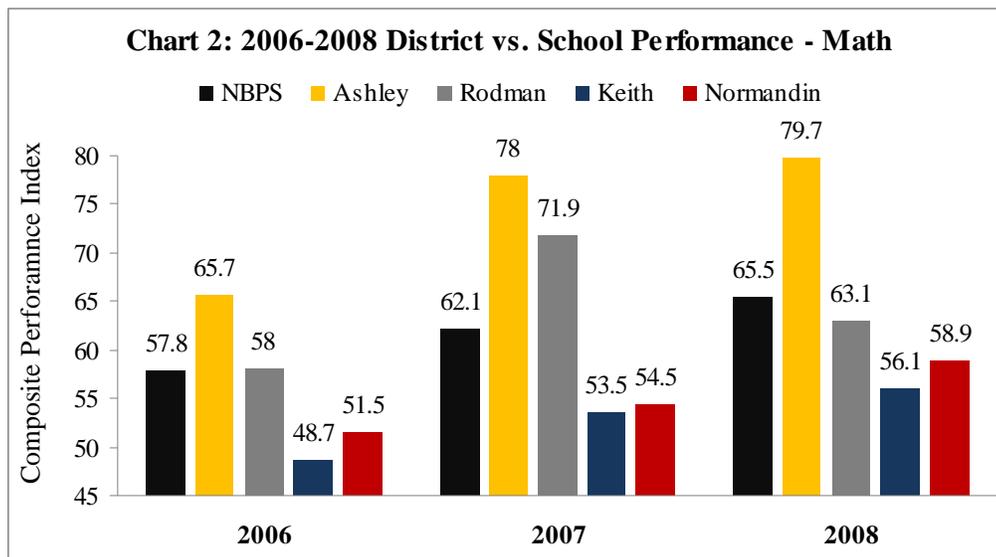
		ELA					Mathematics				
District/School	Enroll	Status 08	CPI 08	CPI Chg 07-08	AYP Agg	AYP Sub	Status 08	CPI 08	CPI Chg 07-08	AYP Agg	AYP Sub
New Bedford	12,988	CA-A	73.3	-0.9	No	No	CA-S	65.5	3.4	No	No
Ashley ES	320	II2-A	78.6	-5.8	No	No	None	79.7	1.7	Yes	Yes
Rodman ES	132	RST1-A	67.1	-0.5	No	No	II2-A	63.1	-8.8	No	No
Keith MS	1,108	RST1-S	73.6	-5.2	No	No	RST2-A	56.1	2.6	No	No
Normandin MS	1,068	RST1-S	78.3	0.5	No	No	RST2-A	58.9	4.4	Yes	No

Note: A or Agg = Aggregate; CA = Corrective Action; CPI = Composite Performance Index; II2 = Identified for Improvement year 2; RST1 = Restructuring year 1; RST2 = Restructuring year 2; S or Sub = Subgroup

The district's Composite Performance Index (CPI) in ELA has remained stable over the past three years. Across MCAS administrations (2006 to 2008), both the Ashley School and Keith Middle School have outperformed the district in ELA. Normandin Middle School performed slightly below the district in 2006, but has improved its CPI each year and outperformed the district in both 2007 and 2008. Only the Rodman School, across years, has performed below the district.



In mathematics, the district has increased its CPI each year, with a total CPI increase of 7.7 points from 2006 to 2008. Only the Ashley School has consistently outperformed the district in mathematics each year, and it has also shown continuous improvement from year to year. The Rodman School performed above the district in 2007 but fell below it in 2008. Both Keith and Normandin Middle Schools have shown improvement each consecutive year – 2006-2008 – but neither school has outperformed the district.



New Bedford Public Schools

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?

There have been significant changes in leadership at the district level in the New Bedford Public Schools (NBPS). As a result, there have been changes to the district's improvement strategies. While evidence of implementation of strategies in the District Plan for School Intervention (DPSI) exists, these activities were more prominent in the 2007-2008 school year. Some strategies have not been continued or are being revised under the new administration. In the fall of 2008, under the direction of the superintendent, the development of a strategic plan has begun to change the focus of some the district's efforts, including the adoption of several initiatives.

There are a large number of initiatives that exist in the district at the current time. While a relationship exists between some strategies in the DPSI, the strategic plan and school improvement plans, the connection is not explicit. It is not clear which initiatives are specifically designed to drive improvement and to hold individuals and schools accountable for performance.

Findings

There is evidence that initiatives outlined in the DPSI have been implemented in the district. Some strategies have been revised during the current school year.

The New Bedford Public Schools DPSI outlines three key strategies for improving teaching and learning: 1) provision of National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) training to enhance the existing district framework for building instructional leadership capacity; 2) expansion of the district's approach for monitoring teaching and learning to enable a review of progress being made toward performance targets; and, 3) implementation of a balanced interim assessment program for ELA and mathematics across grade levels (3-9) to inform instructional practice and to drive program changes.

