



Massachusetts Department of
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY
EDUCATION

Webster Public Schools District Review

Review conducted April 11-14, 2011

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Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Overview of Level 3 District Reviews

Purpose

The Center for District and School Accountability (CDSA) in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) conducts district reviews under Chapter 15, Section 55A of the Massachusetts General Laws. This review is focused on “districts whose students achieve at low levels either in absolute terms or relative to districts that educate similar populations.” Districts subject to review in the 2010-2011 school year include districts in Level 3¹ of ESE’s framework for district accountability and assistance in each of the state’s six regions: Greater Boston, Berkshires, Northeast, Southeast, Central, and Pioneer Valley. The districts with the lowest aggregate performance and least movement in Composite Performance Index (CPI) in their regions were chosen from among those districts that were not exempt under Chapter 15, Section 55A, because another comprehensive review had been completed or was scheduled to take place within nine months of the planned reviews.

Methodology

To focus the analysis, reviews collect evidence for each of the six district standards: **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 may be impeding rapid improvement as well as those that are most likely to be contributing to positive results. Team members preview selected district documents and ESE data and reports before conducting a two-day site visit in the district and a two-day site visit to schools. The team consists of independent consultants with expertise in each of the standards.

¹ In other words, as Level 3 is now defined, districts with one or more schools that score in the lowest 20 percent statewide of schools serving common grade levels pursuant to 603 CMR 2.05(2)(a).

Webster Public Schools

The site visit to the Webster Public Schools was conducted from April 11-14, 2011. The site visit included visits to the following district schools: Park Avenue Elementary School (PK-2); Webster Middle School (3-6); and Bartlett Junior-Senior High School (7-12). 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 student achievement data for 2008-2010. Appendix D contains finding and recommendation statements.

District Profile²

Webster is a town of approximately 17,000 residents located in south central Massachusetts along the Connecticut border. Founded in 1812, Webster soon became an industrial center with textile mills and shoe factories powered by its significant water resources. Samuel Slater, the primary founder and a prominent manufacturer, named the town for his friend, Daniel Webster. Like many former mill towns, Webster has experienced high unemployment and poverty rates. According to Department of Revenue (DOR) data, Webster had a March 2011 unemployment rate of 10.5 percent, compared with the statewide rate of 8.2 percent and the central Massachusetts rate of 8.6 percent. During the interval from 2000 to 2009, median household income in Webster increased by only 28 percent compared with the statewide increase of 36 percent, and the gap is growing: at \$41,103, Webster's 2009 median household income was only 88 percent of the 2000 statewide median income of \$46,947, and 73 percent of the 2009 statewide median income of \$64,081. In 2011, low-income students constituted 52 percent of the students enrolled in the Webster Public Schools (see Table 1 below); the percentage of low-income students increased by 27 percent from 2007 to 2011.

Webster's natural features and proximity to major highways, in combination with its employers, have spurred land development and construction, especially in the last decade. Webster is home to Commerce Insurance Company, one of the state's largest insurance carriers and largest employers, as well as being the site of Webster Lake, more properly, Lake Chargoggagogmanchauggagogggchaubunagungamaugg (or, in a shortened version, Lake Chaubunagungamaug), a recreational attraction and destination point. High speed connections to Worcester along Interstate 395 and the commercial-industrial developments along the 495 corridor have increased Webster's appeal as a bedroom community, resulting in redevelopment activity. Redevelopment is occurring both along the shores of Lake Webster, with year-round million-dollar homes replacing small seasonal camps, and throughout the town with the conversion of larger tracts of land to subdivisions.

² Data derived from ESE's website, ESE's Education Data Warehouse, or other ESE sources.

Webster has an open Town Meeting form of government with a five-member board of selectmen and a town administrator. Governed by a five-member school committee, the Webster Public Schools had a 2011 enrollment of 1,882 students in preschool through grade 12 (see Table 1 below). The enrollment is relatively stable, having declined by only four percent since 2007. The educational facilities consist of three school buildings: the Park Avenue Elementary School, containing preschool through grade 2; Webster Middle School, containing grade 3 through grade 6; and Bartlett Junior-Senior High School, containing grade 7 through grade 12. The Webster Middle School is new, and the Bartlett Junior-Senior High School was renovated in the 1990s.

The 2010 Town Meeting approved a feasibility study to consider the renovation or reconstruction of the Park Avenue Elementary School, and to explore other alternatives. Central office administrators told the review team that ideally, it would be best to re-organize the grade spans to preschool through grade 4; grade 5 through grade 8; and grade 9 through grade 12 in order to create separate elementary, middle and high school units. They went on to state that this could be accomplished by building a new elementary school, or by reconfiguration and possible expansion of the current middle and junior-senior high school structures to house the three grade spans in separate sections.

The local appropriation to the Webster Public Schools budget for fiscal year 2011 was \$15,784,631, up 2.3 percent from the appropriation for fiscal year 2010 of \$15,423,693. School-related expenditures by the Town of Webster were estimated at 5,995,533 for fiscal year 2011, up 0.66 percent from the estimate for fiscal year 2010 of \$5,956,333. In fiscal year 2010, the total amount of actual school-related expenditures, including expenditures by the district (\$15,002,539), expenditures by the town (\$5,903,290), and expenditures from other sources such as grants (\$4,596,780), was \$25,502,609.

The superintendent was in his sixth year of service in the district at the time of the review.³ Following a planned reorganization, the district's 2011-2012 central leadership team was to consist of the superintendent, assistant superintendent for business, director of curriculum and instruction, director of student support services, adult and community education director, the literacy coordinator,⁴ and the principals of the three schools. In 2010-2011, the director of student support services position was filled part-time as an interim measure, the director of curriculum and instruction position was vacant, and the kindergarten through grade 8 coordinator of reading position was a temporary one-year position.

A part-time, interim director of student support services was hired in the early fall of 2010 when the nine-year incumbent resigned to take another position at the time of the review the part-time director of curriculum and instruction directorship was not filled. Following the retirement of the incumbent in June 2010, the district used the salary line for the part-time director of curriculum and instruction to underwrite teacher stipends for curriculum development in 2010-2011, and enhanced the salary for the position in the 2011-2012 budget to underwrite a full-time curriculum

³ He retired at the end of the 2011-2012 school year; a new superintendent began July 1, 2012.

⁴ Replacing the earlier position of K-8 coordinator of reading.

and instruction directorship. The district also made the kindergarten through grade 8 reading coordinator position districtwide and permanent.

According to ESE data for 2010 and 2011, only 85 percent of school-aged residents were enrolled in the Webster Public Schools, compared with 91 percent statewide.⁵ Unlike most Massachusetts communities of its size, Webster has three preschool through grade 8 parochial schools: Saint Anne, Saint Joseph, and Saint Louis. According to central office administrators, although all are regional schools, they enroll Webster students predominantly.

Webster enrolls students from Worcester and other communities under the school choice program, but according to the budget and ESE data, the district expends more in school choice tuition than it receives. Central office administrators told the review team that parents exercising their right to school choice often enroll their children in the Dudley-Charlton and Douglas school districts. Central office administrators, principals, and school committee members told the review team that some of the parents with the financial means to afford higher home values enroll their children in charter, private, and other public schools. They added that the dichotomy between the families of little and more means had created “two Websters.”

Administrators, teachers, school committee members, and parents referred to the district’s diminishing capacity to provide programs and services to meet a variety of student needs. For example, administrators pointed to a lack of practical options for certain high school learners with the reduction in business education offerings and the elimination of the vocational education programs. Many interviewees stated that there were also too few options for accelerated students. Some long-time teachers told the review team that while Webster graduates were once accepted at highly selective colleges, there were few pathways now to upper level courses, especially in mathematics and science. According to ESE data⁶, the percentage of Webster juniors and seniors enrolled in at least one Advanced Placement course fell below the state percentage in 2009 (15 percent compared with 19 percent statewide) and 2010 (16 percent compared with 17 percent statewide), and according to student self-reports in 2009, only 48 percent of Webster 8th grade students were enrolled in algebra, which positions students to enroll in advanced mathematics courses.

Administrators and teachers stated that there were limited options for English language learners, especially those requiring more hours of English language instruction at the secondary level, and for adolescents with behavioral and emotional problems. The district does not have certain substantially separate programs for students with low-incidence special needs, resorting to costly out-of-district placements. According to ESE data, Webster’s 2008-2009 out-of-district placement rate for students receiving special education services was 15.1 percent, more than double the state rate of 6.8 percent. Its 2009-2010 rate was 14.0 percent, again more than double the state rate that year of 6.7 percent. Central office administrators and school committee

⁵ See the District Analysis and Review Tool (DART) for Districts for Webster, District Context tab, at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/>.

⁶ See DART for Districts for Webster, Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment tab, at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/>.

members told the review team that the district was analyzing its school choice and out-of-district tuition costs in order to develop cost-saving options.

Table 1 below shows Webster student enrollment in 2010-2011 by race/ethnicity and special populations. According to ESE data (not shown in table), the percentage enrollments in all categories have been relatively stable since 2007, except for the previously cited 27 percent increase in the low-income population, and a slight (3 percent) decline in the white population. The special education enrollment of 17.1 percent in 2010-2011 was close to the statewide proportion in special education of 17.0 percent.

Table 1: 2010-11 Webster Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total	Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total
African-American	95	5.0	First Language not English	132	7.0
Asian	14	0.7	Limited English Proficient	47	2.5
Hispanic or Latino	220	11.7	Low-income	983	52.2
Native American	13	0.7	Special Education	329	17.1
White	1,459	77.5	Free Lunch	877	46.6
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	2	0.1	Reduced-price lunch	106	5.6
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	79	4.2	Total enrollment	1,882	100.0

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Findings

Leadership and Governance

Though Webster was planning a reorganization of central office leadership roles and responsibilities, at the time of the review two director positions were vacant or had been filled as an interim position, leading to problems with communication and direction.

The superintendent told the review team that he was in his sixth year of service at the time of the review in April 2011. This was confirmed by other administrators and a review of the superintendent's personnel file. According to the superintendent, a planned reorganization of the district's central office was to result in the following full-time positions: superintendent, assistant to the superintendent for business, director of curriculum and instruction, director of student support services, kindergarten through grade 8 coordinator of reading, and director of adult and community education.

In an interview with the review team the superintendent provided a history of central office administrative positions since his arrival in the district in 2006. The position of director of curriculum and instruction did not exist when the superintendent began in Webster. In 2008, the superintendent secured school committee approval of the directorship. Following a screening and interviewing process, the successful candidate declined the position because the salary was not competitive. As a result, the district hired a recently retired administrator part-time to oversee the curriculum. This administrator served for two years before retiring again in June 2010. In 2010-2011, the superintendent used funds that had been allocated for the part-time director's salary to underwrite a teacher-led curriculum mapping project. The superintendent went on to say that the directorship had been re-instituted in the 2011-2012 budget and increased to full-time. Finalists for the full-time position of director of curriculum and instruction were being interviewed during the site visit.

The superintendent also explained that when he arrived in the district, the director of student support services was primarily responsible for special education. In 2007, this position was expanded to include responsibility for English language learners, health, Title I, and Section 504 coordination. In 2010, the individual who had held the position for nine years resigned to accept an administrative position elsewhere. Because the resignation occurred in September, the superintendent hired a recently retired experienced administrator part-time for the remainder of this school year. He told the review team that the district was also in the process of interviewing finalist candidates for the full-time position of director of student support services for the 2011-2012 school year.

The superintendent stated that the assistant to the superintendent for business has served in the position for three years and was a former chair of the school committee.

The one-year position of kindergarten through grade 8 coordinator of reading was created in 2010-2011. The superintendent stated that the responsibilities for this position were expanded in the absence of a director of curriculum and instruction, adding that the position was excluded

from the teachers' bargaining unit. The superintendent intended to make the position districtwide and permanent for the 2011-2012 school year.

