



Massachusetts Department of
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY
EDUCATION

Stoneham Public Schools District Review

Review conducted April 9-12, 2012

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



This document was prepared by the
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner
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Overview of District Reviews

Purpose

The goal of district reviews conducted by the Center for District and School Accountability (CDSA) in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) is to support districts in establishing or strengthening a cycle of continuous improvement. Reviews consider carefully the effectiveness, efficiency, and integration of systemwide functions using ESE's six district standards: **Leadership and Governance, Curriculum and Instruction, Assessment, Human Resources and Professional Development, Student Support, and Financial and Asset Management.**

District reviews are conducted under Chapter 15, Section 55A of the Massachusetts General Laws and include reviews 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 2011-2012 school year include districts that were in Level 3¹ (in school year 2011 or school year 2012) 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 (see above). 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. The district review team consists of independent consultants with expertise in each of the district standards who review selected district documents and ESE data and reports for two days before conducting a four-day district visit that includes visits to various district schools. The team holds interviews and focus groups with such stakeholders as school committee members, teachers' union representatives, administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Team members also observe classes. The team then meets for two days to develop findings and recommendations before submitting the draft of their district review report to ESE.

¹ In other words, as Level 3 is 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).

Stoneham Public Schools

The site visit to the Stoneham Public Schools was conducted from April 9–12, 2012. The site visit included 29 interviews and focus groups with over 45 stakeholders ranging from school committee members to district administrators and school staff to teachers' association representatives. The review team conducted interviews with one elementary, three middle school, and two high school teachers. The team also conducted visits to each of the district's six schools: Central Elementary School (kindergarten through grade 5), Colonial Park Elementary School (pre-kindergarten through grade 5), Robin Hood Elementary School (kindergarten through grade 5), South Elementary School (pre-kindergarten through grade 5), Stoneham Middle School (grades 6–8), and Stoneham High School (grades 9–12). 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 information about student performance from 2009–2011. Appendix D contains finding and recommendation statements.

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

District Profile²

A five-member board of selectmen governs the town of Stoneham and a town administrator provides the administration. The schools have a five-member school committee. The superintendent has just completed his fifth year in the position. In addition to the superintendent, the leadership team consists of the director of curriculum, the director of pupil personnel, and the director of school finance. The director of pupil personnel is in his first year in 2011–2012. In addition, as of July 2012, the director of elementary education position will be eliminated and the incumbent of that position will begin service as the new director of curriculum PK–12. This means that content area program supervisors, who had previously supervised curriculum at the secondary level, now work under the overall direction of the director of curriculum PK–12.

Table 1a below shows the 2010–2011 Stoneham enrollment by race/ethnicity and selected populations, while Table 1b shows the same for 2011–2012. The Stoneham school district has a total enrollment in 2012 of 2,467 students. The enrollment decreased from 2,894 in 2007 (data not in a table) to 2,550 in 2011 (a 12 percent change) and decreased again in 2012. Over the same period, the proportion of low-income students increased from 11 percent of total enrollment in 2007 (data not in a table) to 15 percent in 2012. From 2007 to 2012 the district's enrollment of students receiving special education services fluctuated between 16.8 percent and

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

18.5 percent (2007–2010 data not in a table). There has been little change in the proportion of students whose first language is not English. From 2007 to 2012 it has fluctuated between 6.8 percent and 7.9 percent of total enrollment, while the proportion of English language learners has fluctuated between 1.8 percent and to 2.5 percent of total enrollment (2007–2010 data not in a table).

**Table 1a: Stoneham Public Schools
Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations
2010–2011**

Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total	Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total
Total enrollment	2,550	100.0	African-American/Black	47	1.8
First Language not English	183	7.2	Asian	75	2.9
Limited English Proficient*	65	2.5	Hispanic/Latino	88	3.5
Special Education**	438	16.8	White	2,278	89.3
Low-income	371	14.5	Native American	2	0.1
Free Lunch	281	11.0	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	13	0.5
Reduced-price lunch	90	3.5	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	47	1.8
<p>*Limited English proficient students are referred to in this report as “English language learners.” **Special education number and percentage (only) are calculated including students in out-of-district placements. Sources: School/District Profiles on ESE website and other ESE data</p>					

**Table 1b: Stoneham Public Schools
Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations
2011–2012**

Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total	Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total
Total enrollment	2,467	100.0	African-American/Black	43	1.7
First Language not English	196	7.9	Asian	73	3.0
Limited English Proficient*	49	2.0	Hispanic/Latino	94	3.8
Special Education**	461	18.3	White	2,187	88.7
Low-income	362	14.7	Native American	3	0.1
Free Lunch	292	11.8	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	13	0.5
Reduced-price lunch	70	2.8	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	54	2.2
<p>*Limited English proficient students are referred to in this report as “English language learners.” **Special education number and percentage (only) are calculated including students in out-of-district placements. Sources: School/District Profiles on ESE website and other ESE data</p>					

As Table 2 below illustrates, Stoneham Public Schools' actual net school spending was 11.8 percent and 15.4 percent above required net school spending in fiscal year 2010 and fiscal year 2011, and was projected to be 19.8 percent above in fiscal year 2012. Chapter 70 aid dropped from \$3,461,523 in fiscal year 2010 to \$3,310,118 in fiscal year 2011 and increased slightly to \$3,327,888 in fiscal year 2012. Local appropriations increased by 2.2 percent in fiscal year 2011 (based on estimated or budgeted amounts) and by 2.7 percent in fiscal year 2012.

**Table 2: Stoneham Public Schools
Expenditures, Chapter 70 State Aid, and Net School Spending
Fiscal Years 2010–2012**

	FY10		FY11		FY12
	Estimated	Actual	Estimated	Actual	Estimated
Expenditures					
From local appropriations for schools					
by school committee	22,007,111	22,006,070	22,500,000	22,230,000	23,074,917
by municipality	10,731,663	10,470,453	10,971,481	11,112,355	11,289,399
Total from local appropriations	32,738,774	32,476,523	33,471,481	33,342,355	34,364,316
From revolving funds and grants	---	4,335,614	---	4,605,496	---
Total expenditures	---	36,812,137	---	37,947,851	---
Chapter 70 aid to education program					
Chapter 70 state aid*	---	3,461,523	---	3,310,118	3,327,888
Required local contribution	---	19,854,576	---	19,664,269	19,761,522
Required net school spending**	---	23,316,099	---	22,974,387	23,089,410
Actual net school spending	---	26,071,434	---	26,522,779	27,659,405
Over/under required (\$)	---	2,755,335	---	3,548,392	4,569,995
Over/under required (%)	---	11.8%	---	15.4%	19.8%
*Chapter 70 state aid funds are deposited in the local general fund and spent as local appropriations.					
**Required net school spending is the total of Chapter 70 aid and required local contribution. Net school spending includes only expenditures from local appropriations, not revolving funds and grants. It includes expenditures for most administration, instruction, operations, and out-of-district tuitions. It does not include transportation, school lunches, debt, or capital.					
Sources: FY10, FY11 District End-of-Year Reports; Chapter 70 Program information on ESE website. Data retrieved on September 10, 2012.					

Findings

Student Achievement

Student proficiency rates between 2009 and 2011 have consistently been above state rates in ELA and at or above state rates in mathematics. Between 2009 and 2011, median student growth percentiles (SGPs) in ELA improved substantially and those in mathematics increased steadily.

The Stoneham school district has seen steadily improving and strong results on MCAS (see Tables C1 and C2 in Appendix C). In ELA in 2009, 70 percent of the district's students were proficient, while 67 percent of their peers across the state were proficient, a three-point difference. In 2010, the district's percent proficient rose 6 percentage points to 76 percent while the state rate moved up to 68 percent, an 8-point difference. In 2011 there was still an 8 percentage point difference between the two with the district's students at 77 percent proficiency and their peers across the state at 69 percent proficiency.

In math, the district and the state had the same rates of student proficiency in 2009 and 2010. In 2009, the district and the state had 55 percent of students scoring proficient or higher, and in 2010, district and state results both improved slightly, to a 59 percent proficiency rate. Then in 2011, the district proficiency rate moved up 3 percentage points to 62 percent while the state proficiency rate went down one percentage point to 58 percent.

The district also had improvements in its median SGPs. In 2009, the district's median SGP in ELA was in the moderate range, at 51.0. But in 2010 the district's median SGP improved meaningfully to 62.0 (in the high range), and remained in the high range in 2011 at 61.0. In math in 2009, the median SGP was also in the moderate range, again at 51.0. Then it increased in 2010 to 53.5 and to 57.0 in 2011.

In addition, MCAS ELA scores in several grades showed impressive improvements. Grades 5, 6, and 7 all had proficiency rates at least 10 percentage points higher in 2011 than they had in 2009. In grade 10, the proficiency rate did not increase, but it was already more than 10 percentage points higher than the state grade 10 rate. The percentage of district grade 10 students scoring proficient or higher in 2009, 2010, and 2011 hovered around 90 percent, their median SGP increased from 59.0 in 2009 to 73.0 in 2010 to an unusual 87.0 in 2011.

In math, two grades showed remarkable improvements. In grade 5, the percentage of students proficient or higher moved from 43 percent in 2009 to 64 percent in 2010 to 74 percent in 2011, an improvement of 31 percentage points. Median SGPs in grade 5 moved from 41.0 in 2009 to 54.0 in 2010 to 65.0 in 2011, in the high growth range. In grade 8 over the same period, the percentage of students proficient or higher rose from 42 percent in 2009 to 58 percent in 2010 to 66 percent in 2011, an improvement of 24 percentage points. And the median SGPs increased from 65.0 in 2009 to 77.0 in 2010 to 83.0 in 2011.

In general, the district demonstrates an impressive ability to analyze MCAS results after each administration and adjust instruction to address areas of need, as will be described in detail in the second Assessment finding below. At some grades, improvements have been remarkable.

Leadership and Governance

The replacement of the middle school, following approval of a debt-exclusion override by voters, will bring a reorganization of the grade structure in the middle and elementary schools. Other anticipated educational changes for the middle school include a return to a team teaching model and the addition of instructional staff and technology.

In interviews with the review team, administrators said that the greatest needs for the middle school were the restoration of team teaching, the need for exploratory subjects, the addition of a 7th period, and the hiring of a math coach and a reading teacher. And Stoneham Teachers' Association officers expressed the sentiment that the current middle school was "incredibly inadequate."

Approval for a New Middle School

In an interview with the superintendent and another central office administrator, the superintendent said that at a Town Meeting on February 7, 2012, residents in attendance had voted favorably, "approximately 400 to 15," supporting a project for a new middle school and approving its placement on the ballot. The Warrant for the Annual Town Meeting, dated Tuesday, April 3, 2012, included the following ballot question: "Shall the Town of Stoneham be allowed to exempt from the provisions of Proposition two and one-half, so-called, the amounts required to pay for the bonds issued in order to pay for the costs of the addition to and renovations of the Central School, which will house the Middle School grades 5-8 and replace the Stoneham Middle School, both located on the site between Central and Pomeworth Streets, including the payment of all costs incidental or related thereto?" The voters of Stoneham approved this debt-exclusion override 2,009 to 1,688; the superintendent told the review team that \$22 million of the estimated \$40 million cost would be paid for by the state and \$18 million by the community.