The district has participated in NISL training since 2007. District leaders and most school principals have completed NISL. During the current school year, aspiring district leaders (such as assistant principals, teachers and other school support staff) are being trained. District assistant superintendents indicated NISL training has had a positive impact in the district, citing as two primary outcomes an increased focus on instructional leadership and the development of a common language to discuss teaching and learning. A positive impact was also noted at all four schools visited by the review team (see key question 2).

In the 2007-2008 school year, the district worked with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) to implement Learning Walks. The Learning Walks focused on five characteristics from the Department's Learning Walk Characteristics Continuum, identified by the district and the Department. All four schools visited by the review team participated in the Learning Walk process in the previous school year but have discontinued use of the tool in the current school year.

In the fall of 2008, the Learning Walk process was discontinued at the request of the superintendent. In an interview, the superintendent indicated that teachers had not had sufficient training on the tool or on the process to yield positive results and, further, that a Learning Walk tool should be targeted and used to evaluate implementation of a specific strategy. “It’s a refining tool,” stated the superintendent. Consistent with this philosophy, the district has created a new Learning Walk tool that is designed to provide feedback to teachers specifically on implementation of the 6+1 Traits of Writing. (See finding on pages 12 and 13 regarding instruction and feedback processes for teachers). At the time of the review, although a schedule had been established for Learning Walks to occur at several district schools, the revised Learning Walk process had not yet been implemented.

The district has continued to implement an interim assessment program. The Galileo assessment system, which began with mathematics at the middle school level, was expanded to grades 3-9 in 2007-2008. The district has begun the initial roll-out of Galileo in ELA in the current school year and will continue in the 2009 - 2010. The NBPS is shifting its data management system from TestWiz to Education Data Warehouse (EDW), which – district administrators reported – will increase centralized management of assessment information and enable the district to further customize data reports.

The newly developed strategic plan is designed to provide future direction for the district.

During the first six months in the district, the superintendent developed a new strategic plan for the New Bedford Public Schools (NBPS) that was approved by the School Committee on December 9, 2008. In addition to establishing a revised mission and vision for the district, the 2008-2011 Strategic Plan established four overarching goals: 1) Set high academic standards for all students and believe they can achieve them; 2) Create a positive school culture that builds on character and self confidence; 3) Engage parents and the community in the learning process; and, 4) Establish a professional staff that demonstrates quality, diversity and a strong background in content knowledge and pedagogy.

Each of these goals is further defined by a set of objectives, corresponding activities, persons responsible and expected outcomes. The superintendent reported that updates will be added to measure progress toward achievement of goals in the multi-year plan, stating that the plan is intended to be a “living document.”

The 2008-2011 Strategic Plan is a robust document that contains more than 20 pages of activities to be implemented over the course of three years to achieve the above-mentioned goals. When asked about strategic plan initiatives, district administrators, school leaders and teachers provided consistent descriptions of key events – for example: “a changing culture,” “use of guided reading,” “implementation of the 6+1 Traits of Writing,” “John Collins” (an additional writing program) and “professional learning communities (PLCs).” It was clear to the review team that stakeholders were aware of initiatives in the strategic plan.

As for how the strategic plan was created, the superintendent reported in an interview that it was developed on the basis of input from district stakeholders. Facilitated focus groups were

conducted throughout the community, based on 10 to 12 guiding questions. Multiple focus groups were conducted on different days with a range of stakeholders, including: parents, students, business and community leaders, and representatives from local colleges/universities. The superintendent also indicated that student performance data were reviewed and considered as a driving force in the development of the strategic plan, but that the DPSI was not a consideration.

In focus groups, however, district administrators (e.g., assistant superintendents, academic directors) reported that they were asked to provide feedback on a draft of the strategic plan but that input into its development was limited. One principal reported participating in the writing of one section of the strategic plan. Some district staff described individual meetings with the superintendent to help define roles and responsibilities and to provide input into the direction of the district, which some individuals believe may have been considered in the development of the strategic plan.

There is no explicit alignment between the strategic plan, the DPSI, and school-based improvement initiatives. As a result, there is no clear set of expectations to hold individuals accountable for performance and improvement.

The district's strategic plan was recently adopted and its roll-out is just beginning. The review team noted evidence of implementation of strategic plan initiatives at some schools. At Keith Middle School, for example, school leaders and teachers described the establishment of mathematics learning communities, which is the beginning of PLCs in the school. In focus groups, principals also reported receiving training in PLCs. At the Rodman School, teachers are beginning to implement guided reading practices through leveled groups, which were observed during classroom visits. Leveled readers were recently purchased at Rodman to expand the school's library, and the school is in the early stages of implementing the 6+1 Traits of Writing. The Ashley School has begun implementation of the 6+1 Traits of Writing, which teachers described in focus groups. Evidence (e.g., anchor charts) was also seen in some classrooms visited in these schools. Normandin Middle School is using the 6+1 Traits of Writing at grade 6 as students transition from the elementary schools; it has begun to transition to John Collins at grades 7 and 8.

