



Massachusetts Department of
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY
EDUCATION

Tantasqua Regional School District

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

Review conducted February 7-10, 2011

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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

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.

a result of having these “gap-closer” schools, districts from this group were invited to participate in this set of reviews aimed at identifying district and school practices associated with stronger performance for low-income students.

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 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 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. 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.

Tantasqua Regional School District

The site visit to the Tantasqua Regional School District was conducted from February 7-10, 2011. The site visit included visits to the following district schools: Tantasqua Regional Junior High School (TRJHS) and Tantasqua Regional Senior High School (TRSHS). The Junior High School was identified as a “gap-closer” for its low-income students, as described above. Further information about the review 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 contains information about student performance from 2008-2010. Appendix D contains finding and recommendation statements.

Note that any progress that has taken place since the time of the review is not reflected in this benchmarking report. Findings represent the conditions in place at the time of the site visit, and recommendations represent the team’s suggestions to address the issues identified at that time.

District Profile⁴

The Tantasqua Regional School District encompasses grades 7-12 and includes three schools: Tantasqua Regional Junior High School (7-8), Tantasqua Regional Senior High School (9-12), and Tantasqua Regional Vocational High School (9-12). Students come to TRJHS from five small towns located in Worcester and Hampden counties in central Massachusetts: Brimfield, Brookfield, Holland, Sturbridge, and Wales; each of these towns has its own school district with its own school committee for the elementary grades. The towns are governed by a town meeting/board of selectmen. An eighteen-member school committee with representatives from each town serves the Tantasqua Regional School District. The leadership of the Tantasqua Regional School District also serves the five elementary school districts.

Tantasqua Regional Vocational High School, also known as the Technical Division of the Tantasqua Regional Senior High School, provides several Chapter 74 approved programs including carpentry, culinary arts, drafting, electricity, health assisting, machine tool technology, and information support services and networking. Students within the Technical Division attend the same academic classes as all other high school students in the district. The Technical Division has its own principal/director.

Tantasqua Regional School District had a 2010-2011 enrollment of 1,782 students. ESE categorizes the enrollment in three distinct groups: 557 at TRJHS in grades 7 and 8; 867 at the TRSHS in grades 9 through 12; and 358 at Tantasqua Regional Vocational. In 2011 the student

⁴ Data derived from ESE’s website, ESE’s Education Data Warehouse, or other ESE sources.

demographics for TRJHS were as follows: limited English proficient (none), special education (13.8 percent), low-income/free lunch (15.6 percent), and low-income/reduced price (2.3 percent). The 2011 student demographics for TRSHS and the Technical Division were as follows: limited English proficient (0 percent for both), special education (9.1 percent and 25.4 percent respectively), low-income/free lunch (13 percent and 20.7 percent respectively), and low income/reduced price (2.9 percent and 5.3 percent respectively). Throughout the review team’s visit district leaders and teachers at both schools referred to the students as “all of our students” and said that they did not disaggregate student data by subgroup for analysis. By district practice, though not ESE’s, data for Technical Division students is generally incorporated into the data for Tantasqua Regional High School students.

The superintendent at the time of the review had been in the district since 1995 and held the positions of TRJHS assistant principal and principal, and associate superintendent. He was appointed district superintendent in 2006. The leadership team was composed of the associate superintendent (first year), the then assistant superintendent (third year), the educational technology director, the special education director, the business manager, the then TRJHS principal (third year in district, but served as a local school committee member prior to her hiring), the TRHS principal (first year following one year as interim) and the Technical Division principal (first year). All central office staff have responsibility for School Union 61, including the five member towns. Many of the leaders were new to the district.

Student enrollment decreased slightly from 1,854 in 2008 to 1,782 in 2011, but the stability rate was high at 93.6 percent in 2011. The district’s population of low-income students grew from 10.9 percent (204) in 2007 to 18.6 percent (331) in 2011.

Table 1: 2010-2011 Tantasqua Regional School District Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total	Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total
African-American	12	0.7	First Language not English	11	0.6
Asian	27	1.5	Limited English Proficient	2	0.1
Hispanic or Latino	77	4.3	Low-income	331	18.6
Native American	12	0.7	Special Education	269	14.9
White	1,622	91.0	Free Lunch	274	15.4
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	2	0.1	Reduced-price lunch	57	3.2
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	30	1.7	Total enrollment	1,782	100.0

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

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

	Total Enrollment	Low-Income Students			Limited English Proficient Students	Special Education Students
		All	Eligible for Free Lunch	Eligible for Reduced-Price Lunch		
State	955,563	34.2	29.1	5.1	7.1	17.0
Tantasqua	1,782	18.6	15.4	3.2	0.1	14.9
Tantasqua Regional Junior High School	557	18.0	15.6	2.3	0.4	13.8
Tantasqua Regional High School	867	15.9	13.0	2.9	0.0	9.1
Tantasqua Regional Vocational High	358	26.0	20.7	5.3	0.0	25.4

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

The local appropriation to the Tantasqua Regional School District budget for fiscal year 2011 was \$23,952,160, down slightly from the appropriation for fiscal year 2010 of \$24,008,283. In fiscal year 2010, the total amount of actual school-related expenditures including expenditures by the district (\$23,124,766) and expenditures from other sources such as grants (\$3,368,494) was \$26,493,260. Actual net school spending in fiscal year 2010 was \$17,442,013.

Findings

Key Question 1: To what extent are the following conditions for school effectiveness in place at the school 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

TRJHS has created conditions for improving the achievement of all students. The school has encompassed, but not specifically targeted students from low-income families for its interventions.

TRJHS has an academic mission to meet the needs of all students regardless of economic status. District and school leaders and teachers stated that they strive to help all students meet high standards and do not specifically target students from low-income families. They added that they attempt to provide appropriate services for all students in order to achieve the mission.

The superintendent at the time of the review told the review team that district and school leaders focused on TRJHS when the school failed to make AYP for two successive years and introduced inclusion as a way of improving student performance. The newly-hired principal had experience in implementing inclusionary models. In her second year, she strengthened the school leadership team by recruiting and engaging as assistant principal a colleague who also had substantial experience in implementing inclusion. Drawing on their experience, the school leaders introduced a comprehensive model of inclusion involving teamwork and co-teaching.

District leaders and the principal also determined that not all students at TRJHS were being taught the grade level curriculum in mathematics. Two groups were particularly affected: Grade 7 students were using a mathematics textbook based on grade 6 skills, and some special education students were receiving pull-out instruction with mathematics materials based on grades 3, 4, or 5 skills. The principal and the superintendent agreed that use of below grade level materials had compromised student performance.

In an interview with the review team, the principal stated that the 2009 ESE Coordinated Program Review placing the school on “warning status” provided another reason for school change. The reviewers found “isolation of special education.” In rectification, the new principal instituted heterogeneous grouping, a co-teaching model to benefit all struggling learners, and data analysis to understand and improve student achievement.

Because the necessary changes at TRJHS were comprehensive, the principal, supported by the superintendent, recognized the importance of immediate changes in the curriculum and culture.

As a result, the principal purchased new mathematics textbooks, introduced the process of teaming and including special educators at all levels of instruction, and strengthened the practice of using data to make decisions. Despite a decrease in funding because of declining enrollment the principal was able to secure resources and re-aligned staff to maintain effective teams by reducing from three teams to two-and-a-half at each grade level. She also stated that although her request for a four percent budget increase was supported by the superintendent and business manager she was ultimately required to cut \$50,000 and looked for efficiencies to meet this requirement.

After a challenging first year of changes, the principal assessed the progress and analyzed teachers' responses to the changes. She referred to the year as a "do-over" and began to prioritize, re-allocate, and seek resources. She trained teachers in co-teaching, refined the team structure, and provided struggling students with an extra mathematics class. In interviews with the review team, the principal discussed the challenge of bringing about change. She stated that she was "trying to get them (teachers) to feel comfortable about being accountable...and to implement real student success plans." She went on to say that use of data was a big cultural change at TRJHS because "a child's failure was not a teacher's responsibility" previously. Teacher ownership of student performance results was one of the biggest breakthroughs.

The principal targeted professional development to support on-going change. A consultant helped the staff develop effective teaming and co-teaching models and substitute teachers were engaged to facilitate peer observations of promising practices. Faculty meetings were used for professional development on understanding the use of data to inform instructional decisions. Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) began in 2010-2011 and one of the first areas of interest was investigating the Response to Intervention (RTI) model for supporting all learners. The principal stated that she used the teacher supervision and evaluation process to give teachers specific suggestions in support of the change to a more inclusionary model.

