



Massachusetts Department of
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY
EDUCATION

Gateway Regional School District District Review

Review conducted April 2-5, 2012

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Overview of District Reviews

Purpose

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

District reviews are conducted under Chapter 15, Section 55A of the Massachusetts General Laws and include reviews focused on “districts whose students achieve at low levels either in absolute terms or relative to districts that educate similar populations.” Districts subject to review in the 2011-2012 school year include districts that were in Level 3¹ (in school year 2011 or school year 2012) of ESE’s framework for district accountability and assistance in each of the state’s six regions: Greater Boston, Berkshires, Northeast, Southeast, Central, and Pioneer Valley. The districts with the lowest aggregate performance and least movement in Composite Performance Index (CPI) in their regions were chosen from among those districts that were not exempt under Chapter 15, Section 55A, because another comprehensive review had been completed or was scheduled to take place within nine months of the planned reviews.

Methodology

To focus the analysis, reviews collect evidence for each of the six district standards (see above). The reviews seek to identify those systems and practices that may be impeding rapid improvement as well as those that are most likely to be contributing to positive results. The district review team consists of independent consultants with expertise in each of the district standards who review selected district documents and ESE data and reports for two days before conducting a four-day district visit that includes visits to various district schools. The team holds interviews and focus groups with such stakeholders as school committee members, teachers’ union representatives, administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Team members also observe classes. The team then meets for two days to develop findings and recommendations before submitting the draft of their district review report to ESE.

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

Gateway Regional School District

The site visit to the Gateway Regional School District was conducted from April 2–5, 2012. The site visit included 32.5 hours of interviews and focus groups with over 47 stakeholders ranging from school committee members to district administrators and school staff to teachers' association representatives. The review team conducted focus groups with three elementary, three middle school, and three high school teachers. The team also conducted visits to all five of the district's schools: Chester Elementary School (pre-kindergarten through grade 4), Littleville Elementary School (pre-kindergarten through grade 4), Gateway Regional Middle School (grades 5–6), Gateway Regional Junior High School (grades 7–8) and Gateway Regional High School (grades 9–12). Further information about the review and the site visit schedule can be found in Appendix B; information about the members of the review team can be found in Appendix A. Appendix C contains information about student performance from 2009–2011. Appendix D contains finding and recommendation statements.

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

District Profile²

The Gateway Regional School District serves students from seven surrounding towns: Huntington, Russell, Blandford, Chester, Worthington, Montgomery, and Middlefield. These towns are represented by 17 school committee members who meet twice each month.

Schools

There are five schools in the district; one, Chester Elementary, is located in Chester, MA. The other schools (Littleville Elementary, Gateway Regional Middle, Gateway Regional Junior High, and Gateway Regional High) share a large complex in the town of Huntington. The district enrolled 1,103 students in October 2011, as follows: Chester Elementary, 135; Littleville Elementary, 286; Gateway Regional Middle, 150; Gateway Regional Junior High, 197; and Gateway Regional High, 335. A number of students seek admission into the region's vocational school.

The present superintendent has been in the position since 2003. The members of the leadership team include: the director of academics, the director of technology, the director of pupil services, the business manager, the public relations and grant writer, and the school principals.

In recent years there have been several changes in the central office and in the organization and leadership of the schools:

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

- Because of declining enrollment and fiscal constraint, the five elementary schools were consolidated to the current two elementary schools beginning in 2010-2011.
- The former principal of the five elementary schools who served in that position for one year was appointed to the district level position of director of academics.
- The principal of the Chester Elementary School resigned in 2010 and the school is now led by the principal of the middle school (grades 5–6), with an assistant principal on site at Chester.
- In 2009-2010 grades 7–8 were separated from the middle school to create a junior high school under the supervision of the high school principal.
- The position of director of pupil services was vacated in fall 2011, and the position filled by a former member of the regional school committee.
- At the time of the review team visit, the middle school/Chester principal had accepted a position in another district for the 2012–2013 school year and the superintendent planned to re-organize leadership so that one principal will oversee all elementary schools and the middle school (pre-kindergarten through grade 6).

Student Demographics

Table 1a shows student enrollment by race/ethnicity and selected populations for the 2010–2011 school year and Table 1b shows the same for 2011–2012. In 2011 nearly a third of all students, 31.7 percent, were identified as low income, 1 percent of all students were identified as English language learners and the largest ethnic subgroup was Hispanic/Latino at 2.2 percent of all students. The district’s enrollment dropped by 18% between 2007 and 2011, from 1,137 to 1,103 students (data not in a table).

In 2011 the proportion of students receiving special education services was low, 14 percent, with the highest proportion identified at the junior high school (19 percent) and the remaining proportions at the other schools ranging between 10 percent and 14.0 percent (data not in a table).

**Table 1a: Gateway Regional School District
Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations
2010–2011**

Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total	Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total
Total enrollment	1,103	100.0	African-American/Black	3	0.3
First Language not English	34	3.1	Asian	5	0.5
Limited English Proficient*	11	1.0	Hispanic/Latino	24	2.2
Special Education**	156	14.0	White	1,055	95.6
Low-income	350	31.7	Native American	1	0.1
Free Lunch	267	24.2	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0	0.0
Reduced-price lunch	83	7.5	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	15	1.4

*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

In 2012 the number of English language learners (ELLs) dropped from 11 to 8. All the ELLs are Russian or Ukrainian speakers enrolled in the Littleville Elementary School.

**Table 1b: Gateway Regional School District
Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Selected Populations
2011–2012**

Selected Populations	Number	Percent of Total	Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent of Total
Total enrollment	1,084	100.0	African-American/Black	6	0.6
*First Language not English	25	2.3	Asian	5	0.5
Limited English Proficient*	8	0.7	Hispanic/Latino	26	2.4
Special Education**	149	13.7	White	1,031	95.1
Low-income	340	31.4	Native American	5	0.5
Free Lunch	277	25.6	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0	0.0
Reduced-price lunch	63	5.8	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	11	1.0
<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>					

Financial Profile

The district has been able to maintain a level of in-district per pupil expenditure at \$13,767 in 2011, above the state average of \$12,907, and above the median of \$11,882 for districts in its size group, in spite of dropping enrollment. Actual net school spending has been consistently above required net school spending, by 15.9 percent in 2011.

**Table 2: Gateway Regional School District
Expenditures, Chapter 70 State Aid, and Net School Spending
Fiscal Years 2010-2012**

	FY10		FY11		FY12
	Estimated	Actual	Estimated	Actual	Estimated
Expenditures					
From school committee budget	17,115,511	16,259,919	16,383,752	16,011,225	16,581,514
From revolving funds and grants	---	1,729,414	---	1,916,692	---
Total expenditures	---	17,989,333	---	17,927,917	---
Chapter 70 aid to education program					
Chapter 70 state aid*	---	5,866,604	---	5,523,878	5,553,533
Required local contribution	---	5,871,665	---	5,975,739	5,977,311
Required net school spending**	---	11,738,269	---	11,499,617	11,530,844
Actual net school spending	---	13,259,787	---	12,901,248	13,640,089
Over/under required (\$)	---	1,521,518	---	1,401,631	2,109,245
Over/under required (%)	---	+13%	---	+12.2%	18.3 %
<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: FY11 District End-of-Year Report; Chapter 70 Program information on ESE website.</p>					

Findings

Student Achievement

Student achievement in the district has generally been below that of students throughout the state, though the district has narrowed the gap.

The district made modest progress over the five test administrations from 2007 to 2011 in narrowing a gap with the state in ELA and mathematics, in both percentage of students scoring Proficient or higher and in Composite Performance Index (CPI).³

- The gap with the state with respect to the ELA proficiency rate narrowed from 9 percentage points in 2007 (57 percent proficient in district, 66 percent in state) to 6 percentage points in 2011 (63 percent proficient in district, 69 percent in state).
- The gap with the state with respect to the math proficiency rate narrowed from 15 percentage points in 2007 (38 percent proficient in district, 53 percent in state) to 12 percentage points in 2011 (46 percent proficient in district, 58 percent in state).
- The gap in Composite Performance Index (CPI) in ELA narrowed from 3.1 points in 2007 (district CPI 82.7, state CPI 85.8) to 2.7 points in 2011 (district CPI 84.5, state CPI 87.2).
- The gap in CPI in math narrowed from 9.5 points in 2007 (district CPI 66.7, state CPI 76.2) to 6.9 points in 2011 (district CPI 73.0, state CPI 79.9).

In 2011 the district proficiency rate for particular grades was well below the state's rate in both ELA and math between grades 4 and 8, except for grade 6; in math the district proficiency rate was well below the state's rate in grades 3 and 10 also. In four grades, grades 4, 5, 7, and 8, the 2011 median student growth percentile⁴ for ELA was in the 30s, below the moderate range. In grade 7 this had been true in 2009 and 2010 also, and in grade 8 it had been true in 2009. The 2011 median student growth percentile in math was below the moderate range in two grades, grades 7 and 8; in grade 8 it had been very low in 2009, also. (See Appendix C, Tables C1 and C2.)

In all schools except the middle school the proficiency rates in both ELA and math declined from 2010 to 2011; except for Chester Elementary in ELA, the proficiency rates in both subjects had declined for all schools from 2009 to 2010.

There were some strengths in specific areas:

³ The data that follows is from ESE's District Analysis and Review Tool.

⁴ "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/>.

- In 2011 grade 10 students' proficiency rate was very close to the state proficiency rate in ELA (82 percent proficient compared to 84 percent), and the ELA proficiency rate of grade 6 students was 13 points above the rate for state 6th graders (81 percent compared to 68 percent) . The grade 10 ELA proficiency rate had been substantially higher than the state rate in 2009 and 2010. See Table C1.
- Grade 10 had a high median SGP in ELA (66.5) in 2011, as did grade 6 (61.5). In 2009 and 2010, grade 10 also had high median SGPs in ELA (74.0 and 76.0). See Table C1.
- In 2011, achievement for students from low-income families was at, or close to, achievement for the subgroup statewide: the ELA CPI for district students from low-income families (77.5) was slightly higher than the state's CPI (77.1), and the mathematics CPI for district students from low-income families (65.7) was only 1.6 points below that of the state subgroup's (67.3). See Tables C3 and C4. (In 2011 350 students, 31.7 percent of the total enrollment, were from low-income families.)

