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ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY
EDUCATION

New Bedford Public Schools

Review of District Systems and Practices Addressing the Differentiated Needs of Low-Income Students

Review conducted November 15-18, 2010

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Overview of Differentiated Needs Reviews: Low-Income Students

Purpose

The Center for District and School Accountability (CDSA) in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) is undertaking a series of reviews of school districts to determine how well district systems and practices support groups of students for whom there is a significant proficiency gap. (“Proficiency gap” is defined as a measure of the shortfall in academic performance by an identifiable population group relative to an appropriate standard held for all.)¹ The reviews focus in turn on how district systems and practices affect each of four groups of students: students with disabilities, English language learners, low-income students (defined as students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch), and students who are members of racial minorities. Spring 2011 reviews aim to identify district and school factors contributing to improvement in achievement for students living in poverty (low-income students) in selected schools, to provide recommendations for improvement on district and school levels to maintain or accelerate the improvement in student achievement, and to promote the dissemination of promising practices among Massachusetts public schools. This review complies with the requirement of Chapter 15, Section 55A to conduct district reviews and is part of ESE’s program to recognize schools as “distinguished schools” under section 1117(b) of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which allows states to use Title I funds to reward schools that are narrowing proficiency gaps. Exemplary district and school practices identified through the reviews will be described in a report summarizing this set of reviews.

Selection of Districts

ESE identified 28 Title I schools in 18 districts where the performance of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch has recently improved. These districts had Title I schools which substantially narrowed proficiency gaps for these low-income students over a two-year period: schools where the performance of low-income students improved from 2008 to 2009 and from 2009 to 2010 in English language arts or mathematics both in terms of low-income students’ Composite Performance Index (increased CPI in the same subject both years and a gain over the two years of at least 5 points) and in terms of the percentage of low-income students scoring Proficient or Advanced (at least one percentage point gained in the same subject each year).² As a result of having these “gap-closer” schools, districts from this group were invited to participate

¹The term “proficiency gap,” originally coined by Jeff Howard, a member of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, was adopted in 2010 by the Board’s Proficiency Gap Task Force. BESE Proficiency Gap Taskforce. April 2010. *A Roadmap to Closing the Proficiency Gap*.

²To be considered, a school had to be a Title I school and had to have been recognized as a 2010-2011 Commendation School (for narrowing proficiency gaps, high growth, or exiting NCLB accountability status). In addition to having an increase in CPI and proficiency rate in English language arts or mathematics both years, the school could not have experienced a decline in CPI or proficiency rate either year in either subject; had to meet the 2010 AYP participation rate and attendance or graduation rate requirements; and had to have had at least 40 low-income students tested each year from 2007-2008 through 2009-2010.

in this set of reviews aimed at identifying district and school practices associated with stronger performance for low-income students. In a few cases, districts invited to participate in this set of reviews were Level 3 or Level 4 districts that had also been selected for district reviews. In these cases, ESE conducted the two reviews simultaneously.

Key Questions

Two key questions guide the work of the review team.

Key Question 1. To what extent are the following conditions for school effectiveness in place at the school or schools where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?

1. School Leadership (CSE #2): *Each school takes action to attract, develop, and retain an effective school leadership team that obtains staff commitment to improving student learning and implements a well-designed strategy for accomplishing a clearly defined mission and set of goals, in part by leveraging resources. Each school leadership team a) ensures staff understanding of and commitment to the school's mission and strategies, b) supports teacher leadership and a collaborative learning culture, c) uses supervision and evaluation practices that assist teacher development, and d) focuses staff time and resources on instructional improvement and student learning through effective management of operations and use of data for improvement planning and management.*

2. Consistent Delivery of an Aligned Curriculum (CSE #3): *Each school's taught curricula a) are aligned to state curriculum frameworks and to the MCAS performance level descriptions, and b) are also aligned vertically (between grades) and horizontally (across classrooms at the same grade level and across sections of the same course).*

3. Effective Instruction (CSE #4): *Instructional practices are based on evidence from a body of high quality research and on high expectations for all students and include use of appropriate research-based reading and mathematics programs. It also ensures that instruction focuses on clear objectives, uses appropriate educational materials, and includes a) a range of strategies, technologies, and supplemental materials aligned with students' developmental levels and learning needs; b) instructional practices and activities that build a respectful climate and enable students to assume increasing responsibility for their own learning; and c) use of class time that maximizes student learning. Each school staff has a common understanding of high-quality evidence-based instruction and a system for monitoring instructional practice.*

4. Tiered Instruction and Adequate Learning Time (CSE #8): *Each school schedule is designed to provide adequate learning time for all students in core subjects. For students not yet on track to proficiency in English language arts or mathematics, the district ensures that each school provides additional time and support for individualized instruction through tiered instruction, a data-driven approach to prevention, early detection, and support for students who experience learning or behavioral challenges, including but not limited to students with disabilities and English language learners.*

5. Social and Emotional Support (CSE #9): *Each school creates a safe school environment and makes effective use of a system for addressing the social, emotional, and health needs of its students that reflects the behavioral health and public schools framework.³ Students' needs are met in part through a) the provision of coordinated student support services and universal breakfast (if eligible); b) the implementation of a systems approach to establishing a productive social culture that minimizes problem behavior for all students; and c) the use of consistent schoolwide attendance and discipline practices and effective classroom management techniques that enable students to assume increasing responsibility for their own behavior and learning.*

Key Question 2. How do the district's systems for support and intervention affect the school or schools where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?

Methodology

To focus the analysis, reviews explore six areas: **Leadership and Governance, Curriculum and Instruction, Assessment, Human Resources and Professional Development, Student Support, and Financial and Asset Management**. The reviews seek to identify those systems and practices that are most likely to be contributing to positive results, as well as those that may be impeding rapid improvement. Reviews are evidence-based and data-driven. A four-to-six-member review team, usually six-member, previews selected documents and ESE data and reports before conducting a four-day site visit in the district, spending about two to three days in the central office and one to two days conducting school visits. In the case of the combined reviews (see **Selection of Districts** above), two to four review team members preview selected documents and ESE data and reports before participating in the district review site visit and conducting a one- to two-day site visit to each of the identified schools in connection with the low-income review. The team consists of independent consultants with expertise in each of the six areas listed above.

³ The behavioral health and public schools framework was developed by the Task Force on Behavioral Health and Public Schools pursuant to c. 321, s. 19, of the Massachusetts Acts of 2008.

New Bedford Public Schools

The New Bedford Public Schools were selected by the Center for District and School Accountability (CDSA) for a district review in school year 2010-2011 as a Level 3 school district; the district was one of three selected for district review in 2010-2011 that were also invited to participate in this set of reviews aimed at identifying district and school practices associated with stronger performance for *low-income* students (see **Selection of Districts** above). The onsite portions of the two reviews were conducted simultaneously in November 2010.

After the publication of the 2010 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) results, New Bedford became a Level 4 district because the John Avery Parker Elementary School was identified as a Level 4 school. In May 2011, the district review report for the New Bedford Public Schools was published⁴, while the report of the differentiated needs review for the district and its four “gap-closer” schools (see **Selection of Districts** above), Congdon Elementary, Gomes Elementary, Pacheco Elementary, and Swift Elementary, was on a different report production schedule, along with the other school-level differentiated needs reports from 2010-2011. Because of district challenges identified in the review report and because the district struggled to produce an acceptable turnaround plan for its Level 4 school, the commissioner of elementary and secondary education directed the district to develop a districtwide Accelerated Improvement Plan to be monitored monthly by the district and an Accountability Monitor assigned by the Department. The Accelerated Improvement Plan has not yet been approved. Meanwhile, following the publication of the 2011 MCAS results, New Bedford’s Hayden-McFadden Elementary School was also identified as a Level 4 school.

While communications have been proceeding about the turnaround plans for New Bedford’s Level 4 schools and the districtwide Accelerated Improvement Plan, along with the completion of monitoring reports, the production of the report of the differentiated needs review in New Bedford has been unfortunately delayed. The following report details not only the strengths and challenges the review team found among the four gap-closer schools it visited, but also describes district systems of support for its schools and provides recommendations for making those systems stronger. The findings on the four schools and the district, along with the report’s recommendations for the district, may be useful both in continuing to strengthen the four gap-closer schools and in casting light on how to strengthen other schools in the district as well as districtwide systems of support.