Reorganization of the Grade Structure

According to the superintendent, with the opening of the middle school in September 2014, the school grade organization in the district will change from PK-5, 6-8, and 9-12, to PK-4, 5-8, and 9-12. Thus, when the middle school opens in 2014, it is to house students in grades 5–8 as opposed to its current organization of grades 6–8. Because the middle school is replacing the Central School in the old Central School building, there are now to be three elementary schools instead of four.

Anticipated Educational Benefits

With the opening of the new middle school a number of educational benefits are anticipated. The superintendent mentioned that team teaching had been eliminated five years before for financial

reasons, but that the plan was to bring it back. According to that plan, in 2014–2015 “the core curriculum will stay the same,” but in grades 6–8 teachers and students will be organized into teams composed of an English, math, science, and social studies teacher and approximately 100–125 students. The superintendent said that the educational structure of grade 5 was yet to be determined. Several possibilities were under consideration, such as self-contained classroom instruction (similar to that in the elementary schools), paired subject/teacher instruction (one teacher teaches English and social studies, and another teacher teaches math and science), and team teaching instruction (similar to that for grades 6–8). Another anticipated benefit accompanying the opening of the new middle school is an increase in the number of class periods each day from six to seven. This will enable students to have additional time in specialty subject programs such as art, music, and physical education.

With the opening of the new middle school, the superintendent plans to increase the availability of instructional technology and add instructional technology teachers. A school committee member, referring to technology, said that things had changed from the time when the middle school was the “poor child that gets everything last.” Also, the superintendent indicated the possibility that with the consolidation of the elementary schools, the district will move from half-day to free full-day kindergarten at the three remaining elementary schools. The approval by voters of a debt-exclusion override allowing the replacement of the middle school is anticipated to bring a number of educational improvements to both the middle school and the elementary schools. This new middle school project is an important step in Stoneham’s commitment to the education of its young people.

The district’s guiding documents, the District Improvement Plan (DIP) and the School Improvement Plans (SIPs), were developed without participation from key stakeholders. The SIPs were not aligned with the DIP and progress toward the plans’ goals has not been addressed in evaluations.

In interviews the superintendent said that the district does not have a vision statement. Rather it has the following mission statement: “The mission of the Stoneham Public Schools is to develop students who: are creative, critical and independent thinkers; have respect for and acceptance of self and others; know and apply communication and information literacy skills; are responsible contributors to the local community; have skills and abilities to adapt to a changing and uncertain economic future.” The superintendent also said that he had drafted the District Improvement Plan himself without participation from key stakeholders; rather, he brought his draft to the administrative team for feedback. Providing feedback is a different role from contributing at the development stage. The superintendent then brought the document to the school committee for their review, comments, directions for public review, and adoption.

The Stoneham Public Schools District Improvement Plan, 2011–2014, is divided into six standards with topics listed under each standard. The standards are leadership & governance, curriculum & instruction, assessment, human resources & professional development, student support, and financial & asset management. The functions for each topic are current strengths,

areas of improvement, recommendations, responsible group or individual, time schedule, and expected outcome.

For the most part in the state, to ensure that a district's efforts are focused and coordinated, the SIPs follow the format and thrust of the District Improvement Plan. However, in Stoneham the SIPs vary in content and format. All the SIPs contain goals but only one SIP includes functions with these goals. For example, the Central School SIP, 2011–2012, has goals for the following areas: academic, professional development, technology, school health & safety, and parent & community partnership. However, the SIP contains no functions such as action step[s], resources needed, person[s] responsible, measure[s] of accomplishment, and deadline. The South School SIP, 2011–2012, has a template that consists of goals and functions. The goal areas are: learning environment, social environment, and physical environment. With each goal are three functions: activities, responsibility, and timeframe.

In an interview with review team members the superintendent agreed that the SIPs varied from the DIP template. He said that they had not yet been aligned because the DIP was created in the fall and the spring would be their first chance to do so. The superintendent also said that he was leaving the content and format up to the schools. An administrator said that the superintendent had requested that they go ahead and have their school councils assist them as they developed their SIPs. He did not request that they format the SIPs using the same template as the DIP.

Principals and teachers said that administrators reported progress toward attainment of the SIP goals in various ways. The review team's notes on responses from principals included "Running update with staff," "Periodically with staff," "Some goals discussed more frequently with some staff," and "Addressed at every staff meeting." In contrast, teachers interviewed had comments such as "It's not really discussed," "Need additional information on the goals," and "Principal presents at beginning and updates at the end of the year."

Accountability for progress toward attainment of the goals in the SIPs also varied. The superintendent said that he evaluates the principals every other year. He mentioned using a goal-setting process. The superintendent also said that in 2010–2011 he did not address SIP and DIP goals in evaluations because many goals depended on monies that the schools did not get. This calls into question the overall usefulness of the SIPs.

Principals said that there are no formal discussions about progress toward the SIP goals. They did note that in the spring, in preparation for writing their evaluations, the superintendent requests written self-assessments from them. However, in response to an inquiry to principals about whether accomplishment of SIP goals was included in their evaluations, the answers were "No" and "Not every one." A review of the evaluations included in the personnel files of the principals confirmed that, in most instances, progress made toward the attainment of the goals in the SIPs is not included.

Explicit, coordinated focus on goals in the DIP and the SIPs is not in place in the district. It is essential for all stakeholder groups to know and share the vision of the Stoneham Public Schools. Furthermore, unless all parties associated with the educational system share in the development

of the DIP and the SIPs and are held accountable for attaining them, it will be difficult to achieve the district's priorities.

Curriculum and Instruction

Much work has been done already to develop a strong coordinated program of curriculum and instruction in the Stoneham Public Schools, but curricula have insufficient specificity, direction, and consistency to guide best teaching and learning in all classes.

Since the placement of Stoneham High School on Warning status by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) in 2006, the district has been working to improve its curricula. In interviews, administrators and teachers from all levels told the review team that for the previous 20 years, there had been little focus on either curriculum or coordinated instruction. Before the most recent efforts, there had been little horizontal alignment across elementary schools or grades and little vertical alignment from elementary through high school. They told the review team that with the arrival of the present superintendent, there has been a major change to a focus on developing a strong coordinated program of curriculum and instruction. In addition, much work has been done to develop high school curriculum in response to the NEASC warning; in December of 2010 the warning was removed in recognition of the progress made.

Consistency

In discussions about curriculum, program supervisors and principals told the review team that there are great beginnings but “not a lot to show.” When asked about the condition of curriculum at the elementary, middle, and high schools, the team was told, “We have begun putting together curriculum documents for K-5 math and ELA; [previously] teachers never even met districtwide” and “Changes are just beginning.” The team was told in another interview, “Whatever book we purchased would be the curriculum. We are starting to move away from that ...with standards established.” When asked how a teacher new to the system would know what to teach and how to teach it beginning on the first day, the response from all interviewed Stoneham staff was “We will supply him/her with a mentor.” Teachers told the review team that they are teaching to the MCAS test. The superintendent told members of the visiting team that though it was improving, curriculum was an area of great need and the district was behind where it should be.

Elementary teachers and principals credit the introduction of Readers' Workshop, balanced literacy programs, and the Atlas Curriculum Management System, with beginning the process of creating a systematic program of instruction. One teacher said, “They've gone out of their way to get us vested in it rather than just imposing.” Everyday Math, the program in place for a number of years, was also intended to bring consistency to elementary math instruction. However, not all teachers are using Everyday Math as it is designed. In interviews, teachers and principals said that they have found in the past that the program as designed is difficult for the students. As a

result, some teachers have added their own units and assessments, some have modified the Everyday Math units and assessments, and some have stopped using the Everyday Math assessments completely. Recently, administrators and teachers determined that Everyday Math is not aligned with the new Massachusetts curriculum frameworks.

Program supervisors oversee the content area programs in grades 6–12. In 2009, the district established the position of director of elementary education, replacing the position of assistant superintendent, to coordinate the development and implementation of curriculum and instruction in pre-kindergarten through grade 5. However, the director, principals, and teachers reported that elementary teachers do not have common planning or meeting time during the school day to accomplish such work. Curriculum committees, composed of one teacher volunteer per grade, meet after school. Unfortunately, attendance at these meetings has been poor, and often one or two teachers have written curriculum documents for the full district. The team was told that some time for curriculum development and professional development has been provided by bringing in substitute teachers about once a month, despite the loss of teaching time. The superintendent said that the district needed to increase teacher time.

Direction

There is an absence of clarity about the line of authority and ultimate responsibility for curriculum development and implementation. The high school and middle school principals, teachers, and program supervisors agree that program supervisors are the instructional leaders for their content areas in grades 6–12; however, at the high school, the principal is also recognized as the instructional leader for the school. In the elementary schools, there is no common understanding about who is responsible for the implementation and oversight of curriculum, pre-kindergarten through grade 5. When the team asked elementary teachers who the instructional leaders in their schools are and who oversees implementation of curriculum, interviewees named various individuals.

For example, elementary principals confirmed the role of the director of elementary education in initiating curricular programs, but asserted that they are the instructional leaders in their schools. However, teachers said that the director of elementary education is the instructional leader and that the elementary lead teachers are responsible for the implementation of curricula. At one school the team was told that the principal drives the curriculum; at two others, it was told that principals meet weekly with grade-level teachers to check implementation progress; and at the fourth, that the principal checks in once a month.

It is unclear from these conversations who is ultimately responsible for leading curriculum development and instructional programs at all levels. Lines of authority and responsibility are not understood. As a result there is an absence of consistency and considerable variation about what is taught and how it is taught across classrooms within the same school and among schools across the district. The superintendent told the team that he has been concerned that the four elementary schools were following three different curricula, and he and the school committee

wanted to first focus on elementary education. The middle and high schools have just begun to rewrite curricula in standards-based formats.

In July of 2012, the director of elementary education position was to be eliminated and the incumbent of that position was to begin service as the new director of curriculum PK–12; she was to lead a new Curriculum Leadership Team. The superintendent told the review team that the director of curriculum would oversee all curriculum and instruction in pre-kindergarten through grade 12. The superintendent said, “Everyone’s pleased to have her expand her role for PK-12.” Program supervisors agreed and told the team that they had begun to meet together weekly and were going to invite the director to join them. The job description for the new director of curriculum PK–12 does not specifically give the position authority to supervise and evaluate program supervisors or to make final decisions about curriculum and instruction in grades 6–12. Rather, the job description charges the director to “work with” principals and program supervisors; as a result, the issue of authority and ultimate decision making remains unclear.