With the support of the district leadership team, the principal has developed a clearly defined mission and related goals to raise the achievement of all students. After a challenging initial two years, the principal worked diligently to ensure that staff understand the commitment to improve the achievement of all students. While these efforts were not specifically intended to improve the achievement of students from low-income families, the achievement gap for this subgroup has narrowed. TRJHS made AYP in ELA, both in the aggregate and for all subgroups in 2009 and 2010. Although the low-income and special education subgroups met their improvement targets in 2010, the school did not make AYP in mathematics. Over the past two years, the school has also narrowed the proficiency gap between low-income and non-low-income students

Consistent Delivery of an Aligned Curriculum

The team structure at TRJHS provides for the consistent delivery of curriculum, with vertical and horizontal alignment; science and ELA are aligned to the state Framework. The team did not have access to mathematics and social studies documents to determine the alignment. Although the district improvement plan describes a seven-year curriculum cycle, the district has not produced timely revisions of the ELA and mathematics curricula.

Objective 1.c of the district improvement plan for fiscal years 2011 through 2013 makes specific reference to a seven-year curriculum cycle plan. “Production of documents and reports which adhere to the seven year curriculum cycle” is the action step accompanying the district improvement plan objective “to continue to refine our common curriculum and teaching practice, encouraging and sharing innovation in practice.” According to the plan, professional development related to the fulfillment of the objective will be “focused on writing across all curriculum areas.” The plan also contains the intentions to “convene curriculum study teams as indicated on seven year curriculum cycle,” and to develop a “teacher leadership cohort that will work in schools to align curriculum and encourage innovation in teaching.”

The review team examined a diagram of the curriculum cycle on a district computer, but did not have access to a paper copy of the complete curriculum cycle and information about placement of the core content areas on the cycle. Interviewees verbalized the activities that take place during the seven years. According to interviewees, curriculum content teams examine the curriculum during years one and two. Year three is an implementation year and year four is a review year. Years five and six are devoted to maintenance and implementation of minor changes. One district leader said that the social studies curriculum was in the second year of the cycle with an anticipated delivery date of the late summer of 2011.

According to interviewees, teams of teachers work during the school year and summer as part of the seven-year cycle, and the assistant superintendent at the time of the review said that it is not uncommon for the team to be intact for the entire cycle. Teachers serving on a curriculum committee meet five or six times during the year, and the district provides substitute teachers to facilitate their participation. Meetings are also scheduled for four or five days during the summer and teachers receive a stipend for engaging in curriculum work.

The review team examined the pre-kindergarten through grade 12 science curriculum, but it was not clear how the development, implementation, and review followed the seven-year cycle. According to district leaders, work began on the science curriculum in the fall of 2007 and the finished curriculum was implemented in the spring of 2008.

The district also developed a kindergarten through grade 6 writing curriculum that was implemented in 2008-2009. In interviews, the assistant superintendent said that the school committee made “a common observation” that students needed better writing skills. As a result, the district developed a kindergarten through grade 6 writing curriculum. The review team did not have access to the writing component for grades 7 through 12, but was able to examine the component for kindergarten through grade 6.

According to a high school administrator, the school established for high school students a tutorial program run by the National Honor Society (NHS). The current ELA curriculum guide contains the state framework standards, student outcomes, some suggested teaching strategies, and instructional materials and resources. The assessment strategies and activities are limited, and one district leader told the review team that the guide was weak on assessment strategies. A comprehensive pre-kindergarten through grade 6 word study curriculum was developed and included as an addendum to the ELA curriculum in 2009-2010. According to the assistant superintendent, further plans for curriculum development included a review of ELA starting in the spring of 2011. Teams of pre-kindergarten through grade 12 teachers were to meet to discuss the ELA curriculum that was last revised six or seven years before. Revision of the pre-kindergarten through grade 12 mathematics curriculum was planned to begin upon the release of the Common Core curriculum.

TRJHS teachers said that they were in the process of developing curriculum maps for content areas and that map development was ongoing in all departments. The review team examined the mapping format that the principal required teachers to use. The required components include skills/objectives, essential questions, assessments, extensions for high achievers, state frameworks addressed, report card standards, additional materials, and support for struggling learners. The review team examined the curriculum maps for science and found that all of the components were completed. Curriculum maps for other content areas were unavailable, but interviewees said that much work had been done on them.

In interviews with the review team, two of the TRJHS curriculum coordinators said that the principal “got them started on curriculum maps.” They had been using the grade 7 and 8 ELA curriculum guide previously. According to teachers and coordinators, much of the work on curriculum maps is done at monthly department meetings. Curriculum coordinators said that monitoring the use of the curriculum maps is not difficult because they are discussed at monthly meetings as well as twice-weekly during team meetings. They added that curriculum coordinators and the principal are “in and out of classrooms all the time.” Teachers are also required to prepare lesson plans and this provides another way of monitoring implementation of the maps. At the time of the review team’s visit, the principal was the acting mathematics curriculum coordinator following the mid-year departure of the incumbent.

Curriculum coordinators said that horizontal articulation is accomplished through monthly meetings and vertical articulation takes place on an informal basis with the elementary and senior high schools.

Work on developing common curricula is ongoing in the district, but the time allotted to development and revision is not always consistent with a seven-year cycle. As a result, both the ELA and mathematics curricula have not been fully reviewed or revised. For example, the TRJHS principal discovered that the mathematics curriculum was not appropriately aligned as implemented. Although new texts have been purchased for the TRJHS mathematics program, their alignment with the kindergarten through grade 12 mathematics program has not yet been determined in the absence of a curriculum review.

Effective Instruction

The review team found evidence of effective classroom organization and elements of sound instructional design at TRJHS. However, the team did not observe a wide range of instructional techniques, or the routine use of higher-order questions to challenge student thinking. Instruction was generally teacher-directed with few opportunities for students to articulate their thinking and reasoning.

Both the principal and curriculum coordinators monitor instruction at TRJHS. Some curriculum coordinators also evaluate teachers. According to the then assistant superintendent, district leaders do not conduct walkthroughs, but the principal and assistant principal are regularly in the classrooms. Teachers and curriculum coordinators corroborated this in interviews with the review team, and the review team's classroom observations were confirming. The assistant superintendent and principal said that teachers visit each other's classrooms to view instructional practices through peer observation and the district provides substitutes to facilitate this process.

The review team visited 26 classrooms in the district: 20 classrooms at the TRJHS and six at the TRSHS. The review team visited six mathematics, six ELA, six science, and two social studies classes at TRJHS. The review team observed three ELA and three mathematics and classes at the TRSHS. The observations were 20 to 30 minutes in length.

The review team used the protocol's Instructional Inventory Record that included 14 different indicators rated on a three-point scale. The 14 indicators fell into two broad categories: organization of the classroom, and general instructional design and delivery. Review team members rated each indicator according to whether they found solid evidence, partial evidence or no evidence.

Under the "organization of the classrooms" category, review team members found solid evidence of a classroom climate characterized by respectful behaviors, smooth routines, and good tone and discourse in 100 percent of the junior and senior high school classes observed. Review team members commented that students were highly organized, attentive, polite and respectful to each other. Well-developed student organizational skills were evident. For example, in a mathematics class the review team observed all of the students routinely and quickly recorded information in their mathematics notebooks without teacher prompting.

The review team found solid evidence that time was maximized for learning in 90 percent of the TRJHS classrooms and 67 percent of the classrooms at TRSHS. The team noted that generally instruction started immediately after the bell and moved from point to point with no time wasted. Lesson pacing was skillful, with solid evidence of good pacing in 75 percent of classes at the TRJHS and 83 percent at TRSHS. There was no evidence at the high school of posted learning objectives and objectives were posted in only 33 percent of the classrooms at TRJHS. A district administrator told the review team that posting of objectives was not a district requirement.

In the "general instructional design and delivery" category, teachers at both schools linked academic concepts to students' prior knowledge approximately 85 percent of the time. Review team members observed teachers saying "We talked about this yesterday," "Remember when we

discussed this,” “What have we done in the past” and “...going to start something new today but it relates to what we already know.”

The review team did not see a range of techniques in teachers’ instructional practices: At TRJHS, there was solid evidence of a variety of instructional strategies in only 25 percent and partial evidence in 83 percent of the classes observed. Most of the instruction observed by the review team was direct instruction with limited use of facilitating, modeling, or student grouping.

