



Massachusetts Department of
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY
EDUCATION

Greater Lawrence Regional Vocational Technical School District Review

Review conducted December 12–15, 2011

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
Date of report completion: October 2012

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Overview of District Reviews

Purpose

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

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

Methodology

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

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

Greater Lawrence Regional Vocational Technical School District

The site visit to the Greater Lawrence Regional Vocational Technical School District (Greater Lawrence) was conducted from December 12-15, 2011. The visit included 29 hours of interviews and focus groups with over 60 stakeholders, ranging from school committee members to district administrators and school staff to teachers' federation representatives. The review team conducted focus groups with 37 Greater Lawrence teachers. Further information about the review and the site visit schedule can be found in Appendix B; information about the members of the review team can be found in Appendix A. Appendix C contains information about student performance from 2009-2011. Appendix D contains finding and recommendation statements.

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

District Profile²

Located in Andover, the Greater Lawrence Regional Vocational Technical School District serves four communities in northeastern Massachusetts: Andover, Lawrence, Methuen, and North Andover. Established in 1963, the district consists of one school, Greater Lawrence Regional Vocational Technical High School, embracing grades 9 through 12. The school facility was nearly doubled in size through a building project completed in 2005. Greater Lawrence offers 15 career/technical programs including health assisting, biotechnology, culinary arts, automotive-related, construction-related, electronics, and computer-related. Seventy-nine percent of the students enrolled at Greater Lawrence reside in the city of Lawrence and 18 percent reside in Methuen. Three percent of enrolled students come from Andover, North Andover, and several other communities under the interdistrict school choice program. The district's 2011 low-income enrollment of 76 percent was highest among the state's regional vocational schools.

The Greater Lawrence superintendent-director was in his second year of service at the time of the review. The leadership team consists of the superintendent-director; principal; grant-writer/director of research and development; director of human resources; director of curriculum, instruction, and professional development; director of career and technical programs; coordinator of special education; assessment supervisor; supervisor of guidance and admissions; business manager; and five academy supervisors: three for the career/technical program and two for the academic program. Although their salaries were funded in the budget, the two academy supervisors for the academic program had not yet been hired at the time of this review. The

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

Leadership and Governance section of this report describes a recent reorganization of the leadership structure that increased the authority of the principal. The district has a seven-member school committee.

Table 1 below shows the 2011 Greater Lawrence enrollment by race/ethnicity and selected populations. According to Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) data, the total enrollment declined by 20 percent from 1,462 in 2007 to 1,170 in 2009. Administrators and school committee members told the review team that the enrollment decrease was designed to reduce class size, accommodate students’ diverse learning needs, and improve academic results. The district has since increased enrollment by 4 percent from 1,170 in 2009 to 1,222 in 2011. During the three-year period of declining admissions the race/ethnicity and selected population proportions of the total population were relatively constant.

Table 1: Greater Lawrence Regional Vocational Technical 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 | 1,222 | 100.0 | African-American/Black | 9 | 0.7 |
| First Language not English | 357 | 29.2 | Asian | 3 | 0.2 |
| Limited English Proficient* | 34 | 2.8 | Hispanic/Latino | 950 | 77.7 |
| Special Education** | 263 | 21.5 | White | 248 | 20.3 |
| Low-income | 926 | 75.8 | Native American | 0 | 0.0 |
| Free Lunch | 809 | 66.2 | Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander | 0 | 0.0 |
| Reduced-price lunch | 117 | 9.6 | Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic | 12 | 1.0 |
| *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 | | | | | |

As stated previously, 79 percent of Greater Lawrence students reside in the city of Lawrence. Based on 2011 data, compared to the Lawrence Public Schools, Greater Lawrence had lower

percentages of students whose first language was not English (29.2 percent versus 77.3 percent), limited English proficient students (2.8 percent versus 23.8 percent), and students from low-income families (75.8 percent versus 87.1 percent). The percentages of students with disabilities enrolled in Greater Lawrence and the Lawrence Public Schools were nearly equivalent (21.5 percent and 20.1 percent, respectively). Greater Lawrence had a lower percentage of Hispanic/Latino students (77.7 percent versus 90.1 percent) and a higher percentage of white students than the Lawrence Public Schools (20.3 percent versus 6.0 percent).

Table 2 on the next page shows Greater Lawrence's expenditures, Chapter 70 state aid, and net school spending during the three-year interval from fiscal year 2010 through fiscal year 2012. The great recession imposed fiscal challenges on Greater Lawrence and other districts throughout the state. The district's actual net school spending was \$450,601 below the required amount in fiscal year 2010, and the shortfall became a carryover requiring additional local contribution and required net school spending in fiscal year 2011. However, the district again did not meet required net school spending with a shortfall and carryover to fiscal year 2012 of \$613,156. The carryovers resulted in the required local contribution increasing by 32 percent from fiscal 2010 to fiscal year 2011 and an estimated further increase of 9 percent in fiscal year 2012.

