



Massachusetts Department of  
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY  
EDUCATION

## **West Springfield Public Schools District Review**

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Review conducted April 24–27, 2012

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# Overview of District Reviews

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## ***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 3<sup>1</sup> (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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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).

# West Springfield Public Schools

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The site visit to the West Springfield Public Schools was conducted from April 24–27, 2012. The site visit included 33 hours of interviews and focus groups with over 96 stakeholders ranging from school committee members to district administrators and school staff to teachers' association representatives. The review team conducted focus groups with 9 elementary, 21 middle school, and 8 high school teachers. The team also conducted visits to all the district 8 schools: Ashley (pre-kindergarten and kindergarten), Coburn (kindergarten through grade 5), Fausey, (kindergarten through grade 5), Memorial (grades 1–5), Mittineague (grades 1–5), Tatham (grades 1–5), West Springfield Middle School (grades 6–8), and West Springfield 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 Profile<sup>2</sup>***

The city of West Springfield, with a population of 28,381 according to the 2010 census, is governed by a mayor and a town council of nine members. The city is considered part of the Springfield Hartford Knowledge Corridor. The present mayor, who was elected in November 2011, also serves as chairperson of the seven-member school committee. The district has been a choice district since the 2005–2006 school year. During the 2011–2012 school year there were 120 choice students in the district's K–12 schools. The present superintendent served as acting superintendent from July 2010 until October 2010 when he was formally appointed. Before being appointed superintendent he also served as the district's special services administrator for four years. During the team visit to the district interviewees mentioned how pleased they are with the appointment, spoke of the superintendent with a positive regard, and indicated that they view him with respect. Recently, the school committee voted a six-year extension to the superintendent's contract.

Members of the district's leadership team include the superintendent, the acting assistant superintendent in charge of business and personnel as well as the business manager. The team also includes a special services administrator as well as the district's eight principals who meet regularly with the superintendent.

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<sup>2</sup> Data derived from ESE's website, ESE's Education Data Warehouse, or other ESE sources.

After the superintendent was appointed, he assumed the responsibilities of the retiring curriculum director. These curricular responsibilities require the superintendent to be involved not only in the development but also in the implementation of curriculum in all its aspects.

### *Schools*

The district has six elementary schools, a middle school, and high school with a total enrollment of 3,868 students during the 2011–2012 school year. Student enrollment at each of the elementary schools varies from 136 students to 464 with the following breakdown: Ashley enrolls 310 students; Coburn serves 464 students; Fausey has a student population of 437; Memorial enrolls 191 students; Mittineague has a student population of 136, and Tatham serves 221 students. There are 890 students at the West Springfield Middle School. West Springfield High School has a student population of 1,219.

In December 2011 the city broke ground for the building of new high school scheduled to be completed in the summer of 2015.

### *Enrollment*

In interviews, the review team was told that there has been an increase in recent years in the numbers of homeless students at all levels, of English language learners (ELLs), and of students from low-income families. According to ESE data, West Springfield reported 89 homeless students in 2010, 101 homeless students in 2011, and 120 homeless students in 2012. Also, the proportion of ELLs has increased steadily from 6.8 percent in 2009 to 7.4 percent in 2010 to 8.1 percent in 2011 and 2012, compared to the state rate of 7.3 percent. And the proportion of students from low-income families has increased nearly nine percentage points since 2009— from 40.5 percent in 2009 to 42.9 percent in 2010 to 46.4 percent in 2011 to 48.9 percent in 2012, compared to the state rate of 35.2 percent.

Table 1a illustrates the West Springfield 2010–2011 enrollments by race/ethnicity and selected populations, while Table 1b does the same for 2011–2012.

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

<b>Selected Populations</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>	<b>Percent of State</b>	<b>Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>	<b>Percent of State</b>
<b>Total enrollment</b>	<b>3,932</b>	<b>100.0</b>	--	African-American/Black	137	3.5	8.2
First Language not English	965	24.5	16.3	Asian	177	4.5	5.5
Limited English Proficient*	291	7.4	7.1	Hispanic/Latino	574	14.6	15.4
Special Education**	809	20.3	17.0	White	2,943	74.8	68.0
Low-income	1,825	46.4	34.2	Native American	9	0.2	0.2
Free Lunch	1,607	40.9	29.1	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	4	0.1	0.1
Reduced-price lunch	218	5.5	5.1	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	88	2.2	2.4
<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: West Springfield Public Schools  
Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations  
2011–2012**

Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total	Percent of State	Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total	Percent of State
<b>Total enrollment</b>	<b>3,868</b>	<b>100.0</b>	--	African-American/Black	124	3.2	8.3
First Language not English	956	24.7	16.7	Asian	186	4.8	5.7
Limited English Proficient*	315	8.1	7.3	Hispanic/Latino	604	15.6	16.1
Special Education**	833	21.2	17.1	White	2,838	73.4	67.2
Low-income	1,891	48.9	35.2	Native American	12	0.3	0.2
Free Lunch	1,667	43.1	30.4	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	3	0.1	0.1
Reduced-price lunch	224	5.8	4.8	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	101	2.6	2.5
*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							

*Finances*

See Table 2 below. Expenditures by the district from all funding sources increased by \$2,352,906 (4.6 percent) from fiscal year 2010 to 2011. Chapter 70 aid to the district in fiscal year 2011 increased from \$17,369,506 to \$18,143,323 (4.5 percent), further augmented by State Fiscal Stabilization Fund/Education Jobs (SFSF/EdJobs) federal funding of \$895,260 from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA.) In fiscal year 2012, however, Chapter 70 aid of \$18,857,776 was \$180,807 below the combined total of Chapter 70 and SFSF/EdJobs funding in fiscal year 2011. Actual net school spending was about 7 percent above required in fiscal years 2010 and 2011, and was estimated to remain at that level in fiscal year 2012.

**Table 2: West Springfield 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	35,728,262	35,728,262	35,300,223	35,339,638	36,076,394
by municipality	7,924,099	8,219,940	9,022,212	9,553,437	9,727,258
Total from local appropriations	43,652,361	43,948,202	44,322,435	44,893,075	45,803,652
From revolving funds and grants	---	6,917,656	---	8,325,689	---
Total expenditures	---	50,865,858	---	53,218,764	---
Chapter 70 aid to education program					
Chapter 70 state aid*	---	17,369,506	---	18,143,323	18,857,776
Required local contribution	---	19,265,177	---	19,240,,559	19,599,705
Required net school spending**	---	36,634,683	---	37,383,882	38,457,481
Actual net school spending	---	39,375,283	---	40,002,571	41,389,378
Over/under required (\$)	---	2,740,600	---	2,618,689	2,931,897
Over/under required (%)	---	7.5 %	---	7.0 %	7.6 %
<p>*Chapter 70 state aid funds are deposited in the local general fund and spent as local appropriations.</p> <p>**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.</p> <p>Sources: FY10, FY11 District End-of-Year Reports; Chapter 70 Program information on ESE website. Data retrieved on September 20, 2012.</p>					

Although there is work to be done in the district, as the following report will show, the district has a superintendent who is very familiar with the district, as at the time of the review he had been in the district for over six years. Further, he has the confidence of teachers, the school committee, and community members in the work that he must undertake during the coming years.

## Findings

### Student Achievement

Proficiency rates for grade 10 students in ELA and math have been well below the state's rates. Further, in the three test administrations from 2009–2011, except for math in 2010, median SGPs for West Springfield's grade 10 students were in the 30s, outside the moderate range of 40 to 60.

**Table 3: Grade 10 Proficiency Rates and Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)  
West Springfield Compared to the State  
2009–2011 ELA**

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade 10 ELA	Percent Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Proficient	Median SGP
District	70	31	67	32	71	36
State	81	50	78	50	84	50

**Table 4: Grade 10 Proficiency Rates and Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)  
West Springfield Compared to the State  
2009–2011 Mathematics**

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade 10 Math	Percent Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Proficient	Median SGP
District	64	33	67	41	67	33
State	75	50	75	50	77	50

During the three test administrations from 2009–2011 the overall percentage of grade 10 students scoring proficient or higher on the ELA and math MCAS was about 10 percentage points below that of the state. In ELA while the proficiency rate for grade 10 students in the state improved from 81 percent in 2009 to 84 percent in 2011, the proficiency rate for grade 10 students in Springfield increased only 1 percentage point over that period, from 70 percent to 71 percent. The median SGP increased from 31.0 in 2009 to 32.0 in 2010 and to 36.0 in 2011.

In math as with ELA, during the three test administrations from 2009–2011 the overall percentage of students in grade 10 scoring proficient or higher was about 10 points below that of the state. The proficiency rates for grade 10 students in West Springfield and for their peers in the state showed almost the same rate of increase, with the state increasing by two percentage

points from 75 percent in 2009 to 77 percent in 2011, and West Springfield improving by three percentage points from 64 percent in 2009 to 67 percent in 2011, with no improvement from 2010 to 2011. However, of concern is the fluctuation in the median SGP from 33.0 in 2009 to 41.0 in 2010 and back to 33.0 in 2011.

As discussed in the second Assessment finding in the report, high school interviewees were surprised at the median SGPs and offered a variety of reasons for such an absence of growth in both ELA and math. The fact that those responsible for the instruction seemed unaware of the data is also a cause for concern. The hope is that the information provided in the report that follows will provide some insight into the reasons for the low student growth.

## **Leadership and Governance**

**The West Springfield school district does not have the organizational structures to embed the district's efforts to improve student achievement throughout classrooms in the district.**

The West Springfield District Improvement Plan is organized around three overarching initiatives: aligning the curriculum to the new Massachusetts curriculum frameworks, creating knowledge-driven schools, and increasing the use of technology. Principals reported that although their individual School Improvement Plans are aligned in form and content they had no involvement in the development of the direction of the district or the district goals. Most teachers indicated no knowledge of the generation of either the district or the school plans.

Shortly after he was appointed, the superintendent assumed the responsibilities of the retiring curriculum director. As a result, the superintendent is directly involved in the day-to-day functions of writing and implementing curriculum, selecting teaching materials, mentoring new teachers, and planning professional development. To support these efforts the superintendent mandated the establishment of data teams in the schools. Without a formal structure or process the teams operate differently at each site. All elementary teams meet to discuss monthly math benchmarks; middle-school teams meet most regularly but discuss data gathered three times per year, and the high school does not have a data team to examine achievement data.

Principals and intervention specialists were unable to articulate specific teaching strategies that have improved student performance as a result of the work of these teams. Although there are some positive efforts at codifying instruction such as the adoption of a math program in the summer 2011 and the planned implementation of an ELA program in the 2012–2013 school year at the elementary schools, and work on continuity and alignment through the MMSI grant at the high school, there is an absence of K–12 coordination across curriculum, instruction, and assessment; this contributes to weak student performance.

The superintendent's efforts to align the district's planning and its curriculum, assessment, professional development, and the allocation of financial and human resources, demonstrate his thorough understanding of the interface of all parts of the system to support instruction. The collection of these functions through central control has not resulted in a uniform strategy to

embed the superintendent's vision and strategies throughout the system. Rather principals and teachers seem to be responsive to the superintendent's plans rather than proactive partners in creating a dynamic system that responds to student need. The vision and mental model for improvement rests solely with the superintendent. Without seminal involvement of the administrators and teachers in creating and cultivating a shared vision and accompanying strategies to create a culture of high achievement, the vision and the District Improvement Plan remain with only the superintendent.