The site visit to the New Bedford Public Schools for the combined reviews was conducted from November 15-18, 2010. The district review site visit included visits to the following district schools: Ashley Elementary (K-5), Campbell Elementary (K-5), Devalles Elementary (K-5), Hathaway Elementary (K-5), Hayden/McFadden (K-5), Keith Middle (6-8), New Bedford High School (9-12), Normandin Middle (6-8), Parker Elementary (K-5), Pulaski Elementary (K-5), Roosevelt Middle (6-8). Visits to the Congdon Elementary (K-5), Gomes Elementary (K-5), Pacheco Elementary (K-5), and Swift Elementary (K-5) schools, which were identified as gap-

⁴ Available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/accountability/dr/reports.html?district=K-O>.

closers for their low-income students, as described above, were conducted as part of the low-income review.

Further information about the reviews and the site visit schedule can be found in Appendix B; information about the members of the review team can be found in Appendix A. Appendix C lists the Finding Statements and Recommendation Statements.

District Profile⁵

New Bedford is a seaport city 54 miles south of Boston, formerly famous for whaling,⁶ with a 2009 population of 91,112.⁷ Its 2010 unemployment rate was 14.6 percent, and its 2009 average weekly wage was \$778.⁸ The tax levy is close to the maximum allowable. For fiscal year 2011 residential property is taxed at \$12.88 per thousand and commercial, industrial, and personal property is taxed at \$27.14 per thousand. The Department of Revenue lists the average single family tax for fiscal year 2011 in New Bedford at \$2,762. The state average for a single family tax bill for the year 2010 was \$4,390.⁹

New Bedford has a mayor and city council and a school committee with seven members including the mayor, who serves as school committee chair *ex officio*. The superintendent was appointed on April 9, 2010, during the middle of the 2009-2010 school year. Since the time of the site visit she has been given a three-year contract as superintendent. She has been with the district for 26 years; many other central office staff are also long-time district employees. The district has recently gone from having a deputy superintendent and three assistant superintendents to having one assistant superintendent, responsible for student services.

The student enrollment in 2010-2011 is 12,538 students; the district has 26 schools. As Table 1 below indicates, about half the student population in New Bedford is white, and there is a large population of Hispanic students (27.8 percent). Nearly three-quarters of the district's students are low-income, and for about one in five English is not their first language.

⁵ Data derived from ESE's website, ESE's Education Data Warehouse, or other ESE sources.

⁶ See Department of Housing and Community Development's community profiles at <http://www.mass.gov/Ehed/docs/dhcd/profiles/205.doc>

⁷ See At-A-Glance report for New Bedford on the Department of Revenue (DOR) website at http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=dorterminal&L=4&L0=Home&L1=Local+Officials&L2=Municipal+Data+and+Financial+Management&L3=Data+Bank+Reports&sid=Ador&b=terminalcontent&f=dls_mdmostuf_aag_aagindex&csid=Ador.

⁸ See Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development statistics at <http://lmi2.detma.org/lmi/Townbox.asp>.

⁹ See DOR At-A-Glance report for New Bedford cited in footnote 7 above.

Table 1: 2010-2011 New Bedford Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total	Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total
African-American	1,467	11.7	First Language not English	2,683	21.4
Asian	111	0.9	Limited English Proficient	519	4.1
Hispanic or Latino	3,488	27.8	Low-income	8,927	71.2
Native American	119	0.9	Special Education*	2,491	19.8
White	6,471	51.6	Free Lunch	7,997	63.8
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	68	0.5	Reduced-price lunch	930	7.4
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	814	6.5	Total enrollment	12,538	100.0

*Special education number and percentage (only) are calculated including students in out-of-district placements.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website and other ESE data

The following table shows considerable variation in the sizes of elementary schools. Five (Carney Academy and Gomes, Hayden/McFadden, Lincoln, and Pulaski Elementary Schools) have enrollments over 500, while four (Dunbar, Hathaway, Kempton, and Rodman) have student populations under 200. Another 8 elementary schools have populations between 200 and 300. As described later in this report, in a fiscal year 2001 feasibility study 65 percent of the district's buildings were found to be 80 or more years old, and their maintenance is a continuing challenge. Yet the district is holding open and maintaining some schools with very low enrollments.

Also of interest in Table 2 is the percentage of low-income students in various schools. Percentages vary from 40.0 percent low-income students (Winslow Elementary School) to 89.8 percent (Pacheco Elementary School). The percentage of low-income students in four elementary schools is less than 55 percent, while there are 8 elementary schools with low-income populations of more than 80 percent.

Table 2: Comparison of State, District, and All District Schools by Selected Population: 2010-2011 (in Percentages except for Total Enrollment)

	Total Enrollment	Low-Income Students			LEP* Students	Special Education Students
		All	Eligible for Free Lunch	Eligible for Reduced-Price Lunch		
State	955,563	34.2	29.1	5.1	7.2	17.0
New Bedford	12,538	71.2	63.8	7.4	4.1	19.8
Ashley ES	331	54.4	44.4	10.0	0.0	16.0
Brooks ES	257	69.6	62.3	7.4	0.0	16.7
Campbell ES	246	67.1	56.1	11.0	0.0	19.1
Carney Academy	582	68.4	62.0	6.4	0.0	27.1
Congdon ES	269	80.7	71.7	8.9	14.1	13.8
Devalles ES	355	85.6	78.3	7.3	12.7	17.2
Dunbar ES	112	87.5	83.9	3.6	0.0	10.7
Gomes ES	779	81.6	75.2	6.4	9.0	27.7
Hannigan ES	229	85.2	82.1	3.1	0.0	12.7
Hathaway ES	182	73.6	63.2	10.4	1.1	24.7
Hayden/McFadden ES	713	82.7	79.4	3.4	8.6	27.2
Kempton ES	123	74.8	57.7	17.1	0.0	15.4
Lincoln ES	695	77.8	69.6	8.2	0.0	16.0
Pacheco ES	322	89.8	85.7	4.0	0.0	24.5
Parker ES	256	86.7	80.5	6.3	0.0	18.4
Pulaski ES	562	45.0	35.9	9.1	0.0	25.8
Rodman ES	144	77.1	69.4	7.6	0.0	9.7
Swift ES	218	50.0	40.8	9.2	0.0	11.0
Taylor ES	274	62.8	54.7	8.0	0.0	16.8
Winslow ES	290	40.0	33.4	6.6	6.9	11.4
Keith MS	1,028	79.8	71.9	7.9	0.1	18.5
Normandin MS	982	65.1	55.2	9.9	0.1	18.3
Roosevelt MS	790	86.2	77.8	8.4	15.6	19.4
New Bedford HS	2,711	63.2	56.5	6.7	5.8	16.1
Trinity Day Academy	40	65.0	60.0	5.0	0.0	92.5
Whaling City Jr/Sr HS	48	95.8	91.7	4.2	0.0	41.7

*LEP=Limited English Proficient

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Differentiated Needs Review (Low-Income Students)

New Bedford Public Schools

The local appropriation to the New Bedford Public Schools budget for fiscal year 2011 was \$102,582,495, down from the appropriation for fiscal year 2010 of \$106,469, 613. School-related expenditures by the city were estimated at \$42,769,034 for fiscal year 2011, up from the estimate for fiscal year 2010 of \$37,207,625. In fiscal year 2010, the total amount of actual school-related expenditures, including expenditures by the district (\$106,469,613), expenditures by the city (\$37,517,163), and expenditures from other sources such as grants (\$33,023,141), was \$177,009,917. Actual net school spending¹⁰ in fiscal year 2010 was \$124,234,153.

Student Performance¹¹

As Table 3 indicates, when proficiency rates and median student growth percentiles in ELA from 2008 to 2010 are analyzed by grade, the results vary. Though experiencing varied changes in 2009, proficiency rates for grades 3 through 6 were higher in 2010 than in 2008, with Grade 3 showing a 15 percentage point increase in 2010 (after no increase in 2009). In grades 7, 8, and 10, proficiency rates were the same or lower in 2010 when compared with 2008. With the exception of grade 3, the 2010 proficiency rates in all grades were within 5 percentage points of the 2008 rates.

