



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

August 2009

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

The purpose of the eight DPSI reviews is to assess district efforts to support school intervention, including strategic decisions made to support ongoing school improvement. These reviews also seek to assess the impact of support given by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) for improvement efforts. DPSI reviews also carry out requirements for state audits of districts.¹

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

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

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

The DPSI review to the Springfield Public Schools was conducted from May 26–June 10, 2009. The DPSI review included visits to the following district schools: Elias Brookings School (K-8); Daniel Brunton Elementary School (PreK-5); Chestnut Middle School (6-8); Van Sickle Middle School (6-8); John F. Kennedy Middle School (6-8); Marcus Kiley Middle School (6-8); White Street School (K-5); Gerena Community School (PreK-5); Brightwood School (K-5); and Springfield Academy for Excellence (SAFE) (K-12). 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>.

Springfield Public Schools

District Profile

The Springfield Public Schools (SPS) came under the leadership of a new superintendent for the 2008-2009 school year. The district has a new administrative organization that is designed to provide increased accountability and an improved infrastructure, separating operations from academics. While titles and responsibilities have shifted somewhat, many central office staff have remained in the district under the new administration.

The district's students are enrolled in 45 schools: 30 elementary schools (PreK/K-5); 2 PreK/K-8 schools; 1 middle/high school (6-12); 7 middle schools (6-8); 4 high schools (9-12); and 1 alternative school that is spread across seven campuses (K-12).

Student enrollment in the district has remained fairly stable. In the 2008-2009 school year, SPS enrolled 25,233 students. Student demographic and subgroup information for the 2008-2009 school year is provided below in Table 1.

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

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Percent of Total	Selected Populations	Percent of Total
African American	23.2%	First Language not English	23.7%
Asian	2.2%	Limited English Proficient	12.7%
Hispanic or Latino	54.8%	From low-income families	77.8%
Native American	0.1%	Special Education	23.9%
White	15.7%	Free-lunch	70.5%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.0%	Reduced-price lunch	7.3%
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	4.0%		

Student enrollment in the schools visited by the review team has varied. Enrollment in five schools (Brookings, SAFE, White Street, Kiley, Van Sickle) has decreased from 2005 to 2008. Enrollment in four schools (Brunton, Gerena, Chestnut, Kennedy) has fluctuated but remained stable during this same time period. Enrollment at Brightwood has increased each year from 2005 to 2008.

The district experiences high student mobility rates, both from outside the district (i.e., students entering and exiting) and within the district (i.e., movement from school to school). Annual mobility rates were estimated to be approximately 30 percent.

The percentage of special education students served by the district (23.9 percent) is higher than the state percentage (17.1 percent). Of the ten schools visited by the review team, seven schools serve a percentage of students with disabilities that exceeds the district rate (see Table 2 on the following page). This includes all four middle schools, Gerena Community School, the Brookings K-8 and SAFE (the district's alternative school).

**Table 2: Special Education and Limited English Proficient Enrollment
District and School Comparisons 2008-2009**

District/Schools	Special Education Percent of Total Enrollment	Limited English Proficient (LEP) Percent of Total Enrollment
Springfield Public Schools	23.9%	12.7%
Brightwood ES	18%	36%
Brunton ES	14%	13%
Gerena ES	25%	25%
White Street ES	15%	20%
Brookings K-8	25%	22%
Chestnut MS	27%	22%
Kennedy MS	25%	8%
Kiley MS	27%	13%
Van Sickle MS	26%	11%
SAFE	64%	5%

NOTE: Bolded school percentages indicate rates higher than the district rate.

The percentage of limited English proficient (LEP) students served by the district (12.7 percent) is also higher than the state percentage (5.9 percent). Of the ten schools visited by the review team, seven schools serve a percentage of LEP students that exceeds the district rate (see Table 2 above). This includes all four elementary schools, the Brookings K-8, and two middle schools (Chestnut and Kiley).

Student Performance

In 2008, the Springfield Public Schools did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the aggregate or for subgroups in English language arts (ELA) or mathematics. The district currently has an ELA No Child Left Behind (NCLB) status of Corrective Action in the aggregate for both ELA and mathematics.

Table 3: SPS Adequate Yearly Progress History

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

In 2008, nine of the ten schools included in this review did not make AYP in ELA in the aggregate; Kiley Middle School is the exception. Kiley is also the only school that had a composite performance index (CPI) gain from 2007 to 2008 in ELA in the aggregate. Nine of the ten schools have an NCLB status in ELA of Restructuring Year 2 in the aggregate. Brunton Elementary School has an NCLB status in ELA of Restructuring Year 1 in the aggregate. No schools made AYP for subgroups in ELA in 2008. (See Table 4 below.)

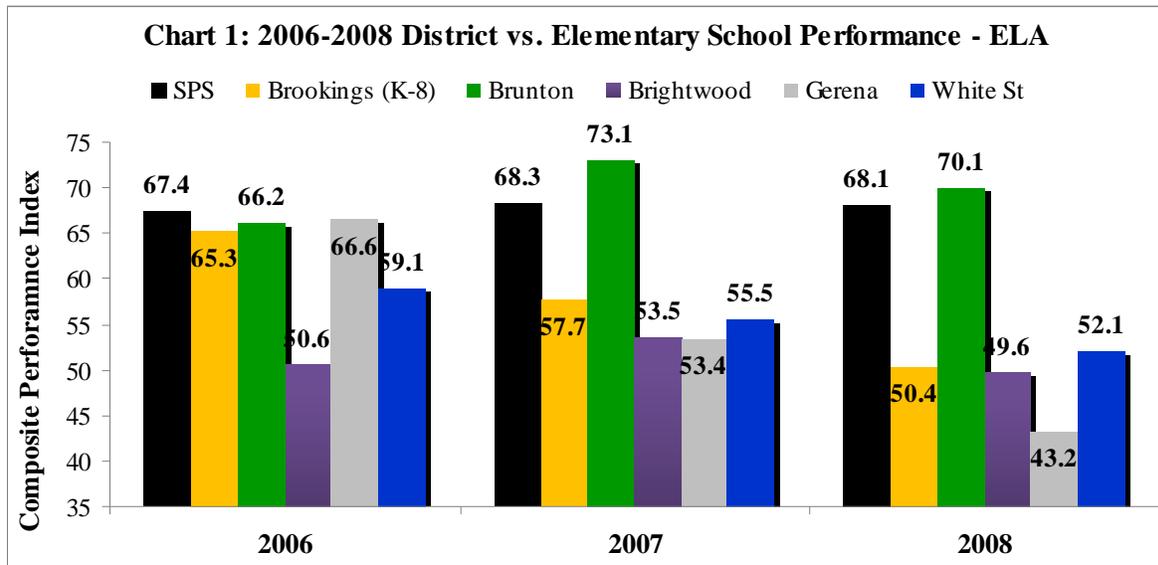
In mathematics, Brunton Elementary School and Kiley Middle School made AYP in the aggregate in 2008. The other eight schools included in this review did not make AYP in mathematics in the aggregate. Five additional schools, however, had a CPI gain in mathematics from 2007 to 2008 (White Street, Brookings, Chestnut, Van Sickle and SAFE). Nine out of ten schools have an NCLB status in mathematics of Restructuring Year 2 in the aggregate; Brunton Elementary School has an NCLB status of Improvement Year 2 for subgroups. No schools made AYP for subgroups in mathematics in 2008. (See Table 4 below.)