Specificity

The team was provided with and reviewed many curriculum documents. A review of curriculum documents found little specificity or guidance for teachers. Several high school documents included a number of units in a pacing guide and outlines for some but not all of the units. One binder listed essential questions, skills that students will use, learning standards, mission connection, types of assessments (without guidance as to when or how they should be used), and other resources. The remainder of the binder consisted of sheets with questions that varied in terms of level of complexity. Most required a one-word answer or were in a fill-in-the-blanks format. Some did include questions involving comparing, analyzing, and interpreting. No formative assessments or common assessments were included and there was no connection to either previous or subsequent learning.

Another high school document included a section entitled “Time Frame and Text/Resource Correlations”; however, both the curriculum and the resources cited are the textbook. The Massachusetts standards are included as well as a call for higher-order thinking, although most of the assessments included in this document are recall, fill in the blank, and multiple choice with some word problems to be solved. Benchmarks are not included. The final exam included in this document is labeled “Research and Field Study.” Massachusetts standards call for students to *design and conduct a scientific investigation*. The “Research and Field Study” in this document has been designed by the faculty, not, as intended, by students. Students are asked to fill in blanks and then choose any two of the predetermined choices and write a report that describes the impact of each. Common mid-term and final exams are included, but teachers said that common exam results are rarely shared among teachers.

The Draft Science Curriculum for pre-kindergarten through grade 5 includes the mission statement that “[s]tudents will ask questions to test ideas ... reason logically, and draw conclusions based on reliable evidence.” The curriculum includes a list of “Skills of Inquiry,

Experimentation and Design” that includes higher-order skills such as: “ask questions, tell about why and what would happen if . . . , make predictions, discuss observations, compare the result of an investigation or experiment with the prediction, and communicate findings to others.” The language of the standards includes: *identify*, 11 times; *recognize*, 12 times; *describe*, 9 times; *differentiate*, 3 times; and *demonstrate*, once. However, the district document provides only grade-level topic headings and standards. It calls for passive learning, memorization, and recall, rather than higher-order skills.

Teachers, administrators, and district leadership told the team that budget reductions, which eliminated middle school teams and electives throughout the district, reduced time for professional development, common planning, and curriculum development, and have had a damaging impact on the district’s ability to focus on curriculum and instruction. They explained that the absence of funds for technology hardware, software, support, and instructional personnel made it difficult to integrate the use of technology as a teaching and learning tool into the curriculum.

The need for aligned, consistently delivered, and continuously improving curriculum is recognized throughout the Stoneham Public Schools. Well-designed and written curriculum includes components such as objectives, resources, instructional strategies, timelines, teacher guides, model lessons, technology integration, and assessments. The district has begun to create curriculum documents at the high school and middle school, although they provide minimal direction or guidance for teachers and do not include strategies to promote best practice teaching or higher-order thinking skills. The absence of a well-developed written curriculum is also apparent at the elementary level where each school and teacher makes independent decisions about what will be taught, how it will be taught, and when it will be taught.

In the Stoneham Public Schools, the absence of horizontally aligned curriculum and common assessments hinders the district’s ability to provide a quality education for all students.

Further, in a well-designed twenty-first century curriculum, the use of technology as a learning and teaching tool is integrated into every area of the curriculum. There was no evidence of technology being an integral part of any of the curriculum documents reviewed and few classroom computers or related technologies were observed during classroom visits, with the exception of Smart Boards in mathematics classrooms. Teachers told the review team that the computers that are available are outdated and that the technology infrastructure is so undependable that they generally do not plan lessons that require the use of computers. Stoneham students will not be prepared to actively participate in civic or academic life as adults without appropriate preparation to use technologies as a part of their daily experiences.

Although much work has been done to create a strong, coordinated program of curriculum and instruction and the district’s leadership understands the need for a continuous cycle of curriculum review, revision, implementation, and assessment, the district has not provided adequate time, a strong, well-understood curriculum, and an instructional leadership structure to ensure that there is a well- aligned, consistently used, and effectively delivered curriculum.

Classroom observations showed that strong instructional practices are not generally and consistently in place in the district.

The team conducted 59 observations of district classes; 22 classes at the elementary level, 17 at the middle school, and 20 at the high school. The classes included: 11 English language arts (ELA), 7 mathematics, and 4 “other” at the elementary schools; 3 ELA, 7 mathematics, and 7 “other” at the middle school; and 6 ELA, 8 mathematics, and 6 “other” at the high school level. The observations ranged from 20 to 30 minutes in length. All review team members used ESE’s instructional inventory, a tool for observing characteristics of standards-based teaching and learning. The tool contains 35 characteristics within 10 categories: classroom climate, learning objective, use of class time, content learning, instructional techniques, activation of higher-order thinking, instructional pacing, student thinking, student groups, and use of student assessments.

In three areas of classroom management and organization, classroom climate, use of class time, and instructional pacing, there was evidence of strong instructional practices at certain levels. The review team found solid evidence of a classroom climate characterized by respectful behaviors, routines, tone, and discourse. It was apparent that there is a strong climate of respect and consideration among students and staff. These behaviors were observed in between 88 percent to 100 percent of the classes visited, depending on grade span and the characteristic being observed.

- Observers found teachers setting and conveying high expectations for learning to students in 74 percent of observed high school classes, 65 percent of middle school classes visited, and only 41 percent of observed elementary classes.
- In 91 percent of elementary, 100 percent of middle school, and 89 percent of high school classes observed, the review team found strong evidence of teacher preparedness.
- Teachers were seen to explain task instructions and provide choices for when tasks are complete in 91 percent of elementary visits, 76 percent of middle school observations, and only 53 of percent high school classrooms visited.
- Students responded quickly and appropriately to routines and expectations in 94 percent of observed elementary classes, 77 percent of middle school classes visited, and 63 percent of observed high school classes. One elementary teacher prepared students for a move to a different room to use a Smart Board by giving a five-minute notice and announcing team members. She further offered additional “points” to the team that was the first seated and prepared to begin the “game,” which was an activity designed to review and apply information in new settings.
- Teachers were observed to have command of pacing a lesson in a way that allows all students to be engaged. In the classes visited this characteristic was observed in 86 percent of elementary, 100 percent of middle school, and 79 percent of high school classes.

- Teachers were observed using wait time to allow for responses from all students in 94 percent of middle school classes but only in 52 percent of elementary classes and 47 percent of high school classes visited.

In the area of instructional design and delivery, the frequency with which key instructional characteristics were observed was 50 percent or lower in the district overall. There were five exceptions:

- In 79 percent of observed classes the team found students making connections to prior knowledge or experience (82 percent at the elementary level, 88 percent at the middle school, and 68 percent at the high school).
- Teachers were observed communicating academic content with clarity and accuracy in 88 percent of classes visited (100 percent at the middle school, 89 percent at the high school, and 78 percent at the elementary level).
- Content appeared to be appropriate for grade and level in 95 percent of the classes observed districtwide.
- The team observed that students examined, analyzed, or interpreted information in 81 percent of elementary classes visited, 94 of middle school classes, and only 58 percent of high school classes.
- In some classes, students received feedback that told them where they were in relation to the learning goals (42 percent of observed high school classes, 76 percent of observed middle school classes, and 57 percent of observed elementary school classes).

The practice of communicating learning objectives and identifying learning outcomes that drive instruction has not been established in the district:

- The learning objective of the lesson was clearly communicated to students in less than half the elementary classes observed (48 percent), slightly more than half the middle school classes seen (59 percent), and in 37 percent of high school classes visited.
- In none of the observed high school classes (zero percent) was a learning objective that identifies the student learning outcome (as contrasted with a student task) identified by the teacher. The review team found this characteristic in 41 percent of the elementary classes observed and in 59 percent of the middle school classes observed.
- A learning objective that drives all components of the lesson was observed in 32 percent of elementary classes visited, 59 percent of middle school classes visited, and 24 percent of high school classes visited. One team member said that in one high school class, the teacher told the students, “I’m going to do this over and over and over again until you’re so bored you can’t stand it. Then when you see it on the MCAS you’ll just start laughing because you’ll know it cold.”

Districtwide, the key instructional characteristics of content learning were present in less than half of the classrooms observed:

- In less than half of observed elementary (48 percent) and middle school (41 percent) classes, and in less than one quarter (21 percent) of observed high school classes, students were engaging with a variety of curriculum resources or technology to enhance their learning.
- In slightly more than half of observed middle (53 percent) and elementary (59 percent) school classes, students were engaged with content through a variety of instructional strategies that accommodated their learning styles. In 32 percent of observed high school classes students were engaging with a variety of instructional strategies.
- The review team observed different or tiered activities in few classes in any grade span, in 36 percent of observed elementary classes, 6 percent of middle school visits, and 4 percent of high school classrooms visited. When asked about differentiated or tiered instruction, teachers, principals and curriculum leaders said that differentiation was accomplished through leveled sections of courses at the high school and to some extent at the middle school.
- In 75 percent of observed middle school classes students were observed applying new conceptual knowledge during the lesson. In less than half of observed elementary classes (32 percent) and high school classes (42 percent) students were seen applying new conceptual knowledge.

In less than half of the classes observed was there evidence of the use of a range of instructional techniques and grouping. In all grade spans, most teachers were observed to use only teacher-directed, whole-group instruction.

- Direct, whole-group instruction was the most prevalent form of instruction in observed classes. It was observed in 76 percent of elementary, 82 percent of middle, and 89 percent of high school classes visited.
- Guided practice (students practice with teacher) was seen in 59 percent of district classes visited.
- Small-group learning (students work together without direct instruction) was evident in 52 percent of classes visited districtwide and in 37 percent of classes observed at the high school.
- Independent practice (student has full responsibility for the task) was evident in 51 percent of classes visited.

In the categories of activation of higher-order thinking and student thinking, five of the six instructional characteristics were observed in less than 40 percent of the observed classes.

- In less than one third of observed classes were students seen to form predictions, develop arguments, or evaluate information (33 percent of elementary, 18 percent of middle, and 26 percent of high school classes visited).

- In even fewer classrooms were students observed evaluating or reflecting on their own thinking (10 percent of elementary, 29 percent of middle, and 5 percent of high school classes visited).
- In 65 percent of visited middle school classes students were observed generating questions related to the lesson objective, while this was true of students in only 29 percent of elementary classes and 21 percent of high school classes visited.
- Teachers were observed asking students to use various means, verbally or in writing, to represent their ideas and thinking in 37 percent of observed high school classes, 65 percent of observed middle school classes, and 67 percent of observed elementary classes.
- Team members observed students engaging in structures that advance their thinking (i.e., think-pair-share, turn-and talk) in 6 percent of middle school classes, 14 percent of high school classes, and 33 percent of elementary classes visited.

The use of student groups to strengthen learning was evident in less than 30 percent of all classes observed.

- Students were observed inquiring, exploring, or solving problems together in small groups or pairs in 29 percent of elementary, 18 percent of middle school, and 28 percent of high school classes visited.
- Students were held accountable for their contributions to group work in 36 percent of high school classes, 6 percent of middle school classes, and 10 percent of elementary classes visited.