**Table 2: Greater Lawrence Regional Vocational Technical 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 | 29,577,678 | 28,678,030 | 28,781,085 | 28,013,446 | 28,745,636 |
| From revolving funds and grants | --- | 2,824,683 | --- | 4,482,757 | --- |
| Total expenditures | --- | 31,502,713 | --- | 32,496,203 | --- |
| Chapter 70 aid to education program | | | | | |
| Chapter 70 state aid* | --- | 20,988,571 | --- | 19,762,420 | 19,868,513 |
| Required local contribution | --- | 2,952,089 | --- | 3,898,746 | 4,250,574 |
| Required net school spending** | --- | 23,940,660 | --- | 23,661,166 | 24,119,087 |
| Actual net school spending | --- | 23,490,059 | --- | 23,048,010 | 23,607,141 |
| Over/under required (\$) | --- | (450,601) | --- | (613,156) | (511,946) |
| Over/under required (%) | --- | (1.88) | --- | (2.64) | (2.1) |
| <p>*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.</p> | | | | | |

Findings

Student Achievement

Greater Lawrence has made substantial progress recently in ELA achievement as well as other student indicators, but in mathematics there was no improvement from 2007-2011 in the 29-point proficiency gap between Greater Lawrence students and their peers statewide.

The district's performance has improved in many areas since 2007, the last time the district received an accountability review.³ Administrators, staff, and parents described a cultural change from a culture of mediocrity to a culture of improvement. Greater Lawrence's progress is evident on a number of metrics. For the first time in 2011, Greater Lawrence achieved Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in English language arts (ELA), both in the aggregate and for all subgroups, and in mathematics in the aggregate (though not for all subgroups). The district achieved improvement ratings of "above target" in ELA and "on target" in mathematics.

Greater Lawrence student performance in ELA has improved substantially since 2007. The district's percentage of students proficient in ELA increased from 33 percent in 2007 (as compared to the state grade 10 proficiency rate of 71 percent) to 65 percent in 2011 (as compared to the grade 10 state proficiency rate of 84 percent).⁴ Thus from 2007 to 2011 the proficiency gap in ELA between Greater Lawrence students and state students decreased from 38 percentage points to 19 percentage points.

As stated in the District Profile section of this report, Greater Lawrence's low-income enrollment of 76 percent (in 2010-2011) is highest among the vocational technical schools in Massachusetts. In 2011, the proficiency rate for Greater Lawrence's low-income students in ELA, 65 percent, was close to the proficiency rate for the state's grade 10 low-income students of 69 percent (as compared to proficiency rates of 29 percent and 48 percent for district and state low-income grade 10 students in 2007). Thus the proficiency gap in ELA between Greater Lawrence low-income students and state low-income students in grade 10 had decreased from 19 percentage points to 4 percentage points.

Greater Lawrence's median student growth percentile (SGP)⁵ in ELA for all students moved from 39.0 in 2009⁶ to 38.0 in 2010, in the low range, to 51.0 in 2011, in the moderate range (see

³ The report of the review, conducted by the former Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, is available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/review/district/default.html?district=G>.

⁴ The district's proficiency rate was 49 percent in 2008, 58 percent in 2009, and 48 percent in 2010.

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/>.

⁶ The first year for which median SGP figures were calculated for grade 10 was 2009.

Table C1 in Appendix C). And the district's median SGP in ELA for low-income students was 51.5 in 2011 as compared with the state's median SGP for grade 10 low-income students of 46.0.

The percentage of Greater Lawrence's students with disabilities who were proficient in ELA was 33 percent in 2011, compared to 11 percent in 2007⁷ (though 49 percent of state grade 10 students with disabilities were proficient in ELA in 2011 as compared with 30 percent in 2007). Thus the proficiency gap between Greater Lawrence's students with disabilities and their state peers in grade 10 was slightly smaller in 2011 than in 2007 (16 points as compared with 19 points). The median student growth percentile in ELA for Greater Lawrence's students with disabilities went from a very low 22.0 in 2009 to an even lower 19.0 in 2010 to 42.0, in the moderate range, in 2011.

In 2011, an equal proportion of Greater Lawrence's students and the state's grade 10 students scored 2 or above on ELA open-response items—86 percent. Of Greater Lawrence's low-income students, 88 percent scored 2 or above on ELA open-response items, a higher percentage than the 75 percent of the state's grade 10 low-income students who achieved a score of 2 or above on these items.

Although Greater Lawrence's student performance in mathematics has improved since 2007, that improvement has not reduced the gaps between Greater Lawrence and the state. From 2007 to 2011, Greater Lawrence's proficiency rate in mathematics for all students increased from 40 percent to 48 percent (an increase equal to the state's increase from 69 percent to 77 percent) and for low-income students from 36 percent to 45 percent (a slightly smaller increase than the state's increase from 47 percent to 58 percent). Thus the proficiency gap in math between Greater Lawrence students and state students of 29 percentage points remained unchanged over those years, and the math proficiency gap between district low-income students and state low-income students in grade 10 increased slightly, from 11 points to 13 points.