Across schools visited, the review team noted the presence of DPSI initiatives, including: participation in NISL training to building instructional leadership capacity; efforts to monitor teaching and learning; and initial implementation of a balanced interim assessment program to inform instructional practice. The DPSI strategies overarch improvement strategies outlined in School Improvement Plans (SIPs). However, the selection of specific strategies and the approach to implementation is determined at the school level. For example, principals and teachers across schools reported a focus on data to inform instruction. However, the structure of meetings, the length of time committed to data meetings and the use of data to inform instruction varies by school. "School Improvement Plans are to be woven into the DPSI," stated one district administrator, "there are differences school by school." Another district leader reported, "How [the DPSI and SIPs] is implemented at each school is different."

The process for establishing goals and selecting school improvement strategies is unclear. School leaders reported discussing school-based improvement strategies and plans with district liaisons, but a formal process of feedback, review, and approval was not clear to the review team. School plans were initially developed several years ago. At some schools, the SIP had been revised to reflect current strategies. Other schools provided a summary of improvement initiatives in place at the school that are being implemented locally to improve teaching and learning. Normandin Middle School, for example, is focusing on elements of a good lesson (e.g., essential questions, warm-ups, objectives, summarizers). A focus at Keith Middle School – under new leadership in the current year – had been implementation of a co-teaching model to improve services for students with disabilities. The Ashley School has implemented monthly mathematics writing prompts, daily read-alouds, and school-wide use of Read It! Draw It! Solve It! activities. The focus at the Rodman School in the current year has been to increase a culture of collaboration that is focused on teaching and learning, including use of a common language.

It is not clear what plan is currently guiding the actions, particularly at the school level. School principals and leadership teams interviewed by the review team were able to articulate the overarching priorities in the strategic plan but were less articulate about its role in the overall improvement of the district and its relationship to current initiatives (i.e., the DPSI, school improvement initiatives). One school leader stated, “I’m not sure how it all meshes together at this point.” Another indicated, “We know the school plan should be a three-year plan.” In focus groups, both district and school leaders reported that School Improvement Plans to be developed in the coming year “should align with the strategic plan,” as stated by one principal. In an interview, the superintendent also cited an expectation that School Improvement Plans will align to the strategic plan. However, the majority of individuals interviewed by the review team were not clear about this expectation. Nor was it clear how the strategic plan would serve as an umbrella for school goals, school improvement efforts, or individual performance in the future.

In focus groups, neither district administrators nor school leaders were able to articulate the process to be used to evaluate principals during the current year. District administrators were able to articulate processes under the previous administration. Some school leaders reported that they had not received an evaluation in the previous year, although each anticipated being evaluated at the end of the current school year. The criteria, however, are not clear. One principal reported, “I know I need to bring data.” In an interview, the superintendent indicated that school leaders will be evaluated on the basis of School Improvement Plans and professional learning communities in the future. There is no clear set of expectations holding individuals accountable for performance and improvement.

It is not clear which initiatives in the district are specifically designed to drive improvement or to provide specific support to Commonwealth Priority Schools beyond what is offered to other district schools.

A large number of initiatives currently exist in the district. During the 2008-2009 school year, several strategic plan initiatives were introduced (e.g., PLCs, John Collins). Others were given increased attention (e.g., 6+1 Traits of Writing) under the new administration. In the previous

school year, the development of the DPSI had also brought new initiatives into the district (e.g., NISL principles, Learning Walks). In addition to strategic plan initiatives and DPSI strategies, schools visited by the review team are working to implement school-based improvement strategies. This has created at least some confusion around priorities.

Confusion also exists around reasons for adoption of initiatives. In focus groups, some school staff indicated a belief that the district makes decisions about program adoption and implementation on the basis of the availability of resources from external vendors. Another individual stated, “In New Bedford, a lot of things are introduced and a lot of things leave.”

The district offers a range of professional development opportunities for teachers. An extensive list of district trainings was provided to the review team, as well as a range of flyers announcing both internal trainings and those provided by other entities (e.g., Hampshire Educational Collaborative). Mentors and external consultants are used to provide additional training and embedded support to teachers and staff. The district also provides to staff opportunities outside of the district, including attendance at conferences and course reimbursements.

There is not clearly targeted district professional development to support specific aspects of practice that require improvement. A district director stated, “[the plan] is to be in support of district initiatives.” There are a large number of initiatives in the district and an extensive number of professional opportunities to support implementation of initiatives. That is, teachers are provided training opportunities. However, there is not an explicit link between professional development activities and improvement initiatives nor is there a specific professional development plan to ensure key improvement strategies are the focus of staff training and development. The superintendent and district administrators in charge of professional development indicated that a professional development plan is in the process of being created. Both also indicated that this future professional development plan will align with the strategic plan.

