Comprehensive District Review Report

Fitchburg Public Schools

Review conducted April 24–27, 2018

Office of District Reviews and Monitoring

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Executive Summary

In 2017–2018, 5,349 students were enrolled in the Fitchburg Public Schools. Between 2013 and 2018, overall student enrollment increased by 8.8 percent.[[1]](#footnote-1) Many students come to school each day with high programmatic and support needs. In 2017, 71.1 percent of the district’s student enrollment were part of the high needs subgroup because they were in one or more of the following subgroups: economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English language learners (ELLs) or former ELLs, compared with 46.6 percent of statewide enrollment. Economically disadvantaged students made up 61.9 percent of the total student population, compared with 32 percent statewide. In addition, students with disabilities represented 23.9 percent of enrollment, compared with 17.7 percent statewide. Students from families whose first language is not English made up 32.7 percent of the district’s total student population, compared with 20.9 percent statewide.

The district struggles with students transferring into and out of schools during the year, resulting in a stability rate in 2017 of only 88.9 percent, compared with 94 percent statewide. Educators told the review team that many students came to school with needs that the district continually worked to meet. Schools in the district have active food pantries and clothing racks for families to access as needed. The district maintains partnerships with community-based organizations that provide on-site counseling and support for students. Fitchburg is one of nine districts working with ExSEL at the Rennie Center to promote and support social-emotional learning districtwide.

Helping students to meet academic expectations has been a challenge for the district. In 2017, only 31 percent of students in grades 3–8 met or exceeded expectations on the ELA Next-Generation MCAS assessment and only 29 percent met or exceeded expectations on the mathematics Next-Generation MCAS assessment. In 2017, in science, only 29 percent of students scored proficient or advanced on the MCAS assessment. In 2017–2018, Fitchburg High School was a Level 3 school and was in the 5th percentile of high schools across the state.

At the time of the review in late May/early June 2018, the superintendent of 13 years had announced that he would retire in October 2018.

**Instruction**

The team observed 86 classes throughout the district: 26 at the 2 high schools, 30 at the 2 middle schools and in grades 5–8 in the district’s Pre-K–8 school and 30 at the 3 elementary schools including prekindergarten through grade 4 in the district’s Pre-K–8 school. The team observed 40 ELA classes, 27 mathematics classes, and 19 classes in other subject areas. Among the classes observed were six inclusion classes, one special education class, and two ELL classes. The observations were approximately 20 minutes in length. All review team members collected data using ESE’s Instructional Inventory, a tool for recording observed characteristics of standards-based teaching. This data is presented in Appendix C.

In observed elementary classrooms, review team members found a consistently high incidence of characteristics of high-quality instruction. In almost all observed elementary classes, the review team found well-structured lessons with clear expectations, a high level of student engagement, and many opportunities for students to be engaged in higher-order thinking. Overall, inclusive practices were firmly established. A challenge for the district is to achieve this consistency at the secondary level, and particularly at the high school where there was a consistently lower incidence of characteristics of high-quality instruction than at the elementary and middle-school levels.

**Strengths**

The district has a range of strengths that can be built on to enhance overall performance.

* District leaders and city officials have established a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility for improving student learning in the district. District and school improvement plans are comprehensive, actionable, and aligned.
* The district has math and literacy coaches in all elementary and middle schools. Coaches play a critical role in aligning curriculum and supporting teachers’ capacity to effectively deliver the ELA and math curricula. Coaches train teachers to analyze and use student achievement data to adjust instruction and to monitor students’ progress.
* A comprehensive and coordinated assessment system helps to identify students in need of additional instruction and to inform instruction. Coaches also play a pivotal role in helping grade-level teams analyze and review data.
* Professional development is aligned with district and school priorities, supports administrators and teachers, and is informed by student achievement data and assessments of instructional practice.
* The district has systems and programs in place in all schools to identify and address students’ academic and non-academic strengths and needs.
* The district proactively supports sudent subgroups by providing professional development and ongoing support for teachers, promoting inclusionary practices, and maintaining some targeted support. The district is attentive to the participation of underrepresented student subgroups in advanced and accelerated programs.
* District administrators and city officials ensure that Fitchburg meets required net school spending and collaborate to meet students’ and district needs. District administrators communicate well with their municipal counterparts about purchasing, payroll, and safety needs.
* The district’s budget process is transparent with input from principals and other stakeholders.
* Leaders have leveraged resources by basing decisions on school plans and students’ needs and by considering all funding sources.

**Challenges and Areas for Growth**

The review team identified several challenges and areas for growth.

* The district’s planning documents do not contain sufficient data and analysis for student subgroups. The District Improvement Plan and the School Improvement Plans are not shared widely with stakeholders and progress toward district goals is not communicated to the public.
* At the high school, core content teachers do not have sufficient designated time to collaborate on curriculum and instruction, and do not have sufficient content leadership to provide curricular and instructional support.
* The district has not established structures to allow regular and sustained training to enable all teachers to use student achievement data to meet students’ needs.
* The district has not achieved consistency in the implementation of its educator evaluation system.
* Professional development in the district does not have a unified and effectively coordinated leadership structure and comprehensive written plans with clearly articulated and measurable goals, and formal faculty collaboration in professional development leadership and planning.
* District policies and practices are not sufficiently improving student attendance or the in-school and out-of-school suspension rates.
* Some district schools are in poor condition and need significant work. The district and the city do not have a funded long-range capital plan.

**Recommendations**

* The district should increase the use of data analysis in developing and revising its planning documents and should share the plans and information about progress toward plan goals with stakeholders.
* The district should review and redesign curriculum oversight in grades 9–12, including providing time for teachers in the same content areas to meet regularly. The district should ensure that all curricula are fully aligned with the current Massachusetts curriculum frameworks.
* The district should ensure, particularly at the middle and high schools, that instruction supports students’ diverse learning needs and provides students with opportunities to engage in higher-order thinking and communicate about their ideas. The district should address the need for varied, well-structured lessons, frequent checks for understanding, and engagement with meaningful real-world tasks at the high-school level.
* The district should expand its existing practices to ensure that all teachers become proficient in analyzing and using student data to make timely, appropriate instructional decisions.
* The district should continue its efforts to fully and effectively implement all components of the state’s Educator Evaluation Framework, with particular attention to the quality and consistency of supervisory practices and written evaluations, and the development of appropriate systems for the collection and use of multiple sources of evidence.
* The district should designate a leadership group charged with the responsibility of developing and monitoring a comprehensive professional development plan with well-defined measurable goals closely aligned with district priorities and school goals and the identified needs of educators.
* The district should enhance its efforts to improve attendance, particularly at the high school and among Latino/Hispanic students. More efforts should be made to further reduce the numbers of students suspended in- and out-of-school at the middle and high schools.
* The district in cooperation with the city should continue and increase its efforts to perform needed repairs and renovations on its most needy school buildings, including use of the upcoming feasibility study to consider options for them, continued application to the MSBA (Massachusetts School Building Auhtority) for funding for accelerated repairs, and a long-range capital plan to help determine how to schedule and fund them.

Fitchburg Public Schools Comprehensive District Review Overview

Purpose

Conducted under Chapter 15, Section 55A of the Massachusetts General Laws, comprehensive district reviews support local school districts in establishing or strengthening a cycle of continuous improvement. Reviews consider carefully the effectiveness of systemwide functions, with reference to the six district standards used by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE): leadership and governance, curriculum and instruction, assessment, human resources and professional development, student support, and financial and asset management. Reviews identify systems and practices that may be impeding improvement as well as those most likely to be contributing to positive results. In addition to being a tool that districts can use to inform their own improvement efforts, review reports may be used by ESE to identify technical assistance and other resources to provide to the district.

**Methodology**

Reviews collect evidence for each of the six district standards above. A district review team consisting of independent consultants with expertise in each of the district standards reviews documentation, data, and reports for two days before conducting a four-day district visit that includes visits to individual schools. The team conducts interviews and focus group sessions with such stakeholders as school committee members, teachers’ association representatives, administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Team members also observe classroom instructional practice. Subsequent to the onsite review, the team meets for two days to develop findings and recommendations before submitting a draft report to ESE.

Site Visit

The site visit to the Fitchburg Public Schools was conducted from April 24–27, 2018. The site visit included 32.5 hours of interviews and focus groups with approximately 143 stakeholders, including school committee members, district administrators, school staff, students, and teachers’ association representatives. The review team conducted three focus groups with nine elementary-school teachers, six middle-school teachers, and seven high-school teachers.

A list of review team members, information about review activities, and the site visit schedule are in Appendix A, and Appendix B provides information about enrollment, attendance, and expenditures. The team observed classroom instructional practice in 86 classrooms in 8 schools. The team collected data using ESE’s Instructional Inventory, a tool for recording observed characteristics of standards-based teaching. This data is contained in Appendix C.

**District Profile**

Fitchburg has a mayor-council form of government and the mayor chairs the school committee. The seven members of the school committee meet twice a month.

The superintendent has been in the position since 2005. The district leadership team includes the assistant superintendent for curriculum, grants, and Title I; the assistant superintendent of finance and operations; the administrator of pupil services; the ELL director; the director of technology and assessment; the director of enrollment and parent engagement; the director of special education; the human resources director; the athletic director; the nursing and health services director; and the induction and mentoring coordinator. Central office positions have been mostly stable in number over the past four years. The district has eight principals leading eight schools. There are 17 other school administrators, including assistant principals and student program support administrators. In the 2017–2018 school year, there were 366.5 teachers in the district.

In the 2017–2018 school year, 5,349 students were enrolled in the district’s 8 schools:

**Table 1: Fitchburg Public Schools**

**Schools, Type, Grades Served, and Enrollment\*, 2017–2018**

| **School**  | **School Type** | **Grades Served** | **Enrollment** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Crocker  | ES | Pre-K–4 | 665 |
| South Street | ES | Pre-K–4 | 666 |
| Reingold | ES | K–4 | 665 |
| McKay Arts Academy | ESMS | Pre-K–8 | 681 |
| Memorial Middle School | MS | 5–8 | 708 |
| Longsjo Middle School | MS | 5–8 | 590 |
| Fitchburg High School | HS | 9–12 | 1,205 |
| Goodrich Academy | HS | 9-12 | 169 |
| **Totals** | **8 schools** | **Pre-K–12** | **5,349 students** |
| \*As of October 1, 2017 |

Between 2013 and 2018 overall student enrollment increased by 8.8 percent. Enrollment figures by race/ethnicity and high needs populations (i.e., students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and English language learners (ELLs) and former ELLs) as compared with the state are provided in Tables B1a and B1b in Appendix B.

Total in-district per-pupil expenditures were lower than the median in-district per-pupil expenditures for 32 districts of similar size (5,000–,999 students) in fiscal year 2017: $13,605 as compared with $13,809 (see [District Analysis and Review Tool Detail: Staffing and Finance](http://www.doe.mass.edu/dart/)). Actual net school spending has been equal to what is required by the Chapter 70 state education aid program, as shown in Table B3 in Appendix B.

Student Performance

**Note:** The Next-Generation MCAS assessment is administered to grades 3–8 in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics; it was administered for the first time in 2017. (For more information, see <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/parents/results-faq.html>.) The MCAS assessment is administered to grades 5 and 8 in science and to grade 10 in ELA, math, and science. Data from the two assessments are presented separately because the tests are different and cannot be compared.

**The average scaled score on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment for all students was below the state rate by 8.9 points in ELA and by 10.0 points in math.**

| **Table 2: Fitchburg Public Schools****Next-Generation MCAS ELA and Math Average Scaled Score(SS) Grades 3–8, 2017** |
| --- |
| **Group** | **N** | **ELA SS** | **State SS** | **N** | **Math SS** | **State SS** |
| High Needs | 1,767 | 486.0 | 488.5 | 1,767 | 484.7 | 488.1 |
| Econ. Dis. | 1,559 | 486.8 | 489.2 | 1,561 | 485.0 | 488.1 |
| SWD | 544 | 472.9 | 480.0 | 541 | 473.3 | 479.8 |
| ELLs | 521 | 479.2 | 484.9 | 519 | 479.5 | 486.8 |
| All | 2,404 | 490.2 | 499.1 | 2,405 | 488.8 | 498.8 |
| Next Generation MCAS Achievement Levels: 440–470 Not Meeting Expectations; 470–500 Partially Meeting Expectations; 500–530 Meeting Expectations; 530–560 Exceeding Expectations |

**The percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment in grades 3–8 was below the state rate by 18 percentage points in ELA (31 percent vs. 49 percent) and below the state rate by 20 percentage points in math (28 percent vs. 48 percent).**

* In ELA, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations was below the state rate by 4 to 10 points for high needs students, economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English language learners.
* In math, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations was below the state rate in math by 5 to 11 points for high needs students, economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English language learners.

| **Table 3: Fitchburg Public Schools****Next-Generation MCAS ELA and Math Percent Meeting or Exceeding (M/E) Expectations Grades 3–8, 2017**  |
| --- |
| **Group** | **N** | **ELA M/E** | **State M/E** | **Above/Below State** | **N** | **Math M/E** | **State M/E** | **Above/Below State** |
| High Needs | 1,767 | 23% | 27% | -4 | 1,767 | 21% | 27% | -6 |
| Econ. Dis. | 1,559 | 24% | 29% | -5 | 1,561 | 22% | 27% | -5 |
| SWD | 544 | 6% | 13% | -7 | 541 | 8% | 14% | -6 |
| ELLs | 521 | 13% | 23% | -10 | 519 | 15% | 26% | -11 |
| All | 2,404 | 31% | 49% | -18 | 2,405 | 28% | 48% | -20 |

**The percentage of all students scoring proficient or advanced on the MCAS assessment in 10th grade was 21 and 29 percentage points below the state rate in ELA and math, respectively.**

* In ELA, the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced was below the state rate by 19 to 33 percentage points for high needs students, economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English language learners.
* In math, the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced was below the state rate by 11 to 32 percentage points for high needs students, economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities and English language learners.

| **Table 4: Fitchburg Public Schools****MCAS ELA and Math Percent Scoring Proficient or Advanced in Grade 10, 2017** |
| --- |
| **Group** | **N** | **ELA** | **State** | **Above/Below State** | **N** | **Math** | **State** | **Above/Below State** |
| High Needs | 216 | 60% | 79% | -19 | 217 | 42% | 58% | -16 |
| Econ. Dis. | 189 | 60% | 81% | -21 | 189 | 44% | 60% | -16 |
| SWD | 80 | 35% | 68% | -33 | 80 | 10% | 42% | -32 |
| ELLs | 52 | 38% | 59% | -21 | 53 | 28% | 39% | -11 |
| All | 313 | 70% | 91% | -21 | 315 | 50% | 79% | -29 |

**Between 2014 and 2017, science proficiency for all students declined by 5 percentage points, and declined by 9 percentage points for high needs students, by 3 percentage points for students with disabilities, and by 13 percentage points for English language learners.**

| **Table 5: Fitchburg Public Schools****MCAS Science Percent Scoring Proficient or Advanced in Grades 5, 8, and 10, 2014–2017** |
| --- |
| **Group** | **N (2017)** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr change** | **State (2017)** |
| High Needs | 727 | 29% | 22% | 20% | 20% | -9 | 31% |
| Econ. Dis. | 637 | -- | 23% | 20% | 21% | -- | 32% |
| SWD | 222 | 10% | 9% | 7% | 7% | -3 | 21% |
| ELLs | 188 | 20% | 11% | 10% | 7% | -13 | 20% |
| All | 1,032 | 33% | 31% | 30% | 28% | -5 | 53% |

**In ELA, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment was 18 percentage points below the state rate in grades 3–8 as a whole, and 11 to 25 percentage points below the state rate in the 3rd through 8th grades.**

**In math, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment was 20 percentage points below the state rate in grades 3–8 as a whole and 10 to 28 percentage points below the state rate in the 3rd through 8th grades.**

| **Table 6: Fitchburg Public Schools****Next-Generation MCAS ELA and Math Percent Meeting or Exceeding (M/E) Expectations in Grades 3-8, 2017** |
| --- |
| **Grade** | **N** | **ELA M/E** | **State ELA** | **Difference** | **N** | **Math M/E** | **State Math** | **Difference** |
| 3 | 436 | 35% | 47% | -12 | 437 | 39% | 49% | -10 |
| 4 | 418 | 33% | 48% | -15 | 417 | 35% | 49% | -14 |
| 5 | 408 | 24% | 49% | -25 | 409 | 18% | 46% | -28 |
| 6 | 447 | 27% | 51% | -24 | 449 | 24% | 50% | -26 |
| 7 | 334 | 30% | 50% | -20 | 331 | 21% | 47% | -26 |
| 8 | 361 | 38% | 49% | -11 | 362 | 32% | 48% | -16 |
| 3–8 | 2,404 | 31% | 49% | -18 | 2,405 | 28% | 48% | -20 |

**Between 2014 and 2017, in science, the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the MCAS assessment declined by 5 percentage points in the district as a whole and by 13 and 4 percentage points in the 5th and 10th grades, respectively, and improved by 3 percentage points in the 8th grade.**

| **Table 7: Fitchburg Public Schools****MCAS Science Percent Scoring Proficient or Advanced in Grades 5, 8, and 10, 2014–2017** |
| --- |
| **Grade** | **N (2017)** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr change** | **State (2017)** |
| 5 | 409 | 35% | 32% | 26% | 22% | -13 | 46% |
| 8 | 363 | 20% | 21% | 21% | 23% | 3 | 40% |
| 10 | 260 | 49% | 42% | 47% | 45% | -4 | 74% |
| All | 1,032 | 33% | 31% | 30% | 28% | -5 | 53% |

**Between 2014 and 2017, in ELA, the median student growth percentile (SGP) declined by 15 to 23 points in the 4th, 5th, 6th, and 10th grades.**

| **Table 8: Fitchburg Public Schools****ELA Median Student Growth Percentile, 2014–2017** |
| --- |
| **Grade** | **N (2017)** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr change** | **State (2017)** |
| 3 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 4 | 379 | 60.0 | 39.0 | 48.0 | 45.0 | -15.0 | 50.0 |
| 5 | 366 | 47.5 | 33.0 | 60.0 | 30.0 | -17.5 | 50.0 |
| 6 | 401 | 57.0 | 47.0 | 50.0 | 37.0 | -20.0 | 50.0 |
| 7 | 285 | 48.0 | 49.0 | 37.0 | 44.0 | -4.0 | 50.0 |
| 8 | 314 | 63.0 | 65.0 | 51.0 | 56.0 | -7.0 | 50.0 |
| 10 | 178 | 43.0 | 46.5 | 39.0 | 20.0 | -23.0 | 50.0 |
| Changes in SGP of 10 points or more are considered meaningful. |