The superintendent enjoys the support and confidence of his major constituencies. He is universally viewed as a leader. Principals and teachers are eager to implement his vision. However, because there are no structures in place at the district or school levels—such as directors, department heads, or coordinators—to embed the vision and model throughout the district, the efforts remain at a superficial level and do not currently have an impact on instruction.

In the judgment of the review team the absence of systemwide structures at the district and school levels is impeding the district's efforts to improve student achievement.

## **Curriculum and Instruction**

**Curriculum in the district is incomplete; it does not include many standard curriculum components and does not have an overall district perspective. There are variations in resources for curriculum development at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.**

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), in its District Standards and Indicators, lists under Curriculum and Instruction the components of a curriculum guide as “objectives, resources, instructional strategies, timelines, and assessments.” When the curriculum documents are considered in this light, West Springfield's curriculum does not have a number of these components.

### *Curriculum Components*

At the elementary and middle-school levels, curriculum documents are entitled Scope and Sequence. The elementary math curriculum, produced in the summer of 2011 to support the new math program Envision, provides a month-by-month list of the program lesson number, content, and standard (from the new Massachusetts curriculum frameworks) that teachers are to address. It is what it calls itself—a scope and sequence curriculum. A final column, called Notes/Modifications, indicates when lessons from the supporting program, Groundworks, are to be included. Standards are listed by notations (for example 5.NBT.1, 5.NF.1, etc.) so that a teacher must turn to a separate document to know the substance of the standard being addressed. Content is addressed by topic name with no instructional guidance, and there is no reference to assessments. Several interviewees told the review team that the elementary language arts Scope and Sequence in place was not a current document and would soon be replaced. This means that at the time of the site visit there was no guiding curriculum document for elementary language

arts. Balanced literacy and Readers' Workshop and Writers' Workshop were in place and had been for several years. Interviewees indicated that the district had selected a complementary program, Journeys, because balanced literacy had been found to be inconsistently implemented in the district, and a team of teachers would produce a curriculum guide to support its implementation. That guide would be available for the fall of the 2012–2013 school year when the district oriented teachers to the new program. The middle school also uses Scope and Sequence as their curriculum. The grade 8 math Scope and Sequence has been updated to include references to the new Massachusetts curriculum frameworks standards. However, the document consists primarily of lists of topics with standards referenced in notations (for example, 2-5, 1-4, 7-1). There are no references about the time of the year; presumably the topics are to be taught in the arranged sequence. No resources are listed; however, during review team interviews there was discussion of a search underway for a textbook to support the Scope and Sequence curriculum. Also, there is no reference to instructional strategies or to assessments.

The grade 6 math Scope and Sequence lists the sequence of events month by month. Each entry is accompanied by a reference to the new Massachusetts curriculum frameworks standard. However, the entries vary across the document. Some are simply topics (for example, properties of polygons, perimeter and area, circumference and areas of circles), and some are listed as student objectives (for example, students should be able to order negative decimals and place them on a number line), and some include the steps to accomplish a task (for example, Step 1: compare decimals, Step 2: place them on a number line, etc.). The contents of this Scope and Sequence are not consistent. As mentioned earlier, a complete curriculum guide should also include objectives, resources, instructional strategies, and assessments. For its ELA curriculum the middle school lays out charts, one each for reading, writing, and speaking, with genres and content by term. So, for example, for Writing Term I, the genres are MCAS Open Response and Story Ending: Fantasy. The accompanying content is Paragraph Structure, Elaboration of Evidence, and Transitional Words and Phrases. A number of Conventions are listed for coverage at the same time, such as Simple and Complex Sentences, End Punctuation, and Quotations. Then each stage of the writing process is listed as well as the MCAS open-response toolkit. Although these middle-school ELA charts have thorough, separate lists of what is to be taught, the topics are not integrated. So the teacher, to avoid teaching skills in isolation, is responsible for planning the instruction that addresses each topic in combination with others from the same chart and from the accompanying reading and speaking charts.

Interviewees more than once indicated that curriculum at the high school consists of syllabi. This represents a misunderstanding. Individual teachers write syllabi to inform students and their parents about course objectives, grading policy, and materials. Curriculum guides are intended for teachers and include what is to be taught (objectives and standards), how it is to be taught (resources and instructional strategies), and how achievement of the objectives is to be measured (assessments). One high-school curriculum document that moves beyond the notion of a syllabus is the Model Algebra I guide. This lists by topic what students will be able to do and differentiates by level the depth of the presentation. Clearly this guidance is for teachers.

### *District Perspective*

The limited curriculum in the district is developed and coordinated by levels: elementary, middle, and high school. At the elementary level, there is one literacy coach for the five elementary schools. The literacy coach works with the elementary language arts curriculum committee to develop curriculum and examine assessment results. The same structure exists for elementary math. Since both coaches work in five different schools, responsibility for coordination of implementation and alignment rests with the individual principals. At the time of the review, the elementary math Scope and Sequence was being implemented with fidelity and alignment. With an undeveloped Scope and Sequence in elementary language arts, although balanced literacy strategies are in place in elementary language arts classes, there is little evidence of content alignment. Curriculum is also organized by levels at the middle and high schools. The middle school has a literacy coach and a math coach, each of whom is responsible for curriculum development and implementation in that school. At the high school, the structure changes—with department chairs responsible for curriculum development and alignment. At the elementary and middle-school levels, some oversight of the alignment of the Scope and Sequence curricula across schools and across grades is possible, and with the exception of elementary language arts is in place because of the work of the coaches. Also, some elementary schools have common planning time, and the middle school has team time every day with curriculum discussed once a week. However, at the high school, where department chairs teach a full load of classes and there is no common planning time, there is very little curriculum development and alignment taking place. This will, to a certain extent, be addressed as the high school approaches its New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) visit and has summer curriculum writing time available. However, the characterization of curriculum as syllabi constitutes a barrier to the meaningful development of curriculum at the high school.

The challenge for the district with its curriculum work by levels is to vertically align the work across levels. There are efforts in that direction. The district has created a vertical alignment team for math, partly because alignment with the new Massachusetts curriculum frameworks has required significant adjustments as to when topics are taught. There has also been some discussion between the middle and high schools about curriculum alignment. As a result, for example, a member of the high-school science department now attends the middle-school science department meetings. Although curriculum discussions between the elementary schools and the middle school are less far along, they are scheduled to take place. So attention to the vertical alignment of curricula across levels is very much a work in progress.

### *Limited Resources*

At the high school in particular, there are limited resources for the development and alignment of curriculum. Department heads in interviews agreed that they have responsibility for curriculum in their content areas. However, unlike the coaches at the elementary and middle-school levels, they are full-time teachers without any time during the school day for curriculum work and numerous duties beyond curriculum. In effect, they conduct one department meeting a month,

with curriculum one of several agenda items. They reported that the funds available to them during the summer of 2012 for curriculum writing are the first in a number of years. Also, they function under both school and district direction that involves a misconception that syllabi constitute curriculum.

### *Conclusion*

The incompleteness of district curricula means that teachers do not have available to them full guidance as to what they are to teach, how to teach it, and how to measure the extent of student learning. In addition, the fact that curriculum is almost completely developed by levels (elementary, middle, and high school) leads to a disconnect in the sequencing of curriculum between grades 5 and 6 and between grades 8 and 9. Finally, the limited resources for curriculum development and support mean that curriculum development at the high school has not been taking place and at the other levels is only now in the process of being fully established. The district's uneven and inconsistent curriculum development and implementation have contributed to student achievement results that are similarly irregular and vary widely from year to year.

**Classroom observations indicate a range of strengths and challenges in professional practice. While relationships are positive and respectful and class time is used well, students are not active participants in their learning and instruction is not differentiated or supported by technology.**

### *Monitoring Instruction*

Interviews with principals during the onsite visit established for the review team the understanding that for most of the principals there is limited monitoring of classroom instruction. Most principals reported that while they want to spend a large portion of their time visiting classrooms, their numerous duties make the accomplishment of that intention difficult. An additional way for a principal to monitor instruction is to closely analyze formative assessment information. However, administrators acknowledged that little formative and summative assessment data is available to them. As a result, monitoring instruction by tracking data, particularly formative data, is not an effective strategy for them. Another opportunity to monitor classroom instruction is the use of learning walks. At the time of the site visit, the district was in the initial stages of introducing that protocol. Administrative learning walks take place twice monthly and include not only the superintendent and the school principal but also a principal from another school. District administrators said that teachers would like to have direct feedback from the superintendent. However, he shares his responses with the principal who, in turn, shares that information with the staff. It is important to review the following tally of the instructional inventory in this light.

### *Classroom Observations*

The review team observed classrooms in each of the elementary schools as well as at the middle and high schools. Review team members visited a total of 61 classrooms, 26 at the elementary level, 16 in the middle school, and 19 at the high school. All review team members used ESE's instructional inventory, a tool for observing characteristics of standards-based teaching and learning to record their observations. 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.

### *Classroom Climate*

In the category of classroom climate:

- In 79 percent of observed classrooms across the district the students behaved according to rules and expectations.
- Further, students and teachers demonstrated positive and respectful relationships in 93 percent of observed classes across all levels.
- However, teachers set high expectations for learning and conveyed these to students in 73 percent of the classrooms observed, and only in 58 percent of the classes visited at the high school.

### *Learning Objective*

In the learning objective category, an area that the district indicated it had been focusing on:

- In only 64 percent of the observed classrooms across all grades was the learning objective communicated to students.
- In a lower percentage of instances (54 percent of visited classrooms in the district), the learning objective identified student learning outcomes. At the high school, this characteristic was observed in only 37 percent of the visited classes.
- Finally, the learning objective drove all components of the lesson in 55 percent of observations, and only in 47 percent of the observations at the high-school level.

### *Use of Class Time*

In the category of use of class time:

- In 98 percent of the classrooms observed overall, teachers were found to be prepared, with materials readily available.
- The teacher explained task instructions and provided choices for when tasks were complete in 100 percent of the classes visited at the elementary level, in 88 percent of the observed classrooms at the middle school, and in 68 percent of the classes visited at the high school.

- Students responded to routines and expectations in 96 percent of the observed classes in elementary classrooms, in only 69 percent of the classes visited at the middle school level, and in 84 percent of classrooms observed at the high school.

### *Content Learning*

In the category of content learning, there was wide variation in the observations of the characteristics:

- In 84 percent of the visited classrooms, students across the grades made connections to prior knowledge or experience.
- In 89 percent of observed classes, teachers communicated academic content with clarity and accuracy.
- And in 92 percent of the visited classrooms, the content appeared appropriate for the grade and level.
- There was little variety in either the use of curriculum resources or technology (only 39 percent of the visited classes), and there was little variety in the use of instructional strategies (49 percent of observed classrooms).
- Review team members observed tiered instruction in 31 percent of the classes visited at the elementary level, in 32 percent of the classrooms observed at the high school, and not at all in the classes visited at the middle school.
- Students applied new conceptual knowledge 54 percent of the time overall in observed classrooms, and in 58 percent of the classes visited at the elementary level, in 63 percent of the observed classrooms at the middle school, and in 42 percent of visited classes at the high school.