Teachers were observed using at least one informal assessment aligned to the lesson goals to check for understanding or mastery in 62 percent of classes observed districtwide. Two important characteristics of the use of student assessments were observed in less than 40 percent of classes visited, overall:

- Team members observed teachers adjust instruction based on on-the-spot or formal assessment in 28 percent of observed high school classes, 35 percent of observed middle school classes, and 9 percent of observed elementary classes.
- Teachers were observed asking students to revise work based on feedback in less than 38 percent of elementary classes, 35 percent of middle school classes, and 16 percent of high school visits.

In less than half of the nearly 60 class observations was there evidence of the use of a range of instructional techniques in the classroom. In all grade spans, most teachers were observed to use teacher-directed, whole-group instruction. Also, the review team observed different or tiered activities in few classes in any grade span and little evidence of teachers adjusting instruction based on on-the-spot assessment. A review of teacher evaluations and documents showed no evidence of administrators addressing these concerns and no evidence of a planned, ongoing, and

systematic program of supportive professional development leading to improvement of instructional strategies and practices. Teachers and administrators told review team members that time for professional development is severely limited and often not well coordinated.

Instructional practice in this district is not at a high enough level to be able to move students to higher levels of achievement or to meet the needs of all students.

Assessment

The absence of formal and informal formative assessment data in the district has left teachers without the information that they need to make informed instructional decisions.

There is extremely limited formal formative assessment data available in the district. One source of such data is at the elementary level. Title I teachers administer the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) three times a year in kindergarten through grade 2. The DIBELS is a normed assessment that measures student progress in phonemic awareness and accuracy and fluency against its own benchmarks. So teachers at the early elementary level have assessment data in these areas three times a year. However, in interviews teachers consistently remarked on the limitations of DIBELS and expressed the need for additional tests of fluency and comprehension; they, in effect, downplayed the usefulness of the data that it yields and expected that DIBELS would be eliminated in the future. For students in grades 3 to 5, there is not yet an assessment in place to periodically measure each student's progress toward benchmarks in English language arts (ELA). In fact, in these grades there are no benchmarks established to delineate students' expected progress in ELA. There is a reference in the Colonial Park School Improvement Plan to teachers mapping grade-level skills in the frameworks, so there is a suggestion of work on benchmarks. However, there was agreement in interviews that the district as a whole has neither its own nor program-specific benchmarks in ELA in grades 3 to 5. And as a result, there are no formative assessments.

Over the two years before the site visit, the district has been introducing balanced literacy at the elementary level with a roll-out of accompanying professional development. During the 2011–2012 school year, a small number of teachers received training and implemented balanced literacy in their classrooms. The remaining teachers agreed to launch at least one unit in balanced literacy. In 2012–2013, all teachers will fully implement balanced literacy. In moving toward a related assessment system, the same few teachers who are doing full implementation during the 2011–2012 school year have also been trained in the accompanying Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (BAS) and have administered the complete assessment to five of their students. For the 2012–2013 school year the plan is that these teachers will administer the assessment to all their students. And the remaining teachers will be trained in the BAS and will use it with five of their students. If the district follows this plan, by 2013–2014 balanced literacy and its assessment system will be in place. However, there is a drawback to this benchmark assessment system; it is administered to students individually. These elementary teachers, who already have limited available time, will require either time or support to accomplish the

administration of the assessments to each student three times a year. In addition, full implementation of the assessment system will not take place until the 2012–2013 school year. In the meantime, teachers, particularly in grades 3 to 5, have little data for planning their instruction.

The district began full implementation of Everyday Math in 2009. Each unit in this program has an accompanying assessment. As Everyday Math was introduced, the director of elementary education met with teachers to modify the unit assessments. Some teachers reported in interviews that the unit assessments were modified because the questions were not well formulated, others said that the questions were too challenging for their students. Whatever the reason, the district produced modified unit assessments. The review team received conflicting information as to whether the modified unit assessments are currently in use. Some teachers said that they and other teachers used the unit assessments regularly. Others said that they did not administer the assessments. One principal reported that she asked her teachers to meet at the beginning of each unit to develop an appropriate assessment. Whatever the extent of the use of the Everyday Math unit assessments, it seems clear that the original unit assessments are frequently modified and sometimes simply ignored. The result is that some teachers in kindergarten to grade 5 have formative assessment data in math that they can use to plan instruction. However, these assessments, when they are used, vary widely across schools. And all teachers are not using them. So administrators and all elementary teachers do not have useful formative assessment data with which to design their math instruction.

Administrators in the district mentioned an additional complication. They believe that Everyday Math is not compatible with the new curriculum frameworks currently being introduced in the state. As a result, there are plans for teachers this summer to adapt Everyday Math to fit the requirements of the new curriculum frameworks. This is a disincentive to use the program's unit assessments, as well as an additional delay in progress toward implementation of a system of formative assessments in elementary math.

In the middle school, in math in grades 6 and 7, there are common chapter exams; however, it is not clear whether they are formative assessments that measure student progress against benchmarks. At the middle and high school, program supervisors report there are common midterms and finals in most mathematics and science courses. However, midterms and finals take place only twice a year, at the close of a course, and cannot be called formative assessments. They do not provide a teacher with periodic, mid-course information about student progress. Rather they are summative. Common summative assessments are useful, but they do not enable a teacher to adjust instruction to address the immediate needs of students.

Also, it is important to understand these common midterms and finals in the light of how curriculum is produced at the secondary level. In many cases, because these schools are relatively small, a single teacher may teach all sections of a course. That teacher is then usually assigned responsibility for developing the curriculum for that course. Teachers in that situation sometimes include in the curriculum binder midyear and final exams. Because the teacher then administers that assessment in each of the sections, that course technically has a common final.

In interviews, teachers reported informal communication and cooperation around curriculum and assessments when two teachers teach sections of the same course and only one of them developed the curriculum binder.

With the exception of math, middle school classes are heterogeneously grouped. In a few instances, middle school teachers reported developing differentiated assessments for students in a single course. For the most part, however, all students in a class take the same tests. At the high school, teachers maintain that they successfully operate without formative assessments because classes are leveled. They believe that they already know what students need from the levels they are in. At the same time, however, in interviews they discussed the range of abilities within leveled classes. Also, it is important to note that in this district students frequently choose the levels of the classes that they take. This means that teachers do not have a reliable measure of the ability and achievement of the students in their leveled classes.

The review team's classroom observations yielded information about teachers' use of informal assessments to check for understanding. At the elementary level, teachers used an informal assessment to check for understanding in 83 percent of observed classes. However, at the middle school this took place in only 47 percent of observed classes and at the high school in 50 percent of classrooms visited. Teachers were observed adjusting their instruction based on formative assessment information in 9 percent of visited classes at the elementary level and in 35 and 28 percent of the classes observed, respectively, at the middle and high schools. With the exception of DIBELS results in English language arts in kindergarten through grade 2 and possibly math courses in grades 6 and 7, teachers in the district do not have available data about their students' progress. Teachers reported in interviews how they determine informally what their students need. But in a standards-based system with formative assessments, teachers regularly measure students' progress against established benchmarks. At the time of the review, the district did not have in place systems to accomplish this. The establishment of benchmarks and the implementation of formative assessments is an urgent matter for the district. Without them, teachers cannot determine and then address their students' instructional needs.

The extent and effectiveness of district analysis and decision making around summative and formative assessment data vary widely in the Stoneham Public Schools.

With those assessments available to administrators and teachers in the district, the analysis and consequent decision making vary from strong to weak and in some cases to non-existent.

With MCAS tests results, the district's analysis is thorough and far reaching. Analysis begins with the superintendent. His analysis is careful and leads to some discussion at leadership meetings as well as individual discussions with principals and the elementary curriculum director. After analysis of the 2011 results, the superintendent called the staff's attention to the achievement of students with disabilities, as he had previously.³

³According to ESE data, in 2011 in ELA in grades 3 and 7 students with disabilities lagged behind their peers statewide by 4 percentage points and 5 percentage points, respectively (data not in a table). In math in grades 3 and

Principals and program supervisors download MCAS information from the Education Data Warehouse and do their own analysis. Results come to teachers through the principals at the elementary level and through program supervisors at the middle and high schools. In schools, teachers and administrators devote faculty meetings, early release time, department time, and any common planning time in place to a careful teacher review of results by subject, by level, and by student. A substantial amount of the review involves item analysis in areas of weakness. Teachers described staying with the MCAS tests analysis until they believe that they have fully examined student needs and decided upon the instructional adjustments needed.

When secondary English teachers recognized that writing was an issue, they adopted a graphic organizer for writing, teachers and students used it, and writing scores improved. In English in particular, the program supervisor develops materials for use in classrooms to support instruction in perceived areas of weakness. This extensive analysis and the resulting instructional changes have helped make MCAS tests results very strong, according to interviewees.

Principals, classroom teachers, and Title I teachers review and use DIBELS results. The assessment is administered three times a year to all students in kindergarten, grade 1, and grade 2. Some principals, along with their teachers, review their school's scores after each test administration to determine which students need interventions. However, this is not consistent across schools. Title I teachers use the results to place students in Title I classes. And they do progress monitoring with the students assigned to their classes. District-office administrators also use DIBELS results for grant writing. However, principals and teachers do not hold the DIBELS in high regard. In interviews, they stressed the limitations of the DIBELS; as a result, it has limited impact on their instructional decision making.

In elementary English language arts (ELA), the district will have fully implemented balanced literacy and its assessment system in 2013–2014. Only then will teachers have formative assessment data to review in that area. The district developed unit assessments for the Everyday Math program when it was introduced in 2009, but interviewees said they are not reliably in use across all classrooms. Those teachers who are using these assessments have some data to use in planning their instruction. However, grade-level, schoolwide, and districtwide decisions cannot flow from an assessment so frequently modified and so inconsistently used. In one instance, a principal said that when she began in 2011 to graph the results of the Everyday Math unit assessments, she found that teachers were not prepared to handle the results. As a result, she discontinued the practice in 2012.

In interviews, program supervisors said there are common midterms and finals in most secondary courses. However, they agreed that while they are in place, there is no effort to analyze the

7, students with disabilities lagged behind their peers across the state by 14 percentage points and 8 percentage points, respectively (data not in a table). See the School/District Profiles on the ESE website at: <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/mcas/subgroups2.aspx?linkid=25&orgcode=02840000&fycode=2011&orgtypecode=5&>

results to determine how successful students had been in courses and whether the curriculum or the assessment needs modification. As a result, the rationale for common midterms and finals at the secondary level—measuring the achievement of a common set of standards across courses—is lost.