Table 4: 2008 District and School AYP Status

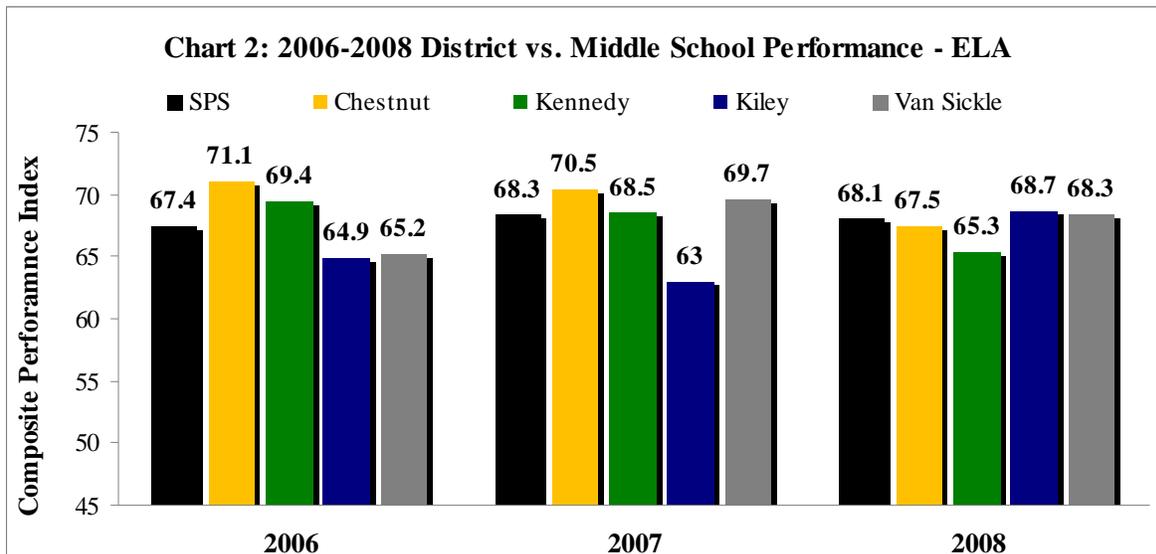
		ELA					Mathematics				
District/School	Enroll	Status 08	CPI 08	CPI Chg 07-08	AYP Agg	AYP Sub	Status 08	CPI 08	CPI Chg 07-08	AYP Agg	AYP Sub
Springfield	25,233	CA-A	68.1	-0.2	No	No	CA-A	56.0	3.4	No	No
Brightwood ES	422	RST2-A	49.6	-3.9	No	No	RST2-A	45.5	-3.5	No	No
Brunton ES	543	RST1-A	70.1	-3.0	No	No	II2-S	74.5	2.4	Yes	No
Gerena ES	639	RST2-A	43.2	-10.2	No	No	RST2-A	30.6	-13.9	No	No
White Street ES	366	RST2-A	52.1	-3.4	No	No	RST2-A	49.1	3.0	No	No
Brookings K-8	464	RST2-A	50.4	-7.3	No	No	RST2-A	38.6	0.3	No	No
Chestnut MS	1,224	RST2-A	67.5	-3.0	No	No	RST2-A	46.0	1.9	No	No
Kennedy MS	778	RST2-A	65.3	-3.2	No	No	RST2-A	43.2	-3.9	No	No
Kiley MS	829	RST2-A	68.7	5.7	Yes	No	RST2-A	45.4	6.4	Yes	No
Van Sickle MS	935	RST2-A	68.3	-1.4	No	No	RST2-A	44.0	3.9	No	No
SAFE	373	RST2-A	53.9	-1.2	No	No	RST2-A	46.2	5.1	No	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

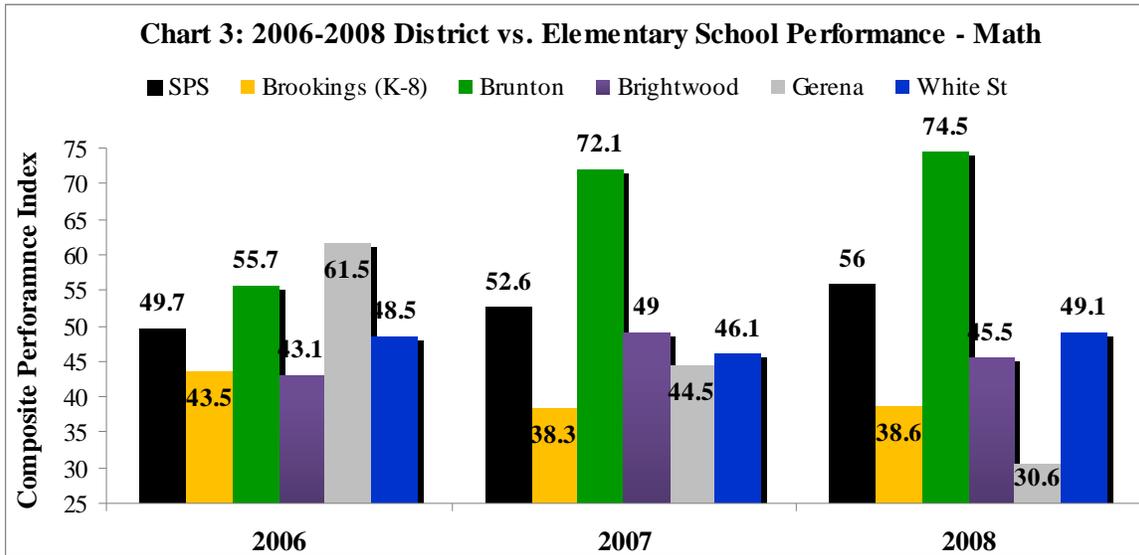
The district's Composite Performance Index (CPI) in ELA has remained stable over the past three MCAS administrations. Brunton is the only elementary school to outperform the district, both in 2007 and 2008. Performance in ELA at Brookings, Gerena, and White Street has declined each year from 2006 to 2008. In 2008, these three schools have a CPI in ELA that is more than 15 points lower than the district's. Gerena has shown the most marked decline in performance—23.4 points from 2006 to 2008. Brightwood has also performed below the district across years and has a CPI in ELA in 2008 that is more than 15 points lower than the district's.



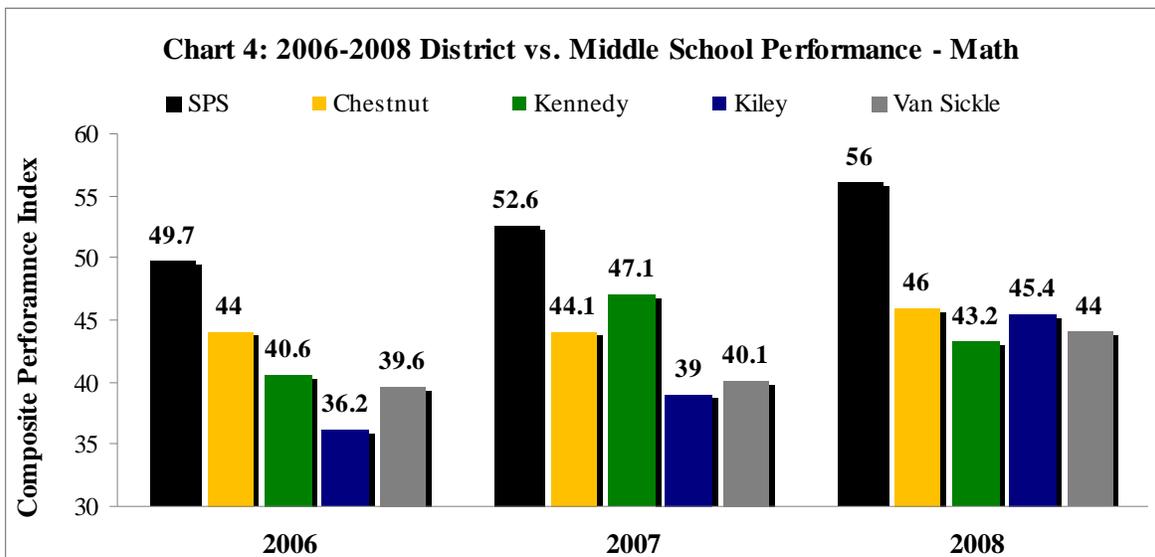
The four middle schools have performed similarly to the district in ELA from 2006 to 2008. No school has shown significant improvements and no school has shown significant CPI decreases in ELA. In 2006 and 2007, both Chestnut and Kennedy performed slightly higher than the district; both schools performed slightly below the district in 2008. In 2007 and 2008, Van Sickle performed slightly higher than the district. Kiley also outperformed the district in 2008.