Achievement in the district remains a concern, however. Student performance in the district as a whole in 2011 still lagged statewide performance, especially in mathematics, and the areas of strength noted above were mostly in ELA and did not cover a wide range of grades or subgroups.

Leadership and Governance

The reconfiguration of the school and district level administration has resulted in an inconsistent implementation of improvement initiatives designed to raise student achievement.

In the two years before the site visit the Gateway Regional School District had undergone a significant reorganization. In 2010 Gateway closed three of its five elementary schools and reassigned students in pre-kindergarten through grade 4 to the Chester and Littleville Elementary Schools. The district also divided its middle school that housed grades 5–8 into a middle school that houses grades 5 and 6 and a junior high school that houses grades 7 and 8. As a result of reorganizing the grade levels the administrative staff was redeployed. Every administrative position in the district was affected except the business manager. The redeployment of the administrative staff and resulting changes took place as follows:

- The principal of the Chester Elementary School resigned in 2010 after serving less than a year in that position.
- The principal of the middle school was charged with supervising Chester Elementary and continued to do so at the time of the site visit. (A full-time assistant principal for Chester Elementary School had been hired before the 2010–2011 school year.)
- The reorganization increased the enrollment at the Littleville Elementary from 182 to 286 students.
- Grades 7 and 8 were separated from the middle school to create a junior high school under the supervision of the high school principal. Grades 5–12 continue to be housed in the same complex.

- The former principal of the five elementary schools served for one year and then was appointed to the position of director of academics.
- The position of director of special education was vacated through resignation and a director of pupil services was filled by a former member of the regional school committee.

With declining enrollment, staffing was also reduced in some areas. Between 2007 and 2011, teachers were cut from 107.7 FTE to 85.0, a 21 percent decrease, while student enrollment dropped from 1,337 in 2007 to 1,103 in 2011, an 18 percent decrease.

According to the superintendent, school committee members, and some administrators and teachers, the district was reorganized because of declining enrollment and fiscal constraint. Nevertheless, there were benefits to students such as the elimination of multi-age classrooms. One of the disparities that arose from the reassignment of students concerned the average class size in the elementary schools. At the time of the team's visit, there was one section per grade level at Chester Elementary with class sizes ranging from 25–27 students; Littleville Elementary had three sections per grade with average class sizes of approximately 20 students. The proportion of students receiving special education services who were included in regular classrooms was comparable in the two schools. According to enrollment data provided by the district, there were 11 included students in 6 classrooms at Chester and 33 in 18 classrooms at Littleville.

The review team examined planning documents that predate the reorganization; the documents referred to the need for an articulated mathematics curriculum, the development of benchmarks in ELA and math, the development of a kindergarten through grade 12 comprehensive assessment system, and the establishment of a Response To Intervention (RTI) protocol. These initiatives were only partially implemented at the time of the site visit. While district leaders and teachers said that there was evidence of some progress in establishing these initiatives, they also acknowledged that the redeployment of the administrative staff has affected these initiatives. They noted that the implementation of a comprehensive assessment system and the establishment of an RTI model were scheduled to come online in the 2012–2013 school year although they were identified as needs of the district as early as 2009. They also expressed a need for administrators to become acclimated to their new roles and said that they needed time to become effective in the reorganized structures.

The ambiguity in the responsibilities of school and district administrators about the development and supervision of programs and the supervision of teachers within the evaluation system contributed further to slowing the progress of initiatives across the district. In some cases the delineation of responsibilities and the lines of authority appeared unclear to the review team. For example, the director of academics oversaw curriculum and instruction and had oversight of developing comprehensive assessment and professional development programs. Yet school principals directly supervised and evaluated their teachers who were in year one of the district's four-year evaluation cycle; the director of academics was responsible for the supervision and monitoring of teacher projects in years 2 and 3 of the evaluation cycle.

The district does not engage in long-range planning for program changes. There is no evaluation of current programs to determine areas for further development. For example, school committee members and teachers said that 33 of the 78 current grade 8 students have applied for admission to area vocational programs. The outgoing vocational students have increased over the past several years as have outgoing school choice students. Incoming school choice has decreased over the same period of time. The district has done little to analyze and plan for these trends.

As a result of the reorganization and the accompanying attention required to accomplish it, the achievement initiatives have been slowed in their implementation and in the team's judgment, have had little impact in improving student achievement.

There is insufficient advocacy by district leaders in the seven communities that make up the district.

The Gateway Regional School District is composed of seven towns: Chester, Huntington, Middlefield, Worthington, Russell, Blandford, and Montgomery. Each community has its individual character and issues that contribute to its perception of the regional school district.

Interviews with administrators, teachers, town officials, and school committee members revealed that although the general perception of the school district is positive there are varying degrees of understanding about the mission and direction of the district. Interviewees also displayed varying degrees of understanding of the fiscal health of the district.

School committee members said that they do not make decisions based upon the District Improvement Plan. While members were aware of the general direction of the school district, they were unable to articulate the relationship between the district planning efforts and decisions that they are asked to make about the budget. Most were equally unaware of the annual assessments for each town. In addition, despite receiving annual updates on MCAS performance, members were unsure about data trends and implications for instruction gleaned from the results. School committee members said that they did not include student achievement in their "360 degree evaluation" of the superintendent.

The school district has a system of communication to ensure that the administration, school committee members, and some townspeople have current relevant information about the budget and other important initiatives. The superintendent provides the school committee with detailed planning and budget documents. Principals are kept abreast of the progress on the budget process through emails that detail events at school committee meetings and meetings with town officials such as the boards of selectmen and finance committees in the seven member towns. The school district maintains a current and detailed website. In addition, the public relations administrator for the district has a network of townspeople throughout the district who are kept informed of important events in an attempt to have reliable information about the schools "on the streets." Despite these efforts there is little advocacy for the schools with government boards and town meetings in the member towns.

Most members of the school committee and the superintendent said that the relationship between them is positive and collegial. However, this relationship does not extend to the member

communities. According to town officials, the school committee is distant from the other town boards and few members attend public meetings about fiscal issues in the individual towns. The members of the school committee are perceived to be separated from the issues that face the towns. As a result of the absence of advocacy from the committee, the support for the school district ebbs and flows based upon perception, the recent school reorganization decisions, and available resources.

Town officials, teachers, and school committee members acknowledged that the reorganization of the school district has left division among the member communities. This division and the absence of clarity in the community about the needs of the school district have contributed to varying levels of financial support in the individual towns.

Curriculum and Instruction

The district has complete kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum documents that have facilitated the district's beginning work to align English language arts (ELA) curricula to the new Massachusetts curriculum frameworks.

The district has a fully documented kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum. In a web-based document dated 2009 on the district's website, the district has provided the scope and sequence and curriculum guides for 65 of 67 courses offered. This information is well organized and available to parents and staff. It is clustered into pre-kindergarten through grade 4, grade 5–8, and grades 9–12 curriculum guides. For each grade level, documentation is provided for the core subject areas as well as health, physical education, art, and music (pre-kindergarten through grade 4), multicultural education (grades 5–8), and Spanish and special education courses (grades 9–12). The curriculum is further sorted by subject across all grades so that teachers and parents can track the vertical alignment of each subject. The director of academics and teachers told the team that appropriate documents are provided to teachers in binders in addition to the online access as described above.

Each content area uses a common template with the following information: Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (MCF) standards, curriculum benchmarks about what students will know and do, a list of “possible instructional strategies,” evidence of learning (assessments), a pacing chart, and the name of the textbook(s). Each document also lists the date when the curriculum was first developed, subsequent adaptations based on MCF revisions, and the names of teachers involved in its writing.

The district began to align its ELA curricula to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in the 2010–2011 school year. The current director of academics, new to her position in 2011, provided an overview of the CCSS in all schools and for all grades, provided training to teachers by grade level or by department at the secondary level, and is now guiding and supporting staff as they develop the ELA curriculum maps and move into unit planning. The implementation plan is well organized as evidenced by the math implementation plan and the agenda for the January 19, 2012 ELA planning meeting.

Common lesson plan templates have been established and are based on a suggested template from ESE. Some of the required components include: goals/objectives, framework focus, approach/delivery, assessment, required skill/prior knowledge, materials, and timelines. Teachers may also select from an additional list of 18 components such as terminology, interdisciplinary connections, and suggested texts. The director of academics told the review team that the district's data team is developing the benchmark and assessment sections. She also noted that differentiation strategies (which are not in the current documents) are planned for future teacher-developed unit plans.

Because the district has a well established curriculum platform that it has thoroughly documented, and a developing mathematics curriculum aligned to the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks (MCF), it has the necessary foundation to transition the remaining core curricula to the MCF.

The district's system of monitoring curriculum implementation to insure attainment of high levels of achievement for all students is underdeveloped.

The district currently relies on a combination of formal and informal systems to ensure consistent use, alignment, and effective delivery of the district's curricula. The director of academics position was created in 2010. The first holder of the position was replaced in 2011 by the former principal of the five elementary schools. The position has several areas of responsibility in addition to the supervision of pre-kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum. These include: districtwide professional development, assessment, home school monitoring, Title I and Title II grant management, monitoring of all teachers on years two through four of the evaluation cycle, and evaluation of all literacy/reading teachers.

In interviews with the superintendent, principals, and the academic director, all said that the primary monitors of curriculum quality and fidelity are the school principals. The principals are supported by high school department chairs, and by team and grade-level leaders (junior high, middle, and elementary schools). In addition, at the high school one teacher, who is slated to retire before the end of the school year and has no current teaching assignment, is serving as an ELA curriculum coordinator. This position is slated to become a high school "curriculum facilitator" in the 2012–2013 school year.

