



Chelsea Public Schools  
REVIEW OF  
DISTRICT SYSTEMS AND PRACTICES  
ADDRESSING THE DIFFERENTIATED NEEDS  
OF ALL STUDENTS

---

May 2010

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



This document was prepared on behalf of the  
Center for School and District Accountability of the  
**Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**  
**Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D**  
**Commissioner**

**Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Members**

Ms. Maura Banta, Chair, Melrose  
Ms. Harneen Chernow, Jamaica Plain  
Mr. Gerald Chertavian, Cambridge  
Mr. Michael D'Ortenzio, Jr., Chair, Student Advisory Council, Wellesley  
Dr. Thomas E. Fortmann, Lexington  
Ms. Beverly Holmes, Springfield  
Dr. Jeff Howard, Reading  
Ms. Ruth Kaplan, Brookline  
Dr. Dana Mohler-Faria, Bridgewater  
Mr. Paul Reville, Secretary of Education, Worcester  
Dr. Sandra L. Stotsky, Brookline  
Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D., Commissioner  
and Secretary to the Board

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, an affirmative action employer, is committed to ensuring that all of its programs and facilities are accessible to all members of the public.

We do not discriminate on the basis of age, color, disability, national origin, race, religion, sex or sexual orientation.  
Inquiries regarding the Department's compliance with Title IX and other civil rights laws may be directed to the  
Human Resources Director, 75 Pleasant St., Malden, MA 02148 781-338-6105.

© 2009 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

*Permission is hereby granted to copy any or all parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes. Please credit the  
"Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education."*

*This document printed on recycled paper*

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



## Overview of the Reviews of District Systems and Practices Addressing the Differentiated Needs of All Students

---

### Purpose:

The Center for School and District Accountability (SDA) in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) is undertaking a series of school district reviews to determine how well district systems and practices support groups of students for whom an achievement gap exists. The reviews will focus on how district systems and practices affect each of four groups of students: students with disabilities, English language learners, low-income students, and students who are members of racial minorities. The first set of districts reviewed, in May and June 2009, are Agawam, Chelsea, Lexington, Quincy, Taunton, and Westwood, districts where data pointed to responsive and flexible school systems that are effective in supporting all learners, particularly students with disabilities, or where there was an interest in making these systems more effective.

### Key Questions:

Three overarching questions guide the work of the review team.

- **How do district and school leaders assume, communicate, and share responsibility for the achievement of all learners, especially those with disabilities?**
- **How does the district create greater capacity to support all learners?**
- **What technical assistance and monitoring activities from ESE are most useful to districts?**

### Methodology:

To focus the analysis, the reviewers collect evidence in three critical domains: **(I) Leadership, (II) Curriculum Delivery, and (III) Human Resource Management and Professional Development**. The reviews seek to identify those systems and practices that are most likely to be contributing to positive results, as well as practices that may impede rapid improvement. Practices were identified from three sources: Educational Quality and Accountability indicators, Program Quality Assurance Comprehensive Program Review criteria, and the Essential Conditions for School Effectiveness. The three domains, organized by system with component practices, are detailed in Appendix F of the review protocol. Four team members previewed selected district documents and ESE data and reports before conducting a four-day site visit in the district. The four-member teams consist of independent consultants with expertise in district and school leadership, governance, and financial management (to respond to domain I); curriculum, instruction, and assessment (to respond to domain II); human resource management and professional development (to respond to domain III); and special education (to collect evidence across all three domains; see italicized indicators under each domain in Appendix F of the review protocol).

The review to the Chelsea Public Schools was conducted from **May 26-May 29, 2009**. The review included visits to the following district schools: John Silber Early Learning Center (Pre-K-1), Frank M. Sokolowski Elementary (grades 1 – 4), Edgar A. Hooks Elementary (grades 1 – 4), Eugene Wright Middle School (grades 5 – 8), and Chelsea High School (grades 9 – 12). Further information about the review and its schedule can be found in Appendix B; information about the members of the review team can be found in Appendix A.

## Chelsea Public Schools

---

### District Profile

Settled in 1624, Chelsea is a city of 1.8 square miles that lies next to Boston Harbor on the Mystic and Chelsea Rivers. Situated close to Logan International Airport, Chelsea is an industrial center that combines an urban setting with tree-lined streets, neighborhood parks, and local eateries. Downtown Chelsea is anchored by city hall and provides views of the Boston skyline and the Tobin Bridge. Chelsea residents have access to the Massachusetts Transit System and Suffolk County services.

Originally settled by Italian, Irish, and Polish immigrants, Chelsea is now home to a very diverse population of approximately 38,203 people. 2007 demographics showed a population in the city that was 48.4 percent Hispanic, 38.3 percent White non-Hispanic, 7.3 percent Black, and 2.5 percent Vietnamese. Approximately 60 percent had a high school diploma or higher with 10 percent holding bachelor's degrees or higher. Chelsea's estimated 2007 median income was \$38,458; the state's median income was \$62,365. Chelsea residents serve in a variety of jobs in the service or construction industry, accommodation and food services, health care, administration and education services. Twenty-three percent live below the poverty level with 12.3 percent having income below 50 percent of the poverty level (<http://www.city-data.com/city/Chelsea-Massachusetts.html>; retrieved July 5, 2009).

In 2008-2009 Chelsea Public Schools had an enrollment of 5,602 students with 165 core subject teachers across 9 schools. Schools include 1 pre-kindergarten and kindergarten Early Learning Center and 4 elementary schools, grades 1 through 4 (John Silber Early Learning Center, William A. Berkowitz Elementary, Edgar A. Hooks Elementary, and Frank M. Sokolowski Elementary); 3 grade 5 – 8 schools (Eugene Wright School, Clark Avenue School, and Joseph A. Browne School); and 1 high school (Chelsea High). In addition, Chelsea Public Schools has relationships with Shore Educational Collaborative, Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational Technical, and St. Rose Elementary, a private school. The director of special education and pupil personnel services retired at the end of 2008-2009, and was replaced.

All Chelsea schools have a diverse population as well as a high percentage of students from low-income households. Table 1 below shows the district's student demographics. Most schools have students with disabilities, ranging from a low of 5 percent in the Silber Early Learning Center to a high of 24 percent at the Eugene Wright School. Students come to school regularly, only missing, on average, 9 days a year. Attendance is 94.4 percent. The retention rate is 6.4 percent, the in-house suspension rate 4.5 percent, and the out-of-school suspension rate 4.2 percent.

**Table 1: CPS Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Selected Populations 2008-2009<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>	<b>Selected Populations</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>
African American	7.1%	First Language not English	83.5%
Asian	2.6%	Limited English Proficient	17.0%
Hispanic or Latino	81.0%	From low-income families	77.8%
Native American	.1%	Special Education	13.9%
White	8.6%	Free-lunch	66.7%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.0%	Reduced-price lunch	11.0%
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	0.6%		

**Student Performance<sup>2</sup>**

On the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), Chelsea made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the aggregate for both English Language Arts and mathematics every year up through 2008, with the exception of 2005, when it did not make AYP in the aggregate for either subject. The district made AYP for all subgroups in both subjects in 2003 and 2006, but did not make AYP for all subgroups in either subject in 2004, 2005, 2007, or 2008. Several Chelsea schools have not made AYP in mathematics for subgroups in any of the years from 2003 to 2008. Schools include Chelsea High School (CHS), Eugene Wright Middle School, Clark Avenue Middle School, and Joseph A. Browne Middle School). However, Chelsea students, as a whole, have demonstrated some improvement on the MCAS over the last few years.

Percentages of students scoring advanced or proficient (A/P) have increased. For example, the percentage of 10<sup>th</sup> graders scoring A/P in ELA grew from 27 percent in 2004 to 45 percent in 2008 while the percentage of failures dropped from 37 percent in 2004 to 10 percent in 2008. Scores in math also showed improvement, with the percentage of 10<sup>th</sup> graders scoring A/P in mathematics growing from 25 percent in 2004 to 44 percent in 2008, while the percentage of failures dropped from 37 percent in 2004 to 28 percent in 2008.