The district has shown improvement in mathematics performance from year to year. The district's total CPI gain from 2006 to 2008 is 6.3 points. Brunton has also shown improvement across years—its CPI gain from 2006 to 2008 in mathematics is 18.8 points—and it outperformed the district each year. Gerena outperformed the district in 2006, but has shown steady declines in performance in both 2007 and 2008. Brightwood, White Street and Brookings have performed below the district across years in mathematics.



From 2006 to 2008, all four middle schools have performed below the district in mathematics. Chestnut, Kiley, and Van Sickle have shown improvement from year to year. Kiley has the greatest CPI increase in mathematics—9.2 points from 2006 to 2008. Performance at Kennedy increased from 2006 to 2007 and then declined slightly from 2007 to 2008.



Springfield 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?

The Springfield Public Schools (SPS) have undergone several changes in the current school year. There is a new administrative structure, accountability has increased in some areas, and a culture of collaboration and communication is being established. The district has established strategic priorities for improvement that reflect initiatives outlined in the DPSI.

The district has implemented a new benchmark assessment system in the 2008-2009 school year, designed to provide increased information about student achievement in relation to the state standards. Data is being reviewed to understand student performance, but use of data to change the delivery of instruction is limited. There is no system in place to provide formative feedback and support to teachers at the classroom level; expectations for individuals in instructional leadership positions are not clear.

There is an overabundance of intervention programs in schools and the district does not have a process to monitor implementation or to ensure effectiveness. As a result, there is a lack of fidelity of implementation in most schools, and interventions are not being used as designed to address the needs of specific student populations.

Findings under Key Question 1

The DPSI document is not used to drive improvement efforts in the Springfield Public Schools. Key improvement strategies cited in the DPSI are reflected in the district's new strategic priorities.

The Springfield Public Schools' District Plan for School Intervention (DPSI) was developed under the previous administration. The process to develop the DPSI was not inclusive; few stakeholders are familiar with the document. Although the DPSI is not the driving document, areas identified for improvement in the DPSI are reflected in the strategic priorities that are being rolled out under the new administration.

It is important to note that only five of the ten schools visited by the review team are included in the DPSI (Brunton, Brookings, Chestnut, Kennedy, and Van Sickle). The other five schools (Brightwood, Gerena, Kiley, SAFE, and White Street) were identified for improvement in a previous accountability cycle, and therefore inclusion of these schools in the DPSI was not required.

The Springfield DPSI was developed in the 2007-2008 school year under the former administration. In focus groups, district administrators reported that the DPSI was written at the district level. One principal reported attending a meeting to identify the cross-cutting strategies but also indicated that the core document was developed and written at the district level. Other principals stated, "[The DPSI] was written by central office" and "The team that developed the DPSI was chosen." Principals of schools included in the DPSI (see above) were asked to submit a one-page document identifying school-specific improvement actions not included in the

district's cross-cutting strategies. In focus groups, leaders of schools included in the DPSI were aware of the plan but also indicated that it has not served as a guiding document. Other school-based staff (e.g., teachers) have limited, if any, knowledge of the DPSI.

The Springfield DPSI identifies three cross-cutting strategies to improve student achievement: 1) development of highly effective leadership teams for continuous school improvement; 2) recruitment, development, and support of highly qualified teachers; and 3) analysis and use of data to inform and improve practices. In addition, the Springfield DPSI identifies seven "other necessary conditions to support improvement strategies." These include: 1) placement of *best-in-class* teacher leaders (e.g., instructional leadership specialists); 2) professional development opportunities for all teachers; 3) onsite coaching and support for teacher development; 4) pupil progression plan (PPP) for time on learning, effective scheduling, and placement of personnel; 5) financial supports; 6) performance management system for principals and assistant principals; and 7) Keys to Excellence for Your Schools (KEYS) data pertaining to school culture.

While the DPSI document is not driving improvement efforts in the district, many areas for improvement and corresponding strategies listed in the plan are reflected in the revised strategic priorities. The superintendent reported that the DPSI touched on most key improvement initiatives, but that it was not explicit enough to "drill down to specific actions." The revised framework establishes seven strategic priorities for improvement and corresponding key performance indicators. These strategic priorities are listed below; examples of goals are listed in parentheses.

- *Priority 1: High Academic Achievement for 21st Century Success* (e.g., increase districtwide proficiency in ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies for all students; increase attendance rate for all students)
- *Priority 2: Safe, Nurturing, Respectful Working and Learning Environment* (e.g., ensure an accountability system that holds all staff, students, parents, and community members responsible for the safety of the SPS community)
- *Priority 3: Highly Qualified Staff at all Levels* (e.g., use timely and accurate performance data for all decision making; provide professional development that is differentiated, targeted, and monitored for results)
- *Priority 4: Effective Parent and Community Partnerships* (e.g., assist and support parents and guardians to help improve learning; develop a comprehensive system that supports, encourages, values, and manages community partnerships)
- *Priority 5: Equitable, Efficient, and Appropriate Use of Resources and Funding* (e.g., pursue alternative and supplemental funding that supports district goals and priorities; assure equitable distribution of funding aligned with district priorities; improve and maintain district buildings)
- *Priority 6: Responsive, Effective, and Accountable Leadership at all Levels* (e.g., develop and support effective leadership skills; develop and support a culture of shared accountability)

- *Priority 7: Responsive, Multi-Cultural, and Effective Communications at all levels* (e.g., establish a common understanding of shared goals and challenges; improve community engagement and commitment to district goals and mission)

These priorities will serve as the foundation for the development of a strategic plan, which will be used to drive improvement efforts in the district. The strategic plan will also be a guiding document to ensure that the district mission—“to provide the highest quality of education so that all of our students are empowered to realize their full potential and lead fulfilling lives as lifelong learners, responsible citizens and leaders in the 21st Century”—is accomplished and the vision—“a culture of educational excellence”—is realized. The district has also established beliefs and core values to guide how work in the district is conducted. The superintendent reported that in the future departments, also, will develop goals and action plans that align with the district’s strategic priorities.

Systems and structures have been established to create change, increase collaboration, and guide improvement in the district.

Under the leadership of the new superintendent, several changes have been made to increase communication and collaboration in the district. These include the reorganization of the administration and regular meetings to increase collaboration between school-based staff and the central office. A range of stakeholders throughout the district and the Springfield community have been involved in these changes.

The district’s new administrative organization is designed to increase accountability and to provide a more streamlined infrastructure, separating operations from academics. The superintendent has eight central office staff who report directly to him. On the operational side are the chief of grants management, chief operations officer, chief parent and community engagement officer, chief communications officer, chief information and instructional technology officer, and chief of pupil services. On the academic side, the chief academic officer oversees all teaching and learning departments (e.g., ELA, mathematics, science, foreign languages), professional development, leadership programs, and grants related to educational programming (e.g., Reading First, magnet programs). The chief schools officer provides oversight for the three area improvement officers, who provide direct oversight of principals in their respective geographic zones.

In addition, the superintendent has established a leadership team of district administrators that meets regularly to ensure a collaborative and unified approach to implementation of key initiatives. The leadership team includes the superintendent’s direct reports, the area improvement officers, the director of safety and security, the executive director of finance, and the executive director of human resources. The leadership team serves as “a vehicle to help us come together,” reported one district administrator. In focus groups, members of the leadership team reported making decisions collaboratively and based on district priorities. Previously, decisions were passed down or, “everyone did something different.”

Other structures have been implemented to increase communication and collaboration. A principals’ committee that brings school leaders together from across the district was created.

The committee's meetings provide an organized forum for principals to share practices with each other and to communicate directly and regularly with the superintendent. The committee also creates a direct link to the superintendent, who participates in these meetings. In focus groups, principals reported that these meetings have been valuable and that they believe they have created increased collaboration. In another newly-established structure, academic department directors (e.g., mathematics, ELA) and area improvement officers (AIOs) meet monthly with the chief academic officer. In focus groups, AIOs and directors reported that these meetings are helpful and have provided a regular venue for communications. Instructional leadership specialists (ILSs) also meet on a monthly basis by academic department. These meetings include the department director, the district-level ILSs, and the school-based ILSs. These meetings are used primarily to collaborate on topics relating to academic content.