Schools identified as Commonwealth Priority Schools (CPSs) receive little support beyond what other district schools are provided. Support occurs primarily in the form of an assigned district liaison (assistant superintendent) and monies for additional programs or initiatives. Schools visited by the review team each have an assistant superintendent assigned to monitor and support improvement. As described by both assistant superintendents and principals, this support consists primarily of classroom walk-throughs, discussions about classroom instruction, review of the School Improvement Plan and other collegial conversations. While these supports align with DPSI initiatives, there are not specific criteria or expectations for monitoring to ensure improvement.

CPS schools have also been provided additional intervention programs such as Lexia, My Reading Coach, ELLIS and NovaNet. Irlen reading intervention training, which other teachers in the district will attend, will be provided at the Ashley school. Other CPS schools have used consultants to assist with implementation of school-based initiatives. However, a district administrator stated, “We’re looking at the whole – improvement for all kids.” The strategic plan is focused on all students and does not delineate specific supports for schools or students who are

struggling. The DPSI is designed to support the district's priority schools, but all three key strategies are being implemented across all district schools. All elementary schools in the district have two coaches (literacy and mathematics), and the teacher contract prohibits the district from placing the most effective coaches in struggling schools.

Schools identified as Commonwealth Priority Schools are those that have shown consistently lower rates of student performance over time. In New Bedford, CPSs visited during this review have made gains over time. While improvement initiatives should be in place across all schools to ensure continued growth, those schools that have the lowest student performance rates should receive increased supports to enable them to continue these gains.

The district does not have a system to measure the impact of initiatives.

Student learning data is the primary mechanism to measure the impact of initiatives in the district. There are no systems to evaluate the impact of various initiatives being implemented at the school or district level to ensure improvement to teaching and student learning. In focus groups, district administrators reported that MCAS scores and Galileo results are the primary sources of information used to assess impact. School leaders and teachers reported the same. While increases in student performance results suggest that something is working, there is not data do not determine what strategy, program, or other initiatives caused the increase. New Bedford has no mechanism to determine, among its large number of initiatives, which are having the greatest impact or which are not working and should be discontinued. In focus groups, district administrators indicated that there is no time to isolate specific initiatives to understand what is working and what is not, also suggesting that this is a complex process. Urgency in the district is expressed through the implementation of new initiatives, which has resulted in numerous initiatives, as opposed to extensive commitment to selected programs and strategies that work. The latter may be more beneficial.

The district and its schools are in the initial phases of analyzing and using data to understand student learning. Data are not used on a regular basis to inform instruction at the individual student level.

A range of data sources are available to understand student learning at the school level. MCAS data are used at all four schools to understand student performance. In addition to examination of MCAS results, teachers at the Rodman School cited using mock MCAS assessments to provide data to inform instruction and to increase student test-taking stamina. At Keith Middle School, MCAS practice assessments are also used. All four schools visited by the review team reported using Galileo in mathematics. At the middle schools, the first Galileo assessment in ELA was administered this year. Both the Rodman School and Ashley School also use the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) to assess student's early literacy skills (e.g., phonemic awareness, fluency). Across schools, a range of classroom-based assessments (e.g., unit assessments, pre-tests, post-tests, projects, quizzes) are also used to understand student performance.

Use of data to drive instruction is in its initial phases in the district. District administrators reported that the first priority has been to build school leadership's capacity to identify effective practices through the use of data. NISL has been a catalyst for this shift. District leaders reported that teachers are expected to look at and discuss data, but there is no district-wide systematic method for data use and analysis. Although conversations around use of data have begun across schools, processes for reviewing and using data vary by school. For example, at the Ashley School, weekly data meetings are used to review data and to determine areas that need re-teaching. The Rodman School reviews MCAS data and uses this information to create leveled student groups, for example. In focus groups, Rodman School teachers reported that this was the first time they had engaged in this type of data review under the new school leader. Content area and collaboration times occur daily at Keith Middle School. Both school leaders and teachers reported examining data but stated that these processes are just beginning. One teacher stated, "We have just begun to scratch the surface." At Normandin Middle School, teachers use common planning time to examine student data and identify trends across grade levels and subject areas. Changes are made to lesson plans as a result.

Across the schools visited, the review team noted that data-based discussion around mathematics instruction occurred more frequently than for other types of instruction. In focus groups, school leaders and teachers across schools noted the benefit of data discussions with the district mathematics supervisor. Teachers also noted that Galileo (currently only implemented in mathematics) had been instrumental in understanding student performance and aligning instruction more closely with standards. The district mathematics supervisor reported, "Galileo has been pivotal in triggering data-based discussion." This is also noteworthy since district performance in mathematics has continued to increase since 2006, whereas ELA performance has remained stable, showing little improvement. Performance at the Ashley School, Keith Middle School and Normandin Middle School has also improved across years in mathematics.

