Comprehensive District Review Report

Waltham Public Schools

Review conducted May 29–June 1, 2018

Office of District Reviews and Monitoring

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Executive Summary

At the time of the district review in late May/early June 2018, the superintendent was in his third year. Under his leadership, the district developed a five-year strategic plan referred to as the Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP) 2017–2022. Each school has an improvement plan referred to as a Quality School Plan (QSP), which is aligned with the AIP.The priorities in the AIP are:

1. Deliver high quality instruction for ALL students.

2. Meet the needs of diverse learners.

3. Increase access to rigorous, enriching opportunities for All students

4. Retain, cultivate, and recruit high quality teachers and leaders to stay in system.

5. Improve student learning experiences in and out of school by truly engaging families and community organizations as partners.

The Waltham Public School district is composed of seven elementary schools, two middle schools, and one comprehensive high school. One elementary school, the Dual Language program, opened in 2016–2017 with a kindergarten class, and has added a first grade. The district plans to make the school a K–5 school. Between 2014 and 2018, district enrollment increased 8.6 percent, from 5,155 students in 2014 to 5,600 students in 2018.

In the 2017–2018 school year, 52.3 percent of students are part of the high-needs subgroup because they are in one or more of the following groups: economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English language learners (ELLs) or former ELLs. Many students come to school each day with high programmatic and support needs. For example, students with disabilities in the district represent 15.9 percent of the total student population, compared with 17.7 percent of the state; ELLs make up 22.2 percent of enrollment, compared with 10.2 percent across the state; 46.3 percent of students do not have English as their first language, compared with 20.9 percent of the state; and 34.5 percent of students come from economically disadvantaged households, compared with 32 percent across the state.

In 2017, In ELA, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectation on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment was below the state rate in the 3rd through 5th grades and above the state rate in the 6th through 8th grades. In mathematics, the percentage of student meeting or exceeding expectations on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment was below the state rate in all tested grades. The percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the 10th grade MCAS assessment was below the state rate in ELA and math.

In 2017, in science, the percentage of all students scoring proficient or advanced on the MCAS assessment was slightly below the state rate (51 percent vs. 53 percent).

In 2017, Waltham Senior High School was classified as a Level 3 school[[1]](#footnote-1) and was in the 30th percentile of high schools.

**Instruction**

The team observed classes throughout the district: 26 at the high school, 22 at the two middle schools and 56 at the 7 elementary schools. The team observed 40 ELA classes, 37 mathematics classes, and 27 classes in other subject areas. Among the classes observed were 8 special education classes, 6 ELL classes, and 1 career/technical education class. 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. Because of the timing of the onsite review at the end of May/early June, the team was not able to observe grade 12 classes.

Districtwide in observed classrooms, the quality of instruction was inconsistent. In most observed classrooms, teachers demonstrated knowledge of their subject matter. The review team found a lower incidence of the use of student learning objectives, classroom activities aligned with learning objectives, and frequent checks for student understanding including feedback to students and adjustments to instruction at the high school than at the elementary and middle-school levels. In observed lessons at all levels, particularly at the high school, teacher-directed lessons diminished students’ opportunities to be active learners and to engage in higher-order thinking tasks connected to the real world. In observed classrooms, the review team found that the district has established positive classroom culture. In most observed classrooms, effective routines and positive supports were in place to ensure that students behave appropriately. However, districtwide in observed classrooms, inclusive practices designed to support the varied learning needs of all students were not implemented sufficiently to ensure that all students had access to the curriculum.

**Strengths**

The review team identified district strengths in all standards.

*Leadership and Governance*
The superintendent and the school committee have created a culture of collaboration to support the district’s efforts to improve student achievement. The district’s planning documents provide a clearly defined vision for improvement for the district as a whole and for each school individually.

*Curriculum and Instruction*
An established collaborative leadership model at the district and school levels promotes effective curricular and instructional practices.

*Assessment*
District and school leaders collect, analyze, and disseminate student performance, outcome, demographic, and participation data for district and school improvement planning and use data to inform decisions about programs, budgets, professional practice, and student learning goals. Elementary and middle-school teachers have structures and regularly scheduled time during the school day to analyze student performance data and use data to modify instruction and to inform appropriate interventions. The high school has a range of formative and summative assessments and technology to support the assessment program.

*Human Resources and Professional Development*
The district has taken concrete steps to increase the diversity of its professional staff.

*Student Support*
The district has implemented some promising practices for identifying and supporting students with disabilities and students who are struggling.

*Financial and Asset Management*
The development of the district’s budget and of its award-winning budget document is transparent, collaborative, and comprehensive. The district and the city have shown a commitment to providing up-to-date and educationally appropriate facilities and technology.

**Challenges and Areas for Growth**

As the district enters the second year of implementing its AIP, the following areas of growth bear attention.

* In observed classrooms districtwide, the quality of instruction was inconsistent.
* The district does not have a cohesive model for science instruction including adequate time for science at the elementary level.
* Teachers in the high school do not have common planning time. High-school teachers have limited time to collaborate and analyze student performance data to inform instructional planning and decision-making.
* The district has not achieved consistency in the implementation of its educator evaluation system.
* The district does not have a comprehensive professional development (PD) plan with clearly articulated and measurable goals, wide input from educators, and strategies for determining the effect of PD.
* The district has not created an environment in which all families and students feel welcomed, connected, and safe. The district has not established a system that supports rigorous learning and engagement for all its students.
* Despite district efforts to improve attendance, including hiring an attendance officer and whole-school attendance challenges with incentives, attendance remains an issue, especially at the high school.
* The district’s financial management involves some inefficiencies, including the use of two accounting packages and a dependence on manual accounting procedures.

**Recommendations**

To address these challenges, the team has the following recommendations:

* The district should continue to take steps to ensure that high-quality instruction is consistently implemented districtwide.
* The district should ensure that all high-school teachers have sufficient time to collaborate and analyze data to inform decisions about instructional planning and decision-making.
* The district should work with teachers and administrators to ensure that feedback in all stages of the evaluation process is instructive and contributes to professional growth and student achievement.
* The district should convene a professional development committee to review current offerings and develop a long-term plan for professional development linked to district and school improvement goals.
* The district should take steps to ensure that English language learners have access to the full curriculum, including high-quality, engaging learning opportunities.
* The district should redouble its efforts to improve climate and culture in the district so that all students feel safe, supported, and connected.
* The district should continue its efforts to improve student attendance. The district should review its initiatives to improve attendance and adjust efforts as needed. The district should consider that addressing attendance issues may involve a variety of wider initiatives such as improving instruction and its relevance to post-graduation goals; strengthening school climate; and building relationships with students’ families.
* District leaders and city officials are encouraged to discuss together improving and streamlining district accounting procedures particularly with respect to the two accounting software packages now in use and the access to financial data by cost center administrators.

Waltham 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 Waltham Public Schools was conducted from May 29–June 1, 2018. The site visit included 32.5 hours of interviews and focus groups with approximately 140 stakeholders, including school committee members, district administrators, school staff, students, students’ families, and teachers’ association representatives. The review team conducted 3 focus groups with 12 elementary-school teachers, 10 middle-school teachers, and 9 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 104 classrooms in 10 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**

Waltham has a mayor-council form of government and the mayor chairs the school committee The seven members of the school committee meet two times per month.

The current superintendent has been in the position since July 2015. The district leadership team includes the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, the administrator of pupil and personnel, the administrator of educational technology integration, the director of English language learning, the school business administrator, the human resources administrator, the director of facilities, and the grants and network administrator. Central office positions have been mostly stable in number over the past three years. The district has 10 principals leading 10 schools. There are 27 other school administrators, including assistant principals, housemasters, directors, and assistant directors. In the 2017–2018 school year, there were 502.4 teachers in the district.

In the 2017–2018 school year, 5,600 students were enrolled in the district’s 10 schools:

**Table 1: Waltham Public Schools**

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

| **School**  | **School Type** | **Grades Served** | **Enrollment** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Northeast Elementary  | ES | Pre-K–5 | 593 |
| Stanley Elementary | ES | Pre-K–5 | 432 |
| Dual Language Program | ES | K–1 | 79 |
| Fitzgerald Elementary | ES | K–5 | 438 |
| MacArthur Elementary | ES | K–5 | 440 |
| Plympton Elementary | ES | K–5 | 422 |
| Whittemore Elementary | ES | K–5 | 433 |
| Kennedy Middle | MS | 5–8 | 512 |
| McDevitt Middle | MS | 5–8 | 631 |
| Waltham Senior High  | HS |  9–12 | 1,620 |
| **Totals** | **10 schools** | **Pre-K-–12** | **5,600** |
| \*As of October 1, 2017 |

Between 2014 and 2018 overall student enrollment increased by 8.6 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 higher than the median in-district per-pupil expenditures for 32 K–12 districts of similar size (5,000–7,999 students) in fiscal year 2017: $19,840 as compared with $13,809 (see [District Analysis and Review Tool Detail: Staffing and Finance](http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/ese/programs/accountability/tools-and-resources/district-analysis-review-and-assistance/dart-for-districts-and-dart-for-schools.html)). Actual net school spending has been well above 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 0.4 point in ELA and by 2.8 points in math.**

| **Table 2: Waltham 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 | 1,246 | 489.6 | 488.5 | 1,248 | 486.5 | 488.1 |
| Econ. Dis. | 857 | 491.3 | 489.2 | 860 | 487.2 | 488.1 |
| SWD | 514 | 480.1 | 480.0 | 511 | 477.7 | 479.8 |
| ELLs | 514 | 483.9 | 484.9 | 518 | 482.9 | 486.8 |
| All | 2,331 | 498.7 | 499.1 | 2,334 | 496.0 | 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 2 percentage points in ELA (47 percent vs. 49 percent) and below the state rate by 7 percentage points in math (41 percent vs. 48 percent).**

* The percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations in ELA was above the state rate by 2 and 4 percentage points for high needs students and economically disadvantaged students, respectively, equal to the state rate for students with disabilities, and below the state rate by 4 percentage points for English language learners.
* The percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectation in math was below the state rate by 2 percentage points for economically disadvantaged students and by 4 to 8 percentage points for high needs students, students with disabilities, and English language learners.

| **Table 3: Waltham 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 | 1,246 | 29% | 27% | 2 | 1,248 | 23% | 27% | -4 |
| Econ. Dis. | 857 | 33% | 29% | 4 | 860 | 25% | 27% | -2 |
| SWD | 514 | 13% | 13% | 0 | 511 | 9% | 14% | -5 |
| ELLs | 514 | 19% | 23% | -4 | 518 | 18% | 26% | -8 |
| All | 2,331 | 47% | 49% | -2 | 2,334 | 41% | 48% | -7 |

**The percentage of all students scoring proficient or advanced on the MCAS assessment in 10th grade was 7 and 14 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 11 to 17 percentage points for high needs students, economically disadvantaged students, and English language learners, and below the state rate by 2 percentage points for students with disabilities.
* In math, the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced was below the state rate by 13 to 21 percentage points for high needs students, economically disadvantaged students, English language learners, and students with disabilities.

| **Table 4: Waltham 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 | 176 | 68% | 79% | -11 | 186 | 42% | 58% | -16 |
| Econ. Dis. | 123 | 68% | 81% | -13 | 131 | 47% | 60% | -13 |
| SWD | 59 | 66% | 68% | -2 | 63 | 29% | 42% | -13 |
| ELLs | 62 | 42% | 59% | -17 | 68 | 18% | 39% | -21 |
| All | 360 | 84% | 91% | -7 | 370 | 65% | 79% | -14 |

**Between 2014 and 2017, science proficiency for all students did not improve, improved by 1 percentage point for high needs students and English language learners, and declined by 3 percentage points for students with disabilities.**

| **Table 5: Waltham Public Schools****MCAS Science Percent Scoring Proficient or Advanced, 2014–2017** |
| --- |
| **Group** | **N (2017)** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** | **State (2017)** |
| High Needs | 554 | 31% | 31% | 30% | 32% | 1 | 31% |
| Econ. Dis. | 381 | -- | 39% | 36% | 35% | -- | 32% |
| SWD | 226 | 22% | 18% | 21% | 19% | -3 | 21% |
| ELLs | 178 | 15% | 11% | 14% | 16% | 1 | 20% |
| All | 1,096 | 51% | 50% | 51% | 51% | 0 | 53% |

**In ELA, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment was 2 percentage points below the state rate in grades 3-8 as a whole and 7 to 11 percentage points below the state rate in the 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades, and 2 to 11 percentage points above the state rate in the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades.**

**In math, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment was 7 percentage points below the state rate in grades 3–8 as a whole and 3 to 11 percentage points below the state rate in the 3rd through 8th grades.**

| **Table 6: Waltham Public Schools****Next-Generation MCAS ELA and Math Percent Meeting or Exceeding Expectations (M/E) in Grades 3–8, 2017** |
| --- |
| **Grade** | **N** | **ELA M/E** | **State ELA** | **Difference** | **N** | **Math M/E** | **State Math** | **Difference** |
| 3 | 432 | 36% | 47% | -11 | 433 | 44% | 49% | -5 |
| 4 | 416 | 39% | 48% | -9 | 415 | 40% | 49% | -9 |
| 5 | 407 | 42% | 49% | -7 | 410 | 35% | 46% | -11 |
| 6 | 365 | 53% | 51% | 2 | 364 | 42% | 50% | -8 |
| 7 | 348 | 58% | 50% | 8 | 351 | 44% | 47% | -3 |
| 8 | 363 | 60% | 49% | 11 | 361 | 44% | 48% | -4 |
| 3–8 | 2,331 | 47% | 49% | -2 | 2,334 | 41% | 48% | -7 |

**Between 2014 and 2017, in science, the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the MCAS assessment did not improve in the district as a whole, declined by 9 percentage points in the 5th grade, and improved by 7 and 5 percentage points in the 8th and 10th grades, respectively.**

| **Table 7: Waltham 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 | 52% | 47% | 42% | 43% | -9 | 46% |
| 8 | 360 | 34% | 30% | 40% | 41% | 7 | 40% |
| 10 | 327 | 68% | 73% | 72% | 73% | 5 | 74% |
| All | 1,096 | 51% | 50% | 51% | 51% | 0 | 53% |

**Between 2014 and 2017, in ELA, the median student growth percentile (SGP) improved by 19 points in the 8th grade and declined by 20.0 points in the 4th grade.**

| **Table 8: Waltham Public Schools****ELA Median Student Growth Percentile, 2014–2017** |
| --- |
| **Grade** | **N (2017)** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** | **State (2017)** |
| 3 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 4 | 377 | 64.0 | 58.0 | 51.0 | 44.0 | -20.0 | 50.0 |
| 5 | 368 | 61.0 | 59.0 | 61.0 | 59.0 | -2.0 | 50.0 |
| 6 | 335 | 64.0 | 60.0 | 70.0 | 64.0 | 0.0 | 50.0 |
| 7 | 320 | 56.0 | 49.0 | 48.0 | 57.0 | 1.0 | 50.0 |
| 8 | 327 | 58.0 | 61.0 | 58.0 | 77.0 | 19.0 | 50.0 |
| 10 | 291 | 54.0 | 57.0 | 66.0 | 53.0 | -1.0 | 50.0 |
| Changes in SGP of 10 points or more are considered meaningful. |