District leaders told the review team that curriculum articulation, and the management of gaps and redundancies, are managed by the principals within their schools. For example, all teachers are expected to produce lesson plans that the principals monitor. One teacher focus group confirmed that teachers are expected to produce plans and that these are checked for adherence to the curriculum guidelines. However, some evidence of loose coordination exists. For example, some department chairs at the high school were not sure whether their areas of oversight included grades 7 and 8, although the junior high school (grades 7-8) and the high school (grades 9–12) share the same principal. The director of academics said that she meets with principals monthly to coordinate and update them on curriculum progress, professional development, and other relevant issues. However, while all principals are invited to professional development meetings on the curriculum, not all participate. Some teachers at the high school level described

an informal system of checking with colleagues about curriculum alignment because in many cases there was only one teacher responsible for a subject, or the person was located nearby so formal meetings were neither scheduled nor required.

Before being appointed as the director of academics, the director served as the district's principal of all five elementary schools; the academic director told the review team that before the latest consolidation in 2010, curriculum coordination among all of the elementary schools was "very poor." She noted that all the schools followed varying philosophical systems, curriculum, and assessments and the planned reconfiguration of two elementary schools with one principal (who will also serve as the principal for grades 5–6) would facilitate alignment.

While the district is guided by a strong system of curriculum documents, and the alignment to the new Massachusetts curriculum frameworks is in the elementary stages, the responsibility for consistent delivery and continuous improvement resides with multiple administrators, department chairs, and grade-level leaders. Under the current director of academics leadership, systems and practices for alignment, consistent delivery, and continuously improving curriculum are being developed. Sustained district support for this position, and for principal training in curricular components, are critical in moving the district forward.

Leaders and teachers do not have a common understanding of high-quality instruction that meets the needs of all learners; this has contributed to the uneven quality and uneven rigor of instruction across the district.

The review team observed instruction in 33 classrooms: 11 in the elementary schools (kindergarten through grade 4), 8 in the middle school (grades 5–6), 4 in the junior high school (grades 7–8), and 10 in the high school (grades 9–12). At the time of the review team visit, the grade 8 classes were on an out-of-state field trip and the team could not observe any classes at this grade level. The team observed seven classes at the larger elementary school (Littleville) and four at the smaller school (Chester). The team observed 18 ELA classes, 10 mathematics classes, and 5 "other" subject classes. Of the 33 classes observed, one was a separate special education classroom and one an English language learner classroom.

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. Review team members are asked to note when they observe or do not observe a characteristic and record evidence of a characteristic on a form.

Classroom Climate

The district has high expectations for students to behave well and for teachers to establish classroom environments that support student learning. For example, students and teachers demonstrated positive and respectful relationships in nearly all of the observed classrooms. Teachers set clear behavioral expectations, and communicated procedures clearly in 76 percent of observed classrooms and students behaved according to rules and expectations in 85 percent of classrooms visited.

Learning Objective

The district does not have a common expectation that teachers post or communicate learning objectives that are stated in terms of learner outcomes rather than as a list of activities. At the high school the team saw objectives posted in five (50 percent) of the ten observed classrooms but these generally were listed as the day's agenda. For example, in one grade 9 classroom, the objective posted was "Silent reading—In Search of Shakespeare, and Working on revising essay drafts." Objectives were posted or verbally conveyed by the teacher in 13 (57 percent) of the 23 observed classrooms in kindergarten through grade 8 and these too referred to activities rather than to student learning outcomes. For example, in one grade 4 classroom the objective was "You need to complete the math morning work" and in a grade 3 classroom "I'm going to give you the change to practice reading for fluency."

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Use of Class Time

Teachers consistently made effective use of class time; nearly all teachers were well prepared with materials readily available and efficiently deployed to students. They communicated academic content with clarity and accuracy and students generally made smooth transitions between activities.

Content Learning

Several district leaders told the team that they expected teachers to use technology to support student learning. While the district director of technology told the team that they had made a significant investment in the use of iPads, laptops, SmartBoards, and other current technology, its use had not yet become standard practice across the district. The team observed the use of

technology in nine (28 percent) of the thirty-three classrooms visited. For example, in one grade 1 classroom, students were engaged in small-group reading activities, with the teacher working with one group of students on reading instruction and the others were engaging in skill practice with iPads. This contrasted with another grade 1 ELA lesson where students sat on the rug for approximately 30 minutes as the teacher talked about a book and students answered her questions. In a grade 4 class at one school there was exemplary use of technology to provide tiered instruction using iPads and individual computers, while at another school grade 4 students completed pages in a workbook while the SmartBoard at the back of the room appeared inaccessible with materials stacked in front of it.

In 85 percent of the observed classrooms the content taught appeared appropriate for the grade level, reflected adherence to district curriculum maps, and students (particularly at the high school) often made connection to prior knowledge or experience.

District leaders told the review team that differentiated instruction and the appropriate use of classroom interventions were not systematically implemented in the district. One district leader said that “RTI is not the strongest, so students are getting referred” for special education services. Team observations confirmed a low use of differentiated instructional strategies. Teachers in focus groups and school leaders said that professional development in differentiation and Response to Intervention (RTI) strategies were needed in the district.

In only 7 (21 percent) of the 33 observed classrooms was there evidence of differentiated instruction or tiered activities based on academic readiness and no tiered activities were observed in the junior and senior high classrooms visited. Use of differentiated materials or methodology was observed in only five (46 percent) of the eleven elementary classrooms visited and two (25 percent) of the eight ability-grouped classrooms visited at the middle school (grades 5–6); no differentiated materials or methodology were observed in high school or junior high classrooms visited. Differentiation took place more often when teachers used technology or grouped their students for literacy instruction.

Instructional Techniques

Teachers used one predominant type of instructional technique, teacher-led instruction, in 26 (79 percent) of 33 observed classrooms, and the team noted that in only 11 (33 percent) of observed classrooms teachers used strategies that offered accommodations for different learning styles (auditory, visual, kinesthetic). Accommodation for different learning styles took place more frequently at the elementary level where students in five (46 percent) of the eleven observed classes used small white boards, mathematics manipulatives, or listening centers.

Activation of Higher-Order Thinking

The rigor of instruction was uneven across grade levels and schools. Teachers constructed lessons that asked students to examine, analyze, or interpret information in many (23 or 70 percent) of 33 observed classrooms, but fewer than half (43 percent) of observed teachers asked students to form predictions, develop arguments, or evaluate information. Sometimes teachers asked higher-order thinking questions, but also provided the answers. This took place often in

lecture-type classes at the high school where teachers posed the questions, waited briefly, and then did not sufficiently engage the students in responding—so few did. In contrast, at the junior high school (grades 7–8) in almost every class observed (four), the teachers asked “What do you think?” or engaged the class in whole group discussions that generated further inquiry. Slightly over one third (thirty-seven percent) of observed teachers asked students to evaluate or reflect on their own thinking or approach, and as a result, students generated questions in only 13 (40 percent) of the 33 classrooms visited. In fewer than half (40 percent) of the observed classrooms, teachers asked student to engage in structures such as think-pair-share or turn and talk, that could advance student thinking.

Instructional Pacing

Lesson pacing and teacher use of wait-time were strong in observed classrooms, indicating that teachers were aware of the different abilities of students to effectively access and process the information. The overall observed incidence of the two characteristics in the category of instructional pacing was 66 percent (lesson pacing) and 70 percent (wait time) at the elementary and middle school levels, 75 percent (both for lesson pacing and wait time) at the junior high level, and 60 percent (lesson pacing) and 50 percent (wait time) at the high school level.

Use of Student Assessments

Slightly more than one third (thirty-seven percent) of the observed teachers used strategies to check for student understanding and as a result adjusted their instruction. This worked best when teachers questioned students as they were teaching. For example, a grade 2 teacher showing her students how line breaks in a poem conveyed different messages, made sure to ask students to talk with a partner to answer the question “What’s different about this word configuration in this poem?” From student answers she realized that students needed to explore the use of line breaks without changing the order of words before they could see the impact of changes in word order.

Slightly more than one third (thirty-seven percent) of observed teachers provided students with feedback about their progress towards learning objectives; review team members observed students revising their work as a result. For example, in a high school algebra/trigonometry class, when a student was confused about how to solve a polynomial problem using the procedure taught to the class, the teacher conferred with the student and provided an alternative approach; the student then succeeded independently to solve the problem, much to his relief. Nevertheless, in observed classrooms ongoing assessments to help teachers gauge whether their instruction was effective were not consistently used across the district.

In interviews with the team the school leaders did not have similar expectations for how they wanted teachers to teach. Principals described different characteristics that they looked for when conducting walkthroughs. For example, while teachers at the high school were expected to have agendas, objectives, and homework listed, a principal at another level said that students were expected to know the objective, but teachers were not expected to write it. The director of academics, who served as the district’s elementary principal (for five schools) for the year before the consolidation of the elementary schools, told the team that she had discovered wide disparities in instruction among the teachers at that level.

The absence of clear, unified expectations for exemplary teacher practice has contributed to a one-style-fits-all teaching methodology and insufficient differentiation to insure strong student comprehension. Not having a common understanding of high-quality professional practice and enough differentiation and tiered activities to meet the needs of all learners makes it difficult to accelerate the pace of student growth and raise student achievement.

Assessment

The district is in the early stages of developing an assessment system that has the capacity to collect relevant student data, make it accessible to staff, and use it to monitor student performance, modify instruction, and determine individual needs. Most of the progress noted to date has taken place at the elementary level.

The District's 2009–2012 Improvement Plan (DIP) identifies assessment as one of the core areas in need of attention to improve overall student academic performance. The DIP also clearly articulates those related practices and conditions that have been determined to be contributing problems across the district. They include:

- Inconsistent use of assessment tools and data
- Absence of consistency in the use and interpretation of data
- Absence of a process model to gather and interpret data
- Absence of common understanding of the use of formative and summative assessments
- Classroom assessments that do not always connect directly to expectations of what students are expected to know and be able to do

The DIP and the School Improvement Plans (SIPs) of the district's two elementary schools (Littleville and Chester) and the Gateway Regional Middle School, are in general alignment; they identify a number of clear and relevant goals and objectives, as well as the specific implementation strategies, action steps, timelines, resources, etc., required to address identified problems and achieve assessment goals.