**Between 2014 and 2017, in math, the median SGP declined by 17.0 to 23.0 points in the 4th, 5th, 7th and 10th grades.**

| **Table 9: Fitchburg Public Schools****Math Median Student Growth Percentile, 2014–2017** |
| --- |
| **Grade** | **N (2017)** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr change** | **State (2017)** |
| 3 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 4 | 376 | 58.0 | 36.0 | 47.0 | 41.0 | -17.0 | 50.0 |
| 5 | 365 | 39.0 | 39.0 | 38.0 | 21.0 | -18.0 | 50.0 |
| 6 | 398 | 51.0 | 48.0 | 49.0 | 43.5 | -7.5 | 50.0 |
| 7 | 279 | 55.0 | 54.0 | 54.0 | 32.0 | -23.0 | 50.0 |
| 8 | 301 | 46.0 | 62.0 | 56.0 | 47.0 | 1.0 | 50.0 |
| 10 | 172 | 46.0 | 40.5 | 44.0 | 24.0 | -22.0 | 50.0 |
| Changes in SGP of 10 points or more are considered meaningful. |

**In ELA, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment ranged from 26 to 61 percent in the 3rd grade and from 20 to 53 percent in the 4th grade in the district’s elementary schools. The percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 18 to 28 percent in the 5th grade, from 17 to 34 percent in the 6th grade, from 25 to 36 percent in the 7th grade, and from 32 to 49 percent in the 8th grade in the district’s schools.**

| **Table 10: Fitchburg Public Schools****Next-Generation MCAS ELA Percent Meeting or Exceeding Expectations by Grade and School, 2017** |
| --- |
| **School** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **3–8** |
| Crocker | 61% | 53% | -- | -- | -- | -- | 57% |
| Reingold | 27% | 28% | -- | -- | -- | -- | 27% |
| South Street | 28% | 33% | -- | -- | -- | -- | 31% |
| McKay Arts Academy | 26% | 20% | 18% | 17% | 25% | 32% | 23% |
| Memorial Middle | -- | -- | 28% | 34% | 31% | 38% | 33% |
| Longsjo Middle | -- | -- | 22% | 24% | 36% | 49% | 31% |
| District | 35% | 33% | 24% | 27% | 30% | 38% | 31% |
| State | 47% | 48% | 49% | 51% | 50% | 49% | 49% |

**In math, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment ranged from 22 to 71 percent in the 3rd grade, and from 9 to 58 percent in the 4th grade in the district’s elementary school. The percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 15 to 31 percent in the 5th grade, from 16 to 36 percent in the 6th grade, from 19 to 23 percent in the 7th grade, and from 28 to 39 percent in the 8th grade in the district’s schools.**

| **Table 11: Fitchburg Public Schools****Next-Generation MCAS Math Percent Meeting or Exceeding Expectations by Grade and School, 2017** |
| --- |
| **School** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **3–8** |
| Crocker | 71% | 58% | -- | -- | -- | -- | 64% |
| Reingold | 34% | 37% | -- | -- | -- | -- | 36% |
| South Street | 30% | 33% | -- | -- | -- | -- | 32% |
| McKay Arts Academy | 22% | 9% | 31% | 19% | 21% | 39% | 24% |
| MemorialMiddle | -- | -- | 15% | 36% | 23% | 34% | 27% |
| Longsjo Middle | -- | -- | 16% | 16% | 19% | 28% | 19% |
| District | 39% | 35% | 18% | 25% | 21% | 32% | 28% |
| State | 49% | 49% | 46% | 50% | 47% | 48% | 48% |

**On the MCAS assessment in the 10th grade, the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced at the district’s high schools was below the state rate by 18 and 26 percentage points in ELA and math, respectively**.

| **Table 12: Fitchburg Public Schools****MCAS ELA and Math Percent Scoring Proficient or Advanced in Grade 10, 2017** |
| --- |
| **School** | **ELA** | **Math** |
| Fitchburg High | 73% | 53% |
| Goodrich Academy | -- | -- |
| State | 91% | 79% |

**In science, the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the MCAS assessment ranged from 14 to 28 percent in the 5th grade and from 20 to 30 percent in the 8th grade. The percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced in science was 48 percent in the 10th grade at Fitchburg High.**

| **Table 13: Fitchburg Public Schools****MCAS Science Percent Scoring Proficient or Advanced by School and Grade, 2017** |
| --- |
| **School** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **10** | **Total** |
| Crocker | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Reingold | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| South Street | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Memorial Middle | -- | -- | 25% | -- | -- | 20% | -- | 23% |
| Longsjo Middle | -- | -- | 14% | -- | -- | 25% | -- | 19% |
| McKay Arts Academy | -- | -- | 28% | -- | -- | 30% | -- | 29% |
| Fitchburg High | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 48% | 48% |
| Goodrich Academy | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| District | -- | -- | 22% | -- | -- | 23% | 45% | 28% |
| State | -- | -- | 46% | -- | -- | 40% | 74% | 53% |

**In ELA, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment ranged from 23 to 57 percent in the district’s schools.**

* The percentage of high needs students meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 16 to 52 percent in the district’s schools.
* The percentage of economically disadvantaged students meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 16 to 52 percent in the district’s schools.
* The percentage of students with disabilities meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 2 to 32 percent in the district’s schools.
* The percentage of English language learners meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 8 to 40 percent in the district’s schools.

**In math, the percentage of all students meeting or exceeding expectations on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment ranged from 19 to 64 percent in the district’s schools.**

* The percentage of high needs students meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 13 to 61 percent in the district’s schools.
* The percentage of economically disadvantaged students meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 13 to 62 percent in the district’s schools.
* The percentage of students with disabilities meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 0 to 35 percent in the district’s schools.
* The percentage of English language learners meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 6 to 65 percent in the district’s schools.

| **Table 14: Fitchburg Public Schools****Next-Generation MCAS ELA and Math Percent Meeting and Exceeding Expectations by School, 2017** |
| --- |
|  | **ELA** | **Math** |
| **School** | **All** | **High Needs** | **Econ. Dis.** | **SWD** | **ELLs** | **All** | **High Needs** | **Econ. Dis.** | **SWD** | **ELLs** |
| Crocker | 57% | 52% | 52% | 32% | 40% | 64% | 61% | 62% | 35% | 65% |
| Reingold | 27% | 16% | 16% | 2% | 13% | 36% | 26% | 25% | 9% | 20% |
| Memorial Middle | 33% | 22% | 23% | 3% | 8% | 27% | 16% | 17% | 4% | 6% |
| South Street | 31% | 24% | 25% | 8% | 11% | 32% | 25% | 25% | 11% | 18% |
| Longsjo Middle | 31% | 24% | 25% | 8% | 11% | 19% | 13% | 13% | 10% | 6% |
| McKay Arts Academy | 23% | 16% | 18% | 4% | 11% | 24% | 19% | 20% | 0% | 11% |
| District | 31% | 23% | 24% | 6% | 13% | 28% | 21% | 22% | 8% | 15% |

**Between 2014 and 2017, ELA proficiency at Fitchburg High declined by 3 percentage points for all students and by 9 and 1 percentage points for high needs students and students with disabilities, respectively, and improved by 1 percentage point for English language learners.**

**Between 2014 and 2017, math proficiency at Fitchburg High declined by 10 percentage points for all students, by 12 percentage points for high needs students and students with disabilities, respectively, and by 19 percentage points for English language learners.**

| **Table 15: Fitchburg Public Schools****MCAS ELA and Math Percent Scoring Proficient or Advanced in Grade 10, 2014–2017** |
| --- |
|  | **ELA** | **Math** |
| **School** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** |
| Goodrich Academy | -- | 82% | -- | -- | -- | -- | 50% | -- | -- | -- |
| Fitchburg High | 76% | 83% | 80% | 73% | -3 | 63% | 54% | 57% | 53% | -10 |
| High Needs | 71% | 77% | 71% | 62% | -9 | 56% | 44% | 45% | 44% | -12 |
| Econ. Dis. | -- | 77% | 74% | 62% | -- | -- | 45% | 46% | 46% | -- |
| ELLs | 41% | 33% | 47% | 42% | 1 | 51% | 33% | 30% | 32% | -19 |
| SWD | 37% | 47% | 38% | 36% | -1 | 22% | 17% | 11% | 10% | -12 |

**Between 2014 and 2017, in science, the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the MCAS assessment declined by 2 to 10 percentage points in the district’s middle schools and declined by 2 percentage points at Fitchburg High.**

* Science proficiency for high needs students declined by 5 to 14 percentage points in the district’s middle schools and declined by 7 percentage points at Fitchburg High.
* Science proficiency for students with disabilities improved by 6 percentage points and declined by 3 and 7 percentage points in the district’s middle schools, and declined by 11 percentage points at Fitchburg High.
* Science proficiency for English language learners declined by 1 to 26 percentage points in the district’s middle schools, and by 35 percentage points at Fitchburg High.
* In 2017, science proficiency for economically disadvantaged students ranged from 15 to 21 percent in the district’s middle schools and was 38 percent at Fitchburg High.

| **Table 16: Fitchburg Public Schools****MCAS Science Percent Scoring Proficient or Advanced in Science by School and Subgroup, 2014–2017** |
| --- |
| **School** | **N (2017)** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** |
| Crocker | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Reingold | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| South Street | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Goodrich Academy | 4 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| MemorialMiddle | 336 | 25% | 23% | 25% | 23% | -2 |
| High Needs | 219 | 21% | 15% | 13% | 16% | -5 |
| Econ. Dis. | 196 | -- | 17% | 13% | 15% | -- |
| SWD | 53 | 5% | 5% | 2% | 11% | 6 |
| ELLs | 74 | 8% | 9% | 8% | 7% | -1 |
| Longsjo Middle | 259 | 26% | 22% | 24% | 19% | -7 |
| High Needs | 209 | 23% | 19% | 21% | 15% | -8 |
| Econ. Dis. | 187 | -- | 20% | 21% | 16% | -- |
| SWD | 57 | 11% | 11% | 6% | 4% | -7 |
| ELLs | 47 | 8% | 13% | 13% | 6% | -2 |
| McKay Arts Academy | 147 | 39% | 43% | 27% | 29% | -10 |
| High Needs | 97 | 32% | 30% | 12% | 18% | -14 |
| Econ. Dis. | 82 | -- | 32% | 10% | 21% | -- |
| SWD | 28 | 3% | 11% | 8% | 0% | -3 |
| ELLs | 19 | 31% | 11% | 9% | 5% | -26 |
| Fitchburg High | 244 | 50% | 44% | 48% | 48% | -2 |
| High Needs | 161 | 44% | 35% | 35% | 37% | -7 |
| Econ. Dis. | 141 | -- | 35% | 39% | 38% | -- |
| SWD | 53 | 26% | 12% | 13% | 15% | -11 |
| ELLs | 40 | 44% | 19% | 17% | 10% | -34 |

**Between 2014 and 2017, the district’s four-year cohort graduation rate for all students increased 5.8 percentage points, from 71.1 percent in 2014 to 76.9 percent in 2017, below the state rate of 88.3 percent. In 2017, the four-year cohort graduation rates for each subgroup was below the state rate except for Asian students and Hispanic or Latino students.**

| **Table 17: Fitchburg Public Schools****Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rates, 2014–2017** |
| --- |
| **Group** | **N** **(2017)** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** | **State (2017)** |
| High needs | 311 | 66.2% | 71.5% | 72.5% | 75.6% | 9.4 | 80.0% |
| Economically Disadvantaged\* | 297 | 64.9% | 72.1% | 72.8% | 75.8% | 10.9 | 79.0% |
| ELLs | 28 | 56.5% | 79.2% | 76.5% | 60.7% | 4.2 | 63.4% |
| SWD | 91 | 57.3% | 50.5% | 52.9% | 57.1% | -0.2 | 72.8% |
| African American | 24 | 87.0% | 78.1% | 78.6% | 62.5% | -24.5 | 80.0% |
| Asian | 16 | 95.0% | 82.1% | 100% | 100% | 5 | 94.1% |
| Hispanic or Latino | 161 | 63.2% | 64.6% | 68.6% | 75.2% | 12 | 74.4% |
| Multi-Race, non-Hisp./Lat. | 18 | 69.2% | 76.9% | 83.3% | 66.7% | -2.5 | 85.2% |
| White | 153 | 73.6% | 78.0% | 75.4% | 79.7% | 6.1 | 92.6% |
| All | 372 | 71.1% | 73.2% | 74.4% | 76.9% | 5.8 | 88.3% |
| \* Four-year cohort graduation rate for students from low-income families used for 2014 and 2015 rates. |

**Between 2013 and 2016, the district’s five-year cohort graduation rate increased by 0.9 percentage point for all students, from 78.4 percent in 2013 to 79.3 percent in 2016, above the state rate of 89.8 percent.**

| **Table 18: Fitchburg Public Schools****Five-Year Cohort Graduation Rates, 2013–2016** |
| --- |
| **Group** | **N** **(2016)** | **2013** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **4-yr Change** | **State (2016)** |
| High needs | 363 | 77.1% | 73.2% | 76.3% | 77.1% | 0.0 | 82.9% |
| Economically Disadvantaged\* | 345 | 77.5% | 72.2% | 76.4% | 77.1% | -0.4 | 82.1% |
| ELLs | 34 | 68.6% | 56.5% | 79.2% | 76.5% | 7.9 | 70.9% |
| SWD | 104 | 66.4% | 63.6% | 55.8% | 61.5% | -4.9 | 76.5% |
| African American | 28 | 80.0% | 87.0% | 78.1% | 78.6% | -1.4 | 83.4% |
| Asian | 26 | 91.3% | 95.0% | 82.1% | 100% | 8.7 | 94.8% |
| Hispanic or Latino | 188 | 71.4% | 67.5% | 70.1% | 73.9% | 2.5 | 76.8% |
| Multi-Race, non-Hispanic or Latino | 12 | 66.7% | 76.9% | 92.3% | 83.3% | 16.6 | 87.4% |
| White | 175 | 82.4% | 81.3% | 82.7% | 81.7% | -0.7 | 93.5% |
| All  | 430 | 78.4% | 76.6% | 77.8% | 79.3% | 0.9 | 89.8% |
| \* Five-year cohort graduation rate for students from low-income families used 2013 and 2014 rates. |

**Between 2014 and 2017, the in-school suspension rate for all students declined by 4.4 percentage points and was 5.1 percent in 2017, three times the state rate of 1.7 percent. The in-school suspension rates for each subgroup with reportable data also declined by 2.1 to 5.4 percentage points.**

| **Table 19: Fitchburg Public Schools****In-School Suspension Rates by Subgroup, 2014–2017** |
| --- |
| **Group** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** | **State (2017)** |
| High Needs | 10.6% | 11.1% | 11.0% | 6.0% | -4.6 | 2.6% |
| Economically disadvantaged\* | 11.0% | 11.5% | 11.5% | 6.2% | -4.8 | 2.9% |
| ELLs | 8.1% | 10.8% | 12.5% | 6.0% | -2.1 | 1.7% |
| SWD | 12.7% | 14.8% | 13.7% | 7.5% | -5.2 | 3.1% |
| African American | 10.7% | 10.2% | 8.8% | 5.5% | -5.2 | 3.3% |
| Asian | 3.6% | 4.6% | 2.7% | -- | -- | 0.5% |
| Hispanic or Latino | 12.3% | 12.6% | 12.1% | 6.9% | -5.4 | 2.5% |
| Multi-Race, non-Hispanic or Latino | 7.5% | 10.0% | 9.1% | 4.8% | -2.7 | 2.1% |
| White | 6.9% | 7.1% | 6.9% | 3.1% | -3.8 | 1.3% |
| All  | 9.5% | 9.9% | 9.5% | 5.1% | -4.4 | 1.7% |

\*Suspension rates for students from low income families used for 2014 rates.

**Between 2014 and 2017, the district’s out-of-school suspension rate for all students declined by 2.9 percentage points and was 3.9 percent in 2017, above the state rate of 2.8 percent. The out-of-school suspension rates for each subgroup with reportable data also declined by 1.9 to 5.8 percentage points.**

| **Table 20: Fitchburg Public Schools****Out-of-School Suspension Rates by Subgroup, 2014–2017** |
| --- |
| **Group** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** | **State (2017)** |
| High Needs | 8.0% | 8.2% | 6.4% | 4.7% | -3.3 | 4.5% |
| Economically disadvantaged\* | 8.3% | 8.4% | 6.8% | 4.8% | -3.5 | 5.3% |
| ELLs | 6.1% | 8.2% | 8.0% | 4.2% | -1.9 | 3.8% |
| SWD | 12.3% | 12.2% | 10.9% | 6.5% | -5.8 | 5.5% |
| African American | 9.0% | 6.5% | 6.6% | 3.5% | -5.5 | 6.3% |
| Asian | 1.3% | 0.7% | 1.0% | -- | -- | 0.7% |
| Hispanic or Latino | 8.7% | 8.9% | 7.0% | 5.0% | -3.7 | 5.2% |
| Multi-Race, non-Hispanic or Latino | 6.9% | 7.3% | 6.6% | 3.8% | -3.1 | 3.1% |
| White | 5.0% | 5.5% | 3.3% | 2.9% | -2.1 | 1.6% |
| All  | 6.8% | 7.0% | 5.4% | 3.9% | -2.9 | 2.8% |

\* Suspension rates for students from low income families used for 2014 rates.

**In 2017, the district’s dropout rate for all students was 3.8 percent, more than twice the 2017 state rate of 1.8 percent. The dropout rates for each subgroup with reportable data ranged from 0.0 to 5.6 percent.**

| **Table 21: Fitchburg Public Schools****Dropout Rates by Subgroup, 2014–2017** |
| --- |
| **Group** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** | **State (2017)** |
| High Needs | 5.5% | 4.2% | 4.9% | 5.0% | -0.5 | 3.5% |
| Economically disadvantaged\* | 5.3% | 3.9% | 5.5% | 5.0% | -0.3 | 3.6% |
| ELLs | 2.2% | 2.2% | 6.8% | 5.6% | 3.4 | 6.5% |
| SWD | 6.3% | 3.9% | 6.0% | 5.4% | -0.9 | 3.3% |
| African American | 8.2% | 3.7% | 4.9% | 1.1% | -7.1 | 2.9% |
| Asian | 0.0% | 2.3% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0 | 0.6% |
| Hispanic or Latino | 7.9% | 3.8% | 5.3% | 3.6% | -4.3 | 4.2% |
| Multi-Race, non-Hispanic or Latino | 0.0% | 8.3% | 3.4% | 2.9% | 2.9 | 1.7% |
| White | 4.3% | 3.4% | 3.7% | 5.4% | 1.1 | 1.1% |
| All  | 5.8% | 3.7% | 4.3% | 3.8% | -2.0 | 1.8% |
| \*Dropout rates for students from low income families used for 2014 rates. |

Leadership and Governance

***Contextual Background***

At the time of the onsite review in April 2018, the superintendent planned to retire in the fall 2018, after 13 years of service. The school committee planned to conduct a search for a new superintendent.