---

<sup>1</sup> Student demographic data derived from the website of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

<sup>2</sup> Data derived from the website of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

## **Findings**

### *Student Achievement*

#### **Chelsea K-12 special education students have performed below their peers. District leadership has been actively pursuing ways to improve their educational achievement.**

Students with disabilities have not fared as well as students generally. In 2006, only 2 percent of 59 10<sup>th</sup> grade students with disabilities scored A/P on the ELA assessment, as compared with 29 percent of 10<sup>th</sup> grade students with disabilities statewide; in 2007, 14 percent of 37 students as compared with 30 percent statewide, and in 2008, 13 percent of 46 students did so, as compared with 35 percent statewide. The percentages of 10<sup>th</sup> graders with disabilities scoring A/P in math were lower, with only 8 percent of 59 students demonstrating A/P in 2006, as compared with 30 percent of students with disabilities statewide; 5 percent of 39 students in 2007, as compared with 31 percent statewide, and 2 percent of 49 students in 2008, as compared with 33 percent statewide. The review team must point out that the number of Chelsea students with disabilities actually taking the MCAS exams is relatively low; therefore the percentages can be misleading. The results in the other grades, however, are similarly low.

The 2007 graduation rate for Chelsea students with disabilities was low at 28 percent when compared to the state's rate at 62.8 percent. Only 21 out of 75 special education students in the 2007 cohort graduated from high school. Fifty-nine percent of general education students in the same cohort graduated when compared to the state's rate for general education students of 84.9 percent. In 2008, 25 (32.5 percent) out of 77 Chelsea students with disabilities graduated from high school, compared to the state's rate of 64.1 percent for students with disabilities. Only 49.9 percent of all Chelsea students graduated the same year.

The district, in pursuit of improving its programs, policies, and practices, has hired outside consultants to provide internal reviews. In June 2008, a consultant conducted an internal audit of the special education department. This report was followed by a review of the outreach department program in November 2008 and a review of the parent information center program in January 2009. The reviews involved an analysis of documents and programs, interviews with key staff, and site visits. Reports included highlights of findings, analysis of data, and recommendations. A result of these reviews is the district's decision to re-organize its special education service delivery model. In May 2009, the deputy superintendent held a strategic planning session to kick off the reorganization of special education. The district volunteered to participate in this 2009 ESE Differentiated Needs Review in order to receive feedback on its services to students with disabilities. Fueled by the findings of these reviews, the district will create and implement an action plan to re-organize its special education service delivery model. It will review and revamp its delivery models, staffing, and support initiatives for students with disabilities.

## Leadership

**District leadership has made a dedicated effort to provide Chelsea students with an evidence-based educational program and has sought expert advice in the pursuit of improving programs, policies, and practices.**

According to the Boston University/Chelsea Partnership's 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Report to the Massachusetts Legislature in September 2008, one of the key developments of the partnership has been "the institutionalization of sound habits and practices." Indeed, district leaders, administrators, and teachers have developed a robust standards-based curriculum across grade levels and content areas. This work is a reflection of the district's guidance and support of its curriculum specialists, department chairs, and teachers in creating a strong system that articulates what students need to know and be able to do. From health to music to the core subjects of English, social studies, mathematics, and science, each content area has developed a curriculum, scope and sequence, and formative and summative assessments.

The district has also developed a comprehensive data management system that allows principals and teachers easy access to data on students' progress. Screening, diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments are used throughout the district, across grade levels and content areas. The reporting system is flexible so that teachers can request class reports and use the data to progress-monitor their students. The use of data to inform decision-making is evident throughout the district.

The district has provided support to principals by the creation of the "district principal," whose role is to assist principals in developing and implementing a School Improvement Plan (SIP). The district principal works with school-based leadership teams and teachers, provides professional development as needed, and conducts learning walks.

In addition, the district has reviewed its three-tiered literacy model. An outside consultant examined districtwide assessments, core instruction, and interventions. After a review of the documents and programs as well as interviews with staff and site visits, the consultant suggested that the district closely examine its student performance data in terms of peaks and valleys.

**The district's service delivery model and continuum of educational placement options are not sufficiently flexible and do not provide sufficient access to the general curriculum.**

Statistics reveal that access to the general education curriculum is limited for a large number of Chelsea students with disabilities. According to district special education placement data, the district's percentage of students found eligible for special education services is low, 13.9 percent in 2008-2009 compared to 17.1 percent for the state. However, the number of students in substantially separate programs in the district in 2007-2008 was significantly higher than the state's average. The district placed 29.1 percent of its students with disabilities in substantially separate (sub-separate) programs compared to the state percentage of 15.1 percent. Similarly, Chelsea Public Schools placed 13.6 percent of its students with disabilities in out-of-district settings in 2007-2008 as compared to the state figure of 6.7 percent; Chelsea had twice the state rate. In total, 42.7 percent of all Chelsea special education students were served outside of the general education classroom more than 60 percent of the time or were placed in out-of-district

programs. According to district leadership, in response to this issue the district allocated American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds for a summer 2009 Special Education Reorganization Plan.

District leaders, principals, and special education Team leaders provided some examples of students getting access to and support for challenging coursework. However, mechanisms to examine patterns of placements for different student populations in the district's programs were not evident at every level of leadership and, specifically, were not clearly articulated at all levels of special education administration. Also, designating specific classrooms as "inclusion" classrooms misses the opportunity for training to expand the number of teachers capable of teaching a wider range of students and relegates students to a smaller selection of teachers that may or may not be sufficient to teach them.

The district does not use a sufficiently flexible or efficient service delivery model and continuum of placement options. Interviews with Team leaders districtwide and chairpersons at the early childhood level indicated that special education placements and service delivery models are seen as inflexible, not meeting students' needs, and designed so that the student's needs must fit the placement. Team leaders expressed the view that often students are better off placed out of the district because appropriate programs are not available within the district, especially for children with autism or behavioral challenges. Some parents, when interviewed by the review team, voiced a lack of confidence in the effectiveness of district special education programs. They stated perceptions of being ignored by Chelsea staff and having to fight for services. They expressed confidence in out-of-district collaborative programs due to the personalized attention that they and their children receive in such programs. In their experience with these programs, as they described it, out-of-district staff communicated daily with them and shared what seemed to be a wealth of knowledge regarding their children's care.

Early learning center staff indicated that, at initial Team meetings for some entering three-year-old children, the district does not have the programmatic capability or "the room" to place the child in a district program. Therefore, placement decisions were made because of capacity reasons rather than for the best interest of students, including placing them in the least restrictive environment. Ironically, special education staff indicated that out-of-district collaborative day program staff do not understand why some students are placed out of the district; they feel that the students could be provided services in the Chelsea Public Schools.

The problem of unsuitable out-of-district placements is a matter that also concerns high-level administrators. Both sets of interviewees expressed concerns about a growing trend of students' needs not being met in the district and frustration that programs were not being developed to increase in-district placements.

The lack of programmatic coherence, long-range planning, and program development has fiscal and educational impacts. In the area of student achievement, the district loses day-to-day contact when a student is placed out of the district. Careful district monitoring of academic and behavioral progress is less likely. Furthermore, students placed in substantially separate programs within the district risk losing opportunities to improve their academic performance if

not taught by highly qualified content area teachers. Providing access to the district's general education curriculum is a significant challenge.

The fiscal impact, as documented by the district, has been substantial despite the existence of the state circuit-breaker reimbursement program. According to its end-of-year report, the district spent \$4,877,475 in the 2007-2008 school year for public and private collaborative day program tuition and transportation. If more students were kept in district, these funds would be available to develop in-district services and programs to meet the needs of more students.

Finally, every child has the legal right to be educated in the least restrictive environment. Lack of space or programs is not an educationally justifiable reason for placing students in a more restrictive environment, especially when there has been a history of such practices for some time. District leadership must act to rebuild confidence in the district's capacity to educate more students with disabilities in appropriate in-district placements. General and special education staff, Team leaders, and parents need to see a new approach that will create better programmatic solutions and develop a sense of responsibility for all students with disabilities.

**The district and schools have data-based decision-making practices, but they do not result in sufficient improvement to instructional strategies at the classroom level to support the achievement of students with disabilities.**

The district and schools have systems in place to analyze disaggregated student performance data, but a gap exists between the analysis and the implementation of classroom instructional practices. Documents and interviews indicated that district and school leaders meet regularly to disaggregate data for analysis of student performance. The perspective of teachers in focus groups was that the analysis of data and planning of instructional strategies to improve student performance is fragmented and does not involve special education staff in a meaningful manner. They described an essentially bifurcated system of teacher preparation and service delivery, the result of which is that students with disabilities do not benefit from analyses of disaggregated student performance data. As one senior administrator expressed it, "The gap is where there should be planning and classroom collaboration between the special and general education teachers; not all teachers see they have a role, not all see everyone owning the child."