The incumbent director of adult and community education has served in the role for ten years. The superintendent stated that drawing upon her previous business experience, she also facilitates district planning by participating in data gathering and goal-setting.

In interviews, other members of the leadership team and school committee members provided a similar history of district-level administrative positions, and the review team's examination of personnel files confirmed the chronology.

The superintendent told the review team that in 2010-2011 most central office administrators had assumed duties and responsibilities beyond those typically assigned because the district was without a director of curriculum and instruction and had only a part-time director of student support services. He went on to say that his own duties and responsibilities for curriculum and instruction and professional development had expanded. In interviews, other central office leaders and school committee members also stated that central office administrators had assumed additional duties because critical administrative positions were unfilled or part-time.

Pending the full implementation of the district administrative reorganization plan, there had been, at the time of the review, limited direction, supervision, and communication in some critical areas of the school system. The school committee and the superintendent recognized that they could not continue to have part-time and interim personnel assuming the roles and responsibilities of full-time district-level administrators. The district required a full and adequate leadership team to move the school system forward.

Although the district has a three-year improvement plan, many stakeholder groups were not directly involved in the development of the plan, and interviewees other than administrators and school committee members were not aware of its contents. Status reports on the accomplishment of the goals in the plan were not regularly scheduled.

The Webster Public Schools District Improvement Plan (DIP) for fiscal years 2011-2013 establishes five goals: The first is to design and implement programs to improve MCAS test scores in all subject areas, at all grades, and for all student subgroups. The second is to increase revenues available by pursuing federal, state, local, and foundation funding. The third is to expand and improve the educational facilities including the buildings, equipment, and technology available to students of the Webster Public Schools. The fourth is to work closely with the director of curriculum and instruction to create and put in place a process and structure to continually review and renew the curriculum of the Webster Public Schools. The fifth goal is to improve outreach to the community by expanding partnerships with school parents, the business community, and other town departments. The format for the DIP consists of goals, sometimes with specific objectives, indicators of success, and strategies with action steps, persons responsible, and related professional development. The DIP also specifies the district standard(s) aligned with each of the five goals.

The DIP incorporates the district's mission statement and includes a data summary, analysis of student and subgroup achievement in core subjects, progress reports on the district goals for the two prior years, professional development plans, and an updated teacher induction and mentor program description.

When asked about the process for developing the DIP, the superintendent stated that the director of adult and community education prepared a draft with advice from central office administrators and the three principals. The superintendent stated that he gave this responsibility to the director of adult and community education because she is highly experienced in writing goals and developing action plans from her prior career in business. The superintendent told the review team that he reviewed and revised the draft DIP and presented it to the school committee. The school committee subsequently reviewed and approved it. The superintendent said that he then sent an email to staff informing them that the DIP was accessible on the district website. Central office administrators and the principals confirmed that the director of adult and community education supervised the preparation of the plan, and that they provided comments and recommendations during the development. In interviews, school committee members confirmed that they received, reviewed, and approved the DIP.

According to the superintendent and the principals, in 2010-2011 principals prepared their School Improvement Plans (SIPs) with the participation of their school councils, shared them with the administrative council, consisting of central office administrators and principals, and presented them to the school committee during the months of December and January. The superintendent told the review team that the DIP was prepared and presented to the school committee close to the end of the 2010-2011 school year, months after the SIPs had been prepared and presented. Administrators confirmed that the SIPs were prepared before the development of the DIP. This is not the typical sequence, since SIPs are based in part on the goals in the DIP. Administrators told the review team that the process would be re-aligned in 2011-2012 to ensure that the DIP is reviewed and approved before the SIPs are developed.

In interviews with teachers' association representatives and groups of teachers, the majority indicated that they were unaware of the DIP. Some recalled receiving an email from the superintendent informing them that it was accessible on the district website. They added that they were not invited to participate in the development of the DIP.

The superintendent said that he has occasionally provided the school committee with oral status reports on the accomplishment of the district plan goals. School committee members and the central office administrators concurred with this statement. Teachers' association representatives interviewed and teachers in focus groups said they had no knowledge of status reports on DIP goals.

Although the district has a well-formatted and documented 2011-2013 DIP which integrates data, the process for preparing it involved only district administrators. According to administrators, organizations and groups such as the teachers' association, the business community, parents, and partners did not participate in the development of the DIP, and

interviewees other than administrators and school committee members displayed limited understanding of district goals, initiatives, and direction. The direct involvement of a wide selection of stakeholders was a missing component of the planning process. Educational leaders must work collaboratively with stakeholders in order to garner support for district initiatives, programs, and budgets. It is difficult to realize DIP goals without the understanding and support of all constituent groups.

The district has some fully functioning systems and some partially functioning systems needing further development, including curriculum development, professional development, assessment, and student support services. With few exceptions, district systems are not linked and inter-related.

Throughout the review, interviewees expressed concern that some district systems were not completely developed and most were not closely connected. They did, however, give two examples of complete systems. The first was the district recruiting, interviewing, and hiring process. Leaders and teachers explained that vacancies are posted and advertised. Completed applications are sent to the central office and forwarded to the appropriate principal. The principal then reviews the applications and selects and interviews candidates, often with the participation of some faculty members and parents. The principal completes reference checks and makes a recommendation to the superintendent. The superintendent meets with the recommended candidate, informs the candidate about district qualities and expectations, and offers the candidate a contract, subject to the successful completion of a Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) check.

The process for development of the annual school department budget was another example of a complete system cited by interviewees. They said that principals and directors prepare their budgets based upon the needs in their schools or areas of responsibility. The budget proposals are then submitted to the assistant to the superintendent for business, who compiles the proposed budget requests and develops a preliminary budget. Upon receipt of a budget guideline from the town administrator, the superintendent meets with the administrative council to review the budget requests, and they collectively make any reductions required to meet the target. Next, the superintendent presents the proposed annual budget to the school committee. This presentation at a school committee meeting is followed by school committee budget review sessions and an annual public hearing on the budget. Finally, the budget adopted by the school committee is presented at the annual Town Meeting.

Leaders also cited several examples of systems partially in place and, in some cases, needing increased direction. Curriculum development and review was one example. Interviewees stated that there was a major focus on systemwide curriculum mapping in 2010-2011. This was evident from documents examined by the review team. However, the district was without a director of curriculum and instruction to lead the mapping in 2010-2011 (see first Leadership and Governance finding above), and interviewees were uncertain about what would come next in this critical area. They also expressed concern about curriculum articulation in the district, especially vertical articulation.

Professional development was another system described by interviewees as partially in place. The main focus of professional development programs in 2010-2011 was the district curriculum mapping initiative. Leaders and teachers stated that professional development programs were determined by administrators without teacher participation. In addition, teachers' association representatives stated that the school committee and the superintendent had yet to comply with item 8 in the memorandum of agreement between the Webster Educators' Association and the Webster School Committee agreed to on September 28, 2010, which amended the collective bargaining agreement to add a Section 22-2 stating, "A committee shall be established consisting of representatives of the Association and the Administration to discuss and plan professional development programs, provided that final discussions regarding such programs shall be at the discretion of the Superintendent. Such committee shall also develop a method to issue and document professional development points earned by teachers through the school professional development program." According to interviewees, the school-based and teacher-based components of the district professional development program were not fully in place, and the program was incomplete.

Assessment was a third system described by interviewees as partially in place and in need of attention. Administrators and teachers said that more work was needed to develop common assessments, common unit tests, and benchmark assessments. In addition, administrators told the review team that there was a need to train teachers to analyze assessment results and to use this information to modify teaching techniques and strategies for the purpose of improving student achievement. The superintendent said that that he had directed the principals "to break down the classroom walls" to monitor assessment and instruction. Furthermore, interviewees stated that there was a need for the new director of curriculum and instruction to develop a plan to tie assessment to the curriculum.

Student support services constituted a fourth area that interviewees indicated needed improvement. Teachers and leaders commented about there being limited financial resources and staff to address the needs of special education students, English language learners, and low-income students. Interviewees told the review team that the schools currently had full-time and part-time teaching associates to assist in the classrooms and serve as substitutes for absent teachers. Based upon 2011-2012 budget projections at the time of the review, the superintendent stated that it was likely that a number of teaching associate positions would be eliminated. In addition, teachers told the review team that they did not have common planning time to meet with specialists to discuss concerns about individual students, concerns, for example, about students who act out. Administrators and teachers told the review team that the number of specialty staff such as social workers, school psychologists, and school adjustment counselors was inadequate. Interviewees added that there were few community outreach programs for individuals and families in need.

Administrators, teachers' association representatives, and teachers in focus groups often commented about a "disconnect" in the school system and the need to "tie things together." Fragmented and incomplete systems and lack of explicit communication about the relationships

among district systems have caused confusion and uncertainty and reduced the efficiency and effectiveness of the staff.

Curriculum and Instruction

Webster's curriculum was in development at the time of the review.

At the time of the review Webster was developing curriculum maps for ELA, mathematics, and science in kindergarten through grade 6, and for social studies in kindergarten through grade 12. The district was revising its curriculum map for science in grades 7 through 12. The curriculum maps for ELA and mathematics in grades 7 through 12 have been completed and are revised annually during the summer.

In a memorandum to the review team dated April 2, 2011, the superintendent described curriculum development in Webster since 2006. According to the memorandum, in the absence of a central process, the principals were responsible for curriculum development in their schools, assisted by literacy coaches, grade level coordinators, department heads, and the director of student support services. The memorandum stated that teams of teachers also reviewed areas of the curriculum during summer workshops funded annually by the school committee. The memorandum went on to state that textbooks served as the curriculum in certain disciplines at some grade levels and in some high school courses, and that the district selected textbooks that correspond with the state frameworks. According to the superintendent's memorandum, the district's approach to early literacy was based directly on the precepts of the Reading First program.

According to the superintendent's memorandum and interviews with central office administrators and principals, the district created the position of director of curriculum and instruction in 2008 but was unable to hire the selected candidate because the budgeted salary was not competitive. The superintendent and school committee made the position part-time to enhance the salary, and the district engaged a part-time director who served from 2008 until retirement in 2010. According to the superintendent's memorandum and interviews with principals and teachers, during this two-year term of service the part-time director helped the schools develop improvement and restructuring plans, and led a review and selection process resulting in the adoption of the Reading Street program in grades 1 through 6.

Principals and teachers told the review team that this selection process was inclusive and thorough, resulting in a single core program to replace *Open Court* in grades 1 through 3 and what was described as a dated Houghton Mifflin program in grades 4 through 6. There had been discontinuity and inconsistencies with the two reading series: for example, not all teachers used reading workshop techniques. The principals told the review team that the new core program ensured that all of these grades used a standardized approach.

According to the superintendent's memorandum and interviews with administrators and teachers, when the incumbent director of curriculum and instruction retired, the district used the budgeted

salary to underwrite a curriculum mapping project conducted by a committee composed of teachers representing most grade levels and disciplines, assisted by a consultant. Teachers serving on the committee were paid a stipend, and other teachers were compensated for curriculum work performed outside of the school day. In 2010-2011 the district devoted five full professional development days, and nine early release time professional development days to curriculum mapping.

In an interview with the review team, teachers on the mapping project committee described changes in the scope, focus, and nature of the project at mid-year. Kindergarten through grade 6 teachers had been documenting daily what was taught in ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies, but the number of disciplines proved to be too ambitious, and the standards addressed too numerous. In addition the retrospective point of view restricted opportunities to re-sequence the content and skills. Principals and central office administrators worked with the mapping committee and consultant to redefine the project. They decided to increase the unit of time to monthly; focus only on mathematics, a priority area according to district assessment results (see Table C4 in Appendix C); consolidate the standards by identifying power standards; and adopt a future rather than retrospective point of view. The mapping project committee and district administrators also converted the project in grades 7 through 12 from development of new maps to revision of existing maps in ELA, mathematics, and science.

