

*How Is Your  
School District  
Performing?*



*A look at  
Easton  
Public Schools  
2004–2006*

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL  
*Office of Educational Quality and Accountability*

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*The five-member Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC) and its agency, the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA), were established by the Massachusetts Legislature in July 2000 to examine public school districts in the commonwealth. The mission of the EMAC and EQA is to provide independent verification of schools' and districts' efforts to promote higher levels of academic achievement among their students, as measured by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests.*

*The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability would like to acknowledge the professional cooperation extended to the audit team by the Massachusetts Department of Education; the superintendent of the Easton Public Schools, William Simmons; the school department staff; and the town officials of Easton.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Test scores provide one method of assessing student achievement, but a variety of factors affect student performance. The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) was created to examine many of these additional factors by conducting independent audits of schools and districts across the commonwealth. The agency uses these audits to:

- Provide a comprehensive evaluation of each school district's performance;
- Publish annual reports on selected districts' performance;
- Monitor public education performance statewide to inform policy decisions; and
- Provide the public with information that helps the state hold districts and schools, including charter schools, accountable.

In February 2007, the EQA conducted an independent examination of the Easton Public Schools for the period of 2004–2006. The EQA analyzed Easton students' performance on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests and identified how students in general and in sub-groups were performing. The EQA then examined critical factors that affected student performance in six major areas: leadership, governance, and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, participation, and student academic support; and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency.

The review was based on documents supplied by the Easton Public Schools and the Massachusetts Department of Education; correspondence sent prior to the EQA team's site visit; interviews with representatives from the school committee, the district leadership team, school administrators, and teachers; numerous classroom observations; and additional documents submitted while the EQA team visited the district. The report does not take into account documents, revised data, or events that may have occurred after June 2006. However, district leaders were invited to provide more current information.

## Putting the Data in Perspective

Easton, MA



### DISTRICT

*Population:* 22,299

*Median family income:* \$82,190

*Largest sources of employment:*

Educational, health, and social services; retail trade

*Local government:* Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator, Open Town Meeting

### SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

*School committee:* 5 members

*Number of schools:* 7

*Student-teacher ratio:* 16.0 to 1

*Per Pupil Expenditures:* \$8,362

*Student enrollment:*

Total: 3,875

White: 92.7 percent

Hispanic: 1.9 percent

African-American: 2.1 percent

Asian-American: 1.2 percent

Native American: 0.2 percent

Limited English proficient:

0.4 percent

Low income: 3.7 percent

Special education: 17.1 percent

*Sources:* 2000 U.S. Census and Massachusetts Department of Education.

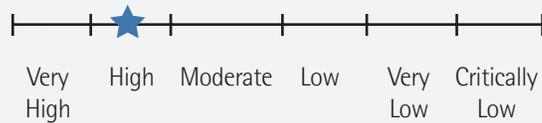
### EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL ACTION

The Educational Management Audit Council accepted this report and its findings at their meeting of October 1, 2007.

## MCAS Performance at a Glance, 2006

	DISTRICT	STATE
Average Proficiency Index	86	78
English Language Arts Proficiency Index	91	84
Math Proficiency Index	81	72

### Performance Rating



The Average Proficiency Index is another way to look at MCAS scores. It is a weighted average of student performance that shows whether students have attained or are making progress toward proficiency, which means they have met the state's standards. A score of 100 indicates that all students are proficient. The Massachusetts DOE developed the categories presented to identify performance levels.

## HOW DID STUDENTS PERFORM?

### Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Test Results

Students in grades 3–8 and grade 10 are required to take the MCAS tests each year in one or more specified subject areas, including English language arts (ELA), math, and science and technology/engineering (STE). Beginning with the class of 2003, students must pass the grade 10 math and ELA tests to graduate. Those who do not pass on the first try may retake the tests several more times.

The EQA analyzed current state and district MCAS results to determine how well district students as a whole and sub-groups of students performed compared to students throughout the commonwealth, and to the state goal of proficiency. The EQA analysis sought to answer the following five questions:

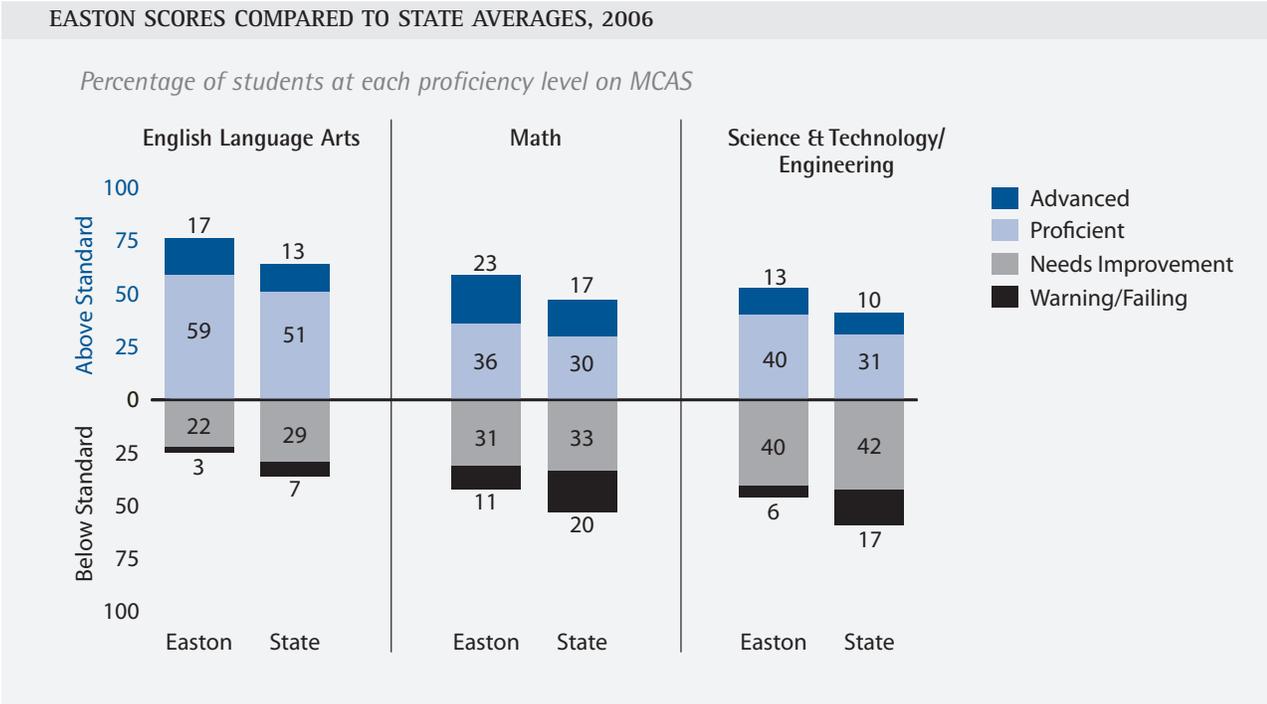
#### 1. Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

On the 2006 MCAS tests in ELA, math, and STE, eligible students in Easton participated at levels which met or exceeded the state's 95 percent requirement.