### *Instructional Techniques*

In the category of instructional techniques, review team members observed:

- Whole-group instruction in 75 percent of the observed classes,
- Guided practice in 52 percent of the visited classrooms overall, and only in 19 percent of the observed classes at the middle school,
- Small group/pair learning in 46 percent of the visited classrooms overall,
- Independent practice in 62 percent of the observed classes overall, and only in 54 percent of the visited classrooms at the elementary level.

### *Activation of Higher-Order Thinking*

Activation of higher-order learning took place in the following ways:

- Students examined, analyzed, or interpreted information in 69 percent of classrooms observed districtwide.

- In only 31 percent of visited classes districtwide were students forming predictions, developing arguments, or evaluating information, and in only 19 percent of the observed classrooms at the middle school.
- In 30 percent of the visited classrooms overall, students evaluated/reflected on their own thinking, progress, and approach. There was wide variation by levels with this characteristic observed in 31 percent of classrooms visited in the elementary schools, in 13 percent of observed classes at the middle school, and in 42 percent of classrooms visited at the high school.
- Finally, students generated questions related to the goals of the lesson in 39 percent of all classrooms observed, and only in 25 percent of the classes visited at the middle-school level.

### *Instructional Pacing*

In the category of instructional pacing:

- The pace of the lesson allowed all students to be engaged in 96 percent of the classrooms observed at the elementary level, in 81 percent of visited classes in the middle school, and in 68 percent of classrooms observed at the high school.
- And the teacher used wait time to allow for responses from all students in 92 percent of visited classes at the elementary level, in 87 percent of observed classrooms at the middle level, and in 63 percent of visited classes at the high school.

### *Student Thinking and Student Groups*

In the categories of student thinking and student groups:

- Students used various means, orally or in writing, to represent their ideas and thinking in 69 percent of the observed classrooms at the elementary level, in 56 percent of visited classes at middle school, and only in 47 percent of observed classrooms at the high school.
- In 50 percent of the classes visited at the elementary level, and in 31 percent and 37 percent at the middle and high-school levels, respectively, students engaged in structures that advance their thinking.
- Students inquired, explored, or solved problems together in small groups/pairs in 58 percent of the observed classrooms at the elementary level, and in 31 percent and 37 percent of visited classes, respectively, at the middle and high schools.
- Finally, students were held accountable for their contributions to group work in only 30 percent of the classrooms observed throughout the district.

### *Use of Student Assessments*

About the use of student assessments:

- Teachers used at least one informal assessment to check for understanding or mastery in 58 percent of the classrooms observed at the elementary level, in 44 percent of classes visited at the middle school, and in a low 16 percent of observed classrooms at the high school.
- With similar striking variation, teachers adjusted instruction based on on-the-spot or formal assessment in 58 percent of visited classes at the elementary level, in 44 percent of observed classes at the middle school, and in a low 26 percent of visited classes at the high school.
- Students received feedback that tells where they are in relation to the learning goals in 65 percent of the observed elementary classrooms, in 50 percent of visited middle-school classes, and in 37 percent of observed high-school classes.
- Students revised their work based on feedback in 41 percent of the visited classrooms overall, and only in 25 percent of observed middle-school classrooms.

### *Conclusion*

In summary, in some categories such as classroom climate and use of class time, observations in classrooms across the district demonstrated that the characteristics of teaching and learning within these categories were in place at a high rate. Although there are pockets of good practice in the district, overall instruction is not strong. For example, in the category of activation of higher-order thinking, aside from examination, analysis, and interpretation, in observed classrooms there was a low incidence of characteristics, particularly at the middle school. Also, tiered instruction took place infrequently and in the middle school, not at all. Pacing that allows all students to be engaged and teacher use of wait time were strong in the visited classes in the elementary and middle schools; however, the incidence of these characteristics at the high school was lower. In general, the observations by the review team indicate that students are not active participants in their learning, whether for example, by expressing their thinking, solving problems in small groups, or generating questions related to the goals of the lesson.

### **Assessment**

**The district has a variety of assessments available at the elementary and middle-school levels with limited assessments available at the high school. However, not all school levels have the time or trained staff to analyze available assessment data in order to improve instruction, although the district is beginning to address these issues.**

The District Improvement Plan (2011–2014) includes a strategic initiative that focuses on improving the “understanding and application” of quantitative and qualitative data to improve

instruction. In interviews the superintendent said that the goal is to have knowledge-driven schools and act upon that knowledge.

#### *Assessments Required Districtwide*

To provide schools with knowledge to act upon, the district administers a mix of formative and summative assessments with a majority of the formative assessments administered at the elementary level. According to a district document entitled Required Literacy Assessments, these include Running Records administered every 4 weeks in kindergarten and grade 1 and Running Records using leveled books for struggling readers every 6 to 8 weeks in grades 3–5. These formative assessments are administered in a time frame that allows the results to be used to have an impact on instructional strategies. The district also administers a monthly math assessment that was developed by the district math committee, with the results used to adjust student instruction. Interviewees said that while the monthly math test is not mandatory most schools do administer it. Teachers in focus groups also identified the review of student work as well as conversations with students as ways of gathering formative assessment information.

However, many of the other assessments are summative in nature because they are administered only two or three times a year and as a result can be best used for placement and to show growth. These assessments include the Benchmark Assessment System (BAS) developed by Fountas and Pinnell. This ELA summative assessment is administered 3 times during the year for all students in kindergarten through grade 8. This takes place in spite of the fact that the BAS is administered on an individual basis and generally takes 40 minutes to complete. According to interviewees, the BAS “mirrors” the language in the Journeys reading program, which is to be implemented in the 2012–2013 school year for students at the elementary level. However, one school administrator said that although the BAS is administered more than three times per year in her school she “cannot wait until the next administration time to know where her students are.” The administrator said that administration can be done in 20 minutes with younger children and “sometimes even faster.” Students in kindergarten through grade 5 also respond to a writing prompt twice during the year with results used to show progress.

#### *Assessments at the Middle School*

Assessments at the middle school include the above mentioned monthly math assessment as well as the ELA quarterly benchmarks, which are developed using selected MCAS questions and are summative. As a result of the analysis of MCAS data, the middle school administers monthly open-response assessments that are used formatively to determine student needs and the implementation of appropriate instructional strategies across all grade levels. A requirement to aid in instruction is a tool kit designed to provide instructional strategies to improve student responses to open-ended questions on the MCAS tests. End-of-unit tests are also used in science, social studies, and mathematics.

### *Assessments at the High School*

High-school interviewees expressed concern about the absence of formative assessments at their level and told the review team that they have a lot of courses and as a result courses are not sequenced as they are at the middle school. They went on to say that they need more assessments. The review team was told that in math every subject has team-written, standard unit tests as well as a midterm and a final. However, according to interviewees, there is no formal process in place to collect, analyze, and disseminate student data. Further, there is no time for teachers to collaborate and confer. According to a school administrator, the development of common assessments is a mandated goal at the high school. This goal will be difficult to achieve; the review team was told that common assessments are a work in progress because there is no formal structure, time, or process and development varies from department to department. In some cases there is even an absence of acceptance of the philosophy of common assessments. An exception to the absence of time for collaboration and examination of data is at grade 9 at the high school. Grade 9 is structured so that teachers have common planning time; this allows time for content teams and cross-curricular teams to meet for collaboration.

### *Examining Student Data at the Elementary Schools*

In order for the district to use the above mentioned data to improve instruction, the District Improvement Plan lists the establishment of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in each elementary school as a way to examine student work and data. The superintendent believes that change needs to happen at the classroom level and that PLCs are very important in changing instruction. All interviews with district administrators and staff indicate that these communities have been established at all elementary schools. However, there has been very little training in how to “do PLCs” and “they look different in every building”; interviewees said that it was a challenge to get started. One elementary school has had an advantage in adhering to the initiative to use data to improve instruction because it was a Reading First School and one of the requirements included the establishment of PLCs. As a result, this elementary school has had a PLC in place since 2008. Basically, according to interviewees, the thrust is to have teachers and principals meet regularly to discuss data. The meetings usually take place twice monthly and at each school the principal must provide ways for teachers to meet. In some cases substitutes are hired for the day so that each grade-level team may meet throughout the day. In other schools Title I staff and literacy and math coaches are used to provide classroom coverage while teachers attend meetings. Teachers said that they plan the agendas and that they are trying to get everyone on the “same page.” Principals agreed that the analysis of data is driving the PLCs, but it is a “push to get teachers to look at data.” An obstacle to the push to get teachers to look at data is the absence of data analysis training for teachers.

### *Examining Student Data at the Middle School*

The middle school has team planning time four times during the week and content planning time one day each week. Interviewees said that the analysis of student data sometimes takes place during content meeting time and that the discussion of data usually takes place four times a year.

However, interviewees were quick to add that individual student needs are always discussed in an informal way at team meetings.

### *Examining Student Data at the High School*

At the high school teachers have one planning time of 58 minutes each day; this limited amount of time does not allow for collaboration and discussion of data. There is a group of 11 teachers who are designated as a data team and work with the regional District and School Assistance Center (DSAC) in analyzing data. They focus on the results of a survey taken at the high school rather than on student assessment data. The superintendent plans to have a data team in place at the high school during the 2012–2013 school year to look at achievement data as a revamped schedule will allow for additional planning time for staff.

### *Data Walls*

The superintendent has put in place the requirement that principals maintain data walls in their schools. He believes that students need to own their growth and that data walls are meant to achieve this. During visits to all schools in the district the team saw some data walls in some schools but not in others.

### *Conclusion*

The district is in the elementary stages of using PLCs at the elementary level in order to improve instruction. These teams are essentially data teams with a specific role of looking at student data. Time will be needed to develop teachers' skills in analyzing data and using the results to improve student achievement. At the middle school while there is time to collaborate and discuss student data, there is less emphasis than at the elementary level. Because there is no designated time to discuss student data, the district cannot be certain that analysis of student data is taking place regularly. At the high school the limited planning time does not allow for collaboration and thus has a direct impact on student achievement; all interviewees acknowledged that there is an absence of analysis of student achievement data at the high school. Further, insufficient formative assessments at all levels are an impediment because there is limited data available to have an impact on instruction.

**Many district leaders and staff were unaware of fluctuating or declining proficiency rates in recent years in several elementary grades in both ELA and math. Many leaders and staff were also unfamiliar with the low median SGPs in ELA and math at West Springfield High School.**

Student proficiency rates in ELA and math in several elementary grades fluctuated substantially or declined in the three test administrations from 2009–2011 (data not in a table). Proficiency rates for grade 10 students were well below the state rates. Further, in these three years, except for math in 2010, median SGPs for West Springfield's grade 10 students were in the 30s, outside the moderate range from 40 to 60. See the Student Achievement finding above and Appendix C.

Many district and school leaders expressed surprise at the data, as they really thought achievement was higher and that they were doing well. They said they were unable to understand why achievement was low given the district's professional development efforts. The superintendent attributed the problematic achievement to an absence of fidelity of implementation as well as not enough universal Tier I interventions.