Opportunities for general education teachers and special education teachers to collaborate and examine student performance data in their preparation of instructional strategies are limited. Interviews of special education staff revealed that some special education teachers do not attend the same content area professional development as general education teachers. Middle school special education teachers expressed frustration that they do not receive professional development in content areas, while high school department leaders stated that special education teachers do not attend content area department meetings for the subject they are teaching because they have their own training. As one middle school principal stated, "The trickle-down from school level analysis to the classroom level is the big disconnect." District data-based decision-making stalls when key personnel do not collaborate and plan instructional strategies at the school level to help the students in greatest need. In this case the achievement gap for students with disabilities is, in part, the result of a "process gap" in data-based decision-making practices.

District leadership described plans to institute Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as a means to address this gap.

The district has co-taught “inclusive” classes and a consulting model of special education and related services delivery in place for students with disabilities, but there is no ongoing training in best practices of co-teaching and consultation. Middle school special education teachers stated in interviews, “There was recent professional development on co-teaching for special education teachers only, and it wasn’t as effective as it could have been.” General education and special education teachers are not well prepared to work together and meet student needs. The review team’s observations of “inclusive classes” revealed classrooms where the special education teachers were often seen standing silently while general education teachers conducted a lesson. The presence of two teachers in a classroom has great possibilities for improved instruction and assistance to needy students if there is instructional cohesiveness. However, if collaborative teaching is not effectively implemented and monitored, it can confuse students and represent a waste of human resources. Effective collaborative and cooperative co-teaching represents a skill set that must be developed and supported.

Students with disabilities are not receiving the benefit of adjustments in instructional strategies because the district has a “process gap” that prevents effective general education and special education collaboration and consultation. Data-based decision-making is fragmented and does not allow for special educators and general educators to analyze academic performance results and plan interventions for students with disabilities.

### Curriculum Delivery

#### **Chelsea Public Schools have developed a robust K-12 curriculum that is based on evidence-based research in reading and mathematics.**

Information on Chelsea’s 3-tier model of instruction is evident on examination of K-12 literacy and mathematics curriculum documents. Close inspection of these documents reveals that the district has aligned its curriculum with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks, created quarterly assessments and exit criteria for all English language arts, reading, and mathematics classes, and developed pacing guides.

The 3-tier English language arts curriculum includes 90 minutes of instruction daily in the core program Open Court Reading. Teachers use the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) to assess students’ reading three times a year in grades 1 to 4, and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) in the fall and spring for students in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. The district reported that it intended to replace administration of AGS GRADE Fluency Indicator in grades 5 and 6 with DIBELS during the winter of 2010. Students who need additional support receive supplemental instruction for an additional 40 minutes a day. If students continue to need additional support, they are placed in an intensive intervention for an additional 40 minutes a day. All students participate in a writing workshop class.

The DIBELS and PPVT are used primarily in the early grades. Other assessments include Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE), Reading Fluency, Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, English language arts quarterly exams, Corrective Reading, Reading Mastery, and the Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (CTOPP). Progress monitoring in fluency uses Read Naturally and Great Leaps; in phonics, Lexia Reports.

The document “3-Tier Model, Chelsea Public Schools, Grades 5–High School” lists approximately 19 intervention programs, many funded through the district’s Reading First grant, including among others Great Leaps Fluency, Rewards, Teaching Phonics and Word Study, Soar to Success, Soliloquy Secondary Reading Assistant, Lexia SOS, Read Naturally, and Accelerated Reader. Students receive supplemental and intensive support based on their assessments and progress monitoring.

Mathematics follows a similar model. Assessments include Galileo Quarterly, CPS math assessments, Naglieri Non-verbal Abilities Test (NNAT), CPS exit criteria, and the Orleans-Hanna. A full description of these assessments as well as the ELA assessments, including content, purpose/use, and frequency, are found in “Chelsea Public Schools, Assessment Framework, 2008-2011.” The grades 1 – 4 core curriculum is *Mathematics* by Scott Foresman. *Do the Math* by Marilyn Burns is used primarily with English language learners and special education students. Supplemental materials come from a variety of sources, including University of Georgia’s Selected Geometry Lessons, The Problem Solver, Groundworks: Algebraic Thinking, It’s Elementary!, Hot Math Topics: Number Sense, Spatial Sense, Operations, TOPS Problem Solving Cards, and Great Graphing. Students who need additional math support receive it in the workshop period.

Conversations with the district’s math coordinator, writing coordinator, and reading director validated the use of the 3-tier model throughout the schools. The reading director said, “When we started Reading First, many students couldn’t read. Now, most can read, and many are fluent. The comprehension is our challenge.” According to the math coordinator, all middle grades students have 1.5 hours of mathematics per day. All have basic math and then, depending upon their performance, differentiated instruction. At Clark Middle, for example, clusters are large enough so that one teacher can teach Math I and Math II. She said, “The goal is to give students practice time at their own levels.”

Conversations with literacy and mathematics coaches in grades 1-4 offered examples of the 3-tier model in practice. Though they teach one or two classes, their primary responsibility is to support teachers. The coaches work directly with teachers in supporting student academic success. They receive and interpret the data reports, provide information to the teachers, train the teachers as needed on the different programs, and interface with district personnel.

The impact on students of the 3-tier model has been that general education students have demonstrated growth on the MCAS. Student scores have improved in English language arts and mathematics. Chelsea’s 3-tier model is a very good example of how a district can develop and implement a PreK-12 system of assessments and instruction. It shows that the district understands research-based practices and that the leadership is committed to developing and

implementing the model. Chelsea's districtwide model should be an exemplar for other urban districts.

### **Chelsea's 3-tier model of ELA interventions and supports has stratified educational choices for special education students.**

Many Chelsea special education students are enrolled in supplemental and intensive reading programs. Once they are enrolled in these interventions, the system seems to be relatively inflexible, and, according to teachers interviewed, it is difficult for students to move from one tier to another. Students get tracked according to their intervention and the assessment that is attached to it.

An elementary assistant principal gave an example of a student who had been in a tier 3 intervention for three years, though the assistant principal felt that the intervention did not directly address the student's needs. The same administrator also felt that assessments like CTOPP were being used more as a labeling device than as a means to modify the interventions to meet students' needs. He pointed out, "We have a 3-tiered instruction. It has become a crutch for teachers." Successes do exist, and Wright staff acknowledged that some students had been able to move from special education to general education after the intervention.

The availability of many support programs for students outside of the general education classroom has two unintended consequences: 1) eroding of ownership by general education teachers of improving achievement of special education students within their classrooms, and 2) the fragmentation of services for students. When teachers send students out to receive supplemental and intensive instruction, they relegate responsibility for students' success to that particular program or intervention. The result is a fragmentation of service delivery. Students may experience many different teachers, one for core instruction, another for intensive invention, and a third for writing, with no one teacher taking the lead for the student's total program.

The district brought in a consultant who reviewed the district's patterns of student achievement. The consultant encouraged the district to study the peaks and valleys of student achievement more carefully in order to understand the data precisely and to look for patterns of mistakes. This analysis would help district staff in providing a more finely-tuned intervention model that directly addresses students' needs.

The district's robust 3-tier model has produced an over-reliance on their model, with the result that students can become trapped in supplemental and intensive reading interventions. A "sorting by design" or a strictly-tiered program allows little flexibility for students with disabilities to leave these programs. When students cannot read, teachers turn to their 3-tier model to find solutions that, at times, might not be appropriate. The district's 3-tier model is both its strength and its weakness. The strength is that it is based on research and experience through the district's Reading First grant. The weakness is that it has taken over the system and diminished teachers' ability to make instructional decisions without relying on the programs. The district needs to take a step back to examine the efficacy of its programs and the unintended results on student learning. District leaders can articulate the need for teachers to enhance their responsibility for all students instead of relegating students to programs. In order to establish a sense of balance,

different pathways need to be created within the 3-tier model by which students can flow back and forth between tiers.

**The district does not provide a systemic professional development plan that focuses on building special education and general education teachers' knowledge and use of instructional strategies for students with disabilities. Training on collaboration and time to collaborate are also lacking.**

A review of the Chelsea professional development course of study for new teachers showed few required courses that focus on diverse learners. PreK-K teachers must take two courses: "Overview Training" (1 hour) and "Implementing Modifications and Differentiated Instruction" (2.5 hours). Two courses are required of all high school teachers: "Instructional Strategies for Special Needs Students" (3 hours) and "Differentiated Instruction" (3 hours).

Through conversations with special education and general education teachers and administrators, the review team identified gaps in knowledge in the following areas of particular importance to students with disabilities: implementation of strategies in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP), knowledge of diverse strategies for diverse learners, including assistive technology, and collaborative teaching.