#### 2. Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on the MCAS examination?

On average, more than two-thirds of all students in Easton attained proficiency on the 2006 MCAS tests, much more than that statewide. Roughly three-quarters of Easton students attained proficiency in English language arts (ELA) and more than half of Easton students attained proficiency in math and in science and technology/engineering (STE). Ninety-eight percent of the Class of 2006 earned a Competency Determination.

- Easton's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 86 proficiency index (PI) points, eight PI points greater than that statewide. Easton's average proficiency gap, the difference between its API and the target of 100, in 2006 was 14 PI points.
- In 2006, Easton's proficiency gap in ELA was nine PI points, seven PI points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA. This gap would require an average improvement in performance of approximately one PI point annually to achieve adequate yearly



progress (AYP). Easton's proficiency gap in math was 19 PI points in 2006, nine PI points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of more than two PI points per year to achieve AYP. Easton's proficiency gap in STE was 18 PI points, 11 PI points narrower than that statewide.

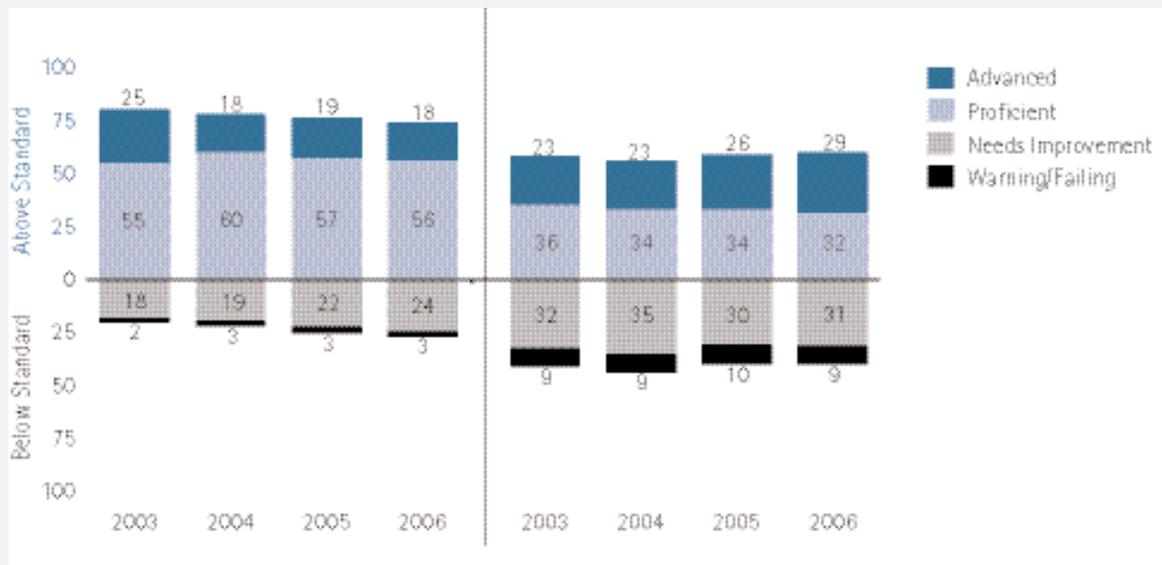
**3. Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?**

Between 2003 and 2006, Easton's MCAS performance showed a slight decline overall, a decline in ELA, slight improvement in math, and little change in STE.

- The percentage of students scoring in the 'Advanced' and 'Proficient' categories fell by two percentage points between 2003 and 2006, while the percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category remained the same. The average proficiency gap in Easton was 14 PI points in both 2003 and 2006.
- Over the three-year period 2003-2006, ELA performance in Easton declined at an average of approximately one-half PI point annually.
- Math performance in Easton improved slightly during this period, as the percentage of students attaining proficiency rose by two percentage points, although the proficiency index remained flat.
- Between 2004 and 2006, Easton's STE performance improved by approximately two PI points over the two-year period as a result of a decline in the percentage of students scoring in the 'Warning/Failing'

## EASTON ELA SCORES COMPARED TO MATH SCORES

Percentage of students at each proficiency level on MCAS



category. This resulted in an improvement rate of six percent despite a decline of three percentage points in the number of students attaining proficiency.

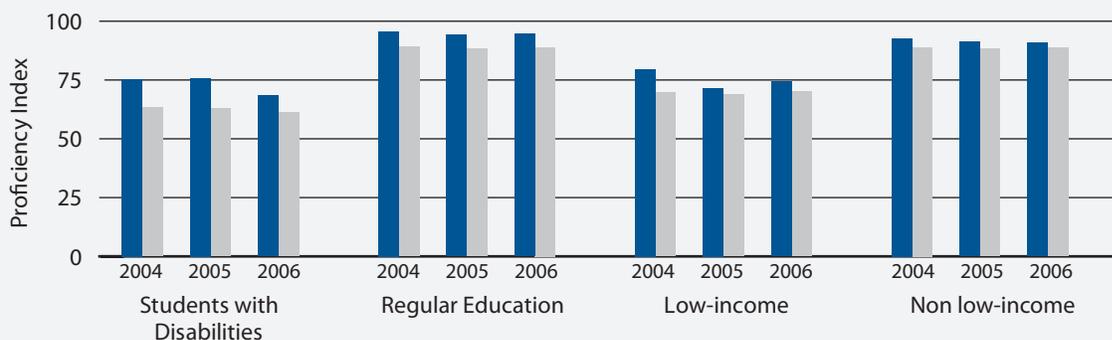
#### 4. Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?

MCAS performance in 2006 varied substantially among subgroups of Easton students. Of the eight measurable subgroups in Easton in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 24 PI points in ELA and 31 PI points in math (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively).