All grades but 5 and 6 showed a lower median SGP in ELA in 2010 than in 2008. And grade 10 median SGPs in ELA were remarkably low, decreasing from 29.0 to 24.0 (from 2009 to 2010, the two years with available growth data for that grade). Grade 6 showed an increase of 8 points in 2010 over 2008, though in 2009 the median SGP had decreased by 5 points.

Median SGPs in ELA for all grades in the district hovered at the bottom of or just below the moderate range. The increase in the proficiency rate in ELA for all grades in the district, four percentage points, mirrored the increase in the proficiency rate for all grades in the state from 2008 to 2010, but the discrepancies between proficiency rates in the district and the state in 2010 were very large, ranging from 10 to 34 percentage points, with a 24 percentage point difference for all grades. Without greater gains in proficiency than those made in New Bedford from 2008 to 2010, it seems as though gains at the state level will keep the gap between New Bedford and the state from diminishing.

¹⁰Net school spending includes municipal indirect spending for schools but excludes capital expenditures, transportation, grants, and revolving funds.

¹¹ Data derived from ESE's website, ESE's Education Data Warehouse, or other ESE sources.

**Table 3: 2008-2010 New Bedford Proficiency Rates,
with Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs), compared to State:
by Grade
ELA**

Grade	2008		2009		2010	
	Percent Proficient/Advanced	Median SGP	Percent Proficient/Advanced	Median SGP	Percent Proficient/Advanced	Median SGP
Grade 3—District	38	NA*	38	NA*	53	NA*
Grade 3—State	56	NA*	57	NA*	63	NA*
Grade 4—District	28	40.0	33	37.0	32	39.0
Grade 4—State	49	48.0	53	50.0	54	50.0
Grade 5—District	37	45.0	39	41.0	42	46.0
Grade 5—State	61	51.0	63	50.0	63	50.0
Grade 6—District	44	39.0	36	32.0	48	47.0
Grade 6—State	67	50.0	66	50.0	69	50.0
Grade 7— District	38	37.0	41	35.0	38	32.0
Grade 7— State	69	50.0	70	50.0	72	50.0
Grade 8— District	53	46.0	54	44.0	49	37.5
Grade 8— State	75	49.0	78	50.0	78	50.0
Grade 10— District	50	NA*	55	29.0	46	24.0
Grade 10— State	74	NA*	81	50.0	78	50.0
All Grades— District	40	41.0	42	37.0	44	39.0
All Grades—State	64	50.0	67	50.0	68	50.0

Note: The number of students included in the calculation of proficiency rate differs from the number of students included in the calculation of median SGP.

*NA: Grade 3 students do not have SGPs because they are taking MCAS tests for the first time. Median SGPs were not calculated for Grade 10 students until 2009.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Table 4 below shows proficiency rates and median growth percentiles by grade over the period 2008-2010 for mathematics. Four grades (3, 5, 6, and 7) showed a higher proficiency rate in 2010 than in 2008, while three grades (4, 8, and 10) had the same or a lower rate. Mathematics proficiency rates for 2010 in grades 7 and 8, at 26 and 23 percent, were remarkably low. Again with the exception of grade 3, where the proficiency rate rose 17 points from 2009 to 2010 after falling 6 points from 2008 to 2009, math proficiency rates in 2010 were all within 5 points of the 2008 rates, in three grades (4, 6, and 8) within one point.

Median SGPs in mathematics were lower in 2010 than in 2008 for three grades (5, 6, and 7); the 2010 median SGP for grade 8 showed no change over 2008, that for grade 4 showed a 6-point increase over 2008, and that for grade 10 showed a 2-point increase over 2009, when data on student growth became available for that grade. The median SGP for all grades was 7 points lower in 2010 (40.0) than in 2008 (47.0). At 37.0, the median SGP for grade 8 in 2010 was below the moderate range, while the median SGPs for grades 7 and 10 were even more notably low, at 28.0 and 24.0.

The increase in the mathematics proficiency rate for all grades in New Bedford from 2008 to 2010 (3 percentage points) was very similar to the increase in the math proficiency rate for all grades in the state (4 points). As for ELA, however, the differences in 2010 between proficiency rates in the district and proficiency rates for the state were very large, with the exception of grade 3: the district's grade 3 proficiency rate (61 percent) was only 4 percentage points below the state's (65 percent), while the gaps for other grades ranged from 14 to 33 percentage points, with a gap for all grades of 20 percentage points. As for ELA, the district has a long way to go to increase the mathematics proficiency of its students to a level close to that of students statewide.

**Table 4: 2008-2010 New Bedford Proficiency Rates,
with Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs), compared to State:
by Grade
Mathematics**

Grade	2008		2009		2010	
	Percent Proficient/Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Proficient/Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Proficient/Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>
Grade 3—District	50	NA*	44	NA*	61	NA*
Grade 3—State	61	NA*	60	NA*	65	NA*
Grade 4—District	34	47.0	34	44.0	33	53.0
Grade 4—State	49	49.0	48	50.0	48	49.0
Grade 5—District	35	54.0	40	49.0	37	45.0
Grade 5—State	52	51.0	54	50.0	55	50.0
Grade 6—District	44	56.0	40	50.0	45	51.0
Grade 6—State	56	50.0	57	50.0	59	50.0
Grade 7— District	21	42.0	24	27.0	26	28.0
Grade 7— State	47	50.0	49	50.0	53	50.0
Grade 8— District	23	37.0	22	41.0	23	37.0
Grade 8— State	49	51.0	48	50.0	51	51.0
Grade 10— District	46	NA*	43	22.0	42	24.0
Grade 10— State	72	NA	75	50.0	75	50.0
All Grades— District	36	47.0	35	40.0	39	40.0
All Grades—State	55	50.0	55	50.0	59	50.0

Note: The number of students included in the calculation of proficiency rate differs from the number of students included in the calculation of median SGP.

*NA: Grade 3 students do not have SGPs because they are taking MCAS tests for the first time. Median SGPs were not calculated for Grade 10 students until 2009.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

In addition to their academic achievement, New Bedford students' attendance and chronic absence rates are of serious concern, as are high school students' suspension, retention, dropout, and graduation rates. See the Student Support section beginning on p. 32 of the district review report, available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/accountability/dr/reports.html?district=K-O>.

Table 5 shows the ELA achievement trends for the district, the state, and the four selected “gap-closer” schools between 2008 and 2010. The table indicates that while the district’s overall proficiency rate for low-income students rose 6 percentage points over the two-year period, the rates in each of the four gap-closer schools rose between 21 and 24 percentage points. ELA CPIs for district low-income students rose 3.3 points, while those for the four gap-closer schools rose between 9.5 and 20.1 points. The low-income students in the four schools are outperforming those in the district overall with regard to proficiency rates and CPI.

Trends in median student growth percentiles (SGPs) in the four schools vary from trends for proficiency rates and CPIs. (Median student growth percentiles were not a factor in the selection of schools—see Selection of Districts in Overview of Low-Income Reviews above.) Median SGPs for low-income students increased in 3 out of 4 of the schools, but decreased in the 4th school. At the Congdon, Gomes, and Swift, median SGPs rose by 13, 16, and 23.5 points respectively. However, at the Pacheco, the median SGP declined over the two-year period – from 43.0 in 2008 to 41.0 in 2009 to 33.5 in 2010. This decline in low-income students’ median SGP at Pacheco is paralleled by a decline in the median SGP for all Pacheco students between 2008 and 2010 (as is to be expected, since low-income students make up a large percentage of all students at Pacheco—87.0 percent in 2010). For district low-income students, the median SGP declined from 40.0 in 2008 to 37.0 in 2009, rising again slightly to 38.0 in 2010. In 2010, median SGPs for low-income students were below 40 in the district and at the Gomes and Pacheco Elementary Schools, at 42 at the Congdon, and at 61.0 at the Swift, this score showing impressive growth.