The review team found some evidence of the use of questions that required students to analyze, synthesize and evaluate information. At TRJHS, solid evidence was found in 28 percent and partial evidence was found in 66 percent of the classes observed. At TRSHS there was solid evidence of this type of questioning in 33 percent and partial evidence in 50 percent of observed classes. At both schools, students were not usually required to articulate their thinking and reasoning or to justify their answers. The team observed solid evidence of this characteristic in 30 percent of classes observed at TRJHS and 17 percent of the classes observed at TRSHS.

The use of on- the-spot formative assessments to check for understanding to inform instruction was solidly in place in 55 percent of TRJHS classrooms and in only 33 percent of the TRSHS classes observed. However, the team did see partial evidence in at least half of the remaining TRSHS classes. Solid evidence of opportunities to apply new knowledge and content was observed in 56 percent of classrooms at TRJHS. At TRSHS there was solid evidence of this characteristic in 33 percent, and partial evidence in 50 percent of the classes observed.

The review team found that instruction was generally well delivered with emerging strengths at TRJHS. In both schools, students did not always have ample opportunities to express their thinking or respond to questions that require higher-order thinking skills, affecting students’ ability to respond to complex questions verbally and in writing.

Tiered Instruction and Adequate Learning Time

The instructional model at the TRJHS has changed from a pullout model for special education students to an inclusion model with co-teaching. District and school leaders consider this a key factor in improving the achievement of all students, including students from low-income families.

District and school leaders told the review team that until two years ago the instructional model for students in special education at TRJHS was not inclusive. Instead students were pulled-out of their regular classrooms for support services. As a result, students under special educational management and special education teachers had limited access to the general curriculum and were isolated from the mainstream. The principal instituted heterogeneous grouping and co-teaching in an inclusionary model.

District and school leaders told the review team that changing the model was not easy. Many staff were uncomfortable with inclusion and there was “pushback.” The principal said that the superintendent provided support as she introduced change; at one point, she addressed the faculty

in support of her initiatives. According to interviews with the principal, many teachers thought that the former model prepared students well for high school and that “a child’s failure was not their issue.” The principal’s goal was to change the culture of the school to a middle school model where the learning and social-emotional needs of that age group could be more effectively met. As a result, according to interviewees, some teachers opted to leave the school, transfer to the high school, or retire.

At that same time, there were also concerns about instructional expectations for students. According to district leaders and the principal, grade 7 students were using mathematics materials based on the grade 6 mathematics curriculum. A new mathematics series (Glencoe) was purchased for grade 7 with the new expectation that students at all levels receive appropriate grade-level instruction. In addition, interviewees said that students under special educational management were pulled from the regular classroom and it was not uncommon for grade 7 students to receive instruction based on material used at lower grade levels. In many instances students received high grades on remedial work, but they were neither addressing nor meeting grade-level standards.

District and school leaders stated that there were a “handful of people who came forward to make changes as a result of being empowered by the principal.” As a result, during the 2009-2010 school year under direction from the principal in her second year, the staff began to accept inclusion. The co-teaching model has been fully implemented since the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year. According to interviewees, district leaders provided support and funding to train teachers throughout the 2009-2010 school year. This training was provided to mathematics and ELA teachers as well as special education teachers with the result that effective co-teaching is beginning to take place in inclusion classrooms. During visits to the school’s classrooms by review team members it was not uncommon to find special education and regular education teachers working together in many classrooms.

Regular education teachers meet with special education teachers during team meetings twice each week. According to teachers in a focus group this has been one of the biggest changes in team collaboration since all members of the school system are able to meet and discuss student needs and progress. Curriculum coordinators said that it was now common for teachers to share best practices at these meetings.

TRJHS has embraced inclusion and leaders and staff believe all students are now receiving appropriate instruction. In addition, teachers are planning together to meet the needs of all students in an environment where all feel responsible to ensure student success.

Assessment

TRJHS leadership has begun to focus on using data to drive decision-making.

The TRJHS School Improvement Plan (SIP) is consistent with the District Improvement Plan (DIP) on the use of assessment to increase the number of students achieving at high levels. Specifically, the school's SIP identifies three proposed activities and six success measures involving assessment and data analysis. The activities stated in the plan follow: "to identify and demonstrate the support and monitoring of all students who score in *Needs Improvement* or *Warning* categories on the MCAS test and/or who demonstrate a pattern of failure/struggle academically, behaviorally and or socially/emotionally; to continue utilization of databases such as the ESE Data Warehouse, IPASS and ESPED systems to make data-driven, informed decisions regarding student services and school initiatives; and assessment and continuation of a Literacy Committee with representation from all disciplines."

The success measures include "collaborative assessment and review of formal testing procedures; data analysis collected from (various assessments) by the end of the first marking period; a PLC to review current interventions; creation of student success plans by December 2010 for students who have not reached proficiency; MCAS analysis document including action plans and enrollment in math remediation by November 2010; and a 10% increase in MCAS scores by all departments."

School and team leaders, curriculum coordinators, and guidance counselors stated that they work with teachers to analyze MCAS test data. Interviewees stated that the school is using data and other information to meet the needs of every student rather than focusing its efforts on any particular subgroup. They added that subgroup assessment data is used minimally, with the school preferring to focus on each individual student regardless of subgroup affiliation.⁵ Data is used to monitor student growth, but according to interviewees little use is currently made of student growth percentiles (SGPs).⁶

Professional development funds have been allocated for specialized training and program development to help teachers use data to drive decision-making. Based upon an analysis of MCAS and other data, mathematics time was increased to a double block and new textbooks were purchased. Recent training included holding monthly meetings of core teachers with

⁵ Analysis of subgroup data, however, leads to what may be informative inquiries. For instance, ESE data shows that from 2008 to 2010 in mathematics the school's low-income subgroup increased its CPI by 17.4 points, surpassing the state subgroup CPI in 2010 (69.7 to 67.1), while the school's special education subgroup increased its CPI by a smaller margin, 9.8 points, still falling short in 2010, with a 49.7 CPI, of the 57.5 CPI for the state subgroup. What were the reasons for the disparate improvement at TRJHS between these two subgroups?

⁶ A review of 2008-2010 district and TRJHS median SGPs in Tables C1-C4 in Appendix C shows multiple instances of median SGPs below the range of what is considered to be moderate growth (40-59.9). District median SGPs in 8th grade ELA and 7th grade math were below that range in all three years (see Tables C1 and C2), as were median SGPs for TRJHS and district low-income students in ELA (see Table C3) and for TRJHS low-income students in math (see Table C4). The only median SGP shown in Tables C1-C4 that was above the moderate range was for district grade 10 students in math in 2009.

educational consultants; training teachers to “unwrap” standards; working with Teachers 21 on co-planning models; team building; and expanding teachers’ instructional repertoires. An additional six hours of professional development time during the summer of 2010 focused on co-planning.

Guidance counselors, advisory teachers, teams, and special educators work collaboratively to monitor student progress. According to the principal and guidance staff, student success plans are in place for the lowest-achieving 10 percent of the students and are monitored regularly by the guidance department. The members of the guidance department stated that the IPASS process was a key tool for monitoring students.

There are curriculum coordinators in the areas of English/language arts, science, and special education. Mathematics coordination is currently handled by the school principal, since the position is vacant. Coordinators and team leaders use data to determine student academic and social needs. Some curriculum coordinators and all guidance staff use Data Warehouse information to assist in the development of appropriate interventions for students with student success plans.

According to documents provided by the school and interviews, there is an expanding variety of assessment use. STAR (Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading) has been implemented and administered twice annually, increasing to three times annually during the 2010-2011 school year. TRJHS is in the process of developing common assessments in each subject area and was in the first year of putting some into practice. The school is expanding its implementation and analysis of student writing. All teams have increased the use of open response questions as a part of their classroom assessments. Teachers employ common MCAS test prompts as a part of their assessment in all subject areas. However, there were no consistent mathematics assessments at the time of the review and leaders, curriculum coordinators, and teachers stated that ELA data analysis was more advanced than mathematics. Curriculum guides in all areas contain minimal assessment information.

The school’s growing focus on the development of assessment methodology is enabling TRJHS to meet its SIP goals, and to begin to evaluate the impact of interventions on student learning. Analysis of subgroup performance and student growth data for all students does not appear to be a goal of the school and district, limiting the potential of the analysis of assessment data to improve student achievement.

Social/Emotional Support

TRJHS provides academic, social, and emotional support to improve the achievement of all students.

The school’s SIP for 2010-2011 lists four goals, the third of which is “support for the social/emotional and physical growth of students.” The proposed activities related to this goal build upon the structures already in place to monitor and support all students. These include creating a safe environment, offering a character-building education, involving more students in

extracurricular activities and initiatives, and instruction by the guidance and health and wellness departments.