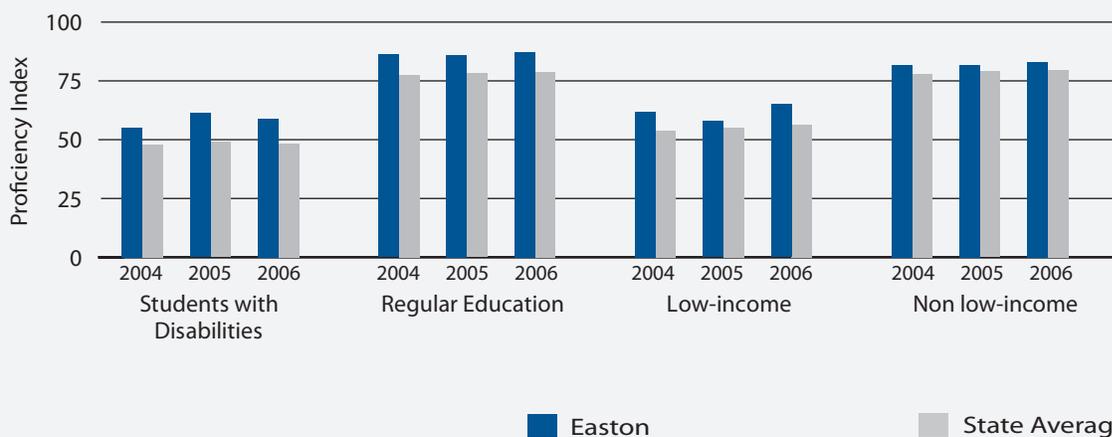
- The proficiency gaps in Easton in 2006 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities, African-American students, and low-income students (those participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program). For these subgroups, two-fifths or fewer of the students attained proficiency.
- The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students, White students, and non low-income students. For each of these subgroups, more than two-thirds of the students attained proficiency.
- The proficiency gap for male students was wider than the district average in ELA but narrower in math, while the proficiency gap for female students was wider than the district average in math but narrower in ELA. Roughly two-thirds of the students in both subgroups attained proficiency.

EASTON STUDENTS' IMPROVEMENT OVER TIME, COMPARED TO STATE AVERAGES

English Language Arts



Math



5. Has the MCAS test performance of the district's student subgroups improved over time?

The performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA narrowed from 28 PI points in 2003 to 26 PI points in 2006, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math narrowed from 32 to 28 PI points over this period.

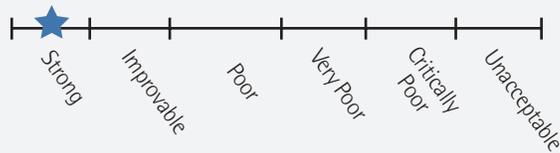
- In Easton, all subgroups of students had decreased performance in ELA between 2003 and 2006. The subgroup with the greatest decline in ELA performance was regular education students.
- In math, all subgroups in Easton with the exception of regular education and African-American students showed improved performance between 2003 and 2006. The most improved subgroup in math was students with disabilities. The performance of both regular education and African-American students was relatively flat during this period.

Performance at a Glance

Management Quality Index

The Management Quality Index is a weighted average of the district's performance on 67 indicators that measure the effectiveness of a district's management system. Easton received the following rating:

Performance Rating:



WHAT FACTORS DRIVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE?

Overall District Management

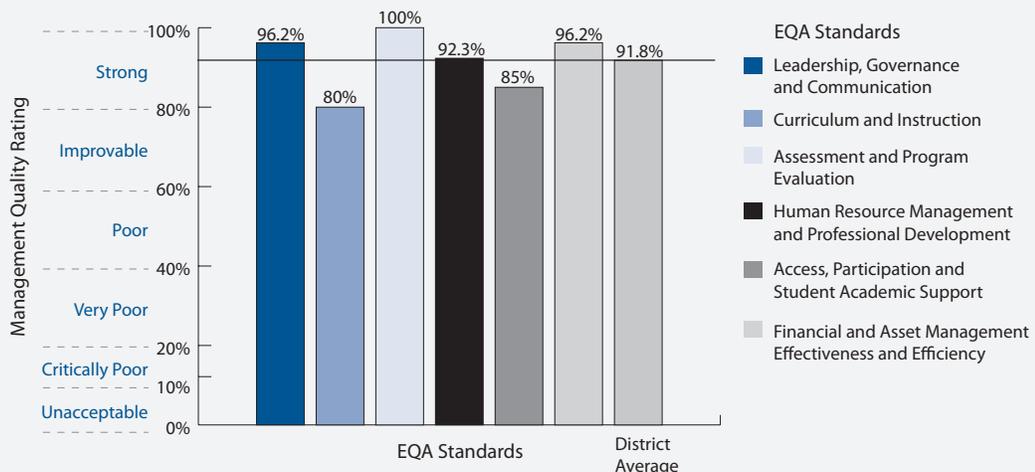
To better understand the factors affecting student scores on the MCAS tests, the EQA analyzes district performance on 67 indicators in six areas: leadership, governance, and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and program evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, participation, and student academic support; and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency.

Taken together, these factors are a measure of the effectiveness – or quality – of a district's management system. A score of 100 percent on the Management Quality Index (MQI) means that the district meets the standard and performed at a satisfactory level on all indicators. However, it does not mean the district was perfect.

In 2006, Easton received an overall MQI score of 'Strong' (91.8 percent). The district performed best on the Assessment and Program Evaluation standard, scoring 'Strong.' It was also rated 'Strong' on all the other standards. Given these ratings, the district is performing as expected on the MCAS tests. During the review period, student performance declined in ELA but improved in math. On the following pages, we take a closer look at the district's performance in each of the six standards.

A CLOSER LOOK AT MANAGEMENT QUALITY

Easton, 2004–2006



## Leadership, Governance, and Communication

Ultimately, the success or failure of district leadership was determined by how well all students performed. As measured by MCAS test performance, Easton ranked among the 'High' performing school districts in the commonwealth, with scores that were 'Very High' in ELA and 'High' in math.

### Leadership and Communication

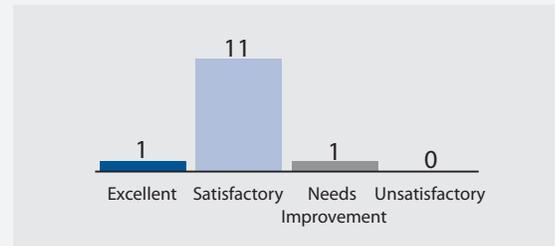
Under the leadership of the five-member school committee and the superintendent, Easton Public Schools arranged for individuals from various stakeholder groups to participate collaboratively as a committee on several major initiatives. The school committee and leadership personnel kept townspeople informed about the District Improvement Plan (DIP) and other educational issues through the district website and through coverage of school committee meetings on cable television and in local newspapers. Principals wrote periodic newsletters to provide parents with education-related information and to notify them about upcoming school events.

Another example of the collaborative approach used by the district was the focus on gathering support for the district's debt exclusion and operational budget overrides during the review period. Through the combined efforts of the town officials, school leadership personnel, the Easton Educators Association (EEA), and community groups such as Support The Easton Public Schools (STEPS) and the "Restore, Rebuild, Reserve" advocacy effort, the townspeople passed three overrides during the period under review. Two debt exclusion overrides totaling \$81 million provided funds for the new additions and renovations to the high school and the junior high school. In addition, because of the collaborative work of the stakeholder groups, the school and municipal departments received \$3.4 million from an operational override passed in June 2006.

### Performance at a Glance

#### Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 13 performance indicators. Easton received the following ratings:



#### Areas of Strength

- District leaders used a collaborative approach involving key stakeholders with major initiatives such as the DIP, curriculum coordination, and override votes.
- Administrators supervised the development and implementation of the MCAS adequate yearly progress (AYP) action plans following the analysis of the MCAS test results.
- The school committee and the superintendent provided leadership in obtaining one operational school/municipal budget override and two school construction and renovation debt exclusion overrides during the review period.