The extent of knowledge, understanding, and use of strategies articulated in a student's IEP by general education teachers is unclear. The district ensures that staff members are informed of their specific responsibilities related to the implementation of a student's IEP, including the specific accommodations, modifications, and supports that must be provided, by requiring them to sign a form. The special education liaison gives a copy of the IEP to the general education teacher who signs off on having received it. However, after this initial contact, both special and general education teachers seemed to agree that the role of each teacher within the classroom in implementing the accommodations, specific strategies, and behavioral supports is unclear. Little or no training exists on how teachers should work together to support students with disabilities in the classroom, and it is unclear what other types of IEP conversations or trainings take place.

Evidence that teachers have been trained on or use diverse instructional strategies, including accommodations, to meet the needs of students with disabilities is weak. In interviews, teachers did report that they had received professional development in the use of diverse instructional strategies; some gave differentiated instruction as an example. However, when asked about accommodations to support students with disabilities, two different groups of teachers, elementary and high school, could not respond with concrete examples. Some did mention the use of graphic organizers; however, most were not aware of terms such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Response to Intervention (RtI). When the review team asked about assistive technologies, only two department leaders (physical education and science) could talk about the use of iPods and compact discs by students to access text. The June 2008 "Special Education Internal Audit" report provides additional evidence that the use of diverse strategies and teacher training on that subject are less than optimal. The consultant found, "Patterns and trends from the Learning Walk Protocol indicated that there was minimal evidence of instructional techniques used for either the English language learners (ELL) or the students with disabilities

(SWD) population.” Though the Chelsea teacher evaluation form does contain language about the use of diverse strategies, the impact of the evaluation upon teacher growth is not evident.

Differentiation strategies, classroom environment accommodations, grouping practices, and behavioral management suggestions that are frequently part of specialists’ training and background seldom find their way into general education classrooms. The sharing of expertise between general and special education staff is rarely achieved, according to staff from both areas. The lack of formal planning time for general education and special education teachers to work together has a major impact on the quality and delivery of instruction and content. Time limitations, the lack of the availability of both teachers during teacher preparation time, and the lack of training in effective consultation are major constraints in fostering collaboration between general and special education teachers. One group interviewed by the team stated that consultation is often done “on the run.” Teachers, including the special education teacher, usually meet with their teams and/or departments. Some special educators and other specialists also wished for more time to meet as a special education Team to confer about student progress and problems.

Principals, program leaders, and teachers stated that many teachers are not trained in models for sharing teaching responsibilities within their classrooms. Teachers across the district said that co-teaching, where two teachers take joint responsibility for classroom instruction, was not typically practiced. Special education teachers seemed uncertain about their roles in delivering instruction within collaborative-teaching classrooms.

The result of the gaps in the knowledge of general education teachers and the lack of collaboration between special and general education teachers is that some students with disabilities may not be receiving the types of academic supports that they need in order to be successful. Access to the general education curriculum requires that the special educator and general educator work together as a unit to provide a cohesive instructional approach for students with special needs. The inefficient use of special education teachers’ talents and skills as well as the lack of training for the general educator can produce a challenging classroom situation for students with disabilities, which can lead to failure and frustration on the part of these students.

**The district’s current programs and policies targeting the needs of specific student groups are inadequate to support their full participation in the general education program.**

In interviews with district and school staff, several student groups emerged as needing extra support and programs targeting their needs. District demographics and data reveal that these groups disengage with the general education program and that the system fails to provide practices, policies, and procedures that scaffold their re-entry and success. The groups include the following:

Dropouts. While leaders are aware and concerned about dropouts, the district has no systematic plan in place to reduce the number of dropouts. Currently, there are no programs for returning students to recover credits, and very limited alternatives (evening classes, online classes, etc.) to the existing high school program. Chelsea recognizes the need to focus on increasing the

graduation rate, and the goal, as articulated in the “Chelsea Public Schools District Vision,” is to have a 90 percent graduation rate.

Overage freshmen. There are no special programs to address freshman repeaters. High school administrators reported that the number of overage freshmen in the 2008-2009 school year was approximately 80, with 77 of them in danger of failing again. Retention rates in 2009, according to a data report from ESE’s Education Data Warehouse, were 23.9 percent for 9<sup>th</sup> graders and 14.5 percent for 10<sup>th</sup> graders. The high school has targeted this group in planning its freshman academy for 2009-2010.

African-American males. Some School Improvement Plans (SIPs) identified African-American males as a struggling group. The Chelsea High School SIP includes the following statement: “Such a change has occurred this year in both the African-American and First Year Limited English Proficiency (FLEP population) (54). A significant number of recent immigrants from Somalia are included in both the African-American and FLEP subgroups. Many of these students arrived in Chelsea from an environment of civil war where their education had been disrupted. When taken as a subgroup of their own, the African-American FLEP students with less than 5 years in Massachusetts have a CPI of 12.5 on the 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Math MCAS.” Though the district is aware of the needs of this immigrant population, the review team did not find evidence of a support mechanism for this group.

High-mobility students. It is unclear if any specific education programs or supports designed for these students are available. The assistant superintendent wrote *Swapping Desks: The Impact of Mobility on Student Achievement* for her dissertation. The dissertation describes Chelsea’s high-mobility student population and discusses some of the district policies that “seek to diminish the negative impact” of student mobility. These include having curricular coherence and consistency, establishing a central student registration, restricting intra-school moves, and placing students within 48 hours of entry into the system. These policies were put in place to help Chelsea schools and teachers deal with highly mobile students, but it is unclear what programs were established to meet the specific needs of the students. The dissertation concludes with the need to continue to establish district, state, and federal policies to assist schools and districts with a highly mobile student population.

The review of the outreach department’s program, conducted by an external consultant in November 2008, identified areas where supports for students needed improvement. The outreach department consists of counselors and social workers; staff work with students who are at risk socially, emotionally, and academically. Their responsibilities range from counseling students to providing support to students and teachers to sitting on the instructional support teams, to tracking of at-risk students. The report found that “At the present time, there does not appear to be basic criteria to prioritize referrals or to measure and evaluate effectiveness of services.” The report goes on, “The focus of services appears to vary from counselor, social worker and school to school. While there is agreement that students whom the Special Education, administration and parents refer will receive some form of counseling, there is little consistency beyond that point. Additional duties vary from school to school. For example, it is agreed that counselors at

the elementary and middle school are involved in dealing with attendance issues, but who makes the calls and what actions should be taken vary.”

The result of the insufficiency of district supports for these groups of students is that the number of students who fail to achieve academic and social success is alarming. Students at risk of dropping out of school, overage freshmen, African-American males, and highly mobile students are falling through the cracks of the 3-tier model. When a student is in danger of failing, the district does provide a well-developed 3-tiered model of interventions, but few special supports to keep that student engaged socially. When a student returns to the district, it is unclear what programs or procedures are in place to assist the student in re-engaging with the school’s educational program. These student groups have been identified as a challenge; however, there is no history of an articulated vision of support for these children and youths. The team is concerned that these students are not benefiting from the district’s extensive 3-tier model.

The team found three other groups of students whose needs may bear examination: students with behavioral issues, students on 504 plans, and students who, with support, might be able to handle Advanced Placement courses.

Students with behavioral issues. The district has created alternative programs for general and special education students with challenging behaviors. These programs can be found at the elementary and secondary level. The team did not gather sufficient evidence on the number of students with disabilities in these programs, or on how beneficial they are.

Students on 504 plans. For the most part, the district ensures that students without disabilities are not placed in special education for other, inappropriate reasons. The 3-tier instructional approach, a well-developed Title I program, and IST work together to provide other opportunities for support for students who are not eligible for special education. However, a very high number of students are placed on Section 504 plans—plans for students whose disabilities do not impede their educational progress but nevertheless require accommodation. The team did not have information on the causes for placement on 504 plans but did obtain the numbers by grade. In May 2009, 207 students Pre-K-12 were on 504 plans.

Advanced Placement (AP) Enrollment. In order to take AP courses, students must take pre-AP or honors courses in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, have a good GPA, and be recommended by teachers. Though some special education students and ELL students take AP courses, it is unclear how many actually enroll and receive credit. It is unclear if the school has a deliberate strategy for reaching out to parents in order to have their input into their children’s course of study.

### **Current policies and practices are insufficient to reduce the number of failing students or the dropout rate.**

The district recognizes that it has a serious and longstanding dropout problem. Despite many attempts to improve student retention, the proportion of students who drop out remains at an unacceptable 10.1 percent compared to the state figure of 3.4 percent (grade 9-12 rate for the 2007-2008 school year). One administrator at the high school stated in an interview, “We can do a better job; there is no reason for the high dropout rate.” The district does not currently have a

coordinated dropout recovery effort to return students who have left school to appropriate education placements.