The district has also sought collaboration from the larger Springfield community in its improvement efforts. The superintendent indicated that "the voice of the community" was critical to change in the district. Through a series of meetings and community forums, feedback was gathered from more than 5,000 individuals, including district administrators, school leaders, teachers, union representatives, parents, and representatives from community-based organizations (e.g., local businesses, higher education institutions). This input was used to help inform the district's strategic priorities.

Other steps have been taken within the district to increase collaboration and to begin to establish a process for continuous improvement. For example, an Organizational Health Inventory (OHI) was administered districtwide this year; all teachers and school leaders completed the OHI during an extended professional development day. Results from the OHI, which provided feedback along a continuum on aspects of culture and relationships, was collated at the district level and distributed to individual schools. Across schools, principals indicated that the OHI had been helpful. One new principal reported that the OHI was extremely helpful because it provided a sense of where to focus improvement efforts. The OHI also served to shift the focus to organizational—as opposed to individual—performance (i.e., working as a team instead of in silos). Systems and structures designed to advance improvement have been established in SPS to increase collaboration among the district, its schools, and the larger community.

School Improvement Plans (SIPs) are driving improvement efforts at the school level. The SIP is actively being implemented in most schools.

In the fall of 2008, all district schools were required to complete a SIP addendum. District leadership wanted to ensure that strategies identified in the SIP address student performance weaknesses shown by the 2008 MCAS. Schools were provided guiding questions and a template to assist in completion of the SIP addendum. A quarterly review was also added this year to ensure that the SIP is a living document and that progress is monitored regularly. Across schools visited by the review team, teachers were aware of the SIP addendum and the quarterly review, as well as the reasons for their implementation.

Based on the guiding questions, SPS SIP addendums include a narrative response that identifies: 1) causes for (NCLB) school improvement status based on a review of MCAS data; 2) areas of instructional practice that require improvement to address the causes; 3) goals and strategies to

improve student achievement for all student groups; and 4) priorities for professional development. The SIP addendum template requires schools to identify performance goals, student learning objectives, action steps, resources, timelines, and implementation benchmarks in three content areas—ELA/reading, mathematics, and science. The addendums also document professional development needs, which are expected to be linked to performance goals. All SIP addendums examined by the review team included these key components.

SIP addendums were developed collaboratively by teams of individuals that, in most schools, included teachers. While specific processes varied from school to school, principals, instructional leadership specialists (ILSs), and teachers reported using team meeting time to review MCAS data and other assessment information to identify weaknesses in student skills that should be addressed by the improvement plan. In a few schools, teachers were less clear about who prepared the SIP. In one school, for example, teachers reported that they were asked to provide input on areas that required improvement, but were less clear how specific goals and strategies were ultimately selected. At one school, school leaders and teachers indicated that although the SIP addendum had been created, it was not an active document.

SIP addendums focus mostly on school-based improvement strategies (e.g., teachers will provide students multiple opportunities to practice writing; teachers will activate prior knowledge to integrate new mathematical concepts). Some SIP addendums also include improvement initiatives that have a district-level focus (e.g., implementation of KEYs action steps to improve climate and culture; improved attendance). In most schools, teachers were able to clearly articulate SIP priorities and strategies—at one school, a focus on comprehension and implementation of Writers’ Express; at another school, writing across the curriculum, vocabulary, mathematics problems of the day, and use of rubrics. In some schools, the review team noted implementation of SIP strategies at the classroom level.

The quarterly review is designed to measure progress in implementing each strategy included in the SIP. Schools identify implementation levels—from high to low—on a four-point scale. The quarterly review also asks schools to reflect on what they have done well and what could be done differently to raise student achievement further. In focus groups, most school leaders indicated that the SIP revision and quarterly review have been helpful. One member of a school leadership team stated, “The monitoring process has really helped to keep us focused.” In a few schools, leaders reported that the process was not beneficial or it was not yet clear how the review would help. One principal reported that the quarterly review was not useful because the school is clear about its direction.

The SIP addendum was developed and the quarterly review introduced in order to ensure that schools are using current data to focus on the effectiveness of strategies being used to improve student performance. This is a step toward using data to better understand what is (or is not) driving improvement at the school level.

There is evidence of increased accountability in the district. Data is being used to hold individuals accountable.

In addition to accountability for implementation of data-based SIPs, school leaders are being held accountable for their own performance in relation to the achievement of school improvement goals. Before the 2007-2008 school year, the district did not have an effective system for evaluating principals and assistant principals. Revisions to the evaluation process began in 2007-2008 and have been continued in the 2008-2009 school year. The focus has been on establishing targeted and measurable goals for performance. This year, principals were required to write three goals—two that were explicitly aligned to goals in the SIP, and a third that reflected an area for individual improvement. The chief academic officer is working with the AIOs, who are responsible for completing a written review of each principal in their zone.

Teachers are being held accountable for performance in the classroom. The Springfield Teacher Evaluation and Development (STED) system is the process used to evaluate teachers in the district. The STED protocol is based on the state's seven principles of effective teaching. A teacher who does not meet one or more of the standards is placed on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). As part of the PIP process, the teacher and principal establish goals and related action plans to address the area(s) in need of improvement. It is a requirement that teachers on PIPs receive support to help improve performance; however, teachers on PIPs cannot receive incremental raises. Principals are held accountable by the AIO for ensuring that teachers who are not meeting the standards of effective teaching are placed on PIPs.

A priority initiative implemented in the current school year was increased accountability for attendance. Rolled out in September of 2008, the attendance improvement initiative established clear procedures for cumulative, unexcused absences at both the elementary and secondary levels. The procedures define specific actions for each unexcused absence, as well as specific levels of intervention (Levels I, II, and III) as the number of unexcused absences increases. A single unexcused absence results in a telephone call to the student's home by the attendance officer. (All schools have a dedicated attendance officer.) Teachers are also encouraged to call home. Level I interventions result in a case management referral and a home visit by the attendance officer or designated school staff. Level II interventions include a parent conference and the completion of an attendance contract that must be signed by the parent, student, and principal. At Level III (12 days of unexcused absences), students are placed on critical status and, as appropriate, referred to the Department of Children and Families (DCF).

In focus groups, district administrators and school leaders reported that attendance had never before been explicitly tracked. Although attendance officers had previously been in place, procedures for addressing truancy had not been defined. Across the schools visited, school administrators and teachers reported that attendance has improved. Each school is responsible for tracking daily attendance. Attendance data is reported to the school committee every month. As of June 2009, the district's average daily attendance had increased from 89.9 percent in the previous year to 90.8 percent. Also, truancy had decreased by 24 percent.

In addition to ensuring that Springfield students attend school, the new attendance policy has fostered increased communication between the school and students' families. Teachers reported

making telephone calls to students' homes. All schools indicated that parents are responding to calls and letters. One school reported receiving calls from families asking if they could go on vacation. At another school, it was reported that 35 families were on signed attendance contracts and at the time of the visit, 11 of these families were about to be released from these contracts as a result of improved attendance. In focus groups, teachers and school leaders reported that individuals are taking responsibility for monitoring student attendance and that there have been improvements in school culture and safety.

There is a positive climate and culture across district schools. The foundations are in place for teaching and learning to occur.

A focus on fostering a positive climate and culture appears in all of the district's key improvement planning documents. The DPSI cites culture and an assessment of school climate as necessary conditions to support improvement. One of the district's 2008-2009 strategic priorities is to provide a safe and nurturing learning environment.

In the 2007-2008 school year, the district administered the Keys to Excellence for your Schools (KEYS) survey generated by the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA). Seventy-eight percent of SPS teachers participated in the survey, designed to better understand the climate and conditions in schools. Results from the survey indicated that there was a need to focus on school culture. At some schools, safety was a concern; at others, student behavior management was an issue. Teachers at several schools also noted a need for increased collaboration. KEYS data was the catalyst for implementing strategies to address these concerns.