One of the superintendent's key initiatives is the establishment of PLCs. In addition to increasing collaboration, the superintendent stated that the purpose is "to create more data-driven results." In focus groups, district administrators reported that the establishment of the Education Data Warehouse (EDW) will increase the district's capacity to disseminate data to schools and provide reports that are more student-centered, thereby also increasing the district's capacity to use data as an instructional driver. At the time of the review, the district's mathematics supervisor was in the process of creating training sessions (to be rolled out in the following school year) that are designed to incorporate use of EDW, with a focus on using data to inform instruction.

Current data reports provided to teachers are in the form of trends (e.g., across schools, grade levels, classrooms). Data are used primarily to group students and, in some schools, to plan lessons. Data analyses in the district have not yet been driven down to the student level to inform instructional decisions on a regular basis. This kind of analysis and use of data provides the most valuable information and is likely to have the greatest impact on teaching and learning.

Current processes for monitoring instruction in the district are informal. There is no formalized system to provide feedback to teachers to improve instruction.

There are processes at all four schools visited by the review team to provide at least some informal feedback to teachers on classroom practices. In addition to feedback provided by school leadership, assistant superintendents who have been assigned to each school designated as a Commonwealth Priority School (CPS) reported participating in informal walk-throughs with principals. Current processes, however, are not systemized and do not provide individualized feedback to drive instructional improvements.

Processes to monitor classroom instruction and provide feedback vary by school. At the Rodman School, the principal created a tool to provide feedback on student and teacher behavior, the classroom climate, and implementation of school initiatives. In focus groups, Rodman School teachers reported receiving feedback on classroom practice that is both positive and constructive. Leadership at the Ashley School has created a modified version of the Learning Walk tool that is used to provide at least some feedback to teachers. In focus groups, teachers reported receiving brief comments on “sticky notes,” for example. At Keith Middle School, informal walk-throughs are conducted by school administrators, who reported looking for practices including: common agendas, objectives posted, and evidence of peer learning. Keith Middle School teachers also reported receiving feedback. Normandin Middle School has developed a tool to understand classroom instruction based on Jon Saphier’s *Elements of a Good Lesson*. Teachers reported receiving feedback on the presence of focus elements (e.g., warm-up activity evident and appropriate, instruction varied to meet the needs of all learners). Teachers receive written feedback provided mostly in the form of questions and some recommendations. Normandin school leaders also conduct “5x5” walks – five-minute classroom visits to five classrooms each day. Feedback from 5x5 walks is provided to teachers during content area meetings in the form of trends. If areas of concern are noted across classrooms, school leaders address these trends through professional development.

While informal processes are currently being used to provide some feedback in New Bedford classrooms, most feedback is not individualized. As a result, teachers are not receiving sufficient feedback (i.e., regular, frequent, and specific) to improve the quality of instruction.

The rigor of instruction is not consistent. Processes to provide feedback to teachers are not sufficient to take teaching and learning to the next level.

The review team conducted 72 classroom visits across four schools while on site in New Bedford. While excellent instruction was observed in some classrooms, instruction with minimal rigor was observed in others. In the majority of classrooms, strong foundations were observed, but rigor was not sufficient to take student performance to the next level.

Excellent instruction was observed in approximately 25 percent of classrooms. This was characterized by a range of instructional techniques (23%), including review of previous work, students working in small groups and independent practice, and small group work with peers. Teacher questions required students to engage in higher-order thinking (i.e., analysis, synthesis,

evaluation) in 26 percent of classrooms – for example, “How does this fit in the theme of courage?” In 17 percent of the classrooms, students were able to articulate their own thinking and reasoning by explaining, for example, how they solved a complex algebraic equation to a peer. Use of formative assessments (e.g., questions, walking around the classroom) to check for student understanding was also noted. In these classrooms (27%), instruction was modified to touch on content and skill areas in which students were struggling.

Instruction with minimal rigor was observed in approximately 25 percent of the classrooms. Instruction in these classrooms was marked by no evidence of higher-order questions posed by teachers (30%) and a lack of opportunity for students to articulate thinking and reasoning (34%) or to apply new knowledge (28%). Instruction was delivered with a single technique (27%) – for example, teacher lecture or students completing worksheets, with minimal instruction occurring. Formative assessment to check for student understanding was also limited in these classrooms (28%).

In approximately 50 percent of the classrooms, the foundations of good instruction were evident. There was some variety in instructional delivery (48%). Students were also provided a few opportunities to engage in higher-order thinking, through questions (44%) and opportunities to articulate thinking and reasoning (46%) and to apply new knowledge (38%). Use of formative assessments checked for comprehension (48%) and (for at least some students) resulted in a different instructional approach to ensure student understanding. For example, questions and scaffolding occurred only for small groups or individual students. These classrooms were also marked by a pace that worked for some, but not all, students. In 49 percent of the classrooms, there was partial evidence that class time was maximized. For example, students completed lessons, activities, and/or independent work quickly and, as a result, were not engaged in learning tasks (e.g., were talking to peers, sitting quietly). Other students remained engaged continuing to complete the assignment.