#### Areas for Improvement

- Not all administrators received annual evaluations during the three school years under review.

Among other accomplishments, this override added 15 new teaching and support positions and restored four teaching positions previously eliminated.

To plan for the preparation and review of the annual school budget, administrators stated that the district established a budget subcommittee that included the superintendent, the town administrator, and the chairs and other representatives from the school committee, the board of selectmen, and the finance committee. Interviewees mentioned that the budget subcommittee met every other week from October to June.

Although the district succeeded with an operational override in June 2006, interviewees expressed the need to improve technology system-wide and to provide additional support personnel such as adjustment counselors and special needs teachers. Interviewees mentioned that they expected a significant improvement in the area of technology at the secondary schools with the completion of the construction and renovation projects at the high school and the junior high school.

### **Governance and Planning**

During the period under review, the superintendent, the other central office administrators, and the principals did not receive annual evaluations. Not all teacher evaluations examined by EQA team members complied with Massachusetts General Laws 603 CMR 35.00.

Administrators analyzed MCAS test results, implemented new programs, and made modifications to programs and services to improve student achievement. Principals led the development and implementation of MCAS AYP action plans to address the needs of students who required MCAS test assistance. Some examples of changes to programs and services included adopting and implementing the Everyday Math program at grades K-6, instituting the MCAS academies in grades 4-6 and 7-9, introducing an MCAS math review course at the high school, and shifting the Geometry course from grade 11 to grade 10. The district also established instructional support teams to meet the needs of specific students.

The District Improvement Plan (DIP) began with a needs assessment survey distributed to all the homes in Easton in 2001. After a broad-based committee tabulated the results of the survey, it identified and prioritized 21 goals for the district, four of which became part of the DIPs for the years 2002-2004, 2004-2006, and 2006-2008.

## Curriculum and Instruction

The Easton Public Schools performed effectively in the areas of curriculum development and instructional practice — essential elements of efforts to improve student performance.

### Aligned Curricula

The EOA examiners reviewed documents that indicated the district revised the following curriculum documents between 1995 and 2003: science in 1995, grades K-12 English language arts (ELA) in 1996, grades K-6 math in 2002, and grades 7-12 math in 2003. The format addressed process and skills in each grade; however, the district did not reference strands and standards from the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks in elementary ELA. The district had a Curriculum Coordinating Council (CCC) consisting of the director of curriculum and instruction, a school committee member, two principals, two department chairs, a teacher from each school, and two parents. The CCC oversaw the 10 curriculum committees in the district and reported periodically to the school committee on programs and projects such as the math initiative.

As the district examined MCAS math test scores over time, it initiated a full program review for grades K-6 beginning in 2003-2004. The math curriculum committee followed the full process established by the CCC including surveys to establish needs, research of programs and practices, and selection of four programs to pilot during 2004-2005. The district then adopted Everyday Math and implemented the program in grades K-3 for 2005-2006 with implementation in grades 4-6 planned for 2006-2007. At the time the math curriculum document was completed, it was in the original format, but with more framework components identified.

The district reviewed the science curriculum during 2005-2006, revising the

## Performance at a Glance

### Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 10 performance indicators. Easton received the following ratings:



### Areas of Strength

- The district completed a grades K-6 math program review resulting in adoption of a new math program and two years of professional development for regular and special education staff.
- The junior high school and the H.H. Richardson School developed MCAS AYP action plans in an extensive effort to improve subgroup achievement in math.
- The Curriculum Coordinating Council oversaw 10 standing curriculum committees.
- The district had curriculum documents in each of the core tested content areas.

### Areas for Improvement

- The district lacked aligned curricula in all test content areas since financial restrictions limited its ability to immediately align curricula when frameworks were modified.
- Schools lacked technology resources and technical support, limiting its use as an integral part of instruction; however, the completion of building projects at the secondary schools will increase technology access.

sequence of topics and adopting a new science program for grades K-6. At the same time, the curriculum committee adopted a new template or format for curriculum that began with the standards, included all components, and was more user friendly for the classroom teacher. After the district CCC accepted the curriculum and the format, the district planned to structure all curricula in the new format as reviews proceeded. The district would convert the math curriculum to the new format in 2006-2007.

As the English language arts curriculum underwent a full review beginning in 2005-2006 and continuing through 2007-2008, the final document would appear in the new format. In addition, the Standing Task Force of English Language Arts and Reading (STELAR) developed an extensive rubrics system of measuring communication and writing skills during the period under review. STELAR members surveyed what programs the district used, what programs addressed each strand, and future objectives. They noted the lack of a consistent core program across the district and addressed the needs of grades K-6 first.

### **Effective Instruction**

Beginning with the superintendent, the district recommended components for lesson planning based on Harry K. Wong's guide, *The First Days Of School: How To Be An Effective Teacher*. Principals looked for these components when conducting walk-throughs and formal observations. There was no formal protocol for walk-throughs, and lesson plans were not consistently reviewed on a regular basis in all buildings.

The focus of supervisory observations in grades K-6 was on math instruction during 2005-2006 and would remain so in 2006-2007, with the adoption of the Everyday Math program and the development of the MCAS AYP action plan to address subgroups' failure to make AYP in math at the junior high school level. The district provided initial and continuing professional development for the new math program and monitored fidelity of implementation through observations.

## Assessment and Program Evaluation

Student assessment data include a wealth of information for district and school leaders on strengths and weaknesses in the local system, providing valuable input on where they should target their efforts to improve achievement.

### Student Assessment

The Easton Public Schools developed the DIP and School Improvement Plans (SIPs) through the comprehensive analysis of assessment data with the goal of improving the academic achievement of its students. Evidence indicated that these analyses resulted in many adjustments or modifications to the curricula and instructional practices used by teachers. The district placed major emphasis on requiring all students to take all assessments. Those efforts resulted in the district's near perfect MCAS test participation rate across grade levels over the review period. The district used an array of testing and assessment analyses to develop the instructional programs for its students. The district conducted these assessment analyses across the grade levels, from Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and Stanford reading assessment analyses at the elementary level to administering and analyzing midyear and final common exams at the high school. The district administrative cabinet, comprised of a superintendent, a director of curriculum, instruction, and professional development, a director of special services, and a director of school business operations, first reviewed, analyzed, and discussed the MCAS test results, then further analysis occurred at the school level. Teachers received the analyses from their principals or department heads.

The district made efforts to inform parents and the community of the district assessment results. These efforts included school committee presentations televised by the local cable television station, regional and community newspaper coverage, and direct communication with parents via individual school report cards and progress reports. The district prepared assessment reports focused on student achievement and communicated those reports to the staff and the community. The reports included a comprehensive item analysis that identified academic strengths and weaknesses of grade-level curricula.