**Between 2014 and 2017, in math the median SGP improved by 17.0 to 20.0 points in the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades and declined by 12.0 points in the 5th grade.**

| **Table 9: Waltham Public Schools****Math Median Student Growth Percentile, 2014-2017** |
| --- |
| **Grade** | **N (2017)** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** | **State (2017)** |
| 3 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 4 | 376 | 50.0 | 56.0 | 60.0 | 53.0 | 3.0 | 50.0 |
| 5 | 369 | 52.0 | 36.0 | 44.0 | 40.0 | -12.0 | 50.0 |
| 6 | 333 | 48.0 | 31.0 | 59.0 | 65.0 | 17.0 | 50.0 |
| 7 | 318 | 47.5 | 52.0 | 56.0 | 66.0 | 18.5 | 50.0 |
| 8 | 324 | 49.0 | 46.0 | 59.0 | 69.0 | 20.0 | 50.0 |
| 10 | 295 | 55.5 | 52.0 | 51.0 | 54.0 | -1.5 | 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 16 to 55 percent in the 3rd grade, from 29 to 45 percent in the 4th grade, and from 37 to 51 percent in the 5th grade in the district’s elementary schools. The percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations were 48 and 59 percent in the 6th grade, 60 and 61 percent in the 7th grade, and 57 and 65 percent in the 8th grade in the district’s middle schools.**

| **Table 10: Waltham 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** |
| Stanley | 32% | 29% | 47% | -- | -- | -- | 36% |
| MacArthur | 39% | 45% | 51% | -- | -- | -- | 44% |
| Northeast | 39% | 45% | 37% | -- | -- | -- | 40% |
| Plympton | 43% | 35% | 37% | -- | -- | -- | 38% |
| Fitzgerald | 55% | 41% | 51% | -- | -- | -- | 48% |
| Whittemore | 16% | 44% | 41% | -- | -- | -- | 33% |
| Kennedy Middle | -- | -- | -- | 48% | 60% | 57% | 55% |
| McDevitt Middle | -- | -- | -- | 59% | 61% | 65% | 61% |
| District | 36% | 39% | 42% | 53% | 58% | 60% | 47% |
| 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 28 to 58 percent in the 3rd grade, from 14 to 49 percent in the 4th grade, and from 24 to 51 percent in the 5th grade in the district’s elementary schools. The percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations were 36 and 47 percent in the 6th grade, 37 and 57 percent in the 7th grade, and 43 and 46 percent in the 8th grade in the district’s middle schools.**

| **Table 11: Waltham 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** |
| Stanley | 28% | 14% | 38% | -- | -- | -- | 26% |
| MacArthur | 44% | 41% | 51% | -- | -- | -- | 45% |
| Northeast | 49% | 48% | 34% | -- | -- | -- | 44% |
| Plympton | 53% | 49% | 35% | -- | -- | -- | 45% |
| Fitzgerald | 58% | 43% | 42% | -- | -- | -- | 47% |
| Whittemore | 33% | 47% | 24% | -- | -- | -- | 35% |
| Kennedy Middle | -- | -- | -- | 36% | 57% | 43% | 45% |
| McDevitt Middle | -- | -- | -- | 47% | 37% | 46% | 43% |
| District | 44% | 40% | 35% | 42% | 44% | 44% | 41% |
| 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 Waltham Senior High was below the state rate by 5 and 13 percentage points in ELA and math, respectively**.

| **Table 12: Waltham Public Schools****MCAS ELA and Math Percent Scoring Proficient or Advanced in Grade 10, 2017** |
| --- |
| **School** | **ELA** | **Math** |
| Waltham Senior High | 86% | 66% |
| State | 91% | 79% |

**In science, the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the MCAS assessment ranged from 34 to 55 percent in the 5th grade in the district’s elementary schools, and was 39 and 42 percent in the district’s middle schools. Science proficiency in the 10th grade at Waltham Senior High was 74 percent.**

| **Table 13: Waltham Public Schools****MCAS Science Percent Scoring Proficient or Advanced by School and Grade, 2017** |
| --- |
| **School** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **10** | **Total** |
| Stanley | -- | -- | 34% | -- | -- | -- | -- | 34% |
| MacArthur | -- | -- | 49% | -- | -- | -- | -- | 49% |
| Northeast | -- | -- | 47% | -- | -- | -- | -- | 47% |
| Plympton | -- | -- | 55% | -- | -- | -- | -- | 55% |
| Fitzgerald | -- | -- | 43% | -- | -- | -- | -- | 43% |
| Whittemore | -- | -- | 42% | -- | -- | -- | -- | 42% |
| Kennedy Middle | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 39% | -- | 39% |
| McDevitt Middle | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 42% | -- | 42% |
| Waltham Senior High | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 74% | 74% |
| District | -- | -- | 43% | -- | -- | 41% | 73% | 51% |
| State | -- | -- | 46% | -- | -- | 40% | 74% | 53% |

**In ELA, the percentage of all students meeting or exceeding expectations on the Next-Generation MCAS assessment ranged from 33 to 61 percent in the district’s schools.**

* The percentage of high needs students meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 18 to 41 percent in the district’s schools.
* The percentage of economically disadvantaged students meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 17 to 48 percent in the district’s schools.
* The percentage of students with disabilities meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 0 to 22 percent in the district’s schools.
* The percentage of English language learners meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 7 to 26 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 26 to 47 percent in the district’s schools.**

* The percentage of high needs students meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 14 to 27 percent in the district’s schools.
* The percentage of economically disadvantaged students meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 14 to 29 percent in the district’s schools.
* The percentage of students with disabilities meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 0 to 31 percent in the district’s schools.
* The percentage of English language learners meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 5 to 27 percent in the district’s schools.

| **Table 14: Waltham 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** |
| Stanley | 36% | 25% | 28% | 6% | 26% | 26% | 14% | 14% | 8% | 9% |
| MacArthur | 44% | 20% | 23% | 0% | 17% | 45% | 19% | 23% | 2% | 8% |
| Northeast | 40% | 20% | 25% | 3% | 19% | 44% | 26% | 21% | 31% | 25% |
| Plympton | 38% | 18% | 17% | 10% | 21% | 45% | 24% | 22% | 10% | 19% |
| Fitzgerald | 48% | 29% | 37% | 16% | 14% | 47% | 25% | 28% | 9% | 27% |
| Whittemore | 33% | 26% | 28% | 3% | 22% | 35% | 27% | 28% | 0% | 26% |
| Kennedy Middle | 55% | 33% | 36% | 22% | 7% | 45% | 25% | 29% | 11% | 5% |
| McDevitt Middle | 61% | 41% | 48% | 19% | 19% | 43% | 22% | 27% | 9% | 11% |
| District | 47% | 29% | 33% | 13% | 19% | 41% | 23% | 25% | 9% | 18% |

**Between 2014 and 2017, ELA proficiency at Waltham Senior High declined by 5 percentage points for all students and by 4 and 12 percentage points for high needs students, English language learners, and students with disabilities.**

**Between 2014 and 2017, math proficiency at Waltham Senior High declined by 11 percentage points for all students and by 14 to 23 percentage points for high needs students, English language learners, and students with disabilities.**

| **Table 15: Waltham 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** |
| Waltham Senior High | 91% | 90% | 89% | 86% | -5 | 77% | 72% | 68% | 66% | -11 |
| High Needs | 82% | 78% | 75% | 70% | -12 | 59% | 51% | 43% | 44% | -15 |
| Econ. Dis. | -- | 84% | 89% | 71% | -- | -- | 62% | 53% | 48% | -- |
| ELLs | 48% | 33% | 46% | 44% | -4 | 41% | 10% | 25% | 18% | -23 |
| SWD | 77% | 75% | 88% | 70% | -7 | 44% | 39% | 36% | 30% | -14 |

**Between 2014 and 2017, in science, the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the MCAS assessment declined in four of the elementary schools by 4 to 37 percentage points and improved in two of the elementary schools by 6 and 19 percentage points. Science proficiency improved by 2 and 8 percentage points in the district’s middle schools, and by 5 percentage points at Waltham Senior High.**

* In 2017, science proficiency for high needs students ranged from 15 to 36 percent in the district’s elementary schools, was 22 and 23 percent in the district’s middle schools, and was 53 percent at Waltham Senior High.
* In 2017, science proficiency for economically disadvantaged students ranged from 22 to 41 percent in the district’s elementary schools, was 25 and 26 percent in the district’s middle schools, and was 57 percent at Waltham Senior High.
* In 2017, science proficiency for students with disabilities ranged from 0 to18 percent in the district’s elementary schools, was 15 and 16 percent in the district’s middle schools, and was 38 percent at Waltham Senior High.
* In 2017, science proficiency for English language learners ranged from 7 to 24 percent in the district’s elementary schools, was 5 and 15 percent in the district’s middle schools, and was 23 percent at Waltham Senior High.

| **Table 16 Waltham 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** |
| Stanley | 64 | 71% | 55% | 47% | 34% | -37 |
| High Needs | 36 | 58% | 47% | 27% | 22% | -36 |
| Econ. Dis. | 24 | -- | 38% | 38% | 25% | -- |
| SWD | 15 | -- | 43% | 14% | 13% | -- |
| ELLs | 15 | -- | 50% | 19% | 7% | -- |
| MacArthur | 51 | 53% | 64% | 51% | 49% | -4 |
| High Needs | 22 | 30% | 33% | 32% | 32% | 2 |
| Econ. Dis. | 17 | -- | 44% | 58% | 35% | -- |
| SWD | 13 | 20% | 0% | 0% | 0% | -20 |
| ELLs | 8 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Northeast | 62 | 53% | 55% | 48% | 47% | -6 |
| High Needs | 27 | 22% | 26% | 40% | 15% | -7 |
| Econ. Dis. | 18 | -- | 36% | 45% | 22% | -- |
| SWD | 12 | 15% | 8% | 18% | 8% | -7 |
| ELLs | 13 | -- | -- | -- | 8% | -- |
| Plympton | 71 | 49% | 43% | 38% | 55% | 6 |
| High Needs | 39 | 37% | 28% | 17% | 36% | -1 |
| Econ. Dis. | 27 | -- | 31% | 19% | 41% | -- |
| SWD | 15 | 31% | 21% | 12% | 13% | -18 |
| ELLs | 17 | -- | 7% | 9% | 24% | -- |
| Fitzgerald | 77 | 72% | 55% | 56% | 43% | -29 |
| High Needs | 38 | 50% | 24% | 28% | 26% | -24 |
| Econ. Dis. | 22 | -- | 29% | 25% | 27% | -- |
| SWD | 11 | -- | 14% | 20% | 18% | -- |
| ELLs | 16 | -- | -- | 36% | 19% | -- |
| Whittemore | 59 | 23% | 22% | 6% | 42% | 19 |
| High Needs | 40 | 9% | 13% | 0% | 28% | 19 |
| Econ. Dis. | 30 | -- | 19% | 0% | 33% | -- |
| SWD | 7 | 6% | 0% | -- | -- | -- |
| ELLs | 27 | 5% | 8% | 0% | 15% | 10 |
| Kennedy Middle | 165 | 37% | 32% | 37% | 39% | 2 |
| High Needs | 78 | 18% | 16% | 14% | 22% | 4 |
| Econ. Dis. | 55 | -- | 24% | 20% | 25% | -- |
| SWD | 32 | 20% | 6% | 10% | 16% | -4 |
| ELLs | 19 | 4% | 0% | 4% | 5% | 1 |
| McDevitt Middle | 191 | 34% | 30% | 45% | 42% | 8 |
| High Needs | 98 | 20% | 15% | 28% | 23% | 3 |
| Econ. Dis. | 70 | -- | 26% | 33% | 26% | -- |
| SWD | 47 | 9% | 0% | 10% | 15% | 6 |
| ELLs | 13 | -- | -- | -- | 15% | -- |
| Waltham Senior High | 323 | 69% | 74% | 74% | 74% | 5 |
| High Needs | 144 | 49% | 54% | 51% | 53% | 4 |
| Econ. Dis. | 102 | -- | 65% | 65% | 57% | -- |
| SWD | 53 | 33% | 37% | 61% | 38% | 5 |
| ELLs | 39 | 33% | 14% | 21% | 23% | -10 |

**Between 2014 and 2017, the district’s four-year cohort graduation rate for all students declined 1.2 percentage points, from 84.7 percent in 2014 to 83.5 percent in 2017, below the state rate of 88.3 percent. In 2017, the four-year cohort graduation rate for each subgroup was below the state rate, except for African American students and Asian students.**

| **Table 17: Waltham Public Schools****Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rates, 2014–2017** |
| --- |
| **Group** | **N** **(2017)** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** | **State (2017)** |
| High needs | 252 | 77.3% | 76.8% | 78.1% | 75.0% | -2.3 | 80.0% |
| Economically Disadvantaged\* | 207 | 77.6% | 77.5% | 77.8% | 77.8% | 0.2 | 79.0% |
| ELLs | 51 | 54.3% | 48.7% | 55.1% | 47.1% | -7.2 | 63.4% |
| SWD | 106 | 75.6% | 74.5% | 77.6% | 68.9% | -6.7 | 72.8% |
| African American | 60 | 78.9% | 73.8% | 92.6% | 80.0% | 1.1 | 80.0% |
| Asian | 22 | 96.0% | 90.9% | 89.7% | 100% | 4.0 | 94.1% |
| Hispanic or Latino | 121 | 73.8% | 77.5% | 70.6% | 69.4% | -4.4 | 74.4% |
| Multi-Race, non-Hisp./Lat. | 10 | 92.9% | 87.5% | 90.0% | 80.0% | -12.9 | 85.2% |
| White | 187 | 89.7% | 87.9% | 92.7% | 92.0% | 2.3 | 92.6% |
| All | 401 | 84.7% | 82.7% | 84.6% | 83.5% | -1.2 | 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 3.6 percentage points for all students, from 83.5 percent in 2013 to 87.1 percent in 2016, below the state rate of 89.8 percent. The five-year cohort graduation rate improved by 2.2 to 10.6 percentage points for each subgroup with reportable trend data, except African-American students.**

| **Table 18: Waltham Public Schools****Five-Year Cohort Graduation Rates, 2013–2016** |
| --- |
| **Group** | **N** **(2016)** | **2013** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **4-yr Change** | **State (2016)** |
| High needs | 233 | 76.2% | 79.7% | 79.0% | 81.1% | 4.9 | 82.9% |
| Economically Disadvantaged\* | 176 | 77.0% | 80.6% | 79.7% | 80.7% | 3.7 | 82.1% |
| ELLs | 49 | 50.0% | 60.0% | 53.8% | 59.2% | 9.2 | 70.9% |
| SWD | 98 | 69.0% | 76.8% | 77.4% | 79.6% | 10.6 | 76.5% |
| African American | 27 | 97.5% | 81.6% | 76.2% | 92.6% | -4.9 | 83.4% |
| Asian | 29 | 87.5% | 96.0% | 90.9% | 89.7% | 2.2 | 94.8% |
| Hispanic or Latino | 126 | 68.8% | 77.7% | 79.3% | 76.2% | 7.4 | 76.8% |
| Multi-Race, non-Hisp./Lat. | 10 | -- | 92.9% | 100% | 90.0% | -- | 87.4% |
| White | 164 | 88.9% | 89.7% | 89.1% | 93.9% | 5.0 | 93.5% |
| All  | 357 | 83.5% | 86.1% | 84.4% | 87.1% | 3.6 | 89.8% |
| \* Five-year cohort graduation rate for students from low income families used for 2013, and 2014 rates. |

**In 2017, the in-school suspension rate for all students was 2.5 percent, above the state rate of 1.7 percent. The in-school suspension rates for each subgroup with reportable trend data were above the state rate, except for multi-race, non-Hispanic or Latino students.**

| **Table 19: Waltham Public Schools****In-School Suspension Rates by Subgroup, 2014–2017** |
| --- |
| **Group** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** | **State (2017)** |
| High Needs | 1.2% | 4.8% | 4.1% | 3.8% | 2.6 | 2.6% |
| Economically Disadvantaged\* | 1.2% | 4.4% | 3.1% | 3.8% | 2.6 | 2.9% |
| ELLs | 0.6% | 3.2% | 3.8% | 3.1% | 2.5 | 1.7% |
| SWD | 1.8% | 7.5% | 5.7% | 5.0% | 3.2 | 3.1% |
| African American | 2.5% | 5.0% | 3.6% | 4.3% | 1.8 | 3.3% |
| Asian | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 0.5% |
| Hispanic or Latino | 1.0% | 5.0% | 5.6% | 3.3% | 2.3 | 2.5% |
| Multi-Race, non-Hispanic or Latino | 0.0% | 8.0% | 2.0% | 1.3% | 1.3 | 2.1% |
| White | 0.6% | 2.3% | 1.0% | 1.6% | 1.0 | 1.3% |
| All  | 0.9% | 3.6% | 3.0% | 2.5% | 1.6 | 1.7% |