**Table 5: Achievement Trends for Low-Income Students in Congdon, Gomes, Pacheco, and Swift Elementary Schools, New Bedford, and State, Compared to All Students
ELA**

	2008			2009			2010		
	Percent Proficient/Advanced	CPI	Median SGP	Percent Proficient/Advanced	CPI	Median SGP	Percent Proficient/Advanced	CPI	Median SGP
State Low-Income Students	41	73.2	45.0	45	75.5	45.0	47	76.5	46.0
State All Students	64	85.2	50.0	67	86.5	50.0	68	86.9	50.0
District Low-Income Students	34	69.5	40.0	37	71.3	37.0	40	72.8	38.0
District All Students	40	73.3	41.0	42	74.2	37.0	44	75.4	39.0
Congdon Low-Income Students	23	67.2	29.0	35	72.3	35.0	44	76.7	42
Congdon All Students	26	68.1	29.0	37	73.5	44.0	42	76.1	42.0
Gomes Low-Income Students	14	53.9	23.0	28	66.8	41.0	36	74.0	39.0
Gomes All Students	16	55.6	21.0	28	66.6	39.0	37	74.3	39.0
Pacheco Low-Income Students	25	67.5	43.0	39	76.2	41.0	46	78.6	33.5
Pacheco All Students	25	67.5	44.0	39	76.4	42.0	47	79.4	34.0
Swift Low-Income Students	19	65.1	37.5	36	70.1	35.5	43	77.3	61.0
Swift All Students	30	70.3	34.0	35	72.2	30.0	50	79.3	61.0

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Table 6 again shows achievement trends in the state, district, and the four gap-closer schools between 2008 and 2010, this time in the area of mathematics. The district proficiency rate for

low-income students in mathematics increased by 6 percentage points over the two-year period. However, at the four gap-closer schools proficiency rates increased by between 17 and 38 percentage points. The district CPI in mathematics for low-income students rose 3.9 points whereas CPIs for low-income students at the Congdon, Gomes, and Swift schools rose by 11.1, 12.4, and 12.6 points, and the CPI at the Pacheco rose by 20.6 points.

Median SGPs for district low-income students in mathematics decreased by 6 over the two-year period. The Gomes showed the same decrease in median SGP for low-income students, while median SGPs for these students at the Congdon and Swift increased by 7.0 and 6.0. At the Pacheco, in contrast to the steady decrease of median SGPs for low-income students in ELA over this period, the median SGP in mathematics for low-income students rose by 26 points. The median SGPs for low-income students for the district and the four schools were all between 40 and 50 in 2010, with the exception of the Pacheco at 54.0. Median SGPs for the district and for three of the four gap-closer schools were higher in mathematics than in ELA in 2010; the exception was the Swift school.

Table 6: Achievement Trends for Low-Income Students in Congdon, Gomes, Pacheco, and Swift Elementary Schools, New Bedford, and State, Compared to All Students Mathematics

	2008			2009			2010		
	Percent Proficient/Advanced	CPI	Median SGP	Percent Proficient/Advanced	CPI	Median SGP	Percent Proficient/Advanced	CPI	Median SGP
State Low-Income Students	33	63.1	45.0	33	64.5	44.0	37	67.1	47.0
State All Students	55	77.7	50.0	55	78.5	50.0	59	79.9	50.0
District Low-Income Students	29	61.6	46.0	30	62.8	40.0	35	65.5	40.0
District All Students	36	65.5	47.0	35	65.8	40.0	39	68.0	40.0
Congdon Low-Income Students	27	63.9	39.0	37	67.9	49.0	46	75.0	46.0
Congdon All Students	29	64.2	33.0	38	70.4	53.0	45	74.6	46.0
Gomes Low-Income Students	27	63.1	46.0	41	75.1	63.0	46	75.5	40.0
Gomes All Students	29	64.3	46.0	41	75.3	61.5	45	75.6	40.0
Pacheco Low-Income Students	31	65.8	28.0	57	81.9	67.0	69	86.4	54.0
Pacheco All Students	31	65.2	28.0	56	82.0	67.0	68	86.5	53.0
Swift Low-Income Students	19	55.7	43.5	25	64.3	47.0	36	68.3	49.5
Swift All Students	27	60.9	44.0	28	65.4	47.0	36	68.6	49.0

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Tables 7 and 8 show remarkable variations in 2010 proficiency rates among gap-closer schools, the district, and the state at individual grades. One thing is consistent, however. At grade 3 in

both content areas, the district and three of the four gap-closer schools have higher proficiency rates than the state. In mathematics at this grade, three schools have considerably higher proficiency rates than the state. Also, with the exception of the Congdon and Pacheco schools in math, the four schools and the district mirror the state in that grade 4 has the lowest proficiency rate of the three elementary grades tested in both subjects.

**Table 7: Comparison of 2010 Proficiency Rates
for Low-Income Students by Grade
ELA**

Grade	Congdon	Gomes	Pacheco	Swift	New Bedford	State
3	52 (31)	51 (76)	73 (36)	32 (16)	50 (774)	43
4	37 (30)	16 (61)	23 (30)	14 (14)	28 (682)	31
5	41 (29)	36 (55)	39 (39)	68 (25)	38 (722)	40

Notes: 1. Proficiency rates are the percentages of students scoring Proficient or Advanced.
 2. Numbers of low-income students (n) tested are given in italics and parentheses for schools and district.
 Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

**Table 8: Comparison of 2010 Proficiency Rates
for Low-Income Students by Grade
Mathematics**

Grade	Congdon	Gomes	Pacheco	Swift	New Bedford	State
3	83 (31)	71 (76)	77 (36)	44 (16)	58 (773)	45
4	27 (30)	20 (61)	67 (30)	27 (15)	31 (685)	28
5	24 (29)	38 (55)	62 (39)	36 (25)	33 (726)	33

Note: 1. Proficiency rates are the percentages of students scoring Proficient or Advanced.
 2. Numbers of low-income students (n) tested are given in italics and parentheses for schools and district.
 Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Findings

Key Question 1: To what extent are the following conditions for school effectiveness in place at the school or schools where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?

- **school leadership;**
- **curriculum;**
- **instruction;**
- **tiered instruction and adequate learning time; and**
- **social/emotional support**

School Leadership

The four gap-closer schools have strong principals who have formed cohesive, focused staffs.

Separate interviews with the principals of the four gap-closer schools, Congdon, Gomes, Pacheco, and Swift, revealed certain commonalities in leadership. While these are not necessarily exclusive within the New Bedford system to these schools, they provide a clue as to why the proficiency gap was narrowed within these schools.

In these schools the principal had either served for more than three years as its principal or had worked as a teacher within that school and recently replaced another, longer-serving principal. Teachers interviewed at the schools stressed their confidence in and regard for the principal. In one school, teachers reported that the leadership they experienced from their principal “makes the most difference” in the improvement of student achievement. In another, “The administration has our back.”

Principals described long hours in the building. They reported assuming functions formerly performed by coaches, who were eliminated at the elementary level for 2010-2011. One principal described evening and weekend hours working at the school in the company of her young daughter. During interviews, teachers confirmed the efforts of the principals and expressed their appreciation of them. Teachers at the four schools identified their principal’s long hours as an inspiration for their own additional hours. In focus groups, they identified a group commitment to improving achievement and increasing test scores as a driving force. The sense of “we’re all in this together” added to the community atmosphere in the building.

Principals in the gap-closers reported frustration with the same issues. They identified the restrictions of the collective bargaining agreement with the teachers’ union as an impediment in selecting the best teachers for their school, or even in making the best assignments of teachers to

specific grades within their schools (see district review report, pp. 28-30).¹² They reported dissatisfaction with the organization of the principal meetings currently conducted by the district and the relatively limited opportunity to discuss common concerns with the superintendent (see district review report, p. 16). And they reported frustration with what they saw as their contractual inability to offer informal written feedback to their teachers (see district review report, p.18), although the teachers, in interviews, reported that they received and “appreciate[d]” high levels of informal and what they characterized as “helpful” feedback from the principals. One of the principals expressed to review team members her view that she would “lose any grievances,” but said that she would continue to provide advice to her teachers, and that the teachers would use the advice appropriately to help their students. The principals reported that the lack of resources and their lack of input into the formation of the budget (see district review report, pp. 39-41) resulted in many of the needs of their teachers and students not being effectively addressed. Still, the principals described ways in which they were able to work within the system to obtain resources with which to provision the staff and provide for the students. One principal has found a way to continue offering the DIBELS assessment program despite the lack of funding in the budget. Another principal has found a way, despite restrictions in the collective bargaining agreement that prevent principals from directing common planning time (see district review report, pp. 19-20), to provide guidance to teachers in using their planning time by reviewing the minutes of their previous meeting and supplying comments designed to guide the teachers in the next meeting.