In addition to power standards, the template for the maps contains entries for statements of what students will know (content) and be able to do (skills), assessments, key instructional experiences, and resources. The review team examined 14 large binders containing the maps that had been created as of the time of the review. The team found diary maps in ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies for kindergarten through grade 6 encompassing September through December; and mathematics maps for kindergarten through grade 6 encompassing January through April. The review team also found the revisions made to the grades 7 through 12 curriculum maps in ELA, mathematics, and science encompassing September through April.

In interviews with the review team, mapping project committee members and other teachers stated that the project identified gaps, redundancies, and inconsistencies in the taught curriculum. They added that it was empowering work for teachers. The district raised the salary for the director of curriculum and instruction and had the intention of filling the position full-time for the 2011-2012 school year. Central office administrators and principals told the review team that the maps would provide useful baseline information for the new director.

At the time of the review, Webster did not have a fully documented curriculum aligned to the state curriculum frameworks and the MCAS performance level descriptions, and aligned vertically between grades and horizontally across classrooms of the same grade level and sections of the same course. The district was documenting the curriculum without a timeline for completion or a clearly established procedure for curriculum development and revision. Under conditions existing at the time of the review, it was difficult to ensure that Webster students were receiving appropriate instruction based on the standards in the state frameworks, as well as being

difficult to improve proficiency rates, interpret the results of student and programmatic assessments, hold teachers accountable, or identify professional development needs.

Teachers work to create a respectful environment and maximize classroom time, and they collaborate with available tutors and teaching associates to enhance student learning.

The review team observed instruction in 61 district classrooms: 7 at the elementary level in kindergarten through grade 2; 18 at the middle school level in grades 3 through 6; 16 at the junior high school level in grades 7 and 8; and 20 at the high school level in grades 9 through 12. These classes included 6 ELA classes and 1 mathematics class at the elementary level; 4 ELA, 6 mathematics, 5 science, and 3 social studies classes at the middle school level; 6 ELA, 6 mathematics, 1 science, 1 social studies, and 2 music classes at the junior high school level; and 6 ELA, 7 mathematics, 3 science, 2 social studies and 2 foreign languages classes at the high school level. Four of the observed classes were special education classes.

Fifty-eight observations ranged between 20 and 30 minutes, and three observations were from 40 to 60 minutes, or the full length of the lesson observed. Observers used a standard record form including 14 characteristics of effective instruction and learning grouped under three categories: Organization of the Classroom, Instructional Design and Delivery: General, and Instructional Design and Delivery: Higher-Order Thinking. Observers rated the prevalence of these characteristics on a three-point scale indicating Solid Evidence, Partial Evidence, or No Evidence.

Under the category of Organization of the Classroom, the review team found solid evidence of a classroom climate characterized by respectful behaviors, routines, tone and discourse in 86 percent of elementary school, 95 percent of middle school, 81 percent of junior high school, and 80 percent of high school classes observed. Webster teachers were encouraging and courteous. Many called their students “sir” or “miss” and offered specific praise to reinforce their work habits and accomplishments. Almost all teachers handled off-task behavior unobtrusively, without personalizing. Many responded empathetically and compassionately to students. For example, a middle school teacher apologized to students who had their hands raised for a long time, and a high school teacher told a student who had disclosed a significant family difficulty that she admired his constant cheerfulness under the circumstances. In April, the classroom routines appeared to be thoroughly engrained, and most students were highly self-regulating. This was especially evident in generally smooth and rapid transitions. In these ways, teachers set the stage for an environment conducive to learning.

Almost all teachers gave an instructional purpose orally at the beginning of the lesson and referred to it from time to time—that is a good practice; additionally, in junior high school classes, lesson objectives were posted or written on the board. In most classes, the instructional goals were highly correlated with the state frameworks.

With respect to another characteristic under the category of Organization of the Classroom, observers found solid evidence that available class time was maximized for learning in 71 percent of elementary school, 61 percent of middle school, 63 percent of junior high school, and

60 percent of high school classes observed. Teachers preserved instructional time by employing effective and efficient routines for coordinating student movement and distributing and collecting materials. For example, in one middle school class, the teacher called on five students in rapid succession to explain the rules for handing in homework and securing work folders in order to remind the class of her expectations. In several elementary school classes teachers provided extension activities as students finished their assignments, maximizing the use of instructional time and creating a sense of urgency.

There were at least two adults in 54 percent of the classes observed, and three or more adults in 16 percent of the classes observed. The adult-to-student ratio was actually more advantageous than was observed, since all of the classroom assistants at the middle school work a half-day morning schedule, and some of the review team's middle school observations occurred in the afternoon. In most of the observed classes, all of the adults worked directly with students in an instructional role.

Special education tutors and teaching associates constituted most of the additional staff. Administrators described teaching associates as certified teachers who plan and deliver instruction in cooperation with classroom teachers, without relying on them for guidance and direction. The teaching associates also served as substitute teachers, providing continuity of instruction. Principals told the review team that teaching associates helped to differentiate instruction in Webster classrooms. One principal stated and the others agreed that fluid grouping practices were most evident in classes with teaching associates. They added that there would likely be a significant reduction in teaching associates in the fiscal year 2012 budget.

In all of these ways—fostering a climate conducive to learning, relating learning to a stated instructional purpose, employing effective and efficient routines to maximize learning time, and using available tutors and teaching associates to provide differentiation and additional instruction as well as continuity when the teacher is absent—teachers lay the groundwork for the delivery of high-quality instruction.

Webster has a common definition of high-quality instruction, but the quality of instruction observed by the review team varied widely from class to class within a school, and from school to school within the district.

In separate interviews with the review team, central office administrators, principals, department heads, and instructional coaches defined high-quality instruction as aligned with the standards, engaging, rigorous, and student-centered.

Principals told the review team that improving the quality of instruction was an emphasis of the district's mandatory professional development program. According to documentation and interviews with administrators and teachers, Webster offers research-based trainings to improve instruction, including a series that had recently been given through Research for Better Teaching (RBT). Principals and assistant principals told the review team that they inform teachers of the district's instructional expectations in faculty meetings, monitor their instruction through formal and informal observations, and make suggestions and recommendations for improvement. That

said, they added that they lacked time for follow-up with struggling teachers because they had high numbers of evaluations to perform and many competing responsibilities. In fact, the review team found few specific recommendations for improving instruction in a sample of teacher evaluations.

In focus groups, teachers demonstrated an understanding of the essential components of the district's definition of high-quality instruction, although they sometimes used synonymous language, such as "let the students do the work" for student-centered, and "hard work they can do" for rigor. Elementary and middle school teachers told the review team that they provided for individual differences by grouping and re-grouping students according to their strengths and needs, and providing tiered instruction. Principals told the review team that tiered instruction was more common in reading than in mathematics and more prevalent in grades 1 through 6 than in other grades.

Central office administrators and principals told the review team that although recently trained teachers delivered more consistently high-quality instruction, the district's trainings and supervision had not changed the practices of veteran teachers. One administrator commented, and the others agreed, that it takes a long time to change deeply embedded instructional habits. As a result, they said that the quality of instruction varied from class to class, even in the same school. In classroom observations, the review team found that instructional quality varied most significantly in student-centeredness and rigor.

To return briefly to the category of Organization of the Classroom, the subject of the previous finding: although class time was maximized for learning in most of the junior high school and high school classes observed, the review team noted several instances where it was not. The team observed several high school teachers ending their 60-minute classes with 5 to 7 minutes remaining. The students milled about chatting with each other as the teachers made entries on the computer or readied materials for other classes. In other junior high and high school classes observed the pace lagged, reducing the opportunity for new learning. For example, in one high school class, the teacher was poorly prepared, showing unfamiliarity with materials and making mistakes revealing a lack of familiarity with the content. The students detected and corrected some of the teacher's errors.

Certain characteristics of highly effective instructional design and delivery, from the categories relating to Instructional Design and Delivery: General and Instructional Design and Delivery: Higher-Order Thinking, were not prevalent in the classes observed by the review team. For example, observers found solid evidence of instructional strategies linking concepts to students' prior knowledge in 43 percent of elementary school, 55 percent of middle school, 56 percent of junior high school, and 58 percent of high school classes observed. In certain junior high and high school classes observed by the team, teachers did introduce a new concept by explicitly connecting it to prior learning. Although this was more common in mathematics classes, an elementary teacher introduced a science lesson on weather by asking students what they already knew about the relationship of the earth to the sun and temperature.

The review team saw solid evidence of instruction aligned with students' developmental levels in 57 percent of elementary school, 56 percent of middle school, and 55 percent of high school classes observed. This alignment was solidly evident in only 31 percent of junior high school classes. Tiered instruction was more common in the grade 1 through 6 ELA classes observed by the team, but the team also saw some evidence of tiered instruction in some grade 1 through 6 math classes, especially in grade 6.

While observers found solid evidence of instruction including a range of techniques in 86 percent of elementary school classes, this characteristic was solidly evident in only 58 percent of middle school and 50 percent of high school classes. Instruction including a range of techniques was not solidly evident in any of the junior high school classes observed. Much of the instruction in high school classes observed was large-group. Large-group instruction at all levels tended to be teacher-dominant, with teachers posing concrete, factual questions, and students answering with short, often unelaborated responses. Teachers usually accepted these incomplete responses, furnishing the missing details themselves.

Observers saw very few instances of teachers promoting higher order thinking in the classes observed. The review team saw solid evidence of students articulating their thinking and reasoning in only 29 percent of elementary school, 39 percent of middle school, 31 percent of junior high school and 35 percent of high school classes observed. In an elementary class, the teacher asked students to turn and tell a friend which animal they had chosen to write about, and two reasons for the choice. In a middle school ELA class, the teacher asked students to explain why a poet selected certain words, what these words denoted and connoted, and what other words might fit the context. Generally, however, there were few opportunities for students to explain their thinking and reasoning in the classes observed.

Observers saw solid evidence of students inquiring, exploring, or problem solving together, in pairs or in small groups, in only 42 percent of elementary school, 50 percent of middle school, 13 percent of junior high school, and 5 percent of high school classes observed. In a high school science class, the teacher divided students into groups of three or four to predict the probable outcome of an experiment based on the data they had already developed. Each group presented to the others and responded to questions. This class was exceptional, since group problem-solving was rare in classes observed by the review team.

The review team saw solid evidence of teachers providing opportunities for students to apply new knowledge in only 14 percent of elementary school classes, 39 percent of middle school classes, 31 percent of junior high school classes, and 35 percent of high school classes observed. In a middle school class, the teacher asked students to compare the area of the fields at Fenway Park and Yankee Stadium to determine which was greater, using the formula they had just learned. In a high school class the teacher asked students to identify which of two poems was a sonnet, according to the characteristics they had discussed. But such opportunities were uncommon in the classes observed.

According to the review team's classroom observations, instruction was not consistently rigorous, and the instructional methods used did not always foster active student-centered learning or higher-order thinking. The district was beginning to provide tiered instruction based on students' strengths and needs, but this was not standard practice. Some teachers provided high-quality instruction, but this was not the norm. Without more targeted professional development and increased and active teacher supervision to help all teachers meet Webster's clearly articulated instructional expectations, it will be difficult to improve student growth and increase proficiency rates.

Webster has limited infrastructure for curriculum development and renewal. Teachers have little common planning time, and some curriculum support roles have been eliminated, or expanded to include more responsibilities.

Webster has limited personnel and time for curriculum development and revision. Administrators told the review team that curriculum mapping was a multi-step process. Upon the completion of the monthly maps in each discipline, the district had to develop consensus maps based on teachers' comments and recommendations. In interviews with the review team, central office administrators expressed concern that with the restoration of the director of curriculum and instruction position in fiscal year 2012, there might not be sufficient funds to continue curriculum mapping for another year since the mapping project was partially underwritten with the salary savings from the unfilled director's position.

Webster has eliminated, consolidated, or broadened many curriculum-related positions. For example, the district eliminated the stipends for grade level coordinators in kindergarten through grade 2 from the fiscal year 2010 budget, and it eliminated stipends for grade level coordinators in grades 3 through 6 from the fiscal year 2011 budget. Principals told the review team that at a low cost⁷ coordinators helped to determine the taught curriculum and ensured consistency from class to class at a grade level, as well as articulation from grade to grade, both within a school and between schools.