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

**In 2017, the district’s out-of-school suspension rate for all students was 2.5 percent, below the state rate of 2.8 percent. The out-of-school suspension rates for each subgroup with reportable trend data ranged from 1.5 to 4.7 percent and were below the state rate for each group, except for English language learners.**

| **Table 20: Waltham Public Schools****Out-of-School Suspension Rates by Subgroup, 2014–2017** |
| --- |
| **Group** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** | **State (2017)** |
| High Needs | 3.4% | 3.1% | 3.1% | 3.9% | 0.5 | 4.5% |
| Economically Disadvantaged\* | 3.4% | 2.9% | 2.5% | 3.6% | 0.2 | 5.3% |
| ELLs | 2.8% | 1.5% | 3.2% | 4.2% | 1.4 | 3.8% |
| SWD | 5.6% | 5.3% | 4.6% | 4.7% | -0.9 | 5.5% |
| African American | 5.1% | 3.2% | 2.3% | 4.3% | -0.8 | 6.3% |
| Asian | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 0.7% |
| Hispanic or Latino | 2.9% | 2.5% | 3.6% | 3.5% | 0.6 | 5.2% |
| Multi-Race, non-Hispanic or Latino | 4.1% | 5.8% | 3.3% | 2.5% | -1.6 | 3.1% |
| White | 1.4% | 1.8% | 1.0% | 1.5% | 0.1 | 1.6% |
| All  | 2.3% | 2.2% | 2.1% | 2.5% | 0.2 | 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 3.0 percent, above the state rate of 1.8 percent. The dropout rates for each subgroup with reportable trend data ranged from 0.0 to 12.6 percent and were above or equal to the state rate for each subgroup except for multi-race students and White students.**

| **Table 21: Waltham Public Schools****Dropout Rates by Subgroup, 2014–2017** |
| --- |
| **Group** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** | **State (2017)** |
| High Needs | 5.8% | 4.4% | 4.1% | 5.5% | -0.3 | 3.5% |
| Economically disadvantaged\* | 5.4% | 4.2% | 4.5% | 3.6% | -1.8 | 3.6% |
| ELLs | 10.2% | 7.7% | 9.8% | 12.6% | 2.4 | 6.5% |
| SWD | 8.0% | 3.1% | 2.0% | 3.8% | -4.2 | 3.3% |
| African American | 2.6% | 2.7% | 1.8% | 4.3% | 1.7 | 2.9% |
| Asian | 0.0% | 1.2% | 0.0% | 1.3% | 1.3 | 0.6% |
| Hispanic or Latino | 6.8% | 3.9% | 3.8% | 6.4% | -0.4 | 4.2% |
| Multi-Race, non-Hispanic or Latino | 2.8% | 11.8% | 2.6% | 0.0% | -2.8 | 1.7% |
| White | 2.7% | 0.7% | 0.5% | 0.0% | -2.7 | 1.1% |
| All  | 3.8% | 2.3% | 1.8% | 3.0% | -0.8 | 1.8% |
| \*Dropout rates for students from low income families used for 2014 rates. |

Leadership and Governance

***Contextual Background***

Under the leadership of the mayor, Waltham school committee members are informed and knowledgeable about their responsibilities. They work together on policies and the school budget to support the district’s and the schools’ improvement priorities and initiatives. The school committee supports the superintendent and annually evaluates his performance as he leads and manages the district and holds him accountable for improvements in teaching and learning in the district. The school committee, town officials, and the district have a strong working relationship.

The superintendent promotes collaboration and joint responsibility for student learning in the district. He has a positive relationship with school committee members, town officials, and school leaders. The superintendent delegates educational and operational leadership to central office administrators, principals, and program leaders, as appropriate. He collaborates with all school leaders and monitors the progress of the district and its students during monthly meetings and classroom visits.

Principals collaborate with central office administrators, school leaders, and department directors to manage and lead the schools. Instructional leadership teams made up of administrators and teachers play an important role in decision-making in each school. Instructional coaches at the elementary and middle schools play a vital role in supporting and guiding teachers about curricular and instructional decisions.

The district’s planning documents provide a clearly defined vision for improvement for the district as a whole and for each school individually. Although the district’s planning documents are based on an analysis of student performance data, they do not consistently include disaggregated data and analysis. The district’s 2017–2022 Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP) includes priorities and initiatives, student achievement data, SMART goals, action steps to address initiatives, process benchmarks, evidence of change, and resources to support implementation. The school improvement plans, called Quality School Plans (QSPs), are modeled after the district’s AIP. The principal, the school council, and the instructional leadership team in each school develop the QSP. Initiatives and action plans guide the schools’ work to improve student performance. District and school leaders periodically report progress toward improvement goals to the school committee, families, and the community.

The superintendent and his leadership team analyze data to make budget and program decisions based on efficiencies, return on investment, analysis of data, and the needs of each school. The district has a formal budget process, and the superintendent and his finance team provide enough information to the school committee, so that the committee can appropriately allocate resources to support the district.

**Strength Findings**

* + 1. **The superintendent and the school committee have created a culture of collaboration to support the district’s efforts to improve student achievement.**
1. Interviews and a document review indicated that the superintendent had a supporting and trusting relationship with the school committee.

The superintendent told the review team, “I feel remarkably supported by the school committee.”

1. In turn, school committee members expressed the belief that the superintendent kept them informed so that they could work collaboratively.

 3. A school committee member said, “There is a sense of trust on both sides.” During an early re-districting effort, the superintendent “tapped into key people” to achieve the goal of re-districting students. This helped to develop trust between the school committee and the superintendent.

4. One school committee member characterized the relationship with the superintendent as excellent.

 5. Committee members said that they were respectful and kept in mind that he was the superintendent, but noted they were not afraid to express their opinions or inform the superintendent of community concerns.

 6. In the district’s self-assessment submitted in advance of the onsite review, the district rated focused school committee governance as “Very well” described by the indicator “[the school committee] works well with the superintendent on policy and budget matters.” (Possible answers were "Very well,” “Well,” “Somewhat well,” or “Not at all well.”)

One school committee member said that budget sessions were helpful to understand how the budget process worked. Another member told the team that the superintendent and the school committee reviewed a new policy together and decided where the policy would fit in the policy manual.

1. Interviews and a document review indicated that the superintendent and the school committee had the same priorities to improve the Waltham school system.
	* 1. The district’s five strategic priorities drive the district’s 2017–2022 Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP). The theory of action in the AIP states: “If we deliver (1) high-quality core instruction for all students; (2) meet the needs of our diverse learners; (3) provide innovative enrichment programming for all; (4) support, retain, cultivate strong teachers and leaders to stay in our system; and (5) truly engage families and community in our core work then we will deliver the high-quality education to all students that our Waltham students deserve and will improve outcomes and access across the system for all students.”
		2. The superintendent told team members, “The five strategic priorities are as important to the school committee as they are to me.”

 **C.** The superintendent and the school committee use achievement and enrollment data to keep informed of student performance and district growth.

1. When asked about data, school committee members told the interviewers that they used data in making decisions.

1. One member stated, “Data drove the strategic plan and all those goals. That drove all the individual [quality school] plans.”
2. Another member said that department administrators and principals made presentations at school committee meetings, noting “they always used graphs with data like MCAS.”
	1. A review of school committee meetings indicated that the school committee also received data about graduation rates and advanced placement scores.
3. School committee members told the team that they received data about enrollment and class size monthly. They noted that when Quality School Plans were presented at committee meetings, “We looked at the growth percentiles of students.”

 **D.** The school committee annually evaluates the performance of the superintendent based on summative performance standards and his professional goals and holds him accountable for improvement of the district.

**Impact**: Trusting, supporting, and collaborative relationships provide a foundation for the superintendent and the school committee to work together to solve problems and make decisions in the best interest of the district’s students.

1. **The district’s planning documents provide a clearly defined vision for improvement for the district as a whole and for each school individually.**

 **A.** The Waltham Public Schools Accelerated Improvement Plan 2017–2022 guides the district’s steps for achieving excellence and equity.

 1. The plan consists of the following components: mission, vision, strategic priorities and strategic initiatives, goals and questions about key evidence of change, action steps, process benchmarks, measurable change benchmarks, and resources to support the implementation of the plan.

2. The goals in the AIP are SMART goals.

* 1. For example, one of the goals in the Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP) states that by spring 2022, 90 percent of kindergarten students will read at Level D as measured by the Fountas & Pinnell reading benchmark system.
	2. The AIP also includes MCAS-driven SMART goals across all grade levels and performance goals for advanced placement (AP) exams.

 **B.** Each district school develops a three-year improvement plan called a Quality School Plan (QSP).

1. The superintendent told the team, “Each QSP sets academic, equity, and engagement goals.”

2. The principal and his/her instructional leadership team (ILT) develop school plans and share plans with school councils. The ILT is generally composed of the principal, school and department leaders, teachers, and coaches. Plans are shared with additional teachers and educators at staff or grade-level meetings.

 3. Principals stated that teachers were involved in the development of the QSPs, noting that principals and ILTs developed goals for the school.

 a. Elementary and middle-school teachers told review team members that teachers were involved in developing the QSPs whether they served on school councils or on an ILT.

 b. One teacher stated that teacher leaders on the ILT represented all grade-level teachers, special education teachers, and ESL teachers.

 c. Another teacher stated, “We looked at them [the QSPs] and talked about them and the QSPs were presented at a faculty meeting.”

 4. The review team was told that the schools each had a three-year improvement plan, based on district goals, but set measurable goals each year, to make sure the schools were progressing from year to year.

 **C.** Interviews and a document review indicated that district and school leaders developed the district’s Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP) and the schools’ QSPs based on analysis of student performance data.

1. District and school leaders said that principals and their instructional leadership teams (ILTs) developed QSPs based on data analysis.

2. The development of the QSPs is driven by key questions about student performance data, including:

 a. What pops out at you about your data?

 b. If data remains constant, what are the possible consequences for our students?

 c. What patterns do you see in your data that represent strengths and weaknesses?

 3. One elementary QSP has a goal to reduce the MCAS assessment ELA and math gaps between high needs students and non-high needs students in half by 2020.

 4. One middle-school QSP has a goal to increase the percentage of students with disabilities meeting or exceeding expectations on the math and ELA MCAS by 2019.

 **D.** The superintendent initiated an inclusive process to develop a long-term strategic plan.

1. The superintendent told the interviewers, “We invited a large group to help us craft our new district improvement plan… students, teachers, administrators, school committee members, and members of the community.”

2. Once the draft of the plan was completed, the school committee discussed the five-year plan in public session.

 3. The development of the long-term strategic plan grew out of the superintendent’s 2016 entry plan entitled: “Preliminary Findings and Plan for Strategic Development.” In his entry plan, the superintendent identified the district’s strengths and areas for improvement.

 a. As a result of his findings, the superintendent developed a theory of action that addresses the following: defining central office roles to support principals as instructional leaders; helping principals move from managers to instructional leaders; improving the instructional practice of teachers; and improving learning outcomes for all students.

**E.** Each year the superintendent and his leadership team discuss and share the district’s priorities with principals, assistant principals, coaches, and teacher leaders at a summer administrative institute.

**F.** Each district school presents annual updates about progress toward QSP goals to the school committee.

**Impact**: District and school plans that are developed through an inclusive process and include a clearly defined vision, goals, and priorities for action help teachers and administrators to focus their efforts on instruction and programs that have the most impact on student outcomes and achievement.

Curriculum and Instruction

***Contextual Background***

While the superintendent plays a central role in setting district priorities relating to a rigorous curriculum and high-quality standards-based instruction, the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction has direct responsibility for the district’s curricula. The assistant superintendent provides oversight to the district’s eight content directors who provide leadership in their respective content areas: K–5 director in ELA; K–12 directors in fine arts, athletics/physical education, and mathematics; and 6–12 directors in career and technical education (CTE), English, history and social studies, and science/health education. At the school level, principals along with their instructional leadership teams (ILTs) as well as literacy coaches in kindergarten through grade 5 and math coaches in kindergarten through grade 8 provide curricular, instructional, and assessment support to teachers.

A districtwide curriculum committee selected two literacy programs to pilot in kindergarten through grade 2, *Expeditionary Learning* (*EL*) from Engage NY and *Wit and Wisdom* (from Great Minds), with the goal of adopting a districtwide program by January 2019. The district uses a guided reading model for literacy and *Fundations* for phonics in kindergarten through grade 3.In ELA in grades 3–5, the district uses *EL* modules with units. In math in kindergarten through grade 7, the district uses Engage NY, and in grade 8, the College Preparatory Mathematics,(CPM).

At all levels, teachers have access to online curriculum documents (curriculum maps, standards, units, and resources) through Google Sites. Google Drive is the district’s document management system to store, share assignments, and collaborate. The district's teachers use Google Classroom as a learning management tool for sharing resources and online assignments with students. The district has rolled out a one-to-one Chromebook initiative in grades 6–11. At the time of the onsite in late May/early June 2018, the district planned to implement a one-to-one Chromebook initiative in grades 5–12 in September 2018.

The district’s one high school is a comprehensive high school offering 10 Chapter 74 CTVE (career technical vocational education) programs for its students with plans to expand programs to include health services and programming and web design. In September of 2018, the high school is set to pilot the Changemaker Academy for 80 grade 9 students described as reflecting the makeup of the student body. Teachers in the Academy will have common planning time and will develop interdisciplinary themes for project-based learning.

A key challenge the district faces is meeting its priority to consistently deliver high-quality core instruction for all its students. The review team observed inconsistency in setting objectives for learning, student engagement with content and with higher-order thinking tasks, and appropriately meeting the varied learning needs of all students. Also, the district has not established a system that supports rigorous learning opportunities and full access to the curriculum and academic programs for English language learners in the district. (See the Student Support standard below.) The district does not have a cohesive model for science instruction including adequate time for science at the elementary level. In addition, the district has not aligned its science curriculum with the 2016 Massachusetts Science and Technology/Engineering Framework.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Strength Finding**

**1. The district has established a collaborative leadership model at the district and school levels that promotes effective curricular and instructional practices.**

* 1. While the superintendent plays an overarching role in setting direction and monitoring district priorities relating to curriculum and instruction, the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction provides direct oversight for curriculum and instruction.[[3]](#footnote-3) The assistant superintendent supervises the work of district content directors. The superintendent supervises principals, and the principals supervise assistant principals.

1. Content directors provide leadership for the standards and curriculum in their specific content areas, including scope and sequence and curriculum maps.

* + - 1. Content directors are focused on the standards of their subject area and ensure that the depth and coverage are appropriate, and that curriculum is aligned with the standards. They establish priorities and monitor the taught curriculum through supervision and observations of teachers in their content area.

i. Content directors hold monthly curriculum meetings for departments at all levels, plan professional development (PD), and lead study groups to adjust or align curriculum. In addition, they help to ensure the vertical and horizontal alignment of the curriculum.

* + 1. Both the superintendent and the assistant superintendent facilitate monthly PD meetings for content directors, principals, and assistant principals, who make up the district’s Instructional Leadership Team (ILT). PD includes collaborative walkthroughs focused on looking for evidence of standards-based instructional practices. Participants use the district’s instructional practice guides (IPGs) in ELA, math, science, and social studies. District leaders told the team that IPGs were the most important tool for meeting the district’s priority to deliver high-quality instruction for all students.

a. The team was told that the district’s theory of action was that the district provided PD to the leadership team who in turn would take what they learned to classroom teachers.

b. Principals said that this collaboration gave them a better understanding of the curriculum and the district’s expectations for teaching and learning. For example, in mathematics instruction principals look for a focus on concepts, procedures, and application.

 i. In addition, principals told the team that the assistant superintendent sent memos to directors and principals about curricular and instructional practices observed during walkthroughs.