There was a range in the length of service of the staffs at the four schools, although all four schools had relatively veteran teaching staffs. In some schools, such as the Congdon, most teachers had been at the school for longer than three years, were comfortable working together, and had a longstanding tradition of community. In the Gomes, on the other hand, the staff had been collected from transfers and the combination of two other district elementary schools. During interviews, repeated comments at the schools described the atmosphere as supporting student achievement. And students in interviews reported feeling supported. The students interviewed were able to identify a staff member with whom they felt especially comfortable discussing problems, although in several cases the staff member had left the school for another assignment.

The sharing of the educational goal of “improving test scores” has served school leaders as something of a replacement for the School Improvement Plan (SIP). All the schools had SIPs, but the SIP was not identified as a driving force in any of the schools. This shared goal is supported by the tenacious principals, who fill the assessment and data analysis roles of the coaches and guide unified teaching staffs committed to the effective instruction of the students. Although the schools would benefit from a well-thought-out, data-based SIP, the team believes that this strong common drive has contributed to the narrowing of the proficiency gap.

¹² The district review report is available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/accountability/dr/reports.html?district=K-O>.

Curriculum

In each of the four gap-closer schools, principals and teachers are working to implement curricula that are horizontally and vertically aligned as well as aligned to the state frameworks.

Curricula at the four gap-closer schools are based on the district K-5 curriculum guides in English Language Arts (ELA) and its K-5 curriculum maps in mathematics, all of which are aligned to the state curriculum frameworks. The mathematics maps provide detailed pacing charts, but the ELA guides do not. During school visits, however, three different 3rd grade classes in two different schools were on the same *Open Court* literacy lesson. The story being read by the students was about birds nesting in the city, and the teachers were asking students to “generate questions while reading the text and locating facts from the text for answers,” a critical standard in Reading and Literature from the frameworks. Math classrooms had written objectives that were also clearly based on the state curriculum frameworks.

In these schools, grade-level planning time or other common planning time emerged as a vital necessity for aligning grade-level curriculum. The contractual planning time is not considered sufficient to the task, and so teachers at these schools routinely meet on their own time before and after school to plan curriculum. In one school there are meetings to work on vertical alignment, particularly in the fall, when teachers receive assessment information from the previous grade (DIBELS results, test scores), and also get an MCAS item analysis and copies of questions from previous years. Principals at the four schools use data from DIBELS, Galileo, GRADE, and MCAS to drive instruction. In one school, the principal gives each class in grades 3 through 5 a monthly, abbreviated MCAS test, administered in the auditorium. She then corrects the tests, returns them to the students within the next two days, and goes over the results in class, giving oral feedback to the students and helping teachers stay aligned to the standards.

In these four schools, principals are beyond the initial phases of implementing aligned curricula. They hold teachers accountable for the content and pacing of the curriculum and expect that teachers will teach to the standards of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. The teachers, in turn, use their own time for curriculum planning so as to meet those expectations. The principals and teachers of these four schools have laid the foundations for delivering vertically and horizontally aligned curricula.

Instruction

Classrooms in the four gap-closer schools demonstrated a schoolwide climate that is respectful, purposeful, and focused on learning throughout every lesson. Staff were ready to raise the level of student achievement further by using instructional strategies, not yet evident in these classrooms, that develop higher-order thinking skills.

The great majority of teachers observed in the 41 classrooms visited by the review team created a positive classroom climate focused on learning. These teachers did so in a number of critical ways. Teachers and aides spoke in clear and inviting tones throughout the lessons, addressing

students by name. Students showed the same respectful attitude toward their teachers and fellow students in all observed classrooms—in every grade and every type of learning configuration within these schools, for regular education, ELL, and special education students. Indeed, observers saw several positive examples of students helping each other and acknowledging other students’ good answers throughout the grades. Directions and questions, the majority of which were on the factual or routine level, were given clearly, crisply, and at a good pace. Students readily followed each direction as given and answered their teachers’ questions. The students had clearly absorbed the importance of being well organized and staying focused on the lesson.

The great majority of observed teachers in the four schools introduced and practiced a variety of well-paced, sequential, and efficient routines to maximize learning. This led to little “down time” during observed lessons; parts of lessons followed one another smoothly in logical sequence, and each had a clear instructional focus. Other good practices contributed to the focus on learning throughout the lessons: materials were ready as soon as they were needed, classroom supplies were well organized, and notebooks were distributed quickly and collected with equal dispatch during instruction as well as during the transition from one activity to the next.

Another effective practice in these four schools was the frequent use of formative assessment as a way of providing teachers with immediate feedback and an opportunity to help students recognize their errors and quickly develop a more accurate grasp of the lesson’s main points. One school used small, individual white boards to check for understanding after every problem set or critical question. This technique allowed teachers to address problems as soon as they surfaced, an excellent use of formative assessment to improve learning. In another school, one teacher incorporated a developmentally appropriate formative assessment technique into the lesson. Students were asked to “clap,” “stand up,” or “stay seated” as responses during a review of decimals. This lively activity kept the students riveted to the teacher’s questions and allowed for immediate teacher and student feedback on students’ responses, while at the same time permitting students to make mistakes and giving them a lot of immediate additional practice during which they could try again.

Teachers in these four schools consistently modeled the use of appropriate academic and literary vocabulary. They supported students in using this vocabulary, too, a critical means of creating a culture of high expectations and high achievement. Classrooms had word walls prominently displayed and several classrooms included key vocabulary words in the day’s agenda.

A clear result of such continual support and strong organization was the absence of any discipline problems in any of the observed lessons in the four schools. The few times that students seemed to be getting off track were handled by a quiet, meaningful look and a quick redirecting, given in a calm and quiet manner.

Focus groups with the teachers in each of the four schools made clear that the schoolwide, positive cultures had been developed over time, with the support of the principals and the instructional coaches formerly assigned to these schools. Teachers further noted that despite the high incidence districtwide of staff transfers, these schools had, within a few years, been able to develop a common understanding of effective instruction and a willingness to do “whatever it takes” to maximize student achievement. Teachers who did not share this understanding and

willingness often asked to be transferred from the school. In the teachers' view, staff in their schools was stabilizing, so that the schools were able to retain and strengthen the institutional knowledge gained from previous professional development initiatives.

The principals in the four schools concurred with the teachers' observations as to why each school's learning climate was positive and contributed to learning throughout the school. Like the teachers, the four principals said that they saw the role of the principal as first and foremost being the school's instructional leader. They saw themselves as responsible for establishing and reinforcing a respectful school and classroom environment focused on using best practices to improve the academic achievement of all students. They spoke knowledgeably about the central learning initiatives they had introduced into their schools or inherited from previous principals, the level on which they were being implemented, and the plans they had for increasing their effectiveness schoolwide.

Most importantly, each of these principals expressed a strong belief that a critical part of their instructional role is modeling for teachers the kind of respectful culture they want to see in classrooms. The principals also discussed the importance they place on creating a professional learning community among the school staff, despite the limitations imposed on them by the small amount of common planning time allocated and their inability to control the use of that time by teachers. No matter how large or small the school, the principals indicated that they felt strongly that it is important to include all teachers in helping make decisions, rather than allowing a small group to speak for all the teachers. For example, they regularly convey to the staff, either orally or in writing, information on important student initiatives and make time to meet with all teachers to discuss the initiatives and ask for open feedback about them. The principals expressed the view that such a culture of schoolwide participation is a critical element of high-achieving schools over the long term.

While the principals of the four gap-closer schools noted significant challenges to improving student achievement and narrowing the achievement gap, they discussed the creative ways they had developed of coping with those challenges. For example, each principal has developed strategies to ensure a common school culture focused on learning—whether through written feedback and questions on team minutes, or a quick note of appreciation after a classroom visit, or staff meetings with agendas devoted solely to focusing on critical best practices. One principal teaches a lesson every week. Another principal asks staff to share successful student work during staff meetings. This principal uses protocols for looking at student work so that the entire staff has the same understanding of what quality work should look like and seeks ways for all of their students to meet these standards. In these and similar ways, the principals show their own respect for teaching, are able to model effective practice, and gain insights into student achievement and learning struggles.