### Performance at a Glance

#### Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 8 performance indicators. Easton received the following ratings:



#### Areas of Strength

- District and school leaders stressed the importance of student participation in the MCAS tests, which resulted in a near perfect record of student participation over the review period.
- Each school annually created an MCAS AYP action plan, a comprehensive data analysis document used as an extension of the School Improvement Plan.
- Communication with staff members, parents, and community members concerning assessment results was consistent and timely.
- The district adjusted curricula and instructional practices in response to the analysis of achievement data.
- The district used external and internal program evaluations to modify programs.

## Program Evaluation

A four-year internal initiative by the mathematics curriculum committee resulted in the adoption of the Everyday Math program for grades K-6, a program closely aligned with the Massachusetts mathematics framework. This initiative utilized the expertise of consultants, provided professional development for teachers, and allowed for the purchasing of resources for programmatic success. Interviewees provided many examples of the district's use of program evaluation to modify or discontinue programs in its attempt to improve instruction and student achievement. Examples cited included the addition of daily instructional time in mathematics at all elementary grades, the adjustment of the math course sequence at the high school, and the elimination of the writing lab at the junior high school so that individual teachers could spend more time instructing students in their respective disciplines.

The district engaged in both internal and external audits to evaluate the effectiveness of program implementation and delivery, and shared the results of these audits with staff and the community in a timely fashion. It implemented recommendations from both the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) and Coordinated Program Review (CPR) reports, such as adding more AP courses, changing the sequence of the math courses so that Geometry was taught in grade 10 instead of grade 11, and including sections of the DIP in all the individual SIPs.

District and school leadership used student assessment results and other pertinent data to measure the effectiveness of instructional and support programs, performing cross-grade analyses to assess student performance in particular subjects, using comparative data from the elementary and secondary schools. They annually reviewed these data to maximize effectiveness in assigning staff, prioritizing goals, and allocating time and resources, and to understand how academic offerings affected student learning. They routinely used program evaluation results to initiate, modify, or discontinue programs and services to improve the delivery of instruction and student achievement. The district also developed a protocol and timeline for the review of student portfolios and modification of instructional practices in response to analysis of assessment results.

Principals or department heads used item analysis of questions from the MCAS tests to rearrange the sequence of certain units to concentrate instruction and align them more precisely with the state frameworks. The district's special education personnel evaluated the academic progress of students experiencing difficulty in particular subject areas and if needed developed Individual Student Success Plans (ISSPs). Special education teachers often worked closely with regular education teachers in an inclusion model of instruction throughout the district with the exception of the high school.

## Human Resource Management and Professional Development

To improve student academic performance, school districts must recruit certified teaching staff, offer teacher mentoring programs and professional development opportunities, and evaluate instructional effectiveness on a regular basis in accordance with the provisions of the Education Reform Act of 1993.

### Hiring Practices and Certification

All professional staff in the Easton Public Schools held appropriate licensure. District recruitment and hiring processes were contained in written protocols, according to administrators interviewed, and district and school staff adhered to the protocols when hiring new staff. The district posted all professional positions internally before advertising externally. The district hired approximately 15 new staff members annually. Principals were the hiring authority, with the concurrence of the superintendent. The administrative assistant to the superintendent, with the superintendent's oversight, managed human resources, including the hiring and licensure process.

### Professional Development

District leaders planned, documented, and implemented professional development throughout the district. Documents reviewed by the EQA team included a district professional development plan that summarized professional development offerings by topic and type of activity. The plan also included listings of college courses eligible for district-sponsored tuition reimbursement. Eighty-five teachers took 105 courses from 19 colleges or universities during the period under review. The

## Performance at a Glance

### Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 13 performance indicators. Easton received the following ratings:



### Areas of Strength

- Employees and representatives of leadership and governance teams widely expressed satisfaction with the human resource and professional development systems.
- The district used surveys, assessment data, and progress toward the goals in the DIP and SIPs to determine teachers' professional development needs.
- An active supervision practice was in place to monitor implementation of professional development in the classroom.

### Areas for Improvement

- Other than for targeted workshops, the district had no history of assessing the impact of professional development workshops, district-supported college courses, or consultants on staff performance.
- The performance evaluation system for teachers and administrators did not meet state requirements regarding format for teachers and timing for both administrators and teachers.
- Staff performance evaluations reviewed contained no references to improving instruction except for sporadic and limited comments.

district did not formally examine the impact on performance of workshops and courses taken as part of the district's professional development activities; however, the district had an active supervision process which monitored the implementation of professional development in the classroom. Several interviewees cited the district's professional development effort as a "continuous conversation" in the district. A high school teacher stated, "The district's professional development effort meets any possible need of my teaching."

In addition, the district had a well documented strategic plan for professional development in mathematics. It included detailed, systematic plans to organize the work of several committees targeting improvement of students' math performance. Easton identified a number of other school districts whose math instruction seemed to improve student achievement, obtained data from them, and launched a systematic training program to improve student achievement in math.

### Evaluation

Official evaluation instruments for both teachers and administrators were not in compliance with state regulations, including 603 CMR 35.00, because of both timing and format. An administrator evaluated non-professional status teachers annually in accordance with the regulations, but professional status teachers were evaluated on a four-year cycle with only one evaluation that was compliant with 603 CMR 35.00. The superintendent evaluated principals annually until they reached their fourth year of employment, after which administrative evaluation occurred every other year. The district used a locally developed Management by Objectives (MBO) supervision system every year that focused on connecting district and school goals with annual evaluations of administrators and teachers, but it did not comply with 603 CMR 35.00

## Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support

Students who are at risk of failing or dropping out need additional support to ensure that they stay in school and achieve proficiency.

### Services

The district and schools performed aggregated and disaggregated analysis of MCAS and other assessment data and provided academic support services to students, such as the instructional support team, MCAS test support programs, a homeless coordinator, and special education support. The district provided support services for homeless and transient students, and followed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act regulations. The district provided an early education language-based program, called Project Early, for children with mild and moderate special needs.

### Attendance

Enrollment in the district was approximately 3,900 students. The major student subgroup was students with disabilities, which comprised between 17 and 18 percent of total student enrollment. The district conducted substantial analysis of the special education subgroup's performance data because of failure to meet AYP targets. The district offered accelerated courses, including Advanced Placement (AP) and honors courses, but regular education students comprised most of the enrollment in these courses.

The district had attendance policies at all schools and documented consequences for unexcused absences in student handbooks. Also, the school committee approved a district absence policy. The district implemented procedures and practices to aggressively monitor attendance and account for all students who did not arrive at school. In 2006, the district reported an attendance rate of 95.9 percent, and all elementary schools exceeded 96 percent. In 2005, the district attendance

## Performance at a Glance

### Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 10 performance indicators. Easton received the following ratings:



### Areas of Strength

- The district had policies, practices, and consequences related to student absence from school, and the district attendance rate exceeded the state rate by two percentage points in 2006.
- The district had practices and programs to minimize and prevent dropouts, and the four-year graduation rate was 95.8 percent in 2006.
- The district provided formative and summative assessments and supplementary and academic support programs for students, and levels of proficiency in all content areas exceeded state levels.