The 557 students are divided into five teams, two grade 7 teams, two grade 8 teams and one mixed team of grades 7 and 8. Each team's academic teachers, guidance counselors, and special education staff meet twice a week to discuss academic progress. They plan the necessary supports and interventions for students identified as needing additional tutoring, make referrals, or make other provisions for students. Teachers meet together the other three days to plan their curriculum and co-teaching strategies. The team is home base for the students and they attend all of their classes together. Student teams are carefully constructed by guidance counselors who meet with staff from the five sending elementary schools. Information that helps students to transition smoothly is discussed and suggestions made for student groupings and teacher and course matching.

The school has an academic support classroom providing help with class work for up to seven students assigned each period. There is also a classroom between the support classroom and the assistant principal's office for students serving in-school suspensions or requiring "silent lunches." The teacher who monitors these programs works in conjunction with the guidance staff, the team leaders and the assistant principal, who is responsible for most school discipline.

The principal told the review team that she has an extensive special education background and experience with inclusion and that once she learned about the isolation of students and staff in special education, she focused on improving the team structure of the school. She also provided teachers more time to meet, made sure student support staff played an active role, and worked to change the culture so that students could feel that they belonged to a caring, supportive group of adults.

Guidance counselors create student success plans for those students not scoring in the *Advanced* or *Proficient* categories on the MCAS tests. These plans are monitored and revised regularly as student's make progress. The SIP clearly states that one of its success measures for raising student achievement is a review of student concerns by teacher teams and guidance staff and the implementation of intervention plans. According to TRJHS staff, this practice is in place throughout the school.

The assistant principal uses a systematic behavior modification discipline response approach called the Level Environment for Learning (LEVL). It teaches students responsibility and requires them to do their school work. The assistant principal told the review team that he is working with teachers to use it as well and is trying to convince them that giving students decision-making experiences leads to their making better choices. Hired by the principal in 2009-2010, he shares a common background and educational philosophy and supports her many initiatives designed to "not let any student fall through the cracks."

School program leaders and teachers stated that the school environment had changed and every student now "belongs" to all staff members. One staff member described how the new principal had engaged teachers in an activity that helped them realize that some students were falling between the cracks. She wrote each student's name on a slip of paper and asked the staff to

initial every student they knew. Some students' names were not initialed, indicating they were not known by any teacher and this was unacceptable to the principal and staff.

The drive by the principal to change the school culture was matched by another top priority: modifying the school schedule to accommodate students' individual learning and teacher planning needs. For example, the physical education period is used for academic support when necessary; team meetings are now scheduled twice each week, with teacher planning meetings on the other three days; student schedules are modified frequently when assessments demonstrate that they need more time in structured learning. In recent example of schedule modification, the school added a double period of mathematics or reading to meet the ninety instructional minute requirement for students scoring in the *Needs Improvement* or *Warning* categories on the MCAS tests.

In interviews with the review team, the principal described how difficult it had been to make the needed changes. Her key strategies included moving towards more heterogeneous instruction, including as many students in special education as possible in regular education classes, and implementing an effective co-teaching model. She told the review team that the greatest change was getting teachers to own student failures, adding that that the first year of change was difficult for everyone. The principal went on to say that "a handful of people came forward to make change" and she empowered them. In selecting new staff, she looks for enthusiastic teachers with leadership skills.

When asked by the review team, the principal attributed the narrowing of the achievement gap between the low-income and non-low-income subgroups to the following specific actions: reduction from three mathematics levels to two (regular and advanced) in grade 8; shifting from a resource room support model to inclusion with co-teaching; and replacement of the below grade level mathematics instructional materials in grade 7 with the appropriate grade 7 instructional materials. In agreement with district leaders and the TRSHS principal and Technical Division principal/director, the TRJHS principal stated that while it was good that students from low-income families had benefited, the intent of these changes was to improve the achievement of all students.

The program changes and improved structures have gained acceptance at TRJHS and school leaders believe that both have contributed to improving student performance; however, at the time of the review team's visit, no structures or plans were in place to evaluate their effectiveness and the impact on each subgroup.

Teachers and administrators told the review team that the school accommodated students from low-income families in many ways such as by providing school supplies, clothing, turkeys and food baskets, and holiday gifts. The assistant principal said that students in need could ask the art teacher for supplies for projects such as poster boards and markers. Counselors maintain a free, used-clothing area where students can acquire coats, boots, and other apparel. The administrative team works with the cafeteria staff to ensure that all eligible students receive free breakfast and lunch and to lend lunch money to students who have forgotten their own. As the assistant principal stated, "You can learn when you are warm, fed, and have the materials you need."

Interviewees said that professional development was as an important resource for all staff. For example, consultants from Teachers 21 worked with teams to enhance the co-teaching inclusion model and improve team meeting structures. In 2010-2011, the staff formed Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to explore topics of interest to them. One example of this was researching how Response to Intervention (RTI) could help the school to implement tiered instruction.

The director of special education told the review team that the district has instituted internal programs in the schools to meet the needs of students who were formerly placed outside of the district. For example, the junior high school offers the Pathways program for students with developmental and intellectual disabilities, and the high school offers Pathways to SUCCESS, STRIDES, and Beyond Pathways, an after high school program with vocational and other support.

The school provides transition plans for students entering grade 7 from the five different towns and schools, and for students transitioning to the high school. Students and parents tour the school during the summer and follow a student schedule. There are other transition days in the fall once classes begin. The TRJH counselors meet with the faculty and counselors of the elementary schools and then with the faculty and counselors of the high school's regular and technical programs. Counselors described for the review team their strong commitment to supporting students in transition.

While the review team and the school created an opportunity for parents to meet with the review team, no parents attended. When asked about the relationship between parents and the schools, the superintendent stated that "there was a high level of trust" and a "high level of support." All interviewees said that there was good communication and positive relationships with parents.

Professional Development

TRJHS provides a rich array of professional development opportunities that enhances teachers' skills and prepares them to meet the needs of diverse learners.

The school's 2010-2011 SIP lists four goals, related proposed activities, and success measures. Two of the four goals are specifically related to professional development. The first goal is "to demonstrate a 10% increase in the number of students achieving at high levels, proficient score from the needs improvement and warning categories in MCAS ELA, Math, Science Technology, Engineering, Math (STEM) categories." This goal is accompanied by a long list of professional development opportunities including web-based professional development such as United Streaming and Study Island; department and team meetings; peer classroom observations; ongoing training on inclusion and co-teaching initiatives; observation of classrooms for best practices; and teacher sharing of lessons and materials. According to the principal, teachers, and the director of special education, all of these professional development activities have taken place, or were taking place at TRJHS.

The second goal is "to improve the use of technology for classroom instruction and to

communicate to parents/community.” Professional development focuses on observation of effective technology use, attendance at professional workshops, and training on the use of assistive technology. Additional technology offerings are listed on the district’s website. The TRJHS principal and teachers told the review team that substitute teachers are provided to enable staff to participate in professional development and make classroom visitations.

According to district leaders at the time of the review, a new professional development program was scheduled from February to December 2011 at TRJHS would show principals how to gather teachers around ideas and establish professional learning communities (PLC’s). A well-structured PLC plan outlined in a document provided by the school addresses methods of investigation and assessment for the chosen PLC topic, expectations for teams, tasks and requirements, final product from the team, how to obtain materials, and a professional development points rubric with the number of points earned dependent upon the level of teacher involvement. Exploration of the Response to Intervention (RTI) program was a current topic under investigation by one PLC team at TRJHS.

Professional development has had a significant impact at TRJHS, according to the principal, leading to a shift to teacher ownership of student success and a change in the way in which staff work together to provide support to all students. The importance that school leaders and teachers place on professional development as an impetus for change has helped to change the school’s culture and continues to provide teachers with the tools required to meet the needs of all learners.

Financial and Asset Management

The school leadership has been given flexibility and encouragement to propose budgets and to reallocate resources as necessary to improve instruction and student achievement by meeting students’ needs.

The principal described several steps she has taken to improve instruction to meet students’ needs, and said that her superiors and the school committee supported them. She stated that she was continuing the district’s decision to move from a junior high school to a middle school philosophy by emphasizing differentiated instruction, heterogeneous grouping, and reducing the isolation of special education programs, teachers and students. To accomplish these steps the district supported professional development on differentiated instruction, inclusion and co-teaching, and data analysis, and the superintendent supported the changes in his budget proposals. The budget underwrote teachers’ planning time, substitutes and consultants for professional development on differentiation and inclusion, and professional development opportunities for paraprofessionals. The budget also underwrote appropriate grade-level textbooks in mathematics, and staff to increase mathematics workshop time for underachieving students.