Other positions are or have become more encompassing. According to documentation, upon the retirement of the incumbent, the district eliminated the position of kindergarten through grade 2 elementary reading specialist and increased the role of the grade 3 through 6 reading specialist to kindergarten through grade 8, enhancing the title to "kindergarten through grade 8 reading coordinator." The kindergarten through grade 6 and grade 7 through 12 instructional coaches have multi-disciplinary and multi-grade responsibilities. In interviews, they told the review team that it was a challenge to know the curriculum of every discipline within such broad grade spans.

According to interviews with teachers and principals and a review of schedules, teachers have limited common planning time at a grade level or within a subject area. For example, the elementary and middle school principals told the review team that they schedule grade level teachers' preparation periods at the same time, but that these times are reserved for the teachers' personal use according to the collective bargaining agreement. Common planning time at the

⁷ According to the fiscal year 2011 budget, about fifteen thousand dollars total.

elementary and middle schools is limited to one or two designated periods each week when teaching associates are available to free classroom teachers, and after-school grade level meetings once a month. The elementary and middle school principals also devote their monthly after-school faculty meetings to curriculum development.

Seventh and eighth grade teachers have no common planning time but meet weekly after school with the grade 7 through 12 instructional coach. High school teachers attend monthly department meetings but have no common planning time.

Teachers from different schools have little time to meet across grade levels; teachers and administrators said that during the full-day and release time professional development days insufficient time was allocated for such collaboration. At the time of the review, Webster was without many resources needed for curriculum development and revision. There were few curriculum support positions, and teachers had limited time for joint planning and collaboration within and across grade levels and subject areas. These resources are important ones for an articulated and integrated program.

Assessment

Webster has taken steps to develop an academic assessment system to provide data to assess and address student needs and to inform instructional changes.

The first goal in the DIP for 2011-2013 is to “design and implement programs to improve MCAS scores in all subjects, at all grades, and for all subgroups of students.” District leaders had begun exploring ways of accomplishing this goal. For example, the district adopted AIMSweb, a web-based assessment program administered three times annually. Used initially to determine English language arts proficiency, it was expanded to assess mathematics proficiency in grades 7 through 12 in 2010-2011. The three benchmark periods are fall, winter, and spring. According to administrators, teachers collect their own data and share it with each other on data walls. In interviews, administrators and teachers told the review team that AIMSweb is predictive of MCAS test performance. With AIMSweb, student progress is monitored and classified on a continuum. Teachers told the review team that AIMSweb had replaced the Dynamic Indicators of Early Learning Skills (DIBELS) for progress monitoring. Interviewees informed the review team of assessment initiatives by some teachers at certain grade levels. For example, administrators and teachers told the review team that middle school teachers were beginning to administer common assessments developed collaboratively by teacher teams. According to the teachers, common assessments are used to assess mastery of particular concepts such as fractional parts or literal comprehension. The data from common assessments permits teachers to analyze student performance across grades following standards-based instruction. Some teachers said that they were beginning to make instructional changes, such as re-teaching, initiating interventions, and regrouping, to increase student proficiency. Teachers have also instituted a portfolio system through which students in grades 7 and 8 maintain their accumulated work

products. Teachers said that students were beginning to assess their own progress over the course of the year by using rubrics to evaluate their work.

According to teachers and administrators, teachers were improving their ability to analyze students' needs through such approaches as Examining Student Work (ESW). In interviews, teachers said that they examined student work to determine learning patterns and collaborated on best practices for addressing students' needs during professional development sessions. Teachers also said that they were learning to rate student progress with common rubrics developed collaboratively. Rubrics and examples of student work were posted in some of the classrooms and hallways of the elementary and middle schools.

Individual Student Problem-Solving Teams were a new initiative in the Webster Public Schools at the time of the review. According to administrators and teachers, these teams were organized to improve student performance when skill deficiencies are identified through assessment. The teams meet periodically to discuss the needs of students making unsatisfactory progress. Team members with various areas of expertise plan a path of success for students performing below standards. The problem-solving team also makes recommendations to teachers and parents for improving the performance of struggling students.

MCAS Generator is a web-based system used in the high school to generate MCAS-like practice questions. Teachers and administrators described "MCAS Day" as a designated time, although not the only time, when teachers generate MCAS-like questions to assess the proficiency of students before the actual MCAS testing period. Teachers stated that the results of these assessments predict MCAS test performance.

Although the review team did not find a consistent, districtwide system of assessments and teachers reported a lack of comprehensive data, teachers expressed satisfaction with what appears to be a growing consensus on the need to assess student performance regularly and the use of data to drive instruction. It is important for the Webster Public Schools to continue the development of an academic assessment system. Without a fully developed assessment system yielding a full set of assessment data for teachers across the district to analyze and use to improve instruction, the district is without a necessary tool for reaching its goal of improving MCAS scores in all subjects, at all grades, and for all subgroups.

Webster does not have a systematic procedure for collecting, disseminating, and analyzing multiple sources of data. Consequently, data-based decision-making is little used and decisions are based on factors other than data on student, teacher, and school needs.

From interviews and a review of documents it was evident to the review team that Webster used student performance data to create the goals in the DIP and that the schools used student performance data to design their SIPs. Although those responsible for designing the DIP and SIPs relied on the collection and analysis of MCAS test and other data to determine the goals for improvement, administrators told the review team that the district did not have a systemic procedure for collecting, disseminating, and analyzing multiple sources of data. Administrators said that the leadership team, augmented by instructional coaches, a psychologist, and teachers,

served as the district's data team, meeting every 4 to 6 weeks. Interviewees told the review team that because of not having systemic data-related procedures decisions were often based on subjective factors rather than objective indicators of student, teacher, and school needs such as student assessments, surveys, and other formal and informal indicators.

A teacher in a focus group asked, "Where is the data to back up all the changes being made in Webster?" For example, some years back a decision was made to house all grade 3 students in the middle school with the 4th, 5th, and 6th graders. When given an opportunity to explain the rationale for this decision, interviewees told the review team it was based on the adequacy and capacity of district facilities and budget provisions rather than research and data about the learning needs of eight- and nine-year-old children.

Administrators told the review team that the district intends to use data to support major changes in how students are educated and to determine whether teachers are highly qualified and adequately skilled. Teachers told the review team that they would like to receive regular, ongoing feedback on their instructional practices from administrators. They added that feedback provides useful data for improvement. According to interviewees, administrators engage in classroom walk-throughs from time to time, but teachers do not regularly receive feedback from them. Some administrators told the review team that other time-consuming duties prevented them from visiting classrooms more often and discussing instructional practices with teachers. In the absence of periodic formal and informal feedback, teachers said that they were uncertain how to improve. Some told the review team that they occasionally received helpful feedback and praised one principal for providing immediate comments and suggestions on Post-it notes. Other teachers interviewed by the review team said that it would be helpful if their lesson plans were reviewed and returned with comments. When they did not get feedback from a supervisor, teachers stated that they consulted with peers or sought the expertise of one of the instructional coaches.

According to administrators and teachers, data about teachers' professional strengths, preparedness, and proficiency is not used to assign teachers to classes composed of students with particular learning needs. In interviews, teachers and administrators all agreed that there is room for growth in the teaching staff and that data about teachers and students could help to improve instruction and learning. They also agreed that teachers' improvement goals should be developed based on the weaknesses and strengths identified in each teacher.

Because of the importance of analyzing student, teacher, and community needs to inform decisions about the curriculum, budget, facilities, materials, and personnel, data-based decision-making is a critical methodology for district and school leaders. Faculty and the larger community are more likely to support decisions substantiated by data. One interviewee stated, and others agreed, that data-based decisions facilitate the vertical articulation of district programs and services, integrating the three schools into a school system. Although both administrators and teachers indicated an interest in and openness to making more use of data in decision-making, aside from the use of data in developing the DIP and the SIPs data-based decision-making was not in evidence in the district.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The evaluations of the district’s principals and central administrators were timely, comprehensive, and instructive.

At the time of the review, the superintendent met annually with each principal to establish goals and four times throughout the school year to review their progress toward the accomplishment of the goals. As part of the process, the superintendent accompanied the principals on classroom walk-throughs to observe instruction. The principals told the team that he was closely involved with them and directive in driving them toward higher achievement by reviewing their efforts to improve student performance and requiring them to respond by identifying strategies for improvement in their schools. There was a professional development component to administrative team meetings in addition to the operational aspect. Research-based discussions and readings were used to enhance and improve principals’ practice. At the time of the review, administrators were reading and discussing the research on 90/90/90 schools.⁸

The review team examined the superintendent’s evaluations of principals. The superintendent provided a written annual performance review that addressed each principal’s goals in a narrative. (The district had one new principal, who had met and set goals with the superintendent.) Among the principals’ goals were improving MCAS scores, improving student instruction, and raising student achievement in English and mathematics. The superintendent’s evaluations were informative, instructive, and contained commendations as well as specific recommendations for improvement, including professional development. The superintendent referred to the classroom walk-throughs in the evaluations and discussed what was observed. For example, he noted that in some classrooms teachers’ low-level questions required only recall, and that there was little or no student involvement. The superintendent provided an RBT course on skillful leadership to help principals increase the capabilities of average teachers. He told the review team that he expected principals to deal with underperforming staff and to improve and refine their own supervisory skills.

Principals’ evaluations were aligned with the District Improvement Plan and partially aligned with the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership.⁹ It was evident from an examination of evaluations by the review team that each principal was held to a high standard of performance. In interviews, and through an examination of their personnel files, the team found that central office administrators also received timely and comprehensive evaluations.

In the judgment of the review team, the district’s administrative evaluations were comprehensive and thorough and provided explicit recommendations for further growth. Administrators need

⁸ For information about “90/90/90 schools”—broadly speaking, schools that have significant numbers of low-income students and students from racial and ethnic minorities and show successful academic performance—see [“High Performance in High Poverty Schools: 90/90/90 and Beyond.”](#) by Douglas Reeves.

⁹ The Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership accompanied the regulations on evaluation of teachers and administrators (at 603 CMR 35.00) that were in effect at the time of the review; on June 28, 2011, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted to substitute a new set of regulations on the evaluation of educators.

and deserve support and direction to be highly effective, and the superintendent provided this support and direction.

The district's evaluation procedure was not being consistently implemented, teachers were not being evaluated as required, and the procedure was not in compliance with the state requirement for a formal evaluation of professional status teachers at least once every two years.

Under Mass. Gen. Laws c. 71, s. 38, all teachers without professional status are to be evaluated at least annually and all teachers with professional status at least once every two years. The review team found the district to have an evaluation process entitled *Teacher Performance Assessment Program 2007*. This program meets the requirement for the annual evaluation of non-professional-status teachers, but it does not meet the requirement for the biennial evaluation of professional status teachers. Webster has a three-year evaluation cycle for professional status teachers, with a formal evaluation occurring during the third year of the cycle.

Track I of the *Teacher Performance Assessment Program 2007* is the cycle for teachers without professional status: administrators conduct a minimum of six visits annually, defined as walk-throughs, in the classrooms of non-professional-status teachers. Performance conferences are held to address any areas in need of improvement and the teacher receives a final formal assessment report. Track II is the three-year cycle for professional status teachers: in year one, teachers develop a three-year professional development plan including student achievement goals and benchmarks based on an analysis of student achievement data. Teachers identify teaching practices needed to achieve the goals and professional development goals to enhance the identified teaching practices. In each year of the cycle, teachers track their progress toward the student achievement goals and professional development goals. In year three, the evaluator prepares a formal written assessment based on the teacher's progress report, classroom observations, and work products gathered during the three-year cycle. Track III (Focused Assistance) consists of a process for working with professional status teachers not meeting standards; it is used to improve teachers' performance or counsel them out.