### Areas for Improvement

- Overall achievement on the MCAS tests decreased slightly in 2006, and the district did not meet performance targets in ELA and math for special education students.
- The district provided early intervention programs at the elementary school to improve ELA performance, but the percentage of grade 4 special education students attaining proficiency decreased in 2006 to below the state average.

rate exceeded 96 percent. The chronic absenteeism rate averaged 9.3 percent at the junior high school and 12.8 percent at the high school.

A review of staff attendance data indicated all but one school reported high rates of staff absenteeism, although the superintendent noted that several long-term illnesses had affected these rates. The district mostly relied on substitute teachers to ensure the continuity of instruction, and most schools employed building substitutes when teachers called in sick. The administrative assistant to the superintendent met with all substitute teachers and oriented them to the district. Substitute teachers also received information regarding emergency and crisis procedures. In FY 2006, the district spent almost \$500,000 on substitute teachers, including building substitutes.

### **Discipline and Dropout Prevention**

The district reported low rates of out-of-school suspension at the high school and junior high school even though both buildings lacked in-school suspension resources. The district reported out-of-school suspension rates during the review period that were well below the state average. Interviewees indicated that the district provided teachers with professional development in classroom management, and all student handbooks and the school committee manual included policies that reinforced the need for appropriate behavior in school. The district reported a graduation rate in 2006 of 95.8 percent for a cohort of 262 students and a dropout rate in 2006 of 2.7 percent, according to DOE data. The district had practices and procedures in place to monitor students who considered dropping out and assist them and their parents by recommending options such as flexible scheduling.

## Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

Effective districts develop budgets based on student needs, submit financial documentation in a timely fashion, employ staff with MCPPO credentials, and ensure that their facilities are well maintained.

### Budget Process

The superintendent developed the budget through an open, participatory process in a format used for over 15 years. The budget, which listed and explained all outside funding, was comprehensive, current, understandable, provided details by cost center, and included historical information, which made it possible to compare the expenditures. Class size, staffing, and the on-going analysis of student assessment data influenced budget decisions and the allocation of resources. The district targeted resources to its number one priority—establish reasonable class size. The superintendent provided building principals with a per pupil allocation and enrollment information to develop school budget requests. With input from staff, principals determined their building needs and allocated resources influenced by the goals in the SIPs as well as the ongoing analysis of student assessment data. A budget subcommittee with representation from the school administration and town committees met every other week to discuss financial resources. The superintendent and the town administrator also met biweekly. The district presented the budget, which had the support of the finance committee and the board of selectmen, at the annual town meeting.

### Financial Support

The district exceeded the net school spending (NSS) requirement in each year of the period under review. The tax levy limit was at the maximum allowable levy. Parent Advisory Councils (PACs) organized all fundraising at the schools

## Performance at a Glance

### Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 13 performance indicators. Easton received the following ratings:



### Areas of Strength

- The district's budget document was comprehensive, current, and understandable. It provided details by cost center, and included historical information as well as a listing and explanation of all outside funding.
- The superintendent and the town administrator yearly reviewed and signed a written agreement related to 603 CMR 10.0, which detailed the method for calculating indirect charges.
- The voters approved two debt exclusion overrides totaling \$81 million for construction and renovation of the junior high and high schools and a \$3.4 million operational override for the school and town departments.

### Areas for Improvement

- The district did not evaluate the cost effectiveness of its instructional programs based on student performance data and needs.

and spent funds on enrichment, cultural, and community-based activities. The Foundation for Excellence in Education in Easton (FEEE) raised money through tax-deductible contributions for the purchase of computers and technological equipment and grants for teachers.

In FY 2003, the voters of Easton approved a \$68 million debt exclusion override for construction and renovation of the junior high and high schools. In FY 2005, the voters approved an additional \$13 million debt exclusion override since the high steel costs had increased the cost of the renovation/construction project, but failed to pass an operational override. The cooperative efforts of all stakeholders to garner support for another operational override resulted in a successful \$3.4 million operational override for the school and town departments in FY 2006. This vote increased the FY 2007 school budget by 10.3 percent.

### Facilities and Safety

The district's elementary schools were in generally good, clean, and well-maintained condition, and the district had systems to ensure student safety in the schools. The building and grounds division of the department of public works (DPW) maintained the schools. A written preventative maintenance schedule existed which clearly listed the in-house and contracted tasks, the frequency of occurrence, and the responsible unit.

The town maintained a municipal building committee that had responsibility for all building projects within the town. The town also maintained a capital planning committee that evaluated all capital requests from the town departments. The district's five-year capital improvement plan included projects for the Parkview, Moreau Hall, and Center schools. Since the Olmstead and Richardson schools were 10 years old and still under warranty for a number of items, the district submitted no projects for these schools.

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## CONCLUSION

The Easton Public Schools was considered to be a 'High' performing district, marked by student achievement that was 'Very High' in ELA and 'High' in math during the review period as measured by the MCAS tests. More than two-thirds of Easton's students scored at or above the proficiency standard on the 2006 administration of the MCAS tests. The EQA gave the district a Management Quality Index rating of 'Strong,' with the highest rating in Assessment and Program Evaluation and the lowest in Curriculum and Instruction.

Although the superintendent and the school committee developed and approved sound educational budgets during the period under review, the Easton Public Schools faced financial barriers to improving student achievement. Like many other school districts in the state, Easton was challenged by state tax laws and changing economic conditions, which for the most part precluded substantial increases in the academic resources available to help students improve. However, in Easton, the superintendent, the school committee, the town officials, the Easton Educators' Association (EEA), and many other community members worked collaboratively and made the education of Easton's school children a priority. The Easton schools were supported by advocacy groups such as Support The Easton Public Schools and the Foundation for Excellence in Education in Easton, which supplied funds for technological equipment and teacher grants.

The superintendent, the town administrator, and the chairs and other representatives of the school committee, finance committee, and board of selectmen established a budget subcommittee that met regularly during the year to discuss issues pertaining to both the school and municipal departments. Class size, staffing, and the on-going analysis of student assessment data influenced budget decisions and the allocation of resources. The district targeted resources to its number one priority—establish reasonable class size.

The combined efforts of stakeholders resulted in three successful override votes during the period under review. Although the district did not succeed in its initial attempt at an operational override in 2004-2005, it did pass a \$3.4 million joint school and municipal operational override in June 2006, which resulted in an increase in the district's budget of \$2.5 million and saved a number of teaching positions. The district also succeeded with two debt exclusion overrides; the first, in the amount of \$68 million, covered the renovations and additions to the high school and the junior high school, and the second, in the amount of \$13 million, was to cover the amount by which the bids exceeded the original estimates on both renovation and construction projects. The school committee and the superintendent, with the help of a committee of community members, developed a strategic plan which served as the District Improvement Plan (DIP). The committee identified 21 goals and priorities for the district, and included several in the DIP.