Several schools have established KEYS teams to facilitate improvements in student behavior management and other aspects of school culture, yielding positive results. At one school, teachers received professional development—facilitated by the KEYS team—on responsive classroom language and establishing logical consequences. As a result, there has been a significant reduction in the number of students removed from the classroom. At another school, teachers also received professional development on establishing a Responsive Classroom, as well as schoolwide strategies to address behavioral issues (e.g., enforcing the code of conduct, using the crisis intervention team). In focus groups, school staff reported 350 fewer documented cases of student behavior issues in 2008-2009 than in the previous year. At another school, administrators and teachers reported that the school has worked actively to dissipate a previously toxic culture and to establish a set of positive norms. Staff at this school have also been trained in the Responsive Classroom and Development Design programs.

In other schools, leadership changes were credited with improving school climate and culture. One school, for example, established multiple teams of school leaders and teachers to increase inclusive decision-making, as well as staff communication and collegiality. In focus groups, school stakeholders indicated that school culture and climate have improved as a result of these team-based efforts. Teachers and school administrators described what had been a shattered culture before the arrival of a new principal and the establishment of the new administrative teams. Staff at another school also cited new leadership as a catalyst in changing school culture. In focus groups, teachers reported that the school is “now a place where everyone feels safe and

respected.” When asked about the school’s greatest strength, stakeholders cited the supportive climate and collegiality among staff.

The review team visited 177 classrooms across ten Springfield Public Schools. In 71 percent of classrooms visited, the review team noted solid evidence of a classroom climate characterized by respectful behaviors and students following established routines—for example, positive interactions between teachers and students, as well as among students; students focused on completing assigned academic tasks; no behavioral disruptions; and seamless transitions between activities. In 23 percent of classrooms, partial evidence of this indicator was noted. In these classrooms, the climate was generally positive. Transitions took longer than in the majority of classrooms, and off-task student behavior disrupted teaching and learning in a few instances.

Increased stability of teaching staff in the Springfield Public Schools has also improved the school climate and culture. The district reported losing approximately 1,400 out of 2,600 teachers from 2003 to 2007 as a result of the absence of a teacher contract. Since that time, district and school leaders reported, teacher retention rates have improved significantly. As a result of increased stability, administrators and teachers have been able to develop relationships that foster collaboration and establish a more unified focus.

A commitment to a positive climate and culture is evident in the district. The efforts that have been made across schools have established a sound teaching and learning environment in which future improvement efforts can take root.

Expectations for individuals in instructional leadership roles are not clear. As a result, there are inconsistencies in the oversight and support provided to guide teaching and learning.

At most schools, the instructional leadership specialists (ILSs) are the primary source of support for teaching and learning. At least two specialists are assigned to each school visited by the review team—one for ELA, and the other for mathematics. Most schools have an additional ILS who serves in different capacities, determined by the school (e.g., science, ELL, special education). Other schools have coaches that provide supports associated with specific school programs (e.g., Reading First coaches, Montessori specialists at Gerena). The roles of these individuals are more clearly defined because they are associated with grants.

There are general expectations associated with the role of the ILS—to provide support to teachers in the classroom by modeling or co-teaching; to support the implementation of classroom practices; and to assist teachers in reviewing and analyzing data to understand student learning and inform instruction. While specialists across schools are engaged in each of these activities, methods of implementation, the level of involvement with teachers, and efforts to build teacher capacity vary across schools. In one school, one ILS provides teachers with data reports and recommendations for adjusting practice, whereas another ILS is working with teachers in a variety of ways (e.g., training, data meetings, embedded support) to increase understanding and use of data.

In most schools, the ILSs are working effectively to support teacher practices. However, this part of the role of the ILS also varies from school to school. In some schools, the ILSs are conducting

classroom visits and providing individual, formative feedback to teachers on specific practices. At other schools, the ILS models lessons, co-teaches, provides feedback on lesson plans, and/or presents professional development during extended day sessions as the means of providing support. In a few schools, it is unclear how explicit feedback is provided to teachers.

There is also variability across schools in the amount of experience ILSs have had, which likely has an impact on how support is received, as well as on the quality of the feedback. Some have acted as coaches and/or mentors for many years, whereas others are new to this role. In focus groups, principals recognized inconsistencies in the work of the ILSs, indicating that some specialists are more effective than others. Not only do ILSs have varying levels of experience, there has not been consistent training for them. Some have had limited training or are in the process of receiving training.

Because ILSs are in the same collective bargaining unit as teachers, they are required (in accordance with the STED process) to spend at least 20 percent of their time providing direct instruction to an identified cohort of students. The teacher contract also stipulates that the ILS has to be invited into the classroom to provide support. While this is not an issue in some schools visited by the review team, there are a few schools in which the ILS has not been invited into some classrooms.

The role of the principal in providing instructional leadership is inconsistent across schools. In most schools, as mentioned, the ILSs are the primary source of support for teaching and learning. The ILS function, however, is highly effective in some schools, but less effective in others. It is likely that these differences are the result of a number of factors: not only ILSs' experience in supporting teachers and the initiative of the ILS, but also the climate and culture at the school and specific guidance provided by principals. At some schools, principals were in classrooms frequently, providing informal feedback to staff or conducting learning walks. In other schools, it was not clear how the principal was monitoring the quality of instruction or the work of the ILS.

Across schools, principals expressed a lack of clarity around the support provided to them, in part because of the large number of individuals tasked with assisting school leaders. Several principals at schools visited by the review team have multiple mentors (e.g., a principal from another school, a retired principal, and a turnaround specialist). Several principals reported that the amount of feedback received was overwhelming. Other principals reported using only one mentor. Several school leaders indicated that there was uncertainty as to whether they should listen to the AIO who evaluates them or the mentor who is in the building more frequently.

The district has revised its administrative structure in the 2008-2009 school year to increase its focus on academics and to provide lines of oversight and support to schools (see finding above on new systems and structures). The role of the Area Improvement Officer (AIO), which was previously solely for support (e.g., mentoring, coaching), without evaluative responsibilities, has shifted to involve direct oversight of school leaders (i.e., the AIO evaluates principals). In the revised role, in addition to evaluating the principal, the AIO is responsible for helping schools with goal-setting, monitoring the development and implementation of SIPs, assisting with hiring, addressing personnel issues, and attending to parent concerns. AIOs reported spending extensive time addressing parent concerns and working with parents.

In focus groups, principals generally reported that the AIO is not as visible at the school as in previous years, citing different responsibilities and an increased number of meetings as the primary reasons. Some school administrators reported having limited contact with the AIO unless they call to ask for assistance. One school leader stated, “I don’t hear about [the AIOs] if I don’t ask about them.” Others reported that the AIO’s focus is not always the same as the school’s, making interactions, when they do occur, less helpful. An expectation for the number of days or the percentage of time that AIOs spend in schools has not been clearly established. It is also possible that the change in role—from one of support only to one of evaluation and support—has muddled the relationship between principals and AIOs.

There is no system to provide regular formative feedback to teachers to improve the quality of instruction.

Several learning walk protocols have been implemented in the district. Some schools are using these protocols; others have implemented other processes for providing feedback. It is not clear, however, that these processes are providing specific feedback to teachers to improve the quality of instructional practices.

In focus groups, district administrators described three different learning walk tools; one focuses on environment, the second on instruction, and the third on lesson design. These are designed to be implemented at different stages throughout the year. It was unclear to the review team, however, how consistently these tools were being used, what criterion was used to select the tool, and if implemented, how data was being used to inform classroom practices. Several schools described a few learning walks with the AIO, but this was not reported by all schools.

During school visits, varied learning walk processes were described. A few schools described environmental learning walks to monitor classroom arrangement and lesson design in the first half of the year as well as instructional learning walks in the content areas, in accordance with the district’s tools. At least two schools were conducting learning walks focused on SIP objectives. Other schools were implementing program-specific learning walks to monitor implementation (e.g., Montessori-based learning walks at Gerena, International Baccalaureate (IB) learning walks at Van Sickle). At several schools, principals reported having limited time (due to other responsibilities) to conduct classroom learning walks.

As previously described, the ILSs are the primary vehicles for providing feedback to staff. In focus groups, many teachers across schools reported that feedback and support provided by ILSs was valuable and helped to improve practices. However, most of this occurs informally and school by school. In addition, since ILSs have to be invited into classrooms, feedback provided by the ILSs depends on the relationships developed with the staff. Furthermore, the role, training, and experience of the ILSs are inconsistent across schools, which also brings into question (at least in some cases) the quality of feedback teachers are receiving.