When asked by the review team about the evaluation process, teachers said that they did not receive regular feedback from administrators. According to the teachers, when the teacher evaluation program was instituted, professional status teachers were assigned to either year one or year two of the cycle in order to stagger the evaluators' caseloads. Teachers placed initially on year two said that they had only two years to fulfill three-year goals and lost confidence in the process. Most teachers said that they did not receive a written evaluation in year three as required. The evaluation system was in its fourth year at the time of the review and according to the teachers, there had been little adherence to it. One teacher said that he had not been evaluated in seven years.

Teachers' association representatives told the review team that there was no monitoring system to ensure that teacher evaluations are completed. Administrators told the review team that the

process was demanding. They added that it was difficult to visit classrooms frequently and complete the evaluations given their other responsibilities.

The review team examined a random sample of 31 teacher personnel files to determine the timeliness and quality of teachers' evaluations. In the sample, the review team found that 12 teachers had timely evaluations, 13 had evaluations that were not timely, and 6 teachers had not been evaluated. For the 13 teachers whose evaluations were not timely, the year of the most current evaluation follows: 2008 (one), 2007 (two), 2006 (three), 2005 (five) and 2001 (two). Of the 12 timely evaluations 5 were aligned with the Principles of Effective Teaching,¹⁰ and 10 were informative, with comments such as students were interested and focused; good momentum; and helps students understand. Nine were instructive with comments such as improve organization of classroom; move about the classroom; and check-in with students. Two evaluations contained recommendations for further professional development on classroom management strategies and reading strategies. According to a review of the files, all 31 teachers were appropriately certified.

To sum up, the evaluation system in effect at the time of the review was not in compliance with state requirements for evaluation of professional status teachers every two years; there was also little adherence to the system, which administrators found it difficult to carry out, and no monitoring process to ensure evaluations were completed. The majority of teachers whose personnel files were reviewed had not received evaluations when required; most of those with out-of-date evaluations had evaluations dating back six years or more; and 6 of 31 teachers had never been evaluated. Without a system that is used to evaluate all teachers in a timely, comprehensive, and instructive manner, administrators are not holding teachers accountable or using the principal means available to them of providing teachers with the guidance and direction needed to achieve high quality instruction.

The district's administrative team plans the district professional development program, but there is not a process for identifying and addressing the professional development needs of individual schools and teachers. There is no formal evaluation of the effectiveness of the district professional development program.

The professional development program is planned primarily by the district's central office administrative team, including the principals. The plan is a component of the DIP. According to central office administrators and a review of documents, the professional development program supports major district initiatives and is linked to DIP goals. The district does not have a formal professional development committee including teacher representatives. Teachers' association representatives told the review team that they had no role in determining the topics of the professional development program. Teachers interviewed by the review team said that they did not have a voice in decisions about professional development and went on to say that their

¹⁰ The Principles of Effective Teaching accompanied the regulations on evaluation of teachers and administrators (at 603 CMR 35.00) that were in effect at the time of the review; on June 28, 2011, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted to substitute a new set of regulations on the evaluation of educators.

individual professional development needs were not addressed. Principals told the review team that teacher and school professional development needs were discussed informally at faculty meetings and in ad hoc conversations, but that the professional development program was not structured to take into account school and teacher needs. Teachers are given the opportunity to take and be reimbursed for courses and workshops of their choosing with prior approval of the principal and superintendent.

Professional development time consists of five full days, nine early-release days, and two 75-minute extended day periods a month, with a weekly 47-minute extended day period at the high school. Common planning time is a challenge in the schools. Through interviews with principals and teachers and a review of the SIPs, the review team identified an unmet need for common planning time to map curriculum, develop common assessments, look at student work, and analyze assessment data in order to inform instruction.

Professional development topics for the 2010-2011 school year included kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum mapping; curriculum diaries; focus on number sense; using technology to differentiate math; category training; Tools of the Mind training for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers; examining student work; instructional study groups in mathematics for grade 2 through grade 7; launching and maintaining data teams; The Study of Teaching (RBT); and workshops on identifying power standards through the District and School Assistance Center (DSAC). The school committee regularly funds summer curriculum projects to review and revise areas of the curriculum at certain grade spans.

According to interviewees and a review of documents, although very few professional development offerings were school-specific, the Park Avenue Elementary School was working on developing a positive school culture and assisting teachers with discipline. In addition, as the result of a teacher-led initiative, the district provided professional development in ASSISTment, a web-based grade 4 through grade 10 mathematics tutoring program created by Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

The review team did not see written evaluations of professional development in the district and was told in interviews that the district does not formally evaluate the effectiveness of the professional development program. Administrators said that they solicit teachers' oral comments at staff meetings, and in casual and informal conversations.

Because professional development time is limited, decisions about the use of this time and the value of the professional development program offerings are critical to all stakeholders. By not establishing formal mechanisms for the professional development program to determine and respond to the professional development needs of schools and teachers and by not formally evaluating the program's effectiveness, the district is missing opportunities to increase the value of its professional development offerings. Without a needs assessment and evaluation Webster is unable to make data-driven decisions concerning the use of professional development time—in other words, unable to make the decisions that will most improve instructional practice and student achievement.

Student Support

In many years Webster’s four-year graduation rate has been substantially below the state rate; its annual dropout rate is higher than the state’s, and the dropout rate for its students with disabilities is especially high. The district had limited programs and services for students with behavioral and emotional problems or for struggling students, especially at the high school level, and resources and supports at the high school for students with disabilities were few.

Webster’s four-year graduation rate fluctuated over the period from 2006 to 2010, falling 10 percentage points or more below the state rate in 2006, 2008, and 2009, but in 2007 and 2010 coming approximately within a point or two of the state rate. Although the annual state dropout rate was lower in 2010 than in 2006, Webster’s was higher in 2010 than in 2006, at 5 percent compared to the state rate of 2.9 percent. See Table 2 below.

Table 2: Four-Year Graduation Rates and Annual Dropout Rates for Webster and State 2006-2010

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Four-year graduation rate					
Webster	70.8	79.6	70.6	66.9	80.0
State	79.9	80.9	81.2	81.5	82.1
Annual dropout rate					
Webster	4.4	4.3	6.2	4.4	5.0
State	3.3	3.8	3.4	2.9	2.9

Source: School/District Profiles

In 2010 the four-year graduation rate for Webster students receiving special education services was 31.6, compared to 64.0 for students receiving special education services statewide; 26.3 percent of Webster students with disabilities had dropped out over those four years, compared with 14.7 percent of students in this subgroup across the state.

In interviews with the review team teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors agreed that the course and programmatic offerings for students receiving special education services were limited at the high school level. According to administrators, most students with disabilities at the high school are enrolled in inclusion classes¹¹; however, few teachers had received training in differentiated instruction or co-teaching. According to interviewees, there were only two teachers for students with disabilities serving the entire high school, an inadequate number, and a wider spectrum of services than just inclusion was needed. According to teachers interviewed by

¹¹ ESE data for 2010 shows 71.3 percent of all Webster students with disabilities in full inclusion (inside the general education classroom 80 percent or more of the time), as compared to 57.0 percent of students with disabilities statewide.

the review team, the high school culture was a contributing factor in students dropping out. Teachers told the review team that discipline was ineffective and the school lacked appropriate programs for students in crisis, many of whom had special needs. They described fights, open use of drugs in school, and disrespect for teachers, with a lack of appropriate consequences. As a result, they said, the atmosphere in the school was toxic and there were morale problems among the staff and little pride in the school among students. One teacher told the review team, and others agreed, that many students in crisis, with such problems as hunger, homelessness, lack of warm clothing, and family crises, became disruptive. The teacher said that what they needed was beefed-up social services and professional case workers—not just weak disciplinary measures.

Administrators and teachers stated that the elimination of practical and vocational courses such as carpentry, graphic arts, and metalwork had contributed to the dropout rate. Interviewees cited fiscal constraints as the reason for the decreasing programmatic options and said that school staff were limited in what they could offer students who were dropping out. According to administrators, there were no town-based agencies to support the district in addressing the needs of students with emotional and behavioral problems. Some services are available in Worcester, but this is problematic because many families rely upon the limited public transportation. In 2010-2011, Webster contracted with two external agencies to increase services for students with emotional and behavioral problems, including having a full-time social worker/case manager at the elementary school level to provide support services for students enrolled in a specialized program for students having difficulty with self-regulation.

At the time of the review, Webster had recently instituted internal programs at different levels to address the needs of students with social-emotional problems. Through the STAR and Advocacy programs, these students have access to a supportive environment where they receive both emotional and academic support, for varying amounts of time. Program staff monitor the students and continue to provide them direct instruction and counseling once they return to their classrooms. Both programs serve regular and special education students, and according to interviewees hold promise for reducing the very high number of suspensions. In 2010 the number of incidents per 100 students resulting in out-of-school suspensions was 53.6 in Webster compared to 16.4 in Greenfield, determined by ESE in 2011 to be a community comparable to Webster, and 12.7 in the state.¹² According to administrators, the after-school PASS program addresses issues of tardiness and provides academic support and MCAS tutoring. Administrators told the review team that while all of these programs are promising, many needy students are still unserved or underserved.

Webster has had low graduation and high dropout rates, especially for students receiving special education services. The number of district programs and services has diminished, especially at the high school, leading to too many students leaving the school system without the prerequisites for further education or employment, which puts their futures at risk.

¹² See District Analysis and Review Tool (DART) for Districts for Webster, Student Support tab, at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/default.html>. For a description of the method for determining comparable districts, see p. 23 of the DART User Guide, also available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/default.html>.

At the time of the review Webster provided an insufficient number of hours of English language instruction and did not yet have a complete ESL curriculum.

From 2008-2010, except in ELA in 2010, ELL students in Webster lagged substantially behind ELL students across the state in achievement as measured by the MCAS, both in terms of proficiency rates (the percentages scoring Proficient or Advanced) and in terms of the Composite Performance Index or CPI (in which 100 indicates proficiency). There was, however, improvement in both subjects in 2010. See Table 3.

**Table 3: Proficiency Rates and CPIs for English Language Learners (ELLs)
Webster and State
2008-2010**

	2008		2009		2010	
	% Prof/Adv.	CPI	% Prof/Adv.	CPI	% Prof/Adv.	CPI
ELA						
Webster	11	43.4	0	38.2	27	65.9
State	16	54.1	19	57.2	22	59.8
Mathematics						
Webster	5	31.8	0	26.5	18	46.6
State	21	51.9	22	53.1	24	56.2

% Prof/Adv refers to the MCAS proficiency rate (the percentage of tested students scoring Proficient or Advanced)

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

In 2010-2011 only 2.6 licensed ESL teachers¹³ served a population of 47 ELL students¹⁴ in the three schools. Administrators told the review team that these teachers were unable to provide the hours of ESL instruction by a licensed ESL teacher recommended by the state. ESL teachers interviewed by the review team said that there were not enough hours in the school day for 2.6 staff members to serve the entire district. They added that as a result, many ELL students did not receive the hours of ESL instruction they needed. The district budget was insufficient to underwrite the salary of the third ESL teacher needed in order for the district to follow state recommendations for instruction time for ELL students.

According to administrators and teachers, two ESL teachers had been developing an ESL curriculum aligned with the English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes (ELPBO). They had completed Listening in kindergarten through grade 12 and Reading in kindergarten through grade 8, and were close to completing Writing in kindergarten through

¹³ See District Analysis and Review Tool for Staffing & Finance for Webster, Teachers tab, available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/default.html>.

¹⁴ See Table 1 in District Profiles above, based on October 1, 2010 figures. According to district staff, there were 53 ELL students by the time of the review in April 2011.

grade 8. Administrators told the review team that the teachers were working alone and needed more time and support to complete the curriculum.

Webster has not been providing ELL students adequate and effective English language instruction. Despite the best efforts of the limited number of ESL staff, ELL students have not been receiving the education they need to achieve proficiency in the English language so that they can achieve proficiency in academics.