The district devotes substantial time and work to the analysis of MCAS assessments to determine how to address the student weaknesses that these summative assessments reveal. This time and hard work yield results. MCAS achievement in the district is strong. In other instances, there is less powerful use of assessment data. DIBELS results are used to most advantage for progress monitoring in Title I classes. Principals and teachers draw less useful information from the three times yearly DIBELS administrations for all students. Everyday Math unit assessments are used inconsistently and results are not compared across schools or the district. The work that went into developing the unit assessments has been lost in their inconsistent implementation. Finally, while the secondary schools have placed a value on having common midterms and finals, they are not reaping the benefits that would come from their analysis in the light of achievement of curriculum standards. Only in the case of the MCAS assessment does the district turn the resulting data to advantage as a measurement of the achievement of standards-based benchmarks.

Human Resources and Professional Development

Formal evaluations in the district gave an overall impression of instructional strength in the district that contrasted with classroom observations by the review team. Also, evaluations provided little instructive comment and few recommendations for professional development.

The team reviewed 34 randomly selected personnel files, focusing primarily on evaluations. Eight of the reviewed files were for teachers without professional status. All certifications were up-to-date and all teachers were highly qualified. All teachers without professional status are evaluated annually and receive at least two formal observations by their supervisors during the year. According to the superintendent, professional status teachers in Stoneham are evaluated twice in a four-year cycle, in years one and three. The district uses long and short evaluation forms, both of which are organized according to the seven professional standards from the Principles of Effective Teaching.⁴ The long form with more narrative is used once in the cycle.

The long form evaluations described in detail the practices observed in the classroom, library, or therapy setting. Only three indicated a standard needing improved practice. The two evaluation

⁴ The Principles of Effective Teaching accompanied the regulations on evaluation of teachers and administrators (at 603 CMR 35.00) that were in effect through the 2010-2011 year. On June 28, 2011, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted to substitute a new set of regulations on the evaluation of educators. Under 603 CMR 35.11, districts were required to adopt and begin implementation of evaluation systems consistent with the new regulations in phases, with all districts doing so by the beginning of the 2013–2014 school year.

options are “meets standard” or “needs improvement” and only one evaluation specifically noted that the teacher “exceeds” the standard. These evaluations generally had little instructive comment and specified few professional development recommendations. They did not go beyond a detailed summary of the classroom activities observed. This is of particular concern in a district where so many teachers are in the early part of their careers.

The review team’s observations of 59 classes in the district indicated some instructional strengths as well as significant areas in need of attention; these observations are described in detail in the second Curriculum and Instruction finding above. These results contrasted sharply with the teacher evaluations that were overwhelmingly positive. There is a disconnect between what the review team observed in classrooms and what administrators wrote in formal evaluations. Also, a district in which over fifty percent of teachers are in their first five years of service and are facing the challenges of beginning teaching would suggest a teaching force in need of support and direction.

The absence of instructive evaluations in Stoneham has hindered the professional growth of teachers and the development of their instructional practices. The district has an opportunity now to make evaluation a more informative, reflective, and instructive process and to improve instruction at all levels, as it implements a new evaluation system in accordance with the new Massachusetts model.

Student Support

The district has ample structures in place to address students’ academic, social, and emotional needs. Several indicators point to the success of these programs.

Academic Support

According to interviewees, there is a Teacher Assistance Team (TAT) at every elementary school that is chaired by an adjustment counselor and includes some general education staff, a school psychologist, and the school principal. The Title I teacher, the ESL service provider, and other specialists may also attend depending on the area of expertise needed. The TAT meets weekly. Classroom teachers present the team with concerns about particular students’ academic, social, and emotional needs, including any relevant data. The team suggests strategies for the teacher to implement for six to eight weeks. The adjustment counselor follows up on the recommendations. By the time of a follow-up meeting, either students’ issues will have been satisfactorily addressed or the students may be referred for special education or 504 services. At the middle school level there is the Student Assistance Team (SAT) with functions and a structure similar to those of the TAT. The high school has a student support team and the Guidance Administrative Team (GAT) that address identified and emerging student-related concerns. The GAT meets weekly and consists of the program supervisors, the school principal, the two assistant principals, and the guidance counselors.

The district uses integrated service models to minimize separation of special populations from the mainstream of school activity. According to Stoneham's most recent District Improvement Plan, the district's mission requires that the school committee and the staff "maintain a safe, supportive, and inclusive school culture." Inclusion is implemented at all schools. In 2010, 75.5 percent of students receiving special education services were in full inclusion compared to 57 percent statewide. Another 8.1 percent were in partial inclusion, compared to 20.8 percent in the state, and 5.8 percent were in substantially separate classrooms, compared to 15.4 percent in the state. This means that most of Stoneham's students receiving special education services receive the majority of instruction within the general education classroom. A special education liaison is assigned to each of the inclusion classes. The special education liaison plans and implements interventions, coordinates services for the students, and models best practices in teaching students who receive special education services.

There are various partial-inclusion models in use across the district. Colonial Park Elementary and South Elementary each have an integrated preschool classroom staffed by a certified early childhood special education teacher and a paraprofessional. Both regular education students and students receiving special education services participate in the program. In addition, students receiving special education services receive a range of direct services from specialists including speech and language pathologists, occupational and physical therapists, and Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) specialists, depending on their needs as stated in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Robin Hood Elementary houses two special education integrated programs at the primary level. Central Elementary School has Partner Programs, a form of an inclusion model, for grades 3–5. These are cotaught inclusion classrooms led by both a certified elementary and a special education teacher. Students may receive some remediation and specialized instruction in small groups or in a resource room. At the middle school, the two major subjects are cotaught by both a special and a regular education teacher. The high school has two partial-inclusion classes.

Additional academic supports provided within the district include:

- Three guidance counselors at the middle school and four at the high school. They follow a written curriculum in teaching classes.
- Two Title I teachers assigned to elementary schools, kindergarten through grade 2. Students receive services through a referral.
- The Central Elementary School's homework club supported by local businesses, available right before and after MCAS tests.
- Middle school homework club three days a week for students in grades 6–8, all year.
- Before- and after-school study sessions at the Robin Hood Elementary School to develop critical thinking through reading.
- An ESL teacher assigned to two of the four elementary schools and two ESL tutors assigned to both the middle and high schools, serving approximately thirty students.

- Summer-school programs at the elementary level for students identified by teachers' recommendations and DIBELS scores. Seventy-two students participate.
- After-school MCAS academy offered to grades 4 and 5 in the spring with 35 participants at the Central Elementary School.
- Junior Great Books for grades 7 and 8, every 2 weeks throughout the year with 20–25 students and 2 teachers.
- MCAS program for grade 7, 4 weeks of math and ELA before the test administration.
- Middle school peer leader tutoring program.
- Middle school after-school MCAS tutoring program.
- High school math team for 18–20 students who compete with other students throughout the year.
- High school peer tutors before and after school with 20–25 students involved.
- Summer school in ELA and math at the high school level, generally to make up credits.

Social and Emotional Support

The district has three adjustment counselors, two at the elementary level and one at the middle school. At the elementary level, adjustment counselors chair the Teacher Assistance Team meetings, meet with individuals and small groups of students, promote positive social development, connect families and students with outside services such as the Department of Mental Health, and develop behavior plans. The middle school adjustment counselor has duties similar to those of the elementary adjustment counselors and is also involved with discipline, truancy, and the courts.

The district also has programs that combine attention to students' social and emotional needs with their academic needs. The Reaching Independence through Structured Environment (RISE) program is in place at both the elementary and middle school levels. It is a substantially separate program for students with more severe disabilities who require higher levels of support and specialized instruction. ABA practices are infused into the program. A special education teacher conducts the program and a paraprofessional supports it. At South Elementary the RISE program is offered to preschoolers and has a full-time ABA specialist, several paraprofessionals, and a teacher certified in early childhood special education. The program has a disciplinary team in place to support staff and students enrolled in the program. It includes a board-certified behavior analyst, a speech and language pathologist, and an occupational and physical therapist. The RISE program is also available to kindergarten through grade 2 at Robin Hood Elementary, grades 2–5 at Central Elementary, and to students at both the middle and high school levels.

The Stride program at both the middle and high school levels is designed to address the needs of students faced with social, emotional, and academic challenges that have prevented them from succeeding in a mainstream academic environment. The program emphasizes “respect,

responsibility, self control and repair” and is staffed by a special education teacher with support from a paraprofessional. The Stride program at the middle school level was started midyear in the 2011–2012 school year. It services formerly hospitalized students and students identified as bipolar. This year the program has five students. The district has identified students who have been provided out-of-district placement for social and emotional reasons whom it intends to service through this program. At the high school level the program services students in regular and in special education in grades 9 and 10.

Additional supports for students’ social and emotional needs include:

- Two board certified behavior analysts employed by the district and assigned to support all six schools. They assist students, teachers, and teams with the Functional Behavior Assessments and other forms of behavior plans.
- Open Circle and an AntiBullying program adopted at each elementary school. Open Circle provides a shared philosophy and common language for social engagement. Every new teacher receives training in this program.
- A school psychologist assigned to every school.
- Junior Achievement for all grades at the South Elementary School, where 100 percent of the classrooms participate. It is provided in late winter/early spring.
- Wall of Kindness to promote kind behaviors at the middle school.
- Community-Based Justice meets at the high school once a month for students involved with the courts.

In addition, some professional development (PD) has been offered to staff to support them in addressing diverse learners’ needs, particularly in the social and emotional areas. Paraprofessionals have received training on supporting the social, emotional, and academic needs of students in the classroom. The director of student services has met with paraprofessionals and provided them with case studies and possible approaches. Other PD offered to staff includes: social/emotional needs of students, IEP goal writing, coteaching, ELL Category 1 training, and differentiated instructional practices. Parents have also participated in sessions to inform them of ways to support their children’s social and emotional needs and to better understand the special education process and related resources within the district.

The Stoneham school district has numerous programs and services in place to address the needs of its students. Many academic support programs focus on MCAS preparation, frequently in the time period immediately before the test administration. And the district had a number of positive indicators around MCAS achievement: steadily improving and higher proficiency rates than the state in both ELA (in 2011 77 percent as compared to 69 percent) and mathematics (in 2011 62 percent as compared to 58 percent) and increased median student growth percentiles in ELA (from 51.0 in 2009 to 62.0 in 2010 and to 61.0 in 2011) and in math (from 51.0 in 2009 to 53.5 in 2010 to 57.0 in 2011).

The social and emotional supports available in the district are numerous and a number of the indicators of social and emotional health in the district are positive:

- In 2011 an attendance rate higher than the state rate (95.6 percent as compared to 94.7 percent); the percentage of students absent fewer than 10 days a year (76 percent) was also higher than the state rate (68 percent)
- A 2010 suspension rate lower than that of the state (4 percent as compared to 6 percent)
- In 2010 the number of criminal, drug-or tobacco-related, and violent incidents resulting in out-of-school suspensions below the state rate (1.6 percent as compared to 2.5 percent)
- An annual drop-out rate in 2011 below the state rate (1.4 percent as compared to 2.7 percent)
- A 2011 4-year cohort graduation rate above the state rate (88.6 percent as compared to 83.4 percent)
- A 2010 5-year cohort graduation rate above that of the state (92.9 percent as compared to 84.7 percent)
- In 2011 the proportion of English language learners who attained English language proficiency above the state rate (65 percent as compared to 38 percent)

While it is not possible to establish direct causality between the specific student support programs in place and these positive indicators, in the judgment of the review team there is likely a strong relationship between the two.