* + 1. The assistant superintendent oversees the district’s curriculum review process; the process is standards driven and guided by directors along with literacy and math coaches and teachers.
	1. At the school level, particularly at the elementary and middle schools, principals, directors, coaches, and teachers collaborate to support aligned curricular and instructional practices.
		1. Principals conduct collaborative walkthroughs with directors in their schools and work with directors to ensure that they use similar language and have similar expectations about content-specific curriculum and instruction.
		2. Elementary and middle-school principals regularly collaborate with literacy and math coaches on their ILTs. Every elementary school has a math coach and a literacy coach while the middle schools share one math coach.
			1. The team was told that the roles and responsibilities of literacy and math coaches varied by school. However, all math and literacy coaches are focused on standards including what they are and what students should learn at each grade level. Coaches help teachers to unpack the standards and plan curriculum.
			2. Coaches also provide coaching cycles and work with two teachers who volunteer to participate in a coaching cycle. Coaches observe, model, and co-teach lessons and look at students’ work with teachers. Coaches also provide PD.
		3. Elementary principals debrief on alternate weeks with a math coach or a literacy coach while middle-school principals have weekly debriefs with the math coach. Math coaches use this time to discuss assessment results, re-teaching plans, and results of re-teaching plans.
		4. Elementary principals and teachers attend grade-level meetings led by literacy or math coaches where pacing, standards, and instructional practices are addressed. Similarly, middle-school principals, directors, and teachers attend grade-level content-based common planning time (CPT). The math coach facilitates CPT, which is focused on the teaching and learning cycle.
1. Regular structured opportunities for K–5 literacy and K–8 math coaches to meet across the district with directors and the district’s elementary math coach[[4]](#footnote-4) support vertical and horizontal alignment.
	* 1. The team was told that literacy coaches met twice per month with the K–5 ELA director and meetings were focused on unpacking the standards, and horizontal and vertical alignment. Similarly, math coaches meet twice monthly as a group with the district’s elementary math coach, and with the K–12 director of mathematics.

**Impact**: By establishing an effective, collaborative approach to the district’s curricular and instructional practices, the district is providing the guidance and support necessary to provide high-quality teaching and learning and improve student achievement.

**Challenges and Areas for Growth**

**In observed classrooms districtwide, the quality of instruction was inconsistent.**

 **A. Focus Area #1: Learning Objectives & Expectations** In most observed classrooms, teachers demonstrated knowledge of their subject matter. The team found a lower incidence of the use of student learning objectives, classroom activities aligned with learning objectives, and frequent checks for student understanding including feedback to students and adjustments to instruction at the high school than at the elementary and middle-school levels.

 1. In 61 percent of observed elementary classes, in 59 percent of middle-school classes, and in only 46 percent of high-school classes, there was sufficient and compelling evidence that teachers ensured that students understood what they were learning and why (Instructional Inventory characteristic #2). In addition, in observed classrooms districtwide the team did not see the use of language objectives, an essential component of Sheltered English Immersion practices.

 a. The team was told that setting clear instructional goals was an expectation at the elementary and middle-school levels, although it was not an established schoolwide expectation at the high school.

 b. In many observed elementary and middle-school classes, the team noted examples of how teachers shared and explained learning objectives. For example, elementary teachers used “I can” statements to share objectives with students. Similarly, middle-school teachers shared and/or posted objectives. When asked by review team members, students in these classes could tell observers what they were learning and why.

 b. In contrast, in the majority of observed high-school classes, the review team found limited use of learning objectives. While agendas were often displayed, learning objectives were not present or unclear. When learning objectives were provided, teachers missed opportunities to explain why they were important.

 2. The review team found sufficient and compelling evidence that teachers used appropriate classroom activities well-matched to learning objectives (characteristic #3) in 70 percent of observed elementary classes, in 54 percent of middle-school classes, and in 46 percent of high-school classes.

 a. One example of a teacher structuring classroom activities to match learning objectives was observed in a grade 8 science class where the objective was to compare and contrast shoreline erosion types. Students completed varied activities all supporting the learning objective, including vocabulary development activities, photography, and research on Chromebooks.

 b. In classrooms where activities to support learning objectives were limited, teachers relied on a single activity, such as questions and answers, filling out a worksheet, or note-taking to support learning objectives. In these classes, students were not given sufficient opportunities to explore content with challenging learning activities. For example, in an ESL/ELA class, the teacher provided all the contextual information to the students, not giving students an opportunity to obtain information independently.

 3. In 58 percent of observed elementary classes, in 73 percent of middle-school classes, and in only 46 percent of high-school classes, the review team found sufficient and compelling evidence of teachers checking for understanding and making adjustments to instruction (characteristic #4).

 a. In observed classes in which teachers effectively checked for understanding, teachers circulated the room checking in with individuals, pairs, or small groups and providing feedback, review, and clarification. The team observed teachers’ use of whiteboards to check for students’ understanding. The team noted examples of teachers stopping to re-teach when required and the use of random calling to check for understanding.

 b. Although the team noted examples of teachers effectively checking for understanding and adjusting instruction in observed high-school classes, in a majority of observed high-school classes, the team found ineffective questioning techniques, an absence of targeted questions, limited use of random calling to check for understanding, and limited adjustment of instruction. For example, in a grade 7 math class, the teacher checked in repeatedly with students but made few adjustments to instruction.

**B. Focus Area #2: Student Engagement & Higher-Order Thinking** In observed lessons at all levels, particularly at the high school, teacher-directed lessons diminished students’ opportunities to be active learners and to engage in higher-order thinking tasks connected to the real world.

1. The review team found sufficient and compelling evidence of students assuming responsibility to learn and being engaged in the lesson (characteristic #5) in 71 percent of observed elementary classes, in 64 percent of middle-school classes, and in 54 percent of high-school classes.

 a. In classes in which students were directly engaged in content, they were working independently, in pairs or small groups, reading, writing, leading discussions, acting, or working on group projects. For example, grade 5 science students were completing a project in groups and students in each group were responsible for a specific task to complete the project.

 b. In some observed classes, the review team noted missed opportunities for teachers to structure lessons so that students would do most of the thinking. In these classes, students copied from whiteboards or screens or sat while teachers lectured; students were not given opportunities to engage in content in any meaningful way.

 2. In 55 percent of observed elementary classes, in 50 percent of middle-school classes, and in only 42 percent of high-school classes, there was sufficient and compelling evidence that students were engaged in higher-order thinking such as analysis, synthesis, problem-solving, evaluation or application of new knowledge (characteristic #6).

 a. The team noted many examples of students engaging in higher-order thinking tasks. For example, in some math classes, the focus was on conceptual knowledge and students were required to explain their thinking fully and analyze data, solve problems, and apply concepts and knowledge to new multi-step projects. In some classes, students designed science projects requiring synthesis of knowledge, skills and concepts. In a grade 8 ELA class, students portrayed changes in characterization and plot through the creation of a mini-movie.

 b. While the team noted examples of high-school students engaged in higher-order thinking tasks such as problem solving in math, or writing synthesis essays in ELA, the majority of observed high-school classes relied on teacher-directed lessons using questions and answers as the predominant instructional strategy. Students took notes or answered low-level questions focused on a recall of facts from text or simple computation.

 3. The review team found sufficient and compelling evidence that students communicated their ideas and thinking with each other (characteristic #7) in 54 percent of observed elementary classes, in 60 percent of middle-school classes, and in 46 percent of high-school classes.

 a. In many observed elementary and middle-school classes, the review team noted examples of students sharing their thinking about content in pair work and in small groups. In elementary classes, the review team noted examples of the use of “turn and talk” as a strategy for students to share ideas. At both levels, the team noted some examples of students using academic discourse during these exchanges.

 b. In contrast, in most observed high-school classes, exchanges about content were limited. In these classes, teachers directed questions to students, but students had limited opportunities to exchange ideas about content with each other. The team did not observe a single high-school class where students engaged consistently and deeply in conversations about content.

 4. In 59 percent of observed elementary classes, in 73 percent of middle-school classes, and in 54 percent of high-school classes, the review team found sufficient and compelling evidence that students had opportunities to engage in meaningful, real-world tasks (characteristic #8).

 a. At the elementary level, students worked on a project about the cleanup of the Charles River in Massachusetts that included landforms, climate, and photos. They discussed what it meant to be a friend and read about friendships. They used poetry to reflect on a recent field trip and worked on math problems based on real-world examples.

 b. In middle-school classes, the team noted some examples of real-world hands-on science lessons, including project-based learning that involved building an automated greenhouse with programmed lights. Other real-world projects included a design-a-house project, a project on erosion, and one on volcanoes. In addition, in an ELA class, students related real -life experiences to fictional text and in math, student-generated data was used for a graphing project.

 c. Examples of real-world tasks observed in high-school classes included students in an ELA class writing essays on the pros and cons of the death penalty. In science, students conducted experiments and studied real-world topics, such as the food chain.

**C. Focus Area #3: Inclusive Practice & Classroom Culture** The review team characterized classrooms across the district as warm, respectful, and orderly with students and teachers having positive interactions. In most observed classrooms, effective routines and positive supports were in place to ensure that students behave appropriately. However, districtwide, in observed classrooms, inclusive practices designed to support the varied learning needs of all students were not implemented sufficiently to ensure that all students had access to the curriculum.

 1. The review team found sufficient and compelling evidence that the teacher ensures that students engage in challenging tasks regardless of learning needs (characteristic # 9) in 50 percent of observed elementary classes, in only 28 percent of middle-school classes, and in just 35 percent of high-school classes.

 a. In observed elementary classes, the review team noted many examples of how support for students’ varied needs was being met. The team observed a number of full-inclusion classes with paraprofessionals, including special education paraprofessionals, assisting students in some classes. In addition, in some observed classes flexible groupings enabled teachers to provide small-group support and/or one-on-one support to students.

b. In observed middle- and high-school classes, the review team noted a few classes where students’ varied needs were met in small-group work or through projects where students had choices for assignments. For example, in a high-school CTVE (career technical vocational education) television production class, English language learners were able to participate fully in a silent film project.

 c. While the review team noted paraprofessionals in a small number of observed middle- and high-school classes to support students’ diverse needs, in most classes observed, lessons were the same for all students. In addition, the team did not observe a single class at the middle and high-school levels where content vocabulary was addressed to meet the linguistic needs of students.

 2. In 63 percent of observed elementary classes, in only 45 percent of middle-school classes, and only 27 percent of high-school classes, there was sufficient and compelling evidence that teachers used a variety of instructional strategies (characteristic #10).

 a. At the elementary level, observed lessons contained a range of strategies, manipulatives, and resources. For example, students often worked in small groups or pairs and used a variety of resources such as whiteboards, graphic organizers, and word walls to support their linguistic needs. Students had access to online programs and used Chromebooks routinely.

 b. In some observed middle- and high-school classes, students worked individually, in pairs, and in whole-group activities and assignments. However, in most observed middle- and high-school classes, the teacher relied on one approach or format.

 3. In 96 percent of observed elementary classes, in 82 percent of middle-school classes, and in 84 percent of high-school classes, there was sufficient and compelling evidence that classroom routines and positive supports were in place to ensure that students behave appropriately (characteristic #11).

 a. The review team noted that rituals, routines, and responses were firmly in place in almost all observed elementary classes. Teachers used countdowns and verbal routines to redirect students. In a number of elementary classes, teachers used behavior bingo chips to reward students for appropriate behavior and academic perseverance.

 b. Similarly, in most observed middle- and high-school classes strong classroom routines and positive responses were in place to limit disruptions. For example, in some middle-school classes teachers had established levels for students’ voices and used a one-word reminder to quiet students. In addition, in most observed high-school classes, teachers set and enforced rules about the use of cell phones and wearing hoods in class.

 i. However, in some observed middle and high-school classes, teachers did not set expectations for classroom behavior, enforce rules, or redirect students for inappropriate behavior. For example, some students kept cell phones out after teachers asked them to put them away.

**Impact**: While many students in the district are benefiting from effective, research-based instruction, the absence of consistent implementation in all grades and subjects is preventing the district from achieving its goal of delivering high-quality instruction to all students. Students’ learning experiences over time are likely not fully preparing them for success beyond high school.

**Recommendation**

**The district should continue to take steps to ensure that high-quality instruction is consistently implemented districtwide.**

1. District leaders, directors, principals, assistant principals, and coaches should continue to clearly articulate and monitor the district’s expectations for high-quality teaching and learning practices. Particular attention should be focused on student ownership of learning, higher-order thinking skills, student opportunities to communicate their thinking, and lessons designed to engage all students regardless of their learning needs.

The district should redouble its efforts to articulate and evaluate high-quality instructional practices during district-led collaborative walkthroughs, during common planning with coaches, grade-level meetings with coaches and principals, department meetings, and district professional development opportunities.

At the high-school level, particular attention should be paid to developing a common understanding of communicating and achieving lesson objectives, promoting student ownership of learning, and providing opportunities for students to engage with meaningful tasks that require higher-order thinking.

All levels should develop a shared understanding of inclusive classroom practices.

1. The district should build on its practice of conducting collaborative walkthroughs and develop a similar practice to include teachers and coaches for the purpose of understanding and developing effective instruction districtwide.

The district should identify high-quality instructional practices and create opportunities for peer observations in exemplary teachers’ classrooms. The district should formalize these efforts, particularly at the high school.

1. The district should leverage its educator evaluation system to strengthen instruction by consistently providing constructive, growth-oriented feedback to teachers (see Human Resources and Professional Development section).

**Benefits** from implementing this recommendation will include a shared understanding and more consistent implementation of effective instruction and high-quality learning experiences districtwide. The district will continue to focus its efforts on ensuring that all students receive high-quality instruction and on improving student outcomes and achievement.

**Recommended resources:**

* 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.
* 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.

Assessment

***Contextual Background***

The district has established a data-driven assessment culture characterized by the ongoing collection, timely dissemination, and productive use of student performance data. District and school leaders analyze data and set priorities for the district’s strategic plan referred to as the Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP) and school improvement plans referred to as Quality School Plans (QSPs).

The district has a balanced set of formative and summative assessments, including MCAS, ACCESS, advanced placement exams, Achievement Network (ANet) in grades 2–5 in ELA and in grades 2–8 in mathematics, Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) in kindergarten through grade 5, common assessments in grades 6–12, and mathematics end-of-module assessments (Engage NY) in kindergarten through grade 5. The district is piloting an Expeditionary Learning performance assessment.

Curriculum leaders and coaches support elementary and middle-school teachers in analyzing and using data during grade-level team meetings and content-area meetings. Teams use the teaching and learning cycle embedded in ANet; the cycle includes planning, teaching, assessing, reflecting, and reteaching. ANet is administered three times a year in grades 2–5 for ELA and in grades 2–8 for mathematics.

The high school has a range of assessments and technology to support its assessment program. Educators use Gradecam across most content areas; teachers can use it to scan assessments and instantly display the results on a computer. Teachers use the assessment data to monitor students’ progress and create reteach plans. Google Classroom enables teachers to review and respond to students’ work immediately.

Opportunities to collaborate with colleagues is uneven in the district. During common planning time, elementary and middle-school teachers work with coaches and content directors to analyze student assessment results and plan instruction. High-school teachers do not have common planning time. While content directors at the high-school level have monthly curriculum department meetings, use of this time varies from director to director. High-school teachers do not have regularly scheduled time during the school day to work with colleagues. Often working with one another is voluntary and happens after school; sometimes the district provides stipends. At the time of the review in late May/early June 2018, a team of high-school educators was working on a new school schedule with the hope of providing common planning time for teachers.