Financial and Asset Management

The development of the district's budget is transparent and is done with the collaboration of principals, administrators, the school committee, and town officials.

According to administrators and principals the development of the fiscal year 2012 budget began in the fall with proposals of school needs from the principals. (In contrast, the report of the 2005 review by the former Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) noted that principals had little input into the district budget.¹⁵) Administrators and principals subsequently met to review staffing and fixed costs, and the school committee and its finance subcommittee gave direction on a reasonable increase. According to interviews, the initial fiscal year 2012 budget proposed by administrators reflected an 11 percent increase, which was reduced after discussions with administrators to 3 percent in February when the school committee held a public hearing and voted. Also in February, the chair of the committee, superintendent, and business manager met with the town administrator and chairman of the board of selectmen to review the funds the town expected to be available for schools.

Administrators stated they did not expect the town to have any increased funding for schools in fiscal year 2012. They also stated that they had saved approximately \$700,000 in school choice and Education Jobs accounts from previous years to offset the loss of federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds in fiscal year 2012. The fiscal year 2011 budget document reflected a similar process in the previous year: it showed a budget of \$17,264,132 (including ARRA funding) prepared by administrators, a budget of \$16,783,587 voted by the school committee, and a final budget of \$16,487,480 approved by the school committee and Town Meeting.

School administrators pointed out that the budget document showed offsets for certain revenue sources, such as athletic gate receipts and federal stimulus grants, and stated that reports on revolving funds and grants are made regularly to the school committee. The superintendent's narrative highlighted staffing changes such as added behavioral specialists for students on the autistic spectrum and a reduction in high school business education staffing; he also noted certain budget requests not included in his proposed budget, such as an assistant principal and guidance counselor. The committee also received an updated five-year capital plan for major maintenance

¹⁵ The EQA report is available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/accountability/dr/reports.html?district=W-Z>.

and repair needs such as soffit and masonry repairs for the administration building, and door and roof replacements at the junior-senior high school.

Town officials as well as administrators emphasized the collaboration of school and town officials on the development of the budget. At their joint meeting they went over calculations, estimated net school spending requirements, and estimated state aid and other revenue sources. They pointed out that they have been able to agree on budgets and that Town Meeting has approved recommended school budgets in recent years. They also stated that in 2008 and 2009 the schools were able to give money back to the town to help balance the town budget, and that the schools had revised their bus routes in 2010 to help reduce the number of buses from 14 to 8 for savings in the transportation budget. Likewise they reported that town officials and Town Meeting have supported a boiler conversion project and a feasibility study for a new Park Avenue Elementary School from town funds, avoiding a debt exclusion override vote.

The district's participatory and transparent budget development process and its collaborative approach with town officials have resulted in support for school budgets at Town Meeting.

The district has not had enough resources to implement needed curriculum and student support service reforms and has had to downsize some programs.

The DIP and school committee minutes for the past two years indicated the need for a curriculum director, and administrators confirmed the need for such leadership to bring about long-range planning and reforms to this area. (Funding constraints resulted in this position not being filled in 2008, in it being filled on a part-time basis in 2008-2010, and in it being vacant for the 2010-2011 year; see the first Leadership and Governance finding above.) The report of the 2009 Coordinated Program Review (CPR) by ESE noted a lack of services for students with social, behavioral, and emotional needs and for ELL students.¹⁶ Teachers and administrators expressed concern about the reduction in the number of business education courses and the elimination of vocational courses such as carpentry, graphic arts, and metalworking. Administrators and teachers stressed that salaries had been frozen for two years with no step increases or raises, and that staff took unpaid furlough days in fiscal year 2010, which was confirmed by payroll records.

Administrators reported that times were particularly difficult for the school district because federal ARRA and Ed Jobs grants, which had been available in fiscal years 2009-2011 (Ed Jobs in 2011 only), would no longer be available. They reported that budget constraints had caused needed social workers and adjustment counselors and an assistant principal to be cut from the proposed fiscal year 2012 budget along with existing positions such as teaching associates, a shop teacher, and a reading specialist; programs had been cut including grade level coordinators and certain athletic programs.

The district capital plan includes major building needs such as roof replacements, door replacements, fire suppression, video security systems, handicap accessibility issues, masonry

¹⁶ See pp. 36 and 77 of the 2009 CPR report, available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/pqa/review/cpr/reports/#W>.

and soffit repairs, and site work; most of these projects have been postponed from previous years due to a lack of funding.

Funding for the schools is limited, according to school and town officials alike, by the limited revenues and resources of the town. ESE reports showed that the per pupil expenditures for fiscal year 2010 were \$11,721, about at the median for comparable size districts for that year but considerably less than the state per pupil expenditures of \$13,047. The town's spending on education has generally been slightly above the required net school spending level (0.4 percent above for fiscal year 2010 and budgeted 5.1 percent above for fiscal year 2011).

According to the 2010 End of Year Report, the town paid \$340,174 for school choice tuitions and \$204,504 for charter school tuitions.

Department of Revenue reports confirm that the town had only \$39,745 in free cash in 2010 and virtually no excess levy capacity (\$1,632). Town officials noted that health insurance and other fixed costs use up the small increased levy capacity allowed under Proposition 2½; like school employees, town employees have received no salary increases and took unpaid furloughs. Town officials reported that the town has never passed a general override, although it supported a debt exclusion override on the third attempt for the new middle school (offset by state reimbursements). In 2010 Town Meeting supported a \$600,000 feasibility study for a new elementary school. The town has supported the schools to the extent it is able, but the district has found it necessary to cut back on programs that district staff saw as valuable and has pressing unmet needs.

The district has managed its resources effectively, freeing up as much funding as possible for education and preparing for periods when funding declines.

School administrators have made efforts to be cost effective wherever possible. The budget document for fiscal year 2012 showed that projected out-of-district tuition costs for students with disabilities were actually less than they had been for fiscal year 2011, as the district was proposing to create and improve internal programs for students on the autism spectrum and students with behavioral needs. Administrators told the review team that after an analysis of energy costs the town funded boiler improvements and conversion to natural gas, and the district contracted for high-efficiency lighting and consolidated telephone services. These projects paid for themselves over several years. The DIP and administrators indicated that the district has relied on grants for technology, MCAS help for struggling students, and professional development.

Administrators stated that the district avoided using one-time revenues such as ARRA and school choice revenues for operational expenses in order to avoid drastic cuts when these funds are no longer available. The district had recently hired a grant writer both to write grants and to explore new sources of funding. Part of the grant writer's compensation was to be based on incentives for bringing in new revenues. School committee minutes confirmed that the district had formed a Webster Educational Foundation, which provides grants for up-to-date technology and other classroom improvements.

Administrators stated that the district makes use of cooperative and state bids as much as possible to take advantage of the savings afforded by bulk purchases. The reduction of the number of buses needed from 14 to 8 by modifying bus schedules, saving the town a considerable proportion of its transportation budget, has already been noted. The town reported approval of 74 percent reimbursement from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) for a new elementary school, which helped convince Town Meeting of the feasibility of the project.

The business office reported that budget software does not allow administrators to overspend their budget lines. The office monitors revenues as well, and investigation into lower than expected revenues led to an audit that identified theft of funds, and led ultimately to a conviction and restitution. The district had not spent all of its Ed Jobs grant or school choice revenues, and administrators reported that they set aside those balances to offset the fiscal year 2012 loss of ARRA funds and anticipated reductions in state aid; the proposed 2012 budget included \$692,000 from such balances. The superintendent noted that revolving funds, including circuit breaker reimbursements, were managed carefully, and in 2010 the district was able to prepay special education tuitions from surplus revolving account funds. According to administrators, the district gave \$100,000 back to the town in May 2008 to help alleviate town budget problems, and again in November 2009 returned \$300,000 from its budget to the town.

Careful management of revolving accounts, the participation of employees in cost-cutting with salary freezes and furloughs, and cost-saving strategies have alleviated the need for greater reductions in programs and enabled the district to manage lean budget years.

Recommendations

Note on the delay of this report and the currency of these recommendations:

The finalization of this report has been delayed long past the time the Department recognizes would have been desirable. As a result, 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 and Governance

The superintendent should develop future district improvement plans with the involvement of representatives from stakeholder groups in addition to central office administrators and principals.

The 2011-2013 DIP was developed by central office administrators and principals under the guidance of the director of adult and community education. According to administrators, no representatives from any stakeholder groups participated in the development of the DIP. After the DIP was approved by the school committee and posted on the district website, the superintendent notified the staff of its accessibility. Most of the teachers interviewed by the review team stated that they had no knowledge of the DIP; they were unaware of reports made by the superintendent to the school committee on district progress towards attainment of DIP goals.

Representatives of stakeholder groups such as teachers, parents, the business community and potential partners should be encouraged to assist in the preparation of the DIP. The review team also encourages the superintendent to meet with the faculty of each school to inform them of the goals in the DIP and the steps designed to achieve them once it is approved by the school committee and posted on the district website. The representatives of the stakeholder groups who participate in developing the DIP might also be asked to keep their constituents informed about progress toward accomplishment of the goals.

The review team also recommends that the superintendent report progress on the DIP goals to the school committee and the community regularly. Similar reports might also be made to the faculty of each school. Also, the superintendent should serve as chair of the committee developing the DIP and not delegate it to the director of adult and community education. Finally, as was district administrators' plan for 2011-2012, the DIP should be prepared before the school improvement plans, not vice-versa; the superintendent or his designee should make certain that the goals in each school's SIP align with those in the DIP.

The involvement of stakeholder groups in the development and evaluation of the DIP is critical to securing their support for the goals, initiatives, and direction of the school system. Informed stakeholders can become advocates for the schools.

The review team recommends that once the central office reorganization plan is fully implemented, the superintendent form and lead a committee composed of directors, principals, and teachers' association representatives to develop action plans to address the incomplete components of district systems and to link and integrate the systems.

It was evident to the review team from interviews and an examination of documents provided by the district that some district systems were complete while others were only partially complete. The system for the annual preparation, review and adoption of the budget, and the recruiting, interviewing, and hiring process were complete and fully functioning in the district. However, systems in four areas were incomplete and in need of additional attention. These areas included curriculum development and review, assessment, professional development, and student support services. Many of the interviewees also stated that district systems were not explicitly connected.

When the central office re-organization is complete, the review team recommends that the superintendent convene and lead a committee composed of district and school administrators and teachers' association representatives to develop action plans in the four areas of need. These plans should include objectives, steps, resources, persons responsible, timetables/deadlines, and measures/evaluations. In addition, each of the four action plans should specify the relationships among the areas.

After the action plans are developed and shared with the school committee, the superintendent might meet either with the entire faculty or separately with the faculty of each school to inform them of the plan for each system and how each system relates to the others. It is anticipated that the new director of curriculum and instruction and director of student support services will play key roles in this important initiative.

Building and integrating these crucial systems will make Webster a better-functioning district and improve the education it provides, resulting in better student performance. The district appeared poised and highly motivated to move in this direction.

Curriculum and Instruction

Webster should establish a procedure and a cycle for curriculum development and renewal with timelines for completion of each aspect of the work.

At the time of the review Webster did not have a fully documented kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum. In 2010-2011, the district began mapping the taught curriculum in ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies under the direction of a teacher-led committee. The work was underwritten with the salary savings from the position of director of curriculum and instruction when the incumbent retired. Addressing four disciplines in a single year proved to be too ambitious, and administrators reduced the scope of the project to mathematics at mid-year. The district re-established the role of director of curriculum and instruction full-time for the 2011-2012 school year, and intended to furnish the new director with the maps produced to date as baseline documents; however, what the timeline would be for completion of each aspect of the

work was unclear, as well as what procedure would be used in the future for curriculum development and revision.

The review team encourages Webster to develop a procedure for structuring and phasing curriculum development and renewal, beginning with formation of a district curriculum steering committee. This committee might be composed of the director of curriculum and instruction, all three principals, the literacy coordinator, both instructional coaches, four elementary teacher representatives, one for each core discipline, and the grade 7 through grade 12 department heads.