One challenge that will be addressed in school year 2009-2010 is the number of students failing grade 9. The district is aware of the large number of 9<sup>th</sup> grade “repeaters” who continue to fail. In an interview, one school administrator expressed frustration with the high failure rate among 9<sup>th</sup> grade students and expressed concern with the growing number of repeaters. He said, “We have really no consistent approach.” The high school staff indicated that the 9<sup>th</sup> grade is where the win/lose battle is for many students. The same school administrator stated, “We need to raise the level of teacher interest in the students.”

At the time of the review, the district and school seemed poised to act, as plans for a new 9<sup>th</sup> grade academy were soon to be presented to the school committee. The plans, if approved, were to be implemented in the fall of 2009. Working with a community-based program, the district is attempting to better understand the reasons students fail and drop out—students at risk of dropping out can be identified as early as 6<sup>th</sup> grade. After a brief presentation on a 9<sup>th</sup> grade academy program by the high school leadership, 50 staff volunteered to assist planning efforts, and 20 have applied to be part of the faculty, all encouraging signs. Other outside organizational partnerships and a new parent liaison component are also part of the program design. In another step to address its dropout problem, district leadership reported using ARRA funds to create the position of Coordinator of Dropout Prevention to directly design prevention, intervention, remediation, and recovery programs for its most at-risk youth.

The impact on students of previous inaction has been most severely felt by the district’s students with disabilities, who had a graduation rate of 28 percent from Chelsea High School in 2007 compared to the state rate that year of 62.8 percent for students with disabilities. The overall graduation rate at the high school was 53 percent compared to the state rate of 80.9 percent. In 2008, the picture was only incrementally better, with 32.5 percent of Chelsea’s students with disabilities graduating compared to 64.1 percent of students with disabilities statewide. That year, only 49.9 percent of Chelsea students overall graduated, compared to 81.2 percent of students statewide.

**Two district policies and procedures that affect student placement in special education programs—1) the instructional support team (IST) and 2) the general education accommodation plan—are not sufficiently understood and consistently used.**

The IST process is not uniformly applied throughout the district. A review of documents describing the IST process and interviews with general and special education IST members revealed wide variance in the use and effectiveness of the IST process. IST teams are in place and greatly used in some schools. Some schools even have multiple teams that are well-used by the staff. Some principals and team leaders thought that the maintaining of evidence of the success or failure of suggested interventions and accommodations was the weak point in their process. A few said they thought some classroom teachers saw IST only as a necessary step leading directly to a special education referral.

When interviewed by the review team, principals were generally unfamiliar with the district's curriculum accommodation plan, the purpose of which is to ensure that all efforts have been made to meet the needs of diverse learners in the general education program. Assistant principals, who also serve as Team leaders at the elementary level, were also unfamiliar with school or district accommodation plans.

Individual School Improvement Plans (SIPs) contained lists of curricular programs available to all students; however, none contained a list of classroom accommodations that would increase a teacher's skills in meeting the needs of all learners. Descriptions of instructional and learning accommodations that could be put into place for any student who might benefit from them are not readily available to the entire staff: these are not collected and distributed to educate all staff.

Lists of possible accommodations for IST cases are maintained at some schools, but not others. The Chelsea High School IST Form 9 lists suggested accommodations, while a school team leader said that the school maintains a binder with lists of accommodations. Generally, however, a list of suggested accommodations and/or section 504 suggestions is not readily available to all teachers. For instance, interviews with department leaders and teachers at Chelsea High School indicated that there is no comprehensive list of accommodations/interventions available to all teachers to assist students entering the high school with poor reading skills and inability to access difficult content-area text.

The impact on students with diverse needs of the inconsistency in knowledge and use of the IST and of accommodations is reflected in the district's MCAS scores and graduation rates. The district has put in place the IST and the district accommodation plan, the mechanisms by which to address the varied needs of its students. However, all administrators, teachers, and support staff must become aware of, knowledgeable of, and held accountable for the use of the supports—including accommodations, strategies, and behavioral supports—that students with diverse learning needs require in order to be academically successful.

### Human resources and professional development

**The district's professional development offerings provide the potential for great benefits to teachers and students; however, limited teacher input and participation as well as inconsistent instructional supervision reduce their impact on teaching and learning.**

The number of opportunities for professional development (PD) offered to teachers is impressive. A review of the 2008-2009 professional development plan showed 41 entries offered for the January 26, 2009, professional development day alone, along with another 63 cited as "District-Wide Offerings." The district website also featured links to professional development opportunities at the Shore Collaborative and the Salem State College Collaborative, as well as directions on how to obtain pre-approval and reimbursement for courses, conferences, and workshops taken outside the district. The professional development staff works with both the collaborative and regional networks; there are joint activities with Revere and Lynn, and another collaboration with Worcester, Lynn, and Springfield. In addition, schools provide their own professional development activities, including monthly after-school meetings designed to

discuss school issues. The district routinely purchases online or video training for every new program acquired; the use of these resources is encouraged, but is voluntary except in specific cases where the district requires it.

Administrators mentioned their opportunities for taking courses and workshops at district expense. Most cited the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) training, which was “established to train school leaders to drive their schools to high performance.” During the 2008-2009 school year, the district saw its third cohort begin the two-year program of study. According to administrators, in the first cohort there was one principal on the 12-person district team. The second cohort of 12 people had two principals, and the third cohort of 11 had three. Both participants and other district personnel viewed the NISL experience as positive and valuable, and eight of the prior attendees had become certified NISL trainers and/or presenters. In addition, six administrators attended Community of Learners training, and others have explored Understanding by Design and Keys to Literacy.

Professional development is provided for special needs teachers and paraprofessionals. While special education teachers are encouraged to attend general education PD activities, they are expected to participate in focused special education training as well. The 2005 contract for paraprofessionals stipulated that the paraprofessionals would “meet with representatives of the school department for the purpose of developing in-service training/course development for paraprofessionals.”

Despite the wide range of offerings, teacher focus group reaction to the scope of professional development offerings was less than enthusiastic. Teachers especially noted little available PD in connection with English language learners or the arts. The district makes good efforts to record attendance at each PD offering, and maintains a website that allows teachers to print out certificates for professional development points (PDPs). The large number of offerings, however, means that inevitably one program is in conflict with another. Administrators said that repeated offerings mean that a teacher will eventually be able to obtain access to needed professional development, but the sheer number of offerings, commonly provided after school hours, makes such conflicts practically unavoidable. Furthermore, scheduling offerings after school is problematic because of disparate dismissal times. Teachers at the elementary level have at least one 50-minute block of common planning time per week.

Teachers and administrators reported that attendance at professional development activities was inconsistent. The district drew a clear distinction between “mandatory” and “voluntary” professional development. Mandatory offerings included one day before the opening of school (three days for newly-hired staff members) and one day in January. According to the language of the teachers’ contract, “Two days shall be scheduled for the purpose of staff development and in-service.” Mandatory professional development offerings are made available by the district and are fully compensated. Voluntary experiences can be paid or unpaid, depending upon whether the district requires teachers to attend. For example, Keys to Literacy training was required at both the elementary and secondary level. Teachers reported that when Boston University had a contract to manage the district (until 2008), more professional development activities were

remunerated, and more teachers participated, although they fell short of suggesting a linkage between remuneration and participation.

Evidence of a cohesive, district-level plan that was data-driven and focused on district goals was unclear. Most activities are driven by individual school improvement plans (SIPs). Teacher input into the development of the professional development plan is through their participation on the SIP team and their responses on the annual teacher survey, a link to which is posted on the professional development page on the district website. Interviewees also mentioned a professional development committee, but it was unclear whether or not such a committee currently exists, who serves on it, or what role the committee plays in selecting the professional development offerings.

Professional development is most effective when followed up by effective supervision including regular and timely feedback from supervisors. While teachers at several schools reported that they received much helpful feedback from administrators, teachers at one school reported little feedback. In one focus group, 93 percent of teachers present reported that they had received their personnel evaluation during current academic year or the previous one, or expected to receive it during the current one. Given a definition of the term “informative” as “provides you with new information about your teaching,” 13 percent described their evaluations as informative. Given a definition of the term “helpful” as “providing information that could be used to improve your teaching in the future,” 33 percent described their evaluations as helpful. No teachers reported that their evaluation contained any recommendations concerning professional development. For professional development to be most effective, supervisors need to recognize in the classroom when teachers are using what they have learned and provide feedback on its effectiveness with the students. The district recognizes this need for specialized training for principals and is providing them with training in Adolescent Literacy Walkthrough and Keys to Literacy.