Financial and Asset Management

The amount spent on education in Stoneham has consistently exceeded required Net School Spending (NSS). Although the local appropriations budget increased in both fiscal year 2011 and fiscal year 2012, overall increased costs have necessitated cuts in current programs.

The town has consistently exceeded the state's required net school spending for the schools, most recently by 15.4 percent for fiscal year 2011. The district's fiscal year 2011 expenditure per in-district pupil was at the median for K-12 districts of similar size, but higher-than-median expenditures per out-of-district pupil put its overall expenditures above the median (\$12,449 versus the median of \$11, 922). But although the local appropriations budget increased by 2.2 percent in fiscal year 2011 and 2.6 percent in fiscal year 2012, overall increased costs have resulted in cuts in programs, including programs called for in school committee goals and the District Improvement Plan.

School committee budget goals for fiscal year 2013 included several programs to be restored or improved: all-day kindergarten, middle school teams and electives, and new in-house special

education services. The District Improvement Plan called for the restoration of reading teachers and a mathematics coach, and expanded support for curriculum, professional development, and assessments. Other needs listed included textbook replacements, after-school programs, a resource officer, and up-to-date technology. Teachers reported, and the team observed, that many computers in the schools are out of date or do not work properly. Parents expressed disappointment at the loss of art and music classes at the elementary and middle school levels. Some building maintenance and technology needs remain under consideration until capital proposals are brought to town meeting in October, when unspent fiscal year 2012 funds are allocated. Administrators and school committee members reported that many programs they felt were important had to be eliminated or reduced when the recommended fiscal year 2013 budget had to be cut to meet the town's available funds. Reductions in federal grants have also reduced available revenues.

The district and the town have taken steps to identify savings and to increase revenues to fund school and town needs. Department of Revenue documents and school officials indicated that the town has never supported an operational override, with one losing most recently in 2011, but according to town and school officials a variety of strategies have been used to offset budget cuts. A trash fee was implemented in 2011 that raised revenues roughly equivalent to the override that lost. The district used unspent funds budgeted for utilities to fund a middle school social/emotional/behavioral program. The town joined the state GIC insurance program in 2009, saving approximately \$1 million for the schools. Special education and administrative duties have been reorganized to provide needed special education chairpersons, curriculum supervision, and technology support staff. The district has been reducing out-of-district special education placements for substantial savings, with a reduction from 70 placements in 2011 to 54 projected for fall 2012. Officials also expected that the middle school reorganization planned for 2014 will free up resources that will allow middle school teams and art and music instruction to be restored.

Major program needs will remain, including free all-day kindergarten, exploratory and elective classes at all levels, up-to-date technology and staff to support it, reading teachers, a mathematics coach, teacher time for curriculum and professional development, and maintenance.

The district's budget development process is transparent and collaborative, with input from administrators and the school committee and a comprehensive and clear budget document. The process is done in close cooperation with town officials, with little tension over resources and wide support for the school budget. However, an agreement between town and district on a specific percentage of the budget for schools may be unnecessarily constraining.

The budget document is comprehensive and includes a presentation by line item of the previous year's expenditures, current year's budget, proposed budget, and the amount and percent of increases or decreases. An introductory letter from the superintendent highlights major programmatic and financial changes, and the timeline and budget goals are included for reference. Backup material includes enrollment trends, detailed personnel lists, and proposed

school and district-wide operational expenses including special education tuitions. Grants and other outside funding are included to provide a complete picture of school programs and spending. For reference purposes, the document includes the District Improvement Plan (DIP), the district agreement with the town for the allocation of town revenues, trends for staffing and equipment purchases over the past several years, a recent financial report of the current year's expenditures and projected balances, a survey of school fees, and per pupil expenditures for Stoneham and other Massachusetts districts.

The development and presentation of the budget are transparent. Goals for the budget, such as free all-day kindergarten, the restoration of middle school teams, and the implementation of new special education programs, were discussed by administrators and approved by the school committee in October, when administrators began preparing their budgets for submission to the superintendent in December. In December the town administrator prepared revenue estimates. The superintendent took recommendations into account when preparing a reasonable needs-based budget for presentation to the school committee in January; then principals and other administrators discussed their proposals at school committee meetings and the school committee considered adjustments proposed by the superintendent and fine-tuned the budget. Finally in April the committee held a public hearing and approved a budget in line with projected town revenues and its agreement with town officials. Town officials and the superintendent noted that adjustments are made again at the October Town Meeting to take into account updated revenue information (especially state aid) and unexpected needs (such as utility or special education costs).

There is good collaboration between school and town officials; the school committee, board of selectmen, and finance board have all approved and signed a detailed agreement on the distribution of town revenues that gives 41.4% to the schools after certain adjustments. Medicare reimbursements for special education students (\$166,636 for fiscal year 2011) are included in town revenues and not passed on directly to the schools. The superintendent and town administrator both reported meeting and discussing revenue projections at least monthly from December to October. The superintendent keeps the school committee and administrators aware of changes in the revenue projections and their effect on the proposed budget, and recommends budget adjustments in the spring to meet those projections. In March 2011 he presented a list of \$821,800 in cuts (primarily supplies and personnel) and again presented cuts in April when the committee voted a budget in line with the \$23,003,917 allocation based on the agreement. The budget was adjusted again in October with the addition of approximately \$71,000 from the town's insurance surplus. School committee members, the superintendent, and the town administrator all stressed that the agreement on the amount budgeted to the schools has eliminated much of the tension and rancor that used to accompany budget deliberations.

Stakeholders clearly understand what is in the budget, as well as the impact of budget cuts. However, the agreement allows little flexibility for taking into account meeting the needs of district students. The final budget is based almost entirely on town revenues in spite of language in the agreement making allowances for changes in earmarked revenues (such as Chapter 70) and

uncontrollable costs (such as insurance). Special education tuition costs, for example, are not a factor in the agreement, and it allows no additional funds for other educational needs cited above.

The budget process and the agreement have meant better collaboration with the town but also a gradual tightening of resources for the schools, resulting in cutting areas such as maintenance, middle school teams, art, music, and vocational programs in order to protect teaching services and class size.

The district recently achieved passage of a debt exclusion override to replace and expand its middle school, but the high school is also in need of major repairs and renovations. It needs a security system and technology improvements.

The town has supported building projects for the schools. Administrators reported that the elementary schools are less than 10 years old, and in April 2012 the town voted a debt-exclusion override for a \$40 million conversion and expansion of an elementary school to become a grade 5-8 middle school, with the full support of school and town officials. A vote in the town meeting supported the feasibility study in 2010.

The town has a capital plan which it updates twice a year, and has approved capital projects from unspent revenues at its October town meetings, recently including an oil tank removal, the conversion of some burners to gas, and purchases of technology equipment. High school wireless access is proposed for the 2012 capital projects.

Reviewers found the elementary schools clean, well-maintained, and secure, but the middle and high school buildings have many needs. As noted above, the middle school is to be renovated for fall, 2014. The high school was built in 1968, and team members observed broken sidewalks, flooring and ceiling problems, and no security system; the school is open to public entry during the school day. Administrators stressed the need for better security, including video cameras, and noted the risk of intruders. According to administrators and capital plan proposals, the high school also has no wireless access, needs science lab safety upgrades, flooring and ceiling replacements, and parking lot and field improvements. The 2006 NEASC report cited facility, heating, and equipment needs at the high school among its recommendations. The district is working to solve these problems: its capital plan calls for approximately \$9,000,000 in high school repairs and upgrades and \$1,250,000 for fields in 2015, preceded by a feasibility study in 2014; it also calls for new technology and improved HVAC controls at the elementary schools.

The renovation of the middle school along with up-to-date technology will make that facility much more conducive to learning and, significantly, is expected to re-enable the middle school team teaching model, which has been lost. The high school also needs considerable repair and updating, and the district's plan for that building is reasonable; the security system and technology improvements (especially wireless access) are badly needed to provide a safe and up-to-date educational environment for those students. Yet it will almost certainly require another debt exclusion override vote, and more advocacy by town and school officials will be critical to its success.

Recommendations

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

With input from stakeholder groups, the superintendent should initiate a shared process for development of a vision statement and a District Improvement Plan. Then the principals, using the template developed for the DIP and a similar shared process, should prepare School Improvement Plans with goals aligned to the DIP. Progress toward attainment of DIP and SIP goals should be reported periodically, and the appropriate professional staff should be held accountable for attaining them.

In interviews the superintendent said that the district does not have a vision statement. Rather it has the following mission statement: “The mission of the Stoneham Public Schools is to develop students who: are creative, critical and independent thinkers; have respect for and acceptance of self and others; know and apply communication and information literacy skills; are responsible contributors to the local community; have skills and abilities to adapt to a changing and uncertain economic future.” The superintendent also reported that he had drafted the District Improvement Plan himself without participation from key stakeholders; instead, he brought his draft to the administrative team for feedback. Providing feedback is a different role from contributing at the development stage. The superintendent then brought the document to the school committee for their review, comment, directions for public review, and acceptance.

Also, explicit, coordinated focus on goals in the DIP and the SIPs has not been established in the district, and there was little evidence that school and district personnel are held accountable for accomplishing district and school goals. A review of the SIPs indicated that the goals in the SIPs did not, in many instances, align with the DIP goals, nor were the SIPs formatted using the same template as the DIP. In addition, interviewees differed as to how often principals reported on progress made toward attainment of the SIP goals. And both the superintendent and the principals agreed that the superintendent seldom made comments about progress toward SIP goal attainment in the evaluations of the principals.

The superintendent should prepare a vision statement for the Stoneham Public Schools, with input from members of various stakeholder groups, and should then share the vision broadly. The vision should provide the focus and aspirations for the district. The school committee, administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents, and residents of the community must know and support the superintendent’s direction for the school system. Similarly, the current DIP should be reviewed and revised, with participation from members of stakeholder groups, to identify priorities and goals designed to advance the school system towards its desired vision. The template for both the DIP and SIPs should include SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound) and functions such as action step(s), resources needed,

person(s) responsible, measures of accomplishment, and deadlines. Once the revised DIP has been approved by the school committee, it should be presented to and discussed with all school personnel, posted on the district's website, and made available to interested individuals in Stoneham.

The principals should continue to have the school councils assist them in the preparation of their SIPs. The template for the SIPs should be the same as that of the DIP with SMART goals for each school accompanied by the same functions as those in the DIP. Following approval, the principals should present and discuss the new SIPs with their staffs. Principals should also post their SIPs on their school's website and make copies of the SIP available in their office to interested parties.