In a series of interviews with administration and staff and in a review of a number of key district documents, the review team found evidence that progress has been made in advancing the district's assessment goals, especially during the two years before the site visit, and in kindergarten through grade 6. Interviewees said that a district data team has been established that broadly oversees the development and implementation of student assessment policies and practices within the district. Although there is neither a written description of the data team's mission and strategic goals nor clear articulation of its designated responsibilities, authority, and specific leadership roles within the committee, interviewees described the data team as a type of central clearing house for ideas and source of strategies to improve the district's assessment system.

The data team is composed exclusively of district and school administrators, including the superintendent, with no teaching staff represented. According to team members interviewed, the data team has focused much of its attention on improving the administration of current district

assessments, standardizing administration practices and procedures for data collection and analysis, and promoting the timely distribution of performance results. Additionally, with assistance from a regional collaborative (Lower Pioneer Valley Educational Collaborative), from 2010–2012 the data team has been working to identify or develop a comprehensive data warehouse system that has the capacity to collect, store, and synthesize a broad range of student academic and demographic data, both aggregated and disaggregated, and make it readily accessible, as appropriate, to faculty, parents, and students.

Data team members also identified several other significant actions that their team has taken during the 2011–2012 school year to enhance assessment competencies and build related capacity within the district. These include:

- Using staff from the District and School Assistance Center (DSAC) to provide some professional development training to junior high and senior high school staff in the effective use(s) of MCAS test data
- Successful piloting of the Fountas-Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) program at the elementary schools
- The decision to implement the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing program next year in kindergarten through grade 12
- Piloting of Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBLES) math in kindergarten through grades 4
- The decision to adopt TestWiz to facilitate and standardize the storage, access, and analysis of student academic performance data in the district

The data team also has a tentative plan to expand its influence by adding site-based data teams that will include both teachers and administrators from their respective schools.

District leaders provided the review team with a thorough overview and assessment calendar of the primary, standardized student assessments currently used in the district. At present, these assessments are administered at regular intervals throughout the school year but have been established in kindergarten through grade 6 only. The matrix includes: DIBLES Next, Running Records, Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), Gates-MacGinitie Reading, and the Lucy Calkins Writing Program. In addition, common writing and scoring rubrics have been implemented at every grade level in both elementary schools. Elementary teachers and administrators said that as a result of these practices, more and better academic data is being continuously collected, student learning strengths and weakness are more accurately identified and analyzed during regular principal/teacher conferences and data team meetings, appropriate supports and interventions are more quickly initiated, and overall student progress is more effectively monitored. With the exception of MCAS test data, however, there was scant evidence of comparable assessment programs, practices, or initiatives established at the junior senior high school (grades 7–12).

Although the district is clearly moving forward in its efforts to create a comprehensive and coordinated student assessment system, progress to date has been relatively slow and uneven. For example, the 2006 report of a review by the former Office of Educational Quality and

Accountability (EQA)⁵ listed a number of areas where assessment policies and practices needed improvement: it indicated the need to develop benchmarks in tested core content areas, provide professional development for staff on assessment, and put in place a regular system of program evaluation.

The 2006 EQA report also pointed out that district's limited data-gathering capacity fundamentally limited its ability to make sound, data-driven decisions. Further, because of the absence of common testing across grades or departments, it was almost impossible to generate comparable, objective data by which to measure student performance or teaching effectiveness. Based on the evidence in the current ESE review, it is clear that many of the areas of need cited in the 2006 EQA report have yet to be fully addressed by the district.

In addition, based on interviews and analysis of numerous district documents, it is apparent the progress that has been achieved in kindergarten through grade 6 has not been replicated in grades 7–12. Unlike the DIP and the SIPs of the two elementary schools and middle school the junior senior high school SIP contains no clearly stated goal(s) or specific objectives about the comprehensive and systematic collection, analysis, or use of standardized student performance data to improve instruction, modify curriculum, or monitor student progress. Nor could any other persuasive evidence be found that the school is currently planning or actively participating in any such initiatives. For example, high school English and mathematics teachers acknowledged that they were unfamiliar with or completely unaware of significant current kindergarten through grade 6 instructional/assessment programs in both ELA and mathematics including one, the MAP program that is planned for kindergarten through grade 12 implementation during the 2012–2013 school year, according to the district data team. Although midyear and final examinations are administered at the junior senior high school, the tests are not true common assessments because they merely contain some departmental questions and are otherwise teacher developed and graded. MCAS remains the sole standardized assessment system established in grades 7–12.

The district's current efforts to create a comprehensive and coordinated student assessment system are promising. Although the district does not have a clearly defined leadership model and uniform implementation strategies and expectations for all schools and content areas, progress has been made, especially in kindergarten through grade 6. The need to continue and expand this work to ensure is paramount. Implementing effective policies and consistent practices for the expanded and continuous collection and systematic analysis of student assessment results K-12 allows school leaders and staff to become better able to accurately monitor academic progress, make appropriate decisions and timely improvements to classroom instruction, curriculum, educational programs, support services and interventions, and most importantly, to achieve improved learning outcomes for every student.

⁵ See the EQA General Report available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/accountability/dr/reports.html?district=F-J>.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The district's teacher evaluation system in effect at the time of the review allowed four-year gaps between official evaluations of classroom instruction, in contravention of state law.

The district's teacher evaluation system was developed in 1996 and included in the collective bargaining agreement with the teachers' association by reference. The review team examined The Gateway Regional School District Teacher Evaluation System document, which outlined the system's details, scope, and calendar. The system had a four-year cycle, but only the first year of the four-year cycle required a supervised classroom evaluation. However, the statute and regulations governing teacher evaluation procedures in Massachusetts public schools require an evaluation every two years for teachers with professional status (see G.L. c. 71, s. 38, and 603 CMR 35.00⁶). The four-year district cycle did not meet that requirement.

The first, year-long phase of the district's negotiated evaluation system was a clinical supervision process that included three observations and a schedule of pre- and post- observation meetings. This first, year-long phase was in compliance with 603 CMR 35.00.

The second year of the district's four-year evaluation cycle was a developmental year. There being no requirement of an evaluation under state law during year two for teachers with professional status, the second year was in compliance with state regulations. Under the collective bargaining agreement with the teachers' association, a teacher with professional status had to go through "goal-setting" during the second year of the evaluation cycle. Although this was required under the district's teacher evaluation model, the visiting team found no goal setting documents in the files that it reviewed.

The third year of the district's teacher evaluation process was an alternative evaluation year. The evaluation document included an array of professional development and alternative evaluation options, including a classroom evaluation by a supervisor conducted as described in year one as well as self-evaluation, peer coaching, etc. The regulations require that such an evaluation by a supervisor take place every two years for a teacher with professional status. Therefore, the third year of the teacher evaluation system process was not in compliance with state regulations.

No official evaluation was scheduled for year four of the cycle. In effect, only one supervisor evaluation was required during the four-year cycle although state regulations require two, one every other year. Under this four-year cycle, a teacher with professional status can go through a twenty-year career with only five supervisor evaluations. State regulations require ten official evaluations during that same period.

⁶On June 28, 2011, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted to substitute a new set of regulations on the evaluation of educators. Under 603 CMR 35.11, districts were required to adopt and begin implementation of evaluation systems consistent with the new regulations in phases, with all districts doing so by the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year. Gateway is among the cohort of districts required to do so by the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year.

In addition, the forms used in the evaluation process did not list the indicators included in the regulations (Principles of Effective Teaching⁷); the summative evaluation form did include sections for comments about professional development and responsibility, management and organization, and planning and instruction. A modified version of these indicators appeared in The Gateway Regional School District Teacher Evaluation System document, which stated, “The summative [form] will provide feedback in the areas listed under Principles of Effective Teaching.”

In year one, the clinical supervision year, the evaluation was conducted by a teacher’s supervisor. Years two and three were supervised by the director of curriculum, who is not a teacher’s line supervisor, although she is licensed as a principal and has had extensive experience as a principal.

The district’s teacher evaluation system had been in effect since 1996, during which time teachers with professional status might have been officially evaluated using a clinical supervision model only four times. Twelve classroom observations of teaching periods out of a potential of almost 15,000 teaching periods constitutes the district’s official documentation of supervising instruction during the 16 year period from 1996–2012. In addition, with the recent reorganization of the district’s grade levels and the consolidation of administrators, it could be three years before veteran teachers who were evaluated under phase one of the district teacher evaluation system in their last year in a now closed school could be observed and evaluated in their new teaching assignments.

The visiting team’s review of 27 randomly selected teacher evaluations on file in the district revealed that each teacher had a valid license on file, all the clinical supervision documents were informative, and many were instructive in that they included comments by the evaluator about the observed lessons. Many evaluations contained multiple recommendations for improved instruction, without details about how that improvement might take place. One veteran teacher told the team that her recent evaluation was the best she ever had, that her evaluator knew exactly what to look for, and that the post-observation discussion was valuable. Another teacher in that same interview had a very different experience with her evaluator, reflecting the wide variation in evaluation style and substance in the Gateway Regional School District.

Of the evaluation documents reviewed, none contained instructional ratings or any notations about the impact of observed instruction on student achievement. A district document entitled Gateway 2020 showed that the district leadership believed that “by negotiated contracts” teachers could not be held responsible for student MCAS performance. However, a review of the teachers’ collective bargaining agreement found the agreement silent about using student MCAS data in evaluating teaching performance.