Greater Lawrence's proficiency rate in mathematics for students with disabilities was slightly lower in 2011 (21 percent) than in 2007 (24 percent), while the state proficiency rate in math for students with disabilities increased from 31 percent to 39 percent over those years. Thus the proficiency gap in math between Greater Lawrence student with disabilities and state grade 10 students with disabilities was 18 points in 2011 as compared to 7 points in 2007.

Greater Lawrence has steadily improved attendance, dropout, promotion, and graduation rates (see Table 3 below); the Student Support section of this report discusses these improvements in detail. Thus the district has in recent years improved the proportions of students attending and staying in school, being promoted, and graduating, while also making substantial progress in narrowing the proficiency gap in ELA, though not in mathematics. The following sections of this report describe the conditions of Greater Lawrence's successes and its challenges.

⁷ The percentage rose to 18 percent in 2008 and 24 percent in 2009, falling back to 11 percent in 2010.

Leadership and Governance

The superintendent-director and principal work in a redesigned organizational structure that better aligns their roles, responsibilities, and areas of authority; they have a common understanding of these, share a common approach to school improvement, and have worked to develop positive relationships with staff and other administrators.

In interviews, the review team was told that in 2011-2012, the superintendent-director revised the organizational structure by making several administrators who had formerly reported directly to the superintendent-director responsible to the principal as well, thus increasing the principal's authority and ability to direct instruction and curriculum in the school. Under this revision, all coordinators, directors, and assistant principals report to the principal. The three career/technical area academy supervisors, referred to in the district as middle management, report to the director of career and technical programs, who reports to the principal. Two budgeted but not yet hired academic academy supervisors will report to the director of curriculum and instruction and professional development, who reports to the principal.

In interviews with administrators the review team was told that the Greater Lawrence superintendent-director and principal have a common understanding of their newly delineated roles and responsibilities. In an interview, the superintendent-director told the review team that the principal has primary responsibility for such functions as day-to-day operations, instruction, curriculum, and hiring, while the superintendent-director works with the district committee, the public, ESE, elected officials, and representatives of the member communities, and determines the salaries of newly hired staff. In a separate interview, the principal concurred that she is the educational leader responsible for supervising and evaluating the staff and improving the quality of instruction. The principal told the review team that she supervised teachers through the walkthrough process, reviewed all teacher evaluations, and made comments to evaluators on the thoroughness of their evaluations. The principal confirmed that the superintendent-director was primarily responsible for working with the district committee, community representatives, and elected officials and told the review team that while there is some crossover in their roles, the principal and the superintendent-director work together well and are "in sync on the educational goals."

It was apparent from interviews that the principal and superintendent-director are also in alignment in their approach to school improvement. In an interview with the review team, the superintendent-director said that the district would focus on improving culture, rigor, and data collection and use in 2011-2012. In a separate interview, the principal agreed that the district would focus on the systematic use of data to inform instruction, strategic planning, and aligning goals. Both the superintendent-director and the principal said that active staff participation was important to them. Their statements were borne out by the following example. According to interviewees, when the school council suggested administering the comprehensive ESE conditions for school effectiveness self-assessment to staff in the spring of 2011, the superintendent-director and principal gave their full support and facilitated the staff's implementation of the survey. They provided an opportunity for council members to define the

terms used in the survey in small group sessions with the staff to ensure common understanding and an informed response. They also provided time for the staff to come together to analyze the results, and subsequently worked with them to develop a revised School Improvement Plan (SIP) based on the survey findings. The SIP has become a very powerful tool in the district that is determining the direction of professional development for both staff and administrators. The review team confirmed that professional development was aligned with the goals of the district strategic plan and the SIP.

Representatives of the administrators' association, which represents most administrators below the level of principal, fifteen in total, stated that they had open, supportive relationships with higher administration, that school effectiveness results were being addressed collaboratively, and that the superintendent-director and principal had worked to develop positive relationships with staff and other administrators. Teachers' federation representatives spoke positively about the conditions for school effectiveness self-assessment and the ownership that teachers had in its implementation. They also stated that the superintendent-director was approachable and open-minded—that he was what the school needed. Interviewees stated that they viewed the superintendent-director as one of their own since he had graduated from Greater Lawrence as class valedictorian and gone on to teach at the school before assuming administrative positions in other vocational technical high schools in the state. They added that the superintendent-director and the principal are “on the same page” and that the principal is also highly accessible. They said that the principal regularly holds a forum where staff can raise issues of importance. The principal tries to find answers to questions posed by the staff.