The principal also stated that she has been encouraged to make budget proposals and reallocate resources to support school priorities, although the school budget was limited to the bottom line. When the school eliminated a teaching team due to declining enrollment, the district approved

the principal's proposed reallocation of teaching assignments in order to add a new position for the mathematics workshops. When required to reduce the school's proposed budget, the principal had the flexibility to look for efficiencies and minor reductions that would not diminish efforts to implement the school's priorities and improve student achievement. The business manager stated that whenever a budget line item is inadequate to meet a need, the leader can meet with her to discuss reallocating funds from other line items.

District support of the middle school initiatives and changes has fostered a child-centered approach to instruction with greater inclusion of students in special education in regular education classes. This emphasis has helped to increase the achievement of all students, including those from low income families.

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?

Leadership and Governance

A review of several key documents that guide the district and its schools and interviews with district leaders showed a clear focus on raising the level of achievement of all students.

The review team examined the Tantasqua Regional School District mission statement, the December 2010 strategic plan, the fiscal years 2011-2013 district improvement plan, and the 2010-2011 TRSHS and TRJHS school improvement plans. With improving student learning as the main focus, the documents describe related actions, timelines, measures, and professional development. Key members of the school system including school committee members, district and school leaders, and representatives of the teachers’ association demonstrated a working knowledge of these documents in interviews with the review team.

District and school goals are derived from an analysis of student performance by the superintendent, district and school leaders, teachers, and the school committee. District leaders routinely apprise the school committee of MCAS test results and the committee takes an active role in keeping the focus on student learning. When asked how frequently student achievement comes up in school committee deliberations, one member replied: “It comes up a lot. This group is large and diverse. Anytime an issue comes up, the question is asked: ‘How will it improve student achievement?’ ” One outcome of the analysis of MCAS test results was the focus on improving the kindergarten through grade 8 writing curriculum and the eventual extension of the scope to the high school. The school committee has emphasized improving instruction and results in reading, writing, and mathematics.

In interviews with the review team, district leaders and school committee members often said that support and intervention strategies were intended to increase overall student achievement rather than the achievement of specific subgroups. For example, Goal 1.a. of the district improvement plan states the intention “to provide targeted instruction to increase student achievement so that an additional 10% of the students reach proficiency in all curriculum areas.” Similarly, Goal 1 of TRJHS’s school improvement plan refers to moving students scoring in the *Needs Improvement* and *Warning* categories on the MCAS tests to proficiency. School committee members interviewed by the review team stated that the schools focused on “students who were struggling, not just low-income students.”

The district’s systems and support for interventions were evident in several areas. For example, according to program and school leaders interviewed by the review team, the district improvement plan led to the recent development of a common elementary level report card. This standardized document helps to ensure that students from the five towns of School Union 61 enter TRJHS with common skills and background knowledge. According to district and school leaders, this action is consistent with the emphasis on common assessments, common planning

time, heterogeneous grouping, and inclusion in grades 7 and 8. They also stated that strengthening of the team approach addressed the needs of all students. One stated that “things have turned around” as a result of the changes in school and district leadership.

With the support of the school committee, the superintendent directed school leaders to review the needs of students scoring in the lowest 10 percent on the MCAS tests and report to him monthly about interventions made to help them and the results of these interventions. The superintendent believed that this directive provided the momentum to narrow the achievement gap for all district students, including those from low income families.

From interviews, it was evident to the review team that the superintendent was developing a mostly young team focused on and committed to continuous student progress. The district’s leadership team was relatively new, with the exception of the superintendent, who entered the district in 1995 and became superintendent in 2006. In 2010-2011 the TRSHS principal was in the first year of his appointment after a year as interim principal (and 17 years of teaching in the district), and the Technical Division principal was in his first year in the district. The TRJHS principal was completing her third year in the position and the assistant principal was in his second year. The associate superintendent, “second in command” according to the superintendent, was in her first year, and the then assistant superintendent was in her third year. At the time of the review the review team was told that a vacancy in the position of director of special education would take place at the end of the 2010-2011 school year upon the planned retirement of the current director. The district leadership has established systems and practices that are contributing to steady improvement in the achievement of students from low-income families at TRJHS.

Assessment

The district has supported the junior high school as it continues to expand its use of data to make decisions.

In interviews with school and district administrators and through a review of the documents, the review team found that the district and TRJHS school improvement plans are aligned in requiring the use of assessment to measure student progress. According to district and school administrators and members of the school committee, the superintendent supported the junior high school initiatives to build teachers’ skills in data analysis and expand the use of assessment data.

Curriculum coordinators and team leaders told the review team that there is sufficient time to evaluate data and to develop procedures to address identified student weaknesses. They added that teachers were supported in their efforts to implement change, such as embedding MCAS test questions in instruction, introducing grade-level mathematics textbooks, and increasing the use of technology as a tool to analyze student achievement data.

All members of the school system are kept informed of the results of relevant assessments. District leaders discuss and analyze MCAS test performance data in an annual PowerPoint

presentation to the school committee. This information is published in community newspapers of the school's Union 61 towns. The school committee has provided financial resources to support professional development, purchase of appropriate textbooks and materials, and staffing to accommodate district program changes based on the assessment findings.

As a result of district support, teachers and administrators are collecting student assessment data more efficiently, continuously improving assessment practices, and empowering teachers to make data-based decisions to improve programs and instruction.

The district has begun to use assessment results to improve kindergarten through grade 12 programs.

In interviews, the school committee confirmed their focus on improving student achievement and the use of MCAS test and other data to monitor the effectiveness of improvement strategies. For example following a school committee review of the results of written language assessments, the elementary schools developed and implemented a new kindergarten through grade 6 writing curriculum, and the high school implemented a universal writing program and writing center to address identified instructional needs. The junior high school also has an essay question of the month. The school committee supported the purchase of appropriate grade-level mathematics textbooks to address student skill weaknesses identified through MCAS test analysis.

The district has made additional initiatives to improve assessment practices. A new standards-based kindergarten through grade 6 report card was designed to ensure common standards and achievement expectations for all students. The kindergarten through grade 12 guidance department leads district communication on assessment. The junior high school guidance staff meets with their counterparts and teachers at the elementary and high schools. According to interviewees, the discussion includes sharing of assessment data and discussion of individual student's progress. Junior high school guidance counselors help conduct the school-to-school transition process. High school counselors also consult with their junior high school counterparts when situations warrant, such as when a student is failing in high school, but was not identified as a student at-risk in junior high school.

The district's systems for assessment, support and intervention are guided, coordinated and monitored by district leaders. As a result, students experience a seamless and unified system for improving their achievement.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The district provides professional development programs and services based on district priorities, staff needs, student achievement data, and assessments of instructional practices and programs at each school.

In interviews, district and school leaders, union representatives, and teachers stated that the district strongly supports professional development. The associate superintendent and assistant superintendent share responsibility for the district professional development program. According

to interviews with both of them, and their job descriptions, one is responsible for determining kindergarten through grade 12 professional development needs and mandated trainings, and the other implements and oversees the professional development programs. The most recent professional development plan provided by the district dated 2009-2010 is linked directly to the district improvement plan. The professional development plan introduction states explicit expectations and the review team found evidence that the district's program is meeting these expectations.

In compliance with the expectation that "high quality professional development should meet the needs and requirements of federal and state mandates, such as the Sheltered English Immersion training," the district trained 150 staff members in category 1 and category 2 sheltered English immersion training in 2009 and the district expects to train an additional 29 teachers during the summer of 2011. District leaders said that they have also conducted mandated bully-prevention and restraint training.

In compliance with the expectation that "high quality professional development should meet the needs of the district as detailed through the goals of the District's Improvement Plan and other district initiatives," the structure of the district's improvement plan relates professional development to the achievement of the district's objectives. Eleven of the twelve improvement plan objectives are accompanied by related professional development activities. For example, goal objective 1.b. states the intention "to elevate student proficiency in writing across all content areas" and the related professional development goal states the intention to provide "professional development focused on writing across all curriculum areas." Similarly, the District's Strategic Plan cites numerous goals with references to professional development. For example, strategic goal 2.b. states the intention "to continue to refine our common curriculum and teaching practice, encouraging and sharing innovation in practice" and offering "professional development on teacher supervision and evaluation" is listed as an action step. In interviews with the review team, district leaders provided additional examples of such professional development including a workshop on supervision and evaluation for administrators to be conducted by Kim Marshall in the spring of 2011.