The district’s evaluation documents followed the four-year cycle as required by the collective bargaining handbook, but did not follow the two-year cycle requirements of state regulations for

⁷The Principles of Effective Teaching accompanied the state regulations on evaluation of teachers and administrators (at 603 CMR 35.00) that were in effect for all districts through the 2010-2011 year. See previous footnote.

professional status teachers. Accordingly, the entire four-year system was out of compliance with state regulations. In addition, the clinical supervision forms did not reflect the standards identified as Principles of Effective Teaching.

No professional development recommendations were seen in the team's review of clinical supervision evaluation documents. Several of the "alternative" evaluation year documents were reviewed. They provided a written record of supervisory meetings and teacher accomplishments during that year. The records were well documented but had no relationship to the Principles of Effective Teaching contained in 603 CMR 35.00. They tracked progress on a research or professional project, but were not "evaluation" documents as required by state regulations.

The self-managed culture of supervising instruction current at the time of the review was in direct contrast to the organizational culture of supervision required by the state's new educator evaluation model, which will require every licensed employee to be on an educator plan every year and will mandate ratings of their impact on student achievement.

Evaluations did not rate administrators according to the standards prescribed by regulation.

The district administrator evaluation system did not reflect the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership as published in 603 CMR 35.00.⁸ The system in use was a "work plan" system created by the superintendent to promote administrative goal-setting/ goal tracking during the school year and to create a written record of meetings and discussions. It followed an annual calendar and employed a pre-printed matrix that contained specific, job-embedded administrative indicators to be used annually in the process of evaluating administrative progress toward individual goals. It tracked administrator progress on a number of district and school initiatives.

The visiting team examined all administrator personnel files. All but one was timely; the most recent evaluation document in that file was dated 2006. Several had no evaluation documents because the person in the role was new to the system. None of the records reviewed contained references to student learning outcomes. None of the administrator evaluation records revealed any comments or suggestions by the superintendent on the impact that the administrators were having on student achievement because of their evaluation responsibilities.

Although the completed observation forms used in the supervised evaluation of teachers were included in personnel files reviewed by the visiting team, the superintendent did not file in administrator personnel files completed data-gathering forms used to formulate a final administrator evaluation. The visiting team saw only final evaluation documents on administrators, not the month-by-month tracking forms reflecting the superintendent's

⁸Like the Principles of Effective Teaching (see previous two footnotes), the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership accompanied the state regulations on evaluation of teachers and administrators (at 603 CMR 35.00) that were in effect for all districts through the 2010-2011 year.

interactions with administrators during the evaluation year. One completed form was shown to the visiting team as an example of how that tracking form was used.

Most final evaluation documents for administrators were congratulatory. Some indicated that the administrator “met or exceeded my expectations,” with no details of what standards the superintendent used to make such a strong evaluative comment. Some final evaluation summaries outlined successes and set the framework for a successive year. Others did not.

This administrator evaluation process was an effective one to set and track goals. However, no annual ratings appeared in any final teacher or administrator evaluation document reviewed by the team. The Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership (603 CMR 35.00), which detail the various competencies that administrators must be evaluated upon, were neither available on site, nor referred to in final evaluation documents for administrators. School committee policy required the use of the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership in the evaluation of administrators, but the review team found no evidence in official records that they were used.

The team reviewed the superintendent’s 2010–2011 evaluation. The school committee rated him very highly (3.5 in a 1.0–4.0 rating schedule). The evaluation was signed by the long-term chairperson of the school committee, who recently resigned from her school committee role to become the special education administrator in the district.

While the administrative evaluation process provided a useful and aligned tracking system for the superintendent to stay connected with goal progress for individual administrators, there was no outcome data on file in final evaluations that described the effects of the various goals on student achievement.

Adopting a new evaluation system in alignment with the state’s new educator evaluation model offers the district the opportunity to improve its administrators’ evaluations.

Student Support

The district and its schools have uneven implementation and oversight of programs and initiatives to address the broad range of learner needs and services to support high achievement for all students.

The Gateway Regional School District website states that the vision of the district is: “to provide an exemplary education that challenges all students in an instructional setting appropriate to their needs. The primary aim of the district, as established by the school committee and the superintendent (the governance team) is to support a consistent focus on high student achievement by individualizing instruction to meet the identified needs of each student[across several domains].”

An excerpt about special education states that: “It is the goal of the Gateway Regional School District to make the general education environment the appropriate placement for all students however we provide a full continuum of services and programs to ensure that the needs of our

special education students are met and that they are able to access the general education program to the greatest extent possible.”

District Role

The district presents a wide array of regular and special education programs and services across the current five school sites. In some instances the programs and services are consistent with the mission of the district and the provisions for special education. The programs, however, do not have the necessary coherence that allows for a system of tiered support seamlessly articulated in kindergarten through grade 12 to adequately and equitably meet the needs of the students as they progress through the grades. In general, multiple district documents reflect an array of student support programs; these are noted in a document prepared by pupil services (dated February 28, 2012) which, though not complete, lists programs and available services across the district.

Based on interviews and a review of documents in the district, the team found that the absence of consistent leadership in the pupil services areas has negatively affected any systemic efforts to have fidelity to the vision of the district and fulfill the intent of meeting the needs of students in special education. Most notably, the position of director of pupil services has been marked by high turnover from 2010–2012. Five directors or acting directors (in one case one person served twice in the role) have assumed this role since September 2010. The current director of pupil services assumed responsibilities in October 2011. Given this turnover, the district has been unable to maintain a consistent focus on high student achievement by individualizing instruction that results in improved learner outcomes for all students.

The current perception of the implementation of RTI and other site-based interventions varied across the five school sites. Interviews with various staff revealed mixed perceptions about the nature of RTI and the relatedness and efficacy of various programmatic interventions in the district. The director of pupil services acknowledged the staff’s general absence of understanding about the entire process including how long students remain in any tier, how they move between tiers, what targeted assistance is, what and how data is collected, flexible grouping, and differentiation. The review team also found that the district does not have eligibility criteria for entrance and exit to programs, and the linking of specific, researched-based instruction to tiers and student need. The director of pupil services noted that a “tiered instruction” group composed of two elementary principals, a literacy coach, a special educator, and the director of pupil services were trying to develop a kindergarten through grade 4 tiered approach.

Establishing clear understandings among all teaching staff of the meaning and structure of tiered instruction, accommodations, modifications, and differentiation is recognized as a major challenge at all levels. The director of pupil services said that there were 35 referrals at the elementary level under special education thus far during the 2011–2012 school year. She noted that there are paper processes for referrals, but tiered supports have not been established.

Gateway Regional High School and Gateway Regional Junior High School

The high school and junior high are organized under one principal. Staff said that there is a formal referral system, conducted by the Student Assistance Team (SAT), supporting the junior

and senior high schools. However, no written description of the process could be produced. The Student Assistance Team (SAT) was described as being composed of the guidance staff, adjustment counselor, assistant principal, nurse, and therapist associated with the school-based Health Center. Interviewees said that the SAT operates informally because of the small school and community size and staff familiarity with students and their families.

The director of pupil services and the director of academics noted that while there is an awareness of programs and tiered supports designed to meet the needs of students in the high school setting, less is known about the rationale for the design and implementation or about the efficacy of the multiple secondary programs. Subsequently in interviews with staff at the high school, there were consistent acknowledgements of an array of programs existed though understandings of the programs varied. The Learning Lab (grades 7–10) is designed to keep students in the district; it helps stabilize behaviors and provides a temporary, transitional general education program for students in crisis. The Developmental Life Skills program (grades 9–12) meets the needs of students with significant physical and cognitive challenges.

The special education teachers support students through an inclusion approach at the high school. Inclusion is described as regular education classes during five blocks—four regular education classroom blocks with no co-teaching and one special education block per week. In some cases one-to-one paraprofessionals support students. When asked how teachers differentiated instruction to meet the needs of these students receiving special education services, one teacher said that she “hoped it was being done” and had no way to confirm that differentiation was done at the high school.

Other supports described by staff included a reading teacher. However, in other interviews, it was reported that because so few students were able to be scheduled because of an academic support conflict, the reading position was given to the middle school. The absence of continuous services in grades 10–12 raised questions about how students with this profile were supported beyond grade 10 and what access they had to high-quality, individualized programs to support their achievement.

District documents describe one program at the junior high school that is designed to meet the needs of exceptional learners. The Developmental Program serves middle and junior high school students with autism and other developmental delays. This program includes direct teaching, a functional curriculum, social pragmatic elements, behavioral support, and inclusion in general education classrooms. In a junior high document, another program, entitled Student Support Room is described as being staffed by paraprofessionals and providing both a behavioral and academic intervention to help students who are having difficulty keeping up or staying on task in the classroom. The various configurations of programs may lead to uneven understanding of access for students and could prevent families from having sufficient understanding of services to advocate effectively for their children.

It is the opinion of the team that the informality and case-by-case approach to addressing student needs does not ensure that the district can fulfill its commitment to provide an “exemplary” education in a setting that challenges all learners. This approach puts some students at risk for

not being adequately supported. The informality of this process may not adequately address the needs of other students. For example, the drop-out rate for students receiving special education services at the high school in 2010 was 21.2 percent, compared to the rate of 4.7 percent for their peers statewide. It was noted that because of small size, recovery programs were not routinely structured but addressed case by case.

Gateway Middle School

The principal at the middle school is also responsible for one elementary school. The plan for school year 2012–2013 eliminates that role and makes one principal responsible for three sites serving students in pre-kindergarten through grade 6.

The director of pupil services, the director of academics, other support staff, and the principals said that students in grades 5 and 6 are grouped by ability for ELA and mathematics. At present the district uses DIBELS and the Gates-MacGinitie to assess reading levels to determine placement but has no formal assessment for mathematics grouping. As classroom observations revealed, there appears to be an inconsistent use of differentiated instruction at this level. A further concern about the use of this model relates to the reliance on a tracked system that fails to allow all students to receive sufficiently rigorous instruction that is informed by assessments, monitored for progress, and holds students to high academic achievement.