The superintendent should report on a regular basis to the school committee, the school staff, parents, and the community about the progress made toward attaining each DIP goal. In the same way, principals should report periodically to their school councils, staff, parents, and the community on the progress that they are making toward each of their SIP goals.

Finally, the school committee in its annual evaluation should hold the superintendent accountable for attainment of the DIP goals. Likewise, the superintendent should hold principals accountable for progress on their SIP goals. Once the DIP has been revised with wide stakeholder participation, the DIP and the SIPs are aligned with each other and with the vision statement and have the functions mentioned, and administrators are held accountable for attaining the goals, the district will have more focus and direction and will be better able to make progress toward improving education in the district.

The district should

- **complete the development of vertically and horizontally aligned pre-kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum and ensure its consistent use districtwide;**
- **align the curriculum with the new Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, the MCAS performance-level descriptions, and the district's goals; and**
- **create and implement a continuous, multi-year program of curriculum review, research, revision, implementation, and assessment, under the direction of the director of curriculum PK-12.**

It is important to understand the state of curriculum in the district at the time of the review.

- For many years, curriculum development and coordinated instructional practice were not a focus of the Stoneham Public Schools.
- Since the placement of Stoneham High School on Warning status by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) in 2006, the district has been working to improve its curricula. In December of 2010 the warning was removed in recognition of the progress made.

- The need for aligned, consistently delivered, and continuously improving curriculum is now recognized throughout the Stoneham Public Schools. The district has begun to create curriculum documents at the high school and middle school, although they provide insufficient direction or guidance for teachers and do not include strategies to promote best practice teaching or higher-order thinking skills for students.
- The absence of a well-developed written curriculum is also evident in the elementary level where each school and teacher makes independent decisions about what will be taught, how it will be taught, and when it will be taught. As a result, students do not have common skills, knowledge, or experience when they enter the middle school.
- The review team was told and observed that teachers are “teaching to the MCAS test.” The team was also told that “Whatever book was purchased became the curriculum in that class.”
- According to teachers, program supervisors, and administrators, the district has not provided sufficient time for staff to develop curriculum or to meet for common planning to implement curriculum. When asked how a teacher new to the system would know what to teach and how to teach it beginning on the first day, the response from all interviewed Stoneham staff was “We will supply him/her with a mentor.”
- District teachers need and do not now have written guidance about what is to be taught, how it is to be taught, the materials to be used, or the tools to determine how well students have learned what has been taught.
- There is an absence of clarity about responsibility and lines of authority for curriculum development.

The Stoneham Public Schools should develop and ensure the consistent use pre-kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum maps or guides for all content areas and grades that include: objectives; resources and instructional strategies to promote best practice for teaching and higher-order thinking skills for students; teacher guides; model lessons; supplemental materials; and technology integration strategies; timelines; and assessments (informal, formal, and common). The curriculum should be aligned with the new curriculum frameworks, the MCAS performance-level descriptions, and the district’s goals and should also be aligned vertically (between grades) and horizontally (across classrooms and schools at the same grade level and across sections of the same course).

Additionally, the Stoneham Public Schools should create and implement a continuous, multi-year program of curriculum review, research, revision, implementation, and assessment, under the strong direction of the director of curriculum PK-12. The district should provide enough time, resources, and support for curriculum development and for common planning to enable the implementation and periodic assessment of the curriculum.

The development of a high-quality written curriculum and a curriculum review process will enable the district to coordinate teaching throughout the district. It will ensure that each school’s

taught curricula are aligned to the state curriculum frameworks, the MCAS performance-level descriptions, and the district's goals. It will ensure that there is vertical and horizontal alignment of what is taught. It will enable teachers and other staff to make effective use of curriculum guides that support high-quality teaching and ensure that all students receive high-quality experiences and learning. It will enable staff to assess the efficacy of curriculum and make adjustments to the teaching program. Most importantly, it will foster improved instruction and promote higher levels of achievement for all Stoneham students.

The Stoneham Public Schools should prioritize the creation of a planned, ongoing, and coordinated program of professional development for all instructional and administrative staff that focuses on instructional practices based on evidence from high-quality research and on high expectations for all students. Another priority should be for staff to have sufficient time for professional development, ongoing support, and in-class coaching.

In interviews, in a review of documents, and in nearly 60 observations of classes in Stoneham, the review team found the following areas of concern about the current state of professional practice and professional development in the district:

- Classroom observations across the district did not provide evidence of deep knowledge of best instructional practice.
- The review team observed differentiated or tiered activities in few classes in any grade span.
- The practice of communicating learning objectives has not been established in the district.
- The key instructional characteristics of effective content learning were present in less than half of the classes observed.
- Overwhelmingly, the mode of instruction in observed classes was direct, whole-group instruction.
- Those characteristics that define higher-order thinking were not evident in most observed classrooms.
- Students in observed classes were generally not presented with opportunities that advance their thinking.
- Teachers in most observed classes did not use various student grouping strategies.
- In most observed classes teachers did not demonstrate the use of assessment to adjust instruction: generally, students were not given feedback about where they were in relation to the learning goals, and, when given feedback, students were not asked to revise work based on that feedback.
- Little use of formative assessment to improve instruction and learning was evident in observed classes.

- There was no evidence of a planned, ongoing, and systematic program of supportive professional development leading to improvement of instructional strategies and practices.
- Team members were told by teachers and administrators that time for professional development is severely limited and often not well coordinated.

Instructional practice in this district is not at a high enough level to move students to higher levels of achievement or to meet the needs of all students. In the classes observed by the review team, teachers did not use the techniques and strategies needed to deliver at a high level. Well-planned professional development, provided in workshops and in classrooms with ongoing support, coaching, and monitoring, will provide teachers with the understanding and the training to lift the level of their instruction.

The district should develop or adopt and then administer common formative assessments.

There are few formative assessments established in the district. Teachers administer the DIBELS three times a year to all kindergarten, grade 1, and grade 2 students. Only some elementary teachers use the modified Everyday Math unit assessments. The district plans to have the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System in place for English language arts (ELA) formative assessments at the elementary level in 2013-2014. However, at the time of the review, there were no formative assessments in ELA at the elementary level beyond the DIBELS in kindergarten through grade 2. At the middle and high schools, there were no formative assessments.

Curriculum in Stoneham, as in all districts in the state, is developed within a framework of state-adopted goals and objectives. In this standards-based environment, the thrust of the written curriculum is to provide students with opportunities to make progress toward attainment of these goals and objectives. The teacher has the responsibility to design and deliver the instruction to make that happen. Principals and teachers need information at several points along the way about each student's progress. Formative assessments provide teachers with that data. Teachers in Stoneham have few formative assessments, so they plan their instruction without a solid understanding of where their students are. Instruction across the district will be more focused and effective when it is designed to address the established needs of the students.

The district should use its thorough and purposeful response to MCAS assessment data as a model for analysis and instructional decision-making using current and future formative and summative assessments.

Teachers and administrators in the district address MCAS results with a singular focus. They analyze the data with great care and plan instruction to address the areas of weakness that the assessment reveals. And this considerable analysis and redirection of instruction yields positive results. Overall, Stoneham students have shown remarkable improvements on MCAS.

At the same time, however, teachers in the district do not make effective use of the redesigned unit assessments for Everyday Math. Not all elementary teachers use them, so only some

teachers have results to analyze. And with these varying levels of participation, principals and district administrators do not have the complete information that they need to draw conclusions about elementary math achievement by school or by district. Further, program supervisors reported that they and the teachers did not analyze the results of the common midterms and final exams administered at both the middle school and the high school. Educators in the district are missing opportunities to address the instructional needs of their students when they decide not to administer the unit assessments for Everyday Math or when they give common midterms and finals at the secondary level, but do not examine the results. As the district implements more common formative and summative assessments, administrators and teachers should use the resulting data with the same single-minded determination that they bring to bear on MCAS results.

As it aligns its evaluation system with the new Massachusetts educator evaluation system, 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.

The review team examined 34 randomly selected personnel files, focusing primarily on long form evaluations. The evaluations reviewed were overwhelmingly positive and consisted of little beyond a summary of classroom activities observed. They contained few professional development recommendations although a large number of teachers are in the early stages of their careers. The evaluations gave an overall impression of instructional strength in the district. However, although the review team's observations did show some strengths in the classrooms observed, for example in classroom climate, use of class time, and instructional pacing, they also showed numerous areas of need. See the recommendation under Curriculum and Instruction above, which suggests extensive professional development to deepen teachers' understanding of instructional practice and so raise the level of that practice.

This is an opportune moment for the district to improve the effectiveness of its system for teacher evaluation since under 603 CMR 35.00 as revised in 2011 it is required to adopt and begin implementation of an educator evaluation system consistent with the new regulations by the beginning of the 2013–2014 school year.

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.

The overwhelmingly positive teacher evaluations in Stoneham do not appear to be an accurate reflection of what is happening in classrooms. And they contribute little toward the district's overall objective—namely, the improvement of student achievement. A more effective system for evaluating teachers is one important way to raise the level of classroom instruction. Taking advantage of the opportunities provided by the shift to the new system will address the areas of evaluation the review team identified for improvement at the time of the team's visit.

The district and town should consider reviewing the agreement on a fixed budget percentage; while the agreement reduces friction, it also reduces the possibility of reviewing the district's needs in succeeding years. Given the agreement, the district should consider budgeting strategies that maximize opportunities to allocate limited resources where they are most needed.

Local taxpayers have not supported a general override for town services, most recently in 2011. To counter this, the town has found some ways to support school and town services through other means including a trash fee, joining the state GIC insurance program, use of unspent funds for capital projects, and debt exclusion overrides. The efforts of town and school officials to continue to find alternative sources of revenues have been helpful.

The agreement by town boards on the distribution of revenues has achieved collaboration and a smooth budget process, but at the expense of the flexibility to reallocate resources for special education, utility, and other costs, costs that tend to grow faster than the 2 ½ percent allowed without a general override. The school district has tended to accept the budget limitations imposed on it by the town's decision concerning funds available to the schools. This agreement might better be considered as a starting point in the budget process, to be followed by consideration of the relative merits of all town needs.

Activities such as developing and publicizing strategic planning, public relations and outreach to community groups, and emphasizing the relationship of good schools to property values and quality of life can be helpful in the budgeting discussions.

Town and school officials should continue their efforts to obtain funding for high school renovations, and fund the installation of wireless access and a security system as soon as possible.

The town is to be praised for its recent support of the new middle school project, but facility problems at the high school were cited by the 2006 NEASC study and most remain. Problems noted above included flooring and ceiling issues, heating, broken sidewalks, science lab safety, and outdated technology. That there is no wireless access or security system is a major concern. The town and district capital plan includes renovations to the high school and fields to begin in 2015, and previous success in getting MSBA support and passing debt exclusion overrides for

middle and elementary school buildings is an encouraging sign that the high school project will take place more or less on schedule.

The lack of a security system for the building should be addressed in the short term. It is not as expensive as other proposed renovations, and would contribute greatly to the daily safety of students and staff in the building. Wireless access would be a relatively inexpensive improvement in instructional support and was proposed for the 2012 capital projects.