The majority of NBPS classrooms visited have foundations in place to deliver rigorous instruction, but require feedback to move instruction and teacher practice to the next level, so that excellent instruction may be found in all, not just some, New Bedford classrooms. The majority of classroom walk-through data being reviewed by teachers and school leaders are based on whole school, grade level or content area trends. In focus groups, district administrators, school leaders, and teachers indicated that the teacher contract does not allow for individualized, constructive written feedback to be provided, since it may have evaluative implications. As a result, most feedback is provided orally. In reviewing the contract, however, the team saw no evidence that the contract precludes principals or other Unit B administrators from providing written feedback.

A new Learning Walk process is being implemented. The focus is only on the 6+1 Traits of Writing, which is being used only at some schools and at some grade levels (K-6). This targeted walk-through addresses writing only and is not sufficient to increase the rigor of classroom practices across all grade levels and subject areas.

Every elementary school in the district has two school-based coaches (a mathematics coach and a literacy coach). This has been a key initiative in the district for several years. However, coaches are in the same bargaining unit as teachers and, therefore, are limited in the way they can work with teachers. A district administrator reported that coaches can bid into positions. The district has limited control over coach placement (i.e., the most effective coaches cannot be moved to schools that are struggling the most). In focus groups, district leaders indicated that the impact of coaches varies by school and depends on coach experience, expertise, and the working relationship that has been established with teachers. As a result, the impact of the coaching model and the significant resources expended to provide school-based coaches cannot currently be maximized to improve teaching and learning.

There is insufficient time for focused teacher collaboration at the elementary level.

There is limited common planning time at the elementary level. Teachers are provided 90 minutes every Friday to plan together. However, per the teacher contract, school leadership does not have control over the agenda. At Commonwealth Priority Schools, stipends are provided for planning time after school through the 323A grant. While this provides an incentive for teachers to attend, participation cannot be required (also per the teacher contract).

In focus groups, many stakeholders cited the superintendent's goal of expanding the fine arts and physical education programs to provide increased time for core content area teachers to plan and collaborate. This is contingent upon the FY10 budget, which was under negotiation at the time of the review. In an interview, the superintendent reported that, if agreed upon, at least some of this collaborative time would be under the principal's control.

The current structure of common planning time in the district's elementary schools is insufficient to improve teaching and learning. In addition to time being limited, school leaders have limited control over topics being discussed. As a result, there is no guarantee that collaborative time is being used to focus on key improvement initiatives or strategies that are most likely to impact teaching and learning.

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

Findings

District administrators and school stakeholders have found the range of assistance provided by the Department to be helpful. Many note that the relationship between the Department and the district has changed to be more assistance-oriented.

In focus groups, district administrators and school leaders cited various aspects of Department support that have been helpful. NISL training and the Galileo were consistently identified as supports that have assisted the district in improving its focus on teaching and learning. The range of training and support provided by Department staff to support specific content areas and student populations was also recognized.

Many individuals attributed the increased focus on instructional leadership to participation in NISL training. In reference to NISL, an assistant superintendent stated, “Building leadership is a lever of change; [NISL] has provided a positive foundation.” An impact was also noted at the school level. One principal stated, “[NISL] has been very valuable.” One of the key focuses of the principal at the Rodman School has been redefining the role of leadership as instructional leadership. Key initiatives at Rodman have included use of a common language to discuss standards-based education with a focus on instruction. The principal, three assistant principals and two teachers at Normandin Middle School have participated in NISL, which was the catalyst for the development and implementation of a Learning Walk process at the school. Both the principal and coaches at the Ashley School have also participated in NISL; the principal noted its value. Staff members at the Keith Middle School referred to the impact of NISL principles on teaching and learning.

At both the district and school levels, individuals reported that the Galileo assessment system has greatly benefited New Bedford. One district administrator stated, “Galileo has been pivotal in triggering discussion... there has been buy-in.” Across the four schools visited, Galileo is in use and, as a result of the information provided, teachers have begun having data-based discussions – particularly in the area of mathematics. All four schools have established a foundation for developing PLCs in mathematics. The district mathematics supervisor has been instrumental in the roll out of Galileo and in providing support to schools. The mathematics supervisor has also been an active participant in Department activities to support mathematics – for example, INTEL training and liaison network meetings. “The network has been instrumental in working through issues and questions,” stated the mathematics supervisor, “it has provided a range of contacts.” Implementation of Galileo in mathematics and the extensive support provided by the mathematics supervisor, as well as participation in Department-supported events to support mathematics, is noteworthy. The MCAS scores in mathematics at the district level have continued to increase over the past three years, whereas ELA scores have remained flat.