The district reports inclusion rates at 80 percent. The model includes some students with individualized educational plans in co-taught classes and others in sub-separate classrooms taught by a special educator and supported by one- to-one paraprofessionals. The deployment of special education teachers includes teaching small groups and co-teaching in the general education classroom.

Chester and Littleville Elementary Schools

The two elementary schools offer similar but not structurally identical program interventions. Student Alternatives in Learning (SAIL) is described as a district transition program for elementary students who are experiencing difficulty with mental health, emotional, or behavioral issues. At Chester Elementary, the adjustment counselor plays an active role and serves as liaison between classrooms and any outside providers who schedule students into SAIL. At Littleville Elementary, the SAIL Program is called an “Opportunity Center” that serves more as a drop-in center. Students are sent to complete work or get assistance with review or may take a break in the center. It is staffed by a paraprofessional.

There are special educators who do pull-out and push-in services. Students are supported by individual paraprofessionals in the classroom, primarily one to one. In addition, there are adjustment counselors (one for each school), speech and language, occupational, and physical therapists, and one ESL teacher who serve Littleville and the district.

The most consistent programming in the district takes place in Title I. The director of academics noted that the program requirements have allowed the district to provide closer oversight and progress monitoring. Title I is provided at Chester Elementary School and Gateway Regional Middle School. Title I offers a system of assessments, instruction in Leveled Literacy

Intervention (LLI), researched-based instruction in ELA, and services from the literacy coach at Littleville and Chester elementary schools.

In 2011 the district did not make AYP in either ELA or mathematics, for aggregate and sub-groups. In the judgment of the review team, without making major improvements to the foundational elements of tiered support, in line with its stated mission, the district will fail to substantially improve student performance. The continued reliance on a system of uneven supports and the absence of evaluation of interventions to determine whether they are effective in raising student achievement are hindrances to improving student outcomes.

Financial and Asset Management

The district's business office is well run and each staff person handles a variety of duties; however, the person in the treasurer position also has duties that should be segregated from the treasurer role.

The job description of the business manager is to direct and evaluate all the financial affairs of the district, including central office personnel activities, all funds, accounting, reporting procedures and investment of monies. However, effective fiduciary oversight for the district requires that there is not one single person performing oversight, to help ensure that public funds and property are protected against fraud or irregularities.

The district treasurer has duties as custodian of all district funds; for instance, a legal responsibility of the district treasurer, according to Mass. Gen. Laws c. 71, s. 16A, is to pay any bill of the district that has been approved by the school committee. However, if a district treasurer participates in both the *payment of a bill* and the auditing, validation, and preparation of documentation to *authorize payment*, there is an unclear segregation of duties and responsibilities. The district treasurer, in addition to her treasurer duties as custodian of all district funds, prepares the payroll and warrant documentation, and completes human resources tasks such as establishing individual retirement accounts and health insurance plan selections. In addition, the treasurer assists, as necessary, with central office support such as answering the telephone, greeting visitors, assisting with mail duties and collecting fees. The district treasurer estimated that approximately sixty percent of her time is spent performing treasurer duties.

The district has recently acted on a recommendation of the district auditor to address oversight concerns by shifting check reconciling responsibilities to the superintendent's administrative assistant; however, ongoing practices raise concerns about appropriate financial oversight.

The district school committee is not diligent in its responsibility to examine if warrant charges are correct, and the district does not generally provide detailed documentation to the school committee members who sign the warrants.

The school committee has established a warrant-signing committee in accordance with Mass. Gen. Laws c. 71, s. 16A, with five members and one alternate. The business manager stated, and a review of district policy indicated, that accounts payable and payroll warrants required the

approval of three school committee members. Interviews with finance department personnel and the school committee confirmed that support documentation is available upon request, but is not generally provided with the warrants. Business department personnel confirmed that school committee members have rarely, if ever, requested support documentation. Typically the full committee votes on the approval of warrants based on an agenda item that lists the warrant number and the amount of funds to be paid.

A gap in communication among the district administration, the district school committee, and the towns raises significant concerns.

The fiscal year 2012 district budget failed to receive approval by two-thirds of the seven member towns at their annual town meetings, and district administrators expected a similar result with the fiscal year 2013 budget. Some concerns about the level of financial oversight provided by the school committee were raised in connection with approving warrants. A strong understanding of district budgets and expenditures is needed for school committee members to become well informed and strong advocates for the district with its member towns.

Interviews with both town officials and central office administrators indicated that there was a gap in communication and understanding between the district administration and the member towns, exacerbated by recent financial constraints. An administrator said that the towns' emphasis was more on costs than educational implications and that the administration was not generally invited to attend the town meetings that dealt with the school budget. A town official said that there were serious financial issues, which had led to difficulty in recent years in approving budgets and some feelings of distrust due to lack of budget transparency; this official saw better communication as the remedy. It appeared that the school committee was positioned in between the towns and the school administration. At the time of the review, the district had just secured the 12th of the 12 votes (among the 17 school committee members) necessary to send the budget to the towns.

Town officials expressed a general respect for the district administration, but said that it would be helpful to the budget process to provide additional justification for the budget request, and optional proposals to consider. Given the gap between town officials and district leadership, the school committee has an important role to play. With a strong understanding of district budgets and expenditures and more transparent budgets, school committee members can address town officials' concerns and gain support for continued funding of educationally sound programs and facilities that promote student achievement.

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 Gateway Regional School District, through its superintendent, should clarify the roles and responsibilities of administrative positions in relation to its goals in order to create a seamless articulation of the district’s improvement initiatives in kindergarten through grade 12.

The Gateway Regional School District has undergone a radical reorganization because of declining enrollment and fiscal constraints. The deployment of the district’s administration to fit the reconfigured school structure has resulted in a loss of momentum and some inconsistency in the implementation of improvement initiatives. As a result the district’s efforts at establishing kindergarten through grade 12 structures in curriculum, instruction, and assessment are incomplete and not fully understood or recognized by teachers, administrators, parents, and community members.

Administrators’ responsibilities should be delineated and the lines of authority clarified. The superintendent should impose an order and an accompanying sense of urgency to the district’s improvement initiatives so that they can accomplish their intended impact on student achievement. The superintendent should also ensure that program decisions are based on available data and that programs are continually assessed for effectiveness and “goodness of fit” for the student population. With clarity in administrative roles and a system for continuous improvement, the district’s improvement efforts will be more effective and sustainable.

The Gateway Regional School District should develop a systematic outreach plan in each of its seven communities to better inform residents of the needs of the school district and to garner support for the schools.

There is varying support for the school district among the seven member towns. Town officials expressed a perception that the school committee and administration are distant from the town boards. There is also division among the towns about the recent reorganization that closed three of the district’s elementary schools. This has resulted in varying levels of financial support for the district.

An administrator said the administration was not generally invited to attend the town meetings that dealt with the school budget. According to town officials, the school committee is distant from the other town boards and few members attend public meetings about fiscal issues in the individual towns: they are perceived to be distant from town issues.

It is important for the district to cultivate the relationships between the school district and the member towns to promote public support and to create a sense of community and ownership

among the towns for the students and the schools. The superintendent and school committee members should seek opportunities to meet with local officials and advocate for support of the district. School committee members should be well versed in the implications of that support for school programs and opportunities for students and be able to explain the relationship between the need for financial support and the educational programs.

With a sense of community and ownership among townspeople the schools become more than mere budget items at annual town meeting. With advocacy from the school committee and administration, a firm commitment for financial support can be maintained among all of the member towns over time to provide the district with the resources to meet student needs.

Curriculum and Instruction

The district should identify instructional practices that meet the needs of all learners, and develop its systems to supervise and evaluate teachers' practice and their implementation of the district's mandated curriculum.

The review team found that the district had uniformly high expectations for teachers to establish classroom environments that support student learning; according to the team's observations, teachers consistently made effective use of class time and were well prepared, with materials readily available and efficiently deployed to students. The team found pockets of good practice scattered throughout all schools, with highly effective teachers at each grade level and within each school.

However, district leaders have not established the common instructional practices for all teachers that would lead to improved student achievement for all students. The district also currently relies on an underdeveloped and not fully cohesive system to ensure the consistency, alignment, and delivery of the district's curricula.

In the 33 classes observed by the review team:

- About one half (55 percent) of teachers communicated learning objectives to students.
- Slightly more than one quarter (28 percent) of teachers used a variety of curriculum resources to support or enhance student learning, including technology.
- Seventy-nine percent of teachers used whole-group instruction.
- Students in one third (33 percent) of classes engaged with content through a variety of instructional strategies that accommodated their learning styles.
- Forty percent of teachers used small-group or paired learning.
- Thirty-seven percent of teachers used informal assessments to gauge student learning and make adjustments to their teaching.
- Almost three fourths (70 percent) of teachers activated student learning by asking students to examine, analyze, or interpret information, but less than half (43 percent) asked them to form predictions, develop arguments, or evaluate information.

Two other factors have a direct impact on teachers' ability to implement effective strategies:

- The district has not yet developed an RTI program, with sufficient professional development, to enable teachers to successfully implement teaching strategies better matched to student needs.
- The district is currently following a teacher evaluation process that formally assesses teachers' skills once in four years; interim feedback to teachers is not provided by the line supervisor, and the focus of years two, three, and four of the evaluation cycle may or may not be directly related to the improvement of classroom instruction.

With the schools now consolidated under two principals, the district has the opportunity to establish common instructional practices, ensure fidelity of curriculum implementation, and link all to assessment data. Further, as it implements a new evaluation system aligned with the new state educator evaluation system, the district will have more frequent opportunities to formally assess the quality of instruction and the implementation of practices targeted to improve student achievement, and professional development will be more closely linked with evaluation.

Assessment

The district should prioritize and accelerate its efforts to create a comprehensive assessment system with the capacity to effectively support and monitor the implementation of coordinated programs and aligned practices K-12. Policies and procedures for the collection, analysis, and application of student performance data should be clear, uniform, and include appropriate strategies and expectations for all schools and grade levels.