District staff had a variety of reasons for recent student achievement, including generally changing demographics, the various math programs that were in use at the elementary level until this year (2011–2012) when all levels are using the same program, and special education teachers who do not have enough opportunities to participate in professional development. No interviewee cited instructional practices or insufficient curriculum.

Interviewees did not have an explanation for the low median SGPs in grade 10 in math and ELA. These median SGPs of 37.0 in ELA and 34.0 in math are outside the moderate range of 40 to 60. Interviewees told the review team that it was difficult to account for the median SGPs and wondered what they could do about them. They reiterated that they needed more time to collaborate, mentioning the fact that they have only one preparation period without any time for collaboration. Other interviewees, aware of the absence of collaboration time at the high school, said that the big difference between middle and high school is that middle-school teachers have ample time to talk regularly about the needs of students.

It is evident that district staff have not analyzed student achievement data sufficiently. Without adequate resources, training, and time for complete analysis and understanding of the reasons for student performance levels, teachers will not be able to provide the instruction that fits the needs of students who are not making sufficient progress.

## **Human Resources and Professional Development**

**The recruitment strategies in effect in the district are not aligned with long-standing school committee personnel policies on recruiting. The district's practices for recruiting and selecting educators do not systematically focus on attracting and retaining well-qualified staff with skills and experience aligned with district needs.**

West Springfield's recruiting and hiring efforts are school specific, rather than district specific, and do not reflect the district's personnel policy goals and its needs and priorities. These practices have been ineffective in identifying and attracting candidates who reflect the make-up of the district's student population and whose experience and skills match the district's needs.

### *Recruiting*

In interviews, the visiting team was told that the district uses School Spring as its major teacher recruitment vendor. In addition, the district uses other outside advertising for some positions (usually administrative). Under article 15 of the teachers' bargaining agreement, all vacancies routinely are posted internally. Internal candidates qualified for posted vacancies may apply for such vacancies.

### *Screening, Interviewing, and Hiring*

The team also was told that School Spring résumés from interested candidates arrive electronically and are immediately accessible by the principal of the school that has the vacancy. Principals decide which candidates should be interviewed, using their judgment in selecting potential interviewees. Beyond the licensing requirement for new staff, the district does not have in use a uniform screening rubric that reflects district needs and priorities. The process that then takes place was explained by staff as a flexible, site-based process that includes teams of interviewers chosen by the supervisor of the vacant position. This is consistent with school committee policy, but the review team found no evidence in files or in interviews of any targeted training for either screeners or interviewers.

Each screening and interviewing process is site specific rather than district specific. The superintendent has clearly suggested that districtwide “standardization” should be “customized” at the school level, a healthy organizational value in the judgment of the review team, but the review team found no evidence that important, long-standing school committee policies are folded into school-level hiring protocols.

### *District Personnel Policies*

One of the goals of school committee policy GA is that the district is to “*develop and implement those strategies and procedures for personnel recruitment, screening, and selection that will result in the employment and retention of individuals with the highest capabilities, strongest commitment to quality education, and greatest probability of effectively implementing the system’s learning program.*” Another school committee policy (policy GCE) states in part, “*The search for good teachers and other professional employees will extend to a wide variety of educational institutions and geographical areas. It will take into consideration the characteristics of the town and the need for a heterogeneous staff from various cultural backgrounds.*” When these policies are combined, a clear core recruiting value is established in policy. In addition, this organizational value is further strengthened in school committee policy GCF that states in part: “*It is the responsibility of the superintendent, and of persons to whom he or she delegates this responsibility, to determine the personnel needs of the school system and to locate suitable candidates.*”

### *Changing Student Demographics*

In interviews, the team was told that in recent years there has been an increase in the numbers of homeless students at all levels, of English language learners (ELLs), and of students from low-income families.<sup>3</sup> Staff were aware that changing student populations may require different approaches to traditional staffing patterns and approaches to meeting student needs.

Although the documented changing student populations of students were a point of concern in the district, and there was interest in meeting those needs as shown in the school committee

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<sup>3</sup> Interviewee statements were confirmed by ESE data. For example, the number of homeless students in West Springfield increased from 89 in 2010 to 101 in 2011 to 120 in 2012. See the District Profile above.

policy documents reviewed by the visiting team and in the review team's observations and interaction with staff, the team did not find documentation of any aggressive recruiting effort to seek out and hire new staff to the district who are aligned with the "characteristics of the town" and the district's "need for a heterogeneous staff from various cultural backgrounds" as required by school committee policy.

In interviews, the team was told that the recruiting effort in the district has in the past occasionally contacted various agencies in the region for help finding candidates with skills and experience aligned to the needs in West Springfield, by sending vacancy notices to them.

The team believes that the overall recruitment effort by the district is done in good faith and with fairness, but it does not result in hiring practices that fulfill the spirit and letter of the school committee policy.

### *Conclusion*

Not to connect the district's recruiting, screening, interviewing, and hiring of new teaching staff to the needs of the student body and the cultural variations in the town will limit the district's efforts to include, in its very strong and widely used collaborative conversation, the voices of the most qualified professional staff members. These invaluable and important conversations can, in turn, benefit district strategies and student programs by paying attention to the changing needs of West Springfield's cohorts of students.

**Formal evaluations in the district did not include comments about how to improve instruction and gave an overall impression of instructional strength in the district that contrasted with classroom observations by the review team. West Springfield has spent time and resources to understand the ESE educator evaluation model and design and pilot a new evaluation system to meet the district's needs.**

### *Teachers' Evaluations*

The team reviewed 39 randomly selected teacher personnel files and accessed and reviewed more than 100 evaluation documents. Within each personnel file there were evaluation documents that in some cases went back 30 years. The evaluation forms were in compliance with the Principles of Effective Teaching set forth in 603 CMR 35.00 formerly in effect<sup>4</sup>, and the required rhythm of annual appraisal of teachers without professional status and the biennial appraisal of teachers with professional status was carefully followed.

The most recent (2010) evaluation documents were timely and signed by all parties. The form requires four signatures: the evaluator, the teacher being evaluated, the evaluator's supervisor (if appropriate), and the superintendent of schools. In the most recent set of evaluations, the

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<sup>4</sup> 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.

superintendent personally signed each evaluation. Before 2010, the former superintendent's signature was stamped in the signature block on the form. In interviews the team was told that the current superintendent takes time to read all completed evaluations.

The majority of evaluation documents contained a written history of courses, workshops, initiatives, collaborative projects, and other professional development activities completed by the teacher being evaluated, but only one evaluation (out of over one hundred reviewed) had any professional development recommendation for the teacher, and that recommendation statement contained no helpful suggestions. Teacher evaluation documents were well written and informative, but were not instructive, meaning that they did not include comments about how instruction could be enhanced by participation in professional development activities.

No set of evaluation documents in a personnel file referred to any observations from a previous year. All evaluations were stand-alone documents for that year with no backward link to previous evaluations or forward link to how instruction could be improved through professional development.

Interviewees were asked what value the teacher evaluation process has for teaching practice. While the response was mixed between very valuable to not valuable, there was agreement among several teachers that they yearned for more "face-time" with administrators/evaluators in their own disciplines. For them, the evaluation process was valuable. For others it was not.

The visiting team, all veteran teachers, observed over 61 classes and noted certain teaching characteristics during their visit on a common form. As summarized in the second Curriculum finding of this report, there were noticeable differences in the *instructional techniques*, *instructional pacing*, and *use of student assessments* categories, each of which was included in some form in the teacher evaluation standards and forms used by the district in Appendix F, the evaluation instrument in its teachers' bargaining agreement. An examination by the team of over 100 evaluation documents completed over multiple years showed that only three performance indicators of a possible 2500 performance indicators within the five major evaluative criteria in Appendix F were rated as needs improvement (NI). That is one one/thousandth of one percent of performance variation among a teaching staff of over 300 employees.

When the data in official evaluation forms was compared to the variations included in the team's observations of classroom practice, however, the gaps within each category were enormous. Virtually all teachers met all performance categories in Appendix F, but the classroom practice observed by the review team showed wide variation in instruction.

In summary, the teacher evaluation system that had been in effect at the time of the review positioned all teachers at all levels as meeting all standards associated with the district's negotiated official standards of acceptable instructional practice. However, despite these uniform high ratings, the proficiency rates and median SGPs of many students taught by these highly rated teachers were declining.

### *Administrators' Evaluations*

Twenty administrator personnel files were reviewed by the team. The district's administrative evaluation forms were out of alignment with the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership set forth in 603 CMR 35.00 formerly in effect. In addition, although an annual evaluation is a requirement of law, some of the files reviewed by the team did not include evaluations for 2010 for administrators who were working in the district at the time, and for several administrators there were other gaps in evaluations. When evaluations were done, they were informative; however, no evaluation document was instructive as to what kinds of professional development might improve administrator performance. Six files contained no record of a current license and two licenses contained in the files had expired.

### *Conclusion on the Situation at the Time of the Review*

The district's teacher evaluation system included professional standards that were consistently met by all teachers. The administrative evaluation system was out of compliance with state standards for administrative practice. Simultaneously, student growth measures and proficiency rates were declining for many students.

### *Training in and Piloting of the new Educator Evaluation Framework*

The district has spent time and resources on understanding changes to the teacher and administrator evaluation processes. Staff, leaders from the West Springfield teachers' association, and school committee representatives received three days of training to understand the new standards and to design the new evaluation systems to meet district's needs. The new evaluation process was being piloted in 2011–2012 as well. With this investment of time and resources the district was in the elementary stages of designing new evaluation systems that differentiate among teaching and administrative strategies that effect strong learning outcomes and those which do not, and of strengthening its accountability system.

**The district's professional development effort is centrally controlled and aligned with district priorities, but it does not have universal acceptance among staff, nor is it connected to student achievement data or performance evaluations.**

### *Design and Supervision of the Professional Development Program*

The superintendent has assumed the responsibility of designing and supervising the district's professional development system. As such, the district's professional development system is well crafted, well managed, and targeted to track countless professional development opportunities, all of which are connected to district priorities. It also uses an Internet connection to monitor evaluations of the many meetings, workshops, Professional Learning Community (PLC) sessions, faculty meetings, leadership meetings, and all related in-house professional development events and initiatives.

### *Staff Evaluations of the Professional Development Program*

In some interviews the team was told that there is not a universal acceptance of the district's professional development plan. There were issues raised of having to attend required in-service events that interviewees said were unrelated to their priorities or unrelated to their interests or to their work, of having no voice in planning professional development, and of a sense of disconnect from the topics. Other groups mentioned that the district professional development program had no value to them or to their day-to-day work.

By contrast, another interview indicated strong support for the district professional development plan with impromptu electronic evidence provided by one member to show how professional development had persuaded a school to use data in its decision-making. At that interview there were a number of internal staff who were professional development providers and coaches, including the superintendent, who has chosen to initiate and closely supervise the professional development effort in the district. In that interview the team was told that the development of the professional development plan was initiated by the superintendent.

