Massachusetts Department of
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY
EDUCATION

Quaboag Regional School District
District Review

Review conducted June 11–14, 2012

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

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

Purpose

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

District reviews are conducted under Chapter 15, Section 55A of the Massachusetts General Laws and include reviews focused on "districts whose students achieve at low levels either in absolute terms or relative to districts that educate similar populations." Districts subject to review in the 2011-2012 school year include districts that were in Level 3[1] (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).

Quaboag Regional School District

The site visit to the Quaboag Regional School District was conducted from June 11–14, 2012. The site visit included 34 hours of interviews and focus groups with over 34 stakeholders ranging from school committee members to district administrators and school staff to teachers' association representatives. The review team conducted focus groups with 14 elementary, 4 middle school, and 2 high school teachers. The team also conducted visits to the district's 3 schools: Warren Community Elementary School (pre-kindergarten through grade 6), West Brookfield Elementary School (pre-kindergarten through grade 6), and Quaboag Regional Middle/High School (grades 7–12). Further information about the review and the site visit schedule can be found in Appendix B; information about the members of the review team can be found in Appendix A. Appendix C contains 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 the time.

District Profile[2]

Schools

The Quaboag Regional School District (QRSD) is composed of two districts: West Brookfield and Warren. There are 3 schools: Warren Community Elementary (500 students in 2011), West Brookfield Elementary (364 students in 2011), and Quaboag Regional Middle/High School (582 students in 2011). The district has a 12-member school committee with representatives from each district. QRSD is a choice district that has recently reversed a trend; at the time of the review, more students were entering the district through choice than were leaving it. Until the 2011–2012 school year the district was a Level 3 district because one of its schools, West Brookfield Elementary, was at Level 3. However, in 2011 West Brookfield became a Level 1 school; as a result the district is now at level 2.

At the time of the site visit, the superintendent had been leading the district for three years and had brought significant changes to the leadership team. He had replaced the three principals and the director of student support services and had eliminated the position of assistant superintendent. As a result, the remaining district office administrators were the superintendent, the director of finance/operations, and the director of student support services. The leadership team included the principals of the three schools. According to interviewees, the superintendent has fostered positive relationships between the school district and its communities. The recent

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

passage of the debt exclusion for upgrading the technology in the schools is an indication of the results of those efforts.

Enrollment

Between 2007 and 2011, the district's enrollment declined by 3 percent, from 1,495 students to 1,446 students. Then in 2011–2012, it dropped an additional 4 percent to 1,382 students. In addition to the decrease in enrollment, there has been a shift in the composition of the student population. In 2007, 25 percent of the students were from low-income families. By 2011 that rate was 39 percent. Over the same period of time, the proportion of students receiving special education services went from 18 percent to 21 percent. In 2011, 93 percent of the students were white with no other race or ethnicity higher than 4 percent of the enrollment.

Tables 1a and 1b show student enrollment by race/ethnicity and special populations for the 2010–2011 and 2011–2012 school years, respectively.

Table 1a: Quaboag 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	**1,446**	**100.0**	African-American/ Black	11	0.8
First Language not English	6	0.4	Asian	6	0.4
Limited English Proficient*	1	0.1	Hispanic/Latino	51	3.5
Special Education**	299	20.5	White	1,345	93.0
Low-income	567	39.2	Native American	1	0.1
Free Lunch	443	30.6	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	0	0.0
Reduced-price lunch	124	8.6	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	32	2.2

*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

Table 1b: Quaboag 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	**1,382**	**100.0**	African-American/ Black	11	0.8
First Language not English	17	1.2	Asian	2	0.1
Limited English Proficient*	6	0.4	Hispanic/Latino	48	3.5
Special Education**	274	19.6	White	1,290	93.3
Low-income	525	38.0	Native American	1	0.1
Free Lunch	419	30.3	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	0	0.0
Reduced-price lunch	106	7.7	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	30	2.2

*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

Finance

Local district expenditures have been consistently above required net school spending, by an increasing percentage in the last few years, as indicated in Table 2 below. A large payment of facility capital and debt in fiscal year 2010 increased local appropriations greatly, largely offset by aid from the Massachusetts School Building Authority. Chapter 70 aid decreased in fiscal year 2011, offset by American Recovery and Reinvestment Act aid from the federal government.

Table 2: Quaboag 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	18,366,455	32,879,168*	15,797,006	15,762,925	15,747,915
From revolving funds and grants	---	2,207,770	---	2,600,406	---
Total expenditures	---	35,086,938	---	18,363,331	---
Chapter 70 aid to education program					
Chapter 70 state aid**	---	8,335,277	---	7,848,331	8,393,766
Required local contribution	---	4,409,832	---	4,490,234	4,631,357
Required net school spending***	---	12,745,109	---	12,338,565	13,025,123
Actual net school spending	---	13,564,386	---	13,590,028	14,441,356
Over/under required ($)	---	819,277	---	1 ,251,463	1,416,233
Over/under required (%)	---	6.4 %	---	10.1 %	10.9 %

*The large difference in the actual for FY10 represents payment on facilities debt and capital.
**Chapter 70 state aid funds are deposited in the local general fund and spent as local appropriations.

***Required net school spending is the total of Chapter 70 aid and required local contribution. Net school spending includes only expenditures from local appropriations, not revolving funds and grants. It includes expenditures for most administration, instruction, operations, and out-of-district tuitions. It does not include transportation, school lunches, debt, or capital.
Sources: FY11 District End-of-Year Report; Chapter 70 Program information on ESE website.
Data retrieved on September 20, 2012.

Findings

Student Achievement

Overall, Quaboag's proficiency rates in ELA and mathematics have increased since 2009, and the gap between the district and the state has narrowed. However, over the four or five test administrations ending in 2011, proficiency rates and median student growth percentiles in ELA and math in grades 4, 7, and 8 gave cause for concern.

From 2009 to 2011 the district's proficiency rate in ELA has risen 5 percentage points, from 58 percent to 63 percent, while the statewide ELA proficiency rate rose two points, from 67 percent to 69 percent; thus the gap between district and state narrowed by 3 points. In math over these years, the district's proficiency rate rose 7 percentage points, from 46 percent to 53 percent, while the statewide math proficiency rate rose 3 points, from 55 percent to 58 percent; thus the gap between district and state narrowed by 4 points. (See Tables C1 and C2 in Appendix C.)

In grades 4, 7, and 8, the proficiency rates in both ELA and mathematics were below the statewide rates every year from 2007-2011, except for math in 2010 when students in grade 8 matched their peers statewide. In some instances, the gap was large. In addition, with the exception of grade 4 mathematics, the proficiency rates in those grades and content areas declined between 2010 and 2011. Although the grade 4 mathematics proficiency rate was higher in 2011 (36 percent) than it was in 2010 (31 percent), it was lower than the proficiency rate in 2007, which was 40 percent.

From 2008 through 2011, in grades 4, 7, and 8, the median SGP in ELA was consistently in the low growth range. In 2011, the median SGP in ELA was 30.0 in grade 4, 35.0 in grade 7, and 28.0 in grade 8. In mathematics, while the median SGP was also frequently in the low range during this same time period, there were some instances of the median SGPs being in the moderate range. They include: grade 4 mathematics in 2010 (41.5) and 2011 (45.0), grade 7 math in 2010 (41.0), and grade 8 mathematics in 2009 (41.5), 2010 (41.5), and 2011 (50.0).

In these 3 grades, in 2011, the gap between the district and the state in both ELA and mathematics was more than 10 percentage points, with the exception of grade 8 mathematics, where the gap was 8 percentage points. Most proficiency rates and median SGPs were low and had been so over four or five test administrations. This raises the question of what factors have been hindering higher growth and achievement in these grades and how the district is addressing the matter.

In contrast, Quaboag students' proficiency rates in grades 3 and 6 in ELA and mathematics were higher in 2011 than they were in 2007, and the proficiency rates were higher than those of their statewide peers, with the exception of grade 3 mathematics. In grade 3, in 2011, the proficiency rate in ELA was 65 percent, compared with a statewide rate of 61 percent. In 2011, the proficiency rate in mathematics for grade 3 was 64 percent, which was 2 percentage points lower than their statewide peers. In 2011, the proficiency rate in ELA for grade 6 was 80 percent, 12

percentage points higher than the statewide rate for grade 6. In grade 6 mathematics, Quaboag students' 2011 proficiency rate was 63 percent, compared with a statewide proficiency rate of 58 percent. (See Tables C1 and C2 in Appendix C.)

Leadership and Governance

The Quaboag Regional School District does not have the administrative structures to provide sufficient direction and oversight to the work of the district in raising student achievement.

Administrative Structure

The administrative structure of the Quaboag Regional School District consists of the superintendent, three school principals, one assistant principal, a director of student support services, and a director of finance/operations. These seven administrators share most of the administrative functions and responsibilities of the district. There are also department chairs at the high school who serve a quasi-supervisory role.

The superintendent is charged with the daunting task of improving the district's program offerings to both maintain the resident student population and to attract more choice students from neighboring towns. Generating additional choice revenue is central to maintaining the district's curricular offerings. Thus, the superintendent has embarked upon a multifaceted approach to improving the district's student achievement through the adoption of several programs.

Approaches to Improving Student Achievement

One of the several new initiatives embraced by the superintendent was vertical teams, which had the responsibility of examining all curricular areas and determining the gaps and redundancies in the K–12 curriculum, as well as identifying and providing professional development for team members. The Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) grant promotes increased achievement in these four curricular areas, and will eventually provide high school students with opportunities to earn an associate's degree at Quinsigamond Community College as they earn their high school diplomas. The Massachusetts Mathematics and Science Initiative (MMSI) grant at the middle/high school provides pathways to attract more students to participate in the AP program. The district also recently completed the alignment of the elementary math curriculum to the new Massachusetts standards. Finally, in an effort to increase math and science achievement at the elementary level the district has applied for a Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) grant.

Insufficient Central Coordination for Instructional Functions and Absence of Overarching Goals

The district does not have a central administrator to ensure the necessary coordination and clear lines of communication, oversight, and responsibility in the areas of the curriculum, assessment, and professional development. School administrators and the director of student support services share responsibility for these areas. But principals are rightly and necessarily focused on

improving achievement in their individual schools. The elementary principals work in concert with one another ensuring alignment between the two schools. In a recent effort to provide continuity and oversight, the three school administrators and the director of student services have been meeting separately from the larger leadership team to discuss issues of teaching and learning. Although the administrators are clearly engaged in improvement efforts, from their individual positions they are not able to provide systemwide coordination of the instructional functions of the district, functions that are vital to improving student achievement.