***Strength Findings***

**1. District and school leaders collect, analyze, and disseminate student performance, outcome, demographic, and participation data for district and school improvement planning and use data to inform decisions about programs, budgets, and professional practice and student learning goals.**

1. Interviews and a document review indicated that district and school leaders developed the district’s Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP) and the schools’ Quality School Plans (QSPs) based on analysis of student data. (See the second Strength finding in the Leadership and Governance section above.)
2. Data is shared with the school committee during public meetings.
3. Interviewees and a document review indicated that the superintendent gave an overview of student performance data annually to the school committee.
	1. In November 2017, the superintendent presented an overview of 2017 MCAS assessment data and Advanced Placement participation and performance to the school committee.
	2. The superintendent’s annual data presentation to the school committee includes areas of focus.
		1. Focus areas in 2017–2018 included: elementary literacy, middle-school mathematics, the graduation rate for ELLs (English language learners), and increased opportunities and access for all students.
4. The superintendent and school committee members told the review team that at least two academic reports, including data overviews, were presented at each school committee meeting.
	1. Principals present their QSPs to the school committee annually; these plans include data and SMART goals. Documents provided by the district included QSP presentation slides with 2017 MCAS assessment strengths and areas for growth by school.
	2. One director or department head also presents data from their department at each school committee meeting.
		1. During the November 2017 school committee meeting, the history and social studies department presented updates including data on student participation and performance on advanced placement exams.
		2. During the February 2016 school committee meeting, the ELA department presented highlights that included MCAS assessment data for grades 3–10.
5. District leaders use data to make decisions about programs, budgeting, and professional practice and student learning goals.
6. Interviews and a document review indicated that each school had a Language Acquisition Team (LAT) composed of administrators and ESL, general, and special educators. One LAT goal is to collect and use data to make decisions about student placement, services, and monitoring procedures.
7. Interviewees said that analysis of 2016–2017 MCAS assessment data contributed to the decision to give students more time for math instruction at the middle school. Both middle schools added two math periods per week for grade 6.
8. The review team was told that district data showed a growing number of students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) in the ESL program. As a result of this data analysis, a cohort of SLIFE students were grouped to receive intensive ESL instruction and additional reading support.
9. Interviews and a document review indicated that the AIP and student performance data were among the driving principles for budgetary decision-making.
	1. The school committee’s Budgetary Principles and Guidelines state, “The strategic plan should drive the budget” and “Decisions should be data driven.”
	2. When interviewees were asked for examples of budgeting driven by improvement plans and data, they said that ELL data spurred the development of the Dual Language Program and the creation of the Newcomers Academy to support SLIFE students.
10. Educators stated that data was used to formulate professional practice goals and student learning goals.
	1. Interviewees said that data from common assessments and the Development Reading Assessment has been used to develop professional practice goals and student learning goals.

**Impact**: When district leaders and educators use student data to develop improvement plans and to make budgetary, program, and educators’ professional practice and student learning goals, students are more likely to receive an education that meets their unique needs.

1. **The district provides structures and time during the school day for elementary and middle-school teachers to analyze and use data to modify classroom instruction and to inform interventions for struggling students and those ready for accelerated work.**
2. Interviews and a document review indicated that elementary and middle-school teachers had structures in place to analyze student performance data and use data to inform instruction.
3. The review team was told that elementary and middle-school teachers regularly reviewed data during grade-level meetings and common planning time.
4. Interviewees said that ANet results were discussed during grade-level meetings and common planning time. ELA and math coaches lead discussions.
5. The review team was told that teachers and coaches followed a common ANet teaching and learning cycle, which included plan, teach, assess, reflect, reteach, and reassess.
6. Elementary and middle schools provide a range of interventions for students based on assessment results.
7. Supports for struggling students are identified through the student teacher assistance team (STAT). STAT forms require an overview of a student’s strengths and challenges including assessment data.
8. The review team was told that struggling elementary students could receive targeted reading or math interventions during a 30-minute intervention block during the school day. Coaches also pull groups of students for targeted support. Interviewees said that the district provided supports for middle-school students in ELA and mathematics, including a mathematics lab and ELA lab intervention for grades 7 and 8, an extra support class for 7th grade math, and after-school tutoring is available to middle-school students.
9. Interviews and a document review indicated that the Challenge Program in the elementary schools was designed for students ready for accelerated work. Three Challenge teachers provide advanced work to students in grades 3–5 during an intervention block. Teachers and parents nominate Challenge students.
10. Interviewees stated that students in grade 5 were given the opportunity to take a grade 6 math assessment to determine whether they were on track to advance to a pre-algebra class.

**Impact:** By providing structures, time, and support for teachers to collaborate and review data to plan instruction, the district is establishing conditions that will help ensure that instruction and supports are designed to address students’ strengths and needs.

1. **High-school educators use a range of formative and summative assessments to monitor students’ growth and achievement.**
	* + 1. Interviews and a document review indicated that the high school had a range of assessments to monitor students’ growth and achievement.
2. District and school leaders review MCAS and AP data at the high school to set improvement goals in the district’s Accelerated Improvement Plan and the high school’s Quality School Plan.
3. High-school teachers administer common assessments twice a year (midterm and final) in ELA, mathematics, social studies, and science.
4. All English language learners (ELLs) take ACCESS, an English language proficiency assessment, and the MCAS assessment annually. ESL teachers review ACCESS data and share results with leaders and teachers.
	* + 1. Technology supports assessment programs at the high school and provides immediate student data.
5. The team was told that Google Classroom helped teachers gather results in the moment.
6. The review team observed teachers responding immediately to students’ written work in class. Interviewees said that directors had access to the results of midterms and finals, noting that everything was stored electronically and shared on Google Docs.
7. The review team was told during multiple interviews that the high school used Gradecam, a software program that enables teachers to scan assessments via a smartphone, tablet, webcam, or document camera. Gradecam collects grades and display results instantly on a computer. The high school also uses Panorama, a graphic data platform implemented in 2016, to look at coursework, behavior, and attendance.
	1. A sample Panorama snapshot provided by the district indicated that Panorama could generate data for individual students and for subgroups.

**Impact:** With a range of assessment results and technology to support the assessment program, high-school educators likely can respond to student’s strengths and challenges, target individual students’ needs, and likely improve overall achievement.

***Challenges and Areas for Growth***

1. **There is limited structured time during the school day for high-school teachers to collaborate and use student performance data.**
	* + 1. There is limited time for teachers to meet at the high school during the school day.
2. The review team was told that with the exception of teachers in the ESL department, high-school teachers did not have common planning time (CPT).
	1. Interviewees said that 2017–2018 was the first year that the ELSL department had common planning time, noting that the department used the time to look at students’ work and ACCESS data. The teachers’ association stated that the high school did not have CPT. Another interviewee said that while there was no CPT, teachers could request it.
	2. The review team was told that it was difficult to manage CPT and students’ schedules at the high school.
3. Interviewees said that while there were monthly curriculum meetings, curriculum directors used that time in different ways.
	1. Interviewees said that the amount of structured time to collaborate with colleagues varied from department to department.
	2. The review team was told that social studies and math department heads met with grade-level teams to adjust instruction.

 3. Interviewees told the review team that the high school was working on a new schedule that the district hoped would provide common planning time. However, during a one-hour meeting with high-school staff to review the two proposed plans, neither plan was well received.

**Impact:** Without consistent, reliable time to collaborate during the school day, high-school teachers are missing opportunities to use data to reflect on students’ progress and plan instruction that meets students’ needs.

***Recommendation***

1. **The district should ensure that all high-school teachers have sufficient time to collaborate and analyze student data results to inform instructional planning and decision-making.**
2. The district should continue to review its current high-school schedule and identify potential changes, with a particular focus on providing common planning time (CPT) during the school day for all educators.

The district might consider giving each department the opportunity to meet after school with a stipend to create more equitable CPT among departments.

The district might consider rotating time among departments to ensure all educators have some CPT during the school year.

The district might consider creating content cluster teams for CPT (for example, CPT for 9th and 10th grade ELA teachers or CPT for all biology teachers).

**Benefits:** Common planning time will provide teachers and department leaders with the opportunity to collaborate, reflect, analyze data, and plan instruction that is more responsive to students’ strengths and challenges. Teachers who have regularly scheduled time to collaborate with colleagues will have the opportunity to improve their teaching through teamwork.

**Recommended resource:**

* + - * *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***

The district is prioritizing the hiring of teachers of color as it moves toward increasing the diversity of its staff to more closely reflect the makeup of its student body. Priority4 in the district’s Accelerated Improvement Plan 2017–2022 is “Retain, cultivate and recruit high-quality teachers and leaders to stay in system.” One of four initiatives under this priority is “Increase the racial/ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity of educators throughout the system.” The district is a member of Massachusetts Partnership for Diversity in Education and uses this organization in its recruitment of teachers.

Waltham has 989 (FTE) employees. The district manages its employees without a human resources department, having only a part-time human resources director. The district has been hiring approximately 15 teachers in recent years because of retirements and increased enrollment. The hiring process for teachers includes teachers and in some cases students’ families.

The district provides embedded professional development (PD) through its system of subject area directors and coaches. In addition, the district has one PD day and six early-release days over the course of the year. PD on the early-release days is designed at the school level. In addition, outside PD is available from sources such as the EDCO collaborative and Brandeis University. The district has not developed a comprehensive PD plan with clearly articulated and measurable goals. The PD program does not have a unified and effectively coordinated leadership structure and teacher input into PD planning is limited.

**Strength Finding**

**1. The district has acknowledged that its teaching and support staff does not reflect the makeup of its student body and has made it a priority to increase the diversity of staff.**

* 1. According to ESE data, the district’s teaching staff in the district does not reflect the demographics of the student body.
		1. In 2017–2018, the student body was 9.6 percent African American, 5.6 percent Asian, 39.6 percent Hispanic, and 42.7 percent Caucasian.
		2. In 2017–2018, the teaching staff was 2.2 percent African American, 1.2 percent Asian, 5.2 percent Hispanic, and 90.7 percent Caucasian.
	2. Various members of the school community see creating a more diverse staff as a district priority.

 1. Students stated that students would benefit if teachers were more knowledgeable about them.

 2. When district administrators were asked for a “wish list” for the district, they included staff diversity as a priority.

 a. District administrators stated that the district was trying to address more diversity in hiring.

3. A group of parents stated that the district needed “to recruit teachers that represent the community.” They added that the next change they wanted to see in the district was a more diversified staff.

1. The district has increased the diversity of its teaching staff.
	* 1. Parents said that the superintendent had demonstrated that hiring a more diversified staff was a priority
		2. The district has increased the diversity of staff in recent years. The number of African American staff has increased from 9.8 FTE in 2015–2016 to 18.7 FTE in 2017–2018. From 2016 to 2018, the number of Hispanic staff has increased from 30 FTE to 44.9 FTE and the number of Asian staff has increased from 6.4 FTE to 10 FTE.

**Impact**: Research shows that increasing the presence of teachers of color can have a positive impact on student achievement, retention, and well-being. The district has taken concrete steps to achieve its goal of increasing the diversity of its educators.

**Challenges and Areas for Growth**

**2. The district has not achieved consistency in the implementation of its educator evaluation system and is not fully implementing the requirements of the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework.**

1. The team reviewed the 2015–2017 evaluative documentation of 30 teachers chosen randomly from across the district. Only four evaluations provided feedback with the capacity to contribute to professional growth. These evaluations provided specific suggestions to improve instruction, rather than a description of the teaching observed. The remaining 26 evaluations were informative[[5]](#footnote-5) as to what was observed in the classroom but did not offer recommendations for improvement.
2. Some teachers raised issues of untimely feedback from classroom observations. Other teachers stated that one teacher was observed multiple times without feedback, while another teacher was not observed at all.

The superintendent stated that the district had received 4 to 5 grievances from the teachers’ association about not implementing the educator evaluation system as intended.

The teachers’ association asked the assistant superintendent to review the number of classroom observations that had been conducted because of teachers’ concerns that the requisite number was not happening in all cases.

 a. A document review showed variation between evaluators as to the number of observations done.

1. District administrators expressed concern that with unrealistic deadlines and with pressure from central office, the educator evaluation process could become a compliance exercise rather than an effective way to improve instruction. Teachers expressed concern about the quality of the feedback they have received, stating that much of it was informative but not instructive. Others expressed concern about the quality of the training that the evaluators were receiving.

District leaders expressed the view that the administrators needed to work on the calibration of written feedback. At the time of the onsite review in late May/early June 2018, the administrative team had had one professional development session in the fall 2017 about calibration of written feedback.

New administrators are encouraged but not required to take the three-day training that veteran administrators received when the educator evaluation system was introduced. The only formal expectation for new administrators related to educator evaluation is that they receive training from another administrator appointed by the district as a mentor.

 **D.** Team members also reviewed the 2015–2017 evaluative documents of all the district’s principals. Formative (mid-cycle) assessments/evaluations had not been done, and some summative evaluations had not been done. Completed summative evaluations were brief, congratulatory, and did not contain specific, actionable feedback or concrete recommendations with the capacity to contribute to professional growth, enhanced leadership capacity, or overall effectiveness.

1.The superintendent told team members that he did not follow the educator evaluation process for principals that has been established for the district. He stated, “Principals know how I see their work,” noting that he has “ongoing conversations about their [principals’] data.” The superintendent said that he provided feedback to the principals based on his observations.

 **E.** The review team did not find evidence that the district used evidence of student learning in its educator evaluation system.

 **F.** As of the 2015–2016 school year, state regulations (603 CMR 35.07) call for districts to collect and use student feedback as evidence in the teacher evaluation process and staff feedback in the administrator evaluation process.[[6]](#footnote-6) This feedback may also be used to inform an educator’s self-assessment, goal setting, or as evidence to demonstrate growth over time.

1. Administrators told the team that the district surveyed staff, students, and families about priorities but noted that the district’s use of surveys was “not tied to the educator evaluation system.”

**Impact**: Without frequent classroom observations and timely, high-quality feedback designed to contribute to professional growth, teachers and administrators are challenged to build their skills and to improve students’ learning experiences and outcomes. Without the collectionand use of multiple sourcesof evaluative evidence, the district cannot provide all educators with a comprehensive and accurate picture of their overall effectiveness.

**3. The district has not developed a comprehensive professional development plan with clearly articulated and measurable goals, wide input from educators, and strategies for determining the effectiveness of professional development.**

1. The district has embedded professional development (PD) at every school. In the elementary schools, the literacy and math coaches meet with teachers during common planning time. In the middle schools, the coaches and directors provide PD. At the high school, department leaders and directors provide PD.
2. The assistant superintendent is responsible for overseeing PD, but district leaders told the team, “Many people oversee professional development.”

This has resulted in different priorities in different schools.

In 2017–2018, for the first time, district leaders met with representatives from the schools to discuss PD. After meeting with the elementary schools, district leaders expressed the view that PD was serving the elementary schools’ individual needs and the elementary schools did not have an overarching PD focus.

1. The district has not developed a PD plan that outlines the district’s philosophy of PD and explains clearly the structure, people responsible, and goals and objectives of PD in the district.
2. Teachers on the instructional leadership teams have input into the design of PD in the district, but the rest of the teaching staff have limited opportunities to give input.
3. Interviewees reported that it does not have structured content-based PD for its instructional experts, particularly the coaches and directors.
4. With the exception of exit surveys from PD offerings, the district does not have a mechanism for evaluating the effectiveness of PD. The district relied on anecdotal evidence of the effectiveness of PD.

**Impact**: Without a comprehensive, and collaboratively developed, and data-informed professional development plan for all educators that is aligned with district goals, the district limits its ability to enhance professional practice, to retain highly effective educators, to improve instruction, to advance district goals and priorities, and to improve student achievement.

**Recommendations**

**The district should work with teachers and administrators to ensure that feedback in all stages of the evaluation process is instructive and contributes to professional growth and student achievement. The district should fully implement all required elements of the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework.**

1. The district should support and monitor the skills and practices of all evaluators to ensure that they provide all staff with high-quality feedback that is timely, instructive, and contributes to their professional growth.
2. All administrators should take part in ongoing professional development to strengthen their ability to provide effective feedback focused on professional practice and student growth and achievement.
3. New administrators and any staff new to the district should participate in thorough training in the educator evaluation system.
	1. This is often offered by local educational collaboratives.
4. The superintendent should provide formal, growth-oriented feedback to principals at all stages of the educator evaluation process in accordance with the district’s educator evaluation policy.
5. District leaders should review on a regular basis the quality of feedback submitted by the district’s evaluators and work with them to calibrate the expectations for feedback across the district.
6. The district should work with the teachers’ association to review current practices to ensure that the evaluation protocol is feasible and can be implemented consistently across the district.
7. The district should ensure that its educator evaluation system incorporates all required elements.

1. The district should continue its practice of collecting feedback from stakeholders and should take the necessary steps to formally incorporate student and staff feedback into the educator evaluation process.

2. Evidence of student learning gains should be an explicit part of the district’s educator evaluation system.

**Benefits:** Taking these steps will improve the quality of educator evaluations and reinforce the importance of this tool for helping educators continuously improve their practice. They will help to reduce frustration which threatens to limit the faith teachers have in a system that should be helping them.