Despite the considerable instructional strengths of these four schools, during its visit the review team did not see many examples of teachers asking higher-order thinking questions, questions that ask students to analyze, apply, synthesize or evaluate information. Nor did reviewers observe teachers supporting students in expanding their thinking beyond short, factual responses. In addition, the review team did not hear students asking these kinds of questions of the teachers

or other students. Most dialogue followed the pattern of teacher-student-teacher, with few opportunities observed for students to process their understanding with other students in small groups or with a partner. Teachers were therefore unable to go beyond the factual level to assess students' depth of understanding of key concepts of the lesson.

A number of the initiatives recently introduced into the schools, as reported by the teachers and principals, are designed to promote higher-order thinking (guided reading, an emphasis on reading trade books across the curriculum, the 6+1 Trait writing model, and the use of journals in science to record students' thinking as observers and scientists). At the time of the review, however, the district had no systematic way to encourage teachers to move in this direction. Current professional development offerings, in the few days allotted to them, did not provide the ongoing and sustained support that is critical to making such a shift (see district review report, pp. 31-32). Nor had the district provided enough resources or sufficient districtwide leadership to make this paradigm shift in what all students should know, understand, and be able to do.

Students in the gap-closer schools are enthusiastic learners. The staffs of these schools have created a strong and positive climate for learning. They demonstrated mastery of key instructional strategies, particularly those related to students' knowledge and comprehension. They were ready to begin bringing students to the next level of achievement, creating more open-ended, challenging assignments for all students and developing higher-order thinking skills. Emphasizing higher-order thinking skills is essential to continuing the upward momentum demonstrated by the four schools.

With support in previous years from the instructional coaches and at the time of the review from the principals, teachers in the four gap-closer schools consistently use formative and summative data gathered from their students' test results to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of their own teaching and develop and implement more effective classroom strategies.

The principals in the four gap-closer schools place a great emphasis on data collection and analysis as a means of improving teachers' instruction and students' achievement. Formative assessments are given throughout the year, along with summative assessments including MCAS. While in past years principals were able to rely on their instructional coaches to analyze data and facilitate teachers' analysis of data, in 2010-2011, in the absence of the coaches, they took on this role themselves. They spend a considerable amount of time analyzing the data themselves and preparing the data so that it presents a clear picture of student achievement. They often work in staff meetings, with small groups of teachers, or with individuals to discuss the data and its implications. They ask teachers to make the link between student test scores and their own teaching and to consider continuously how they can improve their instruction so as to improve student achievement.

Strikingly, a number of the principals include not only the teachers but also the students in analyzing data. One principal gathers all of the students from a grade and goes over the test data with them. Other principals encourage teachers to use exemplar texts with students and have developed a common protocol to use in having the students articulate what makes a certain paper proficient and another failing. Based on the models they examine as a group, students have

become aware of the high expectations teachers have for them and the specific ways to achieve what is expected.

These schools, led by their principals, are data-driven. What is particularly noteworthy about their use of data analysis as a means of improving teacher practice and student achievement is that it takes place in the absence of a districtwide method, process, or test framework for collecting and analyzing such data. Staff in the schools noted that the district has not provided a consistent testing framework, support for analyzing the data, or sufficient common planning time to do it; somehow, however, they get it done—another example of the culture of “whatever it takes” in action. Their being commended for narrowing proficiency gaps (see footnote 2 above) attests to the impact of such close and continual data analysis.

In the four gap-closer schools, scores on ELA trended consistently upward from 2008 to 2010 (see Table 5 above). There was no such consistent trend upward, however, in the percentage of students averaging a score of 2 or higher on ELA open response items. In two of the four schools, this percentage was lower in 2010 than in 2008, and in three of the four schools, it was lower in 2010 than in 2006. (This is in contrast to scores on mathematics open response items: in all four schools the percentage of students averaging a score of 2 or higher on open response items in math was higher in 2010 than in 2008; in three of the four schools the percentage was higher in 2010 than in 2006, and in the fourth the percentage was the same.) With better central direction and greater focus on analyzing the data on students’ achievement with regard to higher-order thinking skills in ELA, these data-driven schools could narrow the achievement gap further.

Tiered Instruction and Adequate Learning Time

A tiered instruction model designed to meet the needs of struggling students was not in evidence in the four gap-closer schools at the time of the review.

Review team members observed that most teachers in the four gap-closer schools were using whole-class instruction. Although principals and teachers in interviews referred to their use of guided reading to provide individualized instruction, and although staff mentioned intensive small-group instruction, all students were doing the same thing during the class visits. Review team members noticed some of the tools of other kinds of practice, such as guided reading formats, word walls, and author’s chair, and one school had a leveled book library on its top floor. In most classes, however, individualized instruction or small group instruction was not observed.

There is some supplemental instruction outside of the school day. Three of the four schools have afterschool programs. One has the 21st Century Afterschool and another has an extended day program. In the third school, teachers have set up “learning clubs” to tutor struggling students at least once a week for 45 minutes after school.

Students not yet achieving at grade level in math and English language arts were not observed receiving appropriate tiered instruction during the school day. At the time of the site visit, these

four schools were only in the elementary stages of moving in the direction of tiered, research-based interventions and instruction to support struggling students.

There was no evidence that the district had provided professional development in the area of tiered instruction, with the result that principals and teachers had limited familiarity with tiered instruction strategies.

At the time of the review, principals and teachers at the four gap-closer schools had a limited knowledge of strategies for providing a tiered model of instruction. They appeared to know about individualized instruction for literacy through their work in the area of guided reading. This knowledge appeared to be in the early stages, as teachers expressed interest in continuing the work they had done the year before with the coaches in order to further develop their skills. No mention of Response to Intervention (RTI) or tiered instruction was made in interviews, suggesting a possible lack of familiarity with the concept in general within the district.

Students in the district were not readily able to gain access to the curriculum in the way that best fit their needs. The principals and teachers in the gap-closer schools were willing to serve all their students, including struggling students, but at the time of the review did not seem to have the expertise or to have had the professional development needed to do so.

Social and Emotional Support

The four gap-closer schools seek out and use whatever internal and external resources they can find to provide strong social and emotional as well as academic support for their students.

Principals and teachers at each school stressed the importance of bringing community agencies into the school and having the students experience the larger community outside of school. At two of the four schools, students are being introduced to a world broader than their school or home through contact with college students, volunteers from business, and personnel from community organizations.

In one of the schools, teachers identified their struggling students in need of academic or emotional support, who were then matched with volunteer tutors through the SMILES mentoring program who saw them in school weekly, helping them with literacy over a period of years, possibly until middle school. More than one principal cited mentors and outreach workers as a factor in improving the performance of their low-income students.

Teachers commended their principals for reaching out to families by going to students' homes to determine why they were not in school, and for being accessible to teachers facing challenges with students at risk. Attendance at all four schools ranged from 93 to 96 percent during the past two years (2008-2009 and 2009-2010). Attendance officers, school counselors, and often the principal followed up on frequently absent students. There were no in-school suspensions at any of the four schools during these previous two school years; in 2008-2009 the out-of-school suspension rates ranged from 0.0 percent to 1.6 percent, and in 2009-2010 there were no out-of-school suspensions in any of the four schools.

Principals reported that as well as applying for grants, they seek out community agency personnel, parents, and extended family members—anyone who could help their students perform better in school. Principals praised their counselors for making appropriate referrals because they know students’ families well. One principal described a school counselor who links students to effective support from outside agencies. Another school has weekly meetings of the school nurse and adjustment counselors, the facilitator for the Families and Community Together with Schools (FACTS) program of wraparound student and family supports, a representative from the state Department of Children and Families, and the district attendance officer to review at-risk students and plan support.

Interviewees at these four schools recognize parents as integral to student achievement and encourage their involvement in the schools’ daily life. The schools are open to parent visits and encourage meetings with the principal and presence at school activities. One principal stated: “Parents want to help;” she invites parents to join her for morning coffee meetings. Parents in the schools volunteer on field trips and in classrooms and run school fund-raising events. One school has parent meetings by grade level as well as parent-teacher conferences.