In addition, there is no strategic planning process that sets direction for the district. The District Improvement Plan was developed by compiling the goals of the vertical teams. There are no overarching goals that guide the work of the various teams in the district, again resulting in insufficient coordination.

Recently the superintendent suspended the vertical teams, which had been an attempt to provide coordination and oversight for instructional functions and distribute leadership throughout the district and had engaged all teachers in professional development and curriculum development. They were suspended after two and a half years of operation, during which time they had varying success. Replacing them will be horizontal teams that will focus on the upcoming NEASC accreditation and on completing the alignment of ELA to the new Massachusetts standards at the elementary level.

In interviews, principals, teachers, school committee members, and community members did not seem knowledgeable about systemwide student achievement beyond their own areas of responsibility. Rather, they gave only global information about students at levels other than their own. For example, school committee and community members judged the district's achievement by the choice revenues collected.

Conclusion

Although overall Quaboag's proficiency rates in ELA and math have increased since 2009 and the gap between the district and the state has narrowed, proficiency rates and median student growth percentiles in ELA and math in some grades have given cause for concern in recent years, while achievement and growth in some other grades have been encouraging (see Student Achievement finding above). Insufficient central coordination of the instructional functions of the district is contributing to the uneven improvement in student achievement and student growth in the district, and to differences in approaches to improving it (see second Student Support finding below). The decentralized approach has also contributed to a sense of confusion about the general direction of the system. In interviews some staff seemed unclear about seemingly disparate initiatives.

Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum development is taking place in the district. However, without a single district administrator charged with overall curriculum leadership there is no mechanism to ensure that curriculum documents are comprehensive and of consistent high quality for all core subjects at every level.

Curriculum leadership in the district is a shared responsibility. There is no single administrator with sole responsibility for curriculum leadership. Instead, according to school leaders, responsibility for the oversight of the curriculum is distributed among the superintendent, the three principals, the department heads for grades 7–12, math and ELA instructional coaches at the elementary level, and the vertical team leaders. The superintendent defines curriculum leadership more narrowly: responsibility is delegated to the content specialists whom he named as the vertical team leaders, the department heads, and the elementary reading and math coaches. Some interviewees identified the director of student support services as the curriculum leader in the district explaining that the position was a fused position[3], while another interviewee said that "honestly, no one" was the curriculum leader in the district. According to school leaders, the district does not have curriculum leadership with a K–12 perspective and "no one in the district has the big picture and . . . knows all the pieces."

Vertical Teams

Vertical teams have been a mechanism to align the curriculum districtwide. The superintendent, in conjunction with a team of volunteer teachers, initiated vertical teams in July 2009; at the same time, teachers received professional development to support the initiative. The stated goal of the vertical teams was to "empower teachers to lead, plan, and coordinate effective professional development to improve teaching and learning." Organized by subject into 10 district-wide teams (mathematics, English language arts (ELA), guidance, business technology, science, social studies, health/wellness, arts, world language, and special education), the teams met on professional development days. Teachers, school leaders and the superintendent described the role of the vertical teams as "building a collaborative culture," improving communication while identifying gaps and redundancies in the curriculum both at the elementary level, the middle/high school level, and across levels. Interviewees said that vertical teaming "opened up the silos" and created continuity across grades. In interviews the review team was told that as of January 2012, the 10 districtwide vertical teams had been suspended and replaced by a horizontal team structure.

Horizontal Teams

The focus in the district is now on horizontal teams. In an interview the superintendent said that the district has now moved to a horizontal focus by creating instructional study groups at the K–6 level to address the alignment of the curriculum to the common core state standards and to

[3] According to information supplied by the district, in 2008–2009, before the arrival of the current superintendent, the director of curriculum position was combined with the director of student support services position, with the title of assistant superintendent. In 2009–2010 this position was changed to director of student support services.

complete the written curriculum in both ELA and math in grades kindergarten through grade 6. He also said that the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) accreditation visit to the middle/high school would take place in 2013, and that horizontal team time would allow the middle/high school to prepare for the visit by aligning the curriculum to the common core and by completing the required self-study.

Elementary Curriculum

At the time of the site visit, curriculum documentation for mathematics at the elementary level was nearly complete. Interviewees said that they were finalizing curriculum maps for elementary math. The new documents will map out the units using as resources the Scott Foresman Addison Wesley textbook (2008) as well as supplements to align to the new common core standards for kindergarten through grade 6. Before this, teachers have been relying solely on the textbook series along with the frameworks. Drafts of the documents were made available to the review team, and they indicated nearly completed curriculum documentation for mathematics at the elementary level. The draft curriculum includes the following components: Standards for mathematical practice, common core curriculum maps/overview, units of study along with domain, cluster, and standards, instruction and formative assessment schedule, units of study with objectives, vocabulary, assessments, resources, and a list of supplements that are aligned to the common core.

Curriculum documentation for ELA at the elementary level is not complete. At present, in ELA, a number of components make up that curriculum: the textbook series *Reading Street* (Scott Foresman Addison Wesley), the state frameworks, resources provided by both the instructional coaches and the Bay State Reading Initiative (BSRI), and assessments including the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE). Teachers said that with the support of the Bay State Reading Initiative (BSRI) they have established a timetable for completion of the elementary ELA curriculum including alignment to the common core standards. At the time of the review work on this initiative was to be completed by the end of the 2012–2013 school year.

Full documentation of the elementary social studies and science curricula is not yet in place. However, interviewees said that vertical teams were nearing completion on work to align social studies and science topics between the two elementary schools. In the past, students from the two elementary schools in the district were coming to grade 7 with two sets of science and social studies content knowledge. Vertical teams have identified the gaps and redundancies. Interviewees said that pacing guides for social studies were not in place; instead there was a list of topics assigned to each grade. The elementary social studies texts for grades 4–6 that would support instruction for this list of topics are 30 years old. In kindergarten through grade 3, social studies and science are embedded in the ELA curriculum. Interviewees said that the science vertical team created a list of science topics to be used with the current frameworks and an inventory of materials available to teach science at the elementary level. However, there are no current science textbooks to support instruction at the elementary level.

Writing Curriculum

The district has a unified approach to writing and uses common rubrics districtwide. As a result of the recommendation of the vertical team, the district adopted the Six Traits of Writing, and writing rubrics are in use in every classroom, not just in ELA classes.

Middle/High School Curriculum

Curriculum documentation in grades 7–12 is in the process of development. Initial mapping of the curriculum began in 2010 under the department heads and vertical team chairs. The documents produced under that initiative are the first schoolwide curriculum documents at that level. Interviewees said that staff was addressing curriculum mapping as the school prepared for its NEASC accreditation visit in 2013. The review team also was told that alignment to the common core was to be the major focus during the 2012–2013 school year with the deadline for the transition to the new standards set for September, 2013.

Curriculum leadership in grades 7–12 is the responsibility of the principal and the department heads. Interviewees told the review team that department heads went into classrooms and offered feedback about instruction and content. The schedule for the 2012–2013 school year was to include departmental common planning time for further development and alignment of the curriculum to the common core.

There is a range in the quality and completeness in the newly created curriculum maps at the middle/high school. Teachers, school leaders, and the superintendent said that the curriculum mapping was a work in progress with teachers continually submitting revisions. The common template used includes the following components: essential questions, timeline/duration, learning standards, learning objectives, instructional strategies, assessment strategies, schoolwide expectations for learning, and 21st-century learning objectives. A review of the curriculum maps indicates a broad range of completeness: at the time of the review team visit some maps were fully developed, while most had some components awaiting development.

The district is in the process of documenting and aligning the curriculum to the new common core state standards at every level. At the time of the review the documentation for elementary math was to be complete in September 2012. This has been the result of close cooperation between the two elementary schools. However, curriculum development takes place without districtwide oversight to ensure that curriculum documents at all levels are effective and comprehensive and fully aligned to the common core. Without such oversight, the district cannot guarantee the consistent and effective delivery of its curricula to all students.

Instructional practices are inconsistent across the district, with more effective practices in place at the elementary schools. At all levels, there are infrequent opportunities for students to engage in activities and practices that promote higher-order thinking skills and limited use of formative classroom assessments to check for students' understanding of lessons.

Monitoring and Promoting Instruction

The elementary schools have developed an effective system to monitor and promote instructional practices. Teachers and school leaders said that principals at both schools played an active role in monitoring daily classroom instruction. Interviewees said that walkthroughs and learning walks took place, and that helpful feedback was given to the teachers both orally and in writing. During learning walks, teams of teachers visit classrooms to look for a particular best practice. Interviewees said that the focus of learning walks ranged from differentiation, questioning techniques, and the teacher as a facilitator, to the use of small groups. The results of the observations are shared at staff meetings with the focus on effective practices observed. Interviewees also described the use of the Thinking Through a Lesson Protocol (TTLP), where a team of teachers created a plan for a lesson that was then taught by a "head" teacher while the remaining teachers observed. Afterward, the team debriefed, tweaked the lesson, and teachers taught the lesson themselves in their own classrooms.

The ELA and mathematics instructional coaches at each school provide feedback on instruction and the implementation of the curriculum. They also model practices for teachers with a focus on "I do, you do, we do" (Gradual Release Model). The coaches also promote instruction by working with teachers to design instruction that addresses data. In interviews the review team was told that the number of coaches at the elementary level was to be reduced in the 2012–2013 school year to 1 instructional coach at each elementary school.

Teachers in the middle/high school receive feedback on instruction primarily from department chairs. In interviews, both the principal and assistant principal said that they were not in classrooms as much as they would like to be and fell short of their goal of visiting three to five classes a day. Department heads agreed that they did not visit middle-school classrooms with the same frequency as they visited high-school classrooms; they reported an overall frequency of approximately every three weeks but more frequently in the case of a new teacher. In focus groups, teachers said that feedback was "helpful" and listed suggestions that they received to improve instruction: "the use of more media" and "try cold-calling." Other teachers characterized the feedback as being positive, but not "constructive in nature."