**Recommended 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.
* *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.
	+ - 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.

* + 1. **The district should create a professional development committee to review current offerings and develop a long-term plan for professional development linked to district and school improvement goals.**
1. The committee should contain representation from administrators and teachers from all levels and develop mechanisms for gathering wide input from stakeholders about professional development (PD) in the district.
2. Using the Massachusetts Standards for Professional Development and the district’s improvement goals as a framework, the committee should analyze the “big picture” of districtwide and school-specific PD and determine potential areas for improvement.

As part of its analysis, the committee might consider the impact of the current PD system on the experiences of teachers, students, and administrators at different levels.

Consistent with district practice, the committee should consider student outcome, participation, and performance data, including disaggregated data, to determine areas of need that PD has not addressed.

1. The committee should develop a districtwide PD plan.

The plan should articulate the district’s vision, objectives, and theory of action for PD, along with action steps.

The plan should include explicit strategies for measuring the effectiveness of PD (for example, classroom follow-up to determine the ways that teachers’ instruction changes as a result of specific PD activities).

The plan should contain budgetary implications and a system for integrating new staff as they are hired.

The plan should be communicated to district staff, students, and families, and should be periodically revisited, revised, and updated. This should include a clear description of the ways in which the district’s PD supports the Accelerated Improvement Plan.

**Benefits:** A district professional development plan that is collaboratively developed, thoughtfully coordinated, and linked to the budget and to district and school improvement plans can help to ensure that district resources are allocated to professional development that is highly effective and that helps the district achieve its goals for all students.

**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 *Professional Development Self-Assessment Guidebook* (<http://www.mass.gov/edu/docs/ese/accountability/dsac/professional-development-self-assessment-guide.pdf>) provides tools for analyzing professional development offerings’ alignment with the Massachusetts Standards for Professional Development, the Educator Evaluation Framework, and the Standards and Indicators of Effective Practice.
* *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 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.
* Professional development case studies (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/pd/CaseStudies/>) highlight districts implementing meaningful professional development programs that support educators throughout the entire career continuum. They include examples of PD programs that are job-embedded, teacher-led, data-driven, and aligned to educator and district needs.

Student Support

***Contextual Background***

There are many caring and supportive teachers, counselors, and administrators in the district. Many ideas are discussed and many initiatives are implemented to introduce change and to support the needs of all students. Some district administrators and teachers expressed the opinion that the district was piloting too many initiatives, and that the district did not have clear and consistent criteria for identifying which were successful, which should be discontinued, and which initiatives would be implemented over the long term in the district. The district does not have a systematic approach allowing for regular meetings between English as a second language (ESL) teachers, special education teachers, and general education teachers. Educators and administrators in the district stated that this absence of regular meeting time was a barrier to collaboration and comprehensive districtwide supports to all students over time.

High-school students, teachers, family members, and administrators told the review team that district educators and curricular materials did not reflect the cultural and racial diversity of the district’s student body. The review team was told and a document review indicated that in May 2017 more than 600 Waltham high-school students held a peaceful protest and sit-in at the high school, in response to a student’s “racially charged” post on social media. Many high-school students did not approve of the way in which the district handled the incident. The protest consisted of “large and small-group discussions” and “open dialogue with faculty and students.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Four high-school teachers then began a volunteer equity team in order to examine root causes of bias and inequity. At the time of the onsite review in late May/early June 2018, the equity team had grown to include counselors, administrators, and two school committee members. A member of the team was invited to sit on each high school hiring committee. The district has begun to offer professional development on cultural competency and implicit bias. Interviewees stated that the equity team had just begun to disaggregate secondary students’ discipline data.

Interviewees expressed concern that the district was not meeting the needs of its English language learners (ELLs). The district has not established a system that supports rigorous learning opportunities and full access to the curriculum and academic programs to ELLs in the district. The district does not have an ESL curriculum, and has a limited number of educators, and guidance and adjustment counselors who are bi- or multi-lingual in Spanish and/or Haitian Kreyol, the two most common non-English home languages. Also, ELLs and have had limited access to the Career Technical Vocational Education (CTVE) program at the high school because of scheduling conflicts. Interviewees noted a perception in the district that ELLs’ limited fluency with the English language posed a safety issue.

Despite district efforts to improve attendance, including hiring an attendance officer and whole-school attendance challenges with incentives, attendance remains an issue, especially at the high school. 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 2016–2017, 10.5 percent of the district’s students were chronically absent. In 2016–2017, the percentages of chronically absent students in the high school were as follows: 24.0 percent in grade 9; 23.9 percent in grade 10; 23.6 percent in grade 11; and 27.3 percent in grade 12. The attendance rate has fluctuated slightly in recent years. According to ESE data, in 2014–2015 the district’s attendance rate was 95.2 percent; in 2015–2016, 95.4 percent; and in 2016–2017, the attendance rate was 95.0 percent, compared with the 2016–2017 state rate of 94.6 percent.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The district has begun efforts to increase the number of students in key programs—especially those students under-represented in AP classes. According to ESE data, in 2016–2017, 518 AP tests were taken in the district. Interviewees said that in 2016–2017, 19 percent of students in the district took AP tests, compared with the district’s Accelerated Improvement Plan goal of 30 percent of students taking AP tests. The review team was told that the district allowed any student with a teacher recommendation to take an AP course. Interviewees said that the district would offer AP boot camp in summer 2018 to help prepare students for AP courses.

**Strength Findings**

**1. The district has implemented some promising practices for identifying and supporting students with disabilities and students who are struggling.**

* 1. The district has in place some procedures for identifying and supporting struggling students.
		1. The review team was told that some administrators and educators at one middle school and guidance staff at the high school used the Panorama data platform to get “snapshot” reports of students’ grades, attendance, and behavior, which inform decisions of how to prioritize informal and formal interventions.
			1. Interviewees said that Panorama enabled educators to disaggregate data by student subgroup.
		2. Interviewees stated that in recent years, attention to the accuracy and currency of e-Sped data about students with special education referrals and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) have led to a more accurate count of students on IEPs in the district. The Student Teacher Assistance Team (STAT) process supports teachers working with struggling students in general education classrooms at the elementary level. Teachers delineate areas of difficulty for the student and each STAT works with the teacher to develop and enact responsive strategies.
			1. Interviewees said that the STAT’s composition reflected the student’s needs. For example, a STAT may include an administrator, guidance person, three to four teachers, and the school nurse; it may also include a special educator, an occupational therapist, and a physical therapist.
		3. The review team was told that key staff members were positioned to support secondary students at risk of dropout to persist in school until graduation.
			1. Five school adjustment counselors (SACs) at the middle and high schools help students struggling to stay in school, especially at points of transition from one school to the next level.
			2. The district has two dropout specialists. One helps students re-engage in school through a credit-recovery program and the other works with courts, community networks and partners, and with families—specifically families of English language learners—to support students’ persistence in school.
			3. High-school administrators and guidance counselors work with students at risk of failing classes because of high absence to find options for making up instructional hours in core subjects.
			4. The district offers the Newcomers’ Academy, a program for students arriving in the district with significant interruptions in their formal education.

 **B.** Interviews and a document review indicated that the district provided programs, staff, and other resources to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

1. District programs for students with disabilities include programs for students with autism, emotional impairment, severe disabilities, language-based learning disabilities, and moderate disabilities. Students also have access to a range of related services that include counseling, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, nursing and transportation.

 2. The high school employs a transition specialist to work with students on Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to understand the connection between school engagement and increased opportunities after high school. The transition specialist develops transition services and coordinates with agencies to support success for students after high school.

 3. The district has recently secured external funding to develop a districtwide K–12 curriculum on social-emotional learning to engage all students in school.

**Impact**: Having district personnel, programs, and other resources in place to address the needs of struggling students and students with disabilities and to track their progress may contribute to improved graduation and success beyond high school.

**Challenges and Areas for Growth**

**The district has not created an environment in which all students and families feel welcomed and connected; some practices do not reflect a culturally responsive district that prioritizes equity.**

1. Teachers and parents identified some practices at the district that did not support parents’ sense of belonging and that did not promote a school environment for all.

Several interviewees described practices or situations that indicated that some families did not feel welcomed in the district.

A participant in one interview expressed concern that parents/guardians of students of color, particularly those coming from African countries where neither English nor Spanish is spoken, could not know what was on a high-school survey on equity[[9]](#footnote-9) because it was not offered in a language that those parents could understand.[[10]](#footnote-10) [[11]](#footnote-11) The response rate from families of high-school students was extremely low[[12]](#footnote-12) and therefore the findings did not reflect the experiences of all families.

Some interviewees pointed out that parent volunteers in parent teacher organizations (PTOs) in some elementary and middle schools had strong relationships with individual teachers and leaders, which contributed to strong communication and parent engagement activities. However, others pointed out that the PTOs did not represent the community of Waltham, and that more could be done to engage parents who did not speak English.

There is no PTO at the high school. Interviewees reported that parents have been meeting to try to get one established. One interviewee remarked that the high school was “neglecting family engagement.”

1. Teachers and students identified some practices at the high school that did not enhance students’ sense of belonging and feeling of security at the high school.

A variety of interviewees reported safety concerns at the high school.

Interviewees pointed out that some students left side doors at the high school open if they wanted to go outside or leave for lunch, lessening the security of the school.

Of all respondents to a Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) administered to Waltham High School and Middle School students on June 2, 2017, 5.7 percent reported not having gone to school because they felt that they would be unsafe at school or on their way to school on at least one occasion during the 30 days before the survey.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Some students do not feel personally connected to the adults at the high school or to the district’s curriculum.

Several interviewees reported that high-school students felt comfortable talking with a teacher or counselor if they needed support. However, in the 2017 YRBS, only about half (41 percent to 58 percent) of Waltham high-school girls who responded, depending on the grade, indicated that they had “a trusted adult in school.” Among boys who responded, 42 percent to 58 of high-school boys, depending on the grade, reported having “a trusted adult in school.”

Some interviewees reported that students of color did not feel represented in the curriculum.

a. For example, a student noted that when studying the Civil War, the curriculum did not include the experiences of black slaves or the accomplishments of African Americans after the war.

b. Another student noted that some teachers were not familiar with the cultures of English language learners and that “students would benefit if the teacher were more knowledgeable about them.”

1. In-school suspension rates are a concern.
2. In 2017, the in-school suspension rate for all students was 2.5 percent, above the state rate of 1.7 percent.

The in-school suspension rates for many student subgroups were above the state rate (see District Overview section).

 3. Interviewees reported that district educators were “beginning” to disaggregate data about in-school suspensions and were aware of the relatively high incidence of suspension for students of color and for boys, but that the conversation about this “has to start at the basic level with the educator.”

1. The district does not have a coherent, systematic plan for addressing issues related to racial/cultural equity that would provide opportunities and support for all students.

 1. Interviewees said that when racial incidents arose at the high school among students, leaders often “swept [them] under the rug,” sometimes administering consequences to students but not resolving the issues.

 2. Several interviewees stated that though professional development (PD) about issues of race and bias was a district priority the district had not provided PD about race and equity comprehensively across the district. The professional development about race and equity was missing information about how to implement the training in actual interactions with students, and the district had not provided further PD on these topics in kindergarten through grade 8. One interviewee described PD about race and equity as “a flash in the pan” after which district leaders were hoping “the problem would go away.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

 3. Interviewees said that knowing how to prioritize action steps to address bias was not clear at the moment. However, the equity team’s work to disaggregate data in concert with the PD about cultural competency and implicit bias should result in some clear priorities for next year.

**Impact**: When a district falls short in making all stakeholders feel welcome and connected, it can have a deleterious effect on the well-being and engagement of students and on interactions between educators, students, and families. This, in turn, can disrupt the formal and informal systems and supports that are necessary to ensure students’ learning, persistence in school, and success beyond high school.

**The district has not established a system that supports rigorous learning opportunities and full access to the curriculum and academic programs for English language learners in the district.**

1. According to ESE data, from 2015 to 2018 the percentage of ELLs enrolled in the district increased steadily, from 17.3 percent in 2015 to 17.7 percent in 2016 to 19.3 percent in 2017 to 22.2 percent in 2018, compared with 10.2 percent in districts statewide.
2. Interviews and a document review indicated that the district was not providing English language learners (ELLs) equitable access to rigorous classes and educational programs.
3. The district does not have an English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum. Teachers told the review team that the district had not had an ESL curriculum for at least six years before the onsite review in late May/early June 2018.
	1. Interviewees told the team that the district used model curriculum units (MCUs) developed in conjunction with DESE, and district ESL educators have recently developed an MCU.
	2. The review team was told that district leaders were waiting to select an ESL curriculum for the district until new WIDA standards had been revised.
4. WIDA is not creating new English Language Development (ELD) standards, but rather is introducing a new instructional framework for the existing five standards. The new instructional framework will be implemented in the summer of 2020–2021.[[15]](#footnote-15)
	1. Teachers, rather than district leaders, have undertaken efforts in the district to vertically align ESL instruction. District leaders said that vertical alignment would be addressed as part of districtwide review of the rigor of the curriculum.

 **C.** Interviewees stated that the district needed to do more to increase the access of ELLs to the Career and Technical Vocational Education (CTVE) program at the high school.

1. CTVE is not considered a “welcoming program” for ELLs. ELLs who arrive in the district without a high level of fluency in the English language are not eligible to take CTVE courses leading to certification, since the scheduling for English language instruction and English Language Immersion did not leave enough time in the schedule for the required CTVE course hours. In addition, interviewees noted a perception in the district that students’ limited fluency with the English language was a safety issue in CTVE programs.

 2. Interviewees said that CTVE teachers did not have the SEI (Sheltered English Immersion) endorsement. ESL teachers in the district demonstrate best practices to CTVE teachers, but more is needed.

 3. Some changes in scheduling are planned for the 2018–2019 school year. District educators stated that the district could do more to remove scheduling barriers and to change the thinking that students’ limited English language was a safety issue—for example, by increasing the number of bilingual teachers.

 **D**. Observations by the review team indicated that instruction did not sufficiently include appropriate SEI strategies.

 1. The review team did not see SEI strategies, such as focusing on genre-specific language or language objectives, in observed classrooms.

 a. Review team members found sufficient and compelling evidence that the teacher ensures that students are engaging in challenging tasks regardless of learning needs (characteristic # 9) in only 42 percent of all classes observed (in 50 percent of elementary classrooms, in 28 percent of middle-school classes, and in just 35 percent of high-school classrooms).

 b. Language objectives were not in evidence in any observed classes.

 2. The 2017 Power Point presentation of the high school’s Quality School Plan 2017–2020 identified the need to “strengthen the curriculum and instruction of our ESL and SEI program and courses.”

1. A district administrator said that the district was trying to “catch up” on ensuring that core teachers completed SEI endorsements and used SEI skills in classrooms.
2. Interviewees stated that there was not clear and constructive conversation between SEI teachers of core subjects and the ESL department about helping students to access complex texts.

3. The four-year and five-year cohort graduation rates of ELLs in the district are lower than the rates of their peers across the state.

1. In 2017, according to ESE data, the four-year cohort graduation rate of ELLs in the district was 47.1 percent, 16.3 percentage points lower than the rate of 63.4 percent of their statewide peers.
2. The five-year cohort graduation rate of ELLs was 59.2, the lowest of all subgroups in the district and 7.5 percentage points lower than the rate of 70.9 percent for ELLs statewide.

**Impact**: Without the appropriate systems and practices in place to meet ELLs’ learning and language needs, the district is challenged to improve outcomes for all students.

**Recommendations**

* + 1. **The district should redouble its efforts to improve climate and culture in the district so that all students, families and teachers feel supported and connected.**
1. The district should consider formalizing the existing equity team and acting promptly on its recommendations to improve the climate and culture districtwide.

The district should solicit input from students, families, and other district stakeholders to review areas of current strength about equitable practices in the district and to identify areas where issues of equity have not been adequately addressed.

Specific action steps should be developed and implemented.

a. These should include a review of district curricula with a consideration of cultural relevance for students.