Interviews with student groups in the gap-closer schools reflected the comfort level students feel in school and the ease with which they seek out adults for help or information. A student said that her special person was “a teacher ‘cause when you need help she’s right there.” Students cited their teachers as what they liked best in school. They like their principals as well. One student noted that her principal asks them all how they are doing. At one school, the students liked the principal best because she was “nice and fun.” An anti-bullying curriculum and materials were displayed in one principal’s office. Teachers and students spoke in interviews about using these. Students described figuring out how to tell someone about a bully and were encouraged to do so by other students.

Teachers and principals in the gap-closer schools described their own attachments to the school community and showed close knowledge of their students in talking about them. They discussed emotional bonds with their students and said that many staff members had grown up in the same neighborhoods, understand what the students are experiencing, and want them to succeed regardless of home or other difficulties. One teacher said, “We love these children!”

The four schools are learning communities that promote their students’ well-being. This culture of caring involves all members of the school community and promotes individual student growth and development. The social and emotional support provided for all students, particularly those from low-income families, is integral to their improved academic achievement.

Key Question 2: How do the district’s systems for support and intervention affect the school or schools where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?

In improving student achievement and narrowing the proficiency gap for low-income students, the gap-closer schools have made use of the limited district support available at the time of the review.

The gap-closer schools have received the same support as other schools in the district. Their effective use of the resources provided has contributed in some measure to diminishing the proficiency gap for low-income students in those schools. The district provided a partially-developed written curriculum as well as—until the current year (2010-2011)—coaches who supported teachers and assisted with data analysis. Staff in the gap-closer schools have worked to further develop and align curriculum, and the principals have placed great emphasis on the analysis of data as a means to improve instruction. Principals and teachers in these schools have also managed in some ways to transcend district limitations such as the restrictions or perceived restrictions in the teacher contract and the lack of district systems to lead and guide the schools.

The district hired the creative, energetic, and resourceful principals in the four schools. They are instructional leaders in their schools: they inspire their staffs to work collaboratively and energetically to promote the shared vision of improved student achievement. According to interviews with teachers and principals, principals are striving to create a professional learning community by providing feedback on instructional practices, encouraging collaboration, and supporting and advocating for teachers. Some principals and teachers indicated that seeking resources to provide social and emotional support to students in the absence of a cohesive set of district programs required creativity.

At the same time, to be successful, the principals work as best they can around the limitations imposed by the teacher contract. They have developed ways to give advice and feedback to teachers even with the perceived restriction on taking notes during informal classroom observations. They have managed to have some influence on the common planning time they are prohibited from directing. Also, although they do not have the opportunity to hire the teacher of their choosing for an open position when any teacher with professional teacher status wishes to transfer into it, they have done their best to hold all teachers assigned to their schools to high standards.

While limited collection and analysis of assessment data occurs at the district level, in 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 the district did support the administration in schools of formative assessments such as the DIBELS, the GRADE, and the Galileo mathematics benchmark assessments (see Assessment section of district review report, beginning on p. 26). The gap-closer schools took full advantage of that support. In 2010-2011, however, the district ceased supporting one ELA assessment and did not give clear indication of its support for another until November, resulting in inconsistent administration of that test by schools (see district review report, pp. 26-27). The district also eliminated all of the elementary coaches, who had been responsible for data analysis of the DIBELS, GRADE, and Galileo benchmarks at their schools. Coaches had also worked

with teachers to plan instruction based on formative assessment results. Without coaches providing analysis and support, the schools have been limited as to the assessment support they can offer teachers. Principals have stepped in to do some data analysis, but there is a limit as to the additional support they have been able to provide. Thus in 2010-2011 principals and teachers have not only had less school data to work with than previously, but also have had less support in data analysis.

Regarding professional development, teachers identified few district professional development activities as particularly helpful, but identified some of the embedded activities of the instructional coaches as contributing to the teachers' professional growth.

The four gap-closer schools have used the district resources provided, but have gone beyond them with their own initiatives. In the absence of strong systemic district support, the four schools have taken steps on their own to address key issues around curriculum, instruction, assessment, teacher support and supervision, and student support.

Recommendations

To sustain and disseminate effective practices at individual schools, the district should develop more effective channels for communication and collaboration among the central office and the schools and between principals and teachers.

At the time of the review, principals at the gap-closer schools reported dissatisfaction with the organization of the principal meetings currently conducted by the district and the relatively limited opportunity to discuss common concerns with the superintendent (see district review report, p. 16). Also discussed with the review team were restrictions in the collective bargaining agreement that prevent principals from directing teachers' common planning time, at least at the elementary level (see district review report, pp. 19-20). To ameliorate this limited opportunity to discuss common concerns among themselves, with district leadership, and with teachers, the district should strengthen multi-level communication channels that would enable staff at different levels to explore solutions to common challenges as well as to celebrate accomplishments. In addition to the four gap-closer schools, principals and staff members at many other schools in New Bedford are also worthy of commendation for a variety of reasons. Improvement of the communication structure would allow principals to share their solutions to challenges, would permit central office staff and principals to clarify their roles regarding one another, and would engage principals and teachers in conversations around effective classroom instruction. Improved communication would result in more effective management of the schools and their faculties, and thereby improve student achievement.

To provide all principals with greater autonomy to create the best learning environment for their students, the district should work with the New Bedford Educators Association to remove several restrictions placed on that autonomy by the collective bargaining agreement.

While at the time of the review the school review team noted that the gap-closer school principals have worked within the boundaries of the current collective bargaining agreement to build a strong team of teachers and oversee the educational work in the school, the collective bargaining agreement and the understanding of the collective bargaining agreement have created challenges for school leaders as they work to hire the teachers best suited to meet student needs, as they seek to provide direction for teachers' common planning time, and as they try to give teachers useful feedback from informal observations in the classroom. Principals identified the restrictions of the collective bargaining agreement with the teachers' union as an impediment in selecting the best teachers for their school, or even in making the best assignments of teachers to specific grades within their schools (see district review report, pp. 28-30). As mentioned under the previous recommendation, the collective bargaining agreement also prevents elementary principals from directing common planning time (see district review report, pp. 19-20). Finally, principals discussed with the review team what they saw as their contractual inability to offer informal written feedback to their teachers (see district review report, p.18) The school review team agrees with the district review team that provisions of the collective bargaining agreement place restrictions on principals' ability to create the best learning environment for their students,

and also agrees that the district should work with the teachers' union to remove these restrictions or perceived restrictions.

The district should build on the strong instruction in the gap-closer schools and support them—and all New Bedford schools—in furthering higher-order skill development throughout the curriculum.

At the time of the review, the four gap-closer schools demonstrated that they had created exceptionally strong and respectful climates for learning. Their staffs, as a whole, demonstrated mastery of managing classrooms and creating effective routines for learning. Students were eager to learn and to demonstrate their knowledge. Their knowledge, however, mostly reflected lower levels of thinking and learning.

All four schools are now strongly positioned to move to the next stage of student learning—from a concentration on students learning routines, being able to discuss facts, and comprehending the subject matter taught to an emphasis on students actively participating in higher-order thinking—articulating their thinking, problem solving together, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information, and applying important concepts to new and different situations.

A number of the initiatives recently introduced into the schools (guided reading, an emphasis on reading trade books across the curriculum, the 6+1 Trait writing model, and using journals in science to record students' thinking) are designed to promote this kind of learning. The district, however, has no systematic way to encourage teachers to move toward it. Current district expectations for teaching, expectations for use of common planning time, and professional development offerings do not provide the vision or sustained support for school leaders and teachers to make such a paradigm shift in what all students should know, understand, and be able to do, nor has the district provided the requisite resources or districtwide leadership.

Principals in the four gap-closer schools have the vision and the leadership skills to implement the necessary transformation, but not the authority or resources to carry out that vision. The district should 1) develop a unified vision of a school system where all students learn higher-order thinking skills and use them throughout their schooling and 2) delegate the organization and management of the professional development and guidance to support this type of learning to the professional development committee recommended in the district review report. The development of higher-order thinking skills will help improve student achievement across the district and will help New Bedford students become life-long learners.