The review team visited 177 classrooms across ten schools while on site in Springfield. While the team noted good instruction in some classrooms, many classrooms were limited in rigor and lacked diverse methods of instructional delivery. Solid evidence of higher-order questions was noted in only 8 percent of the classrooms. In these classrooms, teachers used a range of questions

that went beyond knowledge and comprehension (e.g., providing a factual answer). Partial evidence of higher-order questions was observed in 42 percent of classrooms: that is, a few questions asked students to expand on their answer (e.g., “How do you know?”). In 49 percent of classrooms visited, there was no evidence of higher-order questions. In 15 percent of classrooms visited, students were using higher-order skills to articulate thinking and reasoning. In these classrooms, students were engaged in assignments that asked them to apply learning, defend a position, or explain how they arrived at a conclusion. In 53 percent of classrooms visited, there was no evidence of students explaining their thinking.

Most instruction observed by the review team was teacher-led. Student independent work was the next most prominent practice observed. In 47 percent of classrooms visited, the review team noted only a single method of instructional delivery. In 21 percent of classrooms visited, a range of techniques was observed. These classes included some combination of teacher-led instruction, guided practice, modeling taught skills, use of technology, independent work, and small group activities. In 14 percent of classrooms, the review team observed students problem-solving or exploring lesson content in pairs or in small groups in the context of a lesson dedicated to these tasks. In 28 percent of classrooms, partial evidence of this indicator was noted: for example, isolated pair-and-shares embedded into a teacher-led lesson.

Classroom instruction is central to improving student learning and achievement. While some pockets of good instruction were noted in the Springfield classrooms, the current level of rigor observed by the review team is not challenging students sufficiently. In order to improve, teachers require specific feedback that is targeted (i.e., focused on one or two strategies at a time) and scaffolded (i.e., addressed to teachers’ skills at their current level).

Oversight and accountability for performance have been increased at the district level this year. In focus groups, when asked about processes to receive feedback on classroom practices, some teachers described the two observations that occur as part of the STED. Since these observations are part of the evaluation process, they are not designed to provide timely or consistent feedback to improve instruction and classroom practices. Teachers who are not meeting the principles of effective teaching are placed on PIPs, and principals who do not place ineffective teachers on PIPs are held accountable, based on learning walks conducted by the AIO, for not identifying poor performance at the classroom level. It is possible that the changing roles and new systems of accountability have caused some confusion between summative evaluation processes and formative feedback designed to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

The district has implemented a range of assessments to understand student learning. The District Benchmark Assessment (DBA) provides increased information about student performance in relation to the state standards.

The DBA was rolled out in December 2008 and replaced the District Formative Assessments (DFA). This change was made on the basis of feedback from staff districtwide and recommendations provided by an external review team. The DFA was designed to measure student mastery of the standards at each grade level (i.e., how close to proficiency students are at the time of each DFA administration). The DBA is designed to provide information about student strengths and weaknesses in relation to specific standards and is aligned to the district’s

pacing guides. The DBA will be administered three times a year in ELA and mathematics for students in grades 3-10. (It was administered twice in the 2008-2009 school year.) It is expected that all students will participate.

In general, teachers reported that the DBA is helpful and much better than the DFA. Many teachers indicated that DBA results have helped them understand which standards need to be retaught. In most schools, administrators and teachers reported disappointment that the DBA does not include open-response questions, which were included as part of the DFA. Because this is an area identified for improvement based on student MCAS results, several schools have implemented writing prompts and practice open-response questions. During classroom visits, the review team noted posted open-response rubrics that had been scored.

In addition to the DBA, schools administer a range of other assessments to understand student learning. At the elementary level, the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) is used in grades K-3 in most elementary schools to monitor student phonemic and fluency development. The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) is used in grades K-5 to assess reading comprehension. The Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) is administered to grade 5 students to assist with placement at the middle school level. The Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE) and the Group Mathematics Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (G-MADE) are used at most elementary and middle schools visited by the review team. At the middle school level, midterm and final exams are also administered in some subject areas (e.g., ELA). In focus groups, teachers across schools reported also using text-based unit assessments (e.g., for Connected Mathematics Program (CMP), Harcourt, Investigations).

The district has implemented a range of assessments to understand student learning and achievement. The implementation of the DBA has improved the quality of information teachers are receiving in relation to the state standards.

Assessment data is used primarily to review student progress and inform student placement. Use of data to change the delivery of instruction at the classroom level is limited.

Across schools, assessment information is being used to track student progress. During common planning time, teachers and ILSs review the range of available data to understand students' strengths and weaknesses. Data reports are primarily provided by the ILSs, who retrieve the information from the district's assessment management system. In focus groups, teachers reported similar processes for discussing data across schools—reviewing item analyses, analyzing student work, and determining content and skills that need to be retaught.

Across the schools visited, teachers are aware of student performance levels, and as a result, changes to programming are being made. In one school, teachers described a process for identifying “bubble” students (i.e., those students on the cusp of scoring *Proficient* on the MCAS). These students were provided after-school tutoring. In another school, a review of MCAS open-response scores indicated that a number of students were scoring zero because they failed to respond. Students are now responding to open-response questions. Assessment information is also used to identify content areas in which students are struggling, so as to group

students at the elementary level, place students in leveled courses at the middle school level, and, across schools, to identify students in need of intervention. The interventions used vary from school to school (see finding below on interventions).

While students are receiving some targeted instruction based on placement and interventions, there is limited evidence that data is being used to change instructional practices. Teachers described using data to identify specific skills that need to be retaught. In one school, these skills are retaught through use of an activator (i.e., review of previously learned content) at the beginning of a lesson; in other schools, students are provided additional homework. Other teachers indicated that they feel pressure to adhere to the district pacing guide and as a result do not spend the necessary time reviewing concepts before proceeding to the next lesson. In a few schools, teachers are sharing instructional strategies that the data shows have led to student gains, but this practice is not widespread.

There was also limited evidence of differentiated instruction at the classroom level. As previously described (see page 17), most instruction observed in Springfield classrooms was teacher-led, without much diversity of instructional delivery. Most students were engaged in the same task. The team noted solid use of formative assessments to check for student understanding in 36 percent of the 177 classrooms visited—for example, teachers using a range of questions to ensure student comprehension, or teachers moving around the classroom to check student work. In 31 percent of the classrooms, the review team noted partial use of formative assessments (i.e., the above-mentioned practices were observed, but their use was limited). There was no evidence of this indicator in 36 percent of the classrooms. Use of formative assessments in the classroom is essential to differentiating and making modifications to instructional practices.

While most teachers are discussing data to understand student performance, there is no clear evidence that assessment information is being used to change the delivery of instruction. The implementation of the DBA is providing increased data to teachers about specific students' strengths and weaknesses. It also provides an opportunity for teachers to learn how this data can be used to modify instruction to further support student learning.

The current model of delivering services to English language learners and special education students is inadequate.

The need to develop a more refined model for serving English Language Learner (ELL) and special education students is well-recognized in the district. For both populations, the district is still working to rectify compliance issues, to ensure staff members are licensed, and to determine resources that can be used to support student learning.

English Language Learners

The model for providing services to ELL students varied across the schools visited by the review team. Many of these schools serve a larger percentage of limited English proficient (LEP) students than the district. Some schools are using pull-out services to support ELL students, whereas others are using a co-teaching or inclusion model. Some teachers have participated in training in the required categories of ELL professional development, but the number of categories completed varies. In no schools have all teachers had this training; although it is

offered, participation is voluntary. In one school, for example, teachers were strongly encouraged to attend, but the response was limited.

The district has prescribed no specific set of curriculum materials to support teaching and learning for ELL students. While curricula have recently been written at the elementary and middle school levels, there are a variety of materials being used to support ELL students. In some schools, teachers in focus groups reported “trying a lot of different programs” to deliver instruction. In some cases, materials are being used that are not designed for this population. Several schools are using Read Well as a core program for ELL students. Read Well, however, is a core reading program and is not designed to be used with ELL students. Other schools have used Fast Forward, which is fluency focused and primarily designed to support struggling readers. In three of the schools visited by the review team, specific programs and models are being piloted: for example, Hampton Brown Avenues at one school and an SEI model with assistance from Brown University at another school.