The 2016–2018 District Improvement Plan (DIP) was to expire at the end of the 2017–2018 school year. For the new superintendent, developing the 2019–2021 DIP provides a strategic opportunity to review progress on the goals in the 2016–2018 DIP.

The district’s commitment to continuous improvement and its efforts to promote a culture of professional collaboration, caring, and shared responsibility for student success are admirable. The review team hopes that this report will serve to focus and facilitate the district’s ongoing work to improve student learning.

***Strength Findings***

1. **District leaders and city officials have established a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility for improving student learning in the district.**
2. Interviews and a review of documents and videos of school committee meetings indicated that the superintendent and school committee members had a collaborative relationship.
	* 1. School committee members described their working relationship with superintendent as “fantastic and impeccable,” noting that he was “transparent” and had “a light touch for a heavy job.” They said that the superintendent communicated effectively with school committee members, stating, “He lets us know what’s happening.”

2. The superintendent told the review team that the school committee was focused on what the students needed.

1. District and municipal staff have a positive working relationship.
	* + 1. In the superintendent’s 2017 evaluation, the school committee complimented the superintendent’s ability to work collaboratively with city officials to provide “innovative, wide-ranging, and extensive learning opportunities for students on a trim budget.”
			2. Both district and municipal staff described their positive communications and working relationships among a variety of city departments, including auditing, purchasing, police department, public works, and the fire department.

**C.** District administrators demonstrate collaborative leadership.

When the superintendent was asked what accomplishments during his 13 years of leadership he was most proud of, he said that the district’s leadership had become more collaborative, and the district had been transformed from isolated “little kingdoms” to district leaders demonstrating a “we do this together” attitude.

2. A school committee member described the collegial relationships among the superintendent and school district leaders: “I see a top team working well together—communicating and sharing data and working forward together.”

**D.** School-based leadership also is collaborative.

1. The superintendent told the team that he favored distributive leadership, granting principals a high degree of autonomy and flexibility to decide on school-specific approaches to achieve commonly agreed upon outcomes for student learning.

 2. In district schools, principals collaborate with teachers. As teacher leaders, instructional coaches support teachers to develop and deepen their instructional skills through frequent data analysis, personalized professional development, and modeling effective instructional practices.

Impact: From city hall to schools, adults at several levels of district and city leadership provide district students positive role models for collaborating to achieve common goals that better the schools and the community. Positive relationships between the district and city hall likely increase public trust and confidence in the schools and in city government.

**2. The district has developed comprehensive, actionable, and aligned district and school improvement plans.**

**A.** Under the assistant superintendent’s leadership, district staff developed a comprehensive District Improvement Plan (DIP) for 2016–2018.

1. The 2016–2018 DIP contains four major sections: Vision, Mission, Strategic Goals , and Data (Demographicsand Massachusetts Accountability). The DIP contains seven strategic goals about Curriculum and Instruction; Diverse Learners; Teacher Quality and Professional Development; Parent and Community Involvement; School Culture/Safety; Adequate Staffing; and Capital Needs.

 2. The DIP goals are SMART goals.[[2]](#footnote-2)

3. For each SMART goal, the DIP includes an action plan with detailed information about: student performance and other data sources; learning objectives for students; instructional-change objectives for teachers; benchmarks; measurement/evidence; responsibility/timeline; and resources.

4. The superintendent and his staff meet periodically to discuss progress on DIP goals. In April 2018, at a school committee retreat, the superintendent and school committee members reviewed the 2016–2018 DIP.

**B.** Each school has a School Improvement Plan for 2017–2018, which is aligned with the DIP. With assistance from the assistant superintendent, during the summer and fall 2017, principals and their school councils updated the SIPs.

1. Most SIPs address the majority of the DIP’s goals. Two SIPs include a goal on Time on Learning.

2. The SIP action plan contains the following components: strategic objectives; SMART goals; data rationale; strategic action steps; responsible staff; timelines; implementation benchmarks; and end-of-the-year targets. The elementary SIPs’ action plans also include evidence of change in professional practice.

3. Principals review their SIPs with the superintendent and the assistant superintendent before presenting them to the school committee twice during the school year.

 a. In the fall 2017, schools made presentations to the school committee on their updated SIPs and 2017 MCAS assessment results.

 b. At the time of the onsite review in April 2018, principals planned to present SIPs again to the school committee during budget development in the spring 2018.

 4. The 2018 district budget document contains a summary of the goals and objectives of each SIP.

Impact: With comprehensive, actionable improvement plans with data-based SMART goals that identify timelines for achieving priorities, responsible staff, and necessary resources, the district can systematically implement, monitor, and refine continuous improvements in the district and ensure accountability for meeting improvement priorities.

***Challenges and Areas for Growth***

**2. The district’s planning documents do not include sufficient data and analysis for student subgroups. The district does not share the DIP and the SIPs widely or communicate with the public about progress toward district goals**.

1. The DIP does not contain sufficient data and analysis for student subgroups.

 1. While the DIP does mention ACCESS testing, the DIP does not contain ACCESS data for the district’s English language learners (ELLs) who in 2018 made up 13.8 percent of the district’s enrollment.

 2. The DIP includes a chart of 2017 MCAS assessment data for all grades and subjects. About the 2017 MCAS assessment results, the DIP states: “FPS data indicate that several cohorts of students remain persistently below performance improvement targets in English Language Arts, Mathematics and Science.” However, the DIP does not provide data for subgroup performance gaps.

**B**. A document review indicated that the SIPs did not consistently include student-centered action steps and data and analysis.

1. Strategic action steps in the SIPs do not consistently state the skills and/or behaviors that students will be able to demonstrate as a result of the implementation of the action steps.

2. The SIPs do not contain ACCESS data for the schools’ ELLs.

3. While seven of the eight SIPs include some data in charts or graphs, only two SIPs provide analysis of the data. Most SIPs provided little analysis of data, including trends, achievement gaps, or how the SIP activities would improve student achievement.

4. A document review indicated that the SIPs did not contain data and measures for assessing students’ growth in social-emotional skills and attitudes, a priority focus in the district’s schools.

 **C.** The DIP contains a goal for parent and community involvement that addresses developing and implementing a Parent Outreach Program using electronic/digital media including web sites. However, at the time of the onsite review in April 2018, the district had not posted the DIP on its web site and the SIPs were not posted on the schools’ web sites.

 **D.** The review team did not find evidence that the superintendent reported annual progress on DIP goals to stakeholders.

**Impact**: Without sufficient data and analysis and student-centered action steps, district plans focus more on services provided to students rather than the extent to which students are progressing. When families and other stakeholders cannot access planning documents and do not receive regular updates on progress on strategic initiatives, they do not know the direction in which the district is heading, the plans to achieve goals, or the extent to which progress is being made.

***Recommendation***

**1. The district should increase the use of data analysis in developing and revising district and school improvement plans and should share the plans and information about progress toward plan goals with stakeholders.**

1. The district should ensure that data specific to all of its strategic goals is included in the District Improvement Plan (DIP), and that DIP and SIP (School Improvement Plan) goals are directly linked to addressing trends and gaps in the data.
2. Data illustrating students’ social-emotional growth could be drawn from the district’s current work with outside partners to develop measures and methods for assessing students’ social-emotional learning (see Assessment and Student Support sections below).
3. District and school planning processes should include deep analysis of data related to each strategic goal and revision of action steps, as needed, to ensure progress.
4. The DIP should include an explicit plan for how and when progress toward each goal will be measured and reported to stakeholders, including staff, students’ families, and the school committee.

1. District leaders should ensure that plans and updates are shared widely, including posting them on the district and school websites.

**Benefits:**  By increasing the role of data analysis in the development and reflection on improvement plans, the district will ensure that goals are appropriate, progress toward goals is adequate, and changes to action steps are made based on their effectiveness. Communicating the plans and updates on progress will ensure that district stakeholders understand the direction in which the district and its schools are heading, the steps that will be taken to bring about improvement, and the extent of progress toward each goal.

**Recommended resources:**

* ESE’s *Planning for Success* tools (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/success/>) support the improvement planning process by spotlighting practices, characteristics, and behaviors that support effective planning and implementation and meet existing state requirements for improvement planning.

Curriculum and Instruction

***Contextual Background***

The assistant superintendent for curriculum and grants oversees the district’s K–8 literacy curriculum and to a lesser extent, the K–8 mathematics and science curricula. The K–8 STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) support specialist oversees the elementary and middle-school science curricula. The assistant superintendent and elementary and middle-school principals work with literacy and mathematics coaches who provide ongoing and direct curricular, instructional, and assessment support to K–8 teachers.

At the high school, the assistant principal for curriculum oversees curriculum. An Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), consisting of the principal, his administrative team, a literacy coach, and a mathematics coach, share the responsibility of providing instructional support. The literacy coach and the math coach provide ongoing and direct curricular, instructional, and assessment support to teachers in grades 9–12. The principal of the district’s alternative high school provides curriculum leadership and collaborates with staff to develop individualized learning curriculum.

For K-4 literacy, the district uses *Readers and Writers’ Workshop* (Teachers College, Columbia University), a research-based reading and writing program. For K-4 mathematics, the district follows *Eureka Math* (Engage NY). For ELA in grades 5–8, *Expeditionary Learning* (EL) modules are used and in mathematics, *Connected Mathematics Project 3* (CMP3). Mathematics and literacy coaches at the K–4 and 5–8 levels ensure that the ELA and math programs are aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and support teachers to implement them. The district’s Pre-K–8 McKay Arts Academy has a degree of autonomy concerning curriculum. For example, in grades 5-8, teachers adapted *EL* modules to create interdisciplinary humanities units. Districtwide, teachers have easy access to online curriculum documents through Google Docs.

At the time of the onsite visit in April 2018, the district had implemented a one-to-one Chromebook initiative and Google Classroom at the high school and planned to extend the Chromebook one-to-one initiative to grade 8 in September 2018. At the elementary level, the director of technology and assessment works to incorporate technology into the curriculum. Elementary students are learning about science using the latest technology including virtual reality goggles and hands-on exploration in an augmented reality sandbox.

The district has a partnership with the District and School Assistance Center (DSAC), central region. At the time of the onsite visit, DSAC was working with the high school in a variety of ways. For example, the DSAC provided voluntary after-school pop-up professional development on topics such as teaching English language learners, questioning techniques, and formative assessments. In the 2018–2019 school year, work at the high school with the newly organized west central team of the Statewide System of Support[[3]](#footnote-3) is expected to focus on instructional rigor.

To support preschool literacy, the district has launched a digital program to enhance preschoolers’ language acquisition. The program is entitled, Footstep 2 Brilliance Learning A-Z and is free to participants. Once registered, children and their families can access rich literacy resources available in English with Spanish translations on a range of devices. The district plans to evaluate the program after the first cohort of participants has completed kindergarten.

The district has aligned its Pre-K–8 ELA and math curricula with the current frameworks. The district has planned work to document the instructional practices intended in the current frameworks. Similarly, K–8 science pacing guides and maps reflect the 2016 Massachusetts Science and Technology/Engineering Framework, with additional work planned to focus on the intended instructional practices. At the time of the onsite review in April 2018, the curriculum for grades 9–12 was at various stages of alignment with the current Massachusetts frameworks. The district planned curriculum work for the summer of 2018.

***Strength Findings***

* + 1. **K–8 math and literacy coaches provide a critical role in the aligning of curriculum and supporting teachers’ capacity to effectively deliver the ELA and math curricula.**

 **A**. Under the leadership of the assistant superintendent for curriculum, elementary and middle-school math and literacy coaches help teachers align ELA and math curricula. Coaches work closely with their principals in these efforts.

* + 1. Each elementary and middle school in the district has a full-time math and a full-time literacy coach, except for [[4]](#footnote-4)two elementary schools, which share a literacy coach, for a total of 11 content coaches.

2. The assistant superintendent of curriculum meets with coaches monthly in a day-long meeting. The meeting includes content specific discussion as well as conversations about vertical and horizontal alignment of ELA and math curricula.

 a. District leaders stated that coaches provided a conduit to communicate district instructional and assessment expectations to teachers and referred to coaches as *de facto* curriculum leaders.

3. Math and literacy coaches review, align, and update K–8 ELA and math curriculum documents. These include pacing guides (known in the district as Year at a Glance), benchmark units, and units of study in ELA and math.

a. For example, at the beginning of the 2017–2018 school year, coaches analyzed the changes in the current standards and went over the differences with teachers. Coaches updated Year at a Glance to reflect the 2017 Curriculum Frameworks for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics.

 4. At the end of each school year, coaches and teacher teams document curriculum revisions.

 a. The team was told that the district was planning additional ELA and math curricula updates for the summer of 2018 when curriculum teams would document the instructional practices intended in the current frameworks.

5. Elementary teachers stated that coaches took the lead in updating curriculum to reflect current frameworks. Coaches have made teachers aware of the curriculum changes in weekly grade-level meetings and in professional development (PD) led by coaches. Middle-school teachers said that the math and ELA Year at a Glance documents were aligned with the current frameworks, noting that coaches made teachers aware of the changes to curriculum during common planning time.

 6. Principals meet weekly with coaches to plan school-based initiatives such as job-embedded PD or to go over pacing issues.

* 1. Literacy and math coaches interact with teachers in regularly scheduled structures that vary by level or school. Coaches use these times to provide job-embedded PD through one-on-one coaching, “professional learning circles” (PLCs), or grade-level teams. Embedded PD focuses on formative assessments, student discourse, and a coherent instructional model.
		1. At the elementary level, coaches and principals analyze data during common planning time (CPT). Coaches and principals attend weekly grade-level meetings with teachers.
		2. At the middle schools, coaches meet with teachers once every six days in CPT. In the district’s Extended Learning Time (ELT) school, the McKay Arts Academy, the principal and coaches attend CPT. Coaches stated that they used this time to discuss the current frameworks, to support teachers in planning and using pacing guides, and to review what students are expected to know during a specific time period for each standard. Coaches also meet with new teachers during this time.
1. Interviews and a document review indicated that coaches implemented on-demand coaching and a nine-day coaching cycle to build teachers’ capacity to effectively deliver the curriculum. Coaches also lead learning walks focusing on implementation of specific instructional strategies.
	* 1. The coaching cycle consists of a debrief to determine the teacher’s choice for instructional focus, a personalized improvement plan, modeling and co-teaching, and an additional debrief.
			1. The team was told that every ELA and math teacher in each school was expected to take part in a nine-day coaching cycle over a period of two years
		2. Coaches lead learning walks with teachers focusing on the implementation of specific strategies, such as the use of exit tickets for formative assessments.

**Impact**: By ensuring that K–8 teachers have ongoing support to implement the district’s curricula with fidelity and to implement specific instructional strategies, the district is setting a solid foundation for improving students’ learning outcomes.

1. **In observed elementary classrooms, the review team found a consistently high incidence of characteristics of high-quality instruction.**
2. **Focus Area #1: Learning objectives & Expectations** In almost all observed elementary classes, the review team found well-structured lessons with clear expectations.

Teachers demonstrated sufficient and compelling evidence of knowledge of the subject matter (characteristic #1) in 90 percent of observed elementary classes.

1. In most elementary classes, teachers explained lesson content with fluency and effectively placed the lesson in larger context to ensure students’ understanding. For example, in a grade 4 mathematics class, the teacher reviewed the vocabulary and formulas that students would need for the lesson and connected them to their prior knowledge.

In 73 percent of observed elementary classes, there was sufficient and compelling evidence that the teacher ensures that students understand what they should be learning and why (characteristic #2).

a. In most observed elementary classrooms, learning objectives were written in student-friendly “I can” statements and teachers frequently reviewed the objectives and asked students to explain them.

The review team observed sufficient and compelling evidence that classroom activities were well matched to learning objectives (characteristic #3) in 87 percent of observed elementary classes.

a. In most observed elementary classes, classroom activities, resources, and materials matched the learning objective and supported the content intended. For example, in a grade 4 mathematics class, all the lesson activities, including the teacher’s presentation, student work, turn-and-talk structures, and small group and pair work were aligned with the learning objectives.

In 80 percent of observed elementary classes, the review team found sufficient and compelling evidence that teachers conducted frequent checks for student understanding, provided feedback to students and adjusted instruction (characteristic #4).

a. In these classrooms, teachers circulated the room when students worked independently, in small groups or in pairs, conferenced one-to-one with students, and used strategies such as thumbs up/thumbs down, whiteboards, and calling on students randomly to frequently check for student understanding.

1. **Focus Area #2: Student Engagement & Higher-Order Thinking** Most observed elementary classes reflected a high level of student engagement and many opportunities for students to be engaged in higher-order thinking.

The review team found sufficient and compelling evidence of students assuming responsibility for their learning (characteristic #5) in 97 percent of observed elementary classes.

1. In ELA and mathematics classes, students worked in centers in small groups, independently, or in pairs. They were engaged and active participants in their own learning in multiple learning activities such as independent reading, writing or checking their own work, or scoring each other’s work.
2. Students were also cognizant of their learning progress. For example, in a grade 2 math class, students reflected on their own math progress using a classroom guide describing five levels of acquiring new knowledge.

In 63 percent of observed elementary classes observed, there was sufficient and compelling evidence of students engaged in higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, problem-solving, evaluation or application of new knowledge (characteristic #6).

a. For example, in mathematics classes, students collaboratively analyzed data to create graphs. In ELA classes, students conducted research that required analysis and analyzed textual meaning while collaboratively creating narrative stories. In a grade 4 science class, students worked in groups on a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) project requiring higher-level thinking skills.

The review team found sufficient and compelling evidence of students communicating their ideas and thinking with each other (characteristic #7) in 87 percent of observed elementary classes. Exchanges took place in partner work, in small groups working in centers, and through frequent turn-and-talk structures where students exchanged their thinking about content.

In 73 percent of observed elementary classes observed, there was sufficient and compelling evidence that students were engaged in meaningful real-world tasks (characteristic #8). Examples of real-world tasks included elementary students conducting science experiments, collaborating on narrative stories, writing poems, and conducting debates.

1. **Focus Area #3: Inclusive Practice & Classroom Culture** Overall, inclusive practices are firmly established in observed elementary classes.

In 80 percent of observed elementary classes, the review team found sufficient and compelling evidence that the teacher ensures that students engage in challenging tasks regardless of learning needs (characteristic #9).

1. Examples of how the varied learning needs of students were met included the use of the Workshop Model in reading and writing, which team members consistently observed in elementary classes. By design, this instructional model provides differentiated instruction based on formative assessments.
2. Teachers conducted reading lessons in small guided groups. In observed math classes, students were grouped based on formative assessments. In addition, co-teachers and paraprofessionals were present in some elementary classrooms to help scaffold lessons and make them accessible to all learners.

 2. The review team found sufficient and compelling evidence that teachers used a variety of instructional approaches (characteristic #10) in 80 percent of observed elementary classes. For example, one lesson could include independent, small-group and pairs work as well as one-to-one conferencing with the teacher. In addition, most lessons were designed to appeal to students’ multiple modalities and most classrooms were equipped to meet students’ varied needs.