### *Superintendent's Supervision of the Professional Development Program*

During the design phase, the superintendent said he had brought in some elementary teachers as advisors. It was confirmed that there is no permanent Professional Development Committee in the district. The superintendent is the supervisor of that function. He does meet regularly with staff involved in professional development activities and has developed a tracking system that enables him to target various events and hold staff accountable for their participation. He also participates in learning walks in schools and classrooms. In summary, there is an abundance of professional development events, workshops, and programs available in the district year round. They take place during the school year at meetings, during authorized release time, during the five days of training set aside for professional development, and during the summer months. Some staff appreciate the effort and some do not. What is a well-planned, well-organized professional development effort has received mixed reviews from staff. This may be a function of a new emphasis in the district by the superintendent on standardizing instructional operations, while promoting customization of them at the school level. Although training is centralized, implementation takes place at the school and classroom levels with limited supervision available at some levels. Although the district's professional development time is scheduled, time to meet in schools for school-based professional development is more limited.

### *Mentoring Program*

A strong model of professional development in the district is the Mentoring Program. The superintendent supervises this program personally. He trains the mentors and follows the progress of the mentoring effort closely throughout the year.

### *Absence of Connection to Performance Evaluations*

No personnel evaluation document reviewed by the team contained any recommendations for professional development. There is an Internet connection that tracks evaluation information from participants about the various professional development events. It is an easy-to-access, state-of-the-art electronic system that provides timely feedback about reactions of participants to the training and the appropriateness of the topic to practice.

### *Conclusion*

The wide variation in the way in which the staff at all levels experience the district's professional development efforts has to be a concern for the district leadership. The MyWorkPlan.com Internet site provides an easy-to-use evaluation tool. Evaluations of professional development events that appear on that site do not reflect the information that the team was told in interviews. In addition, student achievement data is disconnected from the district's performance evaluation system and in turn from the district's professional development effort, although the district has a recent history of non-renewal of teachers without professional status for performance reasons.

The district has a well-documented professional development system in place. However, the planning, execution, and evaluation of the system are not integrated into decision-making as student achievement data becomes available and are not connected to performance evaluation documents. Unless district authorities confront the realities outlined above, it will be difficult for the district to strengthen the performance of staff at all levels.

## **Student Support**

**The district has many programs and support staff, but it does not have an effective system to identify and support groups of students performing below proficiency.**

The district has several support staff and programs in place to support students districtwide. Support staff include a special education director, an ELL coordinator, a 504 manager, a Title I director, a district interventionist and districtwide outreach and homeless liaison, an attendance officer, and adjustment counselors. At the elementary level there are math and reading specialists placed at each school. Districtwide programs/initiatives include Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), the Behavior Health Network that provides mental health clinicians at each school, the Bully Intervention Team with a hotline, and Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports also known as PBIS. PBIS is a grant-funded, schoolwide, data-informed, behavioral pyramid of intervention-based approaches that identify worrisome behaviors such as filing and unruliness in corridors and bathrooms and provide schoolwide expectations, rules, and incentives to address these behaviors.

However, the district does not have an effective districtwide, data-driven approach to identify and support groups of underperforming students.

Each school has a team that meets weekly, biweekly, or monthly to discuss students' performance and ways to address students' needs. However, the structure and actual purpose of these teams across schools and levels is unclear. The district and the elementary schools refer to these teams as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). According to administrators, the PLCs look at data and make decisions based on the individual needs of students. At the elementary level, these PLCs consist of administrators, teachers, and specialists or other support staff. Although the middle school has a team of administrators and guidance counselors that meet to discuss student performance, its teams are not called PLCs. At the high-school level the team is referred to as a "modified PLC." According to administration and special education staff, PLCs have replaced the Instructional Support Team (IST), also known as the pre-referral process.

Most of these teams look at data. When interviewees were asked what types of data are shared and discussed, responses included individual student work, student scores (for example, MCAS, PSAT, and SAT tests), student grades, and data from learning walks. In some cases data is used to place students in classes/courses (i.e., AP classes) and inform restructuring of staff. Interviewees said that there is a heavy focus in the PLCs on individual student performance and not on data about groups of students and shared needs. Administrators reported that at the high-school level foci have included discussions of different grading policies to address retention concerns.

One of the district's strategic objectives for 2012–2013 includes implementing and refining targeted interventions and defining effective and continuous systems of tiered interventions. The middle school's Improvement Plan refers to the promotion of tiered instruction. While the district and school leaders recognize the need for tiered instruction, the district has not ensured that each school provides tiered instruction to its students. In spite of the identified need for tiered instruction and the district's assignment of ELA and math specialists at each elementary school, the review team saw tiered instruction in only 31 percent and 32 percent, respectively, of the observed elementary and high-school classrooms and none in the visited classes at the middle-school level. Based on this review team's classroom visits, tiered instruction is not in place in many classrooms throughout the district. It is clear that many students are not offered the opportunity to receive tiered and differentiated instruction to address their specific learning needs.

The district does not have an effective system to identify and support groups of students performing below proficiency, limiting the progress it can make in improving student achievement.

**The district has adopted initiatives to decrease the dropout, retention, and out-of-school suspension rates, and to improve attendance and graduation rates. Although some of these initiatives have contributed to some improved rates overall, certain groups of students have low graduation rates and high dropout, retention, and chronic absence rates.**

While in recent years the number of students graduating from high school has increased, retention rates have improved overall, and out-of-school suspension rates have decreased at the high school, for some students graduation rates are low and dropout, retention, and chronic absence rates are high.

Pockets of students throughout the district are at risk of dropping out. According to ESE data about the four-year graduation rate, 12.1 percent of all students in the 2011 four-year cohort dropped out. The dropout rate was 35.8 percent for Hispanics and 21.4 percent for students with disabilities. In addition, the four-year graduation rate for all students was 77.5 percent. Graduation rates were lower for students from low-income families at 65.6 percent, for Hispanic/Latino students at 54.7 percent, and for students with disabilities at 50.0 percent. Students with disabilities, Hispanic students, and students from low-income families are disproportionately represented among students who drop out or do not graduate in four years. In addition, in 2011 34.9 percent of Hispanic/Latino students were chronically absent.

Students in grades 9 and 10 are also overrepresented in certain areas of concern. In 2011 both grades had the highest retention rates of all grades with 11.9 percent of grade 9 students and 10.2 percent of grade 10 students having been retained. That same year, 24.4 percent of grade 9 students and 21.6 percent of grade 10 students were chronically absent.

Although out-of-school suspension rates at the high school improved from 19.4 percent in 2009 to 16.2 percent in 2010 to 11.7 percent in 2011, the out-of-school suspension rate at the middle school fluctuated from 10.6 percent in 2009 to 13.7 percent in 2010 to 12.7 percent in 2011.

#### *Dropout Initiatives*

Several initiatives have been put in place to help decrease the dropout rate at the high school level. One is the Reconnecting Youth Program, a grant-funded program implemented in 2010 (training of teachers took place in 2009) for students at risk of dropping out and those who are disengaged or disconnected from the school. These students can be identified by guidance counselors, teachers, administrators, and others. Administrators said that conversations with these students revealed that many felt an absence of positive connections with adults at the school. Teachers involved in the Reconnecting Youth Program participate in four days of training on ways to reach out to and support identified students. The program runs for half a semester with approximately 25–30 students. Teachers in the program work on building positive relationships with these students, checking in with them bi-weekly (mostly after school) and helping them to self-monitor, communicate, etc. These students might get involved in school-based, community building projects during which they can be identified by their pastel-blue tee shirts. Former student participants serve as mentors. To further the efforts of connecting students

with teachers trained in the Reconnecting Youth Program, high school administrators and department heads have changed the school schedule from six to seven period blocks for the 2012–2013 school year. During these additional blocks, students will be assigned to engage with trained Reconnecting Youth Program teachers.

Other efforts to decrease the annual dropout rate include:

- A newly established Drop Out Intervention Committee to discuss and develop ways to get and keep students engaged
- Discussion on lowering the number of required promotion credits from 65 to 60
- Credit Recovery Program (with 13 enrolled students per semester)
- YWCA pregnancy and parenting program (current enrollment of approximately 22 students)
- The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Academy that offers smaller classes and one-on-one and group counseling.

While the annual dropout rate improved from 6.3 percent in 2007 to 3.4 percent in 2010, in 2011 it increased to 5.1 percent, almost double the state's dropout rate of 2.7 percent.

#### *Promotion and Retention Initiatives*

There was a steady increase in grade 9 to grade 10 promotion rates from 74 percent in 2007 to 84 percent in 2008 to 86 percent in 2009 to 89 percent in 2010, and a decline to 85 percent in 2011. Several initiatives have been put in place at the high school level to address retention and (see *Attendance-Related Initiatives* below) chronic absence rates, which affect promotion rates. Retained students are monitored throughout the rest of their high school experience by a guidance counselor assigned to monitoring retained students. Students who do not have the necessary credits can enroll in the Credit Recovery Program. Administrators and support staff at the high school level told the review team that grade 9 students are now the only students retained. Retention rates dropped from 10.9 percent in 2008 to 6.8 percent in 2011.

#### *Attendance-Related Initiatives*

According to the high school's Improvement Plan, one of the school's goals is to improve daily attendance. Initiatives have targeted grade 9 and have included weekly monitoring of student attendance and the establishment of the grade 9 Terrier House, which consists of an administrator, a guidance counselor, and 16 teachers. These staff members meet daily during a dedicated period to discuss students who need support and interventions. The creation of Terrier House is a direct response to the high failure rate at the grade 9 level.

Administrators at the high school reported attendance in 2011–2012 to be at a high of 96 percent. According to ESE data, the attendance rate at West Springfield High was 93.4 percent in 2009, dropped to 92.6 percent in 2010, and increased to 93.7 percent in 2011–2012, compared to the state rate of 94.9 percent. Chronic absence at the high school increased from 19.1 percent in 2009 to 21.6 percent in 2010 and then dipped to 19.8 percent in 2011. Also, as noted above,

Hispanic/Latino students and students in grades 9 and 10 had high rates of chronic absence in 2011.

#### *Suspension-Related Initiatives*

Suspension rates at the high school have improved. One initiative addressing out-of-school suspension is the In-House Detention at the high-school level. High-school administration reported a decrease in the number out-of-school suspensions this year. According to ESE data, the out-of-school suspension rate at the high school decreased from 19.4 percent (at 253 students) in 2009 to 16.2 percent (at 213 students) in 2010 and 11.7 percent (at 153 students) in 2011. High school administration attributed the decrease in suspension rates to the Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) initiative (see the first Student Support finding).

At the middle-school level the out-of-school suspension rate has fluctuated from 10.6 percent in 2009 to 13.7 percent in 2010 and 12.7 percent in 2011.

#### *Graduation Rate Improvements*

Improving the graduation rate is a district goal. In recent years, there has been progress made toward this goal. While the four-year cohort graduation rate was 66.3 percent in 2008 and 66.4 percent in 2009, the rate increased to 71.7 percent in 2010 and 77.5 percent in 2011.

#### *Conclusion*

The district has adopted initiatives to keep students in school and have a positive impact on student attendance. These efforts have contributed to an increase in the overall number of students graduating from the high school, improved overall retention rates, and a decrease in out-of-school suspension rates at the high school.