To further the efforts of the gap-closer schools and other schools in the district to meet differentiated learning needs, the district should develop a system of tiered instruction for addressing the needs of students not achieving at grade level.

At the time of the review, the review team found mostly whole-class instruction in the four gap-closer schools, with little evidence that the individual needs of students were being addressed during the school day. It also found little evidence of familiarity with tiered instruction on the part of principals and teachers.

Raising the low achievement of many district students requires that schools and teachers assess and address student deficits. There is no one model of tiered instruction; all approaches include a

three-tier model of student support that uses research-based academic and/or behavioral interventions. High-quality instruction, screening, and group interventions are all part of tier 1. Tier 2 consists of targeted interventions for students not making adequate progress in the regular classroom, and tier 3 provides comprehensive evaluation and intensive interventions that target a student's skill deficits. Continuing to use the single instructional strategy of whole group instruction will not bring struggling students to proficiency. Their specific needs must be targeted through tiered instruction, allowing them to reach proficiency in what is being taught and to be ready to progress to the next levels of learning along with their peers. Once a system of tiered instruction has been instituted all students will benefit, as the system will identify and address all students' needs and will provide a way of dealing with the academic and behavioral issues that, without such a system, impede the academic progress a class can make.

Appendix A: Review Team Members

The review of the New Bedford Public Schools was conducted from November 15-18, 2010, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

District Review Team:

Dr. Nadine Binkley Bonda, Leadership and Governance

Dr. James McAuliffe, Curriculum and Instruction

Willette Johnson, Assessment

Dr. Richard Smith, Human Resources and Professional Development

Patricia Williams, Student Support, Review Team Coordinator

Stratos Dukakis, Financial and Asset Management

Low-Income Review Team:

Dr. John Roper, Low-Income Review Team Coordinator

Mary Eirich

Dr. Sara Freedman

Helen Jacobson

Appendix B: Review Activities and Site Visit Schedule

Review Activities

The following activities were conducted as part of the combined review of the New Bedford Public Schools.

- The review team conducted interviews with the following New Bedford financial personnel: City Auditor, Mayor’s Executive Aide.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following members of the New Bedford School Committee: Chair and four members.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the New Bedford Educators Association, Inc.: President, representative.
- The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the New Bedford Public Schools central office administration: Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Directors of ELA, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies, Mathematics Supervisor, Director of SEI and World Languages, Acting Director of Special Education, Director of Pupil Personnel, Human Resources Manager, Equity Officer, Chief Administrator for Finance and Operations (Business Manager), Director of Federal and State Funded Programs, Director of School Support, Director of Title I, Director of Professional Development.
- The review team visited the following schools in the New Bedford Public Schools as part of the district review: New Bedford High School, Keith, Normandin, Roosevelt Middle Schools, Ashley, Campbell, Devalles, Hathaway, Hayden/McFadden, Parker, and Pulaski Elementary Schools.
 - During school visits, the review team conducted interviews with school principals, teachers, and coaches.
 - The review team conducted 48 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the 11 schools visited.
- The review team visited the following schools in the New Bedford Public Schools as part of the low-income review: Congdon (K-5), Gomes (K-5), Pacheco (K-5), and Swift (K-5) Elementary Schools.
 - During school visits, the review team conducted interviews with principals and focus groups with teachers and students.
 - The review team conducted 41 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the 4 schools visited.
- The review team reviewed the following documents provided by ESE:
 - District profile data

- District and Commendation Schools Analysis and Review Tool (DART)
- Data from the Education Data Warehouse (EDW)
- Latest Coordinated Program Review (CPR) Report and any follow-up Mid-cycle Report
- Most recent New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) report
- Any District or School Accountability Report produced by Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) or ESE in the past three years
- Teacher’s contract, including the teacher evaluation tool
- Reports on licensure and highly qualified status
- Long-term enrollment trends
- End-of-year financial report for the district for 2010
- 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
 - School committee minutes for the past year
 - Most recent budget proposal with accompanying narrative or presentation; and most recent approved budget
 - Curriculum guide overview
 - K-12 ELA, mathematics, and science curriculum documents
 - High school program of studies
 - Matrix of assessments administered in the district
 - Copies of data analyses/reports used in schools
 - Descriptions of student support programs
 - Program evaluations
 - Student and Family Handbooks
 - Faculty Handbook

- Professional Development Plan and current program/schedule/courses
- Teacher certification and qualification information
- Teacher planning time schedules
- Evaluation tools for central office administrators and principals
- Job descriptions for central office and school administrators and instructional staff
- Teacher attendance data
- All administrator evaluations and certifications
- Randomly selected teacher personnel files
- Principal contracts
- Fiscal year 2001 elementary school feasibility study
- The review team reviewed the following documents at the schools visited in connection with the low-income part of the review:
 - School Improvement Plan
 - Calendar of formative and summative assessments for the school
 - Copies of data analyses/reports used in the school
 - Descriptions of student support programs at the school
 - Student and Family Handbooks for the school
 - Teacher planning time/meeting schedules at the school

Site Visit Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the combined review of the New Bedford Public Schools, conducted from November 15-18, 2010.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
<p>November 15</p> <p>Orientation with district leaders; interviews with district staff and principals; review of documents; interview with teachers' association</p>	<p>November 16</p> <p>Interviews with district staff and principals; school visits to New Bedford High School Keith and Roosevelt Middle Schools, and Pacheco and Swift Elementary Schools; classroom observations; review of personnel files; teacher focus groups; two gap-closer schools</p>	<p>November 17</p> <p>Interviews with city personnel; school visits to New Bedford High School, and Congdon, Hathaway, and Swift Elementary Schools; interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; teacher team meetings, focus groups with teachers and students; parent focus group; school committee interviews; two gap-closer schools</p>	<p>November 18</p> <p>School visits to Parker, Devalles, Hayden/McFadden, Campbell, Ashley, and Pulaski Elementary Schools; interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; follow-up interviews; team meeting; emerging themes meeting with district leaders and principals</p>

Appendix C: Finding and Recommendation Statements

Finding Statements:

Key Question 1: To what extent are the conditions for school effectiveness in place at the school where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?

School Leadership

1. The four gap-closer schools have strong principals who have formed cohesive, focused staffs.

Curriculum

2. In each of the four gap-closer schools, principals and teachers are working to implement curricula that are horizontally and vertically aligned as well as aligned to the state frameworks.

Instruction

3. Classrooms in the four gap-closer schools demonstrated a schoolwide climate that is respectful, purposeful, and focused on learning throughout every lesson. Staff were ready to raise the level of student achievement further by using instructional strategies, not yet evident in these classrooms, that develop higher-order thinking skills.
4. With support in previous years from the instructional coaches and at the time of the review from the principals, teachers in the four gap-closer schools consistently use formative and summative data gathered from their students' test results to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of their own teaching and develop and implement more effective classroom strategies.

Tiered Instruction and Adequate Learning Time

5. A tiered instruction model designed to meet the needs of struggling students was not in evidence in the four gap-closer schools at the time of the review.
6. There was no evidence that the district had provided professional development in the area of tiered instruction, with the result that principals and teachers had limited familiarity with tiered instruction strategies.

Social and Emotional Support

7. The four gap-closer schools seek out and use whatever internal and external resources they can find to provide strong social and emotional as well as academic support for their students.

Key Question 2: How do the district's systems for support and intervention affect the school where the performance of low-income students has substantially improved?

8. In improving student achievement and narrowing the proficiency gap for low-income students, the gap-closer schools have made use of the limited district support available at the time of the review.

Recommendation Statements:

1. To sustain and disseminate effective practices at individual schools, the district should develop more effective channels for communication and collaboration among the central office and the schools and between principals and teachers.
2. To provide all principals with greater autonomy to create the best learning environment for their students, the district should work with the New Bedford Educators Association to remove several restrictions placed on that autonomy by the collective bargaining agreement.
3. The district should build on the strong instruction in the gap-closer schools and support them—and all New Bedford schools—in furthering higher-order skill development throughout the curriculum.
4. To further the efforts of the gap-closer schools and other schools in the district to meet differentiated learning needs, the district should develop a system of tiered instruction for addressing the needs of students not achieving at grade level.