In the two years before the review the district made progress in its efforts to create a comprehensive and coordinated student assessment system, though the progress has been relatively slow and uneven. Much of what has been done has been more school-based than centralized and has been focused primarily on the elementary grades, K-6. A district data team appears to have broad oversight of the development and implementation of student assessment policies and practices in the district, but its oversight is not well defined. A formal description of its mission has not been written, it does not have strategic goals and objectives, and its authority and designated responsibilities have not been articulated. Also, the district has not assigned a leadership role to a designated member of the team, which has also diminished the team's effectiveness.

The district data team has the potential to be the entity that develops and directs a comprehensive and coordinated student assessment system for the Gateway Regional School District. In order for it to do so, however, its mission, responsibilities, authority, and leadership must first be clarified. Also, the review team strongly endorses the district data team's tentative plan to expand its influence by creating site-based data teams that include teachers and administrators. This would do much to ensure that the district's overarching assessment goals and objectives are implemented uniformly and appropriately in all schools, while creating a mechanism to provide faculty at all grade levels and content areas with embedded and ongoing training and support(s) in data collection and analysis. Although the ultimate design and operational characteristics of

the student assessment system should be determined within the district, the review team recommends that when fully operational it include the following key components:

- Districtwide assessment policies and practices are characterized by the continuous collection, analysis, and use of multiple sources of student performance data, including MCAS data, by both school and district leadership.
- All schools, including the junior senior high school, use a comprehensive and balanced system of formative, summative, and regular benchmark assessments, both standardized and locally developed, that can effectively monitor the progress of every student toward achieving well-defined learning objectives.
- All staff are provided ready access to school-based and districtwide reports/results of student academic achievement testing, as well as other relevant academic and demographic data. All appropriate members of the school community, including the school committee and parents, are routinely provided with information generated by assessments.
- School leaders and faculty systematically monitor student achievement data throughout the year to measure student progress and to make appropriate adjustments to classroom instruction and curriculum, as well as timely decisions about support services and interventions. This data stream is used to inform and support the tiered instruction model that the district indicated was planned for implementation in 2012–2013.
- Faculty and administration are provided with sufficient and ongoing professional development training in the collection, analysis, and application of student performance results to embed these competencies at all grades levels and content areas.
- District and school leaders use student assessment results, demographic data, and other pertinent information in all aspects of decision making, including developing annual District and School Improvement Plans, allocating human and financial resources, and evaluating the effectiveness of academic programs and services.

Such an integrated, carefully coordinated, and truly comprehensive K-12 student assessment system, developed with the leadership and oversight of the district data team, will result in wide-ranging benefits in all the district's schools. The expanded and continuous collection and systematic analysis of student achievement and other relevant data will enhance classroom instruction, inform curriculum, improve academic programs and support services, strengthen decision making, expand progress- monitoring capacity, and ultimately result in increased learning opportunities and outcomes for every student.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The district should expeditiously design and negotiate agreement on a new system of educator evaluation consistent with the new state system, so as to be ready to begin implementing it in 2013-2014.

The teacher evaluation system in effect in the Gateway Regional School District at the time of the review was not effective in improving teacher performance, in that

- Supervised classroom evaluations of teachers were required in only one year out of a four-year cycle;
- Many teacher evaluations reviewed by the team contained comments aimed at improved instruction without details as to how that improvement might be accomplished;
- No teacher evaluations reviewed contained instructional ratings or considered the impact of observed instruction on student learning.
- No teacher evaluations reviewed contained recommendations for professional development.

Administrator evaluations were for the most part timely, and the administrator evaluation system used in the district at the time of the review was an effective system for setting and tracking goals for administrators; however, these evaluations, too were ineffective as performance evaluations, in that most administrator evaluations were congratulatory, and in some cases had no details of what standards were used to reach the rating of “met or exceeded my expectations.” The system did not reflect the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership.

The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education amended the regulations at 603 CMR 35.00 in June, 2011. All districts are required to adopt and implement new evaluation systems consistent with the new regulations by the 2013-2014 school year. The specifics should be negotiated into collective bargaining agreements. The process of changing and approving written policies and collective bargaining agreements to be consistent with the new regulations will take time. This work should be assigned a high priority. The district might consider organizing a task force including representation from all internal stakeholders to help advance the work.

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

- Professional development for evaluators;
- Training to develop meaningful professional practice and student learning goals;
- Systems to ensure
 - that evaluators have the time and support to carry out the new system with fidelity and
 - that district and school goals are aligned with administrator goals
- Professional development for educators that prioritizes educator needs identified through the goal-setting and evaluation process.

Along with resulting in the integration of personnel evaluation and professional development and encouraging professional growth, expeditious implementation of a new evaluation system consistent with the state system will help the district provide high quality instruction and support to its students.

Student Support

The district should provide a quality tiered system of support to ensure that all students in kindergarten through grade 12 are on track to proficiency.

The district should undertake the creation of a unified system of tiered supports. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) provides a blueprint for a single system of supports that is responsive to the academic and non-academic needs of all students. Building upon the working relationship between the director of academics and the director of pupil services, the district should make sure that this critical initiative has the following characteristics:

- Plainly identifies the range of services currently available under a set of clearly unified functions supporting learner development and proficiency

Identification of RTI services should be expanded to include an assessment of current K-12 programs and their coherency. Planning should focus on creating a unified and sequenced system of programs and initiatives that is consistent with ESE's expectations and responsive to learner needs. Key staff from each level should be identified for participation across the district. A written document should be produced to ensure consistency of understanding of the implementation of tiered supports.

- Provides additional time and support beyond access to classroom instruction

To the greatest extent possible, the district's design for tiered support for all students should provide access to general education classroom instruction as well as additional support and time for learning. Tiered services should be embedded into classroom practices and should not supplant access to instruction in the regular education setting. The tiers should be articulated to ensure an increase in the number of students achieving grade-level benchmarks.

- Uses a data-driven approach to intervention, early prevention and support for students who are experiencing learning or behavioral challenges

As noted in the recommendation on assessment above, an assessment system should include using data to inform daily classroom practices. Data from progress monitoring should allow fluidity of access to services. The use of data should be viewed as essential to making high-quality decisions about instructional approaches that are matched to the specific needs of the learner. School-based teams throughout the district should understand their role to build teacher capacity to use data to inform instruction.

- Is available to all students including those not served by special education

The district's tiered system of support should be clearly designed and sufficiently rigorous to meet the range of learners' needs in any learning context. It should be grounded in high expectations for all and continuously put these expectations into practice. Tiered instruction should not be viewed solely as special education services. The district's tiered system should serve any student who requires additional support, and also students who require challenge as a result of meeting benchmarks.

- Is based on scientifically researched instructional practices

The most critical component of the district's tiered system should be to inform instruction. The staff therefore should have a clear understanding of high-quality, research-based instructional practices.

- Is aligned with district curriculum, district benchmarks, and the new Massachusetts curriculum standards

Given that the district's curriculum has been adequately articulated, it is important for the district to ensure that the curriculum provides sufficient resources for teachers to differentiate instruction for students who require more specific directed instruction and practice and those who would benefit from additional challenge.

- Allocates district resources and time in a way that encourages collaboration

The district should focus on building capacity and oversight for tiered support expeditiously. Planning of a tiered instruction system should include those currently working on related interventions to encourage cross-dialogue and collaboration. The distribution of responsibilities in the design of tiered support should encourage greater and more focused collaboration among general education teachers and staff, special education teachers and staff, intervention specialists, adjustment counselors, psychologists, paraprofessionals, and principals. Innovative opportunities should be provided for personnel to maximize support and ensure high-quality results for learners under a tiered instruction system. The system should encourage collaboration and articulation across school settings to reduce redundancy and improve coherency.

- Provides professional development

The district should ensure ample professional development opportunities designed to build understanding of the underlying theory and components of tiered instruction. Recursive approaches should be established to ensure that personnel new to the district are grounded in the district's mission, related rationale, and approach to tiered support. Staff should have planned opportunities to learn and practice research-based components of high-quality instruction, opportunities that rely on a data-feedback stream from ongoing formal and informal assessments in the classroom. Teachers with exemplary practice and collaborative skills should be given opportunities to develop as teacher leaders to help build capacity within each school.

- Includes an ongoing approach to self-evaluation

The district should include a structure for self-evaluation of efforts to create tiered instruction support, as well as a system for evaluation of the efficacy of practices identified under tiered instruction. The inclusion of stakeholders in the process and the public sharing of findings should advance the critical examination of programs and services in a way that informs the focus on continual improvement and allows all students to receive the maximum benefit from the district's programs and services.

Financial and Asset Management

A clear segregation of the treasurer's duties from additional duties as a full time employee must be assured by the district in order to ensure that the standard of fiduciary oversight is being met.

The same individual serves as the district treasurer and as a business department employee with other financial duties and reports to the business manager. She performs a multitude of duties in several areas of responsibility including the function of custodian of all money belonging to the district, preparation of the payroll and warrant documentation, and human resources tasks such as establishing individual retirement accounts and health insurance plan selections.

The district administration and school committee have a fundamental responsibility to ensure that public funds and property are securely protected against any fraud or irregularities. The district must ensure the segregation of financial personnel duties, as was requested by the district auditor. No single employee should perform both oversight and payment preparation, such as payroll warrant documentation. The standard of fiduciary oversight is met when a clear segregation of personnel responsibilities exists.

The district warrant signing committee should carefully review samples of support documentation for the accounts payable and payroll warrants as trustees of public funds.

Support documentation is available to the warrant signing committee upon request, but is not displayed with the warrants. It was confirmed that school committee members have rarely, if ever, requested support documentation.

The communities of the regional school district clearly have limited available resources and are looking to the district to provide budget justifications and options. The school committee should demonstrate that it meets its obligations for oversight of district funds.

The budget document should be made more transparent as one way of addressing the developing gap in communication and trust between member towns and the district.

Addressing fiduciary responsibilities as recommended above is an important step, but developing a budget that is well-documented and has buy-in and advocacy from school committee members will be key to improving relationships with member towns and garnering more support for the district's budget.