Classroom Observations by the Review Team

The review team observed instruction in 46 classrooms in the district: 26 classrooms at the prekindergarten through grade 6 level; 7 in grades 7 and 8, and 13 in grades 9–12. At the elementary-school level, these classes included 1 social studies, 14 ELA, 7 math, and 4 science classes; at the middle-school level the team observed 3 ELA, 2 math, and 2 science classes; and

at the high-school level, these classes included 1 social studies, 4 English, 5 math, and 3 science classes. The observations were approximately 20 minutes in length.

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 objectives, use of class time, content learning, instructional techniques, activation of higher-order thinking, instructional pacing, student thinking, student groups, and the use of student assessments. Review team members are asked to note when they observe or did not observe a characteristic and record evidence of a characteristic on a form.

Classroom Climate

The review team found that students behaved according to class rules and expectations in 96 percent of classrooms observed at the elementary level and in 100 percent at the middle/high school level. Review team members characterized observed district classrooms as being respectful "in tone and discourse," with classrooms having a "friendly" atmosphere and students and teachers having "good rapport." In a grade 1 class the teacher reminded students to "use their movie theater voices" as they began working with their partners. The review team observed teachers setting high expectations for student learning in 92 percent of classrooms observed at the elementary level, 86 percent at the middle-school level and 77 percent at the high-school level. In a kindergarten class, a large sign read, "Of course you can do it, I am here to help you."

Learning Objectives

Posting or communicating learning objectives was most evident in grades 7 and 8 where the review team observed this practice in 86 percent of visited classrooms. At the elementary level the review team observed posted objectives in 62 percent of visited classrooms and in 69 percent of classrooms at the high-school level. Identifying learning outcomes for students and having students work on activities, tasks or assessments related to the learning outcomes was seen in 71 percent of classrooms observed at the middle-school level, but observed at a lower incidence (54 percent) in both the elementary-school and high-school levels. Rather than objectives, the review team more typically observed agendas and activities in visited classrooms. There were exceptions. In a grade 8 English class, the learning objective posted was "to use the correct verb tense in an expository writing" assignment; the class included activities to support the objective.

Use of Class Time

The review team found that the practice of teachers being prepared with materials ready for instruction was solidly in place in observed classrooms throughout the district: in 96 percent of classrooms at the elementary level, 100 percent at the middle level, and 85 percent at the high-school level. The practice of teachers offering clear explanations in observed classrooms was most frequently in place at the elementary level at 88 percent, in 71 percent of classrooms at the middle level, and in 54 percent of classrooms at the high-school level. The characteristic of students making smooth transitions from one activity to the next was seen in 88 percent of observed elementary classrooms, in 77 percent of the classrooms observed at the high-school

level, and in 57 percent of the classrooms visited at the middle-school level. In a grade 1 class students listened to a story read by their teacher, discussed the new vocabulary words from the story, and interacted with the words on the Smart Board; after a cue by their teacher they turned to their "study-buddies" to talk about the moral of the story and within a few minutes were independently writing their reactions in their journals.

Content Learning

The review team observed accurate delivery of content matched to grade-level standards and objectives in 96 percent of visited elementary classrooms, in 100 percent of visited classrooms at the middle-school level, and in 85 percent of visited classrooms at the high-school level. Making connections to prior learning was solidly in place in observed classes at the elementary level in 88 percent of the classrooms, in 100 percent of the classrooms at the middle-school level, but in 62 percent of classrooms at the high-school level. In a grade 1 ELA class students used the Smart Board to find titles of books that they had read that connected to the theme in a story that they had just heard.

While the delivery of content was in place at all three levels in observed classrooms, the review team found a number of characteristics of effective instructional design and delivery to be frequently in place at the elementary level, but less frequently at both the middle- and high-school levels. The review team observed students exploring content by using a variety of curriculum resources in 73 percent of visited elementary classrooms. Also, opportunities for students to explore content through multiple modalities were seen in 88 percent of observed elementary classrooms. In a grade 3 science class, students working in groups of four were drawing and labeling simple machines that they had seen or used since they had woken up.

At the middle/high school, opportunities for students to experience content through the use of varied instructional resources, strategies, and differentiated instruction were in place in observed classrooms with considerably less frequency. The review team observed the use of varied instructional resources in 29 percent of classrooms visited at the middle-school level and in 31 percent at the high-school level. Varied instructional strategies were observed in 43 percent of classrooms visited at the middle-school level and in 31 percent at the high-school level. Also, differentiated instruction was seen in 29 percent of observed classrooms at the middle-school level and in 0 (zero) percent of classrooms at the high-school level.

The review team found differentiated instruction, including tiered activities, in 50 percent of the classrooms observed at the elementary level. The characteristic of students applying new information to solve problems and to deepen their understanding and knowledge was seen in 88 percent of the classrooms visited at the elementary level. The review team observed an outstanding example of the application of new conceptual knowledge in a culminating grade 6 math exercise. Students in the entire grade participated in a fantasy baseball game in which they used actual professional baseball statistics to play the game. Following a rubric and detailed directions, students worked in teams of four as they used proportions, percentages, fractions, and ratios to play the game. Every student had a role to play on the team and had prepared charts and statistics in advance, including a pie chart of individual player statistics.

Instructional Techniques

The review team observed small-group instruction in 81 percent of classrooms visited at the elementary level. A combination of guided practice with the teacher, direct, whole-group instruction, and independent practice were in place, but no one practice was dominant at the elementary level. However, in visited classes at the middle-school level the review team observed direct, whole-group instruction in 71 percent of the classrooms and in 85 percent of the classrooms at the high-school level. In a middle-school math class students worked in groups of three to four students; in a high-school science class, students worked with partners as they completed a lab. The review team saw numerous examples of varied instructional techniques at the elementary level. In a grade 2 ELA class, 3 activities were going on simultaneously, with the teacher working with a group, another group at a listening station, and the remaining students reading to each other.

With direct, whole-group instruction the dominant mode of instruction in observed classes at both the middle- and high-school levels, students were not experiencing content in small groups or through paired learning. These practices were observed in 29 percent of visited middle-school classrooms and in 23 percent of high-school classrooms.

Instructional Pacing and Student Thinking

The review team found that in 96 percent of observed elementary classrooms, instructional pacing matched the students' rate of learning. The review team saw this practice in 57 percent of visited middle-school classrooms and in 77 percent of classrooms at the high-school level. Students had opportunities to demonstrate their understanding of new concepts or skills and to share their thinking in 96 percent of the observed elementary classrooms and in 86 percent of middle-school-level classrooms, but in 62 percent of the classrooms at the high-school level.

There were more opportunities for students to participate in structures (i.e., think-pair-share) that promote thinking and reasoning at the elementary level where this characteristic was observed in 65 percent of the visited classrooms, but in 29 percent of classrooms at the middle-school level and 31 percent of classrooms at the high-school level. In a grade 5 science class, students worked in pairs sharing ideas about their work on natural resource posters that they were creating.

Student Groups

At the elementary level, in 81 percent of the observed classes the review team observed students grouped to complete carefully designed academic tasks that included speaking, listening, reading and writing. In a grade 2 ELA class, students, in groups of five, were analyzing a book from the perspective of a director, summarizer, questioner, clarifier, and predictor while the teacher and the paraprofessional in the class circulated among the groups. Students understood their roles and could explain them to a review team member.

The review team found little student grouping in the middle- and high-school level classes; it was observed in 29 percent of visited classrooms at the middle-school level and in 15 percent at the high-school level.

Higher-Order Thinking and the Use of Student Assessments

In observed classrooms across the district, the review team found that students had opportunities to examine, analyze, and interpret information. The review team observed this practice in 96 percent of classrooms visited at the elementary level, in 86 percent of classrooms at the middle-school level, and in 77 percent of high-school level classrooms. At the elementary level the review team found students in 65 percent of observed classrooms forming predictions and developing arguments while this characteristic was in place in 43 percent of visited middle-school level classrooms and in 23 percent of high-school level classrooms. Other higher-order thinking skills were observed infrequently at all levels. These included opportunities for students to evaluate and reflect on their own thinking and to ask meaningful questions that were linked to the learning objective of the lesson.

The use of classroom assessments to check for students' understanding of the lesson objective was in place in observed classrooms at a low frequency across the district. The review team observed this practice in 46 percent of visited classrooms at the elementary level, in 43 percent of classrooms at the middle-school level, and in 54 percent of classrooms at the high-school level. In visited classes, other assessment practices including the teacher re-teaching a concept based on informal classroom assessments and having students revise their work based on feedback were not practiced consistently across all the district's schools. At the middle- school level, the review team observed teachers giving feedback to students based on the learning goal in 86 percent of the classrooms observed. This practice took place considerably less frequently at the elementary and high-school levels.

According to the evidence from classrooms observed throughout the district there are areas of common instructional strength at all levels, including a positive classroom climate, teachers prepared and ready to teach, and teachers communicating content with clarity and accuracy and providing content appropriate for grade and level.

However, key instructional practices take place inconsistently across the elementary, middle-, and high-school levels. The observations indicated effective practices in content learning, instructional techniques, instructional pacing, and the use of student groups in elementary classrooms. These effective instructional practices were observed less frequently at the middle- and high-school levels. Effective instructional practices that provide students with opportunities to achieve at high levels are not consistently in place districtwide.

Assessment

The district's two elementary schools are making steady progress in developing a comprehensive student assessment system with the capacity to collect relevant performance data, to make it accessible to staff, and to use it to monitor academic progress, modify instruction, and make timely determinations of individual student needs. At the secondary level, however, there did not appear to be comparable efforts or initiatives.

Assessments at the Elementary Schools

During the past few years, the district's two elementary schools, Warren Community Elementary School and West Brookfield Elementary School have made improving student assessment a strategic priority. The 2011–2012 School Improvement Plans (SIPs) of both schools speak extensively of specific action steps to enhance data collection and dissemination policies, data-based decision making practices, progress monitoring protocols, and the data analysis competencies of staff members.