Appendix A: Review Team Members

The review of the Stoneham Public Schools was conducted from April 16–19, 2012, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Dr. John Kulevich, Leadership and Governance

Dr. Richard Silverman, Curriculum and Instruction

Patricia Williams, Assessment, review team coordinator

Gail Zeman, Human Resources and Professional Development

Dr. Alenor Williams, Student Support

Dr. George Gearhart, Financial and Asset Management

Appendix B: Review Activities and Site Visit Schedule

District Review Activities

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

- The review team conducted interviews with the following Stoneham financial personnel: town administrator, chair, board of selectmen, and member, finance board.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following members of the Stoneham School District School Committee: vice-chair and members.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the Stoneham Teachers Association: president and vice-president.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives from the central office administration of the Stoneham Public Schools: superintendent, director of elementary education, director of student services, and director of finance.
- The review team visited the following schools in the Stoneham Public Schools: Stoneham High School (grades 9–12), Stoneham Middle School (grades 6–8), Central Elementary School (kindergarten through grade 5), Colonial Park Elementary School (pre-kindergarten through grade 5), Robin Hood Elementary (kindergarten through grade 5), and South Elementary (pre-kindergarten through grade 5).
 - During school visits, the review team conducted interviews with school principals and teachers. The team interviewed 23 elementary teachers, 14 middle school teachers, and 19 high school teachers.
 - The review team conducted 59 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the 6 schools visited.
- The review team analyzed multiple sets of data and reviewed numerous documents before and during the site visit, including:
 - Data on student and school performance, including achievement and growth data and enrollment, graduation, dropout, retention, suspension, and attendance rates.
 - Data on the district's staffing and finances.
 - Published educational reports on the district by ESE, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), and the former Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA).

- District documents such as district and school improvement plans, school committee policies, curriculum documents, summaries of student assessments, job descriptions, collective bargaining agreements, evaluation tools for staff, handbooks for students/families and faculty, school schedules, and the district's end-of-the-year financial reports.
- All completed program and administrator evaluations, and a random selection of completed teacher evaluations.

Site Visit Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the district review of the Stoneham Public Schools, conducted from April 9–April 12, 2012.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
<p>April 9</p> <p>Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff and principals; review of documents and personnel files; interview with teachers' association.</p>	<p>April 10</p> <p>Interviews with district staff, principals, and teachers; review of personnel files; focus group with parents; teachers' association interview.</p>	<p>April 11</p> <p>Interview with town personnel; school visits (South Elementary, Colonial Park Elementary, Robin Hood Elementary, Central Elementary, Stoneham High School, Stoneham Middle School); interviews with district and school leaders and teachers; classroom observations; school committee interviews.</p>	<p>April 12</p> <p>School visits (Stoneham High School, Stoneham Middle School); interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; team meeting; emerging themes meeting with district leaders and principals.</p>

Appendix C: Student Performance 2009–2011

Table C1: Stoneham Public Schools and State Proficiency Rates and Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)⁵ 2009–2011 English Language Arts

Grade	2009		2010		2011	
	Percent Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Proficient	Median SGP
All Grades—District	70	51	76	62	77	61
All Grades—State	67	50	68	50	69	50
Grade 3—District	64	NA*	77	NA*	63	NA*
Grade 3—State	57	NA*	63	NA*	61	NA*
Grade 4—District	63	54	57	43	66	53
Grade 4—State	53	50	54	50	53	51
Grade 5—District	68	54	77	58	78	56
Grade 5—State	63	50	63	50	67	50
Grade 6—District	65	43	73	62	78	53
Grade 6—State	66	50	69	50	68	50
Grade 7—District	65	41	77	62.5	77	48
Grade 7—State	70	50	72	50	73	50
Grade 8—District	78	53	84	73	85	70.5
Grade 8—State	78	50	78	50	79	50
Grade 10—District	92	59	86	73	92	87
Grade 10—State	81	50	78	50	84	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.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

⁵ “Student growth percentiles” are a measure of student progress that compares changes in a student’s MCAS scores to changes in MCAS scores of other students with similar performance profiles. The most appropriate measure for reporting growth for a group (e.g., subgroup, school, district) is the median student growth percentile (the middle score if one ranks the individual student growth percentiles from highest to lowest). For more information about the Growth Model, see “MCAS Student Growth Percentiles: Interpretive Guide” and other resources available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/growth/>.

**Table C2: Stoneham Public Schools and State
Proficiency Rates and Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)
2009–2011 Mathematics**

Grade	2009		2010		2011	
	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	Median SGP
All Grades—District	55	51	59	53.5	62	57
All Grades—State	55	50	59	50	58	50
Grade 3—District	67	NA*	73	NA*	68	NA*
Grade 3—State	60	NA*	65	NA*	66	NA*
Grade 4—District	56	64	52	52.5	55	57
Grade 4—State	48	50	48	49	47	50
Grade 5—District	43	41	64	54	74	65
Grade 5—State	54	50	55	50	59	50
Grade 6—District	58	39	43	36	59	33
Grade 6—State	57	50	59	50	58	50
Grade 7—District	39	44	44	29	35	49
Grade 7—State	49	50	53	50	51	50
Grade 8—District	42	65	58	77	66	83
Grade 8—State	48	50	51	51	52	50
Grade 10—District	85	54	83	67.5	80	59
Grade 10—State	75	50	75	50	77	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.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

**Table C3: Stoneham Public Schools and State
Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)
for Selected Subgroups
2011 English Language Arts**

	Stoneham Public Schools			State	
	<i>Number of Students Included</i>	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>
All Students	1,384	91.3	61	87.2	50
African-American/Black	28	89.3	73	77.4	47
Asian	45	91.7	71.5	90.2	59
Hispanic/Latino	49	78.1	48.5	74.2	46
White	1,226	91.9	61	90.9	51
ELL	32	77.3	52	59.4	48
FELL	15	85	---	81.7	54
Special Education	252	71.3	52	68.3	42
Low-Income	230	82.4	56	77.1	46

Note: 1. Numbers of students included are the numbers of district 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. CPI is only reported for groups of 10 or more students.
3. "ELL" students are English language learners.
4. "FELL" students are former ELLs.
Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

**Table C4: Stoneham Public Schools and State
Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)
for Selected Subgroups
2011 Mathematics**

	Stoneham Public Schools			State	
	<i>Number of Students Included</i>	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>
All Students	1,384	83.2	57	79.9	50
African-American/Black	28	70.5	40	65	47
Asian	43	92.4	79.5	89.5	64
Hispanic/Latino	47	70.2	52	64.4	46
White	1,231	83.6	57	84.3	50
ELL	33	77.3	63	56.3	52
FELL	14	94.6	---	75.1	53
Special Education	254	58.4	51	57.7	43
Low-Income	228	71.8	52	67.3	46

Note: 1. Numbers of students included are the numbers of district 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. CPI is only reported for groups of 10 or more students.
3. "ELL" students are English language learners.
4. "FELL" students are former ELLs.
Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Appendix D: Finding and Recommendation Statements

Finding Statements:

Student Achievement

1. Student proficiency rates between 2009 and 2011 have consistently been above state rates in ELA and at or above state rates in mathematics. Between 2009 and 2011, median student growth percentiles (SGPs) in ELA improved substantially and those in mathematics increased steadily.

Leadership and Governance

2. The replacement of the middle school, following approval of a debt-exclusion override by voters, will bring a reorganization of the grade structure in the middle and elementary schools. Other anticipated educational changes for the middle school include a return to a team teaching model and the addition of instructional staff and technology.
3. The district's guiding documents, the District Improvement Plan (DIP) and the School Improvement Plans (SIPs), were developed without participation from key stakeholders. The SIPs were not aligned with the DIP and progress toward the plans' goals has not been addressed in evaluations.

Curriculum and Instruction

4. Much work has been done already to develop a strong coordinated program of curriculum and instruction in the Stoneham Public Schools, but curricula have insufficient specificity, direction, and consistency to guide best teaching and learning in all classes.
5. Classroom observations showed that strong instructional practices are not generally and consistently in place in the district.

Assessment

6. The absence of formal and informal formative assessment data in the district has left teachers without the information that they need to make informed instructional decisions.
7. The extent and effectiveness of district analysis and decision making around summative and formative assessment data vary widely in the Stoneham Public Schools.

Human Resources and Professional Development

8. Formal evaluations in the district gave an overall impression of instructional strength in the district that contrasted with classroom observations by the review team. Also, evaluations provided little instructive comment and few recommendations for professional development.

Student Support

9. The district has ample structures in place to address students' academic, social, and emotional needs. Several indicators point to the success of these programs.

Financial and Asset Management

10. The amount spent on education in Stoneham has consistently exceeded required Net School Spending (NSS). Although the local appropriations budget increased in both fiscal year 2011 and fiscal year 2012, overall increased costs have necessitated cuts in current programs.
11. The district's budget development process is transparent and collaborative, with input from administrators and the school committee and a comprehensive and clear budget document. The process is done in close cooperation with town officials, with little tension over resources and wide support for the school budget. However, an agreement between town and district on a specific percentage of the budget for schools may be unnecessarily constraining.
12. The district recently achieved passage of a debt exclusion override to replace and expand its middle school, but the high school is also in need of major repairs and renovations. It needs a security system and technology improvements.

Recommendation Statements:

1. With input from stakeholder groups, the superintendent should initiate a shared process for development of a vision statement and a District Improvement Plan. Then the principals, using the template developed for the DIP and a similar shared process, should prepare School Improvement Plans with goals aligned to the DIP. Progress toward attainment of DIP and SIP goals should be reported periodically, and the appropriate professional staff should be held accountable for attaining them.
2. The district should

complete the development of vertically and horizontally aligned pre-kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum and ensure its consistent use districtwide;

align the curriculum with the new Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, the MCAS performance-level descriptions, and the district's goals; and

create and implement a continuous, multi-year program of curriculum review, research, revision, implementation, and assessment, under the direction of the director of curriculum PK-12.
3. The Stoneham Public Schools should prioritize the creation of a planned, ongoing, and coordinated program of professional development for all instructional and administrative staff that focuses on instructional practices based on evidence from high-quality research and on high expectations for all students. Another priority should be for staff to have sufficient time for professional development, ongoing support, and in-class coaching.
4. The district should develop or adopt and then administer common formative assessments.
5. The district should use its thorough and purposeful response to MCAS assessment data as a model for analysis and instructional decision-making using current and future formative and summative assessments.
6. As it aligns its evaluation system with the new Massachusetts educator evaluation system, 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. The district and town should consider reviewing the agreement on a fixed budget percentage; while the agreement reduces friction, it also reduces the possibility of reviewing the district's needs in succeeding years. Given the agreement, the district should consider budgeting strategies that maximize opportunities to allocate limited resources where they are most needed.

8. Town and school officials should continue their efforts to obtain funding for high school renovations, and fund the installation of wireless access and a security system as soon as possible.