During the review period, the district began to revise and update its curricula. The district's Curriculum Coordinating Council (CCC) oversaw the 10 standing curriculum committees in the district. The curriculum process since 2000 included needs assessment, planning, development, implementation, and evaluation. In math, the district initiated a review for grades K-6 beginning in 2003-2004 based on trends identified from MCAS test results. The math curriculum committee followed the full review process established under the CCC, including surveys to establish needs, research of programs and practices, and selection of four programs to pilot during 2004-2005. The district then adopted the Everyday Math program for grades K-6. The district reviewed the science curriculum during 2005-2006, revising the sequence of topics and adopting a new science program for grades K-6.

The CCC adopted a new curriculum format that began with the standards, included all components, and was more user friendly for the classroom teacher. The district planned to adopt this new format for all curricula as reviews proceeded, in 2006-2007 for math and in 2007-2008 for ELA. The district developed the Standing Task Force on English Language Arts and Reading (STELAR), which began work on revising the grades K-6 ELA curriculum during the period under review. STELAR members developed an extensive rubrics system of measuring communication and writing skills.

The district's evaluation procedures for administrators and teachers did not comply with 603 CMR 35.00 of the Massachusetts General Laws, as a result of variations in timeliness and format. The district reported high rates of staff absenteeism, averaging 12.4 days, and spent in excess of \$400,000 on substitute teacher compensation in each year of the review period.

EQA examiners noted minimal evidence of efforts to encourage subgroup participation in accelerated courses, despite the fact that special education students comprised approximately 18 percent of Easton's enrollment. The district's special education subgroup failed to meet AYP performance targets in math and ELA, and the percentage of grade 4 special education students attaining proficiency decreased in 2006, falling below the state average. Administrators made efforts to improve students' MCAS test performance by analyzing results, implementing new programs, and modifying existing programs and services. The district provided an early education language-based program, called Project Early, for children with mild and moderate special needs. Principals led the development and implementation of MCAS AYP action plans, and the district instituted MCAS Academies in grades 4-6 and grades 7-9, introduced an MCAS math review course at the high school, and shifted the Geometry course from grade 11 to grade 10. The district also established instructional support teams to meet the needs of specific students.

## APPENDIX A: EQA'S DISTRICT EXAMINATION PROCESS

EQA's examination process provides successively deeper levels of information about student performance. All school districts receive an MCAS data review annually, but they do not all receive the full examination every year.

Based on the MCAS results, Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC) policy, and random sampling, approximately 60 districts statewide received a site review. Still other districts – those that do not meet certain performance criteria set by the state Department of Education – received an even more detailed review.

### *Data-Driven Assessment*

Annually, the DOE and EQA's staff assess each public school district's results on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests to find out how students are performing. This review seeks to answer five basic questions:

1. Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on MCAS?
2. Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students (such as minority and low-income students and students with disabilities)?
3. Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?
4. Has the MCAS test performance of the district's student subgroups improved over time?
5. Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

### *Standards-Based Examination*

Districts with MCAS results that fall within certain thresholds of performance, particularly districts that score below average, may be selected to receive a site review. This review seeks to provide a more complete picture of why the district is performing at that level, examining district management, planning, and actions and how they are implemented at the building level. It focuses in particular on whether the district uses data to inform its efforts.

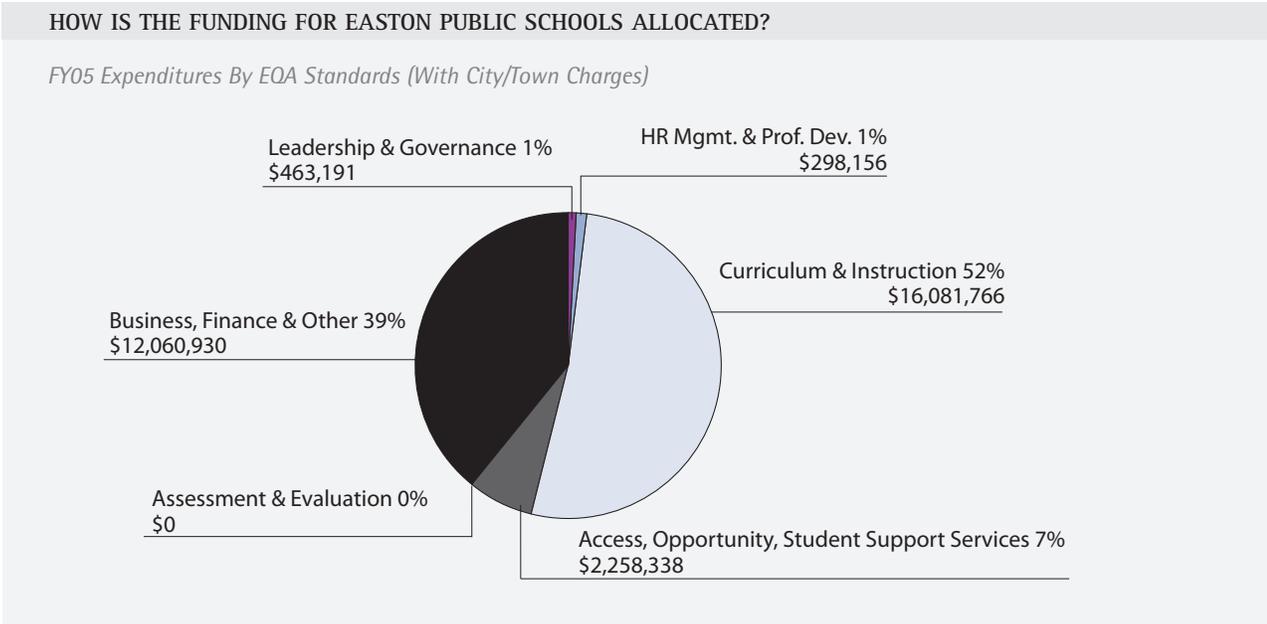
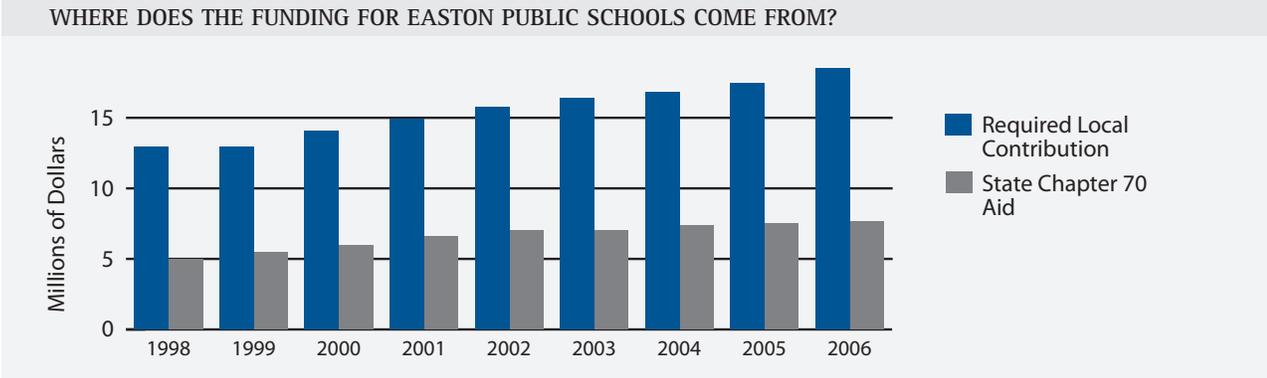
The report analyzes district performance in six major areas: leadership, governance, and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and program evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, participation, and student academic support; and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency. EQA examines a total of 67 indicators to assess whether the district is meeting the standards and provides a rating for each indicator.