Through a series of interviews with administrators and teachers, as well as a review of a number of key documents, the review team found evidence of substantial progress at both elementary schools in advancing the student assessment goals articulated in their SIPs. For example, the assessment calendars of the schools have now been fully aligned so that both elementary schools administer the same battery of standardized tests at the same times throughout the school year. The principals explained that these assessment matrices include: DIBELS (kindergarten through grade 6, three times each year), Daze (grades 3–6, three times each year), GRADE (kindergarten through grade 6, twice each year), and district-developed math benchmark assessments (kindergarten through grade 6, four times each year). Further, for those students identified as needing additional ELA supports, DIBELS and Daze testing is used to monitor progress and is administered more frequently. Teachers and administrators said that as a result of these efforts, more and better academic data was being regularly collected, student learning strengths and needs were more accurately identified, tiered instruction groupings have been enhanced, more appropriate student supports and timely interventions have been initiated, and overall student academic progress was more effectively monitored.

Principals and teachers stressed the value of their collaborations over the two years before the review with specialists from both the District and School Assessment Center (DSAC) and the Bay State Reading Initiative (BSRI). Both have provided a variety of resources and sustained professional development to advance the data collection and analysis capacities of staff at the elementary schools. This support has also enabled teachers and administrators to develop reliable common benchmark assessments. These formative assessments supplement the current standardized testing and provide a more complete and continuous flow of student performance data that can be used to measure academic progress, adjust classroom instruction, identify needed improvements to the curriculum, and facilitate intervention strategies. Interviewees told reviewers that work on developing additional common assessments and rubrics was to continue in 2012–2013. This work was to include content and skill areas (e.g., social studies, science, and

writing) not currently monitored and "each assessment will [would] demonstrate student progress and assessment data will [would] inform classroom instruction."

Both elementary schools have created an infrastructure that greatly supports and promotes teacher collaboration. This includes common planning time for daily grade-level teacher team meetings; twice monthly grade-level data meetings (one in ELA and one in mathematics) attended by the principal, the reading coach, and special education staff; and three additional faculty data meetings that correspond to the DIBELS and GRADE testing calendar. According to those interviewed, the professional development training provided by DSAC and BSRI has also done much to expand the ability of staff to analyze and synthesize student performance data, monitor academic progress both individually and in the aggregate, evaluate instructional practices, and determine appropriate strategies, modifications, or specific interventions. Teachers said they now feel better able to use student assessment results to make timely and appropriate decisions about a wide range of curricular and instructional issues.

Assessments at the Middle/High School

Reviewers noted, however, that progress has thus far been limited almost entirely to the district's two elementary schools. There was little evidence at Quaboag Regional Middle/High School of comparable efforts to develop and employ a comprehensive and effective student assessment system. MCAS is the sole standardized assessment program currently in place in the school. Although mid-term and final examinations are administered in all content areas, only in algebra, geometry, and U.S. history II are there common formative or summative assessments in place. And teachers acknowledged that even in these three content areas, there was no significant analysis of the test results. Also, reviewers found little indication of plans to develop an assessment system with the capacity to continuously collect a range of performance data, make it readily available to staff, and use it to systematically monitor student progress, improve the curriculum and classroom instruction, and determine individual learning needs. Interviewees, as well as the middle/high school's 2011–2012 SIP, did not identify the development of an assessment system as a strategic goal for the school. Interviewees said that the QRSD Data Team, a district committee, met briefly at the beginning of the 2010–2012 school year but has subsequently become inactive.

The efforts of the district's two elementary schools to establish a comprehensive student assessment system are noteworthy and have resulted in considerable progress in kindergarten through grade 6. There are no corresponding efforts currently underway in grades 7–12, however. Without creating a comprehensive, fully articulated K–12 student assessment system, school and district leaders will not be able to accurately monitor student academic progress; make appropriate data-driven decisions and timely enhancements to classroom instruction, programs of study, support services, and interventions; and most important, to improve learning and outcomes for every student in the district.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The district has a comprehensive mentoring program that helps new staff members become acclimated to the district's policies and procedures.

At the time of the review the district's mentoring program had been in place for more than 10 years, and constituencies in the district, from school committee members to administrators and teachers, agreed that the program was an important factor in the overall strength of the district.

The program is powerful because of its comprehensiveness. An important element of the program is the selection and training of the mentors. To be selected as a mentor, teachers must have taught in Quaboag for at least five years and must be recommended by their principal. The training involves a three-credit mentoring course through either the Graduate School of Education at the University of Massachusetts Amherst or the local French River Collaborative. The program director works with principals to match the mentors with the mentees. Once the match has been made, the mentee participates in a full-day orientation and receives a comprehensive Mentoring Handbook.

A unique feature of the program is that the partnership between mentor and mentee is a three-year relationship, and the contract stipulates a minimum number of hours of collaboration (50 hours the first year, 25 hours the second year, and 20 hours the third year.). An important part of that relationship is observing each other's teaching. In addition, during the year there are planned monthly "theme" meetings involving everyone in the mentoring program. In 2010–2011 those mentoring sessions included such topics as Discipline with Dignity, Alternative Assessments, Preparing for the MCAS, and Understanding IEPs and 504s.

The mentoring program contributes powerfully to the introduction of teachers to the district.

Teacher evaluation practices under the system in effect at the time of the review were largely ineffective. Also, time for instructional supervision was insufficient at the middle/high school.

Administrators' Evaluations

In its review of administrators' folders the team found that the Quaboag School Committee had evaluated the superintendent during each of his two years in the district (2009–2010 and 2010–2011). The evaluations in his folder were composites of a number of school committee members' evaluations in which they rated him on each of the elements of the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership. The rating system had a scale of 1–5 with 5 being the highest. The superintendent received high ratings for both years.

The superintendent's evaluations of his administrators were all timely and were aligned with the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership at 603 CMR 35.00.[4] In each evaluation the

[4] 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. On June 28, 2011, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted to substitute a new set of regulations on the evaluation of educators. Under 603 CMR 35.11, districts were required to adopt and begin implementation of

superintendent addressed each administrator's annual goals and in most included instructive comments.

Teachers' Evaluations

The district's teacher evaluation process was based upon classroom observations and did not include summative evaluations. The practice in the district was to evaluate teachers with professional status once every three years, a practice not in conformance with state law. The team found a wide variation in the comprehensiveness and timeliness of the evaluations.

Of the 31 evaluations reviewed, 12 (39 percent) were timely according to state regulation. Most of the comments in the observations were descriptive and few contained instructive comments intended to promote professional growth. In several instances more than three years had elapsed between evaluations, and three folders did not contain evaluations. Also, while department heads had written observations of teachers in their departments, these documents were not included in the district's personnel folders.

Supervision

The ESE team also found a wide variation in the extent to which principals supervised their respective staffs. Elementary school teachers confirmed at their focus group that their principals conducted frequent "walkthroughs." These ranged from nearly daily visits to weekly visits. The principal and assistant principal at the middle/high school, by contrast, said that, while they intended to be in classrooms often, they had not been able to follow through. Because the middle/high school department heads have some administrative responsibility and teach four classes each day, they have a limited amount of time available to visit classrooms. Middle-school teachers said that department chairs visited their classrooms "only occasionally, most often once every three weeks" and that their feedback was for the most part "oral."

The district is well on its way toward implementation of the new educator evaluation model. As a Race to the Top district, it was required by the fall of 2012 to begin implementation of ESE's new educator evaluation model. A committee of administrators and teachers had developed new pre-observation and observation instruments. During the spring 2012, principals were piloting a new procedure using TeachPoint, software that provides instant electronic feedback to teachers after a classroom visit. At the time of the site visit the expectation was that TeachPoint would be used in the fall 2012 for classroom visits.

The teacher evaluations in personnel folders at the time of the onsite visit were not uniformly timely and instructive. These factors undermined the effectiveness of the system in promoting professional growth and improved student achievement. Also, supervision practices varied widely by school. The district has an opportunity with the implementation of a new evaluation system in fall 2012 to improve the effectiveness of its supervision and evaluation processes.

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evaluation systems consistent with the new regulations in phases, with all districts doing so by the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year, and districts participating in the Race to the Top grant program doing so by the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year.

The district's recent professional development program has resulted in a more collaborative culture in the district.

Vertical Teams

Shortly after the superintendent was hired in the spring of 2009, all staff members completed a professional development survey. The results indicated a desire for and a need of more collaboration among staff members. The QRSD Vertical Team Initiative, which began its work in the fall of 2009, addressed that need. The superintendent established 10 vertical teams, 1 for each discipline, and appointed 1 teacher (not the department head) to facilitate the work of each team. Elementary teachers initially had the option of choosing a team; however, this was adjusted after a disproportionate number chose mathematics. Each team was tasked with ensuring vertical alignment in its content area, and that work then became the professional development in the district. All the professional development days in the school calendar (three full days and four half days) were devoted to the work of the vertical teams. Each team established SMART goals that were "strategic, measureable, attainable and realistic" and the District Improvement Plan incorporated the SMART goals of the 10 vertical teams. In addition, the superintendent held monthly meetings with the lead teachers about the teams' progress.

In 2010–2011, the Math Vertical Team established three goals:

1. Improve instruction by aligning the Scott Foresman text with the state frameworks at each elementary grade level;
2. Examine best teaching practices through videos, classroom visits, and sample lessons;
3. Focus instruction on specific areas of weaknesses indicated by MCAS results.

For two and one-half years the vertical team activities were the major portion of the professional development that the district offered its teachers. Sometimes teams broke into smaller groups to get their work done. Reactions to the work and the results of the initiative, however, were mixed. Elementary teachers expressed the view that, although vertical teams provided opportunities for collaboration with colleagues, their professional development time would be better spent working with grade-level teachers on horizontal articulation. The middle/high school teachers, on the other hand, asked for more time to work on their self-study for the NEASC visit that would take place in the fall of 2013. As a result, the superintendent suspended vertical teams so that teachers could address specific areas of need.

Professional Development about Best Practices

In addition to the vertical team professional development, teachers participated in other professional development opportunities. During the few years before the team visit, the District and School Assistance Center (DSAC) and the Bay State Reading Initiative (BSRI) had worked with elementary teachers and coaches to focus on best practices in the teaching of mathematics and ELA. This further enhanced the collaborative nature of the professional development that they were receiving. Elementary teachers in their focus groups deemed this professional development critical to improving their instruction.

The district has provided its teachers with sufficient time for professional development opportunities and has appropriated adequate resources for these activities. The impact of the vertical teams' work and the adjustments made to address the current needs of various segments of the teacher ranks are positive features of the district's professional development program and have contributed to the collaborative culture that exists amongst the faculty.