The steering committee could establish a continuous, multi-year cycle for curriculum development and renewal with timelines for completion. For example, it might decide to implement a four-year repeating cycle consisting of an analysis year, followed by two design and development years and an implementation year.

There are many curriculum development models. In most, the steering committee appoints a subcommittee for each discipline, consisting of kindergarten through grade 12 teachers.

- In the analysis year, the subcommittee reviews student performance data and other data to determine curricular strengths and weaknesses, and reports its findings to the steering committee.
- In the first design year, the subcommittee revises the curriculum to correct deficiencies, circulating preliminary drafts to the steering committee and faculty for comment.
- In the second design year, the subcommittee finalizes the revisions for the approval of the steering committee.
- In the implementation year, teachers are introduced to the approved curriculum and receive professional development on the new instructional and assessment practices, as the steering committee begins to assess the effectiveness of the curricular changes.

Webster might adopt this or a similar model for curriculum development and renewal.

No matter what model the district chooses for curriculum development and renewal, Webster's professional development committee (see recommendation below) should be linked to the curriculum steering committee to ensure that the district's curricular and instructional needs are given highest priority in its mandatory professional development program.

Under current conditions, Webster's curriculum and data analysis functions are not formally linked. Webster might consider revising the charge of the district data team so that this committee analyzes relevant data for the curriculum steering committee in order to inform curriculum renewal.

With an established and continuous process for curriculum development and renewal, Webster can ensure that curricular content is current, research-based, and aligned with state standards. Closer integration of the district's curricular, assessment, and professional development functions will result in more systematic identification of student, curricular, and instructional

strengths and needs, as well as relevant topics for professional development. Integration will also help to increase the effectiveness of the district's resources for improving educational results.

Webster should consider restoring the grade level coordinator positions, re-defining the roles of the instructional coaches, and increasing common planning time for teachers, especially for vertical planning purposes.

Webster has limited personnel and time for curriculum development and revision. The district has eliminated, consolidated, or broadened many curriculum-related positions. Some seem too broadly defined to be maximally effective (e.g., kindergarten through grade 6 and grade 7-12 instructional coaches). Teachers have limited common planning time at a grade level, and within a subject area; and teachers from different schools have little opportunity to meet across grade levels for vertical planning.

The review team recommends that Webster consider restoring the stipends for grade level coordinators in grades 1 through 6. In interviews, the review team learned that the coordinators performed critical functions at a low cost. Principals stated that the coordinators provided consistency in the taught curriculum from class to class at a grade level, and articulation from grade to grade, both within a school and between schools. Consistency and articulation are critical to program effectiveness. According to the fiscal year 2011 budget, the total cost of the stipends for these positions amounted to approximately fifteen thousand dollars.

The review team recommends that the district consider narrowing the disciplinary focus and grade span responsibilities of the two instructional coaches in order to increase their effectiveness. As currently configured the coaches address all of the disciplines in kindergarten through grade 6, and grades 7 through 12, respectively. This configuration provides maximal coverage, but dilutes the resource. The review team recommends reconfiguring the roles by devoting one coach to ELA and the other to mathematics for kindergarten through grade four. Concentration will maximize the benefit of the coaching model and provide helpful background for making a decision about expanding the model to grades 5 through 8, with two additional coaches.

Webster should allocate more teacher time for curricular planning and revision. Time might be allotted before or after school and during the summer, to augment the district's few grade level and subject area meetings, as well as its professional days. Teachers might be paid a stipend for curriculum work or accumulate professional development points for vertical movement on the salary scale. In recognition of the importance of time for teacher collaboration for raising student achievement, additional common planning time might also be addressed by both parties to the teachers' collective bargaining agreement.

The review team believes that Webster will gain traction in realizing its goal of improving achievement for all students and for each subgroup by making the most effective use of its limited personnel, and by actively involving teachers in curricular planning under central direction. The success of the new director of curriculum and instruction depends on the direct involvement of teachers.

Assessment

Webster should continue to explore effective ways of assessing student performance and ensure that assessment results are used systemically to improve teaching and learning.

Interviewees informed the review team of assessment initiatives by some teachers at certain grade levels. Data analysis was beginning to yield information about student learning, enabling teachers to make instructional changes such as reteaching, initiating interventions, and regrouping. Teachers and district leaders spoke during interviews about examining student work and analyzing assessment results in a new way, opening the door for more established, widespread analyses.

Although teachers reported a lack of comprehensive data, they expressed satisfaction with what appeared to be a growing consensus on the need to assess student performance regularly and use data to drive instruction. The review team recommends that the district continue work on developing the functions of a district data team in collaboration with the District and School Accountability Center, further develop the instructional study group (ISG) initiative, and continue to work on identifying power standards.

By continuing to explore effective ways to assess student performance, Webster will create an environment of continuous improvement and academic excellence. Staff and students will then accept ongoing assessment as common practice for determining and addressing the educational needs of students, improving their achievement.

Human Resources and Professional Development

As it aligns its evaluation system with ESE's new model system for educator evaluation, the district should ensure that all educators have meaningful professional practice and student learning goals and consistent, timely feedback, and that professional development is aligned with the evaluation system.

A review team examination of district documents showed that the Webster teacher evaluation system in effect at the time of the review was not implemented consistently; the majority of teachers whose files were reviewed had not received evaluations when required. It was not in compliance with state law as the cycle for teachers with professional status was three years long; beyond that, there was little adherence to the system, which administrators found difficult to carry out, and there was no monitoring process to ensure that evaluations were completed as required.

The new educator evaluation model provides opportunities for school districts to develop and implement

- Professional development for evaluators;
- Training to develop meaningful professional practice and student learning goals;
- Systems to ensure

- that evaluators have the time and support to carry out the new system with fidelity and
- that district and school goals are aligned with administrator goals
- Professional development for educators that prioritizes educator needs identified through the goal-setting and evaluation process.

Taking advantage of these opportunities will address the areas the review team identified for improvement in the educator evaluation system in use in the district at the time of the team's visit.

At the time of the site visit, the review team saw the need for the district to establish a professional development committee including teachers in order to develop, coordinate, monitor, and evaluate its professional development program.

Leaders and teachers told the review team that the professional development program was determined by administrators without teacher participation. The teachers' association stated that is the superintendent and school committee had yet to comply with item 8 in a memorandum of agreement between the Webster School Committee and the Webster Educators' Association establishing a committee consisting of representatives of the association and the administration to discuss and plan professional development programs. The review team did not find written evaluations of the district's professional development offerings, and interviewees stated that there was no formal system for evaluating the effectiveness of the professional development program.

The review team recommended that the district establish a representative professional development committee, with the charge of identifying district, school, and teacher training needs through formal needs assessments and prioritizing the needs according to the DIP and SIP goals. This would ensure that professional development relates to the needs in the school system.

The review team recommended a strong focus in the professional development program on improving the quality of instruction to meet diverse student needs and so improve student achievement. The district should closely monitor the implementation of the program and evaluate its effectiveness. By using professional development time and funds to meet high priority needs the district will make the best use of the resources it has, enhance teachers' instruction, and accelerate student learning.

Student Support

Webster should develop programs at Bartlett Junior-Senior High School that will improve school culture, provide for the needs of special education students and reduce the dropout rate.

Webster's four-year graduation rate fluctuated over the period from 2006 to 2010, falling 10 percentage points or more below the state rate in 2006, 2008, and 2009, but in 2007 and 2010 coming approximately within a point or two of the state rate. Although the annual state dropout

rate was lower in 2010 than in 2006, Webster's was higher in 2010 than in 2006, at 5 percent compared to the state rate of 2.9 percent. See Table 2 below.

In 2010 the four-year graduation rate for Webster students receiving special education services was 31.6, compared to 64.0 for students receiving special education services statewide; 26.3 percent of Webster students with disabilities had dropped out over those four years, compared with 14.7 percent of students in this subgroup across the state.

Bartlett Junior-Senior High School does not have enough resources to address the problems resulting in these graduation and dropout rates. There are too few social workers, school psychologists, and adjustment counselors. There are too few special education teachers to make the inclusion model effective, and few resources for students requiring specially designed instruction in substantially separate classes.

Teachers expressed frustration with ineffective discipline and not enough social services to address the root causes of students' misbehavior. The elimination of certain vocational education courses has reduced the options for providing meaningful educational experiences.

Addressing these needs is a high priority, even under serious budgetary constraints. A program for improving school culture and addressing the problematic dropout and graduation rates, especially for students with disabilities, might include

- hiring social or case workers to assist students and their families with problems that impede educational progress, including behavioral and emotional concerns;
- improving the range of special education services by adding more special educators, training faculty in inclusion classes in co-teaching models, and providing self-contained classrooms when needed;
- restoring the most successful vocational education programs which have provided engaging educational experiences for students in the past; and
- providing more consistent and effective disciplinary procedures.

The funding for these initiatives might come from out-of-district tuition savings as the district creates more effective internal provisions (see recommendation on finance and asset management below).

The school has begun a promising initiative, entitled the Advocacy Program, which provides academic and emotional support for students who act out in class. The review team recommends that the district monitor it and evaluate its effectiveness to determine whether this program can be replicated and expanded.

By improving the internal provisions for students at Bartlett Junior-Senior High School at risk of dropping out, Webster will increase teacher morale and student engagement, improving the climate while reducing the dropout rate and raising the graduation rate. As the reputation of the flagship school for the district improves, the district may become more attractive to residents who enroll their children in charter and other public schools at district expense. (In 2009-2010

and 2010-2011, only 85 percent of school-aged residents were enrolled in the Webster Public Schools, compared to the 91 percent of school-aged residents enrolled in the public schools across the state.) The tuition savings might offset program and staff expansion costs.

The district should improve the education it provides its ELLs by providing adequate time and staffing for ESL instruction and the resources needed to facilitate the completion of the ESL curriculum based on academic content.

The district ELL program does not provide sufficient ESL instruction to the students; according to administrators and ESL teachers, the number of licensed ESL teachers in the district (2.6 in 2010-2011) was insufficient to serve all of the district's ELLs. In addition, at the time of the review the district had not completed the development of the ESL curriculum its staff had begun but not had the resources to finish.

The district should provide a sufficient number of licensed ESL teachers to ensure that appropriate services—and the recommended number of hours of instruction¹⁷—are rendered across the district. It should also provide the resources needed for the completion of the ESL curriculum based on academic content. These recommendations should be given high priority in considering how to allocate the district's resources. Increasing services for ELL students and improving the ELL program will increase ELLs' access to the general education curriculum and improve their achievement.

Financial and Asset Management

The district should continue to explore ways to reduce expenses, enhance revenues, and make use of fund balances to maintain and improve its educational programs. It should evaluate existing programs and initiatives to ensure they are educationally effective and cost-effective and consider reallocations to meet educational priorities.

The district has not had adequate funding to both ensure the continuity of programs and implement new programs needed to improve student achievement and support services. The need for curriculum leadership had been clear to administrators and school committee members alike during the few years preceding the review; other unmet needs include enough instructional coaches to be effective in analyzing assessment data, adjusting curriculum, and improving instruction; more social workers or adjustment counselors to work with students with social needs; and major building needs such as roof replacements.

The district has had success in identifying areas for cost savings and additional revenues, including energy, transportation, an educational foundation, and a grant writer. The team encourages the district to continue its efforts to reduce costs and to enhance revenues. It had already proposed additional internal programs for students on the autism spectrum and students with behavioral needs to save on out-of-district costs while providing a more inclusive

¹⁷ See Guidance on Using MEPA Results to Plan Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) Instruction and Make Reclassification Decisions for Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students, p. 5, available at http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/guidance_laws.html.

experience for the students. Other districts have saved considerable funds on out-of-district costs by creating in-house programs to serve the students, and other in-house programs might be considered in Webster.