**The district has a lower rate of full inclusion and a higher rate of partial inclusion for students with disabilities than the statewide rates.**

The proportion of students with disabilities increased from 14.7 percent in 2007 to 20.3 percent in 2011. The state's rate was 17 percent in 2011. In spite of this increased proportion, only 30.6 percent of students with disabilities in the district are in full-inclusion classrooms, compared to the state's rate of 57 percent. Partial inclusion within the district is 44.5 percent, compared to the state's rate of 20.8 percent.

#### *Partial and Full Inclusion*

The majority of preschoolers (ages three to five), including kindergarten students, are in full inclusion. At the elementary level the majority of students are in partial inclusion. At the middle- and high-school levels the overall model is partial inclusion. Full- and part-time paraprofessionals support the classrooms.

#### *Instruction*

At the elementary level, students with disabilities receive instruction in the regular classroom with the support of a special education teacher and a paraprofessional. However, pull out does

take place. Support at the middle-school level is similar to that at the elementary level with the exception of a resource room offered for all major subjects. The high-school model is similar to that of the middle school. However, the high school has a co-teaching model consisting of a regular and a special education teacher collaborating to instruct diverse groups of students. At the high school inclusion classes have up to 14 students with disabilities and 10 regular education students. Special education teachers throughout the district in kindergarten through grade 12 are trained in the Lindamood-Bell instructional program to provide students with disabilities intense intervention services in literacy and math.

Students with disabilities are served by various specialists in full inclusion, partial inclusion, or self-contained classrooms, with some mainstreaming permitted for those students considered ready for such a challenge. Readiness is not defined. Students may be pulled out for services. At the time of the review the district reported 11 special education teachers at the high-school level. The district has made Success Maker for All, a computer program to support learning, available in resource classrooms and computer labs for all students with disabilities.

#### *Substantially Separate Classes*

Substantially separate classes exist across levels. At the preschool, elementary, and middle-school levels there are classrooms for students with autism (the functional academics class and the applied academics class). At the high-school level there are the Life Skills class, the Cowing Alternative School, and the Alternative High School. Each of the substantially separate classes provides opportunities for inclusion when deemed appropriate. The word appropriate is not defined.

#### *Conclusion*

Given the proportion of students in partial as opposed to full inclusion, it appears that some students with disabilities within the district may not receive instruction within the least restrictive environment possible.

## **Financial and Asset Management**

**The town and the district have managed funds conservatively, which has minimized the impact of difficult revenue years and enabled the town to fund a new high school without asking voters for a debt exclusion vote.**

According to the Massachusetts Department of Revenue's (DOR) At-a-Glance report, the town had excess levy capacity of \$1,243,443 in fiscal year 2011 and an overlay reserve of \$1,091,146; at the end of fiscal year 2010 the town certified \$3,722,671 in free cash and had a stabilization fund of \$7,567,469. Town administrators confirmed that the town currently has approximately \$8 million in the stabilization fund, which has not been tapped in several years. As another example of planning and management, administrators reported that collective bargaining

agreements were funded in the spring of fiscal year 2011 by a transfer from a town fund for wage settlements.

The district has managed its finances carefully as well. When unforeseen expenses such as additional kindergarten teachers arise after the budget is set, transfers from anticipated surplus accounts are used to cover them. They noted that there was approximately \$1 million less in revenue due to the expiration of federal stimulus funds, but because those funds were used sparingly over four years, including carrying some over into fiscal year 2012; the effect of their expiration has been minimized. The district has also conserved its school choice revenue for the past few years, limiting its use to one time expenditures such as new elementary ELA materials, and had approximately \$2 million available in the account to further ease the loss of stimulus grants. Cost-cutting strategies have included a performance contract to implement energy savings, increased controls on overtime costs (overtime now must be approved by an administrator and the mayor), use of E-rate funds for wireless networks, and the local educational collaborative's (LPVEC) services for busing and collective bids. Out of district tuition and transportation declined from \$3.7 million in 2008 to \$3.3 million in 2011.

The district's actual Net School Spending has exceeded required spending consistently in the last several years, and was 7 percent above the requirement in fiscal year 2011. In that year, per pupil expenditure for in-district pupils from all funding sources was \$11,859, just above the median for similar size districts of \$11,608. Although the district had to cut approximately \$786,000 from its level service budget in fiscal year 2012, it was able to avoid layoffs of teachers. School committee members affirmed priorities of maintaining class size and avoiding cuts in the arts or foreign language. Financial constraints have, however, limited the district's programs in some ways. Administrators and school committee members would like to upgrade technology, citing needs such as wireless internet access in schools and replacing 9-year-old computers. More technology support staff are needed to support the DIP goal regarding technology. High school staff members noted that ELL and special education supports are "spotty", teachers need planning time and leadership for the improvement of curriculum and instruction, and supports such as reading specialists are limited. The superintendent has assumed the responsibility for curriculum as well as the overall leadership of the school system. Administrators were concerned that last year's cut of \$200,000 for school supplies could not be sustained without impacting classroom programs.

The district is building a new \$107 million high school; the MSBA has supported the project as a model school and is providing 80% reimbursement. Administrators and town officials said that town resources were sufficient to fund the town share of the project without a debt exclusion vote, making use of borrowing capacity due to retired bonds and other town funds. The town has a capital plan, which funds \$1.5 million to \$2 million in town projects annually, and it has supported other school capital projects exceeding \$80,000 such as middle school fields and security cameras.

The town and district have managed one time funding and cash reserves to minimize the impact of losses in revenue, and to invest in a new school and other capital needs. Resources have been tight, initiatives have been postponed, and the achievement of high school students in particular might benefit from additional ELL and other instructional supports, but the district has been able to protect lower class sizes and classroom programs, its first priority.

**Little use of program evaluations or student achievement data was evident in choosing proposed initiatives or priorities for the budget. Budget information was disseminated in three or four presentations and documents.**

The superintendent reported that he meets with principals individually in the fall to review school resources and prioritize needs, and to explore options to reallocate resources within a school as well. The superintendent emphasized that the preservation of classroom services is central in the development of the budget. He and his administrative staff meet with the mayor and the town chief financial officer frequently from December to May to review state aid estimates and other town revenues. The administrative staff prepares estimates of budget changes due to grants, collective bargaining agreements, staff attrition, utility costs, transportation contracts, and special education costs. The mayor has asked for three budget scenarios: level service, level funded, and a five percent reduction; in 2011 a 10% reduction was also requested. The superintendent presents the budget to the school committee in March, when he outlines anticipated changes (collective bargaining, etc.), initiatives, and the impact of each budget scenario. He discusses these scenarios with the school committee's budget subcommittee and in staff meetings to clarify the process and the impact of potential additions or cuts. The school committee voted for a level service budget in April, 2012. At the time of the review, the mayor planned to present his town budget on May 1, for a town council vote in June with the option to reduce the budget but not to increase it.

Interviewees were asked about the use of achievement and other data in the development of the budget and in setting priorities for initiatives and reductions. Although they indicated that data was considered in the process, few specific examples were given: dropout prevention (credit recovery) and a new ELA curriculum. The priority cited for the budget was to preserve classroom services. The district commissioned an outside evaluation of its literacy programs in spring 2011; although programs were reviewed in place and surveys and interviews were used to evaluate their effectiveness, data from assessments of student progress and achievement were not cited in the analysis. However, the report has been a factor in the decision to fund a new elementary literacy program. In general, initiatives and priorities have not been based on achievement data, but primarily on other factors, such as the alignment of curriculum or the centrality of classroom instruction.

The superintendent's PowerPoint budget presentation showed the major increases required for a level services budget for wages, special education, transportation, and Lower Pioneer Valley Educational Collaborative (LPVEC) services, as well as the loss of stimulus grant funding. His presentation proposed a level funded budget achieved with a one day furlough and the reduction

of 53 positions and various programs. It noted cuts made the previous year, and the option of using a one-time allocation of \$750,000 from school choice funds. The superintendent also prepared a one-page summary comparing the current budget to the proposed level service budget by function, and major offsets such as school choice and circuit breaker revenues. A detailed budget book was also available, which included a message from the superintendent, a staffing summary, line item comparisons to the current budget and expenditures to date, and a budget and narrative for each school and program. Background information was included on enrollments, Chapter 70 aid and NSS requirements, per pupil costs, and grant information. The book did not include staffing by school, school choice and other revolving fund balances, or the prioritized reductions necessary for various budget scenarios outlined in the superintendent's Power Point presentation, and neither the budget information book nor the Power Point presentation made reference to goals of the DIP or to specific needs to improve student achievement. Administrators and town officials reported that the superintendent's presentation and budget book are updated for the Town Council and its budget subcommittee, and noted that the Town Council and other town officials have given positive feedback about the transparency of the district's budget process and information.

The town and district recently changed to new accounting software, which has disrupted quarterly financial reporting to the school committee. Possible reports from the new software have been shared with school committee members, who have given positive feedback. The software reports include the encumbrance of payroll as well as contracts and purchase orders, which helps provide an up to date picture of committed expenditures to date, and administrators carefully track expenditures that can vary from estimates, such as utilities and special education services. While regular quarterly reports and projections are not yet available from the system, projections from information currently available have been accurate enough to avoid deficits, make forecasts and recommend transfers. The business manager is working on a format for new financial reports with input from school committee members.

The development of the district budget is an inclusive process, involving principals, town officials, and the school committee. The budget presentations communicate effectively to the staff, the public, and the Town Council. Stakeholders interviewed by the team indicated that the budget is transparent, and they expressed confidence in the administrators preparing the budget and managing school finances. A great deal of budget detail is available to stakeholders, although there are some areas where it could be more complete, such as staffing by school and revolving funds. Quarterly or monthly reports on projected balances and other financial matters from the new software system are needed.

## **Recommendations**

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

### **Leadership and Governance**

**The superintendent should involve administrators and teachers in shaping the district's vision and implementing strategic plans for improvement; organizational structures to conduct daily operations should be created.**

To date, the superintendent's efforts to improve achievement reflect his vision for the West Springfield Public Schools. The superintendent's vision is captured in his system goals to align the curriculum to the new Massachusetts curriculum frameworks, create knowledge-driven schools, and increase the use of technology in instruction. Following his philosophy of "district implementation, school customization," the superintendent directs principals to align their School Improvement Plans with the District Improvement Plan.

Although administrators and teachers are anxious to implement the superintendent's vision, they were not involved in its development. The vision is not a shared one. In order to move the district forward toward a vision of higher achievement, administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders should be involved in developing the vision and the strategic plan to implement it. Creating ownership for the vision heightens the probability of success.

Part of the development of a shared vision is acceptance of a shared workload. Currently, the daily work in all instructional aspects of the district is overseen directly by the superintendent. In addition to creating an unrealistic workload for the superintendent, this model of leadership precludes the genuine involvement of the staff in improvement efforts. There is a need to implement organizational structures to conduct the daily operations in the areas of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development through involvement of K–12 staff.

Because the typical structures of district- and school-based supervisory directors, department heads, or coordinators to oversee improvement efforts are absent in the district, the superintendent can establish innovative routes to embed these efforts in the culture of the district. Central coordination and articulation of instructional services can be accomplished through creative staffing patterns and/or a teamwork approach to the daily responsibilities.