Interviews with both town officials and central office administrators indicated that there was a gap in communication and understandings between the district administration and the member towns, exacerbated by recent financial constraints. The fiscal year 2012 district budget failed to receive approval by two-thirds of the seven member towns at their annual town meetings, and district administrators expected a similar result with the fiscal year 2013 budget.

One town official said that there were some feelings of distrust due to lack of budget transparency; this official saw better communication as the remedy. Town officials said that it would be helpful to the budget process for the district to provide additional justification for the budget request, and optional proposals to consider. The district should improve the transparency

of its budgets, providing background about programs and services, student achievement, and district needs, and investigating ways to present additional budget options.

As mentioned in the second Leadership and Governance recommendation above, the school committee has an important role to play. In interviews, most committee members were unaware of the annual assessments for each town, and did not show a clear understanding of the relationship between district planning and the decisions they are asked to make about the budget. Committee members should work with the superintendent and his administration to gain a strong understanding of district budgets and expenditures, so that they can address town officials' concerns and gain support for continued funding of educationally sound programs and facilities that promote student achievement.

Appendix A: Review Team Members

The review of the Gateway Regional School District was conducted from April 2–5, 2012, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Magdalene Giffune, Leadership and Governance

Christine Brandt, Curriculum and Instruction and review team coordinator

Frank Sambuceti, Assessment

Tom Johnson, Human Resources and Professional Development

Marilynne Quarcoo, Student Support

Wilfrid Savoie, Financial and Asset Management

Appendix B: Review Activities and Site Visit Schedule

District Review Activities

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

- The review team conducted interviews with two officials from the member towns.
- The review team conducted interviews with four members of the Gateway Regional District School Committee.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the Gateway Teachers' Association: two co-presidents.
- The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the central office administration of the Gateway Regional School District: the superintendent, the director of academics, the treasurer, the accounts receivable/payroll clerk, the director of technology, the director of pupil services, the business manager, the public relations and grant writer, and the administrative assistant for the superintendent.
- The review team visited the following schools in the Gateway Regional School District: Chester Elementary School (pre-kindergarten through grade 4), Littleville Elementary School (kindergarten through grade 4), Gateway Regional Middle School (grades 5–6), Gateway Regional Junior High School (grades 7–8) and Gateway Regional High School (grades 9–12).
 - During school visits, the review team conducted interviews with school principals, teachers, and student support staff. The team interviewed three elementary teachers, three middle school teachers, and three junior and senior high school teachers.
 - The review team conducted 33 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the 5 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 Gateway Regional School District, conducted from April 2–5, 2012.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
<p>April 2</p> <p>Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff and principals; review of documents and personnel files; interview with teachers' association, team meeting.</p>	<p>April 3</p> <p>Interviews with district staff and principals; school visits: high school, junior high school, middle school, and classroom observations; review of personnel files; teacher focus groups; focus group with parents, team meeting.</p>	<p>April 4</p> <p>Interviews with town or city personnel; school visits: Chester and Littleville and class observations; interviews with teachers, interviews with school leaders; school committee interviews, team meeting.</p>	<p>April 5</p> <p>Interviews with school leaders; interview with town finance representatives; follow-up interviews; team meeting; emerging themes meeting with district leaders and principals.</p>

Appendix C: Student Performance 2009–2011

Table C1: Gateway Regional School District and State Proficiency Rates and Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)⁹ 2009–2011 English Language Arts

Grade	2009		2010		2011	
	Percent Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Proficient	Median SGP
All Grades—District	59	44.5	65	51	63	42
All Grades—State	67	50	68	50	69	50
Grade 3—District	51	NA*	61	NA*	59	NA*
Grade 3—State	57	NA*	63	NA*	61	NA*
Grade 4—District	47	52.5	40	43	39	34
Grade 4—State	53	50	54	50	53	51
Grade 5—District	47	44	65	47	52	33
Grade 5—State	63	50	63	50	67	50
Grade 6—District	60	47	64	56	81	61.5
Grade 6—State	66	50	69	50	68	50
Grade 7—District	49	32	59	37	57	37
Grade 7—State	70	50	72	50	73	50
Grade 8—District	69	31.5	77	51	67	33
Grade 8—State	78	50	78	50	79	50
Grade 10—District	94	74	91	76	82	66.5
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

⁹ See footnote 4 above.

**Table C2: Gateway Regional School District and State
Proficiency Rates and Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)
2009–2011 Mathematics**

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	Median SGP	Percent Advanced/ Proficient	Median SGP
All Grades— District	46	44.5	46	45	46	43
All Grades—State	55	50	59	50	58	50
Grade 3—District	60	NA*	55	NA*	51	NA*
Grade 3—State	60	NA*	65	NA*	66	NA*
Grade 4—District	55	60	25	31	40	48.5
Grade 4—State	48	50	48	49	47	50
Grade 5—District	30	29	64	42	42	48
Grade 5—State	54	50	55	50	59	50
Grade 6—District	54	53.5	36	56	59	45.5
Grade 6—State	57	50	59	50	58	50
Grade 7—District	27	48.5	45	43	28	29
Grade 7—State	49	50	53	50	51	50
Grade 8—District	33	25	28	44.5	40	34
Grade 8—State	48	50	51	51	52	50
Grade 10—District	79	64	73	60	62	55
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: Gateway Regional School District and State
Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)
for Selected Subgroups
2011 English Language Arts**

	Gateway Regional School District			State	
	<i>Number of Students Included</i>	<i>CPI</i>	<i>Median SGP</i>	<i>CPI</i>	<i>Median SGP</i>
All Students	608	84.5	42	87.2	50
African-American/Black	2	---	---	77.4	47
Asian	2	---	---	90.2	59
Hispanic/Latino	15	68.3	---	74.2	46
White	581	84.8	41	90.9	51
ELL	---	---	---	59.4	48
FELL	4	---	---	81.7	54
Special Education	100	60.3	30	68.3	42
Low-Income	214	77.5	40	77.1	46
<p>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</p>					

**Table C4: Gateway Regional School District and State
Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)
for Selected Subgroups
2011 Mathematics**

	Gateway Regional School District			State	
	<i>Number of Students Included</i>	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>	CPI	<i>Median SGP</i>
All Students	607	73	43	79.9	50
African-American/Black	2	---	---	65	47
Asian	2	---	---	89.5	64
Hispanic/Latino	15	60	---	64.4	46
White	580	73	43	84.3	50
ELL	---	---	---	56.3	52
FELL	4	---	---	75.1	53
Special Education	101	47	24.5	57.7	43
Low-Income	213	65.7	39	67.3	46
<p>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</p>					

Appendix D: Finding and Recommendation Statements

Finding Statements:

Student Achievement

1. Student achievement in the district has generally been below that of students throughout the state, though the district has narrowed the gap.

Leadership and Governance

2. The reconfiguration of the school and district level administration has resulted in an inconsistent implementation of improvement initiatives designed to raise student achievement.
3. There is insufficient advocacy by district leaders in the seven communities that make up the district.

Curriculum and Instruction

4. The district has complete kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum documents that have facilitated the district's beginning work to align English language arts (ELA) curricula to the new Massachusetts curriculum frameworks.
5. The district's system of monitoring curriculum implementation to insure attainment of high levels of achievement for all students is underdeveloped.
6. Leaders and teachers do not have a common understanding of high-quality instruction that meets the needs of all learners; this has contributed to the uneven quality and uneven rigor of instruction across the district.

Assessment

7. The district is in the early stages of developing an assessment system that has the capacity to collect relevant student data, make it accessible to staff, and use it to monitor student performance, modify instruction, and determine individual needs. Most of the progress noted to date has taken place at the elementary level.

Human Resources and Professional Development

8. The district's teacher evaluation system in effect at the time of the review allowed four-year gaps between official evaluations of classroom instruction, in contravention of state law.
9. Evaluations did not rate administrators according to the standards prescribed by regulation.

Student Support

10. The district and its schools have uneven implementation and oversight of programs and initiatives to address the broad range of learner needs and services to support high achievement for all students.

Financial and Asset Management

11. The district's business office is well run and each staff person handles a variety of duties; however, the person in the treasurer position also has duties that should be segregated from the treasurer role.
12. The district school committee is not diligent in its responsibility to examine if warrant charges are correct, and the district does not generally provide detailed documentation to the school committee members who sign the warrants.
13. A gap in communication among the district administration, the district school committee, and the towns raises significant concerns.

Recommendation Statements:

Leadership and Governance

1. The Gateway Regional School District, through its superintendent, should clarify the roles and responsibilities of administrative positions in relation to its goals in order to create a seamless articulation of the district's improvement initiatives in kindergarten through grade 12.
2. The Gateway Regional School District should develop a systematic outreach plan in each of its seven communities to better inform residents of the needs of the school district and to garner support for the schools.

Curriculum and Instruction

3. The district should identify instructional practices that meet the needs of all learners, and develop its systems to supervise and evaluate teachers' practice and their implementation of the district's mandated curriculum.

Assessment

4. The district should prioritize and accelerate its efforts to create a comprehensive assessment system with the capacity to effectively support and monitor the implementation of coordinated programs and aligned practices K-12. Policies and procedures for the collection, analysis, and application of student performance data should be clear, uniform, and include appropriate strategies and expectations for all schools and grade levels.

Human Resources and Professional Development

5. The district should expeditiously design and negotiate agreement on a new system of educator evaluation consistent with the new state system, so as to be ready to begin implementing it in 2013-2014.

Student Support

6. The district should provide a quality tiered system of support to ensure that all students in kindergarten through grade 12 are on track to proficiency.

Financial and Asset Management

7. A clear segregation of the treasurer's duties from additional duties as a full time employee must be assured by the district in order to ensure that the standard of fiduciary oversight is being met.

8. The district warrant signing committee should carefully review samples of support documentation for the accounts payable and payroll warrants as trustees of public funds.
9. The budget document should be made more transparent as one way of addressing the developing gap in communication and trust between member towns and the district.