Student Support

The district provides its students in grades 7–12 with access to learning opportunities in some innovative ways, but it limits access in other ways.

Changes in Student Population

The Quaboag Regional School District (QRSD) is experiencing changes in the composition of its student population. The proportion of students from low-income families in the district was 25 percent in 2007, compared to the state rate of 28.9 percent, and 39 percent in 2011, compared to the state rate of 34.2 percent. Also, students with disabilities constituted 18 percent of the population in 2007, compared to the state rate of 16.7 percent, and 21 percent in 2011, compared with the state rate of 17.0 percent. As a result of these changes, the district is providing support to an increasingly large proportion of high-needs students.

Learning Opportunities

Quaboag Middle/High School (QMHS) is offering its students some innovative pathways to increased rigor and improved student achievement and in other ways is limiting students' access to opportunities to move ahead. Through two grants, the middle/high school is creating pathways for its traditionally underrepresented students to achieve at higher levels. The school has a partnership with Mass Insight Education to participate in the Mass Math and Science Initiative (MMSI). This initiative is directed at underserved students and promotes increased participation and achievement in math, science, and English Advanced Placement (AP) classes. In 2009–2010, the high school offered 8 AP classes, and 63 AP exams were taken with 68.3 percent of those exams receiving scores of 3 or above. Hopefully, these results will continue even though according to interviewees the MMSI grant might be ending

Through a partnership with Quinsigamond Community College, the STEM Early College High School Initiative targets students from low-income families in the middle/high school and provides some students the opportunity to earn an associate's degree at the same time that they earn their high school diploma. The focus is on math, science, and engineering courses. The school is in its early stages with the initiative, which is funded by the STEM grant, and at the time of the review had offered numerous clubs to middle-school students; the initiative has been successful, according to interviewees. At the same time, with the initiative moving into the high-school level, the school is working to develop the first high-school course that will offer both high school and community college credit.

A further initiative, the PSAT program, promotes eventual, meaningful participation in the SATs. The school pays to have all students in grade 10 take the PSAT. Among the hoped-for outcomes of this initiative is that counselors will work with individuals and small groups of students to analyze their PSAT results and help them plan their high school work so they will eventually be successful on the SAT.

System of Course Prerequisites

While the programs described above offer guidance and pathways for the high school's underserved populations to achieve at higher levels, some practices in place at the high school limit students' access to challenging learning opportunities and to success both within and beyond high school. In some cases, these practices may be intended to raise standards and increase rigor at the school. However, they also serve to limit student access to courses that build on previous ones.

The Program of Studies offers a view of an elaborate system of prerequisites. The art, business, English, foreign language, math, and science departments have numerous course prerequisites. A number of courses require that a student have a 73 in a course to be able to take the next course in the sequence (Advanced Foundations in Art, Introduction to Furniture Making, French 2 and French 3, Algebra I part 2, and Geometry). This means that a student could pass French 1 and receive credit with a score between 60 and 72, but be unable to take French 2. To be able to take French 2, the student must repeat French 1 and finish with a grade of 73 or better, but the student receives no credit for taking French 1 a second time. This applies even in the 2-year Algebra I course now in place. A student who has successfully completed the year of Algebra I part 1 cannot take Algebra I part 2 unless he has passed part 1with a score of at least 70. In some sequenced courses, a grade of 83 or better is required to move on to the next course (Accounting 2, AP Computer Science, Theatre Arts II, French 4, and Honors Chemistry). In English, there are several prerequisites for an honors-level class: 80 in an honors class, 90 in a college-prep class, the recommendation of an English teacher, and a possible writing sample. Students who wish to take Geometry Honors must have an 80 or better in Algebra II, an 80 or better on the Algebra II final exam, and the permission of the department chair.

This complex system is not designed to encourage students to access learning opportunities; rather, it creates barriers to moving ahead in a sequenced course or into an honors-level course. Viewed from a certain angle, 73 or 83 become passing grades. High-school staff, when questioned about these prerequisites, assured the team that prerequisites can be waived on a parent's request or by the decision of a department chair. This may be taking place in some cases, but the question remains why such complex rules are in place. Students may not always have a parent or teacher to advocate for them.

Move from Letter Grades to Numerical Grades

Another practice instituted recently is the move from letter grades to numerical grades. The high school principal said that he had made the change so that low failing grades would not be masked as they are with letter grades. With letter grades, all failures are recorded as 59. Under the new system, if a student failed with a 45, that would be the number averaged. While this may

appear to increase rigor at the high school, there is a well-read body of research that points out just how difficult it is for a student to recover from a low-failing numerical grade and to eventually pass. This new system may well be limiting some students' opportunities to succeed. Finally, in 2009–2010, only 49 students took the SATs. This means that only one-third of approximately 150 juniors and seniors who might take the SATs did so. Four of these students were from low-income families and one was a student receiving special education services.

Conclusion

The SATs are a gateway for student access to opportunities beyond high school. A school paying for all its students to take the PSATs as well as increasing participation in AP classes and providing students from low-income families the opportunity to earn an associate's degree while in high school should have a much higher proportion of its students taking the SATs.

The high school is offering its underrepresented populations some innovative programs to move them forward to success. But at the same time, it has practices in place that limit students' access to important learning opportunities. These practices are not serving the high school's objective of raising standards and increasing student achievement.

The district offers limited academic support for its at-risk students, with more academic support being offered at the elementary than at the secondary level.

Limited Academic Support

Interviewees said that the district offers limited academic support for its students whether during the school day, before or after school, or during the summer. Student Support Services offers students with disabilities and at-risk students a number of programs similar to those frequently available in other school districts, such as:

- An inclusion program with 71.1 percent of students fully included, higher than the state at 57 percent;
- An integrated preschool program;
- Small alternative education programs at both the middle- and high-school levels;
- Learning centers at the secondary level that provide support for students with disabilities beyond their regular classroom instruction.

In addition, as reported in an earlier finding, the middle/high school has two grant programs, one (MMSI) whose objective is to increase both the number of AP courses and student enrollment in these courses, and another grant (STEM) that will eventually provide students the opportunity to earn associate's degrees at the same time that they are earning their high school diplomas. Also, as is appropriate given its high proportion (49 percent) of students from low-income families, the Warren Community Elementary School has a schoolwide Title I program that offers a mixture of pull-out and push-in support in ELA and math. This program is undergoing some changes to better reflect its schoolwide designation and to move it away from serving students through pull-out during mainstream content instruction.

Contrast between Academic Support at the Elementary and Secondary Levels

Examples from the 2011–2012 school year serve to illustrate the contrast between academic support at the elementary and at the secondary levels. Between 2007 and 2011, the achievement of students in grades 4, 7, and 8 fluctuated and did not show promising student growth. In 2007, the proficiency rate for students in grade 4 in ELA was 42 percent. In 2011, it was only 36 percent. In the intervening years, the proficiency rate both increased and decreased. During this time period, the median SGP of grade 4 students never reached 40.0, the bottom of the moderate range. In 2011, the median SGP was 30.0. These were clear indications that grade 4 students were neither consistently increasing their achievement level in ELA nor showing signs of growth. In mathematics, the proficiency rate of grade 4 students also fluctuated between 2007 and 2011. In 2007, the proficiency rate was 40 percent. It dropped to 28 percent in 2008 and then increased. In 2011, it was 36 percent. On a positive note, however, the median SGP in mathematics increased between 2008 and 2011 from 30.0 to 45.0, well within the moderate range.

Both elementary schools responded similarly to the grade 4 results, which were a matter of concern. The principals looked beyond the scores themselves to the quality of the classroom instruction. A key component of the response was training for the teachers involved, particularly in ELA. Coaches modeled, observed the classroom teacher, modeled again, and observed again. Particularly at West Brookfield Elementary, writing instruction and writing time were increased. At both schools, teachers and coaches provided tiered instruction to small groups or individual students with identified specific needs. In both elementary schools, both the classroom instruction and the needs of individual students received a great deal of attention.

2011 MCAS results in grades 7 and 8 also showed instances of declining achievement and low growth. In grade 7, in 2007, the proficiency rate in ELA was 64 percent, and in 2011 it was 58 percent. Although the median SGP in grade 7 ELA was higher in 2011 (35.0) than it was in 2008 (23.0), it did not reach the moderate range. In grade 7 mathematics, the proficiency rate fluctuated between 2007 and 2011. In both 2007 and 2011, the proficiency rate was 33 percent. Similarly, the median SGP was higher in 2011 (39.0) than it was in 2008 (22.0), but student growth was not in the moderate range.

There were similar concerns about grade 8. In ELA, the proficiency rate in 2007 was 73 percent. In 2008, there was a sharp decline, and the proficiency rate was 61 percent. In 2011, the proficiency rate was 65 percent. In 2008, the median SGP in grade 8 ELA was 25.0. In 2011, it was 28.0, and it never reached the moderate growth range. In grade 8 mathematics, the proficiency rate also fluctuated. In 2007, it was 40 percent, and in 2011, it was 44 percent. In the intervening years, it dropped to 30 percent in 2008 and increased to 51 percent in 2010. The median SGP increased from 33.0 in 2008 to 50.0 in 2011, which was well within the moderate range and on a par with the state. Interviewees offered no reasons for the substantial improvement in SGPs in grade 8 math.

The response to these results at the middle/high school differed markedly from that in the elementary schools. The English language arts (ELA) vertical team determined that the decrease

in middle-school ELA scores coincided with the elimination of the required grade 7 reading course, so the decision was made to increase ELA instructional time. This was to go into effect in the 2012–2013 school year. Also, because some grade 7 students who did not score well on the 2011 MCAS had been enrolled in Spanish, the decision was made that with the 2012–2013 school year grade 7 students would no longer be able to take Spanish. This change has the benefit of freeing up time for additional ELA instruction. In addition, interviewees said that at the time of the review, efforts were being made to put the lowest scoring grade 7 students in reading groups. Finally, to address concerns about achievement in grade 7 math, in school year 2012–2013 there was to be an additional block of math in place for lower-achieving students.

Additional instructional blocks were already in place for grade 8 math and ELA, so no time adjustments were to be made there. Interviewees did not report initiatives such as increased supervision and support for the teachers during the 2011–2012 school year. There appeared to be little sense of urgency.