 3. In 87 percent of observed elementary classes, there was sufficient and compelling evidence that class routines and positive supports were in place to ensure that students behaved appropriately (characteristic #11).

 a. In elementary classes, teachers effectively used rituals, routines, and responses to limit disruptions. Teachers quietly, positively, and respectfully redirected students who were off task or misbehaved. Transitions from one activity to the next were smooth with limited loss of instructional time. Students knew classroom rules and followed them.

 4. The review team found sufficient and compelling evidence that classroom climate was conducive to learning (characteristic #12) in 87 percent of observed elementary classes. The review team characterized most observed elementary classes as well ordered with respectful language and interactions. Classroom climate was purposeful and positive with students and teachers demonstrating warm relationships.

**Impact**: When students are consistently provided with well-structured lessons so that they can clearly understand what they are learning and why and take ownership for their learning in lessons designed to support the varied learning needs of all students, students’ learning outcomes are likely to improve.

***Challenges and Areas for Growth***

**In observed instruction at the secondary level, the quality of instruction was inconsistent. There was a consistently lower incidence of characteristics of effective instruction at the high-school level than at the elementary- and middle-school levels.**

**A. Focus Area #1: Learning Objectives & Expectations** Although setting daily learning expectations is an articulated districtwide instructional goal, consistent implementation of this practice was limited to the middle schools. Teachers explaining lesson content with fluency, setting learning objectives and expectations, and checking for understanding were not implemented with fidelity in observed high-school classes.

 1. In 86 percent of observed middle-school classes and in only 39 percent of high-school classes, the team noted sufficient and compelling evidence of clear learning objectives that indicated students knew what they were learning and why (characteristic #2).

 a. In observed middle-school classes, the review team noted the frequent use of “I can” statements and noted that teachers asked students to explain learning targets. In addition, when queried by review team members, students were able to tell what they were learning and why.

b. In the majority of observed high-school classes, objectives were not present, were unclear, were not related to the lesson, or were replaced by the class agenda.

2. The review team observed sufficient and compelling evidence that appropriate classroom activities were well matched to the learning objectives (characteristic #3) in 73 percent of observed middle-school classes and in just 38 percent of high-school classes.

 a. Most observed middle-school lessons contained a range of activities to support the learning objectives. In these classes, lessons included large group, small group, pair work, and turn-and-talk structures all connected to the learning objectives.

 b. In a majority of observed high-school classes, there was a limited range of classroom activities to support content or provide cognitive demand for students. Teacher-directed classes using lectures or relying predominantly on questions and answers limited students’ opportunities to connect to the content of the lesson.

 3. In 73 percent of observed middle-school classes and in only 35 percent of high-school classes, the review team found sufficient and compelling evidence that teachers conducted frequent checks for student understanding, provided feedback to students, and adjusted instruction (characteristic #4).

 a. In middle-school classes, the review team noted the frequent use of “do nows” as a strategy to check for understanding. Teachers circulated the room when students were working independently, in pairs, or in small groups to check for understanding and used effective random-ordered questions.

 b. While the team noted examples of teachers checking for understanding in high- school classes through cold calling on students, conferencing with students, and circulating the room while students worked independently or in small groups, in a majority of observed high-school classes, questioning techniques were not rigorous, did not include random-order questions, and did not require students to fully explain their answers. Teachers accepted one-word answers, allowed students to call out answers, or repeatedly called on the same student or students to answer questions.

**B. Focus Area #2: Student Engagement & Higher-Order Thinking** Although in observed classrooms middle-school students had more opportunities to be active participants in learning than high-school students, opportunities were limited for both middle- and high-school students to be engaged in higher-order thinking. At both levels, students had limited opportunities to exchange ideas.

 1. The review team found sufficient and compelling evidence of students having multiple opportunities to take responsibility for their learning and being engaged in the lesson (characteristic #5) in 77 percent of observed middle-school classes and in only 39 percent of high-school classes.

 a. In most observed middle-school classes, students took responsibility for their learning and/or were engaged in the learning activities of the lesson such as reading circles. For example, in a grade 5 ELA class, students were independently writing essays with the teacher acting as a facilitator moving about the room checking in with students.

 b. The team noted some examples of high-school students being active, engaged, and responsible for their own learning. However, in the majority of observed high-school classes, teacher-directed lessons, with teachers doing the explaining, reading of texts, giving lectures or presenting Power Point slides, limited students’ opportunities to be responsible for their own learning. In these classes, students did not participate in the lesson, but rather took notes, checked cell phones, or quietly conducted conversations.

 2. In only 44 percent of observed middle-school classes and in just 31 percent of high- school classes, the review team found sufficient and compelling evidence of students engaged in higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, problem-solving, evaluation or application of new knowledge (characteristic #6).

 a. The review team noted that some lessons focused on higher-order thinking skills. For example, in ELA classes students used analysis, including making inferences of textual evidence as well as synthesis in creating stories. In a grade 8 social studies class, all the activities that students worked on required higher-order thinking skills.

 b. However, most observed secondary classes focused on procedural knowledge and recall rather than on conceptual knowledge and applications. Teachers asked students low-level questions based on recall, not comprehension. Expectations for student responses were low. Students answered with one word or short responses with the teachers elaborating following the response.

 3. The review team found sufficient and compelling evidence of students communicating their ideas and thinking with each other (characteristic #7) in only 40 percent of observed middle-school classes and in just 23 percent of high-school classes.

 a. In many observed classes, students exchanged their ideas connected to content. These exchanges took place in reading circles, small group and pair work, and in turn-and-talk structures.

 b. In the majority of observed classes, however, student voice was limited to teacher and student exchanges. In some classes, students were not required to explain their answers and students gave answers without explaining their thinking. Opportunities for students to exchange ideas and thinking about content were limited and did not involve students in a sustained way.

 4. In 63 percent of observed middle-school classes and in just 31 percent of high-school classes, there was sufficient and compelling evidence that students engage with meaningful real-world tasks connected to their lives or with the larger world (characteristic #8).

 a. In most observed middle-school classrooms, students were involved in a range of real-world experiences. Examples included conducting research on the Holocaust, learning about world religions, reading non-fiction texts relating to world events and issues, and working on math word problems.

 b. The review team noted some examples of how high-school students engaged in real-world tasks. Students conducted research, designed want ads for the ideal parent, related real world movements to fictional texts, and worked on science labs and projects. In most observed high-school classes, however, students had limited opportunities to engage in meaningful, real-world tasks.

**C. Focus Area # 3: Inclusive Practice & Classroom Culture** In observed middle- and high-school classes, inclusive practices were not consistently implemented. Although classroom routines and positive supports were firmly established in observed middle-school classrooms, they were not consistently present in observed high-school classes.

 1. In 53 percent of observed middle-school classes and in only 35 percent of high-school classes, the review team found sufficient and compelling evidence that lessons were designed to support students’ varied learning needs (characteristic #9).

 a. In most observed middle-school classes, lessons were designed to support students’ varied learning needs. The classroom teacher, co-teachers, and paraprofessionals provided support for students’ learning. Small-group work in a number of classes observed enabled teachers to move about the room and provide support to students.

 b. In some observed high-school lessons, the team found that lessons were designed to support students’ varied learning needs. The team observed co-teachers and paraprofessionals in these classrooms. However, most observed high-school classes were not differentiated in content, process, or product.

 2. The team found sufficient and compelling evidence that teachers used a variety of instructional approaches (characteristic #10) in 53 percent of observed middle-school classes and in just 31 percent of high-school classes.

 a. In a majority of observed middle-school classes, teachers used a variety of instructional approaches including video clips, audio books, small group, and pairs work, and students used Chromebooks and Neo2’s for essay writing.

 b. In some observed high-school classes, teachers used multiple instructional approaches that included the use of video clips and audio books as well as the use of Chromebooks and Google Classroom to share information. In 4 of 26 observed classes, lessons included the use of Chromebooks. In most observed high-school classes, however, whole-class instruction was the dominant instructional approach.

 3. In 90 percent of observed middle-school classes and in only 46 percent of high-school classes, the review team found sufficient and compelling evidence that classroom routines and positive supports were in place to ensure that students behave appropriately (characteristic #11).

 a. In almost all observed middle-school classes, classroom rules were posted and followed. Routines and positive support were in place. Teachers used countdowns to effectively handle transitions and positively framed classroom rules.

 b. In some observed high-school classes, students responded appropriately to classroom routines that were in place. In these classes teachers positively redirected students. There were few or no disruptions to learning.

 c. In contrast, in the majority of observed high-school classes, routines and responses were inconsistent and ineffectual. For example, in these classes teachers did not set expectations about timely arrival to class. Students wandered in, long after the bell. In these classes, there was a continual undercurrent of talking without re-direction by the teacher. The teacher did not address off-task behavior or set behavioral and academic expectations.

4. The review team found sufficient and compelling evidence that classroom climate was conducive to teaching and learning (characteristic #12) in 86 percent of observed middle-school classes and in 58 percent of high-school classes.

 a. The review team characterized the majority of observed middle-school classes as respectful.

 b. At the high school, while a majority of observed classes reflected respectful relationships between teachers and students, in 11 classes out of 26 observed classes, a continual undercurrent of talking and the absence of student engagement had a negative impact on learning.

**Impact**: When effective, research-based instructional practices are not established at all levels, the district cannot ensure that students are sufficiently prepared to achieve at high levels.

**4. At the high school, core content teachers do not have sufficient designated time to collaborate on curriculum and instruction and sufficient leadership to provide instructional and curricular support.**

1. Core content teachers (English, math, science, and social studies) at the high school do not have sufficient designated time to collaborate on curriculum and instruction.

While the elementary and middle schools have common planning time (CPT) at least once per week, at the high school only grade 9 teams have structured time to collaborate.

a. Grade 9 teachers on the teaching teams (School Within A School, the honors academy, and the STEM academy) have common prep time once a week and CPT twice each month during professional learning circles (PLCs).

High-school teachers meet in PLCs twice monthly. The PLCs are multi-content, interdisciplinary groups and follow agendas focused on pedagogy. Department facilitators lead the PLCs.

a. The role of department facilitator is to pass information back and forth from the instructional leadership team (ILT) to teachers.

Department meetings are scheduled monthly on early release days during a 90-minute block of time that is also used for professional development.

4. Some high-school teachers told the team that with an absence of common planning time, they relied on one another for help.

1. Except for the math department, the high school has limited leadership to provide instructional and curricular support in core content subjects.

1. The assistant principal for curriculum provides oversight of curriculum documents, organizes curriculum documents on Google Drive, and keeps track of curriculum revisions in core content areas (English, math, science, and social studies).

2. The math coach has two roles: as math coach to provide instructional and curricular support to teachers, and as the department facilitator, to lead monthly math department meetings. The math coach has been working with math teachers for several years in both roles.

 a. When asked about the status of math curriculum, interviewees consistently described the math curriculum as well documented and aligned.

 3. Although there is a literacy coach at the high school, the position has not been filled continuously and after a hiatus of two years, was reinstated in September of 2017. Teachers have not had consistent ELA support in recent years.

 a. The literacy coach told the team that she worked with grades 9 and 10 college prep classes and provided instructional coaching and 9-day coaching cycles to English teachers. The literacy coach does not serve as department facilitator.

 4. Social studies and science teachers do not have coaches. Science teachers said that they did not have a coach, and the need for science teachers to have certifications in many areas creates additional challenges.

1. Interviews and a document review indicated that the curriculum for grades 9–12 was at various stages of alignment with the current Massachusetts frameworks.

In grades 9–12, math pacing guides (Year at a Glance) and curriculum plans that include units had been updated to reflect the 2017 Massachusetts Mathematics Curriculum Framework.

a. At the time of the onsite review in April 2018, the high-school mathematics department had been working with Mass Insight Education for two years to improve the vertical alignment of math curriculum between the middle and high schools.

In the high-school English department’s self-assessment submitted in advance of the onsite review, the department rated aligned, consistently delivered, and continuously developing curriculum as “Not at all well” described by the following indicators:

a. “The district has a curriculum review and revision process that is comprehensive and addresses identified needs. This process includes teacher input, program evaluation, and regular review of assessment results.”

b. “Curriculum guides are vertically aligned, with particular attention to transition points (e.g., from elementary to middle and middle to high school.”

c. “Principals and district instructional leaders convey the expectation that teachers will teach the written curriculum…”

d. “Curriculum leaders ensure that content is delivered consistently across grades and across schools.”

**Impact**: With limited curriculum leadership, it is challenging for teachers to effectively review and revise curriculum and to ensure alignment of curriculum with the current standards. Without regular opportunities for teachers in the same content areas to collaborate, vertical and horizontal alignment of curriculum is in question, overall school improvement is hindered, and students’ learning outcomes are compromised.

***Recommendations***

**The district should review and redesign curriculum oversight in grades 9–­12, including providing time for teachers in the same content areas to meet regularly. The district should ensure that all curricula are fully aligned to the current Massachusetts curriculum frameworks.**

1. The district should examine current structures and responsibilities in the high school to determine how to best ensure that all content areas have sufficient curricular leadership.
2. The high school should consider identifying comparable high schools that have developed a schedule that includes regular structured opportunities for teachers in the same content area to collaborate.

1. The Statewide System of Support could provide assistance with identifying and implementing these models.

1. The high school assistant principal for curriculum (or a designee) should provide oversight to ensure curriculum documentation, revisions and alignment to the current curriculum frameworks.

The district should consider inviting exemplary educators to help to lead this process.

1. The district should move forward with its plans to fully address and document the instructional practices intended in the 2016 STE curriculum framework and in the 2017 ELA and math curriculum frameworks in kindergarten through grade 8.

**Benefits** from implementing this recommendation will include regular opportunities for high school teachers in the same content areas to collaborate and have sufficient leadership to effectively implement curriculum. With oversight and support, curriculum revisions will take place in a more timely way. The district’s curricula will be fully aligned to current curriculum frameworks, ensuring that students will have access to a high-quality education that promotes higher levels of achievement and enables them to be college and career ready.

**Recommended resources:**

* + - ESE’s Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks web page (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/>) provides information about the 2017 ELA/Literacy and Mathematics Frameworks, including grade-by-grade comparisons between the 2010 and 2017 Frameworks and a slide deck supporting implementation of the 2017 Frameworks.
		- DESE’s STEM home page (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/stem/>) provides the 2016 Science and Technology/Engineering Framework and resources supporting its implementation.
		- DESE’s Instructional Materials and Professional Development page ([www.doe.mass.edu/candi/impd/](http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/impd/)) provides resources for improving and collaborating on curriculum, including quick reference guides and maps designed to facilitate cross-district communication about curriculum.
* *Quick Reference Guide: Establishing an Effective Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Program* ([http://www.doe.mass.edu/stem/ste/STEprogram.docx](https://mail.doe.mass.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=dwIEOlS9GSTHXNe4UkNghewicANuIyVzsQ_YV3vIFzSXCqKt6NjUCA..&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.doe.mass.edu%2fstem%2fste%2fSTEprogram.docx)): ESE has identified five components districts should attend to when designing a rigorous, coherent and relevant pre-K-12 STE education program. Educators, administrators and curriculum designers can refer to this guide for brief descriptions and resources for each component.
* *ESE’s STE Quality Review Rubric* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/model/rubrics/STE.pdf>) is designed to help educators determine the quality, rigor, and alignment of lessons and units to the 2016 MA STE Curriculum Framework.
	+ - *Quick Reference Guide: Aligning Curriculum to Massachusetts Standards* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/impd/qrg-aligning-curriculum.pdf>) is designed to support teachers, coaches, administrators, and curriculum developers in the work of considering the ways in which curricular materials may diverge from the Massachusetts standards.

**The district should ensure, particularly at the middle and high schools, that instruction supports students’ diverse learning needs and provides students with opportunities to engage in higher-order thinking and to communicate about their ideas. The district should address the need for varied, well-structured lessons, frequent checks for understanding, and engagement with meaningful, real-world tasks at the high school level.**

1. District and school leaders and teachers should identify the specific skills and information that teachers need in order to improve their instructional practice, with particular attention to the areas noted in the challenge finding above. It should provide focused, content- and grade- specific guidance and support to help teachers grow in these areas.

 1. The district’s approach should include clearly communicated expectations and regular opportunities for teachers to discuss, explore, and share content-specific best practices.

 2. The district and each school should provide professional development and effective follow-up support using available resources, including coaches, to ensure that teachers have ample and regular opportunities to reflect on and strengthen instruction.

3. The district should ensure that supervisory and evaluation procedures facilitate effective monitoring of instruction and that evaluators provide frequent, useful feedback so that teachers have continued guidance to improve their practice.

1. The middle school and high school should establish and strengthen systems and practices to help educators learn from one another.

The schools should build on the district practice of conducting learning walks/walkthroughs to include teachers along with principals and coaches for the purpose of understanding the characteristics of high-quality instruction and determining how effectively they are being implemented.

Leadership at both levels should identify exemplary teaching practices and encourage educators to conduct peer observations in order to share strategies.

**Benefits:** In a district where instruction is based on effective practices K–12, educators will experience professional growth and the district’s diverse group of learners will be consistently provided with high-quality learning opportunities.

**Recommended resources:**

* ESE’s *Learning Walkthrough Implementation Guide* (<http://www.mass.gov/edu/docs/ese/accountability/dart/walkthrough/implementation-guide.docx>) is a resource to support instructional leaders in establishing a *Learning Walkthrough* process in a school or district. It is designed to provide guidance to those working in an established culture of collaboration as well as those who are just beginning to observe classrooms and discuss teaching and learning in a focused and actionable manner.
* Appendix 4, *Characteristics of Standards-Based Teaching and Learning: Continuum of Practice* (<http://www.mass.gov/edu/docs/ese/accountability/dart/walkthrough/continuum-practice.pdf>) is a framework that provides a common language or reference point for looking at teaching and learning.
* ESE’s *"What to Look For" Observation Guides* ***(Updated August 2017)*** (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/observation/>) describe what observers should expect to see in a classroom at a particular grade level in a specific subject area. This includes the knowledge and skills students should be learning and using (as reflected in state learning standards) and best practices related to classroom curriculum, instruction, and assessment for each subject area. The guides are not designed to replace any evaluation system or tools districts currently use, but are a resource to help classroom observers efficiently identify what teachers and students should be experiencing in specific subjects and grade levels.

Assessment

***Contextual Background***

The district data team, consisting of the director of technology and assessment, the assistant superintendent for curriculum and grants, the ELL director, the director of special education, and the director of student support services, manage the collection, coordination, and dissemination of student assessment data. Instructional coaches for ELA and math at the elementary and middle schools serve as the conduit for district leaders to share data with school data teams, which include principals, student support specialists, and language integration specialists. Language integration specialists share data with classroom teachers. The instructional coaches provide a crucial two-way communication link between district leaders and teachers, helping to ensure that teachers can use student achievement data to adjust their instruction to better serve students’ needs.