With assistance from ESE’s Office of Language Acquisition, the district has developed a corrective action plan that includes specific actions to address areas of noncompliance identified by the Department’s Coordinated Program Review. ESE has also provided funding to support an audit and ESL curriculum materials.

Special Education

The percentage of special education students in the student population of the Springfield Public Schools is nearly seven points higher than the percentage of special education students in the state. In interviews, the superintendent reported that reducing the number of students referred for special education services was a priority.

The position of special education teacher is one of the hardest positions to staff in SPS; of the approximately 250 teachers, 147 are on waivers. The district has implemented strategies designed to increase teacher licensure and competency to teach students with special needs—for example, a focus on teachers passing the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) so that they can work on waiver while satisfying competencies. Teachers have also been encouraged to obtain dual licensure in special education as well as another area. Approximately 30 teachers will receive this license in the coming year.

Some schools are using the Response to Intervention (RTI) process, with varying degrees of implementation. At several schools, the process is in place, and student support teams meet regularly to discuss students’ cases. Other schools are just beginning to use the RTI model to understand how strategies used in pull-out settings could be adapted for the general education classroom. District administrators reported that some schools have been successful in reducing referrals for special education. Other schools, district administrators indicated, do not want to take responsibility for serving students with special needs. The superintendent told the review team that changing this “culture of low expectations” is also a priority.

Intervention programs are selected and implemented at the school level. In some schools, intervention programs are not being implemented as designed. There is no districtwide oversight to ensure effectiveness.

There is an abundance of intervention programs in the Springfield Public Schools. As previously described, teachers and ILSs are using data to identify students for intervention. However, determinations as to which interventions will be used are made primarily at the school level. There is no process for monitoring the implementation or effectiveness of the interventions at the district level.

As described in focus groups with district administrators, school leaders, and teachers, at least 16 different interventions are being implemented across the schools visited by the review team. These include ALEKS, Extreme Read, Fast Forward, Fast Math, Fluency Theater, KeyMath, Lexia, Read 180, Read Naturally, Reading Recovery, Reading by the Rules, Read Well, SPIRE, Soar to Success, Sunday, and Words Their Way. Most of the above-mentioned intervention programs are literacy-based. All schools are using a wide variety of literacy interventions. Several schools do not have specific mathematics interventions.

In focus groups, school leaders and teachers reported that interventions are selected in a variety of ways. For example, individuals bring back programs from conferences, or recommendations are provided by other school leaders and district administrators. At one school, a principal reported receiving intervention programs that were not wanted, but that had been purchased by the district. It was reported in a few schools that they have supply closets that contain extensive materials from programs that have never been used or were used for only a short period of time. In some cases, only certain components of intervention programs are being used. “We pick and pull from different resources.” While most intervention programs are designed to remediate specific skills, students are not receiving the full benefit of the program if it is not used in its entirety. In addition, a few schools have used core instructional programs to provide intervention to students. For example, Investigations, a new mathematics program that is replacing Addison-Wesley, has been used to provide intervention to students in at least one school. This is not an appropriate use of a core program. As another example, Read Well is a basal reading program designed to be used in the general education classroom; however, it is being used as a core program for ELL and special education students.

The district has no unified approach to selecting or implementing intervention programs. As a result, an overabundance of interventions is being used in the district and in at least some cases these programs and materials are being used incorrectly. No oversight has been provided at the district level to monitor selection, use, or implementation of intervention programs, or to determine their effectiveness. Without fidelity of implementation, it is difficult to measure effectiveness.

While on site, the review team was provided with a draft proposal for streamlining ELA programs and interventions at the elementary level as well as for differentiating course sequences in both ELA and mathematics at the middle school level. The proposal has yet to be implemented, but would be a step toward refining and reducing intervention programs.

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

Department funds are being used to support improvement efforts that are aligned with the district's strategic priorities.

Monies provided by the 323A grant for Commissioner's Districts, as well as a range of additional funds from the Department, are being used to support improvement efforts in the district. Expenditure of funds has been aligned to the district's strategic priorities, in particular the first strategic priority, "High Academic Achievement for 21st Century Success." Funds have been spent on such initiatives as the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education/Intel Mathematics Initiative (Mimi), Connected Mathematics Program (CMP), and Investigations in the area of mathematics; Empowering Writers and Writers' Express in the area of reading and writing; and Galileo in the area of assessment.

District administrators reported that the 323A funds have been "extremely helpful," citing in particular the fact that the grant is not earmarked and can be used to guide efforts most important to the district. In focus groups, district administrators listed and described the range of initiatives that are supported by Department funds. At the school level, principals cannot articulate which initiatives and resources are supported by the Department as all monies filter through central office.

District and school-based staff reported mixed responses to the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) training.

The second and third cohort of individuals from SPS, primarily administrators of Commonwealth Priority Schools, participated in NISL training in the 2008-2009 school year. Most central office staff, principals, and assistant principals have participated or are currently participating in NISL. Some central office staff trained with a cohort at the Massachusetts Elementary School Principals' Association in 2006-2008; a small number are currently participating in training.

The district has an internal leadership training and licensure program (Project LEAD) that is used to train aspiring school leaders. Funded by the Wallace Foundation, Project LEAD has been in place in the district for many years. In focus groups, district leaders reported that aspects of the NISL training overlap with skills learned in the district-provided training and that as a result, some aspects of the NISL program are not helpful. Central office staff reported that the Department has begun to work with the district to "differentiate" the NISL training, so that SPS staff who have participated in Project LEAD will not have to repeat similar training sessions. This collaboration has been appreciated.

District administrators reported some positive outcomes from NISL that were "unexpected": for example, the increased use of a common language and the establishment of professional learning communities with other SPS staff as well as individuals from other districts.

At the school level, most principals and assistant principals reported that their experience with NISL was positive, citing opportunities to learn new skills or review previously learned skills as “always helpful.” In focus groups, school leaders reported that the greatest challenge presented by participation in NISL is the amount of time administrators are away from their schools. Some school leaders cited both the amount of time away from school and the fact that there are consecutive days on which different administrators are away. For example, if principals and assistant principals attend NISL training on different days, which is often necessary to ensure an administrator is on site, there are multiple days in a row when school leaders cannot communicate regularly.

The Springfield Public Schools appreciate their collaborative relationship with the Department and the supports it provides.

The Department and the district have established a collaborative relationship. The district values many Department-sponsored activities.

The superintendent was complimentary of the commissioner and Department staff, who have worked to help the district in a number of ways, “truly in the spirit of partnership.” District leaders said that they have been able to establish better relationships with the Department, indicating that there has been less monitoring and that “people are listening” as primary reasons for the improved relationships: “they really want to know how they can help.” For example, district leaders reported that the Department sought input on its strategic plan for use of stimulus funds. District leaders said that they started to feel this change just before the 2008-2009 school year and that while this is positive, they are “still building trust.”

This year the district has initiated, at the middle school level, implementation of the Department’s Learning Walk Continuum. Three focus indicators were selected that target higher-order thinking in the classroom (both teacher questions and student responses) and the use of formative assessments to inform instruction. Department staff provided training in the learning walk protocol and also participated in learning walks. In focus groups, district administrators described the use of the tool as very helpful and said that they realized the powerful effect calibrating observed practices has. One district administrator stated, “We could see the real problems in the district.” Another district administrator reported, “[The learning walk] has been the most difficult initiative to bring into the district; it takes trust.” Schools had different responses to the learning walk protocol. In focus groups, staff at some schools indicated that there were too many people in the classrooms. Other schools’ staff were not bothered by the process, but reported that they still had not received the data. At least one elementary school, using the three focus indicators on its own initiative, implemented the learning walks.