## APPENDIX B: EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED IN EQA REPORTS

<b>ABA:</b> Applied Behavioral Analysis	<b>FTE:</b> Full-Time Equivalent	<b>MQI:</b> Management Quality Index — an indicator of the relative strength and effectiveness of a district's management system
<b>ADA:</b> Average Daily Attendance	<b>FY:</b> Fiscal Year	<b>MUNIS:</b> Municipal Information System
<b>ALT:</b> MCAS Alternative Assessment	<b>Gap Analysis:</b> A statistical method to analyze the relationships between and among district and subgroup performance and the standard of 100 percent proficiency	<b>NAEYC:</b> National Association for the Education of Young Children
<b>API:</b> Average Proficiency Index (of the English Language Arts Proficiency Index and Math Proficiency Index for all students)	<b>GASB:</b> Government Accounting Standards Board	<b>NCLB:</b> No Child Left Behind
<b>ATA:</b> Accountability and Targeted Assistance	<b>GMADE:</b> Group Math Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation	<b>NEASC:</b> New England Association of Schools and Colleges
<b>AYP:</b> Adequate Yearly Progress	<b>GRADE:</b> Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation	<b>NRT:</b> Norm-Referenced Test
<b>CAP:</b> Corrective Action Plan	<b>GRADU:</b> The graduation yield rate for a class four years from entry	<b>NSBA:</b> National School Boards Association
<b>CBM:</b> Curriculum-Based Measures	<b>IEP:</b> Individualized Education Program	<b>NSS:</b> Net School Spending
<b>CD:</b> Competency Determination — the state's interim Adequate Yearly Progress indicator for high schools based on grade 10 MCAS test passing rates	<b>Improvement Gap:</b> A measure of change in a combination of the proficiency gap and performance gap between two points in time; a positive improvement gap will show improvement and convergence between subgroups' performance over time	<b>Performance Gap:</b> A measure of the range of the difference of performance between any subgroup's Proficiency Index and another subgroup's in a given district
<b>CMP:</b> Connected Math Program	<b>IPDP:</b> Individual Professional Development Plan	<b>PI:</b> Proficiency Index — a number between 0–100 representing the extent to which students are progressing toward proficiency
<b>CORI:</b> Criminal Offender Record Information	<b>IRIP:</b> Individual Reading Improvement Plan	<b>PIM:</b> Performance Improvement Management
<b>CPI:</b> Composite Proficiency Index — a 100-point index combining students' scores on the standard MCAS and MCAS Alternative Assessment (ALT)	<b>ISSP:</b> Individual Student Success Plan	<b>POA:</b> Program Quality Assurance — a division of the DOE responsible for conducting the Coordinated Program Review process
<b>CPR:</b> Coordinated Program Review — conducted on Federal Education Acts by the DOE	<b>LASW:</b> Looking at Student Work	<b>Proficiency Gap:</b> A measure of a district or subgroup's Proficiency Index and its distance from 100 percent proficiency
<b>CRT:</b> Criterion-Referenced Test	<b>LEP:</b> Limited English Proficient	<b>QRI:</b> Qualitative Reading Inventory
<b>CSR:</b> Comprehensive School Reform	<b>MASBO:</b> Massachusetts Association of School Business Officials	<b>Rate of Improvement:</b> The result of dividing the gain (improvement in achievement as measured by Proficiency Index points) by the proficiency gap
<b>DCAP:</b> District Curriculum Accommodation Plan	<b>MASC:</b> Massachusetts Association of School Committees	<b>SAT:</b> A test administered by the Educational Testing Service to 11th and 12th graders
<b>DIBELS:</b> Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills	<b>MASS:</b> Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents	<b>SEI:</b> Sheltered English Immersion
<b>DIP:</b> District Improvement Plan	<b>MAVA:</b> Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators	<b>SIMS:</b> Student Information Management System
<b>DOE:</b> Department of Education	<b>MCAS:</b> Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System	<b>SIOP:</b> Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol
<b>DPDP:</b> District Professional Development Plan	<b>MCAS-AIT:</b> Alternative Assessment — a portfolio option for special needs students to demonstrate proficiency	<b>SIP:</b> School Improvement Plan
<b>DRA:</b> Developmental Reading Assessment	<b>MCPPO:</b> Massachusetts Certified Public Purchasing Official	<b>SPED:</b> Special Education
<b>ELA:</b> English Language Arts	<b>MELA-O:</b> Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral	<b>STE:</b> Science and Technology/Engineering
<b>ELL:</b> English Language Learners	<b>MEPA:</b> Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment	<b>TerraNova:</b> K–12 norm-referenced test series published by CTB/McGraw-Hill
<b>EPI:</b> English Language Arts Proficiency Index	<b>MPI:</b> Math Proficiency Index	
<b>ESL:</b> English as a Second Language		
<b>FLNE:</b> First Language Not English		
<b>FRL/N:</b> Free and Reduced-Price Lunch/No		
<b>FRL/Y:</b> Free and Reduced-Price Lunch/Yes		

APPENDIX C: STATE AND LOCAL FUNDING, 1998-2006

A school district's funding is determined in part by the Chapter 70 program – the major program of state aid to public elementary and secondary schools. In addition to supporting school operations, it also establishes minimum requirements for each municipality's share of school costs. The following chart shows the amount of Easton's funding that was derived from the state and the amount that the town was required to contribute. The district exceeded the state net school spending (NSS) requirement in each year of the review period. From FY 2004 to FY 2006, NSS increased from \$25,505,474 to \$28,827,156; Chapter 70 aid increased from \$7,373,725 to \$7,668,207; the required local contribution increased from \$16,802,543 to \$18,495,624; and the foundation enrollment increased from 3,725 to 3,734. Chapter 70 aid as a percentage of actual NSS decreased from 29 to 27 percent over this period. From FY 2004 to FY 2005, total curriculum and instruction expenditures as a percentage of total Schedule 1 net school spending reported in the End of Year Pupil and Financial Report remained at 66 percent.





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