Training provided by Department staff in writing, development of writing programs, and standards-based reading strategies were also noted as helpful by both school leaders and district

administrators. Other district staff members cited assistance with ELL curriculum mapping, category training and teleconference training around special education topics as additional assistance provided by the Department to support district efforts. District administrators also recognized the Department's work to assist the district in obtaining grant funding to support initiatives.

District administrators and school leaders consistently noted the shift in the primary role of the Department from one of accountability toward more of assistance. One member of the district leadership team stated, "Department functions feel much less like an audit and more collaborative." Another district administrator reported, "[the Department] used to say they were critical friends and we didn't believe it. Now we're starting to [believe it]."

District administrators, school leaders and teachers generally found the Learning Walk process to be helpful.

All four schools visited by the review team participated in the Department-supported Learning Walks in the 2007-2008 school year. While a formal Learning Walk process is not currently in place, impact of the Learning Walk was noted. All schools have made efforts to implement informal processes to monitor instruction. In focus groups, district administrators reported that the Learning Walk process, as well as the training prior to participation, was helpful in focusing both district and school staff on effective teaching and learning practices. An assistant superintendent stated, "[the Learning Walks] helped us to discuss classroom practices." Another district leader reported, "It provided a cross-cutting look at instruction in the district." Most school leaders also noted the impact, particularly the provision of focus. One principal reported, "The Learning Walks provided clarity and continuity around our work."

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 Commissioner's districts are being used to support implementation of initiatives in the DPSI in both Commonwealth Priority Schools and other district schools implementing the same cross-cutting initiatives. The district has taken advantage of other grant opportunities to provide additional support to schools and to continue to advance the development of a centralized data warehouse.

The Commissioner's Districts School Support Grant allocated \$347,031 to New Bedford to address services at nine Commonwealth Priority Schools. Approximately two-thirds of these funds (\$225,465) has been designated for CPSs, and \$121,566 of the funding is to be used in support of district-wide cross-cutting initiatives at the other schools. Of the \$225,465 designated to CPSs, \$99,465 is to support the same cross-cutting initiatives being implemented at the other district schools. These cross-cutting strategies being implemented in CPSs, as well as other district schools, focus primarily on support for further development and implementation of the Galileo assessment system. This includes roll-out of benchmark assessments in ELA, training in use of the assessment system, and item analysis on Galileo results.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for fiscal year 2009, which was agreed upon by the Department and superintendent at the end of February 2009, provides some focused funding for the establishment of PLCs, in alignment with the continued roll-out of Galileo and the district's focus on increasing discussion around data-driven instruction.

Funds targeted specifically for CPSs include approximately \$60,000 for interventions (e.g., Lexia, My Reading Coach, Nova Net) and approximately \$66,000 to provide stipends to increase common planning time, particularly at elementary schools.

The Education Data Warehouse (EDW) project is another key initiative in the district that is being supported by additional grant funds. District administrators reported that this grant is important as part of implementation of the Galileo assessment program, as well as in use of data to inform instructional practice (a DPSI strategy). EDW will increase centralized management of assessment information and enable the district to further customize data reports for schools to use to understand student performance.

Three district schools, including the Rodman School, have received the Silber grant to support reading instruction. At the Rodman School, leadership and teachers reported that these monies have been used primarily to increase leveled reading materials to support the implementation of guided reading, a district initiative. Some New Bedford schools are also supported by Reading First grants.

Implementation of Department-supported activities is not always timely and information provided about Department-supported activities is insufficient in some cases.

At the both the district and school levels, individuals reported that the timing of Department-supported activities could be improved. For example, the roll-out of the Learning Walk process at the end of the 2007 – 2008 school year was not ideal. The implementation of the DPSI review this year was also cited as less than ideal – both because it occurred during MCAS and because it occurred toward the end of the school year. District administrators reported that these activities would have provided greater benefit to the district had they occurred earlier in their respective school years. This was corroborated by school leaders.

A few district leaders and the superintendent stated that the process to complete the MOU was lengthy. The superintendent also expressed a desire to have had more time to “understand the needs of the district” before determining what Department-supported activities would provide the greatest benefit to the NBPS. As a newcomer to the state, the superintendent indicated that increased information about Department initiatives (e.g., NISL) and requirements (e.g., plans for restructuring, corrective action schools) would have been useful in understanding state systems and in making decisions about participation in Department-supported activities.

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 recommendations are for the district to consider in future improvement efforts and for the Department to consider in determining support for improvement.

Reduce the number of initiatives to focus on those designed to have the greatest impact on teaching and learning. Provide clarity around why key strategies were selected and establish expectations for implementation.

- The district has a large number of initiatives and it is unclear which are specifically targeted to drive improvement. Providing clear expectations around key initiatives and strategies may help schools to focus efforts and improve implementation.
- Ensuring that district and school staff members understand why specific initiatives have been identified and how they are intended to improve teaching and learning and, therefore, student/school performance may also help with implementation and impact.