Conclusion

At the elementary level, the coaches played a critical part in the effort to address grade 4 achievement. There was no similar infusion of instructional support at the middle-school level. Administrators explained that they left the instructional supervision of the middle school to the department chairs. Yet, several department chairs said that they visited middle-school classrooms approximately once every three weeks. Middle-school teachers verified this frequency. There was little evidence of additional support for the middle-school teachers whose students' achievement is declining and whose MCAS results evidence little growth over a period of several years. Also, any adjustments in instructional time planned for the middle school will not go into effect until school year 2012–2013, a full year after the results were received.

The district admittedly has limited resources to address low academic achievement. However, there is a marked contrast between the application of those limited resources at the elementary and secondary levels. Concerted efforts were made in grade 4 at the elementary schools, but little effort was made to address issues of achievement and growth in middle-school ELA and math. The elementary schools mobilized their limited resources, but administrators and department chairs at the middle/high school did not reallocate their time or bring additional resources to bear on the instructional needs in grades 7 and 8. The middle/high school did little beyond planning for increased instructional time the following year.

Financial and Asset Management

The district was to implement a new chart of accounts aligned with the state's, facilitating reporting and analysis. This provides an opportunity for the district to strengthen its current budget presentation.

The director of finance/operations prepares a schedule of budget preparation and a review plan that outlines all phases of readying financial data and extends from early October through town meetings in early May. Revenue and expense information is gathered with instructional expense

account information, starting with administrators. Non-instructional accounts are estimated from latest expense information as well as trended data. When the director receives updated Chapter 70 revenue estimates, he prepares budget estimates and presents them in a series of stakeholder meetings. According to town officials, the administration's communication is good and has improved over the years. The director noted that the budget document is rudimentary as it stands, and should have narrative in addition to data. The district currently presents budget information by school totals, along with a brief summary total. Performance data and other data relevant to expenditures and allocation of resources has not been included in the budget in the past. The director is collecting examples of excellent budget formats, and expressed the intention of "completely revamp[ing] it [the budget] so that it can provide information to everyone."

The director is updating the district's chart of accounts from the one provided by the district's BudgetSense accounting system, a standard package in the school finance world, to the ESE chart of accounts as applicable, and adding codes that allow sorting of data by more categories., The director estimates that it currently costs between $5,000 and $10,000 to crosswalk local finance data into the ESE codes needed for the annual End of Year Report to the state. The process is cumbersome and not easily understood by business office staff.

At the time of the review, the director expected to implement the ESE codes by the end of December 2012, and would prepare the fiscal year 2014 budget using the new chart of accounts. The issue has been a concern for a few years; when the director has implemented the new chart of accounts with more coding categories, he will also be able to make more use of the integrated system report generator, allowing him to sort budget data and reports to support more analysis and to compare the district to other districts and the state. Although the budget has not previously presented comparison data, this will now be possible.

The district does not have an established work-order system or central maintenance department; informal mechanisms are used to coordinate work, and local vendors do much of the necessary work.

Quaboag regionalized as a PK–12 unified district in 1988. Its approximately 300,000 square feet of space appear to be reasonably maintained. Routine repairs are communicated orally by custodians and others. At the end of the school year, custodians do walkthroughs and list summer repairs.

The district maintains on-call relationships with several local electrical, plumbing, and computer vendors, and formally contracts out repairs beyond the capacity of custodians such as major heating, hood cleaning, fire suppression components, and security. The facilities manager, who recently resigned, was working on a maintenance plan with a calendar of scheduled maintenance for heating, lighting, and mechanical systems.

There is an active capital planning committee, which uses long-term building data developed by the director of finance/operations. The 20-year capital plan has a simple format, and is used annually to inform member towns of capital needs beyond the scope of operating repairs and replacement. In addition, the towns have committees; Warren's Capital Planning Committee receives information from the district about long-term repair/replacement at Warren Elementary,

as does West Brookfield's Advisory Committee, about West Brookfield Elementary. Town officials did say that several school repair/replacement projects done by the town never appear in the budget; because regional districts do not report spending by member municipalities to support education, these do not appear in the End of Year Report totals.

While the district's custodial and maintenance functions are effective, if informally organized, information is uncoordinated. Routine repairs within the schools are being communicated without proper documentation, which may preclude a quick turnaround and in some cases may occasion safety issues. Also, if HVAC, plumbing, and electrical vendors are busy with other work, the district may have difficulty handling emergency repairs.

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 Quaboag Regional School District should establish structures to provide coordination and oversight for the instructional functions of the district.

The district does not have a central administrator with a clear line of authority to supervise curriculum, assessment, and professional development. School administrators and the director of student support services share responsibility for these areas. However, principals should be focused upon improving teaching and learning in their respective schools. Beyond that they should be included in a K-12 structure that distributes leadership for instruction throughout the district and that is tightly coupled between and among schools to provide clear lines of authority and oversight.

The vertical teams, which were suspended in January 2012, had begun to serve some of the functions of coordination and oversight for the district's instructional functions. The structure of the teams engaged all teachers in professional development and curriculum development for two and a half years. The teams identified gaps and redundancies in curriculum and identified professional development needed to support instructional changes at the elementary schools.

As the District Improvement Plan (DIP) was developed by compiling the goals of the vertical teams, it does not include overarching goals to guide work across the district, and so does not provide sufficient direction and coordination for the district as a whole.

With central coordination and oversight, the district will have the assurance that students receive instruction in an articulated manner throughout the system. Centrally coordinated instructional functions facilitate the improvement of student achievement. The district should give a central administrator responsibility and authority over curriculum, assessment, and professional development, revise the DIP to include overarching goals for the district, and consider re-establishing the vertical teams or a similar structure.

Curriculum and Instruction

The district should charge a single district administrator with districtwide leadership of the development and implementation of curriculum in the core subjects.

Curriculum leadership in the district is distributed among the superintendent, the elementary principals, the middle/high school principal, the department heads in grades 7–12, mathematics and ELA instructional coaches at the elementary level and, until January 2012, the vertical team

leaders. The role of instructional coaches in curriculum leadership was to be limited in the 2012–2013 year as the district was moving from two instructional coaches at each elementary school to one. In addition, the suspension of the vertical teams leaves vertical alignment a work in progress, as the mechanism for the alignment is no longer in operation.

At the time of the review the district had begun to develop the needed curriculum documentation. At the elementary level, where there has been a reliance on textbook programs, a fully developed mathematics curriculum aligned to the new common core was nearing completion and was to be in place in classrooms by September 2012. Plans were set to complete documentation of the ELA elementary curriculum and to align it to the new Massachusetts standards during the 2012-2013 school year. Updated curriculum documentation was not yet in place at all levels. In elementary social studies and science, teachers created their own lessons using dated textbooks as resources.

The middle/high school has aligned its curriculum. There is a uniform template, and curriculum maps are in place. Yet there is a range in the quality and completeness of these curriculum maps. The district planned to complete the alignment of the middle/high school curriculum to the new Massachusetts standards by end of the 2012–13 school year. However, at the time of the review there was no districtwide oversight in place to assure that the outcome of this curriculum work would be high quality, effective, and comprehensive curriculum maps.

By giving a single district administrator districtwide leadership of the development and implementation of curriculum in the core subjects, the district will ensure that its students are experiencing a consistent, comprehensive, and relevant curriculum that guides and enriches instruction at all levels and throughout the district's schools.

The district should address the inconsistencies in instructional practice between the elementary schools and the middle/high school. The district should focus at all levels on increasing opportunities for students to engage in higher-order thinking skills and increasing the use of classroom assessments to check for understanding.

Observations by the review team indicated wide variation in the quality of instructional practices between the elementary schools and the middle/high school. This was particularly evident in the area of instructional design and delivery, the use of instructional techniques, and student grouping. The review team found many effective instructional practices embedded at the elementary level. At the middle/high school, however, direct instruction was the dominant mode of instruction observed. The dominance of direct instruction, along with the infrequent use of small groups, limits students' opportunities to explore content through various modalities, becoming fully engaged active learners.

The observations also indicated that students at all levels, elementary and middle/high, had infrequent opportunities to engage in activities and practices that promote higher-order thinking skills. Also, districtwide, the review team found limited use of formative classroom assessments to check for students' understanding of the lessons.

The review team strongly recommends that the district as a whole establish an understanding of high-quality instruction. The three schools would then have the opportunity to examine and

improve their classroom instruction in the light of this understanding. These improvements can be accomplished through a combination of supervision and professional development. In particular, in making the improvements, the district should make sure that teachers systematically check for understanding and that they promote higher-order thinking skills. By developing robust instructional practices, the district will ensure that its students all have opportunities to achieve at higher levels.

Assessment

The district should extend the promising assessment policies and practices being implemented in the elementary schools to the middle/high school.

The ultimate district goal is to create a comprehensive and fully coordinated K-12 assessment system capable of collecting, analyzing, and using performance data to enhance curriculum and instruction and improve achievement for all students.

During the past few years Quaboag's two elementary schools have made significant improvements in data collection and assessment practices. As a result, at that level, student academic progress is being monitored more accurately and data-driven improvements to classroom instruction, academic programs, and support services are being implemented to a greater degree. This progress has been limited almost entirely to the two K–6 schools, however, with no significant corresponding efforts under way at the time of the review at the middle/ high school.

For an assessment system to be fully effective, it is essential that sound policies and practices for the continuous collection, systematic analysis, and appropriate application of student performance data be implemented uniformly in kindergarten through grade 12. The district is urged, therefore, to take the necessary steps to create a comprehensive, fully articulated assessment system with the capacity to serve the needs of students and faculty in every school, grade level, and content area across the district. District and school leaders can best determine the mechanism by which the district properly assumes the oversight and control needed to expand and effectively coordinate a fully integrated student assessment system. Consideration should be given to reestablishing the QRSD Data Team, a district committee that met briefly at the beginning of the 2010–2011 school year but has subsequently became inactive. Such a committee, composed of administrators and teacher representatives from each school, could be empowered to establish overarching assessment goals for the entire district and see to it that they are implemented uniformly and supported appropriately K-12. When it is fully operational, the district will have a comprehensive, carefully articulated, centrally coordinated assessment system that has the following essential characteristics:

(a) Each school in the district, including the middle/high school, uses a comprehensive and balanced system of common formative, summative, and benchmark assessments, both standardized and locally developed. This battery of common assessments must have the capacity to continuously and accurately monitor the academic progress of each student.