In an interview with the review team, parent council members supported the direction taken by the superintendent-director and the principal. They said that all parties bought into the SIP and that they all had a voice in its development. Parent council members also stated that the SIP was bold. Furthermore, they commended the principal for listening, valuing their opinions, and being willing “to take the hits.” They said that they would like to clone the superintendent-director and the principal because they welcomed input and were not dictatorial.

The messages coming from the high-level administrators at Greater Lawrence are clear and focused and the organizational structure gives responsibility and authority to the appropriate administrators. All evidence points to the superintendent-director and the principal having a shared approach to leadership and a common view of the mission and direction of the school. Staff, parents, and administrators recognize and appreciate their collaboration. This clear and consistent approach will help them further the school's improvement goals.

The roles of some middle and lower-level administrators are not well-defined, and some administrators in these positions have not yet taken full responsibility in their roles. Differences in administrative style and decision-making and the absence of clear, consistent communication with staff have been sources of tension in the school.

In interviews with both teachers and administrators the review team found widespread misunderstanding about the roles of some middle and lower-level administrators. Teachers'

federation representatives said that there was much confusion about administrative roles below the level of principal. They questioned the chain of command and who did what. An examination of job descriptions by the review team showed that although descriptions exist for every position, several were outdated and inaccurate about the responsibilities and others were not aligned with the new organizational structure.

The administrative restructuring effective at the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year redefined roles and authority as described in the last finding. The review team found, however, that these changes were often not fully understood or implemented. For example, decisions that should have been made at a lower level were sometimes deflected upward. In interviews, teachers said that they believed that some administrators had to go to higher-level administrators for approval before making decisions. The superintendent-director indicated that some supervisors had difficulty taking the lead on initiatives because of the strong relationships they had with teachers. Because of these relationships, they found it difficult to have the hard conversations with teachers and make the tough decisions that are necessary to improve programs and instruction. To work on this, as part of the adaptive leadership program (see below) the superintendent-director and the principal asked some academy supervisors to meet with the departments where curriculum work had not been completed in a timely manner. They were to meet with these departments to discuss the issues and report back. The superintendent-director stated that while this process worked well initially, it eventually broke down. He said that work on this issue would continue.

But administrators said that there were differences in administrative style among administrators, especially in the emphasis on tasks versus relationships. The superintendent-director told the review team that some middle and lower-level administrators were competent and had good vision, but were not effective at building relationships because their style tended to be top-down rather than collaborative, leading staff to think their opinions are not valued. The superintendent-director said that he valued involvement of all the staff and wanted administrators to put a strong emphasis on soliciting ideas; he wanted buy-in by everyone. Similarly, the principal told the review team that teachers were intimidated when they were given stacks of data by administrators without summary or explanation. She said that she was trying to get administrators to participate in facilitating the use of data by teachers.

In 2011-2012, the superintendent-director provided professional development for administrators in adaptive leadership to improve decision-making and the quality of conversations with the staff. The principal told the review team that adaptive leadership training had been helpful for all administrators. She indicated that through these sessions administrators with different styles were finding some common ground and that the sessions were allowing them to recognize and discuss the differences in their administrative styles. The principal said that she hoped that the adaptive leadership program would help to make the administrative team more cohesive. The principal told the review team that administrators were beginning to act as a team, but it had been a difficult process since some were being asked to take on new and unfamiliar responsibilities.

Teachers' federation representatives told the review team that the absence of clear and consistent administrative communication with teachers causes tension, for instance tension between programs. Some expressed concern that administrators did not always have a common understanding of district practices. An example of this was the confusion about walkthroughs.

Administrators and teachers expressed different views about what feedback was provided to teachers after walkthroughs. Teachers' federation leaders stated that no feedback was given after walkthroughs, even though the federation president had requested automatic feedback for each teacher after every walkthrough. They said that trust was affected by lack of communication about walkthroughs. Administrators' association representatives told the review team that they thought that every administrator gave feedback to teachers after walkthroughs via a note, email, or in person.

The principal stated that walkthroughs were in flux because they were less formal than in the past. The principal stated that she had given feedback through emails when she first conducted walkthroughs, but teachers' federation leaders had requested that she provide the feedback in person instead. The review team found that there was no common understanding in the district about what a walkthrough is or what its purpose is. Individuals rather than a team conducted most walkthroughs and there was no written walkthrough protocol.

Because the principal and superintendent-director identified walkthroughs as an issue, they decided to use them as an adaptive leadership challenge. Half the leadership team concentrated their adaptive leadership work on walkthroughs. These administrators conducted three walkthroughs each week and gave written feedback to every teacher within three days. Other leaders, however, continued to conduct walkthroughs without providing feedback, perpetuating the inconsistency.