Springfield also participates in a range of other Department-sponsored initiatives, which district staff reported have been helpful to the district. Math Support Specialists Network meetings were described as a “catalyst for conversation and sharing.” Urban Superintendents’ Network meetings are another forum administrators indicated benefits the district. The Executive Leadership Program for Educators (ExEL) has provided a facilitated forum for district leaders, with peers from other districts, to focus on improving services for English language learners. Other district administrators reported that the Department has been helpful to the district in

seeking out possible grants and writing applications. Technical assistance to the district in applying for Title III funds was a specific example provided.

Several district administrators spoke of the opportunity provided by the Department to pilot Cognos, an integrated software platform that aggregates student performance data, provides reporting and analysis tools, and has scorecard features. Springfield is one of only two districts in the state that has its own platform.

The district seeks continued collaboration, as well as clarification of accountability regulations.

District leaders reported wanting to continue and increase the collaboration between the Department and the Springfield Public Schools; “we need to do this together.” In addition, leaders believe that they are implementing many good programs and models and hope that venues can be found to share these with the Department and with peers. For example, SPS is one of only eight recipients of the Striving Readers grant nationwide.

District staff are encouraged by the “growth model” being developed by the Department and are hopeful that the Department will continue to explore other ways to demonstrate student achievement. However, the district continues to seek clarification of what it means to be a Commonwealth Priority School (CPS) and how schools are removed from CPS status.

Recommendations

Recommendations provided in this report reflect the areas that the team determined should be priorities for the district and are not intended to address every area. These recommendations are for the district and ESE to consider in prioritizing future improvement efforts.

Make explicit the roles and responsibilities of individuals in instructional leadership positions to ensure quality support and feedback at the classroom level.

- The skills required of instructional leadership specialists (ILSs) are different from those required of classroom teachers. Provide explicit training for individuals who assume this role that includes, for example, methods for observing teacher practice, providing feedback, and supporting implementation.
- The district has made a significant commitment to the ILS position. Ensure that the work of the ILS is monitored to ensure alignment with expectations and district priorities.
- Conduct surveys to assess the effectiveness of support provided by ILSs, principals, and area improvement officers (AIOs). The results from these can be used to inform future supports.

Implement systems to provide specific and targeted feedback to teachers to improve the rigor of instructional practices.

- Several changes have been made in the district's administrative organization in the 2008-2009 school year to increase oversight and accountability at the school level. As roles and responsibilities continue to become more clearly defined, ensure that there is a system designed to provide formative feedback to teachers that is distinct from the evaluation process. Feedback should be provided to all teachers, regardless of experience or skill level.
- Focus feedback on the implementation of a single initiative (e.g., interventions, instructional programs) or the development of one or two instructional strategies. Ensure proficiency in these skills before other initiatives or strategies are rolled out.

Increase teacher capacity to use data to modify instructional delivery.

- The roll-out of the District Benchmark Assessment (DBA) in the 2008-2009 school year provides an opportunity to increase teacher proficiency in the use of data. Ensure that teachers have access to user-friendly reports and provide teachers with training.
- Focus training on using data to modify instructional practices; both as part of lesson planning and during classroom instruction. Embedded support provided by ILSs should reinforce learned practices.

Identify intervention programs and supplemental resources that are designed to address the specific needs of students. Adopt these programs districtwide.

- Once the programs and resources are selected, ensure that teachers receive adequate training on how to use them.
- Monitor fidelity of implementation of intervention programs to ensure that they are used to support student learning in accordance with their design (e.g., to address content and skills in mathematics or academic vocabulary for ELL students).
- The adoption of districtwide programs and resources will ensure uniform use of interventions and supports. It will also ensure continuity for students who move from school to school within the district.

Appendix A: DPSI Review Team Members

The review of the Springfield Public Schools was conducted from May 26–June 10, 2009, by a team of educators from SchoolWorks, LLC on behalf of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Spencer Blasdale, Chief Executive Officer, SchoolWorks

Candice Carpenter, Project Associate, SchoolWorks

Gwendolyn Casazza, Consultant, SchoolWorks

Susan Kerrigan, Consultant, SchoolWorks

Anne Lane, Project Manager, SchoolWorks

Katherine Graves Maycock, Consultant, SchoolWorks

Erin Patterson, Consultant, SchoolWorks

Megan Tupa, Chief Operating Officer, SchoolWorks

Dr. Janet Williams, Consultant, SchoolWorks

Maida Broadbent Williams, Consultant, SchoolWorks

Appendix B: DPSI Review Activities and Schedule

DPSI Review Activities

The following activities were conducted as part of the DPSI review of the Springfield 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; manager of the Office of Language Acquisition; 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 Springfield Public Schools central office administration: superintendent; area improvement officers for zones 1-3; chief academic officer; chief of grants management; chief communications officer; chief information and instructional technology officer; chief parent and community engagement officer; chief schools officer; chief of pupil services; chief operations officer (interim); director of safety & security; executive director of finance; executive director of human resources; executive professional development senior administrator; senior administrator; mathematics director; reading director; social studies director; science director; director, SPS Leadership Institute; director, Striving Readers program; administrator of human resources for recruitment and retention; senior administrator of human resources for recruitment, retention, and teacher quality; coordinator of processes for teachers on waivers and Department licensure; director, English language learner services.
- The DPSI review team visited the following schools in the Springfield Public Schools: Elias Brookings School (K-8); Daniel Brunton Elementary School (PreK-5); Chestnut Middle School (6-8); Van Sickle Middle School (6-8); John F. Kennedy Middle School (6-8); Marcus Kiley Middle School (6-8); White Street School (K-5); Gerena Community School (PreK-5); Brightwood School (K-5); and Springfield Academy for Excellence (SAFE) (K-12).
 - During school visits, the DPSI review team conducted interviews with school principals, assistant principals, members of school leadership/improvement planning teams, department heads, instructional leadership specialists, Reading First coaches, teacher leaders, teachers, special education staff, ELL staff, KEYS teams, school counselors, and students.
 - The DPSI review team conducted 177 classroom visits across different grade levels and subjects in the ten schools visited.

- The DPSI review team reviewed the following documents provided by the Department:
 - The Springfield Public Schools DPSI
 - The Memorandum of Understanding between the Springfield 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):
 - Springfield Public Schools Mandate for Change
 - 2008-2009 Springfield Public Schools Strategic Priorities and Key Performance Indicators
 - District Theory of Action
 - Superintendent’s Entry Plan and Summary Report
 - Strategic Planning Process Overview
 - Organizational Health Inventory and Improvement Process Overview
 - High Performance Model and Alignment Model
 - School Improvement Plans (SIPs) and SIP Addendums
 - SIP Quarterly Review Reports
 - Instructional audit conducted by the Broad Center
 - Human Resources Department Recruitment and Outreach Activities
 - Flow charts and forms for the Attendance Improvement Initiative
 - Attendance Policy and 2008-2009 attendance data
 - A memorandum describing changes to the ELA and mathematics District Formative Assessment process
 - Proposal for streamlining ELA/reading interventions and criteria
 - District Implementation Corrective Action Plan for English language learners
 - Comprehensive School Counseling Program Guide
 - 2009 Professional Development Catalogue of Coursework
 - School extended day professional development calendars
 - Classroom learning walk protocols and notes
 - Data from Department Learning Walks
 - Pupil Progression Plan

DPSI Review Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the DPSI review of the Springfield Public Schools, conducted from May 26 – June 10, 2009.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	May 26 DPSI review team initial meeting Initial district meeting and interview	May 27 Site visit to White St. ES Day 1 Site visit to Van Sickle MS	May 28 Site visit to White St. ES Day 2 Site visit to Kennedy MS	May 29 Site visit to Brunton ES Site visit to Brookings K-8
June 1 DPSI review team meeting Interviews and focus groups with central office administration Mid-point check in with district leadership	June 2 Site visit to S.A.F.E. Day 1 Site visit to Chestnut MS	June 3 Site visit to S.A.F.E. Day 2 Site visit to Gerena ES Day 1	June 4 Site visit to Kiley MS Day 1 Site visit to Gerena ES Day 2	June 5 Site visit to Kiley MS Day 2
June 8 Site visit to Brightwood Day 1	June 9 Site visit to Brightwood Day 2	June 10 DPSI review team meeting Final meeting and interviews with district		