The review team recommends that the superintendent step back from the daily operational tasks in curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development. He should seek to accomplish a shared vision and strategic implementation plan through staff engagement.

## **Curriculum and Instruction**

**The district should move urgently to ensure a common understanding of curriculum, to develop such curriculum, and then to ensure its implementation across classrooms, courses, and schools.**

A review of the district curricula shows documents at the elementary and middle school with some but not all the components of a standard curriculum. At the elementary and middle school levels, most documents are called—and are—Scope and Sequence. Although the documents vary among themselves, most list topics to be covered by month with notations about objectives and program sections in the new Massachusetts curriculum frameworks. Objectives are not explicitly stated, for the most part instructional strategies are not included, resources are seldom named, and assessments are not included. At the high school what is called curriculum is generally a course syllabus, with students and their parents as the audience. A curriculum, which is addressed to teachers, should include in some form objectives, content, instructional strategies, resources, assessments, and standards.

Development of these curriculum documents requires staff. At the elementary and middle schools, literacy and math coaches and ELA and math curriculum committees are charged with responsibility for curriculum development and have time to lead it. At the high school, department chairs are responsible for curriculum development and oversight. However, they are full-time teachers with an hour each month for department meetings. High-school department chairs do not have the time to lead curriculum development, with the result that little has taken place in that regard since the last New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) review eight years before the site visit. For the district to have the curriculum it needs, the high school must have the resources needed to develop curriculum. Finally, responsibility for guaranteeing vertical alignment, particularly between grades 5 and 6 and between grades 8 and 9, cannot rest solely with individuals within those separate schools. There is a need for informed oversight at the district level to provide K–12 perspective on the curriculum as a whole.

Only with complete curricula will teachers know what they are to teach, how to teach it, and how to measure student achievement of curriculum objectives. And only when these curricula are successfully implemented can the district have confidence that it is addressing the required state frameworks and that it is doing what is necessary to improve student achievement.

**To make teaching more effective, administrators should monitor the instruction in their classrooms and provide feedback to teachers on what they observe, as well as reviewing formative and summative assessment data to address teachers' needs.**

The review team's observations in 61 district classrooms from kindergarten to grade 12 showed some strengths in instruction, as in classroom climate and use of class time. However, the observations also showed some instructional areas that need improvement. Activation of higher-order thinking was observed infrequently except in the area of analysis and interpretation. Small-group learning was noted in fewer than half of the classrooms observed. Although instructional

pacing in visited classes was strong at the elementary and middle-school levels, effective instructional pacing was markedly less frequent at the high school. Although teachers communicated academic content with clarity and accuracy, there was a low incidence of tiered instruction in observed classrooms. Finally, in less than half the visited classes were teachers observed informally assessing their students' level of understanding.

It was clear during the site visit that the superintendent was in schools, meeting with principals and observing classrooms. However, principals in interviews said that they were in classrooms far less frequently than they wished to be. Principals also said that they had limited assessment data with which to determine the effectiveness of individual classroom instruction. The district was in the process of introducing learning walks. Observations by the review team showed instructional areas in need of serious attention. Principals have no responsibility greater than supporting teacher instruction so that student achievement will improve. Administrators should take much greater responsibility for monitoring classroom instruction by being in classrooms and providing feedback on what they observe, as well as by reviewing formative and summative assessment data to provide instructional leadership and to address teachers' needs.

## **Assessment**

**The district should develop a comprehensive system of formative and summative assessments across all levels. All teachers should be trained in analyzing data, and time should be provided for data analysis across all levels, especially at the high school where currently there is no time for collaboration among teachers.**

There are now some formative and summative assessments in place; however, the majority of the formative assessments are at the elementary level, with limited formative assessments at the middle school and a scattering of formative assessments at the high school. Mostly, these assessments are end-of-unit tests and vary from teacher to teacher. Formative assessments at the elementary level consist of Running Records and a monthly math assessment. Although at the middle school end-of-unit tests provide some relevant information that can be used to modify day-to-day instruction, the majority of assessments are summative, as they are administered three times during the year and provide information about possible placements and growth. Summative assessments include the Benchmark Assessment System (BAS) at the elementary level and the quarterly ELA benchmark assessment at the middle school. However, because these are summative they cannot provide the information needed by teachers in order to adjust instruction in a timely way.

High-school staff said they needed more assessments in order to adjust instruction; however, at the time of the review teachers could not embark on developing these assessments because there was no time scheduled for collaboration. The high school has a goal to develop common assessments during the 2012–2013 school year; time should be provided for this necessary endeavor.

Efforts are being made to provide for the analysis of data through the introduction of Professional Learning Communities at the elementary level and team planning as well as content planning time at the middle school. However, staff and administrators agreed that teachers have had little training in the analysis of data; this limits the usefulness of the data that is available.

Appropriate and timely instruction to meet the needs of all students is the main ingredient necessary for student success; putting a comprehensive set of formative and summative assessments in place and training teachers in the analysis of assessment data are necessary steps to that goal. The formative assessments will provide teachers with information that will have an impact on day-to-day instruction, and the summative assessments will provide information about the efficacy of that instruction in terms of student growth.

**Besides providing all staff with detailed analyses of student achievement data, the district should provide time for discussions to determine reasons for achievement levels.**

Some administrators and many staff were not aware of the status of student achievement at the elementary and high-school levels. They expressed surprise about data that showed fluctuation and in some cases a downward direction in achievement over recent years for elementary students. High-school staff had the same response about the median SGPs in both ELA and math at grade 10, which, except for math in 2010, were in the 30s from 2009 to 2011. It was clear to review team members that many were not aware of the fluctuating or low achievement or low growth and could not assign reasons for it.

Providing staff with detailed analyses of student MCAS data and adequate time to discuss reasons for achievement levels will contribute to a deeper understanding of why some students in West Springfield are not achieving at a higher level. This understanding can inform changes to curriculum and instruction<sup>5</sup> to bring about greater student success.

## **Human Resources and Professional Development**

**The district should continue to improve its system for building human capital by**

- **aligning its recruiting and hiring system with school committee policies and district needs, and**
- **linking its professional development initiatives to its new evaluation system.**

There was no evidence of a particular effort, in accordance with school committee policies, to seek out and hire new staff who were from various cultural backgrounds or whose experience and skills met the district's needs and priorities. This can be strategically remedied by putting high priority on an outreach effort to colleges, universities, and other more informal sources to attract candidates of various cultural backgrounds and whose experience and skills are aligned

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<sup>5</sup> It can also inform program evaluation. See student support and finance recommendations below.

with the needs of the district. In addition, the Massachusetts Association of School Personnel Administrators (MASPA) could be helpful in directing the district to resources.

The professional development effort in the district is well organized. According to information gained in interviews, the system could further benefit from more input as to its offerings from teachers and from schools. The formation of a districtwide Professional Development Committee that represents professional staff from all levels and employs an open and transparent process would be a first step in broadening professional development planning within the district. Professional development should be connected to performance improvement recommendations generated by the district's evaluation process.

As a participant in the Race to the Top grant program, West Springfield was required to adopt and implement evaluation systems consistent with the new state system for the 2012-2013 school year. The district has spent time and resources on understanding the changes to the teacher and administrator evaluation processes. Staff, leaders from the West Springfield teachers' association, and school committee representatives received three days of training to understand and the new standards and design a new system to meet the district's needs. The new evaluation process was being piloted in 2011–2012. The district's professional development plans must include an integrated connection to its new educator evaluation system.

Its new, comprehensive, standards-based accountability and performance improvement process will enhance the district's ability to identify, document, and propagate successful approaches to meeting students' needs at all levels. Currently the level of student performance varies across the district. It is obvious from documents and interviews that there are a number of important features already in place in the district. There is a culture of transparency in the district. There is a culture of high expectations in the district although expectations vary from school to school. There is a professional development framework in place that has the potential to be used as a powerful tool to understand which student learning interventions are most effective and train to them. In addition, the district is led by an energetic superintendent who has a vision, a plan, and the desire to keep the classroom and its important activities as the focus of the district.

To tie together these important elements—recruitment, hiring, evaluation, and professional development—in a coordinated human resources system will help the district assemble an excellent staff that meets the needs of the district and help it create a continuous cycle of staff improvement.

## **Student Support**

**Districtwide student support initiatives should be monitored and evaluated using aggregated and disaggregated data, to inform the district of their effectiveness in identifying and meeting students' needs.**

Chronic absence, drop-out, graduation, suspension, and retention rates are of concern for certain groups of students in the district. While the district has adopted several initiatives to address

these rates, in some cases they are still of concern. Team efforts that discuss student performance appear to place heavy emphasis on looking at individual student data. While this is important, the district should consider ways to look at larger groups of children using aggregated and disaggregated data. And while there are many initiatives within the district to support students, there is a need for more initiatives that are informed by data about student improvement in the areas of concern.

Efforts should reflect the recognition of disproportionate representation of different subgroups within problem areas. The district should use data to identify subgroups of students overrepresented in challenging areas and target those populations of students using informed methods.

Student programs need to be evaluated and monitored for quality and to see whether they have the capacity to reach all the students in need. Results from the evaluating and monitoring process should contribute to conversations on how the district is maximizing its efforts and building capacity to support larger numbers of students. Ongoing collection and review of data on student performance throughout the year will help inform the district of whether or not students' needs are being met. Use of data can also inform decisions about program design and the district's and school's use of support staff.

While the district has several interventions to address the social and emotional needs of students, there remains a need throughout the district for tiered and differentiated instruction. The district should adopt an instructional model that allows for tiered instruction to reach students throughout the district.

Finally, because only 30.6 percent of the students with disabilities within the district are in full inclusion classes, compared to the state rate of 57 percent, the district should investigate whether all of its students with disabilities are being taught in the least restrictive environment possible. In its current state, there is more full inclusion at the preschool and kindergarten level than in the higher grades.

## **Financial and Asset Management**

**The district should consider some additional information for budget documentation and budget reports. The content of such documents should be decided with input from school committee members and other decision makers.**

The district budget has been presented to the school committee and the public in three formats: a PowerPoint presentation, a budget summary and detailed information book, and presentations by principals and other administrators. One comprehensive budget document is not currently available. The district might add the Power Point presentation to its budget information book to provide information about district initiatives and needs and the implications of various scenarios in the budget. The narratives for each school and program, which summarize school initiatives and needs, would be more complete with current and/or proposed staffing information. Student

achievement data might be considered, particularly where it is relevant to budget proposals. Also helpful to a full picture of the current and proposed budgets would be details on school choice, circuit breaker, and other revolving accounts, along with the grant detail already provided. The balance between detail and the big picture is always difficult, and collaboration between administrators and school committee representatives should lead to documentation useful to all stakeholders.

Administrators are currently revising their written quarterly financial reports to the school committee as they continue implementation of new town-wide accounting software. The written quarterly reports should include expenditures and projections for the school budget, and for major grants and revolving funds.

