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Priority schools' test results improve

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WORCESTER — The city's lowest performing schools last year saw their highest internal test grades ever and are showing great strides toward improvement, a consultant charged with helping the district lose its unfavorable "Commissioner's District" designation told the School Committee yesterday.

Joseph Palumbo, senior executive with the Boston-based Focus on Results, provided an overview of the support his agency has been providing the district over the last 18 months. Mr. Palumbo is a consultant who came to Worcester after the city was labeled a Commissioner's District for having at least three schools that have not made the required progress on standardized tests for four years. Worcester, the only Commissioner's District in Central Massachusetts, has 13 "priority schools," formerly known as "underperforming schools."

Mr. Palumbo, who is paid by the state to help analyze student test scores from a variety of internal exams, told the committee that last school year's midyear and end-of-year reading and math tests results had improved dramatically. He attributed the success, in part, to the ongoing implementation of an "aligned and focused system district-wide."

Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System exam results, which the state uses to measure student progress and achievement, come out in September.

Mr. Palumbo said educators should be able to walk into any of the district's 44 schools and identify the school's instructional focus. Teachers have a role in the policymaking, as they should be given time during the school day to develop collaboration teams that discuss how to improve teaching and learning, he said.

"We know schools that have had sustained improvement have a district-wide plan that includes input from the building level," said Superintendent Melinda J. Boone.

The district's improvement plans for its priority schools was approved last year by the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

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