The large number of professional development activities provides the potential for great benefit to students, but the inconsistent use of them by teachers may waste it. When teachers have received inadequate training on programs or technology due to scheduling conflicts, the impact on students is that teachers are unable to make effective use of the programs or technology. While teachers are exposed to much professional development, the impact of the professional development on a teacher’s professional growth and competency is unclear. As described earlier in this report, the June 2008 special education audit found that learning walks conducted by the district failed to capture any specific instructional strategies being used by teachers for English language learners or students with disabilities.

**General and special education teachers stated the need for consultation with other teachers in order to implement strategies to improve student achievement. They cited a lack of time to engage in effective consultation.**

Teachers at all levels and across all departments stated that consultative services would be a key component of improving the achievement of special needs students.

The high demand for IST services in several schools indicates a strong desire by teachers for support in delivering effective instruction to students with diverse learning needs: some schools have more than one IST team, and many teachers indicated a long wait for IST processing of cases. Consultation to classroom teachers about accommodations for special education students would help increase teachers' skills in meeting the needs of struggling learners.

District leaders and teachers cited the issue of availability of time as one impediment to successful consultation about students. There are strict limits on the use of teacher preparation time for meetings. Nevertheless, all parties agreed that this is an area of great need. Special educators also cited the lack of time for consulting with other teachers, including time to review cases with all service providers present.

Several leaders and special educators mentioned the need to change the historical view of special education staff as the "problem-solvers" in helping students to improve their achievement. They voiced the need to have all administrators, teachers, and staff recognize a shared responsibility for students with disabilities. The review team's observations of special educators and paraprofessionals revealed that these specialists play a supportive role for the student in the classroom, as case managers, but act collaboratively as co-teachers much less frequently. Some general education teachers have not yet accepted full ownership for the success of all students within their classrooms and are sometimes unwilling or unable to implement accommodations or modifications. Both general and special education teachers need support, guidance, modeling, and feedback if student achievement is to improve.

**The human resources (HR) function in the Chelsea Public Schools is well organized and well conducted. Hiring, training, supervision, and evaluation procedures have been institutionalized that are sufficient to recruit and employ a competent and caring staff.**

The district recruits its teachers in a traditional manner but does so effectively. Administrators in the human resources department reported that once they become aware of a potential staff opening, they analyze the position to determine whether an inside posting will suffice or both internal and external postings are required. If staff members determine that an outside posting is needed, an advertisement is prepared for the Boston Globe and submitted for publication. Advertising in the Globe also triggers an entry onto Jobs.com. Interviewees reported that they had once participated in job fairs, but discontinued the practice when principals became responsible for hiring within their own schools. They do not routinely use Internet placement sites, explaining that the required timelines are too long for them to recruit staff members as quickly as is necessary.

Human resources professional staff collect and distribute application materials to principals whose schools have openings. Principals are expected to assemble an interview team, prepare interview questions, conduct the initial interviews, and check references for the preferred candidate. HR maintains in-house forms to validate the hiring process and ensure that it is followed with all candidates. Once the principal selects a finalist, HR schedules a final interview with either the superintendent or the assistant superintendent. Principals reported that they had never recommended a finalist who failed to be offered the position, whether for financial or other

reasons. All principals also noted that they never discussed money with candidates, leaving that to the superintendent or assistant superintendent.

Once the finalist has been offered the position and accepted it, HR conducts the criminal offense record inquiry (CORI) and completes other required paperwork, including registration in the teachers' retirement system and all required federal and state forms. In the vast majority of instances, candidates are required to be licensed before employment. During the 2008-2009 school year, only two teachers were hired on waivers. HR keeps track of progress towards certification, but does not counsel waived teachers on the requirements for attaining full licensure.

Newly hired teachers, some with prior experience outside the district, are required to participate in a new teacher orientation before the start of school. This three-day experience is conducted by trained mentors, who go on to meet regularly with the new teachers throughout the year. Professional readings are assigned, experience logs are kept, and notes on the meetings between mentors and mentees are kept and filed.

District officials reported that the teaching staff was not as diverse as they would wish. They reported that the food service staff, paraprofessionals, and support personnel were diverse, but that there were few African-American or Hispanic teachers on the staff. Human resources staff reported that only 8 percent of the teaching staff were members of racial minorities, although 75 percent of custodians, food service workers, and clerical staff members were. District staff reported no special efforts to recruit teachers from minority groups, explaining that such candidates are more likely to be hired in Boston or surrounding communities before they are hired in Chelsea. Human resources reported that the first level of teacher discipline is within the school, with principals generally initiating district involvement where needed. Most teachers who are not retained by the district are typically in their first three years of employment. When asked about termination of teachers with professional teacher status, staff members reported that such teachers had been "counseled out" to avoid engaging the district in a prolonged and expensive legal dispute. Union cooperation was always obtained in advance. Over the past three years, discipline has been primarily oral or written reprimands, administrative leave pending investigation, suspension, or enforced resignation.

Substitute teachers are employed on a daily basis at the sum of \$75 per day. Following 90 days of employment, the rate increases to \$100 per day. The contract further stipulates that "A substitute teacher who receives a new assignment to work in the same classroom for more than 15 consecutive days will receive a daily rate of \$100.00, effective the 16th day for the duration of the assignment." Principals handle sick calls, except at the high school, where the function is delegated to a staff member who contacts potential substitutes. Substitute teachers are not routinely trained by the district, although one principal indicated that he was "quite confident" that any substitute teacher in his building would be capable of handling a class during a crisis or lockdown situation.

HR staff members were asked what they would like to accomplish that they had been unable to thus far. They responded that they would like to take a more active role in the supervision and

training of new teachers, assist in the training of substitute teachers, and encourage a more effective and better utilized professional development program.

An effective and efficient human resources staff is valuable to a district in ensuring that staff members are qualified to assist in the improvement of student learning. In addition, it leaves teachers and support staff free to concentrate on teaching students rather than having to worry about personnel matters. The Chelsea Public Schools have such a human resources staff, to the benefit of the staff and the students.

**Maintaining a well-trained, stable teaching staff is a challenge. High annual teacher turnover complicates the training needs of teachers in both general and special education, increasing the amount of supervision and feedback necessary by principals, assistant principals, and other district staff members.**

The Chelsea Public Schools reported 407 teachers employed for the 2008-2009 school year. Both administrators and human resources officials expressed concern over what they perceived as a “high turnover rate.” According to human resources officials, in school year 2006-2007 the district replaced 100 teachers. During 2007-2008, they replaced 80 teachers. For the 2008-2009 school year, the number was down to 68 teachers. Human resources staff encourage principals to replace teachers without professional teacher status “if you have any doubt about them whatsoever.” Staff other than the faculty (cooks, custodians, and support staff) was reported to be relatively stable.

Newly hired teachers require training that the teachers they are replacing may already have had. New teachers also require additional supervision and more frequent feedback from supervisors to help them to become more effective. While some principals seem to be able to handle this, others do not, as determined from interviews with teachers at several different schools. District leaders cited the fact that 52 percent of Chelsea teachers had fewer than two years of experience in Chelsea. A review of administrators’ evaluations revealed that 44 percent of the principals within the district had three years of experience or fewer. District administrators also referred to the relative inexperience of assistant principals. As a result, relatively inexperienced administrators are supervising and training relatively inexperienced teachers.

School districts are required by federal law to provide all students with “highly qualified teachers.” Chelsea Public Schools accomplish this well, with between 83.3 and 100 percent of assigned teachers being highly qualified. In special education classrooms, the difficulty with maintaining a qualified staff is clear. According to figures provided by the district to ESE, only 38 percent of special education mathematics classes are taught by highly qualified teachers. In science, the proportion falls to 25 percent.

Administrators in Chelsea described several factors militating against maintaining a well-trained, stable teaching staff. These include a salary schedule that is lower than those of surrounding communities such as Boston, Revere, and Everett. On the other hand, there are factors favoring the retention of teachers. There is a teacher mentoring and support program in place. There are many professional development options provided by the district for teachers who wish to improve their skills. All staff members reported a friendly and supportive environment within

the district. It is possible that in a difficult economy, the positives are beginning to outweigh the negatives, as the number of teachers being replaced has steadily decreased over the past three years.