In compliance with the expectation that "high quality professional development should meet the needs of the schools as detailed in their SIP's and as evidenced by the results of both formal and informal assessment measures," TRJHS combined both district and school-based professional development offerings to meet their school improvement plan goals as noted previously in this report. According to interviewees and documentation, TRJHS has begun to use data to monitor student improvement data and there is informal assessment of the district professional development program through use of a teacher satisfaction form described below. According to school leaders, there are no formal structures to evaluate the impact of professional development on student learning.

In compliance with the expectation that "high quality PD should meet the needs of teachers, as evidenced through survey and evaluation data, in full recognition that the very professionals for whom learning opportunities are provided, *deserve* a say in such offerings," an evaluation form

is available on the district's website for staff to complete after taking part in a professional development program. Participants rate the presenter, the organization of the activity, the materials, and whether the information can be applied to their teaching. In addition, participants are asked to "describe a specific learning from this presentation that you will use in your professional practice," provide additional feedback, and indicate their future professional development needs.

According to the professional development plan, teachers may access professional development through district-sponsored institutes (15 hours) offered by a qualified consultant or "expert practitioner;" district-sponsored study groups composed of three to twelve teachers who meet for 10-15 hours on a specific topic; district sponsored workshops; attending out-of-district conferences and workshops; and enrolling in college courses and degree programs. An extensive list of websites, and nearby colleges, and direct links to ESE, specific content areas, and professional associations provide additional resources for teachers. Four early release days and two professional days are built into the annual school calendar.

District leaders told the review team that recommendations for professional development come from many sources and are often informed by assessment data. For example, school leaders said that the school committee proposed professional development related to improving students' writing skills after a presentation of MCAS test results. Data teams recommended mathematics training for special educators following an analysis of student performance data. Observational data provided by administrators who directly observe classroom practice guides the district towards specific professional development.

Administrators and teachers stated that professional development may also be teacher driven. District leaders described how elementary teachers requested professional development to assist them with the new standards-based report cards and the district funded an outside consultant to guide them in the process. In addition, the district provides opportunities for teachers to make professional development proposals on a form on the website together with approval guidelines.

District leaders described a mentoring program matching each new teacher whenever possible with a trained mentor at the same grade level or subject. The program is based on Saphier's Principles of Effective Teaching. They went on to say that before the current district leadership teachers were trained using the ETS Pathwise model, but this program is taught by district personnel using some components of the model. Mentors are trained during the summer and meet with their mentees at least monthly during the school year.

District leaders gave two examples of administrative professional development: New administrators were enrolled in the Research for Better Teaching course entitled Observing and Analyzing Teaching, and all principals plan to attend a conference on teacher evaluation training to be conducted by Kim Marshall in the spring of 2011. According to school leaders, there are no formal structures to evaluate the impact of professional development on student learning.

In a random sampling of 13 teacher evaluations, the review team found that all were aligned with the Principles of Effective Teaching, and all except four were completed in a timely manner. Only two recommended specific professional development.

The focus and breadth of district professional development programs has helped to promote adult learning throughout the district creating a culture that supports continuous improvement of skills and the development of school structures to meet the needs of all learners.

Student Support

The numerous resources provided by the district have created a safe school environment for addressing students’ academic, social, emotional, and health needs through a coordinated student services model.

TRJHS has two full time guidance counselors for grades 7 and 8 who remain with the same students for two years. A psychologist chairs IEP meetings, a part-time psychometrician conducts testing, and a part-time adjustment counselor monitors 504 accommodation plans, provides counseling and leads groups for students with similar issues. All these student support personnel are connected to the school’s educational teams and attend their meetings. They also monitor student attendance and work with staff to improve it. In interviews with the review team, support staff described the district’s student support programs, and opportunities the district provides them to meet their specific professional development needs. According to ESE 2009 data the total district expenditure of \$705 per pupil for guidance, counseling, and testing exceeded the total expenditures of like districts such as Silver Lake (\$404) and Amherst-Pelham (\$525).

All students take part in an advisory program and each advisor checks in daily with approximately 15 students. This model addresses an early concern the principal shared with her staff about the importance of connecting with every student. Under this model, every student is “attached to a teacher.” While the scheduled advisory time is very short (three minutes every morning) it is often extended for specific tasks and students also check in with their advisors before going home. Advisors are encouraged to follow up on student issues with other staff at team meetings or other times. While the program was more formal in the past, the principal told the review team that compliance with “time on learning” requirements reduced the time available; nevertheless, according to interviewees, the advisory program has enabled the school to provide opportunities for relationship-building and academic monitoring for all students.

The principal and the teachers told the review team that these practices and resources, including sufficient personnel; adequate time for teachers to meet in teams for co-planning; a robust professional development program; extended instructional time for students with remedial needs; diverse special education programs to meet a range of individual differences; and donations to needy students and their families create an environment conducive to learning and help to increase student performance.

Financial and Asset Management

The district's budget development process is transparent and involves appropriate stakeholders.

According to the then superintendent and the business manager the budget process begins with independent requests from teachers and other school staff based on their assessment of the needs. Administrators are given guidelines — in recent years to propose a level service budget — and submit detailed, substantiated budget proposals derived from teacher requests and school needs to the central office. The business manager compiles the proposals and the superintendent's approval is required for major changes, especially additional staffing. He then identifies district priorities and prepares a recommended budget. The budget document includes comparisons of previous years' expenditures and budgets for each line. Administrators and school committee members told the review team that the budget subcommittee of the school committee reviews the proposed budget in detail before submitting it to the school committee. The school committee votes on the budget following a public hearing. The member towns hold town meetings to vote on their assessments and school committee members told the review team that all five towns have passed the budget over the past several years.

The superintendent and business manager stated that they have a close and cooperative relationship with the officials from all five towns. They meet with town officials early in the budget process to identify what each town has available to spend on education and to discuss the town's probable assessments and other educational costs. The superintendent and business manager added that they make every effort to ensure that each town can afford its assessment, taking into account its elementary school costs, transportation charges, local aid, and other potential revenues.

They emphasized that while the district has not increased the junior high school budget, the superintendent and business manager have given the junior high school leaders broad discretion to use the budget as needed within the bottom line. For example, the school eliminated a team due to declining enrollment and used some of the savings to support a new mathematics workshop program for underachieving students. The district has also made use of stimulus, grant, and school choice funds to purchase mathematics textbooks, provide remedial help in reading and mathematics, and professional development for teachers,

A transparent budget development process, based on detailed substantiation of budget requests and the principal's autonomy to propose what is needed to implement improvements and changes have contributed to the junior high school's ability to provide support services and instructional enhancements to improve the performance of struggling students, including those from low-income families. Grant funding and other external revenue sources have also been used to underwrite some of the improvements and needed changes. Close communication between district administrators and town officials has resulted in consistent support for school budgets.

The district and school budgets supplemented with revenues from outside sources have been adequate to provide instruction, support, and interventions that have resulted in improved student achievement. The district has been responsive to the social, emotional, and academic needs of students, and its budgets have supported the school's efforts.

The district's end of the year report shows a fiscal year 2011 budget of \$23,952,160. The total budget amounts to \$56,123 less than the district's budget expenditures for fiscal year 2010. According to administrators the reduction was due to declining enrollment and reduced debt payments. According to ESE data for fiscal years 2008 through 2010 the towns have consistently funded the school district at 3 percent to 6 percent above the required net school spending level and 5 percent to 10 percent above the foundation level. According to ESE data for fiscal year 2009, the district spent above the state per pupil averages and the averages of comparable districts on teaching, guidance, and instructional materials, and below the averages on administration and benefits. According to ESE data for fiscal year 2010 the district received approximately \$2 million in grants, and administrators reported additional revenues from school choice and other tuitions. Administrators reported savings on energy costs and special education tuition achieved by instituting an energy management program in 2008 and by creating internal special education programs.

The district has provided resources for an educationally sound program with the financial support of the towns, external revenue including grant funding, and cost-saving measures. The review team found class sizes averaging approximately 19 students in observed classes. Administrators described a wide variety of support services funded by the district, including guidance and adjustment counselors, behavior and social skills specialists, therapists, social workers, and remedial reading and mathematics specialists. Principals told the review team that the district gave their schools "tremendous budget support" and that they were able to meet individual student's needs by providing programs, services and donations including remedial instruction, breakfast, clothing, and even tickets to school events. In interviews teachers told the review team that they have the necessary supplies and materials, and both teachers and principals praised the district's professional development and mentoring programs.