Efforts to promote the district's advantages to local families and students could reduce the number of students using school choice and charter tuitions. The new elementary school being planned will help make the district attractive to families with young children.

The district used unspent balances to cover deficits and expected shortages in preparation for the fiscal year 2012 loss of federal grants, and future surpluses should also be made available to fund needed programs such as curriculum leadership, teaching associates, and support services. A thorough analysis of staffing and stipends might identify areas where the district can better utilize its resources; its use of the budget for substitutes to fund teaching associates has been a successful example, according to the principals and teachers, and other such opportunities are well worth exploring. The experiences of other districts are a good resource for similar ideas.

Because funding is limited it is particularly important to evaluate existing programs and initiatives. The analysis of energy costs was very successful in making decisions about proposed changes, and an analysis of other fixed costs such as insurance and maintenance would also be useful. An evaluation of programs and initiatives, such as the teaching associates, advocacy and STAR programs, instructional coaches, professional development, ELL, and the curriculum mapping project would help establish their value relative to other needs, and an evaluation of new programs, such as that for students on the autism spectrum, will be important.

Appendix A: Review Team Members

The review of the Webster Public Schools was conducted from April 11-14, 2011, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Dr. John Kulevich, Leadership and Governance

Dr. James McAuliffe, Curriculum and Instruction, review team coordinator

Willette Johnson, Assessment

Helen Apostolides, Human Resources and Professional Development

Dr. Arnold Clayton, Student Support

Dr. 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 Webster Public Schools.

- The review team conducted interviews with the following Webster financial personnel: assistant superintendent for business, assistant business manager, payroll clerk, town administrator, town accountant
- The review team conducted interviews with the following members of the Webster School Committee: chairperson, member (1)
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the Webster Teachers' Association: president (via telephone), vice president, treasurer, secretary, building representatives (6)
- The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the Webster Public Schools central office administration: superintendent, assistant superintendent for business, director of curriculum and instruction, director of student support services, director of adult and community education, and the kindergarten through grade eight coordinator of reading
- The review team visited the following schools in the Webster Public Schools: Park Avenue Elementary School, Webster Middle School, Bartlett Junior-Senior High School
- During school visits, the review team conducted interviews with school principals, and teachers
 - The review team conducted 61 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the three schools visited.
- 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
 - Most recent New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) report
 - Teachers' contract, including the teacher evaluation tool
 - Reports on licensure and highly qualified status
 - Long-term enrollment trends
 - End-of-year financial report for the district for 2010

- List of the district's federal and state grants
- Municipal profile
- The review team reviewed the following documents at the district and school levels (provided by the district or schools):
 - Organization chart
 - District Improvement Plan
 - School Improvement Plans
 - School committee policy manual
 - School committee minutes for the past year
 - Most recent budget proposal with accompanying narrative or presentation; and most recent approved budget
 - Curriculum maps (draft)
 - 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
 - job descriptions for central office and school administrators and instructional staff)
 - Teacher attendance data
 - All administrator evaluations and certifications
 - Randomly selected teacher personnel files

Site Visit Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the district review of the Webster Public Schools, conducted from April 11-14, 2011.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
<p>April 11</p> <p>Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff and principals; review of documents; interview with teachers' association</p>	<p>April 12</p> <p>Interviews with district staff and principals; school visits (Park Avenue Elementary School, Bartlett Junior-Senior High School); classroom observations; review of personnel files; teacher focus groups; focus group with parents</p>	<p>April 13</p> <p>Interviews with town or city personnel; school visits (Park Avenue Elementary School, Webster Middle School, Bartlett Junior-Senior High School); interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; teacher team meetings; school committee interviews</p>	<p>April 14</p> <p>School visits (Webster Middle School, Bartlett Junior-Senior High School); interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; teacher team meetings; follow-up interviews; team meeting; emerging themes meeting with district leaders and principals</p>

Appendix C: Student Achievement Data 2008-2010

Table C1: 2010 Webster and State Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP) by Selected Subgroups, for ELA

	Webster		State	
	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>
All Students (1,034)	79.5	43	86.9	50
Asian (6)	---	---	89.8	59
African American/Black (48)	72.9	47	76.6	46
Hispanic/Latino (133)	71.6	42	73.6	47
White (807)	81.1	43	90.5	50
ELL (22)	65.9	---	59.8	50
FELL (15)	75	---	80.1	55
Special Education (162)	55.9	41	67.3	41
Low Income (514)	74.7	46	76.5	46

Note: 1. Numbers in parentheses are the numbers of students included for the purpose of calculating the CPI. Numbers included for the calculation of the median SGP are different.

2. Median SGP is calculated for grades 4-8 and 10 and is only reported for groups of 20 or more students.

3. "ELL" and "FELL" indicate English language learners and former English language learners.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

**Table C2: 2010 Webster and State
Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)
by Selected Subgroups, for Mathematics**

	Webster		State	
	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>
All Students (1,035)	65	36	79.9	50
Asian (6)	---	---	89	62
African American/Black (47)	59.6	49.5	65.1	48
Hispanic/Latino (134)	53.5	30	63.9	47
White (809)	67.4	37	84.1	50
ELL (22)	46.6	---	56.2	53
FELL (15)	60	---	73.3	55
Special Education (158)	46.4	34	57.5	43
Low Income (513)	60	36.5	67.1	47

Note: 1. Numbers in parentheses are the numbers of students included for the purpose of calculating the CPI. Numbers included for the calculation of the median SGP are different.

2. Median SGP is calculated for grades 4-8 and 10 and is only reported for groups of 20 or more students.

3. "ELL" and "FELL" indicate English language learners and former English language learners.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

**Table C3: 2008-2010 Webster Proficiency Rates,
with Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs), compared to State:
by Grade
ELA**

Grade	2008		2009		2010	
	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 3—District	31	NA*	40	NA*	52	NA*
Grade 3—State	56	NA*	57	NA*	63	NA*
Grade 4—District	39	70	41	69	35	56
Grade 4—State	49	48	53	50	54	50
Grade 5—District	44	35	49	53.5	43	45
Grade 5—State	61	51	63	50	63	50
Grade 6—District	54	46	60	58	55	35
Grade 6—State	67	50	66	50	69	50
Grade 7— District	51	28	37	18	45	24
Grade 7— State	69	50	70	50	72	50
Grade 8— District	58	48.5	51	24	58	51
Grade 8— State	75	49	78	50	78	50
Grade 10— District	63	NA*	74	63	77	61
Grade 10— State	74	NA*	81	50	78	50
All Grades— District	49	44	50	47	52	43
All Grades—State	64	50	67	50	68	50

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

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

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

**Table C4: 2008-2010 Webster Proficiency Rates,
with Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs), compared to State:
by Grade
Mathematics**

Grade	2008		2009		2010	
	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 3—District	35	NA*	33	NA*	45	NA*
Grade 3—State	61	NA*	60	NA*	65	NA*
Grade 4—District	40	73	28	58.5	25	51
Grade 4—State	49	49	48	50	48	49
Grade 5—District	35	37	33	40	29	33
Grade 5—State	52	51	54	50	55	50
Grade 6—District	33	36	33	37	38	36.5
Grade 6—State	56	50	57	50	59	50
Grade 7— District	29	38	17	29	22	21
Grade 7— State	47	50	49	50	53	50
Grade 8— District	25	44	23	28	18	29
Grade 8— State	49	51	48	50	51	51
Grade 10— District	64	NA*	67	64.5	67	57
Grade 10— State	72	NA*	75	50	75	50
All Grades— District	38	45	32	40	34	36
All Grades—State	55	50	55	50	59	50

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

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

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Appendix D: Finding and Recommendation Statements

Finding Statements:

Leadership and Governance

1. Though Webster was planning a reorganization of central office leadership roles and responsibilities, at the time of the review two director positions were vacant or had been filled as an interim position, leading to problems with communication and direction.
2. Although the district has a three-year improvement plan, many stakeholder groups were not directly involved in the development of the plan, and interviewees other than administrators and school committee members were not aware of its contents. Status reports on the accomplishment of the goals in the plan were not regularly scheduled.
3. The district has some fully functioning systems and some partially functioning systems needing further development, including curriculum development, professional development, assessment, and student support services. With few exceptions, district systems are not linked and inter-related.

Curriculum and Instruction

4. Webster's curriculum was in development at the time of the review.
5. Teachers work to create a respectful environment and maximize classroom time, and they collaborate with available tutors and teaching associates to enhance student learning.
6. Webster has a common definition of high-quality instruction, but the quality of instruction observed by the review team varied widely from class to class within a school, and from school to school within the district.
7. Webster has limited infrastructure for curriculum development and renewal. Teachers have little common planning time, and some curriculum support roles have been eliminated, or expanded to include more responsibilities.

Assessment

8. Webster has taken steps to develop an academic assessment system to provide data to assess and address student needs and to inform instructional changes.
9. Webster does not have a systematic procedure for collecting, disseminating, and analyzing multiple sources of data. Consequently, data-based decision-making is little used and decisions are based on factors other than data on student, teacher, and school needs.

Human Resources and Professional Development

10. The evaluations of the district's principals and central administrators were timely, comprehensive, and instructive.
11. The district's evaluation procedure was not being consistently implemented, teachers were not being evaluated as required, and the procedure was not in compliance with the state requirement for a formal evaluation of professional status teachers at least once every two years.
12. The district's administrative team plans the district professional development program, but there is not a process for identifying and addressing the professional development needs of individual schools and teachers. There is no formal evaluation of the effectiveness of the district professional development program.

Student Support

13. In many years Webster's four-year graduation rate has been substantially below the state rate; its annual dropout rate is higher than the state's, and the dropout rate for its students with disabilities is especially high. The district had limited programs and services for students with behavioral and emotional problems or for struggling students, especially at the high school level, and resources and supports at the high school for students with disabilities were few.
14. At the time of the review Webster provided an insufficient number of hours of English language instruction and did not yet have a complete ESL curriculum.

Financial and Asset Management

15. The development of the district's budget is transparent and is done with the collaboration of principals, administrators, the school committee, and town officials.
16. The district has not had enough resources to implement needed curriculum and student support service reforms and has had to downsize some programs.
17. The district has managed its resources effectively, freeing up as much funding as possible for education and preparing for periods when funding declines.

Recommendation Statements:

Leadership and Governance

1. The superintendent should develop future district improvement plans with the involvement of representatives from stakeholder groups in addition to central office administrators and principals.
2. The review team recommends that once the central office reorganization plan is fully implemented, the superintendent form and lead a committee composed of directors, principals, and teachers' association representatives to develop action plans to address the incomplete components of district systems and to link and integrate the systems.

Curriculum and Instruction

3. Webster should establish a procedure and a cycle for curriculum development and renewal with timelines for completion of each aspect of the work.
4. Webster should consider restoring the grade level coordinator positions, re-defining the roles of the instructional coaches, and increasing common planning time for teachers, especially for vertical planning purposes.

Assessment

5. Webster should continue to explore effective ways of assessing student performance and ensure that assessment results are used systemically to improve teaching and learning.

Human Resources and Professional Development

6. As it aligns its evaluation system with ESE's new model system for educator evaluation, the district should ensure that all educators have meaningful professional practice and student learning goals and consistent, timely feedback, and that professional development is aligned with the evaluation system.
7. At the time of the site visit, the review team saw the need for the district to establish a professional development committee including teachers in order to develop, coordinate, monitor, and evaluate its professional development program.

Student Support

8. Webster should develop programs at Bartlett Junior-Senior High School that will improve school culture, provide for the needs of special education students and reduce the dropout rate.
9. The district should improve the education it provides its ELLs by providing adequate time and staffing for ESL instruction and the resources needed to facilitate the completion of the ESL curriculum based on academic content.

Financial and Asset Management

10. The district should continue to explore ways to reduce expenses, enhance revenues, and make use of fund balances to maintain and improve its educational programs. It should evaluate existing programs and initiatives to ensure they are educationally effective and cost-effective and consider reallocations to meet educational priorities.