(b) School administrators and teachers regularly collect and systematically analyze student achievement data to make appropriate adjustments to classroom instruction and timely decisions about support services, interventions, and needed improvements to the curriculum.

(c) Formal opportunities exist for teachers and administrators in all schools, grades, and content areas to meet together regularly throughout the school year to compile and analyze student achievement data.

(d) Targeted and sustained professional development is provided to all staff in the collection, analysis, and application of student performance data, sufficient to embed these competencies at all schools, grade levels (K-12), and content areas.

(e) Staff is provided with convenient access to the results of all student assessments and other relevant academic and demographic data. All members of the school community, including school committee and parents, routinely receive appropriate and timely information generated through assessment programs and practices.

(f) District and school leaders use student assessment results and other pertinent information in all aspects of decision-making, including the development of annual district and school improvement plans, allocation of resources, and the evaluation of educational programs and services.

A truly comprehensive, centralized, and fully unified K-12 assessment system has the potential to produce a wide range of benefits in all the district's schools . The expanded and continuous collection and systematic analysis of student achievement data will enhance classroom instruction, inform curriculum revision, improve student support services, reinforce decision-making, and greatly strengthen progress monitoring capacity across the district. Ultimately, it will result in substantially increased learning opportunities and improved outcomes for students in every school within the Quaboag Regional School District.

Human Resources and Professional Development

As it implements a new educator evaluation system consistent with the new ESE system, the district should ensure that all educators have meaningful professional practice and student learning goals and consistent, timely feedback. It should also make sure that administrators have the time to supervise instruction effectively.

Supervision practices in the district varied greatly between the elementary schools and the middle/ high school. At the elementary schools principals conducted frequent walkthroughs. The principal and assistant principal at the middle/high school had not been able to follow through on their intention to be in classrooms often, and the department heads had limited time to visit classes because of their teaching and administrative responsibilities. Consistent administrative supervision—in part through regular classroom observations and appropriate feedback—focuses teachers' attention on the effectiveness of their instruction.

Frequent, unannounced observations and observations of teachers outside the classroom are both important aspects of an effective educator supervision and evaluation system, as stated in ESE's guide entitled *Strategies and Suggestions for Observations*, which is available at http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/. Specifically, the guide outlines the following:

- ***Frequent, unannounced observations.*** *Frequent observation of classroom practice – with feedback—is essential to improving practice, but only feasible if most observations are short, unannounced and followed by brief, focused feedback. There will be times when an evaluator is in a classroom or other work site and it becomes apparent that the visit needs to be extended, but a visit of approximately 10 minutes can yield a great deal of useful information. With short, unannounced visits, many more samples of practice can be collected, and many more powerful conversations about teaching practice can be had: when the typical observation of classroom practice is 10 minutes in duration and does not have to be preceded by a pre-observation conference or followed by a period-long post-observation conference, then evaluators can reasonably be expected to conduct 2 to 5 such observations on a typical day.*
    - *3 observations conducted each day on 150 of the 180 days in a school year translate to 450 observations each year, or 10 observations per year for each of 45 teachers. 7-10 brief observations followed by focused feedback should be a sufficient number to secure a representative picture of practice and promote the reflection and discussion needed to support improving practice.*
    - *Feedback can be provided during a conversation or in writing. Providing feedback through conversation promotes discussion of practice; providing feedback in writing creates an opportunity for the educator to more easily reflect on the feedback on an ongoing basis. Whenever possible, an evaluator should have a conversation with the educator and follow up with brief written feedback summarizing the conversation and/or offering targeted advice for improvement.*
    - *It should be noted that not all observations can or should be 5 to 15 minutes. There will be circumstances where longer observations are appropriate. Novice or struggling teachers may benefit from longer observations on occasion.*
- ***Observations outside of the classroom.*** *Observation of practice need not be limited to classroom observation. Conferences with individual teachers or teacher teams that focus on unit planning or ways the team is responding to interim assessment data can yield useful information and provide opportunities for feedback and growth. They can also be well-aligned with school and team goals. Most schools have goals that depend on effective collaboration among educators, so observation of educators in settings where they are developing their skills in collaboration can support school-wide goals. That said, care needs to be taken to ensure that observation does not interfere with the free exchange of ideas that*

is important in any healthy collegial environment. Therefore, collecting, reviewing and giving feedback on specific artifacts from department and team meetings can serve a purpose similar to observation of meetings. Similarly observing educators with parents and/or reviewing a team's analysis of representative samples of home-school communications can support collaborative work, reinforce school goals, and provide opportunities for useful feedback.

In addition, a review of 31 teacher personnel files indicated that the evaluation process in place in recent years has not always been effective in promoting professional growth. As a participant in the Race To The Top grant program, the district, is required to implement a new evaluation process consistent with the state's in 2012-2013.

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

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

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

Student Support

The middle/high school should continue to implement and promote the innovative programs and practices in place to raise the achievement of its underserved populations. At the same time, the middle/high school should eliminate practices that create barriers between its students and challenging learning opportunities.

The middle/high school has introduced two grant-funded programs that increase opportunities for its students to achieve at higher levels. The MMSI grant promotes an increase in the number of Advanced Placement (AP) classes offered at the school and helps create pathways for students to access and be successful in those AP classes. The STEM grant gradually introduces courses into the Program of Studies that enable underserved populations to graduate with both a high school diploma and an associate's degree.

At the same time, however, the middle/high school has some practices that make it more difficult for students to move up into challenging course levels. Six departments have prerequisites that prevent students from moving from one course to the next one in a sequence without a numerical average of 73 in the preceding course. In some instances, an 83 is required to pass into the second or higher level of the course. In other cases there are multiple requirements that must be met before a student can move on to the next course in a sequence. Staff said in interviews that waivers on the recommendation of a parent or teacher permit some students access, but students may not always have a parent or teacher to advocate for them.

The middle/high school has recently changed from letter to numerical grades, even though it is extremely difficult for a student to pass a course when a low numerical failing grade is recorded rather than the 59 that represents an F in a letter grade system.

Only approximately one third of juniors and seniors combined take the SATs, with few students with disabilities or students from low-income families in the mix. This means that a relatively small proportion of students are taking this important step to open up access to education beyond high school. In order to increase the proportion, students should be encouraged to take higher level courses as much as possible, and supported in taking them.

On the face of it, practices such as multiple course prerequisites and moving to numerical grades appear to increase the rigor of the high school experience. However, these practices limit students' access to further learning experiences. The district should reconsider them.

While resources in the district are limited, the district and its schools must maximize those resources to address without delay data that indicates low student achievement and low student growth.

District 2011 MCAS results for grades 4, 7, and 8 showed proficiency rates in both ELA and math that were with one exception lower than in 2010 and student growth in both subjects that was with one exception in the low range. In all three grades achievement had been problematic since 2007. See Student Achievement finding above.

The ways that the elementary schools and the middle/ high school addressed this important data contrast sharply. At both elementary schools, the principals oversaw the steps taken to address what was seen as a situation in need of serious attention. They assigned their coaches primary responsibility for addressing the classroom instruction in grade 4 math and ELA. The coaches modeled effective classroom instruction, and observed, and modeled again. Principals increased writing instruction in all grades, but with particular emphasis in grade 4. The principals, coaches, and teachers mined the available data for information about students' instructional needs and—particularly in ELA—offered tiered instruction to address those needs. Administrators, coaches, and teachers took responsibility for improving student achievement in grade 4 ELA and math.

Analysis of the 7th and 8th grade ELA MCAS results fell to the English language arts vertical team. The team concluded that students needed more ELA instruction, and recommended that grade 7 ELA instructional time be increased. This adjustment was to be implemented in the next year's schedule (2012–2013). Similarly, struggling 7th graders were to receive additional math

instruction in the 2012–2013 school year. Interviewees did not report initiatives such as increased supervision and support for the teachers during the 2011–2012 school year. There appeared to be little sense of urgency. Department chairs continued to have responsibility for middle-school instruction, and they reported that they continued to be in middle-school classrooms approximately once every three weeks.

The elementary schools refocused their resources to address the 4th grade needs immediately. The middle/high school instead only planned for increased instructional time the following year. Middle/high school administrators and department chairs did not reallocate their time or bring additional resources to bear on the clear instructional needs in grades 7 and 8. The low achievement and slow rate of growth in the middle school called for increased attention and the marshalling of resources. However, this did not take place in 2011–2012. The review team urges district and school staff to maximize resources to address low student achievement and low student growth as soon as data indicates it.

Financial and Asset Management

The implementation of a more detailed chart of accounts, aligned with statewide finance codes, is an important step toward a more comprehensive budget document and better analysis of resource allocation and effectiveness. The review team urges district administrators to incorporate more detailed finance information, more comparisons to other districts and/or the state, and more student performance and program information into the document as well.

The director of finance/operations was updating the district's chart of accounts to the ESE chart of accounts as applicable, and adding codes that allow sorting of data by more categories and at the time of the review expected to implement the new codes by the end of December, 2012, in time to prepare the fiscal year 2014 budget using the new chart of accounts. When the finance director has implemented the new chart of accounts with more coding categories, he will also be able to make more use of the integrated system report generator, allowing him to sort budget data and reports to support more analysis, and to compare the district to other districts and the state.

Performance data and other data relevant to expenditures and allocation of resources has not been included in the budget in the past. While this represents yet another effort, the budget document would benefit from this data as well.

One of the primary rationales for suggesting the use of comparative data is that it may provide more justification or rationale for expenditures in specific instructional areas based on student needs.

The district should follow up the recently developed maintenance calendar with the development of a simple work order system to provide more information for facility management and planning. This system should incorporate information about vendor work and projects managed by member towns.

With the use of a simple work order system, the district would have a running record of repair work and length of time taken to get the repair done. If the facilities manager coordinates information from the work order system and from the several capital planning committees into a single file that can be used to generate an annual report as well, district and town leaders will have a better understanding of facilities issues and their costs, and the ability to manage them as needed.

Appendix A: Review Team Members

The review of the Quaboag Regional School District was conducted from June 11–June 14, 2012 by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Dr. Magdalene Giffune, Leadership and Governance

Suzanne Kelly, Curriculum and Instruction

Dr. Frank Sambuceti, Assessment

William Wassell, Human Resources and Professional Development

Patricia Williams, Student Support, review team coordinator

Richard Scortino, 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 Quaboag Regional School District.