Instructional coaches facilitate data discussions at elementary and middle-school grade-level meetings, teaching teachers to review assessment results, identify student challenges, and develop action plans. At each quarterly benchmark assessment, coaches work with teachers to develop instructional interventions for the lowest performing students, to support teachers as they implement the intervention plans, and to monitor students’ progress. At the high school, with the exception of the mathematics instructional coach, instructional coaches have limited opportunities to meet with teachers in subject-area or grade-level teams and high-school teachers have limited opportunities to engage in the structured analysis of student achievement data to inform their instructional planning.

In addition to MCAS and ACCESS assessments, the district administers common diagnostic and benchmark measures across the elementary and middle schools and math benchmarks at the high school. The district uses multiple measures of student achievement and progress and schools use curriculum-based measures and common performance and writing tasks across the year to track students’ growth toward grade-level competencies.

Through the Rennie Center’s ExSEL project, district staff are collaborating with other Massachusetts districts to develop measures for assessing students’ growth in social-emotional skills and attitudes, a priority focus in the district’s schools.

The district engages in regular review and revision of its assessments tools and various data management systems in response to input from the instructional coaches and changing assessment needs identified by teachers. Data stored in different systems is difficult to access and district leaders are researching options for a more integrated data management system to resolve this challenge.

***Strength Findings***

* + 1. **At the elementary and middle-school levels, the district has developed a comprehensive and coordinated system of norm-referenced and curriculum-based assessments to identify students in need of additional instruction and to inform instruction.**
	1. The district technology director maintains the comprehensive collection of student achievement data derived from the assessments used across the district and engages the district data teamand school-level instructional coaches in regular analyses of the results. With input from coaches, the district prepares data reports about students’ performance and progress to help teachers refine their instruction.
		1. The district prepares a calendar of assessments and coordinates with each school the development of a testing calendar that balances testing needs with instructional time.
		2. The district gives the instructional coaches the time they need to develop quarterly benchmark assessments and pre-and post-tests in ELA and math based on curriculum pacing guides in grades 3 through 8.
		3. The district uses ATI Galileo for math benchmarks and beginning in 2017–2018, AIMSWeb Plus for ELA. As a screening measure, the district uses AIMSWeb Plus in grades 3 through 8, to compare district students against a nationally normed population.

a. AIMSWeb is also used as a diagnostic tool in grades 3–8 to identify students in need of support in reading or math.

b. Additional literacy screening assessments include standardized measures such as DIBELS and Running Records in kindergarten and grades 1–2 and GRADE in grades 5–8.

* + 1. Curriculum-based measures include curriculum product assessments (Eureka math, Connected Mathematics Project 3 (CMP3), Expeditionary Learning Unit Assessments) as well as locally developed on-demand writing tasks, and constructed response performance tasks from the library of state assessment released items.
	1. Through daily, weekly, and monthly meetings of district and school personnel, the district ensures that critical information, skills, and knowledge about student performance and progress are shared across the elementary and middle schools. The district also ensures that professional staff use student data to screen students for additional instruction or enrichment, monitor progress, and assess the impact of targeted instructional interventions.
		1. The district data team meets for a full day every month, and each year the district involves principals in a three-day retreat dedicated to intensive and thorough review of data.
		2. School data teams meet monthly to review benchmark, diagnostic, screening, and progress monitoring data.

 a. Elementary Honors Academy (EHA) coaches review assessment results in language and math to select students to participate in the enrichment programs that coaches oversee.

 b. Title I staff provide support for students based on their MCAS assessment scores, GRADE stanines, and AIMSWeb Plus scores in oral fluency and comprehension.

1. Elementary and middle-school principals, coaches, and program directors (special education, language acquisition, and student support) review student data to identify teachers in need of instructional support.
	* 1. Principals meet with coaches weekly to review assessment results by classroom. Coaches told the team that during grade-level team meetings teachers engaged in conversations with colleagues to learn the strategies used by teachers with high performing students.

**Impact**: By providing elementary and middle-school teachers with comprehensive and timely data about student performance, the district ensures that teachers have accurate information about students’ changing academic needs on which to base their instructional decisions.

1. **The district’s elementary and middle-school coaches train teachers to analyze and use student achievement data to adjust instruction and to monitor students’ progress.**
2. Teachers, coaches, and school and district leaders said that ELA and math coaches in each elementary and middle school played a critical role as facilitators and trainers in the analysis and use of student performance data.
3. Teachers and coaches told the review team that most training in data use and analysis took place during grade-level team meetings at the elementary and middle schools, and was facilitated by coaches.
4. Coaches and teachers said that during the elementary and middle school benchmark data meetings, coaches lead teachers in the design of action plans to provide interventions for the lowest performing 30 percent of students in their classes. Principals monitor implementation of the intervention strategies as they conduct periodic classroom walkthroughs.
5. Coaches work with teachers to select intervention strategies and to track student progress at the end of the six-week intervention period and determine whether additional interventions are needed.
6. District leaders and coaches stated that as a result of the regular review of benchmark, standardized, and state data, teachers identified persistent gaps in learning and developed common interim assessments to target those gaps.

a. For example, middle-school teachers designed a common constructed response assessment to administer three times per year to track whether students were meeting curriculum targets.

Impact: By establishing a cadre of instructional coaches in each of the elementary and middle schools who provide timely training and support directly to teachers focused on data analysis and use, the district is enhancing the knowledge and skills of the professional staff. As teachers become proficient in the analysis and interpretation of multiple forms of data, they are able to modify their practices to better meet students’ learning needs.

***Challenges and Areas for Growth***

1. **The district has not established structures to allow regular and sustained training to enable all teachers to use student performance data to meet students’ needs.**
2. Interviews and a document review indicated that some high-school staff were not trained in analyzing and using data to address students’ needs.
3. In its self-assessment submitted in advance of the onsite review, the district rated data collection and dissemination as “Not at all well” described by the indicator “Principals and teachers are trained on using the reports to analyze student progress and needs.” (Answers included “Not at all well,” “Somewhat well,” “Well” and “Very well.”)

 a. On the high-school self-assessment submitted in advance of the onsite review, the ELA team rated data collection and dissemination as “Not at all well” described by the indicator “Principals and teachers are trained on using the reports to analyze student progress and needs.

i. The high school did not have an ELA instructional coach for two years before the onsite review in April 2018; the position was reinstated in 2017–2018 year.

 b. In contrast, on the high-school self-assessment submitted in advance of the onsite review, the math team rated data collection and assessment as “Very well” described by the indicator “Principals and teachers are trained on using the reports to analyze student progress and needs. The long-serving mathematics instructional coach provides data use training for mathematics teachers similar to that provided by the elementary and middle-school coaches.

 c. On the self-assessments completed by each school, teachers and administrators in the elementary and middle schools rated data collection and dissemination as “Somewhat well “or “Well” described by the indicator “Principals and teachers are trained on using the reports to analyze student progress and needs.”

**B.** Interviews with principals and a document review indicated that at the high school level there are not established systems or practices to identify students’ needs to inform instruction similar to those in use at the elementary and middle schools. Principals stated that high-school teachers had varied knowledge and skill in using data to modify instruction.

 1. High-school teachers meet monthly in “professional learning circles” (PLCs) to review instructional expectations. Interviewees told the team that because of the interdisciplinary nature of these groups, data analysis training was not usually part of the PLCs’ agenda.

* + 1. Budget cuts led the district to eliminate subject-area department heads at the high school. Department facilitators now serve as communication links between administrators and teachers.
		2. The high-school schedule does not include department meeting time.
		3. High-school science and social studies teachers occasionally meet voluntarily to discuss student achievement results without the guidance of an instructional coach.
		4. In a survey in December 2017 by Mass Insight Education and Research, principals listed the use of benchmark assessment data to reteach and reassess students as one of the top five priority needs in the district.

 **C.** At the middle and high schools, teacher turnover has increased the demand for coaches’ time and skills to train new teachers in the district’s collaborative inquiry process.

District leaders told the team that all but three teachers retired or resigned in one middle school before the start of the 2017–2018 school year.

 2. The list of coaches’ responsibilities noted in the Title I evaluation reports is extensive. Coaches are expected to train teachers new to the district in the collaborative inquiry process within the limited time available in the grade-level team agendas.

 **D.** Two elementary schools share an ELA instructional coach, limiting the time available for data use training.

**Impact**: Without the opportunity to learn how to make effective use of student assessment data to inform instructional planning, teachers cannot make timely and productive shifts in their instructional practices so that all students can be successful. Effective data use practices vary across the district with varying levels of coaching support. In schools in which teachers are guided to make timely use of a variety of student achievement information, students are more likely to make academic progress.

***Recommendation***

1. **The district should expand its existing practices to ensure that all teachers become proficient in the analysis and use of student data to make timely, appropriate instructional decisions.**
2. Building on the practices in place in some schools, the district should provide high-quality coaching and facilitation in data analysis and use to teachers at all grades and subject areas.

 1. The district should ensure that educators at all levels use data strategically to inform instruction, ongoing curriculum revision, program evaluation, and the educator evaluation system.

2. It might be useful to create opportunities for elementary and middle-school coaches to share their current practices with high-school educators.

1. The district should establish structures to provide adequate time for teachers to learn how to interpret data and use it to reflect on and plan instruction.

1. District and school leaders should review school schedules, particularly at the high-school level, to identify opportunities for more frequent data analysis, coaching, and planning.

1. The district should ensure that sufficient achievement data about student subgroups are readily available so that all educators can identify and respond effectively to student subgroups that are struggling.

**Benefits** from implementing systems and structures to build teachers’ skill at using student data to inform their instructional planning will include improved student achievement. Having sufficient data about student subgroups readily available will enable teachers to identify and address the needs of individual students and groups of students through instructional planning and appropriate interventions in order to help to close achievement gaps. In addition, as teachers monitor the impact of their instruction on student learning, they can become more proficient at selecting strategies with the highest potential to improve student outcomes.

**Recommended resources:**

* + - ESE’s *Assessment Literacy Self-Assessment and Gap Analysis Tool* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/ddm/webinar/PartI-GapAnalysis.pdf>) is intended to support districts in understanding where their educators fit overall on a continuum of assessment literacy. After determining where the district as a whole generally falls on the continuum, districts can determine potential next steps.
			* *Time for Deeper Learning: Lessons from Five High Schools*(<http://www.timeandlearning.org/publications/time-deeper-learning>), from Mass2020, examines how schools that prioritize deeper learning are using whatever time they have available—whether through an expanded day or during a traditional school schedule—to reach their educational goals.
		- *Time for Teachers:* *Leveraging Time to Strengthen Instruction & Empower Teachers* (<http://www.timeandlearning.org/sites/default/files/resources/timeforteachers.pdf>) describes the systems and practices implemented at 17 schools to provide students with more time for learning and teachers with more time to collaborate, reflect, and plan.

Human Resources and Professional Development

***Contextual Background***

ESE last reviewed the district in 2011. That report noted concerns with district supervision and evaluation practices. For example, supervisory practices “varied greatly from building to building.” Differences in the frequency of “walkthroughs,” the quality and consistency of feedback, absence of instructive comments on written evaluations, and administrative overload were described as factors undermining the effectiveness of the district’s educator evaluation system.

The 2011 report identified similar concerns with the district’s professional development (PD) system. For example, the district “lacked central office leadership” and “much of what happened in professional development in the district was planned and generated at the building level.” Further, the report stated that “Without some district level participation in leadership and oversight, building based professional development initiatives and programs appeared disjointed and had little direction or traction in the district as a whole.”

The district was an early adopter of the state’s Educator Evaluation Framework and has made a genuine effort to effectively implement the state’s framework. However, the quality and consistency of the district’s implementation has been uneven and inconsistent.

Although the review team identified in this 2018 report some issues with the district’s PD program similar to those identified in ESE’s 2011 report, the team characterized the district’s investment in its PD program as exceptional and many elements of its PD program as exemplary. The district recognizes the critical role of PD in supporting district strategic goals and initiatives.

***Strength Finding***

* + 1. **The district has developed a comprehensive professional development program that is aligned with district and school priorities, supports teachers and administrators, and is informed by student achievement data and assessments of instructional practices.**

**A.** Interviewees told the team that the assistant superintendent in conjunction with principals, coaches, and directors led professional development (PD) in the district.

 **B.** The district provides resources and structures to promote educator learning and expanded opportunities for continuous professional collaboration.

* + 1. The district has built considerable time into its annual calendar to provide PD opportunities and activities for staff. This includes four full in-service days and ten early-release days scheduled throughout the school year.
			1. The district has embedded many ongoing opportunities for teacher collaboration. District and school leaders identified a range of regularly scheduled occasions for teachers to meet, discuss, and plan. These include weekly grade-level common planning meetings at the elementary and middle schools, and twice-monthly interdisciplinary Professional Learning Community (PLC) and monthly department meetings at the high school.
				1. The district further enhances and extends the scope and effectiveness of its PD program through collaborations with state agencies and educational consultants, including the District and School Assistance Center (DSAC),[[5]](#footnote-5) Mass Insight, SchoolWorks, and the Massachusetts Math Science Initiative (MMSI).
				2. Interviewees described a systemwide culture of collaboration, which involves a variety of informal and voluntary faculty interactions and activities throughout and beyond the school day. These include *ad hoc* grade and department meetings, small job-alike groupings, and book study groups.
		2. District and school administrators and teachers characterized instructional coaches as an integral component of the district’s PD program.

a. Each elementary and middle school, except Goodrich Academy, has an ELA coach and a math coach who provide a range of direct support services to faculty throughout the school day. They visit classrooms, participate in schoolwide learning walks, model pedagogy, meet with grade-level teams, and provide teachers with individualized assistance through specific coaching protocols. They also serve on each school’s Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), where they provide guidance for school-based PD planning.

* + 1. Interviewees told the review team that through the commitment of local funding, combined with state and federal grant monies, the district was able to develop and support a comprehensive and robust PD program.
		2. Interviewees stated that the PD program at both the district and school levels was informed by the collection and use of a range of student academic data. Administrators said that assessments such as Galileo, AIMSweb in math and literacy, DIBELS, Eureka Math, MCAS, etc., as well as student demographic data, including attendance and behavioral patterns, are analyzed and used in PD planning and prioritization.
		3. Reviewers were told that the district also compiled data from staff to be used in planning and evaluating PD offerings. Using the “Eleven Conditions for School Effectiveness” as a broad measure, principals are expected to annually survey their staff to help identify and prioritize PD topics. Interviewees said that the district used evidence from learning walks to identify faculty PD needs. Further, teachers evaluate all workshops; this feedback is closely reviewed at both the district and school levels.
		4. The review team was told that district staff are encouraged to submit proposals for PD programs and workshops and that, if approved, they are subsequently incorporated in the district’s PD menu. District teachers develop and present a number of PD workshops.

Impact: The district’s commitment to providing opportunities for teachers to collaborate in purposeful and structured ways is advancing a culture of continuous professional learning and growth and recognition of the shared responsibility among educators and educational leaders for student achievement. Ultimately, this should result in significant and lasting improvements in classroom instruction, professional competencies and climate, and the curriculum, as well as increased learning opportunities and outcomes for all students.

***Challenges and Areas for Growth***

* + 1. **The district has not achieved consistency in the implementation of its educator evaluation system.**
1. The district was an early adopter of the state’s Educator Evaluation Framework and has made a genuine effort to comply with its requirements. The quality and consistency of the district’s implementation of its educator evaluation system have been uneven, however.
2. The team reviewed the 2015–2017 formative assessments/evaluations and summative evaluations of 30 teachers selected randomly from across the district. With a few exceptions, evaluations were completed according to contractual timelines. In general, they were evidence based but frequently were only minimally informative[[6]](#footnote-6) in that the evidence cited was vague, generic, or paraphrased ESE teaching practice indicators.
	* + 1. Some teacher’s evaluations provided teachers with instructive feedback and specific, actionable recommendations for improved classroom practice. Over half of the formative assessment/evaluations and summative assessments reviewed, however, did not contain pedagogical suggestions or contained generic or imprecise feedback such as “Continue to” so as to have limited value for improving teaching or learning.
3. Interviews and a document review indicated that the quality and effectiveness of supervisory practices varied widely across the district. Interviewees generally agreed that the district was developing improved learning walk protocols and procedures. However, teachers expressed diverse views about the frequency of unannounced classroom observations and the quality of feedback on their classroom practices.

a. Some teachers said that they received regular classroom visits along with timely and useful recommendations from their supervisor.

b. Others, however, stated that they seldom saw their evaluator and/or rarely received feedback that was specific, meaningful, or actionable.

1. Although the district’s educator evaluation system is generally aligned with the state Educator Evaluation Framework, reviewers noted a significant difference. According to state educator evaluator regulations, teachers in their first three years of practice should receive “at least four unannounced observations during the school year.” The district’s contractual language, however, requires only one unannounced observation during the school year.

 a. Principals told reviewers that the numerous competing demands on their time and attention made it difficult to meet evaluation timeline requirements, to conduct as many unannounced classroom observations as they would have liked, and to consistently produce comprehensive, high-quality teacher formative assessments/evaluations and summative evaluations.

1. The team also reviewed the 2015–2017 formative assessments/evaluations and summative evaluations of all of the district’s principals. In general, they mirrored the teachers’ evaluations in that they were timely and informative. As with teacher evaluations, while some evaluations were instructive, others contained little specific, actionable feedback or concrete recommendations with the capacity to contribute in a direct, meaningful way to professional growth, overall effectiveness, or enhanced leadership capacity.

Written feedback often consisted of broad generalizations, rather than clear, concrete recommendations for specific leadership behaviors and/or actionable strategies targeted to have a direct impact on student learning and/or systematically increase academic achievement.

1. The district does not have a centralized system for the collection and housing of all evaluative documents in its educator evaluation system. All evaluative documentation, including teacher goals, self-assessments, evidence documents, formative assessments/evaluations, and summative evaluations, are collected and housed in a variety of formats at the individual schools.

**Impact**: Without ensuring that all evaluations are clearly evidence based and meaningfully growth oriented and that classroom observations and evaluative feedback are of sufficient quantity and value, the district cannot effectively support the continuous professional growth of all educators and educational leaders and improve teaching and learning. The absence of a centralized system for managing its educator evaluation system makes it challenging for the district to efficiently access, monitor, and assess its educator evaluation system.

* + 1. **The district has taken some action on the components of the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework that require the collection and use of multiple sources of evaluative evidence.**
1. As of the 2015–2016 school year, state educator evaluation regulations (603 CMR 35.07) call for districts to collect and use student feedback as evidence in the teacher evaluation process and staff feedback as evidence in the administrator evaluation process.[[7]](#footnote-7) This feedback may also be used to inform an educator’s self-assessment, goal setting, or as evidence to demonstrate growth over time.
2. At the time of the onsite in April 2018, principals acknowledged that this was “something that needs to happen.” They described the collection and use of multiple sources of evaluative evidence as a “work in progress” and said that the district was working with consultants to develop the plans and strategies with which to implement this component of the Educator Evaluation Framework.
3. The educator evaluation regulations also call for districts to develop and use multiple measures of student learning, growth, and achievement, including common and standardized assessments.