The superintendent-director said that he intended to give all administrators more curriculum responsibility. He told the review team that it is important for administrators to understand that curriculum and program development are important aspects of leadership. He has provided administrators with professional development on using data and has worked with staff on curriculum development. The superintendent-director stated that he will expect academy supervisors to lead the curriculum development initiative. He concluded by saying that it was important for middle managers to work directly with staff and provide direction on pedagogy, management skills, curriculum, and lesson design.

The revision of the organizational structure has reinforced the central role of principal as the educational leader. In interviews with the review team, administrators identified the director of career and technical programs and the director of curriculum instruction and professional development as the curriculum leaders in the school. Under the new organizational structure, the administrators in these positions report to the principal. The principal has the authority to set expectations with them, supervise their work, and ensure that they act in concert with the school's mission.

It is important for administrators at all levels to understand their roles: what they need to do to move the school forward. With fragmentation in the administrative team, teachers do not have a clear vision of what they need to do to move students toward higher levels of achievement and how they need to do it. Administrators must be empowered and have the skills and knowledge to do their jobs well. Without continued support and clear expectations for all administrators continued progress by the school is jeopardized.

Curriculum and Instruction

Greater Lawrence has developed curriculum maps based on the state curriculum frameworks in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science at all grade levels. Most maps do not have instructional strategies and pacing guides. Although there is no curriculum review cycle, curriculum is being revised and developed during recently instituted common planning time.

The review team's examination of Greater Lawrence's documented curriculum found that it consists of curriculum maps for all seven academic subject areas and for almost all of the 15 career/technical subject areas. Most curriculum maps include the following elements: enduring understandings, essential or overarching questions, framework standards, performance standards, and assessments. However, most maps do not provide guidance for teachers on instructional strategies and techniques, and some career/technical area maps, such as those for plumbing and metal fabrication, do not include resources. Some maps, including the one for cosmetology, consist of only one standard and one question.

Some upper-level electronics courses are not in a curriculum map format. The curriculum maps are not fully standardized and the terms are inconsistent. For example, objectives are referred to variously as learner outcomes, performance standards, framework standards, and content standards.

There is no established curriculum review cycle. In interviews, teachers and administrators told the review team that during the summer of 2011 forty teachers took part in a thirty-hour workshop for the development and revision of many parts of the curriculum using a writing template. This workshop was held in response to the findings of the essential school conditions survey mentioned in the first Leadership and Governance finding above. Curriculum revision and development work also occurs during team common planning time, for which team leaders set agendas and minutes are recorded. Common planning time began in 2010-2011 at the school and is used predominately by teachers in the ELA and mathematics departments to review data and revise grade level curriculum, especially writing. Teachers in the career/technical areas have no common planning time in their schedules. In the conditions of school effectiveness survey teachers cited common planning time as the most important factor in "collaborative reflection on instructional practice." The recent provision of common planning time has given staff an opportunity to begin to align curriculum across the grade levels in several areas.

Many curriculum documents do not have pacing guides. Some maps in the career/technical subject areas indicate in which quarter of the year a unit of study is to be completed, and the number of hours necessary to complete a career/technical sub unit are specified. In interviews teachers told the review team that they based pacing and alignment in the career/technical curriculum on state and national certifications.

When asked about vertical alignment of the curriculum in the academic areas, teachers and administrators told the team that Greater Lawrence had an articulation agreement with Northern Essex Community College (NECC) under which NECC provided students an opportunity to earn college credit while they were enrolled in high school. They explained that a large number of Greater Lawrence graduates were assigned to remedial classes at NECC, for which they received no credit, increasing their tuition costs. Students now take the remedial course at NECC while enrolled at Greater Lawrence, positioning them to take courses for college credit if they pass.

The district has not addressed the issue of student readiness for classes at NECC. Greater Lawrence was concerned about the cost of remedial courses to their graduates, and responded to this need. However, even though many students have been assigned to remedial mathematics courses at NECC neither teachers nor administrators expressed concern in interviews about the adequacy of the school's mathematics curriculum.

Grades 9 and 10 mathematics teachers have made major revisions to the curriculum. At the time of the review, they were developing a standards-based, spiraled technical mathematics program, integrated with the career/technical areas. Teachers expected that this mathematics curriculum would be in place by 2013-2014. The mathematics department had recently developed a Math Enhancement program for grade 9 based on student performance data from the current grade 10 students. Students are grouped by strengths and needs on "flexible Fridays" and teachers individualize instruction. Teachers are working with an external consultant to assure that the new curriculum is standards-based and aligned to the standards in the new curriculum frameworks. Science teachers are also working with a consultant to revise the curriculum, which is based on units of study. ELA courses are the most completely and comprehensively documented and reflect revisions across the grade levels.

The curriculum maps in the academic areas at Greater Lawrence do not have some elements of a comprehensive format. In the career/technical areas some documents are less well developed. The connections between a complete, well-developed, cyclically reviewed curriculum and the alignment of the curriculum horizontally and vertically through the grades are starting to be made through the use of common planning time and uniform formats. Without a well-established process of curriculum development and review and the consistent delivery of an aligned curriculum, it will be difficult to improve student performance and to decrease the need for remedial courses.