The impact of the turnover on students varies. During a focus group at one of the schools, 100 percent of the students were able to cite a specific teacher whom they considered a person that they “would go to” if there were a problem with which they needed help. As teachers leave the district, this informal but valuable support system is disrupted. In addition, teams that are co-teaching inclusive classrooms develop a precise understanding of their students’ learning disabilities and strategies that lead to successful learning. Such an understanding sometimes requires time, and staff turnover strains the process. Teacher evaluations that in many cases are viewed as neither “helpful” nor “informative,” combined in some cases with lack of immediate feedback from supervisors, compound the problem.

## Recommendations

The Chelsea Public School district plans a reorganization of special education during the 2009-10 school year using economic stimulus funding. On May 20, 2009, the deputy superintendent facilitated a “Special Education PreK-12 Strategic Planning Session for 2009-2010.”

The session engaged district staff and leaders in a conversation about how best to support students with disabilities. Focus questions included: *How is the Three-Tiered Model of Instruction/Intervention used in your school? Which teachers are involved in the delivery of instruction within each tier? How effective (for all students) is the Three-Tier Model? How do students with a Learning Center (LC) placement (old substantially separate placement) participate in the Three-Tiered model? Do they or are they in the substantially separate placement for all core instruction integrating for specialists and lunch only?*

The goal is to reorganize the district’s special education support and delivery system by examining programs, positions, and placement.

The reorganization presents an opportunity for the district to evaluate the special education service delivery models currently in place to educate students with disabilities across all levels, as recommended in the 2008 audit of the special education department. The outside consultant found in that audit that “the special education model does not seem to be working, there is a need to examine the model, its effectiveness, and the instructional methods used.” Additionally, the district should consider providing mandatory professional development on best practices in collaboration and consultation for general and special education teachers.

The following recommendations may assist the district in designing, planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the effectiveness of the reorganization of its special education support system, as well assisting it with supporting diverse learners and at-risk students in general education.

### Leadership

1. Consider conducting a complete and comprehensive analysis of the disability determinations and needs of all students in out-of-district placements. The analysis should include focus groups with Team leaders and other staff who do not feel that the district can meet the needs of some students with disabilities. This analysis will inform a needs assessment that will act as the basis of new program development within the district.
  - Often Team leaders indicated that a student would be better off placed out of the district because the school district had not developed appropriate programs.
  - Improved program development would increase the district’s capacity to educate more Chelsea students with disabilities in district programs.
2. Consider an evaluation of restrictive in-district and out-of-district placements to assess the effectiveness of these placements for the achievement of students with disabilities. This evaluation would examine not only student academic achievement but also students’ access

to standards-based curriculum and the types of interventions and support mechanisms available.

- In some cases where Team leaders felt students would be better off in out-of-district programs, out-of-district day program staff indicated to district staff that they did not understand why the students were placed out of the district and that they felt the students could be successfully educated in district programs.
  - No database was available regarding the success of out-of-district students or the strategies, interventions, and supports required to successfully educate them in district.
  - A critical evaluation of the effectiveness of out-of-district programs would provide evidence for the district to use as it seeks to develop internal programs for special education students and to encourage parents to use them rather than insist upon out of district placements for their children.
3. Consider further training for special education Team leaders, many of whom are assistant principals, in determining eligibility for special education services and making placements of those determined to be eligible. Placements should be very carefully monitored so that students are placed in least restrictive settings with appropriate accommodations.
- The Chelsea Public Schools place 42.7 percent of their students with disabilities in out-of-district placements or in-district placements in which they are outside of the general education classroom more than 60 percent of the time. District administrators expressed concern about a growing trend of students' needs not being met in the district.
  - Further training on placements would assist the district in helping IEP Team leaders recognize what the district is capable of offering.
4. Consider a close examination of data-based decision making practices to ensure that students with disabilities are directly benefiting from the process.
- Teacher focus group interviews revealed that the analysis of disaggregated student performance data is fragmented and does not involve special educators in a meaningful manner. This fragmentation of the process leaves students with disabilities and their teachers without the benefits of improved educational interventions.
  - Including special educators in the data-based decision making process would also improve the consistency of monitoring practices throughout the district, ensuring that all decisions are based upon similar and accurate information.
5. The district and principals should ensure that all staff understand and consistently implement the policies, practices, and procedures for the IST; all teachers should be provided with a copy of the district accommodation plan. Consider providing principals and program leaders who conduct classroom visits with additional training in the identification and use of appropriate accommodations. Monitoring teacher use of suggested accommodations and maintaining data to show the effectiveness of any intervention are vital links in the success of the IST process.

- Districtwide, there is great variance in the use and effectiveness of instructional support teams, and administrators were unfamiliar with district or school curriculum accommodation plans.
  - An effective IST process throughout the district, with use of appropriate accommodations, would result in greater support for students with diverse learning needs and therefore increase their academic success.
  - Improving practices surrounding the IST process would also improve the identification of students with disabilities and provide a mechanism to track the results of the three-tiered system of intervention used in Chelsea.
6. Consider the development of an assistive technology guide for use by all teachers as a resource to meet the significant learning needs presented by students entering the high school with poor reading skills and inability to access difficult text.
- Interviews at Chelsea High School indicated that there is no comprehensive list of accommodations/interventions available to all teachers to assist such students.
  - Such a guide would ensure that teachers are using the best resources available to assist struggling students to improve their skills.

### Curriculum

1. Continue to revitalize curriculum and improve instruction as stated in the District Improvement Plan (p. 114).
  - The district has developed and implemented a robust evidence-based 3-tier model in reading and mathematics across grade levels.
  - The impact of the 3-tier model on general education students has been that they have demonstrated improvement on the MCAS in both English language arts and mathematics.
  - While more work needs to be done, the review team believes that the district is on the appropriate path for curriculum improvement in all of its schools.
2. Consider reviewing the impact of the 3-tiered model on students with disabilities in order to make adjustments to program and instructional practices. The review would examine whether all assessments and supplemental and intensive interventions are effective and fiscally viable; how all interventions work independently as well as synergistically to support student learning in the core curriculum; how students move from one tier to another; and what happens when the intervention fails the student.
  - Many students with disabilities receive tier 2 and 3 interventions in reading. Administrators reported that some students get “stuck” in these tiers receiving interventions that do not meet their needs and without any one teacher taking responsibility for the student’s whole program.
  - The percentage of students with disabilities that are scoring advanced or proficient on the state’s ELA and mathematics assessments is very low.

- Several Chelsea schools have not made AYP for students with disabilities for several consecutive years.
  - Chelsea students with disabilities are not graduating from high school at the same rate as special education students across the state. The 2007 graduation rate was only 28 percent when compared to the state's rate of 62.8 percent. In 2008, 32.5 percent of Chelsea students with disabilities graduated from high school compared to the state's rate of 64.1 percent.
3. Consider the creation of a taskforce to examine practices, policies, and procedures to assist all student groups that disengage with the general education program. This group would analyze data on students in various groups, including dropouts, 9<sup>th</sup> grade repeaters, highly mobile students, new immigrant students, and others. The mission of the group would be to review and share best practices; make connections with the community, parents, and other stakeholders; and provide guidance to the district and schools.
    - While district and school administrators and staff recognized the particular needs of several at-risk student groups, the review team found few systematic plans for addressing them.
  4. Review and take action on the recommendations made in the program review of the outreach department (November 2008).
    - The review report found a lack of basic criteria for prioritizing referrals to the outreach department, which consists of counselors, social workers, and psychologists, or evaluating the effectiveness of its services; services and functions varied across the district.

#### Human Resources and Professional Development

1. Consider forming a professional development committee if one does not currently exist, through which teachers and administrators can work together to focus professional development efforts, targeting areas of most immediate need and possibly providing fewer but more attractive choices.
  - Teacher input into the professional development plan is through their participation on the local SIP development team and their voluntary responses on the annual teacher survey provided by a link on the district website.
  - Evidence of a cohesive, district-level plan that is data-driven and focused on district goals was unclear. It was unclear whether the professional development committee mentioned by interviewees currently exists and if so, what its role or composition are.
  - Teachers and administrators reported that attendance at professional development activities was inconsistent.
  - A review of the 2008-2009 professional development plan revealed 41 entries offered for the January 26, 2009, professional development day alone, along with another 63 cited as "District-Wide Offerings."