Principals stated that although data from a number of common assessments were used in all the district’s elementary schools to inform decisions about teaching and learning, the district did not have standardized procedures, contractual language, or rubrics with which to use student assessment data to inform educators’ evaluations.

**Impact**: Without implementing the components of the Educator Evaluation Framework that call for the collection and use of multiple sources of evaluative evidence, the district significantly limits its ability to provide all staff with a comprehensive and accurate picture of their overall effectiveness. This limits educators’ ability to reflect objectively on the efficacy of their professional efforts and to identify areas of strength and opportunities for growth, and to improve efforts learning experiences and outcomes for students.

* + 1. **The district’s professional development (PD) program does not have a unified and effectively coordinated leadership structure, comprehensive written plans with clearly articulated and measurable goals, and formal faculty collaboration in PD planning and leadership.**
1. The district’s PD program is missing key components of the Massachusetts Standards for Professional Development. Among these principles is that PD should be a systematic and purposeful process directed by effective collaborative leadership; aligned with state, district, school, and educator goals or priorities; and clearly organized around measurable goals directly related to student outcomes.
2. The district does not have a formal PD leadership group or guiding document at the district level or in the individual schools.
	1. Each school plans and implements its own PD programming during the 10 early-release days, with the expectation that district and school priorities and needs are appropriately balanced. Interviewees and a document review indicated that significant differences existed among the schools in PD planning, leadership and organizational structures, and quality of programming.
3. Although the District Improvement Plan includes references to PD objectives and each school’s improvement plan includes a PD component, the district has not developed a comprehensive and coordinated annual PD Plan for all professional staff containing clearly articulated goals related to specific student outcomes, directly aligned with district and school improvement plans, and organized around SMART goals. [[8]](#footnote-8)
4. District leaders said that the PD priority areas in the 2017–2018 school year included social-emotional learning, technology integration, blended personalized learning, and the Google Classroom. It was not clear to review team members how school-level PD goals and activities were connected to each of these district priorities.
5. Interviewees stated that teachers were not formally included in district or school PD planning or leadership. They stated that PD was run mostly by the principal and in some cases with the Instructional Leadership Team. District leaders told the team that the coaches served as “our link back and forth to the teachers.”

**B.** District leaders said that the district provided a one-year mentoring program to all teachers and principals new to the district.

**Impact**: Without a designated, centralized leadership structure, comprehensive annual written plans with clearly articulated SMART goals, and formal educator collaboration in the planning and development of PD, the district is challenged to create a culture of purposeful professional learning and growth and recognition of the shared responsibility among educators and educational leaders for student achievement.

***Recommendations***

**The district should continue its efforts to fully and effectively implement all components of the state’s Educator Evaluation Framework, with particular attention to the quality and consistency of supervisory practices and written evaluations and the development of appropriate systems for the collection and use of multiple sources of evidence.**

1. The district should implement structures and systems to ensure that all teachers are provided with regular and frequent unannounced classroom observations, accompanied by timely and actionable feedback for improved instructional practice. Further, teachers and principals should consistently receive formative assessments/evaluations and summative evaluations that contain meaningful and actionable recommendations capable of contributing directly to professional growth and enhanced capacity.
2. The district’s current contractual language that requires a minimum of only one unannounced class observation during the school year should be reviewed; it should correspond to the state regulations that require at least four unannounced annual observations.
3. All evaluators should continue to be provided with training, coaching, and other supports to enhance their evaluative skills. Prioritized attention should be given to improving the frequency and consistency of classroom observations, evidence collection and analysis strategies, and techniques for providing teachers with high quality oral and written feedback that is meaningful, specific, and actionable.
4. Appropriate quality control procedures should be established to ensure that all of the district’s schools produce high-quality formative assessments/evaluations and summative evaluations. All evaluations should consistently provide staff with concrete, substantive feedback and recommendations that are specific, actionable, and genuinely capable of improving pedagogical practice and promoting professional growth.
5. The district should create an efficient, centralized system for the collection and housing of all evaluative documents so that district leaders will be able to readily access relevant documentation and monitor and assess all components of the district’s complex educator evaluation system effectively.
6. The district should consider widening the pool of evaluators as a means of providing teachers with more frequent classroom observations, increased support, and meaningful and timely feedback.
7. The district should continue its current efforts to improve and standardize its learning walk procedures and protocols, ensuring that teachers are included in the process, and subsequently establish uniform policies and consistent practices in each of the district’s schools.
8. The district should continue to work toward full implementation of the components of the state’s Educator Evaluation Framework that require the collection and use of multiple sources of evidence to inform the evaluations of teachers and principals.

Standardized policies and procedures appropriate for the collection and use of student and staff feedback as evidence components of teacher and principal evaluations should be collaboratively developed. In addition to informing evaluations, feedback could be included in an educator’s self-assessment, goal setting, and/or used to demonstrate improvements in practice over time.

The district should develop an effective process, consistent with current state guidelines, whereby the results of common and standardized assessments are included as a component of an educator’s evaluation. Although the recent amendment to the regulations eliminates the need to determine a separate student impact rating, evidence of student learning as a key element of an educator’s summative evaluation is required.

**Benefits**: By improving the quality and consistency of supervisory practices and evaluative products, the district will create a more effective mechanism by which to ultimately provide enriched learning experiences and increased academic achievement for students. The adoption of the additional components of the state’s Educator Evaluation Framework that require the collection and use of multiple sources of evidence to be used in summative evaluations will enable teachers and principals to reflect more accurately on their effectiveness and thereby be better able to identify areas of strength and opportunities for growth.

**Recommended resources:**

* *Quick Reference Guide: Opportunities to Streamline the Evaluation Process* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/QRG-Streamline.pdf>) is designed to help districts reflect on and continuously improve their evaluation systems:
	+ What’s working? What are the bright spots?
	+ How can we streamline the process to stay focused on professional growth and development?
	+ What do we need to adjust to ensure our system is valuable to educators and students?
* *Quick Reference Guide: Student and Staff Feedback* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/QRG-Feedback.pdf>) provides information about how to select feedback instruments and use feedback as part of the educator evaluation system, along with links to relevant resources.
* Educator Evaluation Implementation Surveys for Teachers (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/implementation/TeachersSurvey.pdf>) and Administrators (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/implementation/AdministratorsSurvey.pdf>) are designed to provide schools and districts with information about the status of their educator evaluation implementation. Information from these surveys can be used to target district resources and supports where most needed to strengthen implementation.
* *On Track with Evaluator Capacity* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/pln/OnTrack-EvaluatorCapacity.pdf>) is an interactive document that provides specific strategies, lessons learned, and links to district-created resources. It was produced by eight districts that were part of a Professional Learning Network for Supporting Evaluator Capacity.
1. **The district’s professional development (PD) program should be directed by a designated leadership group that is centralized, unified, and collaborative. It should be responsible for developing and monitoring a comprehensive PD plan with well defined, measurable goals closely aligned with and directly supportive of specific district priorities, school goals, and the identified needs of educators.**
2. The district should develop and support clear plans and measurable goals, directly aligned with well-defined district priorities, school improvement objectives, and the professional growth of staff. It should be carefully aligned with ESE’s Standards for Professional Development.

The district’s PD program should be directed by a designated group composed of administrators, instructional coaches, and classroom teacher representatives from the elementary, middle and high schools. Its role should be to develop, communicate, and implement and evaluate comprehensive, carefully coordinated PD plans, programs, and supports for the district.

This group should identify annual goals and objectives for PD in the district. The goals should be specific, measurable, effectively communicated, and systematically aligned with the priorities articulated in the DIP, as well as data illustrating student and staff needs.

1. Because the district has established a largely decentralized, school based PD model, greater attention should be given to ensuring that a uniform and consistent set of PD structures, procedures, and policies is employed in each of the district’s schools. This should preserve the unique features of each school’s approach but include the formal involvement of teachers in building level PD planning and governance.
2. The district’s current one-year teacher mentoring program should be expanded to the comprehensive three-year Induction and Mentoring model now recommended by ESE.
	1. The district should develop, evaluate, and improve the induction program, including the selection and training of mentors, and ensure that the program is an integral part of the district’s larger PD Plan.

**Benefits:** The development of a more coordinated and unified professional development program characterized by clearly defined, collaborative leadership and specific, well-communicated PD goals will positively affect the district in many ways. PD resources will deployed with greater consistency, efficiency, focus, and equity, thus improving the likelihood of successful outcomes. Providing expanded opportunities for teachers to formally collaborate with administrators in PD planning and leadership will make them partners in school improvement initiatives and advance a culture of purposeful professional growth.

**Recommended resources:**

* *The Massachusetts Standards for Professional Development* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/pd/standards.pdf>) describe, identify, and characterize what high quality learning experiences should look like for educators.
* ESE’s Information for Professional Development Providers web page (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/dsac/profdev.html>) provides links to professional development course parameters and a self-assessment.
* *Identifying Meaningful Professional Development* (<https://youtu.be/zhuFioO8GbQ>) is a video in which educators from three Massachusetts districts discuss the importance of targeted, meaningful professional development and the ways districts can use the evaluation process to identify the most effective PD supports for all educators.
* ESE’s *Induction and Mentoring* web page (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/educators/mentor/resources.html>) includes links to guidance materials and several examples of induction and mentoring strategies and programs in Massachusetts districts.
	+ - The Working Group for Educator Excellence (WGEE), in partnership with ESE, compiled a list of *District Promising Practices and Tools* (<http://wgee.org/best-practices/promising-practices-by-district/>) that support seven levers of educator expertise:
	+ Recruitment, Hiring and Placement
	+ Comprehensive Induction
	+ Professional Development
	+ Supervision and Evaluation
	+ Teacher Leadership
	+ Organizational Structure
	+ Adult Professional Culture

WGEE also offers an *Electronic Clearinghouse* (<http://wgee.org/electronic-clearinghouse-with-promising-practices/>), which includes exemplars for teachers, school administrators, district leaders and evaluators that clarify particular Indicators on the Classroom Teacher Rubric from the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation.

Student Support

***Contextual Background***

The district has a common process used in all schools to identify students who need support both academically and non-academically. A range of interventions are available for academic support, including federally funded 21st Century Learning Centers in four schools and an Expanded Learning Time grant in one school; both provide additional instructional time for students. Funds are locally raised by the district so that all students can have some after-school opportunities.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has been a focus in the district for several years. The superintendent, in partnership with the Rennie Center and eight other superintendents, is promoting and supporting SEL across the district.

The district serves most students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms with co-teaching. Schools are staffed with special education teachers and student program support administrators (SPSAs), who are charged with making sure that the needs of all students with disabilities are met. SPSAs provide training and professional learning for special education and general teachers and special education paraprofessionals. The district has some sub-separate classrooms and some students who are served in out-of-district placements.

English language learners (ELLs) are served primarily in classrooms by teachers trained in Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) instruction. All district teachers are expected to complete SEI training. In addition, the district’s ELL integration specialist provides teachers with ongoing support in SEI instruction. ESL teachers work in classes and do some pull-out instruction. ESL teachers also provide intensive ESL instruction for students in the Newcomers Program.

The district’s efforts to reduce student absence and in- and out-of-school suspensions have been ongoing, but at the time of the onsite review chronic absence and suspension rates were higher than statewide averages.

***Strength Findings***

**The district has systems and programs in place to identify and address students’ academic and non-academic strengths and needs.**

1. Interviewees and a document review by the team indicated systems in place at all schools to identify students who needed additional support.
2. Interviewees said that in each elementary and middle school, grade-level teams met regularly with literacy and math coaches. During these meetings, teachers reviewed data and identified students in need of additional support or interventions.
3. In every elementary and middle school, teachers can refer struggling students to student teacher assistant response teams (STARTs). Administrators, teachers, coaches, behavior specialists, and others serve on STARTs, meeting and working with teachers to develop plans for students who are not making expected progress.
4. At the high school, teachers and guidance counselors refer students to student teacher assistance teams (STATs). STATs meet biweekly to discuss students’ attendance, grades, and discipline reports. They develop plans of action and monitor students’ progress.
5. The district provides a range of practices and programs to support students.
6. Elementary-level interventions include the guided reading program with small-group instruction targeting student’s needs, centered-based math with small-group instruction, Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI), FUNdations, and Lexia and other online programs based on students’ skill levels.
7. The review team was told that the two middle schools provide targeted support for struggling students during interventions blocks built into the school schedule. McKay Arts Academy (K–8) provides time for interventions in the classroom. In addition, the middle schools use Wilson Reading, System 44, Read 180, Language!, America’s Choice Navigator series, and Math 180 to deliver literacy and math interventions.
8. Goodrich Academy is an alternative high school for students in grades 9–12. This whole-school intervention is designed to meet the needs of students who have struggled in conventional school settings. Goodrich students have flexible schedules, small classes, and individualized mentoring. According to the School Improvement Plan presentation made by the principal to the school committee in November 2017, 159 students were enrolled at Goodrich, half from Fitchburg and half from 16 neighboring communities.
9. Fitchburg High School (FHS) created a School Within a School (SWS) for the most at-risk incoming ninth graders. The SWS offers a comprehensive program; students take English, algebra 1, world studies, and engineering for the future. Students receive daily academic support from the SWS team and college and career guidance from the FHS school-based counseling team.
10. The Academic Success Center (ASC) at FHS has technology and a range of software to assist students with their work. ASC staff download textbooks and novels onto students’ computers and IPADs.
11. The district provides before-school and after-school programs.
	1. Federally funded 21st Century Learning Centers provide before and/or after-school programs at two elementary schools and at the two middle schools.
	2. The district hosts an annual GALA to raise local funds for after-school programs at other schools including the high school.
12. Each elementary and middle school has an honors coach who supports and maintains the district’s Advanced Academic Learning Initiative (AALI). Honors coaches work with small groups of students identified through achievement data and teachers’ recommendations. Honors coaches provide accelerated work and extension activities. Honors coaches also work with whole classes.
13. The high school maintains an Honors Academy for incoming ninth graders identified through achievement data and teachers’ recommendations. Honors Academy students take a series of challenging courses throughout their enrollment, and are expected to enroll in advanced placement classes.
14. Interviews and a document review indicated that the district proactively supported students’ social-emotional health and wellbeing.
15. The district is a member of ExSEL at the Rennie Center, where the superintendent along with eight other superintendents work to lead and promote SEL in their schools.
	1. One of the four goals of the District Improvement Plan (DIP) is to ensure a healthy districtwide/schoolwide culture in which respectful and supportive communities are evident, in teachers’ professional practice and in the students’ personal behaviors.
	2. District staff receive professional development in social-emotional learning and the development of pro-social skills.
16. School leaders referenced school-based SEL programs in the fiscal year 2018 budget narratives, among which are Responsive Classrooms, morning meetings, PBIS programs, Second Step, Developmental Design, The 7 Habits of the Leaders in Me, Restorative Justice, kindness clubs, and the creation of a culture/climate committee at the high school.
17. At seven of eight district schools, teams of teachers are receiving United Way/Mount Wachusett Community College training through the international Ashoka program to help students develop skills such as collaboration, problem-solving, and empathy.
18. The review team was told and observed during the onsite review that each school had a food pantry and a clothing closet where families could obtain food and clothing as needed.
19. Community partners and district guidance counselors provide onsite counseling, eyeglasses, and medical and dental care.
20. Nurses, guidance counselors, school psychologists, board certified behavior specialists, behavior technicians/paraprofessionals, and clinical interventionists support students’ social-emotional health and well-being.
21. To support students, the district partners with community organizations, including LUK, a social service agency; Riverside Bilingual Counseling Service; Community Health Wraparound Services; and the United Way. The district also partners with colleges including Mt. Wachusett Community College, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and Fitchburg State College.

**Impact**: Tiered systems of support for academic and non-academic needs likely improve achievement and give students a greater opportunity to be successful.

1. **The district proactively supports student subgroups by providing professional development and ongoing support for teachers, promoting inclusionary practices, and maintaining some targeted support. The district is attentive to the participation of underrepresented student subgroups in advanced and accelerated programs.**

 **A.** Interviews and a document review indicated that the district served some students with disabilities in out-of-school placements and sub-separate classrooms but served most in general education classrooms through inclusive practices that include co-teaching.

 1. The Pupil and Special Education Services Budget update stated that one of the major goals of the pupil and special education department for fiscal year 2018 was to increase inclusive practices by offering professional development in Universal Design for Learning and co-teaching practices.

 2. Interviewees agreed that the district had limited pull-out instruction and provided more co-teaching and inclusion in schools across the district.

 3. Each school (except the alternative high school) has a student program support administrator (SPSA) to help ensure that the needs of students with disabilities are being met. SPSAs provide some training and professional learning support for special and general education teachers and paraprofessionals.

1. The district serves English language learners (ELLs) through sheltered content instruction and English as a Second Language instruction.

 1. Administrators stated, and teachers agreed, that the district expected all district teachers to complete a SEI (Sheltered English Immersion) class to be able to meet the needs of ELLs in general education classrooms.

 a. The district’s ESL integration specialist is charged with supporting teachers with the implementation of SEI strategies.

 b. In the district’s Newcomers Program housed at one of the middle schools, students receive intensive support through English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction.

1. The review team was told that honors coaches reached out to ELL teachers and special education teachers for recommendations to the advanced academic learning initiative.
2. Interviewees stated that, in partnership with MassInsight and the Massachusetts Math Science Initiative (MMSI), the high school has increased the number of students taking Advanced Placement (AP) tests. According to ESE data, between 2011 and 2017 the number of students taking AP tests increased from 77 (131 tests taken) in 2011–2012 to 233 (504 tests taken) in 2016–2017.

 1. In 2011–2012, only 9 Hispanic/Latino students took AP exams compared with 172 in 2016–2017.

2. The number of students from low-income families taking AP exams rose from 25 in 2011–2012 to 93 in 2013–2014. [[9]](#footnote-9)The number of economically disadvantaged students increased from 77 in 2014–2015 to 89 in 2016–2017.

**Impact:** When all students are provided with instruction that is planned to meet their needs and are given opportunities to participate in accelerated programs, the district likely increases the number of underrepresented subgroups in accelerated programs and students likely experience progress and higher achievement.

***Challenges and Areas for Growth***

1. **The district’s policies and practices are not sufficiently improving student attendance or the in-school and out-of-school suspension rates.**

**A.** Despite district efforts to improve attendance, including phone calls, home visits, and whole-school attendance challenges with incentives, attendance remains an issue, especially at the high school.

 1. Attendance rates have fluctuated in recent years. According to ESE data in 2012–2013, the attendance rate[[10]](#footnote-10) was 93.1 percent and by the 2016–2017 school year it had decreased slightly to 92.8 percent, compared with the state rate of 94.6 percent.