Administrators stated that grant funding has been used to underwrite some professional development programs and remedial services and the superintendent told the review team that energy and out-of-district tuition savings have been used to improve instruction. As noted previously, savings due to lower enrollment and staffing cutbacks enabled the district to institute mathematics workshops for low achieving junior high school students. School choice revenue has been used to fund the district's five-year capital and technology plans and new mathematics textbooks for the middle school. According to administrators the district does not charge user fees for transportation, athletics, or student activities.

The review team found that the district has been able to improve and expand its support and remediation programs for underachieving students through funding by the five towns supplemented by savings and external revenues. In particular, provision of professional development on inclusion and heterogeneous grouping, appropriate grade level mathematics

textbooks, and the new mathematics workshop program helped to improve the achievement of all students at the middle school, including those from low income families.

Recommendations

The priorities identified by the review team at the time of its site visit and embodied in the recommendations that follow may no longer be current, and the district may have identified new priorities in line with its current needs.

Leadership

The district should continue to strongly support school leaders as they make ongoing changes in their schools to improve student achievement, especially for subgroups.

According to documents and interviews with school leaders, there had been significant turnover in leadership over the several years before the review, with the exception of the superintendent at the time of the review, who had been in the district since 1995 and superintendent since 2006. The TRSHS principal (after one interim year) and the Technical Division principal were new to their positions in 2010-2011. The TRJHS principal at the time of the review was completing her third year in the position, and the assistant principal was in his second year. The associate superintendent, the “second in command” according to the superintendent, was in her first year, and the assistant superintendent at the time of the review was in her third year. The review team was told that a vacancy in the position of director of special education would take place at the end of the 2010-2011 school year upon the planned retirement of the then director.

With several substantial changes in the implementation stage, including increased data-based decision-making and adoption of a more comprehensive inclusion model, the district should continue to support and encourage the relatively new school leaders as they institute change. The leadership teams, particularly at TRJHS, have begun the process of ensuring faculty understanding and commitment to the school’s mission and strategies, and they have encouraged teacher leadership and a blossoming collaborative learning culture. Interviews with teacher association representatives indicated support for these initiatives. Nevertheless, many were in the early stages of implementation at the time of the review.

The roles of the assistant and associate superintendents in the district’s elementary schools, especially in ensuring curricular alignment and assessment practices, were made clear in interviews and through a review of their job descriptions. Although the TRSHS principal described the superintendent’s supportive role at the high school, it was unclear to the review team how the associate and assistant superintendents supported and interacted with the high school teams, and the curriculum and instructional links between the junior and senior high schools were not evident. Clarifying these links and the roles of central office administrators with TRJHS and TRSHS leaders would help to promote consistency in programs between the two schools. Strong support of the principals and their assistants will help to guarantee program continuity as well as continuous improvement for all learners.

Curriculum

The district should examine its systems and practices for curriculum review and revision to ensure adherence to a regular cycle. This will make sure that each school’s curricula are vertically and horizontally aligned.

The district improvement plan for fiscal years 2011 through 2013 refers to a seven-year curriculum cycle in the objective, “To continue to refine our common curriculum and teaching practice, encouraging and sharing innovation in practice.” The action steps for this objective include “production of documents and reports which adhere to the seven year curriculum cycle.” According to the district improvement plan, the related professional development was to be “focused on writing across all curriculum areas”; the district intended to “convene curriculum study teams as indicated on seven year curriculum cycle,” and to develop a “teacher leadership cohort that will work in schools to align curriculum and encourage innovation in teaching.”

As described previously in this report, revision of the science curriculum began in 2007 with implementation in the spring of 2008. Similarly, according to information provided by the district, the writing curriculum for kindergarten through grade 6 was completed in 2008-2009. The pre-kindergarten through grade 12 ELA curriculum review was expected to begin in the year of the review, 2010-2011. The ELA curriculum had not been revised in approximately seven years, and the district was awaiting the revisions to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks in connection with the Common Core standards before revising the pre-kindergarten through grade 12 mathematics curriculum. At the time of the review the ELA and math curricula had not been fully reviewed or revised, and TRJHS had recently been discovered to be using a mathematics curriculum for grade 7 that was not appropriately aligned as implemented.

While some curriculum work is ongoing in the district it did not appear to the review team to be proceeding systematically in accordance with the district’s seven-year cycle. A review of the established curriculum revision practices should contribute to meeting the district improvement plan’s objective of “production of documents and reports which adhere to the seven-year curriculum cycle.” The district may also wish to consider whether a seven-year cycle is sufficiently frequent to address the rate of change in the curricular areas.

Assessment

- **TRJHS should continue to focus on meeting the needs of its lowest-achieving students and expand data analysis to include subgroups and the use of student growth percentiles.**
- **The district is encouraged to continue its use of IPASS or other applications to manage data, make it available to all staff, and track achievement patterns and trends in the aggregate and for subgroups.**

Through interviews and a review of documents the review team found that TRJHS uses data analysis to meet the needs of struggling students. The commitment of the school and the district

to meeting the needs of all students was clearly evident in the many programs and resources targeted to all struggling students. But interviewees told the review team that subgroup data was used minimally at TRJHS, since the school preferred to focus on each individual student regardless of subgroup affiliation. According to interviewees there was also little use made of student growth percentiles (SGPs).

Further disaggregation of student performance data may help identify the areas of curriculum, instruction, and support that are particularly effective or are in need of improvement or revision to better meet the needs of particular groups of students. An understanding of subgroup performance could guide the district in its selection of programs and interventions and help target resources to the most effective programs. And analysis of median student growth percentiles would provide another way of understanding school and district students' progress and flag student groups with low growth (see footnote 6 in the first Assessment finding above).⁷

As the district continues to develop its common assessments, it should consider the expansion of its IPASS program (or a similar program) and develop other structures and procedures to provide teachers, curriculum leaders, and school leaders with user-friendly access to systemwide data to better monitor student progress.

Student Support

The school district should consider evaluating its many student support initiatives to determine their effectiveness in increasing the achievement of all subgroups and all students.

At the time of the review, the district did not have a system or plan to evaluate student support initiatives and programs and their impact on student achievement, although it was planning to add new programs or expand existing ones.

For example, according to the TRSHS principal and the superintendent at the time of the review, the district was planning to expand the inclusion model; TRJHS was exploring use of the RTI model of intervention through its PLC work; and according to the principal the co-teaching model was still developing and its strategies were not yet fully in place.

Without a system or plan to assess program effectiveness, it is difficult to determine what, if any impact, the many programs are having on increasing student achievement throughout the district. The district's growing use of student performance data provides a good tool to use to begin to assess program effectiveness. The district's long record of effective and careful budget

⁷ Student growth percentiles are a measure of student progress that compares changes in a student's MCAS scores to changes in MCAS scores of other students with similar performance profiles. The most appropriate measure for reporting growth for a group (e.g., subgroup, school, district) is the median student growth percentile (the middle score if one ranks the individual student growth percentiles from highest to lowest). For more information about the Growth Model, see "MCAS Student Growth Percentiles: Interpretive Guide" and other resources available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/growth/>.

management among the five member towns would be enhanced by the capacity to demonstrate that its programs are increasing the achievement of all students (and that any program that is not effective is discontinued).

Appendix A: Review Team Members

The review of the Tantasqua Regional School District was conducted from February 7-10, 2011, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Owen Conway, Leadership and Governance

Dolores Fitzgerald, Curriculum and Instruction

Coral Grout, Assessment

Christine Brandt, Human Resources and Professional Development, Review Team Coordinator

Helen Jacobson, Student Support

George Gearhart, Financial and Asset Management

Appendix B: Review Activities and Site Visit Schedule

Review Activities

The following activities were conducted as part of the review of the Tantasqua Regional School District.