* + - 1. Specific attention should be paid to family engagement practices, including systems for translation into languages spoken by all students’ families.
			2. The district should continue its analysis and planning related to suspension rates of student groups.

The district should consider deepening and broadening professional development (PD) for all educators on issues of equity.

* + - 1. PD should include student voice and participation, as appropriate.

**Benefits:** Implementing this recommendation should result in meaningful improvements to school culture and climate and should signal to stakeholders the district’s commitment to creating an environment in which all students and their families belong and are welcomed.

**Recommended resources:**

* *Making the Case for the Importance of School Climate and Its Measurement* (<http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/events/webinar/making-case-importance-school-climate-and-its-measurement>) is a recorded webinar, along with a detailed PowerPoint presentation, that addresses: the linkages between school climate and students’ development; models of school climate; best practices in communicating the importance of school climate to stakeholders; and characteristics of good school climate measures.
* *Addressing the Root Causes of Disparities in School Discipline* (<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/addressing-root-causes-disparities-school-discipline>) is an action planning guide designed to help school and district teams address disparities in school discipline.
* *Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline* (<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/guiding-principles.pdf>) highlights ways in which states and school districts can promote academic excellence by creating safe and productive learning environments for all students.
* 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.
1. **The district should take steps to ensure that English language learners have access to the full curriculum, including high-quality, engaging learning opportunities.**
	1. The district should prioritize the selection and adoption of a research-based ESL curriculum.
	2. District leaders, including content leaders, should identify ways to support and monitor the use of effective SEI practices in all classrooms.
	3. The district should make changes to the current Career Technical Vocational Education (CTVE) program that would allow all students better access to the program, especially ELLs.

1. This should include ensuring that all CTVE teachers earn the SEI endorsement.

2. Schedules should be modified as needed to promote equitable access to the program.

**Benefits:** Providing a more rigorous and complete learning experience should result in deeper learning, increased engagement, and improved outcomes for ELLs.

**Recommended resources:**

* *The English Learner Tool kit for State and Local Education Agencies* (<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/english-learner-toolkit/index.html>) is designed to help state and local education agencies to meet their legal obligations to English language learners (ELLs) and to provide ELLs with the support needed to attain English language proficiency while meeting college- and career- readiness standards. The tool kit includes such topics as identifying English language learners, evaluating the effectiveness of programs, and supporting limited English proficient parents. Each of its 10 chapters includes: (1) explanations of the civil rights and other legal obligations to ELLs; (2) checklists that can be used as self-monitoring tools; (3) sample tools that may be used or adapted for use to aid with compliance; and (4) free online resources that provide additional relevant information and assistance.
* [*Next Generation ESL Curriculum Resource Guide*](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/curriculum/ResourceGuide.docx)(<http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/curriculum/ResourceGuide.pdf>) This comprehensive guide includes:
* Information about the Next Generation’s ESL project's context, the curriculum design framework, and how to use the framework to develop ESL units.
* Resources for professional learning communities (PLCs) to support collaborative ESL curriculum development.

 [Collaboration Tool V2](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/Website/State%20Pages/Massachusetts/MA_Collaboration_Tool.pdf) (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/curriculum/collaborationtool.pdf>)is designed to help educators develop ESL curriculum that is rooted in academic content and addresses both WIDA and state standards.

[*Interactive Guide to the Collaboration Tool*](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/Website/State%20Pages/Massachusetts/MA_Collaboration_Tool_GUIDE.pdf) (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/curriculum/collaborationtool-guide.pdf>) Use this guide to explore the Collaboration Tool in more detail.

 [Instructional Videos](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/curriculum/mcu-videos.html)

* See eight different ESL MCUs.
* Hear directly from the families of our multilingual learners, including discussion of the importance of the schooling experience, as well as hopes and aspirations for their children. It is our hope that this video can help build enthusiasm for change, strengthen our commitment to the academic success and immense potential of ELLs, and compel and support equity and rich, abundant educational experiences for all our students.

Financial and Asset Management

***Contextual Background***

According to the Department of Revenue at A Glance report, Waltham’s 2015 population was 63,378 with a fiscal year 2017 city budget of $244,556,429; 36 percent of the city’s budget was spent on education. The 2015 average family tax bill was $5,214, and average per-capita income was $35,197. The city had $19,672,075 in free cash in fiscal year 2018 and $3,393,745 in its fiscal year 2017 stabilization fund. City officials stated that Waltham had bonding capacity of over $300 million.

The district’s budget development process includes input from school and department leaders and the school committee, and is transparent to the public. District and school plans are reflected in budget proposals, as are student needs based on student achievement data. The district’s budget document is comprehensive and transparent and has won national recognition. It includes narratives emphasizing plans and needs as well as summaries of how the school budget, grants, and outside funds are used.

District officials have positive relations with city officials, with noteworthy collaboration between the mayor and superintendent on budgeting and a business manager who formerly worked in the city auditor’s office. The city has supported education budgets and capital needs. The district and the city have a longstanding (2002) agreement on the allocation of municipal expenditures for education.

The district’s fiscal year 2017 district expenditures were $78,121,405 and net school spending was $103,950,490, 65.7 percent above the required level. In addition to its annual budget from the city the district has pursued grants and other outside funding, reporting $2,767,169 in grants for 2017 of which $291,201 came from private grants. District administrators said they have not overspent budgets or needed supplemental appropriations. Their closing report for 2017 indicated surpluses for fiscal years 2015–2017 after encumbrances for unpaid invoices.

The district and the city have invested in school buildings and technology. All the K–8 schools have been built or renovated since 2003. The district houses the K–1 new dual-language program in a city building and plans to expand the program to K–5. The district and the city are currently engaged in a feasibility study with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) to build a new high school. Technology is a district priority, with a commitment to a one-one-one Chromebook program in grades 6–12, expanded Wi-Fi and Internet infrastructure, and technology staffing to maintain and support technology in the district.

**Strength Findings**

**1. The development of the district’s budget and of its award-winning budget document is transparent, collaborative, and comprehensive. Initiatives are expected to reflect students’ needs, student performance data, and district goals.**

* 1. Principals, directors, and other administrators make budget requests reflecting school committee and district guidelines, school goals, student performance data, and reductions to offset proposed increases.
		1. The school committee approves budget guidelines from November through December.
			1. Fiscal year 2018 budget guidelines included the expectation that budget requests would be driven by district improvement plan goals such as protecting current class sizes, programs, and assets. Increases were limited to a 3 percent cap plus enrollment changes.
				1. Initiatives based on goals and data have included the dual language program, an adult education program, the Parents’ University, the Changemaker Academy (project-based learning), the after-school Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) program, an expanded career technical vocational education (CTVE) program, and the one-to-one Chromebook program.
			2. Decisions are to be based on proven outcomes, cost effectiveness, and data.
			3. Proposals from administrators are expected to include narratives to justify initiatives and budget increases, long-range trends and plans, and consideration of federal, state, and private grants.
		2. The superintendent said that schools had different needs, for example, because of high numbers of English language learners (ELLs) or students with social-emotional challenges. Principals stated that they could ask for what they needed, including new staff, and teachers and school councils were given the opportunity to make proposals.
	2. The superintendent’s leadership team, the school committee, city officials, and the public have opportunities to review and discuss budget proposals.
		1. Administrators said that the superintendent’s leadership team reviewed budget proposals including those funded by grants and other funds. The team meets with administrators to discuss budget proposals, sometimes one on one.
			1. Grants and other funds have increased recently to a fiscal year 2017 total of $7,910,513 and are taken into account during the preparation of budget proposals.
		2. The school committee holds work sessions to review proposals and discuss budget priorities.
			1. During budget work sessions, school committee members discuss goals and proposals such as alternative education and adult education, and may propose initiatives and priorities, such as additional security officers for elementary and middle schools.
			2. The superintendent told the team that the budget should not contain any surprises for administrators or the school committee.
		3. Following the work sessions, the superintendent presents budget drafts and a final proposed budget publicly to the school committee, and public hearings on the budget are held before voting.
		4. The superintendent and city officials stated that the superintendent and the mayor had frequent discussions about budget proposals and initiatives, and the mayor has supported school budgets. For fiscal year 2018, the mayor and the city council approved an increase of 4.63 percent, only $825,000 (1 percent) less than that requested by the school committee and 64 percent above the required net school spending level.
			1. The mayor and the city have also made capital funds available for school projects such as technology, furniture, vehicles, and space and furnishings for the new dual language program.
		5. The city finance committee and the city council also review and approve the proposed school budget, and school officials make presentations at those meetings.
1. Presentations of the budget to the school committee and city council are comprehensive, transparent, and detailed.
	* 1. The budget document has won a national award. It includes comprehensive information about the district as well as detail and narratives about the proposed budget and initiatives.
			1. The budget document won a national ASBO (Association of School Business Officials) meritorious budget award for 2017–2018.
			2. The document includes sections on the district’s goals and priorities, background information about the city and the schools, the budget development process, and the calendar.
			3. Budget summary information includes a message from the superintendent about priorities and the budget process, financial summaries of proposed expenditures and revenue sources, and budget drivers such as enrollment growth, technology, and contractual obligations. Also summarized are major increases and decreases, city finances and tax rates, and city indirect costs for education.
			4. The budget includes financial detail for each cost center, including trends over five years, narratives about each school/department and its programs and initiatives, detailed budget information by budget lines with trends, similarly detailed information about staffing, and information about outside grants and revolving funds.

2. The public presentations of the budget for the school committee and the city council are PowerPoint presentations summarizing budget drivers, which include enrollment increases (especially for English language learners) and transportation, initiatives such as adult education and middle school sports, efficiencies such as the reduction in out-of-district tuitions because of expanded career education opportunities, and new staff positions. The returns on the city’s investments in education are highlighted, including student achievement growth, improved dropout rates, and growing advanced placement (AP) participation.

**Impact**: When the district’s budget process and its budget document are transparent, collaborative, and comprehensive, stakeholders believe a clear understanding of the district’s priorities, initiatives, and achievements and of how its resources are allocated.

1. **The district and the city have shown a commitment to providing up-to-date and educationally appropriate facilities and technology. The district maintains its facilities and technology assets well, and has comprehensive capital and technology plans.**
2. All the district’s K–8 schools have been built or renovated since 2003.

Reviewers found the K–8 schools to have appropriate spaces for classrooms, for pull-out and small-group instruction, and for counseling and individual instruction, as well as adequate gymnasiums, libraries, and cafeterias.

Administrators said that the schools have security and safety equipment, including locked entry systems and security cameras, and noted that the district planned to install carbon monoxide detectors in the summer 2018.

The new K–1 dual-language program is temporarily housed in a city building. The school committee and city officials told the team that the district planned to renovate a former school to house the program as it expanded to a K–8 program.

1. Additional high-school programs and anticipated overcrowding are driving district and city plans to build a new high school.

According to Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) data, the high school was built in 1969 and was most recently renovated in 2001.

Administrators and school committee members stated that the high school facility had inadequate science labs and limited athletic field space. They said that they had plans to add project-based learning programs and to expand the career/vocational/technical (CTE) offerings to the high-school curriculum and need additional and appropriate spaces to do so.

The plan for the new school is also based on projected districtwide enrollment growth and the need to prepare for it.

Administrators said that the MSBA and the city supported a new high school and were engaged in a feasibility study for the new high school.

1. City officials stated that they expected the MSBA reimbursement rate to be 55 percent and the city had $300 million in bonding capacity to fund the project without the need for an override vote. The district’s maintenance and custodial services keep buildings clean and well maintained.

Reviewers found school buildings to be well maintained and clean.

Administrators said that in addition to custodial staff at each school the maintenance department includes heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) technicians, electricians, a plumber, a painter, carpenters, a driver, a groundsman, and a foreman, enabling the district to do most maintenance jobs in-house. The district has a $150,000 budget for outside contractors when needed.

According to ESE data, in 2017 the district spent $1,519 per pupil on operations and maintenance services for buildings and technology, compared with the 2017 state average of $1,148.

1. Up-to-date technology and infrastructure are a priority of the district.

Administrators said that funding for technology and occasional supplementary capital improvement funding were included in the annual budget.

1. The in-house technology staff has the capacity to deal with almost all technology needs in the district’s buildings, including software and device maintenance, infrastructure maintenance, and installations such as Wi-Fi upgrades, telephones, cameras and key fobs.

 2. The district has implemented a one-to-one laptop program in grades 6–11 and planned to extend the program to grades 6–12 in 2018–2019.

1. The district has capital and technology plans, and many of its capital needs are funded by the city.

The 2018–2022 capital improvement plan includes needs such as computer equipment replacements, equipping new classrooms for the dual-language program, carbon monoxide detectors, music equipment, flooring, athletic field turf, furniture replacements, and vehicles.

The district’s 2016–2019 technology plan includes adding carts of laptop devices for elementary students, expansion of the one-to-one laptop program, network improvements, and additional technology specialists.

City and district administrators stated that the city had a capital reserve account and invited applications for school and other city projects annually.

1. Administrators are invited to include capital requests when preparing annual budget requests.

**Impact**: The commitment of a district and a city to the cleaning, maintenance, and improvement of buildings, technology, and other capital assets contributes to healthy, safe, and suitable environments for education. District and city planning for capital improvements, especially the new high school, likely leads to up-to-date educational spaces and opportunities to implement 21st century learning activities for all district students.

**Challenges and Areas for Growth**

**The financial management of the district involves some inefficiencies including the use of two accounting software packages and a dependence on manual accounting procedures.**

1. The district uses two accounting software packages to track payroll and accounts payable transactions, and this leads to inefficiencies.
2. Administrators said they used two accounting packages: SoftRight for general ledger and accounts payable transactions and Munis for personnel and payroll.
	1. In the district’s self-assessment submitted in advance of the onsite review, the district rated fiscal health and financial management as “Not at all well” described by the indicator “Management of staff and financial resources are integrated.” The district rated fiscal health and financial management as “Somewhat well” described by the indicator “The district fully uses technology that meets its financial and staffing management needs and integrates with the municipal system, if applicable.”
	2. The district has to create two accounts for SoftRight and Munis transactions and maintain a crossover. It is complicated to determine total actual expenditures for all funds, including grants.
	3. The district cannot encumber payroll or download Munis payroll data into Excel, so salary spreadsheets must be created and maintained manually.
3. Projections of expenses for payroll budgeting and accounting are done manually on Excel spreadsheets (989 staff FTE), and projections must be adjusted throughout the year in the spreadsheets and in Munis.
4. Purchase orders and quotes are produced manually and then entered in the SoftRight accounting system for approval.
5. Administrators told the team that there have been some inefficiencies in payroll operations, and the business office was working to improve and streamline payroll and benefit data.

They spoke of bringing records for new hires online, which they said they found more efficient than creating folders for each hire.

Similarly, they said that they were putting W2 and payroll stubs online for access by employees, and attendance data for all employees will be on an online system ABS for tracking absence.

1. Schools and other cost centers do not have access to the city’s financial software and must maintain their own systems to track expenditures.

**Impact**: Inefficiencies such as the use of two accounting software packages and a dependence on manual accounting procedures can cost time and require extra personnel. They can cause inaccuracies in projections and reports, and could even lead to under- or overspending.

**Recommendation**

**District and city officials are encouraged to discuss together improving and streamlining district accounting procedures, particularly with respect to the two accounting software packages now in use and the access to financial data by cost center administrators.**

1. District and city administrators should discuss mutual accounting needs and whether they can use one accounting software package for both payroll and accounts payable.
2. The objective would be to create single reports meeting school committee and administrators’ needs and to eliminate the need to integrate and reconcile reports.
3. Also worthy of discussion is the projection of payroll expenditures. There may be efficient ways to use Munis or Soft Right to project payroll expenditures by encumbering payroll and adjusting payroll data weekly for anomalies such as absences without pay and early resignations.
4. An alternative is to download payroll data from Munis into Excel spreadsheets to save the time needed to create them, and to continue to use the spreadsheets to project payroll expenditures.
5. The district and the city should also consider and discuss the option to provide district schools and other cost centers access to the accounting software.
6. The access to district accounting software by cost center administrators would enable them to post requisitions directly into the software rather than posting them from paper requisitions.
7. Administrators should have access to up-to -date and reliable reports on their purchases and account balances.