**The expanded use of program evaluations and achievement data would be useful in making decisions about initiatives and priorities during budget development.**

The district did an evaluation of its literacy programs that made little reference to student achievement data but resulted in a decision to fund a new literacy program. Budget priorities have been set in terms of impact on the classroom, rather than on needs identified by an analysis of student achievement data. Evaluations of programs (such as high school curriculum planning time and support services) that make use of achievement data to identify student needs could help the district formulate more effective programs. Achievement data can also help when setting priorities in the budgeting process and allocating resources.

## Appendix A: Review Team Members

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The review of the West Springfield Public Schools was conducted from April 24–27, 2012, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Dr. Magdalene Giffune, Leadership and Governance

Patricia Williams, Curriculum and Instruction

Dolores Fitzgerald, Assessment. Review team coordinator

Dr. Thomas Johnson, 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

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### District Review Activities

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

- The review team conducted interviews with the following West Springfield finance personnel: mayor, chief finance officer and treasurer.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following members of the West Springfield School Committee: chairperson and three members.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the West Springfield Teachers' Association: co-presidents (two) and chair of professional rights & responsibilities.
- The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the West Springfield Public Schools central office administration: superintendent, acting superintendent for business & personnel, business manager, and special services administrator.
- The review team visited the following schools in the West Springfield Public Schools: Ashley (pre-kindergarten and kindergarten), Coburn (kindergarten through grade 5), Fausey (kindergarten through grade 5), Memorial (grades 1–5), Mittineague (grades 1–5), Tatham (grades 1–5), West Springfield Middle School (grades 6–8), and West Springfield High School (grades 9–12).
  - During school visits, the review team conducted interviews with school principals and teachers. The team interviewed 9 elementary teachers, 21 middle school teachers, and 8 high school teachers.
  - The review team conducted 61 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the eight 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 West Springfield Public Schools, conducted from April 24–27, 2012.

Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<p>April 24, 2012</p> <p>Orientation with district leaders and principals</p> <p>Student Support Interview with district and school staff</p> <p>Interview with Superintendent</p> <p>Review of documents and Personnel Files</p> <p>HR &amp; PD Interview with district and school staff</p> <p>Curriculum and Instruction Interview with district and school staff</p> <p>Finance Interview with district staff</p> <p>Assessment Interview with district and school staff</p> <p>Teachers' Association Interview</p>	<p>April 25, 2012</p> <p>HR and PD Interview with district and school staff</p> <p>Curriculum and Instruction interview with school staff</p> <p>Classroom visits (West Springfield High School and West Springfield Middle School)</p> <p>Interviews with school leaders</p> <p>Leadership Interview with district principals</p> <p>Finance Interview with City Officials</p> <p>Teacher Focus Group meeting with Elementary, Middle and High School teachers</p> <p>School Council Parent Interview</p> <p>Meeting with Teachers' Association members</p>	<p>April 26, 2012</p> <p>Classroom visits at West Springfield Middle School, West Springfield High School, and Memorial and Fausey elementary schools</p> <p>Interviews with School leaders</p> <p>Student Support Interview with district and school staff</p> <p>Curriculum and Instruction Interview with principals</p> <p>Assessment interview with district and school staff</p> <p>Leadership Interview with Finance</p> <p>School Committee Interviews</p>	<p>April 27, 2012</p> <p>School visits (West Springfield High School, Coburn, Memorial, Mittineague, and Ashley elementary schools)</p> <p>Interviews with School leaders</p> <p>Superintendent Briefing</p> <p>emerging themes meeting with district leaders and principals</p>

## Appendix C: Student Performance 2009–2011

**Table C1: West Springfield Public Schools and State Proficiency Rates and Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)<sup>6</sup> 2009–2011 English Language Arts**

Grade	2009		2010		2011	
	Percent Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Proficient	Median SGP
<b>All Grades—District</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>48</b>
All Grades—State	67	50	68	50	69	50
<b>Grade 3—District</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>NA*</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>NA*</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>NA*</b>
Grade 3—State	57	NA*	63	NA*	61	NA*
<b>Grade 4—District</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>61.5</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>52</b>
Grade 4—State	53	50	54	50	53	51
<b>Grade 5—District</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>58.5</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>47</b>
Grade 5—State	63	50	63	50	67	50
<b>Grade 6—District</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>44</b>
Grade 6—State	66	50	69	50	68	50
<b>Grade 7—District</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>49.5</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>53</b>
Grade 7—State	70	50	72	50	73	50
<b>Grade 8—District</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>55.5</b>
Grade 8—State	78	50	78	50	79	50
<b>Grade 10—District</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>36</b>
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

<sup>6</sup> “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: West Springfield Public Schools and State  
Proficiency Rates and Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)  
2009–2011 Mathematics**

Grade	2009		2010		2011	
	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	<i>Median SGP</i>	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	<i>Median SGP</i>
<b>All Grades—District</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>46</b>
All Grades—State	55	50	59	50	58	50
<b>Grade 3—District</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>NA*</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>NA*</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>NA*</b>
Grade 3—State	60	NA*	65	NA*	66	NA*
<b>Grade 4—District</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>59.5</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>60</b>
Grade 4—State	48	50	48	49	47	50
<b>Grade 5—District</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>44</b>
Grade 5—State	54	50	55	50	59	50
<b>Grade 6—District</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>33</b>
Grade 6—State	57	50	59	50	58	50
<b>Grade 7—District</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>57</b>
Grade 7—State	49	50	53	50	51	50
<b>Grade 8—District</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>51.5</b>
Grade 8—State	48	50	51	51	52	50
<b>Grade 10—District</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>33</b>
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: West Springfield Public Schools and State  
Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)  
for Selected Subgroups  
2011 English Language Arts**

	West Springfield Public Schools			State	
	<i>Number of Students Included</i>	<b>CPI</b>	<i>Median SGP</i>	<b>CPI</b>	<i>Median SGP</i>
<b>All Students</b>	<b>2,086</b>	<b>84.2</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>87.2</b>	<b>50</b>
African-American/Black	74	78.7	42	77.4	47
Asian	80	76.9	62.5	90.2	59
Hispanic/Latino	324	76.1	45	74.2	46
White	1,550	86.5	47	90.9	51
ELL	107	44.4	40	59.4	48
FELL	94	75.8	52	81.7	54
Special Education	474	64.9	33	68.3	42
Low-Income	1,034	76.5	44	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: West Springfield Public Schools and State  
Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)  
for Selected Subgroups  
2011 Mathematics**

	West Springfield Public Schools			State	
	<i>Number of Students Included</i>	<b>CPI</b>	<i>Median SGP</i>	<b>CPI</b>	<i>Median SGP</i>
<b>All Students</b>	<b>2,091</b>	<b>80.1</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>79.9</b>	<b>50</b>
African-American/Black	74	64.9	35	65	47
Asian	80	78.1	63	89.5	64
Hispanic/Latino	329	67.8	44	64.4	46
White	1,550	83.7	46	84.3	50
ELL	111	49.5	72	56.3	52
FELL	93	80.4	63	75.1	53
Special Education	474	56.4	35.5	57.7	43
Low-Income	1,042	72.1	46	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

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### ***Finding Statements:***

#### **Student Achievement**

1. Proficiency rates for grade 10 students in ELA and math have been well below the state's rates. Further, in the three test administrations from 2009–2011, except for math in 2010, median SGPs for West Springfield's grade 10 students were in the 30s, outside the moderate range of 40 to 60.

#### **Leadership and Governance**

2. The West Springfield school district does not have the organizational structures to embed the district's efforts to improve student achievement throughout classrooms in the district.

#### **Curriculum and Instruction**

3. Curriculum in the district is incomplete; it does not include many standard curriculum components and does not have an overall district perspective. There are variations in resources for curriculum development at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.
4. Classroom observations indicate a range of strengths and challenges in professional practice. While relationships are positive and respectful and class time is used well, students are not active participants in their learning and instruction is not differentiated or supported by technology.

#### **Assessment**

5. The district has a variety of assessments available at the elementary and middle-school levels with limited assessments available at the high school. However, not all school levels have the time or trained staff to analyze available assessment data in order to improve instruction, although the district is beginning to address these issues.
6. Many district leaders and staff were unaware of fluctuating or declining proficiency rates in recent years in several elementary grades in both ELA and math. Many leaders and staff were also unfamiliar with the low median SGPs in ELA and math at West Springfield High School.

## **Human Resources and Professional Development**

7. The recruitment strategies in effect in the district are not aligned with long-standing school committee personnel policies on recruiting. The district's practices for recruiting and selecting educators do not systematically focus on attracting and retaining well-qualified staff with skills and experience aligned with district needs.
8. Formal evaluations in the district did not include comments about how to improve instruction and gave an overall impression of instructional strength in the district that contrasted with classroom observations by the review team. West Springfield has spent time and resources to understand the ESE educator evaluation model and design and pilot a new evaluation system to meet the district's needs.
9. The district's professional development effort is centrally controlled and aligned with district priorities, but it does not have universal acceptance among staff, nor is it connected to student achievement data or performance evaluations.

## **Student Support**

10. The district has many programs and support staff, but it does not have an effective system to identify and support groups of students performing below proficiency.
11. The district has adopted initiatives to decrease the dropout, retention, and out-of-school suspension rates, and to improve attendance and graduation rates. Although some of these initiatives have contributed to some improved rates overall, certain groups of students have low graduation rates and high dropout, retention, and chronic absence rates.
12. The district has a lower rate of full inclusion and a higher rate of partial inclusion for students with disabilities than the statewide rates.

## **Financial and Asset Management**

13. The town and the district have managed funds conservatively, which has minimized the impact of difficult revenue years and enabled the town to fund a new high school without asking voters for a debt exclusion vote.
14. Little use of program evaluations or student achievement data was evident in choosing proposed initiatives or priorities for the budget. Budget information was disseminated in three or four presentations and documents.

## ***Recommendation Statements:***

### **Leadership and Governance**

1. The superintendent should involve administrators and teachers in shaping the district's vision and implementing strategic plans for improvement; organizational structures to conduct daily operations should be created.

### **Curriculum and Instruction**

2. The district should move urgently to ensure a common understanding of curriculum, to develop such curriculum, and then to ensure its implementation across classrooms, courses, and schools.
3. To make teaching more effective, administrators should monitor the instruction in their classrooms and provide feedback to teachers on what they observe, as well as reviewing formative and summative assessment data to address teachers' needs.

### **Assessment**

4. The district should develop a comprehensive system of formative and summative assessments across all levels. All teachers should be trained in analyzing data, and time should be provided for data analysis across all levels, especially at the high school where currently there is no time for collaboration among teachers.
5. Besides providing all staff with detailed analyses of student achievement data, the district should provide time for discussions to determine reasons for achievement levels.

### **Human Resources and Professional Development**

6. The district should continue to improve its system for building human capital by
  - aligning its recruiting and hiring system with school committee policies and district needs, and
  - linking its professional development initiatives to its new evaluation system.

### **Student Support**

7. Districtwide student support initiatives should be monitored and evaluated using aggregated and disaggregated data, to inform the district of their effectiveness in identifying and meeting students' needs.

## **Financial and Asset Management**

8. The district should consider some additional information for budget documentation and budget reports. The content of such documents should be decided with input from school committee members and other decision makers.
9. The expanded use of program evaluations and achievement data would be useful in making decisions about initiatives and priorities during budget development.