Create systems to measure the impact of specific strategies, initiatives, and programs and hold individuals accountable for effective implementation.

- Creating systems to measure impact will help the district determine what strategies, initiatives, and programs should be discontinued (if not working), as well as those that should be continued and perhaps expanded, once success has been demonstrated.
- Linking them to professional development will help to provide focus on key initiatives and, therefore, maximize impact on teaching and learning. Providing training on key initiatives and monitoring improved implementation at the classroom level may yield important information (e.g., classroom practices, program effectiveness).

Develop a targeted professional development plan that is focused on key improvement strategies, as opposed to extensive training opportunities.

- A clear professional development plan should be linked to key district improvement initiatives. The majority of training should focus on those activities that are most important in the district.
- The district should consider conducting a cost-benefit analysis to determine the impact of different trainings. This could result in decreased expenditures and increased impact. Trainings that are not working could be discontinued and monies focused on trainings that are impacting teaching and learning at the classroom level.

Ensure that monitoring of improvement initiatives is linked to data and based on clear expectations. This will help increase accountability for staff and student performance.

- Incorporating data into district monitoring processes – at both the systems level and the individual level – provides concrete information that the district, school leaders, and teachers can use to reflect upon the effectiveness of practices.
- Monitoring activities should be targeted and aligned with key district initiatives and improvement strategies. Clear performance expectations (outcomes) should be established for staff; the monitoring process should provide feedback in relation to desired outcomes throughout the course of the year.

Appendix A: DPSI Review Team Members

The review of the New Bedford Public Schools was conducted from April 6-15, 2009, by a team of educators from SchoolWorks, LLC on behalf of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Gwendolyn Casazza, Consultant, SchoolWorks

Anne Lane, Project Manager, SchoolWorks

Nancy Legan, Consultant, SchoolWorks

Dr. Muriel Leonard, Consultant, SchoolWorks

Patricia O’Leary, Consultant, SchoolWorks

Joseph Trunk, Consultant, SchoolWorks

Megan Tupa, Chief Operating Officer, SchoolWorks

Appendix B: DPSI Review Activities and Schedule

DPSI Review Activities

The following activities were conducted as part of the DPSI review of the New Bedford 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; manager of the Educator Leadership 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 New Bedford Public Schools central office administration: superintendent; deputy superintendent; assistant superintendent, accountability & special programs; assistant superintendent, equity & diversity; assistant superintendent, curriculum & instruction; interim assistant superintendent, student services; math supervisor; director, professional development; Title 1 director; director, federal & state funded programs; academic directors (mathematics, ELA, science, social studies, SEI/ELL).
- The DPSI review team visited the following schools in the New Bedford Public Schools: Thomas R. Rodman School (K-5); Charles S. Ashley School (K-5); Keith Middle School (6-8); and Normandin Middle School (6-8).
 - During school visits, the DPSI review team conducted interviews with school principals, teachers, members of school leadership teams, literacy and mathematics coaches, NISL participants and students.
 - The DPSI review team conducted seventy-two classroom visits across different grade levels and subjects in the four schools visited.
- The DPSI review team reviewed the following documents provided by the Department:
 - The New Bedford Public Schools DPSI
 - The Memorandum of Understanding between the New Bedford 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 at the district and school levels (provided by the district or schools):
 - The 2008-2011 New Bedford Public Schools Strategic Plan
 - School Improvement Plans including summary updates

- Description of the processes in place to monitor DPSI implementation and other intervention strategies and improvement efforts, including monitoring updates
- Description of the Galileo assessment system, including data reports
- Processes and tools for monitoring instruction/conducting Learning Walks in the previous school year, including data reports
- Revised Learning Walk tool, based on the 6+1 Traits of Writing
- A range of flyers documenting district professional development offerings
- Documentation about the implementation of Education Data Warehouse (EDW)
- Rosters of NISL participants and summaries of impact of NISL training
- Coaches' schedules and meeting templates

DPSI Review Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the DPSI review of the New Bedford Public Schools, conducted from April 6-15, 2009.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<p>April 6</p> <p>DPSI review team meeting</p> <p>Initial district meeting and interview</p> <p>Site visit to the Thomas R. Rodman School</p>	<p>April 7</p> <p>Interviews and focus groups with central office administration</p> <p>DPSI review team meeting</p>	<p>April 8</p> <p>Site visit to Charles S. Ashley School</p>	<p>April 9</p> <p>Site visit to Keith Middle School</p>	<p>April 10</p> <p>No site visit activities</p>
<p>April 13</p> <p>Site visit to Normandin Middle School</p>	<p>April 14</p> <p>Site visit to Normandin Middle School</p>	<p>April 15</p> <p>DPSI review team meeting</p> <p>Final meeting and interviews with district</p>		