Although teachers had recently received professional development on differentiated instruction (DI) and half had participated in Research for Better Teaching (RBT), the review team’s classroom observations were consistent with administrators’ statement that the school was still working on instruction—and with teachers’ statement that DI was more prevalent in career/technical classes. The team noted as areas of need differentiating instruction, promoting higher-order thinking, establishing learning objectives for purposeful instruction, and using formative student assessments.

The review team observed 49 classes, 31 academic and 18 career/technical. The observations were approximately 20 minutes in duration. Observers used an instrument developed by ESE to record whether a characteristic was observed or not observed. The instrument consists of 10 categories: classroom climate, learning objective, use of class time, content learning, instructional techniques, activation of higher-order thinking, instructional pacing, student thinking, student groups, and use of student assessments. Thirty-five characteristics are grouped within the 10 categories.

In interviews, teachers and administrators told the review team that they expected that differentiated instruction would be highly prevalent in classroom observations because teachers had been trained and were expected to differentiate. On the school’s recent conditions of school effectiveness survey, 64 percent of the respondents indicated that teachers differentiated instruction and 52 percent of the respondents indicated that the overall expectations for student learning were high and that core instruction was challenging. Differentiated instruction was evident in 61 percent of the academic and career/technical classes observed by the review team and student higher-order thinking was evident in 40 percent of the academic and career/technical classes observed.

Greater Lawrence’s emphasis on differentiated instruction (DI) grew out of the response to intervention (RTI) committee’s work in 2010-2011. Administrators were developing a more focused approach to professional development and the committee recommended more training on DI, based on the results of a teacher survey. Grade 9 students receive increased support at tier 2 based on the results of a universal screening. Identified students are assigned to the Read 180 program in addition to their regular ELA class. Grade 9 and grade 10 students are grouped weekly according to degree of mastery of topics on “flexible Fridays” as part of the mathematics enhancement program. In interviews and focus groups, teachers said that formal interventions, such as Read 180 and more structured supports, had helped the school to reduce the dropout rate and increase student attendance (see Table 3 in the first Student Support finding below); however, the review team found evidence of students participating in tiered activities based on academic readiness in only 7 of the 32 academic classes observed.

When asked about DI, teachers told the review team that career/technical teachers were most familiar with it and that staff acceptance varied by department and area. A part-time DI coach from an external agency was providing limited professional development on DI, and helping teachers to build DI designs into newly developed curriculum units. In interviews, administrators

said that increased and better analysis of data facilitated the implementation of DI. The review team's classroom observations did not confirm extensive use of DI, although the results were consistent with the view that there was more use of DI in career/technical classes than in academic classes. On the recent conditions of school effectiveness survey some teachers advocated placement of students in single ability groups where lessons are differentiated to focus on skill development; however, this practice would restrict differentiated instruction to ability grouping. Administrators told the review team that they use an informal process of observations and walkthroughs to determine whether teachers have incorporated new practices.

Teachers demonstrate high expectations for student learning when they encourage students to use higher-order thinking. When asked about expectations by the review team, administrators stated that the expectations were generally low at Greater Lawrence, adding that they had asked teachers to "notch it up" and include items requiring higher-order thinking skills in their 2011 final examinations. While 50 percent of teachers have attended Research for Better Teaching (RBT) training, administrators said that the school is still working on improving instruction. According to the review team's observations, higher-order thinking skills were prevalent in 29 percent of the career/technical classes and 47 percent of the academic classes observed.

One hallmark of effective teaching is the use of a learning objective to drive instruction. In interviews, teachers and administrators told the review team that teachers are expected to develop an agenda, and the review team observed an agenda in most classrooms. A learning objective is an identified learning outcome that drives the lesson, not a task or activity. On many agendas, teachers had described an activity rather than an outcome. A learning outcome was evident in 58 percent of the academic and 65 percent of career/technical classes observed. One clear example of a well-developed learning objective observed by the review team was as follows: "By the end of the class, students will be able to explain how an HIV virus attacks a cell."

Student assessment is an element of effective instruction through which the teacher uses at least one informal (formative) assessment, such as a thumbs up or a ticket to leave, to check for student understanding. Use of informal student assessments was evident in 34 per cent of the academic and 61 percent of the career/technical classes observed. In one example, a teacher asked students to respond to a question by writing their answers on small white boards at their desks and then hold up the white boards. After scanning the responses, the teacher told the students that they would review the material before moving on.