2. Chronic absence is defined as the percentage of students absent 10 percent or more of their total number of student days of membership in a school. In 2012–2013, the district’s chronic absence rate was 23.2 percent; by the 2016–2017 school year the chronic absence rate had increased to 24.7 percent. The percentages of chronically absent students in the district in 2016–2017 were as follows: 32.1 percent for grade 9; 35.5 percent for grade 10; 42.9 in grade 11; and 36.1 percent for grade 12.

 3. In 2017, Hispanic/Latino students had the highest rate of chronic absence of all the subgroups in the district at 31.7 percent.

 **B.** Although suspension rates in the district have improved in recent years, they have been consistently higher than the state rates. The review team was told that the district’s ongoing emphasis on social-emotional learning, professional development on the Responsive Classroom approach, and Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) programs were all attempts to improve student behavior and to reduce in-school and out-of-school suspensions.

**Table 22: Fitchburg Public Schools**

**In-School and Out-of-School Suspension Rates,[[11]](#footnote-11) 2013–2017**

|  | **2013** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| In-School Suspension Rate | 9.5 | 9.5 | 9.9 | 9.5 | 5.1 |
| State In-School Suspension Rate | 2.2 | 2.1 | 1.8 | 1.9 | 1.7 |
| Out-of-School Suspension Rate | 6.6 | 6.8 | 7.0 | 5.4 | 3.9 |
| State Out-of-School Suspension Rate | 4.3 | 3.9 | 2.9 | 2.9 | 2.8  |

Source: MA ESE School and District Profile Data

 **C.** The three-year rates for in-school and out-of-school suspensions are high at the two middle schools and Fitchburg High School.

**Table 23: Fitchburg Public Schools**

**Three-Year In- and Out-of-School Suspensions Rates, 2015–2017**

|  | Three-Year In-School Suspension Rate | Three-Year Out-of-School Suspension Rate |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Longsjo Middle School | 26.6 | 11.5 |
| Memorial Middle School | 11.5 | 8.1 |
| Fitchburg High School | 19.8 | 9.8 |

Source: MA ESE School and District Profile Data

**Impact**: In a district with low student attendance, high chronic absence rates, and high suspension rates, a meaningful number of students loses critical instructional time. Students who miss significant instruction likely experience gaps in learning and low achievement, putting them at-risk of retention and of not completing high school.

***Recommendation***

* + 1. **District leaders should enhance their efforts to improve attendance, particularly at the high school and among Latino/Hispanic students. More efforts should be made to further reduce the numbers of students suspended in- and out-of-school at both the middle and high schools.**
1. The district should conduct a thorough analysis of why students are missing so many days of school. Analysis may include but should not be limited to:
2. Individual and group discussions with high school students and their families, including those with a high rate of absence, to learn more about the root causes of their absences and to better determine what kinds of district strategies would yield the most success.
3. The disaggregation of attendance data using multiple variables including program, course level, and student subgroup categories to identify where there are concentrations of students missing school and provide targeted support and interventions.
4. The district should determine what extent transportation plays a role in student attendance, particularly at the high school located in a remote section of Fitchburg.

The district should consider planning a pilot bus service to the high school from neighborhoods where there is a high concentration of students who miss school.

 **C.** The district should take steps to continue reducing in- and out-of-school suspensions.

 1. The district should continue to promote and support social-emotional learning, particularly at the middle and high school.

 2. The district should strengthen its support for educators, particularly at the middle and high school levels, to ensure that instruction challenges and engages students and addresses students’ varied learning needs.

 3. The district should strengthen its support for high school educators to implement classroom routines and positive supports to reduce the need for disciplinary referrals.

**Benefits** from implementing this recommendation could include a clearer understanding of the reasons that many students are not coming to school consistently. Having authentic causality will enable the district to respond with initiatives and practices that are more likely to improve attendance. When students, particularly high-school students, are engaged in school in meaningful ways and if barriers (such as transportation or other things) are addressed they are more likely to come to school. Furthermore, the continued focus on social-emotional learning will give the district more opportunities develop positive student behavior and reduce in- and out-of-school suspensions.

**Recommended resources:**

* *Every Student, Every Day: A Community Toolkit to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism* (<http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/chronicabsenteeism/toolkit.pdf>) is a set of Action Guides that provide information and resources to help ensure that all young people are in school every day and benefitting from coordinated systems of support.
* The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments’ *School Climate Survey Compendia* (<http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/school-climate-measurement/school-climate-survey-compendium>) is a collection of valid and reliable surveys, assessments, and scales of school climate that can assist educators in their efforts to identify and assess their conditions for learning. Additional surveys and scales are added continually.

Financial and Asset Management

***Contextual Background***

Based on the Department of Revenue At A Glance report, in 2015 Fitchburg had a population of 40,545 with an average annual income of $18,939. In 2017, the city’s total expenditures were $149,216,085 of which 50 percent was spent on education. In fiscal year 2018, state aid accounted for 43 percent of its revenue, including $49,829,149 from the Chapter 70 program.

The district and the city have worked cooperatively to develop a budget that meets the net school spending requirement; they met the requirement for 2017 and 2018, having been slightly below the requirement before that. The district supplements its budget with grants, circuit breaker, and school choice funds to help with classroom supplies and materials, professional development, and technology.

The documentation for proposed budgets is comprehensive and transparent. An introductory letter by the superintendent and his PowerPoint presentation highlight programs, reductions and commitments (increases), and background information about outside funding from grants and revolving funds. The budget document also includes narratives about each school and program, budget line item detail with trends over three years, staffing headcounts, and a two-year capital plan listing building needs. The fiscal year 2018 budget from the city’s appropriation is $54,200,000; it is supplemented by additional estimates of $5,925,452 from grants, $1,742,360 from circuit breaker reimbursements, and $1,068,499 from school-choice tuitions.

Most district buildings are old, with the latest major building project a new high school in 1999; some schools date back as far as 1891. Some buildings have many needs, including roof and boiler repair and door and window replacement. In 2011 and 2016, the district did major studies of the condition and use of its facilities. From 2009–2011, the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) assisted with some repairs to district schools and has accepted the district’s application for a feasibility study for the Crocker school to begin in 2018. The MSBA rejected the district’s 2017 application for accelerated repairs to other schools.

Technology has been a priority of the district, which has committed to a one-to-one Chromebook initiative for grades 8–12 by fiscal year 2019 and has led an initiative for an early education technology program, Footsteps2Brilliance. Most funding for technology comes from outside funding, such as E-rate, school choice funds, and a United Way grant and partnership.

***Strength Findings***

* + 1. **District administrators and city officials collaborate to meet the net school spending requirement and to meet student and district needs as funds permit. District administrators communicate well with their municipal counterparts about purchasing, payroll, and safety needs.**
	1. District leaders and city officials work together to support budgets that meet the net school spending requirement.
		1. Administrators and school committee members praised the mayor for his support for the schools and education.
		2. District administrators stated that they agreed with municipal officials annually on city charges for municipal services that are provided to the district and the school committee approved the written agreement.

 a. In its self-assessment submitted in advance of the onsite review, district administrators said that they had positive working relationships with city officials and agreed on a method for assigning indirect costs for municipal services that are provided to the district.

 i. In order to meet the city offices’ needs to process procurements and bidding more effectively, district leaders and city officials recently agreed to share funding for a new position of deputy procurement officer. In estimates of city charges for expenditures on education, the district and the city agreed that charges for the new position were to decrease from 75 percent to 25 percent.

* + 1. District leaders and city officials stated that they worked together to prepare school budgets that will meet the net school spending requirement.

 a. The district has met the requirement for fiscal year 2017 and fiscal year 2018.

* 1. The district and the city collaborate to fund capital needs in the district.
		1. City officials and administrators said that the city has supported capital projects including a lift, a retaining wall, and auditorium upgrades. The city plans to support major capital needs for the Longsjo and the Crocker schools.

 a. The city council has approved from free cash and bonding $2 million to repair the Longsjo roof, and $200,000 for the city’s share of a $1 million feasibility study for replacing or renovating the Crocker school; The Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) will pay the other 80 percent.

1. District leaders and city officials described positive communication and working relationships with city departments such as auditing, purchasing, police, fire, and public works.
	* 1. Personnel at the district business office told the team that they have established effective routines with the city for processing purchase orders, bids, invoices and payments, payroll, and warrants.
			1. Both district and city personnel stated that they have adjusted well to changes in purchasing routines in 2017–2018.
		2. The police chief collaborated with school administrators to walk through schools and review safety practices following the school shooting in Florida, and he recommended adding a school resource officer.
		3. School administrators collaborate with fire officials on safety drills and fire education simulations, and with the department of public works.

**Impact**: Collaborative relationships between the district and city have helped the district to meet its funding obligations and to address some capital needs for its schools. The positive relationships between the district and city officials and departments keep business operations running smoothly.

**2. The district’s budget development process is transparent, with input from principals and other stakeholders. The budget document includes detailed staffing and budget information, and information about grants and outside funding as well as school budgets.**

 **A.** Administrators told the team that principals and directors were given early estimates of funding and were included in discussions of initiatives and reductions at cabinet meetings.

 **B.** Administrators and city officials work together to estimate required net school spending and to assign indirect costs for municipal services that are provided to the district, along with estimated funding from the city.

 **C.** Estimates of available funding from the city and proposed budgets are shared publicly with the school committee when the governor’s budget is made available and at two hearings in May, culminating in school committee approval for the submission of the budget to the mayor and the city council.

 1. During the budget season principals and directors present updates to the school committee on their School Improvement Plans and their budget priorities.

 2. The school committee’s resource subcommittee reviews budget proposals and provides input to the superintendent and the full committee.

**D.** The proposed budget document is transparent and comprehensive.

1. The budget document includes the superintendent’s PowerPoint presentation of the budget. Both refer to district plans and priorities, enrollment trends, net school spending calculations and city charges, proposed reductions (including an itemized list of 15.5 FTE in staff reductions) and commitments (increases), and information about grants and revolving funds and how they are used.
2. The budget document also includes an introductory letter, narratives and summaries for each school and program, student achievement data, staffing headcounts, proposed budget line items with trends, revolving fund budgets (including circuit breaker and school choice) with year-end balances, and proposed capital projects.

 **E.** The district considers students’ needs, student achievement data, and district and school plans when allocating the budget, grants, and outside funds.

1. Administrators stated that the district set priorities for its budget and spending based on students’ needs and data, as funding allowed.

1. An example of a district priority is social-emotional learning, based on student referrals and attendance data. The District Improvement Plan (DIP) emphasizes social-emotional learning and the budget supports counselors, special education positions, and clinical interventionists.
2. Concerns about high-school achievement are being addressed by DSAC[[12]](#footnote-12) services and a professional development grant.
3. Principals said that they have used outside funds such as grants (including $400,000 to assist with students displaced from Puerto Rico) and school choice funds in addition to the budget to help with school and student needs such as professional development, assessments, and ELL staff.

 2. The district has made a priority in its improvement plans of updating and using technology. At the time of the onsite review in April 2018, the district was implementing a one-to-one Chromebook plan for grades 8–12 using primarily E-Rate and school choice funds.

3. The DIP includes the use of coaches to lead the effort to improve student achievement and instructional practices. The superintendent noted that the district has added to those positions.

**Impact**: Presenting school improvement plans during budget season and the information about plans and goals in the budget document give the school committee and other stakeholders a clear picture of the district’s priorities, initiatives, and achievements and of how its resources are allocated. The transparency of the budget process and the inclusion of grant and outside funding in the budget document gives the school committee, city officials, and the public a comprehensive view of school programs and services and a clear understanding of constraints and priorities.

**3. Leaders have leveraged resources by basing decisions on school plans and student needs and by considering all funding sources.**

 **A.** Interviews and a document review indicated that the district has leveraged its limited funding by making strategic use of outside funds, partnerships, and cost efficiencies.

Administrators said that the budget consisted of five “buckets”: the city’s school budget, grants, circuit breaker reimbursements, school choice tuitions, and capital funding. The major drivers of expenses are special education (especially out-of-district tuition), contractual obligations, and health insurance; cost drivers typically exceed the $2.7 million or so in net school spending increases.

The district makes strategic use of entitlement and competitive grants and other outside funds to offset budget reductions and to implement initiatives.

a. For example, in fiscal year 2018 the district had to reduce ELL positions and was able to use hurricane relief funding for displaced Puerto Rican students to hire four ELL teachers.

b. In addition, the district used school choice funds for technology, professional development, and instructional materials, and the circuit breaker prior year balance and city health insurance reimbursement to offset a special education tuition overage of $2 million.

c. The district has received competitive grants such as 21st Century grants for after-school programs, and a Deacon Jones Foundation grant for the arts.

The district has investigated ways to be more cost effective by investing in solar panels to reduce electric bills (saving $118,000 in the fiscal year 2018 budget), and by conducting a transportation study and changing special education busing vendors to reduce the number of bus runs from 30 to 23.

a. The district took advantage of the Community Eligibility Program to increase subsidies for school food services.

b. It has investigated privatizing custodial services and has created some in-house special education programs to reduce out-of-district tuitions.

c. At the time of the onsite review in April 2018, the district was looking into leasing a local parochial school building to free up space in schools to serve more students with disabilities in-district.

Principals told the team that there had never been a time that they could not move forward with an initiative because of limited funding.

Family members said that the district did “a lot with little” in the way of resources.

Administrators and school committee members described taking advantage of numerous partnerships with state and local agencies including the United Way (for the Footsteps2Brilliance program), DSAC,[[13]](#footnote-13) Community Health wraparound services, and the Department of Children and Families. Administrators also stated that the district had partnerships with Fitchburg State University (dual enrollment and professional development), Worcester Polytechnic Institute (environmental education), and Mount Wachusett Community College (dual enrollment).

Families and others in the community have initiated fund raising efforts such as an annual gala, which was expected to bring in $20,000 in 2017–2018 for after-school programs.

 8. Administrators said that the district received numerous donations for various purposes.

 9. Interviews with school committee members and administrators, and a review of School Improvement Plans indicated that as a result of strategic use of funds the district has been able to maintain programs in the arts and sports.

**Impact:** The leveraging of grant and revolving funds as well as taking advantage of partnerships with local agencies helps the district to maximize available resources in order to provide programs and resources for students.

***Challenges and Areas for Growth***

**4. Some district schools are in poor condition and need significant work. The city and the district do not have a funded long-range capital plan.**

1. Maintenance and building improvements by the district and the city have not kept pace with identified building needs.
2. According to ESE’s RADAR[[14]](#footnote-14) Benchmarking, in 2017 the district’s expenditures on operations and maintenance were $1,006 per in-district pupil, placing it seventh of ten comparable districts.[[15]](#footnote-15) In 2016, the district’s expenditures on building maintenance were $71 per in-district pupil, well below the state average of $247 per in-district pupil.
3. A 2016 district study of its school buildings identified several deferred maintenance and renovation needs, including exterior envelopes, HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) and boiler systems and electrical and plumbing systems.
	1. The study identified the Crocker and Longsjo schools and the north wing of the South Street school as in particularly poor condition.
	2. The study recommended three options for repairing, renovating, and replacing schools with estimated costs ranging from $116,508,200 to $149,720,400.
	3. At the time of the onsite review in April 2018, the Crocker school was closed and under repair. The fourth floor of the Longsjo Middle School was closed because of a roof leak, and its site did not include space for outside activities.
	4. City administrators said that the Crocker school was being repaired and they expected to reopen it by fall 2018. They said that they had recommended a feasibility study for the Crocker school, to be funded by the city from free cash and bonding, noting that the MSBA had approved the study for 80 percent reimbursement. City administrators also said that they were recommending a new roof for the Longsjo Middle School for fiscal year 2019.
4. Interviews with administrators and a review of budget documents indicated that the district and the city have recently committed capital funding for several projects including solar panels, a retaining wall, auditorium seats, audio-visual upgrades, and the elevator at an elementary school.
5. Municipal administrators said that they expected to use city bonding capacity for the full Crocker School renovation as well as renovations of city hall and the city library.
	1. Options to be considered in the feasibility study include a renovated or new Crocker school, redistricting to K–8 schools, and closing the Longsjo middle school.

5. Funding has not been available for many other major building needs, including boilers, HVAC systems, the South Street and high school roofs, door and window replacements, a compressor pump, asbestos mitigation, sprinklers, and plumbing.

6. Several of the district’s buildings are over 50 years old. The most recent major school construction was the new high school in 1999.

1. The city and the district do not have a written long-range prioritized capital plan with a funding component.

City administrators stated that they did not have a written long-range capital plan with a funding component.

The district budget document includes a fiscal year 2017 and fiscal year 2018 capital plan listing some building needs.

1. Many major building issues remain.
	* + 1. Administrators told the team many needs identified in the 2016 district study described have not been scheduled for approval and funding.
			2. They also reported that a statement of interest to the MSBA for accelerated repairs for roofs (South Street, Longsjo, Goodrich), window and door replacements, and boilers was rejected, and (except for the Longsjo roof) funding was not available for those projects.

**Impact**: Inadequate buildings and outdated facilities are not conducive to teaching and learning. The absence of a long-term plan for renovating or replacing the district’s aging schools results in delayed efforts and limited coordination to improve the condition of the schools.

***Recommendation***

**The district in cooperation with the city should continue and increase its efforts to perform needed major repairs and renovations on its most needy school buildings, including use of the upcoming feasibility study to consider options for them, continued applications to the MSBA for funding for accelerated repairs, and a long-range capital plan to help determine how to schedule and fund them.**

1. The MSBA (Massachusetts School Building Authority) has approved a feasibility study for the Crocker school, which can be used to explore options for students at other elementary and middle schools as well.
2. Options proposed in the 2016 report can provide a foundation for the feasibility study. They included building an addition to the Crocker school or a new K­8 school on the Crocker site, creating space for the students at Longsjo to be educated elsewhere.
3. The feasibility study may suggest other options to improve the Crocker school building and to help alleviate problems with the learning environments at Longsjo and other schools.
4. Despite the rejection of the 2017 application to MSBA for accelerated repairs, the district is encouraged to apply again.

Building problems at the schools such as roofs, boilers, doors, and windows need to be addressed, and MSBA funding for accelerated repairs would help make them affordable.

1. The district should prepare a long-range capital plan with a funding component to help the district and city prioritize and schedule projects in a practical and affordable way. If possible, the inclusion of needed city building renovations such as city hall and the library would help make the long-range planning, prioritization, and funding more realistic.

Prioritizing and scheduling the projects should help ensure that the neediest schools and projects get the attention and funding they deserve.

If possible, the plan should be citywide including needed municipal building renovations such as city hall and the library with a funding component to make effective use of the city’s bonding capacity as it becomes available.

**Benefits** from implementing this recommendation include improved and up-to-date environments for teaching and learning, and improved scheduling for those improvements. It can help prioritize building projects and maximize the impact of available funds, especially the impact of bonding capacity as it becomes available.