**Benefits** from implementing this recommendation could include:

* + Elimination of the need to integrate and reconcile the two systems of accounting data.
	+ Reduced time and effort required to post payroll data twice into Munis and Excel.
	+ Fewer chances for error in posting transactions and projecting balances.
	+ Avoiding the need to track expenditures manually at each cost center, giving administrators up to date records of expenditures and balances.
	+ Elimination of the duplication of paper and electronic requisitions.

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

Review Team Members

The review was conducted from May 29–June 1, 2018, by the following team of independent ESE consultants.

1. Marc Kerble, Ed.D, Leadership and Governance
2. Sue Kelly, Curriculum and Instruction
3. Lenora Jennings, Assessment, *review team coordinator*
4. John Retchless, Human Resources and Professional Development
5. Janet Smith, Ph.D, Student Support
6. George Gearhart, Ed.D., 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 business administrator, the accountant, the grants administrator, the head bookkeeper, the head of payroll and benefits, the city auditor, and the purchasing agent.

The team conducted interviews with the following members of the school committee: mayor/chair, three members, and two high-school student school committee members.

The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the teachers’ association: the two co-presidents, the secretary, one member of the executive board, and three building representatives.

The team conducted interviews/focus groups with the following central office administrators: the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, the administrator of pupil and personnel, the administrator of educational technology integration, the director of English language learning, the school business administrator, the human resources administrator, and the director of facilities.

The team visited the following schools: Dual Language Program (K–1), Stanley Elementary (Pre-K–5), Northeast Elementary (Pre-K–5), MacArthur Elementary (K–5), Plympton Elementary (K–5), FitzGerald Elementary (K–5), Whittemore Elementary (K–5), Kennedy Middle (grades 6–8), McDevitt Middle (grades 6–8), and Waltham Senior High (grades 9–12).

During school visits, the team conducted interviews with 10 principals and focus groups with students, parents, 12 elementary-school teachers, 10 middle-school teachers, and 9 high-school teachers.

The team observed 104 classes in the district: 26 at the high school, 22 at the 2 middle schools, and 56 at the 7 elementary schools.

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**5/29/2018 | **Wednesday**5/30/2018 | **Thursday**5/31/2018 | **Friday**6/01/2018 |
| Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff and principals; document reviews; interview with teachers’ association; and visits to Whittemore Elementary and Kennedy Middle School for classroom observations. | Interviews with district staff and principals; review of personnel files; teacher focus groups; parent focus group; parent focus group; and visits to MacArthur, McDevitt, and Northeast elementary schools for classroom observations. | Interviews with town or city personnel; interviews with school leaders; interviews with school committee members; visits to Waltham Senior High , Kennedy Middle School and Plympton and Stanley elementary schools for classroom observations. | Interviews with school leaders; follow-up interviews; district review team meeting; visits to McDevitt Middle School, the Fitzgerald, MacArthur, Plympton, and Stanley elementary schools, and the Dual Language Program for classroom observations; district wrap-up meeting with the superintendent. |

Appendix B: Enrollment, Attendance, Expenditures

**Table B1a: Waltham Public Schools**

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

| **Group** | **District** | **Percent****of Total** | **State** | **Percent of****Total** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| African-American | 535 | 9.6% | 86,305 | 9.0% |
| Asian | 313 | 5.6% | 65,667 | 6.9% |
| Hispanic | 2,217 | 39.6% | 191,201 | 20.0% |
| Native American | 6 | 0.1% | 2,103 | 0.2% |
| White | 2,393 | 42.7% | 573,335 | 60.1% |
| Native Hawaiian | 4 | 0.1% | 818 | 0.1% |
| Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic  | 132 | 2.4% | 34,605 | 3.6% |
| All  | 5,600 | 100.0% | 954,034 | 100.0% |
| Note: As of October 1, 2017 |

**Table B1b: Waltham 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 | 902 | 30.4% | 15.9% | 171,061 | 38.0% | 17.7% |
| Econ. Dis. | 1,931 | 65.1% | 34.5% | 305,203 | 67.9% | 32.0% |
| ELLs and Former ELLs | 1,243 | 41.9% | 22.2% | 97,334 | 21.6% | 10.2% |
| All high needs students | 2,968 | 100.0% | 52.3% | 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 5,677; total state enrollment including students in out-of-district placement is 964,806. |

**Table B2: Waltham Public Schools**

**Attendance Rates, 2014–2017**

| **Group** | **N (2017)** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **4-yr Change** | **State (2017)** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| High Needs | 2,909 | 94.0 | 94.4 | 94.5 | 93.7 | -0.3 | 93.1 |
| Econ. Dis. | 1,664 | -- | 93.9 | 94.4 | 93.7 | -- | 92.6 |
| ELLs | 1,270 | 94.5 | 94.7 | 94.8 | 93.9 | -0.6 | 93.5 |
| SWD | 1,036 | 92.9 | 93.7 | 93.7 | 93.2 | 0.3 | 93.0 |
| African American | 581 | 95.7 | 96.1 | 96.4 | 95.8 | 0.1 | 94.0 |
| Asian | 344 | 96.5 | 96.1 | 96.3 | 96.3 | -0.2 | 96.3 |
| Hispanic or Latino | 2,280 | 93.7 | 94.4 | 94.6 | 94.1 | 0.4 | 92.8 |
| Multi-Race | 163 | 94.5 | 93.9 | 95.0 | 94.7 | 0.2 | 94.5 |
| White | 2,506 | 95.5 | 95.5 | 95.6 | 95.4 | -0.1 | 95.1 |
| All  | 5,885 | 94.8 | 95.2 | 95.4 | 95.0 | 0.2 | 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: Waltham 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 | $74,575,851 | $74,171,440 | $77,181,798 | $78,192,292 | -- | $79,778,316 |
| By municipality | $30,887,435 | $31,733,378 | $32,578,009 | $33,010,156 | -- | $34,728,431 |
| Total from local appropriations | $105,463,286 | $105,904,818 | $109,759,807 | $111,202,448 | -- | $114,506,747 |
| From revolving funds and grants | -- | $8,022,032 | -- | $7,990,057 | -- | $8,473,974 |
| Total expenditures | -- | $113,926,850 | -- | $119,192,506 | -- | $122,980,721 |
| Chapter 70 aid to education program |
| Chapter 70 state aid\* | -- | $9,012,826 | -- | $9,711,597 | -- | $10,863,166 |
| Required local contribution | -- | $51,151,815 | -- | $52,507,147 | -- | $51,887,299 |
| Required net school spending\*\* | -- | $60,164,641 | -- | $62,218,744 | -- | $62,750,465 |
| Actual net school spending | -- | $95,822,413 | -- | $100,360,261 | -- | $103,950,490 |
| Over/under required ($) | -- | $35,657,772 | -- | $38,141,517 | -- | $41,200,025 |
| Over/under required (%) | -- | 59.3% | -- | 61.3% | -- | 65.7% |
| \*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 8/24/18 |

**Table B4: Waltham Public Schools**

**Expenditures Per In-District Pupil**

**Fiscal Years 2014–2016**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Expenditure Category** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** |
| Administration | $760 | $743 | $699 |
| Instructional leadership (district and school) | $923 | $956 | $1,103 |
| Teachers | $6,633 | $6,780 | $6,729 |
| Other teaching services | $1,211 | $1,235 | $1,345 |
| Professional development | $372 | $416 | $403 |
| Instructional materials, equipment and technology | $464 | $290 | $426 |
| Guidance, counseling and testing services | $544 | $545 | $573 |
| Pupil services | $1,393 | $1,485 | $1,488 |
| Operations and maintenance | $1,555 | $1,652 | $1,491 |
| Insurance, retirement and other fixed costs | $4,774 | $4,867 | $5,090 |
| Total expenditures per in-district pupil | $18,628 | $18,967 | $19,347 |
| Sources: [Per-pupil expenditure reports on ESE website](http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/statistics/)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 | AverageNumber of points |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (1 to 4) |
| 1. The teacher demonstrates knowledge of the subject matter. | **ES** | 13% | 23% | 55% | 9% | 2.6 |
| **MS** | 9% | 27% | 50% | 14% | 2.7 |
| **HS** | 4% | 42% | 50% | 4% | 2.5 |
| **Total #** | 10 | 30 | 55 | 9 | 2.6 |
| **Total %** | 10% | 29% | 53% | 9% |  |
| 2. The teacher ensures that students understand what they should be learning in the lesson and why. | **ES** | 13% | 27% | 52% | 9% | 2.6 |
| **MS** | 5% | 36% | 50% | 9% | 2.6 |
| **HS** | 4% | 50% | 46% | 0% | 2.4 |
| **Total #** | 9 | 36 | 52 | 7 | 2.5 |
| **Total %** | 9% | 35% | 50% | 7% |  |
| 3. The teacher uses appropriate classroom activities well matched to the learning objective(s). | **ES** | 4% | 27% | 59% | 11% | 2.8 |
| **MS** | 0% | 45% | 36% | 18% | 2.7 |
| **HS** | 0% | 54% | 42% | 4% | 2.5 |
| **Total #** | 2 | 39 | 52 | 11 | 2.7 |
| **Total %** | 2% | 38% | 50% | 11% |  |
| 4. The teacher conducts frequent checks for student understanding, provides feedback, and adjusts instruction. | **ES** | 5% | 38% | 45% | 13% | 2.6 |
| **MS** | 9% | 18% | 68% | 5% | 2.7 |
| **HS** | 15% | 38% | 42% | 4% | 2.3 |
| **Total #** | 9 | 35 | 51 | 9 | 2.6 |
| **Total %** | 9% | 34% | 49% | 9% |  |
| **Total Score For Focus Area #1** | **ES** |  |  |  |  | 10.6 |
| **MS** |  |  |  |  | 10.7 |
| **HS** |  |  |  |  | 9.8 |
| **Total** |  |  |  |  | 10.4 |

| **Focus Area #2: Student Engagement & Higher-Order Thinking** |  | Insufficient Evidence | Limited Evidence | Sufficient Evidence | Compelling Evidence | Average Number of points |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (1 to 4) |
| 5. Students assume responsibility to learn and are engaged in the lesson. | **ES** | 2% | 27% | 48% | 23% | 2.9 |
| **MS** | O% | 36% | 59% | 5% | 2.7 |
| **HS** | 8% | 38% | 46% | 8% | 2.5 |
| **Total #** | 3 | 33 | 52 | 16 | 2.8 |
| **Total %** | 3% | 32% | 50% | 15% |  |
| 6. Students engage in higher-order thinking. | **ES** | 14% | 30% | 46% | 9% | 2.5 |
| **MS** | 5% | 45% | 41% | 9% | 2.5 |
| **HS** | 23% | 35% | 38% | 4% | 2.2 |
| **Total #** | 15 | 36 | 45 | 8 | 2.4 |
| **Total %** | 14% | 35% | 43% | 8% |  |
| 7. Students communicate their ideas and thinking with each other. | **ES** | 13% | 34% | 45% | 9% | 2.5 |
| **MS** | 5% | 36% | 55% | 5% | 2.6 |
| **HS** | 8% | 46% | 46% | 0% | 2.4 |
| **Total #** | 10 | 39 | 49 | 6 | 2.5 |
| **Total %** | 10% | 38% | 47% | 6% |  |
| 8. Students engage with meaningful, real-world tasks. | **ES** | 13% | 29% | 45% | 14% | 2.6 |
| **MS** | 5% | 23% | 55% | 18% | 2.9 |
| **HS** | 15% | 31% | 50% | 4% | 2.4 |
| **Total #** | 12 | 29 | 50 | 13 | 2.6 |
| **Total %** | 12% | 28% | 48% | 13% |  |
| **Total Score For Focus Area #2** | **ES** |  |  |  |  | 10.5 |
| **MS** |  |  |  |  | 10.7 |
| **HS** |  |  |  |  | 9.6 |
| **Total** |  |  |  |  | 10.3 |

| **Focus Area #3: Inclusive Practice & Classroom Culture** |  | Insufficient Evidence | Limited Evidence | Sufficient Evidence | Compelling Evidence | Average 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** | 20% | 30% | 45% | 5% | 2.4 |
| **MS** | 9% | 64% | 23% | 5% | 2.2 |
| **HS** | 15% | 50% | 31% | 4% | 2.2 |
| **Total #** | 17 | 44 | 38 | 5 | 2.3 |
| **Total %** | 16% | 42% | 37% | 5% |  |
| 10. The teacher uses a variety of instructional strategies. | **ES** | 14% | 23% | 52% | 11% | 2.6 |
| **MS** | 14% | 41% | 36% | 9% | 2.4 |
| **HS** | 12% | 62% | 27% | 0% | 2.2 |
| **Total #** | 14 | 38 | 44 | 8 | 2.4 |
| **Total %** | 13% | 37% | 42% | 8% |  |
| 11. Classroom routines and positive supports are in place to ensure that students behave appropriately. | **ES** | 0% | 4% | 39% | 57% | 3.5 |
| **MS** | 5% | 14% | 41% | 41% | 3.2 |
| **HS** | 0% | 15% | 69% | 15% | 3.0 |
| **Total #** | 1 | 9 | 49 | 45 | 3.3 |
| **Total %** | 1% | 9% | 47% | 43% |  |
| 12. The classroom climate is conducive to teaching and learning. | **ES** | 0% | 7% | 41% | 52% | 3.4 |
| **MS** | 5% | 14% | 36% | 45% | 3.2 |
| **HS** | 4% | 15% | 69% | 12% | 2.9 |
| **Total #** | 2 | 11 | 49 | 42 | 3.3 |
| **Total %** | 2% | 11% | 47% | 40% |  |
| **Total Score For Focus Area #3** | **ES** |  |  |  |  | 11.9 |
| **MS** |  |  |  |  | 11.0 |
| **HS** |  |  |  |  | 10.3 |
| **Total** |  |  |  |  | 11.3 |

1. Waltham Senior High was classified as Level 3 because of persistently low graduation rates for ELLs and former ELLs, and low assessment participation (less than 95 percent) for economically disadvantaged students, Hispanic/Latino students, and ELLs and former ELLs. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The superintendent reported that the district has aligned the science curriculum for grades 6–8 and done substantial work to align science curriculum for grades 9–12. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In addition to curriculum and Instruction, the assistant superintendent has additional responsibilities in the district. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. One K–8 math coach is the district’s elementary math coach. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 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-5)
6. 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-6)
7. See [Burton, Paul, "Waltham Students Protest Classmate's Racially Charged Instagram Post," WBZ -TV News, May 15, 2017.](https://boston.cbslocal.com/2017/05/15/waltham-high-student-curry-college-racist-instagram/) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Attendance rate equals the average number of students present each day divided by the average number of students enrolled each day. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Interviews and a review of the Waltham Public Schools website indicated that in 2018 Waltham High School partnered with Teaching Excellence Network (TEN) to “support an equity audit of Waltham High School and to determine the root causes of inequities in our system.” In May 2018, “more than 90 percent of students, 160 educators, and over 200 parents participated in the TEN survey.” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. It was not clear to the review team that the TEN survey was given only in English. However, the invitation to district stakeholders to participate in a “community dialogue” on the survey results and “a panel discussion on race, equity, and diversity” was written in English. The team did not find evidence that the invitation was available in other languages.  [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The superintendent reported that the survey was translated and administered in English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, and Portuguese. He also noted that the flyers communicating about the equity discussions were also sent out in multiple languages. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In 2018, 1,620 students were enrolled at Waltham High School. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The YRBS is administered biannually to Waltham High School and Middle School students. In 2017, 1,283 of 1,586 high-school students (81 percent) and 1,076 of 1,091 middle-school students (99 percent) completed the YRBS. The Waltham Partnership for Youth, Inc., partners with Waltham High School and Waltham Middle School to administer the survey. See <http://www.walthampartnershipforyouth.org/current-initiatives.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The superintendent reported that the district has provided a series of four professional development (PD) sessions about race and equity for all staff at Waltham High School and the district’s two middle schools and plans to provide this PD to all the district’s elementary schools in 2018–2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/wida/eld-standard.pdf>, [↑](#footnote-ref-15)