Classroom climate was observed to be respectful, with clear routines, and adherence to classroom rules in 81 percent of the academic and 89 percent of the career/technical classes observed. Teachers were prepared, materials were ready, and transitions were smooth in 74 percent of the academic and 72 percent of the career/technical classes observed. In 48 percent of academic classrooms observed, instructional pacing was appropriate. The review team noted that the pace seemed slow in some academic classrooms with students off-task and waiting for the teacher to move along with the lesson. Appropriate pacing was observed in 75 percent of the career/technical classes. Use of varied instructional techniques, such as small groups, paired

learning, and independent practice, was observed in 46 percent of the academic and 54 percent of the career/technical classes. The review team observed students representing their thinking and ideas by writing or speaking in 40 percent of the academic and 50 percent of the career/technical classes.

The review team's classroom observations found areas of need in differentiating instruction, promoting higher-order thinking, establishing learning objectives for purposeful instruction, and use of formative student assessments. In general, the prevalence of effective instructional practices in academic and career/technical classes was low, with combined rates below 50 percent in 5 of 10 categories. Without increased coaching and targeted walkthroughs to ensure that the aims of professional development are being realized, further advances in student achievement will likely be compromised.

Assessment

Although the district was still in the early stages of developing a comprehensive assessment system, it had made progress on building capacity to collect and disseminate student performance data and to use it to identify student learning needs, monitor academic progress, modify instruction, and inform curriculum.

Key district documents, including the Greater Lawrence Technical School Strategic Plan (2009-2012), and the SIP (2010-2011; 2011-2013) clearly identify prioritized plans for the increased collection and timely, systematic use of student assessment data to modify instructional practice, enhance the curriculum, and improve overall learning outcomes. Strategic goals common to the plans include the creation of a well-designed and comprehensive districtwide data system, policies and protocols, and the establishment of a “culture of data usage for decision making in the district and in the classroom.” More specifically, the plans identify the need to: (a) create districtwide data protocols that include increased collection, dissemination, and collaboration; (b) centralize student data and make it easily accessible; (c) provide quality professional development training targeting the effective use of data; and (d) establish a district data agenda that addresses the needs of the professional staff about the relevance of data and affects their beliefs and understandings of the uses and value of student assessment data.

Through interviews with staff and administrators, as well as a thorough review of relevant district documents, including the district's assessment matrix and assessment calendar, the review team found that the district is making progress in achieving these goals. For example, in 2010-2011, with the collaboration and support of the District and School Assistance Center, the school created a district data team whose mission was to initiate and oversee the development and implementation of data policies and protocols. This steering committee is composed of administrators, including the superintendent-director, the assessment supervisor, the principal, academic and career/technical teachers, and student support specialists, including guidance and special education staff. Members of the data team told the review team that they are currently developing a detailed, long-range data plan for Greater Lawrence and are in the completion

phase of writing a vision and mission statement that will articulate the data team's central role in creating and coordinating a comprehensive and highly effective data system for the district.

Although the district was largely in the initial stages of developing a comprehensive system with much work yet to be done, the review team found clear evidence in documents and interviews that it has made progress in establishing promising key systems, strategies, and expectations. For example, interviewees explained that improved and expanded data collection, dissemination, and analysis practices had been implemented over the two previous school years, 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. Standardized assessments such as Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) are currently administered as pre- and post-tests to all freshmen in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) assessments are also given quarterly to students identified as needing academic interventions. Results of these tests, which are primarily summative, are analyzed by staff and used to assist with academic placement, identify student learning needs, and inform the school's RTI screening process. Further, when appropriate, assessments from the Read 180 and System 44 reading intervention programs are administered quarterly in ELA to monitor the progress of students identified as needing remedial help. District leaders and teachers also indicated their plans to expand MAP testing into both the mathematics and science curricula within the 2012-2013 school year.

In addition, the career/technical program administers a battery of specific standardized career and occupational assessments including those from the National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI), and safety tests administered as part of the required Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) training courses. It also collects OSHA certification information, Perkins placement data, licensure rates, and other information. Attainment of vocational competencies is tracked using the Skills Plus Work Force Readiness System. The review team found that all academic and career/technical departments have developed and administer common, grade-level quarterly or end of unit assessments, as well as mid-year and final examinations. With the active involvement and ongoing participation of the Greater Lawrence assessment supervisor, teachers can review and analyze the results of student performance data in weekly departmental meetings held during common planning time. These meetings are currently limited to the academic subject areas. An examination of the minutes of these meetings confirmed the district's increasing attention to data and teachers' growing ability to analyze both aggregated and disaggregated achievement data.

Additionally, interviewees noted that the district's student information software system, iPass, was significantly expanded in 2011-2012 to provide staff with a comprehensive data bank of student performance results, including state assessments such as the MCAS tests, Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA), Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral (MELA-O), and standardized academic and career assessments administered by the district, such as MAP, SRI, and NOCTI, as well as other school-based academic data and student biographical information. Administrators and staff described the improved iPass system as timely, informative, and a valuable diagnostic tool. The system serves as a district-level data warehouse

providing teachers with ready access to assessment results, including links to academic strands, standards, and test questions, The system also contains a parent portal that provides convenient login access to a wide array of relevant data and information including attendance, discipline, grades, homework assignments, and class schedules.