**Recommended resources:**

* ESE’s *School Building Issues* web page (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/sbuilding/>) includes funding opportunities, guidelines, and resources related to school buildings.
* *Planning Guide for Maintaining School Facilities* (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2003347>), from the National Center for Education Statistics, is intended to help school districts plan for efficient and effective operations. It addresses various topics, including conducting a facilities audit, planning and evaluating maintenance, and managing staff and contractors.
* *The Massachusetts School Checklist* (<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph/programs/environmental-health/exposure-topics/iaq/iaq-methods/the-mass-school-checklist.html>) is a list of the most important environmental health and safety issues for schools to address. It includes regulations and industry standards/guidelines related to elements on the checklist, as well as additional resources.
* MassEnergyInsight (<https://www.massenergyinsight.net/home>) is a free, web-based tool made available by the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources as part of the Massachusetts Green Communities Program. The tool is designed to help communities learn about and monitor energy use and related costs, plan energy efficiency programs, and communicate this information.

Appendix A: Review Team, Activities, Schedule, Site Visit

Review Team Members

The review was conducted from April 24–27, 2018, by the following team of independent ESE consultants.

1. Dr. Jim Caradonio, Leadership and Governance
2. Sue Kelly, Curriculum and Instruction
3. Dr. Karen Laba, Assessment
4. Dr. Frank Sambuceti, Human Resources and Professional Development
5. Lenora Jennings, Student Support, *review team coordinator*
6. Dr. George Gearhart, Financial and Asset Management

District Review Activities

The following activities were conducted during the review:

The team conducted interviews with the following financial personnel: the assistant superintendent of finance and operations, the payroll coordinator, the grants bookkeeper, the fiscal coordinator, the city auditor, and the deputy auditor.

The team conducted interviews with the following members of the school committee: co-chair and four members.

The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the teachers’ association: secretary, treasurer, and five building representatives.

The team conducted interviews/focus groups with the following central office administrators: the superintendent; the assistant superintendent of curriculum and grants and Title I director; the assistant superintendent of finance and operations; the administrator of pupil services; the director of enrollment and parent engagement; the director of technology and assessment; the director of special education; the human services director; the ELL director; the induction and mentoring coordinator; the director of athletics; and the school building/maintenance director.

The team visited the following schools: Crocker (Pre-K–4), Reingold (K–4), South Street (Pre-K–4), McKay (Pre-K–8), Longsjo (grades 5–8), Memorial (grades 5–8), Fitchburg High School (grades 9–12), and Goodrich Academy (grades 9–12).

During school visits, the team conducted interviews with eight principals and focus groups with nine elementary-school teachers, six middle-school teachers, and seven high-school teachers.

The team observed 86 classes in the district: 26 at the 2 high schools, 30 at the 2 middle schools including grades 5–8 at the district’s Pre-K–8 school and 30 at the 3 elementary schools including Pre-K–4 in the district’s Pre-K–8 school.

The review team analyzed multiple data sets and reviewed numerous documents before and during the site visit, including:

* + Student and school performance data, including achievement and growth, enrollment, graduation, dropout, retention, suspension, and attendance rates.
	+ Data on the district’s staffing and finances.
	+ Published educational reports on the district by ESE, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), and the former Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA).
	+ District documents such as district and school improvement plans, school committee policies, curriculum documents, summaries of student assessments, job descriptions, collective bargaining agreements, evaluation tools for staff, handbooks, school schedules, and the district’s end-of-year financial reports.
	+ All completed program and administrator evaluations, and a random selection of completed teacher evaluations.

Site Visit Schedule

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Tuesday**04/24/2018 | **Wednesday**4/25/2018] | **Thursday**04/26/2018 | **Friday**4/28/2018 |
| Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff and principals; document reviews; and visits to Fitchburg High School, Goodrich Academy, South Street, and Crocker (at the temporary Lunenburg campus for K–3 students) for classroom observations. | Interviews with district staff and principals; town or city personnel; review of personnel files; interview with the teachers’ association, teacher focus groups; parent focus group; and visits to Longsjo, South Street, and McKay Arts Academy for classroom observations. | Interviews with school leaders; interviews with school committee members; visits to Memorial, Reingold, South Street, McKay, and Longsjo for classroom observations. | Interviews with high school students and DSAC partners; review team meeting; visits to Fitchburg High School and Crocker (at the temporary Fitchburg campus for students in grades 4–6) for classroom observations; district wrap-up meeting with the superintendent. |

Appendix B: Enrollment, Attendance, Expenditures

**Table B1a: Fitchburg Public Schools**

**2017–2018 Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity**

| **Group** | **District** | **Percent****of Total** | **State** | **Percent of****Total** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| African American | 315 | 5.9% | 86,305 | 9.0% |
| Asian | 264 | 4.9% | 65,667 | 6.9% |
| Hispanic | 2,703 | 50.5% | 191,201 | 20.0% |
| Native American | 2 | 0.0% | 2,103 | 0.2% |
| White | 1,679 | 31.4% | 573,335 | 60.1% |
| Native Hawaiian | 4 | 0.1% | 818 | 0.1% |
| Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic  | 382 | 7.1% | 34,605 | 3.6% |
| All | 5,349 | 100.0% | 954,034 | 100.0% |
| Note: As of October 1, 2017 |

**Table B1b: Fitchburg Public Schools**

**2017–2018 Student Enrollment by High Needs Populations**

| **Group** | **District** | **State** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **N** | **Percent of High Needs** | **Percent of District** | **N** | **Percent of High Needs** | **Percent of State** |
| Students w/ disabilities | 1,310 | 33.6% | 23.9% | 171,061 | 38.0% | 17.7% |
| Econ. Dis. | 3,309 | 85.0% | 61.9% | 305,203 | 67.9% | 32.0% |
| ELLs and Former ELLs | 739 | 19.0% | 13.8% | 97,334 | 21.6% | 10.2% |
| All high needs students | 3,895 | 100.0% | 71.1% | 449,584 | 100.0% | 46.6% |
| Notes: As of October 1, 2017. District and state numbers and percentages for students with disabilities and high needs students are calculated including students in out-of-district placements. Total district enrollment including students in out-of-district placement is 5,476; total state enrollment including students in out-of-district placement is 964,806. |

**Table B2: Fitchburg Public Schools**

**Attendance Rates, 2014–2017**

| **Group** | **N (2017)** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** | **State (2017)** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| High Needs | 3,983 | 92.4 | 92.3 | 91.7 | 91.9 | -0.5 | 93.1 |
| Econ. Dis. | 3,423 | -- | 91.3 | 91.4 | 91.7 | -- | 92.6 |
| ELLs | 692 | 93.2 | 92.0 | 91.1 | 91.2 | -2.0 | 93.5 |
| SWD | 1,319 | 91.5 | 90.4 | 90.6 | 91.7 | 0.2 | 93.0 |
| African American | 353 | 93.6 | 93.7 | 93.8 | 94.1 | 0.5 | 94.0 |
| Asian | 280 | 95.5 | 94.3 | 94.8 | 94.9 | -0.6 | 96.3 |
| Hispanic or Latino | 2,902 | 92.1 | 91.2 | 91.5 | 91.9 | -0.2 | 92.8 |
| Multi-Race | 405 | 92.7 | 92.0 | 92.7 | 93.5 | 0.8 | 94.5 |
| White | 1,935 | 93.6 | 93.2 | 93.4 | 93.5 | -0.1 | 95.1 |
| All  | 5,882 | 92.9 | 92.3 | 92.5 | 92.8 | -0.1 | 94.6 |
| Notes: The attendance rate is calculated by dividing the total number of days students attended school by the total number of days students were enrolled in a particular school year. A student’s attendance rate is counted toward any district the student attended. In addition, district attendance rates included students who were out placed in public collaborative or private alternative schools/programs at public expense. Attendance rates have been rounded; percent change is based on unrounded numbers. |

**Table B3: Fitchburg Public Schools**

**Expenditures, Chapter 70 State Aid, and Net School Spending Fiscal Years 2015–2017**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | **FY15** | **FY16** | **FY17** |
|   | **Estimated** | **Actual** | **Estimated** | **Actual** | **Estimated** | **Actual** |
| Expenditures |
| From local appropriations for schools: |  |
| By school committee | $49,500,000 | $49,499,999 | $51,400,000 | $51,400,000 | $52,827,310 | $53,287,310 |
| By municipality | $22,067,280 | $21,537,558 | $22,791,575 | $22,448,508 | $22,951,927 | $22,349,958 |
| Total from local appropriations | $71,567,280 | $71,037,557 | $74,191,575 | $73,848,509 | $75,779,237 | $75,637,268 |
| From revolving funds and grants | -- | $12,264,635 | -- | $12,659,618 | -- | $14,809,206 |
| Total expenditures | -- | $83,302,192 | -- | $86,508,127 | -- | $90,446,474 |
| Chapter 70 aid to education program |
| Chapter 70 state aid\* | -- | $45,409,881 | -- | $45,700,337 | -- | $47,404,728 |
| Required local contribution | -- | $15,954,871 | -- | $16,662,973 | -- | $16,963,311 |
| Required net school spending\*\* | -- | $61,364,752 | -- | $62,363,310 | -- | $64,368,039 |
| Actual net school spending | -- | $60,882,442 | -- | $63,034,927 | -- | $64,846,646 |
| Over/under required ($) | -- | -$482,310 | -- | $671,617 | -- | $191,587 |
| Over/under required (%) | -- | -0.8% | -- | 1.1% | -- | 0.3% |
| \*Chapter 70 state aid funds are deposited in the local general fund and spent as local appropriations.\*\*Required net school spending is the total of Chapter 70 aid and required local contribution. Net school spending includes only expenditures from local appropriations, not revolving funds and grants. It includes expenditures for most administration, instruction, operations, and out-of-district tuitions. It does not include transportation, school lunches, debt, or capital.Sources: FY15, FY16, and FY17 District End-of-Year Reports, Chapter 70 Program information on ESE websiteData retrieved 12/13/17 and 7/17/18 |

**Table B4: Fitchburg Public Schools**

**Expenditures Per In-District Pupil**

**Fiscal Years 2014–2016**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Expenditure Category** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** |
| Administration | $472 | $527 | $513 |
| Instructional leadership (district and school) | $1,093 | $884 | $809 |
| Teachers | $5,235 | $4,919 | $5,008 |
| Other teaching services | $768 | $742 | $885 |
| Professional development | $209 | $318 | $327 |
| Instructional materials, equipment and technology | $615 | $445 | $526 |
| Guidance, counseling and testing services | $183 | $425 | $364 |
| Pupil services | $1,689 | $1,617 | $1,659 |
| Operations and maintenance | $912 | $933 | $825 |
| Insurance, retirement and other fixed costs | $2,206 | $2,296 | $2,382 |
| Total expenditures per in-district pupil | $13,382 | $13,106 | $13,297 |
| Sources: [Per-pupil expenditure reports on ESE website](http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/statistics/ppx.html)Note: Any discrepancy between expenditures and total is because of rounding. |

Appendix C: Instructional Inventory

| **Focus Area #1: Learning Objectives & Expectations** |  | Insufficient Evidence | Limited Evidence | Sufficient Evidence | Compelling Evidence | Avg Number of points |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (1 to 4) |
| 1. The teacher demonstrates knowledge of the subject matter. | **ES** | 0% | 12% | 65% | 23% | 3.1 |
| **MS** | 0% | 6% | 74% | 21% | 3.1 |
| **HS** | 12% | 31% | 54% | 4% | 2.5 |
| **Total #** | 3 | 13 | 56 | 14 | 2.9 |
| **Total %** | 3% | 15% | 65% | 16% |  |
| 2. The teacher ensures that students understand what they should be learning in the lesson and why. | **ES** | 4% | 27% | 54% | 15% | 2.8 |
| **MS** | 3% | 9% | 76% | 12% | 3.0 |
| **HS** | 15% | 46% | 31% | 8% | 2.3 |
| **Total #** | 6 | 22 | 48 | 10 | 2.7 |
| **Total %** | 7% | 26% | 56% | 12% |  |
| 3. The teacher uses appropriate classroom activities well matched to the learning objective(s). | **ES** | 0% | 15% | 65% | 19% | 3.0 |
| **MS** | 0% | 21% | 53% | 26% | 3.1 |
| **HS** | 12% | 50% | 38% | 0% | 2.3 |
| **Total #** | 3 | 24 | 45 | 14 | 2.8 |
| **Total %** | 3% | 28% | 52% | 16% |  |
| 4. The teacher conducts frequent checks for student understanding, provides feedback, and adjusts instruction. | **ES** | 0% | 23% | 50% | 27% | 3.0 |
| **MS** | 0% | 24% | 50% | 26% | 3.0 |
| **HS** | 12% | 54% | 35% | 0% | 2.2 |
| **Total #** | 3 | 28 | 39 | 16 | 2.8 |
| **Total %** | 3% | 33% | 45% | 18% |  |
| **Total Score For Focus Area #1** | **ES** |  |  |  |  | 12.0 |
| **MS** |  |  |  |  | 12.2 |
| **HS** |  |  |  |  | 9.3 |
| **Total** |  |  |  |  | 11.3 |

| **Focus Area #2: Student Engagement & Higher-Order Thinking** |  | Insufficient Evidence | Limited Evidence | Sufficient Evidence | Compelling Evidence | Avg Number of points |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (1 to 4) |
| 5. Students assume responsibility to learn and are engaged in the lesson. | **ES** | 0% | 4% | 69% | 27% | 3.2 |
| **MS** | 0% | 21% | 62% | 18% | 3.0 |
| **HS** | 19% | 42% | 31% | 8% | 2.3 |
| **Total #** | 5 | 19 | 47 | 15 | 2.8 |
| **Total %** | 6% | 22% | 55% | 17% |  |
| 6. Students engage in higher-order thinking. | **ES** | 0% | 42% | 46% | 12% | 2.7 |
| **MS** | 3% | 47% | 44% | 6% | 2.5 |
| **HS** | 31% | 38% | 27% | 4% | 2.0 |
| **Total #** | 9 | 37 | 34 | 6 | 2.4 |
| **Total %** | 10% | 43% | 40% | 7% |  |
| 7. Students communicate their ideas and thinking with each other. | **ES** | 0% | 15% | 65% | 19% | 3.0 |
| **MS** | 3% | 50% | 38% | 9% | 2.5 |
| **HS** | 31% | 46% | 23% | 0% | 1.9 |
| **Total #** | 9 | 33 | 36 | 8 | 2.5 |
| **Total %** | 10% | 38% | 42% | 9% |  |
| 8. Students engage with meaningful, real-world tasks. | **ES** | 0% | 27% | 54% | 19% | 2.9 |
| **MS** | 6% | 29% | 50% | 15% | 2.7 |
| **HS** | 15% | 54% | 27% | 4% | 2.2 |
| **Total #** | 6 | 31 | 38 | 11 | 2.6 |
| **Total %** | 7% | 36% | 44% | 13% |  |
| **Total Score For Focus Area #2** | **ES** |  |  |  |  | 11.9 |
| **MS** |  |  |  |  | 10.8 |
| **HS** |  |  |  |  | 8.4 |
| **Total** |  |  |  |  | 10.4 |

| **Focus Area #3: Inclusive Practice & Classroom Culture** |  | Insufficient Evidence | Limited Evidence | Sufficient Evidence | Compelling Evidence | Avg Number of points |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (1 to 4) |
| 9. The teacher ensures that students are engaging in challenging tasks regardless of learning needs. | **ES** | 4% | 19% | 65% | 12% | 2.8 |
| **MS** | 9% | 32% | 50% | 9% | 2.6 |
| **HS** | 27% | 42% | 31% | 0% | 2.0 |
| **Total #** | 11 | 27 | 42 | 6 | 2.5 |
| **Total %** | 13% | 31% | 49% | 7% |  |
| 10. The teacher uses a variety of instructional strategies. | **ES** | 0% | 23% | 58% | 19% | 3.0 |
| **MS** | 3% | 38% | 47% | 12% | 2.7 |
| **HS** | 23% | 46% | 31% | 0% | 2.1 |
| **Total #** | 7 | 31 | 39 | 9 | 2.6 |
| **Total %** | 8% | 36% | 45% | 10% |  |
| 11. Classroom routines and positive supports are in place to ensure that students behave appropriately. | **ES** | 0% | 15% | 42% | 42% | 3.3 |
| **MS** | 0% | 9% | 56% | 35% | 3.3 |
| **HS** | 8% | 46% | 31% | 15% | 2.5 |
| **Total #** | 2 | 19 | 38 | 27 | 3.0 |
| **Total %** | 2% | 22% | 44% | 31% |  |
| 12. The classroom climate is conducive to teaching and learning. | **ES** | 0% | 15% | 42% | 42% | 3.3 |
| **MS** | 0% | 12% | 47% | 41% | 3.3 |
| **HS** | 8% | 35% | 46% | 12% | 2.6 |
| **Total #** | 2 | 17 | 39 | 28 | 3.1 |
| **Total %** | 2% | 20% | 45% | 33% |  |
| **Total Score For Focus Area #3** | **ES** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **MS** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **HS** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Total** |  |  |  |  |  |

1. Enrollment increased from 4,915 in 2013; 5,010 in 2014; 5,041 in 2015; 5,192 in 2016; 5,272 in 2017; and 5,349 in 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. SMART goals are Specific and Strategic; Measurable; Action Oriented; Rigorous, Realistic, and Results Focused; and Timed and Tracked. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The District and School Assistance Center has been restructured into the Statewide System of Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The district also has four elementary honors academy coaches and two advanced academic learning initiative coaches (AALIs) at the middle schools, as well as a literacy coach and a math coach at the high school. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The District and School Assistance Center has been restructured into the Statewide System of Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. An informative evaluation is factual and cites instructional details such as methodology, pedagogy, Standards and Indicators of Effective Teaching Practice or instruction of subject-based knowledge that is aligned with the state curriculum frameworks. It does not commit to improvement strategies. An instructive evaluation includes comments intended to improve instruction. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. On Tuesday, February 28, 2017, after collecting public comment since November 2016, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted 9-1 to amend the educator evaluation regulations. The most significant change in the regulations is the elimination of a separate student impact rating. Under the [amended regulations](http://www.doe.mass.edu/boe/docs/FY2017/2017-02/item6.html), evaluators do not have to make a separate judgment about an educator’s impact on student learning. Instead, student learning is embedded as an indicator within one of the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework’s four standards. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. SMART goals are Specific and Strategic; Measurable; Action Oriented; Rigorous, Realistic, and Results Focused; and Timed and Tracked. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. In 2014–2015, ESE replaced the low-income metric with the economically disadvantaged metric. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Attendance rate equals the average number of students present each day divided by the average number of students enrolled each day. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Suspension rates represent the percentage of students suspended at least once during the school year. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The District and School Assistance Center has been restructured into the Statewide System of Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The District and School Assistance Center has been restructured into the Statewide System of Support. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. RADAR stands for Resource Allocation and District Action Report. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Comparison districts in the report were Holyoke, New Bedford, Pittsfield, Haverhill, Salem, Chelsea, Chicopee, Everett, Leominster, and Revere. In 2017, comparison districts spent between $809 and $1,444 per in-district student on operations and maintenance. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)