- The review team conducted interviews with the following district financial personnel: School Business Official.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following members of the Tantasqua Regional School Committee: Chair and Secretary.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the Tantasqua Regional School District: President and Vice-President.
- The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the Tantasqua Regional School District central office administration: superintendent, associate superintendent, assistant superintendent, special education director, and school business official.
- The review team visited the following school(s) in the Tantasqua Regional School District: Tantasqua Regional Junior High School (grades 7–8) and Tantasqua Regional Senior High School (grades 9–12).
 - During the Tantasqua Regional Junior High School visit, the review team conducted interviews with the principal, the assistant principal, curriculum coordinators, and focus groups with teachers and students.
 - During the Tantasqua Regional Junior High School visit, the review team also conducted 20 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects.
 - During the Tantasqua Regional Senior High School visit, the review team interviewed the principal.
 - During the Tantasqua Regional Senior High School visit, the review team also conducted six classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects.
 - The review team also interviewed the principal of the third school in the Tantasqua Regional School District, the Tantasqua Regional Vocational High School.
- The review team reviewed the following documents provided by ESE:
 - District profile data
 - District 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
- 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
 - Tantasqua Union 61 Strategic Plan, December 2010
 - 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
 - Selected K-12 ELA 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
 - 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

- Classroom observation tools not used in the teacher evaluation process
- Job descriptions for central office and school administrators and instructional staff
- Teacher attendance data
- All administrator evaluations and certifications
- Randomly selected teacher personnel files
- The review team reviewed the following documents at the Tantasqua Regional Junior High School visited because it was identified as a “gap-closer” for low-income students:
 - 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
 - Classroom observation tools/Learning walk tools used at the school

Site Visit Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the Differentiated Needs (Low-Income) Review of the Tantasqua Regional School District, conducted from February 7-10, 2011.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
February 7 Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff and principals; review of documents.	February 8 Interviews with district leaders, staff and principals; review of personnel files, HS/JHS classroom visits.	February 9 JHS/SHS visits, interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; school committee interviews; teacher focus groups; focus group with parents (no attendees).	February 10 JHS visits, follow-up interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; interview with teachers' association, follow-up interviews; emerging themes meeting with district leaders (principal absent).

Appendix C: Student Achievement Data 2008–2010

Table C1: 2008-2010 Tantasqua Regional School District Proficiency Rates, with Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs), compared to State: by Grade ELA

Grade	2008		2009		2010	
	Percent Proficient or Advanced	Median SGP	Percent Proficient or Advanced	Median SGP	Percent Proficient or Advanced	Median SGP
Grade 7— District	71	46	78	45	79	49
Grade 7— State	69	50	70	50	72	50
Grade 8— District	76	35.5	79	32	82	39
Grade 8— State	75	49	78	50	78	50
Grade 10— District	74	---	77	45	73	36.5
Grade 10— State	74	---	81	50	78	50

Notes: The number of students included in the calculation of proficiency rate differs from the number of students included in the calculation of median SGP. Median SGPs were not calculated for grade 10 until 2009.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

**Table C2: 2008-2010 Tantasqua Regional School District Proficiency Rates,
with Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs), compared to State:
by Grade
Mathematics**

	2008		2009		2010	
Grade	Percent Proficient or Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Proficient or Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Proficient or Advanced	<i>Median SGP</i>
Grade 7— District	46	29	49	34	50	34.5
Grade 7— State	47	50	49	50	53	50
Grade 8— District	53	47	51	45	54	44.5
Grade 8— State	49	51	48	50	51	51
Grade 10— District	77	---	82	64	78	49
Grade 10— State	72	---	75	50	75	50

Notes: The number of students included in the calculation of proficiency rate differs from the number of students included in the calculation of median SGP. Median SGPs were not calculated for grade 10 until 2009.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

**Table C3: Achievement Trends for Low-Income Students in
Tantasqua JHS, Tantasqua Regional School District, and State,
Compared to All Students
ELA**

	2008			2009			2010		
	Percent Proficient or Advanced	CPI	Median SGP	Percent Proficient or Advanced	CPI	Median SGP	Percent Proficient or 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	55	80.3	34.0	64	84.8	36.0	61	86.0	31.0
District All Students	73	89.9	41.0	78	91.4	40.0	77	92.4	40.0
Tantasqua JHS Low-Income Students	54	79.0	34.0	65	84.8	30.5	66	88.1	30.0
Tantasqua JHS All Students	74	90.1	41.0	78	91.9	37.0	81	93.3	43.5

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

**Table C4: Achievement Trends for Low-Income Students in
Tantasqua JHS, Tantasqua Regional School District, and State,
Compared to All Students
Mathematics**

	2008			2009			2010		
	Percent Proficient or Advanced	CPI	Median SGP	Percent Proficient or Advanced	CPI	Median SGP	Percent Proficient or 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	30	58.1	33.0	39	65.1	43.0	44	74.6	38.0
District All Students	59	79.2	37.0	62	80.5	49.0	62	82.1	42.0
Tantasqua JHS Low-Income Students	22	52.3	33.0	29	58.7	39.0	38	69.7	34.0
Tantasqua JHS All Students	51	74.6	37.0	50	74.5	41.0	54	77.3	39.0

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

**Table C5: Comparison by Grade of 2010 Proficiency Rates*
for Low-Income Students in Tantasqua JHS, Tantasqua Regional School District,
and State
ELA**

Grade	Tantasqua JHS	Tantasqua	State
7	64 (58)	62 (61)	52
8	69 (51)	68 (53)	59
<p>Note: Numbers of low-income students (n) tested are given in parentheses for school and district. *Proficiency rates are the percentages of students scoring Proficient or Advanced on MCAS. Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website</p>			

**Table C6: Comparison by Grade of 2010 Proficiency Rates*
for Low-Income Students in Tantasqua JHS, Tantasqua Regional School District,
and State
Mathematics**

Grade	Tantasqua JHS	Tantasqua	State
7	39 (58)	37 (61)	32
8	37 (51)	35 (54)	30
<p>Note: Numbers of low-income students (n) tested are given in parentheses for school and district. *Proficiency rates are the percentages of students scoring Proficient or Advanced on MCAS. Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website</p>			

Appendix D: 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?

1. Tantasqua Regional Junior High School has created conditions for improving the achievement of all students. The school has encompassed, but not specifically targeted students from low-income families for its interventions.
2. The team structure at Tantasqua Regional Junior High School provides for the consistent delivery of curriculum, with vertical and horizontal alignment; science and ELA are aligned to the state Framework. The team did not have access to mathematics and social studies documents to determine the alignment. Although the district improvement plan describes a seven-year curriculum cycle, the district has not produced timely revisions of the ELA and mathematics curricula.
3. The review team found evidence of effective classroom organization and elements of sound instructional design at Tantasqua Regional Junior High School. However, the team did not observe a wide range of instructional techniques, or the routine use of higher-order questions to challenge student thinking. Instruction was generally teacher-directed with few opportunities for students to articulate their thinking and reasoning.
4. The instructional model at the Tantasqua Regional Junior High School has changed from a pullout model for special education students to an inclusion model with co-teaching. District and school leaders consider this a key factor in improving the achievement of all students, including students from low-income families.
5. Tantasqua Regional Junior High School leadership has begun to focus on using data to drive decision-making.
6. Tantasqua Regional Junior High School provides academic, social, and emotional support to improve the achievement of all students.
7. Tantasqua Regional Junior High School provides a rich array of professional development opportunities that enhances teachers' skills and prepares them to meet the needs of diverse learners.

8. The school leadership has been given flexibility and encouragement to propose budgets and to reallocate resources as necessary to improve instruction and student achievement by meeting students' needs.

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?

1. A review of several key documents that guide the district and its schools and interviews with district leaders showed a clear focus on raising the level of achievement of all students.
2. The district has supported the junior high school as it continues to expand its use of data to make decisions.
3. The district has begun to use assessment results to improve kindergarten through grade 12 programs.
4. The district provides professional development programs and services based on district priorities, staff needs, student achievement data, and assessments of instructional practices and programs at each school.
5. The numerous resources provided by the district have created a safe school environment for addressing students' academic, social, emotional, and health needs through a coordinated student services model.
6. The district's budget development process is transparent and involves appropriate stakeholders.
7. The district and school budgets supplemented with revenues from outside sources have been adequate to provide instruction, support, and interventions that have resulted in improved student achievement. The district has been responsive to the social, emotional, and academic needs of students, and its budgets have supported the school's efforts.

Recommendation Statements:

1. The district should continue to strongly support school leaders as they make ongoing changes in their schools to improve student achievement, especially for subgroups.
2. The district should examine its systems and practices for curriculum review and revision to ensure adherence to a regular cycle. This will make sure that each school's curricula are vertically and horizontally aligned.
3.
 - Tantasqua Regional Junior High School should continue to focus on meeting the needs of its lowest-achieving students and expand data analysis to include subgroups and the use of student growth percentiles.
 - The district is encouraged to continue its use of IPASS or other applications to manage data, make it available to all staff, and track achievement patterns and trends in the aggregate and for subgroups.
4. The school district should consider evaluating its many student support initiatives to determine their effectiveness in increasing the achievement of all subgroups and all students.