- The review team conducted interviews with the following Warren and West Brookfield financial personnel: Warren selectman, Warren treasurer, Warren town clerk, West Brookfield finance committee chair, West Brookfield treasurer, West Brookfield town clerk.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following members of the school committee: chair, four members.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the teachers' association: president, vice-president.
- The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the Quaboag Regional School District central office administration: superintendent, director of finance/operations, and director of student support services.
- The review team visited the following schools in the Quaboag Regional School District: Quaboag Middle/High School (grades 7–12), Warren Community Elementary School (pre-kindergarten through grade 6), and West Brookfield Elementary School (pre-kindergarten through grade 6).
- During school visits, the review team conducted interviews with school principals and teachers. The team interviewed 16 elementary teachers, 4 middle-school teachers, and 2 high-school teachers.
    - The review team conducted 46 classroom visits for different grade levels and subjects across the 3 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 selection of completed teacher evaluations.
- Newly developed pre-observation and observation forms.

Site Visit Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the district review of the Quaboag Regional School District, conducted from June 11–June 14, 2012.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
June 11 Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff and principals; review of documents; test of payroll and purchasing; interview with teachers' association.	June 12 Interviews with district staff and principals; school visits (Quaboag Regional Middle/ High School); classroom observations; review of personnel files; teacher focus groups; focus group with parents; interview with teachers' association.	June 13 Interviews with town personnel from both districts; school visits (West Brookfield Elementary, Warren Elementary); interviews with school leaders; classroom observations; school committee interviews.	June 14 School visits (Warren Elementary, West Brookfield Elementary, Quaboag regional Middle/High School); classroom observations; teacher team meetings; team meeting; emerging themes meeting with district leaders and principals.

Appendix C: Student Performance 2009–2011

Table C1: Quaboag Regional School District and State Proficiency Rates and Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)[5] 2009–2011 English Language Arts

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	**Percent Proficient**	***Median SGP***	**Percent Proficient**	***Median SGP***	**Percent Proficient**	***Median SGP***
All Grades—District	**58**	***39.5***	**61**	***45***	**63**	***45***
All Grades—State	67	*50*	68	*50*	69	*50*
Grade 3—District	**52**	***NA****	**61**	***NA****	**65**	***NA****
Grade 3—State	57	*NA**	63	*NA**	61	*NA**
Grade 4—District	**48**	***34***	**41**	***39***	**36**	***30***
Grade 4—State	53	*50*	54	*50*	53	*51*
Grade 5—District	**46**	***44***	**56**	***44.5***	**63**	***53.5***
Grade 5—State	63	*50*	63	*50*	67	*50*
Grade 6—District	**64**	***59***	**62**	***52***	**80**	***70***
Grade 6—State	66	*50*	69	*50*	68	*50*
Grade 7—District	**62**	***28***	**59**	***38***	**58**	***35***
Grade 7—State	70	*50*	72	*50*	73	*50*
Grade 8—District	**53**	***21***	**70**	***38***	**65**	***28***
Grade 8—State	78	*50*	78	*50*	79	*50*
Grade 10—District	**86**	***56***	**84**	***58***	**78**	***55.5***
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

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

Table C2: Quaboag 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***	**49**	***50***	**53**	***57***
All Grades—State	55	*50*	59	*50*	58	*50*
Grade 3—District	**46**	***NA****	**55**	***NA****	**64**	***NA****
Grade 3—State	60	*NA**	65	*NA**	66	*NA**
Grade 4—District	**30**	***32***	**31**	***41.5***	**36**	***45***
Grade 4—State	48	*50*	48	*49*	47	*50*
Grade 5—District	**39**	***39***	**38**	***36.5***	**55**	***63***
Grade 5—State	54	*50*	55	*50*	59	*50*
Grade 6—District	**46**	***51***	**54**	***64***	**63**	***82.5***
Grade 6—State	57	*50*	59	*50*	58	*50*
Grade 7—District	**40**	***28***	**37**	***41***	**33**	***39***
Grade 7—State	49	*50*	53	*50*	51	*50*
Grade 8—District	**39**	***41.5***	**51**	***41.5***	**44**	***50***
Grade 8—State	48	*50*	51	*51*	52	*50*
Grade 10—District	**80**	***67***	**88**	***70.5***	**78**	***54***
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: Quaboag Regional School District and State
Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)
for Selected Subgroups
2011 English Language Arts

	Quaboag Regional School District			State	
	Number of Students Included	**CPI**	***Median SGP***	**CPI**	***Median SGP***
All Students	***764***	**84.9**	***45***	**87.2**	***50***
African-American/Black	*5*	---	----	77.4	*47*
Asian	*2*	---	---	90.2	*59*
Hispanic/Latino	*28*	76.8	*44*	74.2	*46*
White	*709*	85.5	*45*	90.9	*51*
ELL	*1*	---	---	59.4	*48*
FELL	---	---	---	81.7	*54*
Special Education	*166*	66.3	*40.5*	68.3	*42*
Low-Income	*293*	79.9	*40*	77.1	*46*

Note: 1. Numbers of students included are the numbers of district students included for the purpose of calculating the CPI. Numbers included for the calculation of the median SGP are different.
2. Median SGP is calculated for grades 4-8 and 10 and is only reported for groups of 20 or more students. CPI is only reported for groups of 10 or more students.
3. "ELL" students are English language learners.
4. "FELL" students are former ELLs.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

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

	Quaboag Regional School District			State	
	Number of Students Included	**CPI**	***Median SGP***	**CPI**	***Median SGP***
All Students	***765***	**76.7**	***57***	**79.9**	***50***
African-American/Black	*5*	---	---	65	*47*
Asian	*2*	---	---	89.5	*64*
Hispanic/Latino	*28*	58.9	*63.5*	64.4	*46*
White	*710*	77.7	*57.5*	84.3	*50*
ELL	*1*	---	---	56.3	*52*
FELL	---	---	---	75.1	*53*
Special Education	*166*	54.1	*53*	57.7	*43*
Low-Income	*294*	68.7	*60*	67.3	*46*

Note: 1. Numbers of students included are the numbers of district students included for the purpose of calculating the CPI. Numbers included for the calculation of the median SGP are different.
2. Median SGP is calculated for grades 4-8 and 10 and is only reported for groups of 20 or more students. CPI is only reported for groups of 10 or more students.
3. "ELL" students are English language learners.
4. "FELL" students are former ELLs.

Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Appendix D: Finding and Recommendation Statements

Finding Statements:

Student Achievement

1. Overall, Quaboag's proficiency rates in ELA and mathematics have increased since 2009, and the gap between the district and the state has narrowed. However, over the four or five test administrations ending in 2011, proficiency rates and median student growth percentiles in ELA and math in grades 4, 7, and 8 gave cause for concern.

Leadership and Governance

2. The Quaboag Regional School District does not have the administrative structures to provide sufficient direction and oversight to the work of the district in raising student achievement.

Curriculum and Instruction

3. Curriculum development is taking place in the district. However, without a single district administrator charged with overall curriculum leadership there is no mechanism to ensure that curriculum documents are comprehensive and of consistent high quality for all core subjects at every level.
4. Instructional practices are inconsistent across the district, with more effective practices in place at the elementary schools. At all levels, there are infrequent opportunities for students to engage in activities and practices that promote higher-order thinking skills and limited use of formative classroom assessments to check for students' understanding of lessons.

Assessment

5. The district's two elementary schools are making steady progress in developing a comprehensive student assessment system with the capacity to collect relevant performance data, to make it accessible to staff, and to use it to monitor academic progress, modify instruction, and make timely determinations of individual student needs. At the secondary level, however, there did not appear to be comparable efforts or initiatives.

Human Resources and Professional Development

6. The district has a comprehensive mentoring program that helps new staff members become acclimated to the district's policies and procedures.

7. Teacher evaluation practices under the system in effect at the time of the review were largely ineffective. Also, time for instructional supervision was insufficient at the middle/high school.
8. The district's recent professional development program has resulted in a more collaborative culture in the district.

Student Support

9. The district provides its students in grades 7–12 with access to learning opportunities in some innovative ways, but it limits access in other ways.
10. The district offers limited academic support for its at-risk students, with more academic support being offered at the elementary than at the secondary level.

Financial and Asset Management

11. The district was to implement a new chart of accounts aligned with the state's, facilitating reporting and analysis. This provides an opportunity for the district to strengthen its current budget presentation.
12. The district does not have an established work-order system or central maintenance department; informal mechanisms are used to coordinate work, and local vendors do much of the necessary work.

Recommendation Statements:

Leadership and Governance

1. The Quaboag Regional School District should establish structures to provide coordination and oversight for the instructional functions of the district.

Curriculum and Instruction

2. The district should charge a single district administrator with districtwide leadership of the development and implementation of curriculum in the core subjects.
3. The district should address the inconsistencies in instructional practice between the elementary schools and the middle/high school. The district should focus at all levels on increasing opportunities for students to engage in higher-order thinking skills and increasing the use of classroom assessments to check for understanding.

Assessment

4. The district should extend the promising assessment policies and practices being implemented in the elementary schools to the middle/high school.

Human Resources and Professional Development

5. As it implements a new educator evaluation system consistent with the new ESE system, the district should ensure that all educators have meaningful professional practice and student learning goals and consistent, timely feedback. It should also make sure that administrators have the time to supervise instruction effectively.

Student Support

6. The middle/high school should continue to implement and promote the innovative programs and practices in place to raise the achievement of its underserved populations. At the same time, the middle/high school should eliminate practices that create barriers between its students and challenging learning opportunities.
7. While resources in the district are limited, the district and its schools must maximize those resources to address without delay data that indicates low student achievement and low student growth.

Financial and Asset Management

8. The implementation of a more detailed chart of accounts, aligned with statewide finance codes, is an important step toward a more comprehensive budget document and better analysis of resource allocation and effectiveness. The review team urges district administrators to incorporate more detailed finance information, more comparisons to other districts and/or the state, and more student performance and program information into the document as well.

9. The district should follow up the recently developed maintenance calendar with the development of a simple work order system to provide more information for facility management and planning. This system should incorporate information about vendor work and projects managed by member towns.