- While many of these offerings appear to have great merit, inconsistent attendance represents an underutilization of valuable and finite resources. Focusing on a smaller menu of more targeted activities would be a more efficient way to use those resources, at least for the short term.
2. Consider providing training in supervision for principals, assistant principals, and program supervisors who observe and evaluate teachers, so that the evaluation process is consistent from school to school and teachers receive prompt and useful feedback.
    - A review of administrators' evaluations revealed that 44 percent of the principals within the district had three years of experience or fewer. District administrators also referred to the relative inexperience level of assistant principals. As a result, relatively inexperienced administrators are supervising and training relatively inexperienced teachers.
    - Although it should be noted that the district is in compliance with state regulations on teacher evaluation (603 CMR 35.00), teachers in focus groups expressed mixed reactions as to the value of their professional evaluations, directly relating to the degree of feedback they received from the evaluators.
    - Administrators would benefit from a consistent approach to conducting teacher evaluations and providing both positive and instructive feedback to the teaching staff.
  3. Consider providing mandatory ongoing professional development on best practices in collaboration and the consultative model for special education delivery for all general and special education staff, including paraprofessionals. Also, consider training all administrators, teachers, and staff in the use of strategies for students with disabilities in all content areas. The district should consider requiring that content area and special education teachers attend professional development trainings together that are related to the subject they teach. The Communities of Practice being adopted by the district in 2009-2010 could be used to focus on strategies for diverse learners.
    - Principals, program leaders, and teachers stated that many teachers are not trained in models of sharing teaching responsibilities within their classrooms. One senior administrator referred to a "gap . . . where there should be planning and classroom collaboration" between special education and general education.
    - Special education and general education teachers voiced a need for additional support and training on collaboration as well as for common planning time.
    - A review of the district professional development offerings revealed limited opportunities for training on strategies for diverse students.
    - Several leaders and special educators mentioned the need to change the historical view of special education staff as the "problem-solvers" in helping students to improve achievement. They voiced the need to have all administrators, teachers, and staff recognize a shared responsibility for students with disabilities.

- Mandatory professional development in consultative and collaborative discussion between general and special educators and in strategies for students with disabilities should lead to improved levels of communication and better results in student learning.
4. Consider ways to link the professional development plan to data on special education students. Use that data, in addition to individual School Improvement Plans, to develop a more focused professional development plan that addresses the needs of special education students as well as district and school goals.
- A review of 2007-08 professional development offerings and 2008 and 2009 summer professional development offerings revealed a plethora of content-specific choices with an emphasis on reading and mathematics. None included training on the use of diverse strategies for students with disabilities.
  - Interviews with special and general education teachers and administrators indicated gaps in knowledge in areas of particular importance to students with disabilities: implementation of strategies in the Individualized Education Plan, knowledge of diverse strategies for diverse learners, and collaborative teaching.
  - The district has done well in securing data on student learning and providing it to those who need it to improve instruction. Investigating ways to link the professional development plan to special education data would assist the district in using the data that it now possesses to determine professional development needs and so improve student learning.
5. In order to reduce teacher turnover, continue to support new teachers and the personnel needs of both new and veteran teachers. Continue the emphasis on the new teacher orientation. During the orientation, consider providing some activities where teachers can interact with the supervisors who will be evaluating them so that potential opportunity for feedback is maximized. Consider implementing a system to recognize and reward valuable teachers so as to encourage them to remain in the district.
- Although the district has an effective mentoring program for new teachers, both administrators and human resources officials expressed concern over what they perceived as a “high turnover rate” among Chelsea teachers: in 2008-2009 the district replaced 68 out of 407 teachers, while in 2007-2008 and 2006-2007 the numbers replaced were 80 and 100.
  - District leaders cited the fact that 52 percent of Chelsea teachers had fewer than two years of experience in Chelsea. A review of administrators’ evaluations revealed that 44 percent of the principals within the district had three years of experience or fewer.
  - The high turnover rate of instructional staff is inefficient for several reasons, including the increased amounts of supervision new teachers require, the necessity of again providing training for teachers replacing teachers who had been trained previously, and the stress produced on the informal but important teacher-student support system. While

there are some variables over which the district has little control, it still needs to adopt strategies to lower the turnover rate without diluting the quality of its teaching staff.

6. Consider implementing at least a brief training for substitute teachers, particularly in the implementation of the school and district crisis plans at each school.
  - Substitute teachers are not routinely trained by the district, although one principal indicated that he was “quite confident” that any substitute teacher in his building would be capable of handling a class during a crisis or lockdown situation.
  - HR staff members were asked what they would like to accomplish that they had been unable to thus far. One of their responses was that they would like to assist in the training of substitute teachers.
  - While the district has substitute teachers assigned to each school on a regular basis, it is likely unavoidable that untrained substitute teachers will be assigned to classrooms at some points in the school year. Providing some training to all, at least on implementing the school and the district crisis plans, would improve the level of safety within school buildings for both students and staff.
7. Look for more innovative ways of recruiting a diverse teaching staff.
  - Human resources staff reported that the teaching staff in Chelsea was the least diverse, with only 8 percent being members of racial minorities, as opposed to 75 percent of the custodians, food service workers, and clerical staff members.
  - District staff reported no special efforts to recruit teachers from minority groups, and there were no particular programs identified to reward or honor teachers.
  - With a diverse student population, it is important to provide role models for students. Providing greater representation of diverse cultures in professional positions would assist in raising expectations for students and might even assist in lowering the dropout rate.

## **Appendix A: Differentiated Needs Review Team Members**

---

The review of the Chelsea Public Schools was conducted from May 26 – May 29, 2009, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Dr. Lawrence Finnerty, leadership

Cynthia Mata Aguilar, curriculum delivery and site coordinator

Dr. John Roper, human resources and professional development

Christine Brandt, special education

## Appendix B: Differentiated Needs Review Activities and Schedule

---

### Differentiated Needs Review Activities

The following activities were conducted as part of the review of the Chelsea Public Schools.

- The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the Chelsea Public Schools central office administration: superintendent, deputy superintendent, executive director of administration and finance, director of human resources, districtwide lead principal, director of special education and pupil personnel services, director of student outreach services, director of Title I services, director of English language learners services, director of literacy, director of assessment and planning, director of before/after-school services, coordinator of middle school mathematics program, coordinator of writing program, and executive director for administration and finance.
- The review team visited the following schools in the Chelsea Public Schools: John Silber Early Learning Center (Pre-K-1), Frank M. Sokolowski Elementary (grades 1 – 4), Edgar A. Hooks Elementary (grades 1 – 4), Eugene Wright Middle School (grades 5 – 8), and Chelsea High School (grades 9 – 12).
  - During school visits, the review team conducted interviews with school principals, teachers, reading and math coaches, and students.
  - The review team conducted 18 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the 5 schools visited.
- The review team reviewed the following documents provided by the Department:
  - District profile data
  - Latest Coordinated Program Review Report and the follow-up Mid-cycle Report
  - Staff contracts
  - Reports on licensure and highly qualified status
  - Long-term enrollment trends
  - End-of-year financial report for the district for 2008
  - List of the district's federal and state grants
  - Municipal profile
- The review team reviewed the following documents at the district and school levels (provided by the district or schools):
  - Organization chart
  - District Improvement Plan

- School Improvement Plans
- School Committee Policy Manual
- Curriculum Guide
- High School Program of Studies
- Calendar of Formative and Summative Assessments
- Copies of data analyses/reports used in schools
- Descriptions of Student Support Programs
- Program Evaluations
- Student and Family Handbooks
- Faculty Handbooks
- Professional Development Program/Schedule/Courses
- Teacher Planning Time/Meeting Schedules
- Teacher Evaluation tool
- Classroom Observation Tools/Learning Walk Tools
- Job descriptions (for central office and school administrators and instructional staff)
- Principal evaluations
- Description of Pre-Referral Process
- School schedules
- Special Education PreK-12 Strategic Planning Session for 2009-2010, Power Point presentation

## Review Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the differentiated needs review of the Chelsea Public Schools, conducted from May 26 – May 29, 2009.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<p>Memorial Day Holiday</p>	<p><b>May 26</b> Introductory meeting with district leaders; interviews with district staff and principals</p>	<p><b>May 27</b> Document review; interviews with district staff and principals  School visits: Frank M. Sokolowski Elementary (grades 1 – 4) &amp; Edgar A. Hooks Elementary (grades 1 – 4).  Interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; teacher team meetings.</p>	<p><b>May 28</b> School visits: John Silber Early Learning Center (Pre-K-1) &amp; Chelsea High School (grades 9 – 12).  Interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; teacher team meetings; teacher and parent focus groups.</p>	<p><b>May 29</b> School visits: Eugene Wright Middle School (grades 5 – 8).  Interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; teacher team meetings.  Interview with union president.  Final meeting with district leaders  Findings development team meeting</p>