In interviews, teachers and administrators stated that Greater Lawrence is making a more focused effort to use professional development to support its strategic assessment initiatives. In monthly professional development programs on early release days and through embedded supports provided by the assessment supervisor and data team members during common planning, departmental, and faculty meetings, teachers are receiving training about using data to improve curriculum and instruction. The school's 2011-2012 professional development program catalog contained a strategic objective to create a "culture of data usage for decision-making in the district and in the classroom." This document cited "common understanding of literacy, including relevant data" as a focus of the 2011-2012 professional development program. A review of the 2011-2012 professional development calendar verified the alignment of the offerings with the district's SIP goals. Although there was general agreement among interviewees that progress is being made, it was also clear to the review team that levels of data analysis proficiency and use among teachers and administrators vary considerably across the school and within departments and that much remains to be done. According to administrators, staff tend to rely on the services of a small number of data leaders in the school to compile, distribute, analyze, and explain student performance data rather than developing their own capacities to continuously collect and appropriately use assessment data to improve classroom instruction and inform curriculum review and revision.

Greater Lawrence administrators spoke in detail of the work that was done in 2010-2011 to develop an improved Response to Intervention (RTI) process for the district. It was clear from interviews and a review of the school's 2011-2012 draft RTI document that the newly developed protocols and procedures are based on expanded data collection and an enhanced and more formalized data analysis teaming process. It was also evident that related instructional decision-making is now more firmly grounded in and informed by a better defined and continuous review of both aggregated and disaggregated student performance results and other relevant measures, such as the MCAS tests, teacher assessments, MAP, SRI, and Read 180.

Administrators and staff expressed the belief that classroom instruction, curriculum, and ultimately student achievement can be significantly enhanced through the continuous collection, timely analysis, and appropriate use of data. The review team found that the promising assessment practices that the district has begun to put in place are gaining traction and believes that with continued support, and professional development for staff, this process will continue. Expanding and improving the use of student performance data is a primary means to promote improved teaching practices, assessment experiences, educational opportunities, and most importantly, enhanced learning outcomes for all students.

The district does not have a sufficiently well developed, comprehensive, and reliable data system to effectively inform decision-making, prioritize goals, allocate resources, and initiate, modify, or discontinue programs and services.

The review team was presented with some evidence that the district is beginning to make limited use of student performance data to influence decision-making, particularly decisions about modifying classroom practice and academic programs. For example, interviewees explained that the major curriculum revision underway in mathematics, which when completed would replace the current mathematics sequence with a new integrated mathematics program, had been initiated by and was being supported at least in part with data from both formative and summative assessments. In other academic departments, including English language arts (ELA) and science, teachers are using their newly provided common planning time to collect and examine the results of both locally developed and standardized common assessments with the support of the assessment supervisor. In this way, teachers are becoming better able to make appropriate adjustments to classroom instruction and timely modifications to curricular units.

Administrators and staff in the career/technical program acknowledged that although some standardized and local data are compiled, there is no reliable or consistent data driven system or common mechanism to measure students' career/technical competencies. Administrators and staff expressed widely differing ideas when asked how best to measure student career/technical competencies or how the effectiveness of specific career/technical programs was determined. There was little agreement about what data should be used, how it should be used, and in some cases where the data was located. Because the career/technical program does not have in place a uniform and well-defined process by which it regularly compiles, systematically integrates, and consistently analyzes student assessment results, it does not have the ability to use performance data to appropriately inform all aspects of its decision-making. Consequently, the career/technical program has a diminished capacity to prioritize goals, allocate human and financial resources, and accurately monitor or measure the effectiveness of its programs and the related competencies of its graduates.

Furthermore, the district does not have the capacity to determine how to divide financial and human resources equitably between the academic and career/technical programs, or within the career/technical program itself. School leaders explained that in general the district's capacity to continuously collect, organize, analyze, and systematically employ data to drive decision-making about programs, personnel, and resource allocation is not well or fully developed. Greater Lawrence is in the early stages of this process and is just beginning, even in the academic programs, to appropriately use student assessment results, external and internal reviews, and other pertinent data to prioritize goals, allocate resources, and consistently monitor and appropriately evaluate the effectiveness of educational programs and services.

However, the district provided the review team with sufficient information and documentation to substantiate the district's genuine commitment to school improvement and demonstrate their growing belief that student achievement, instructional practices, programs, and assessment procedures can be significantly improved through the continuous collection, careful analysis, and

appropriate use of data. Among the most convincing evidence was the school's administration of the conditions for school effectiveness self-assessment in the spring of 2011; this self-assessment collected extensive and detailed data from faculty on a wide range of academic and systemic categories. These included: aligned curriculum, tiered instruction, effective instruction, effective school leadership, and student assessment. According to documents provided to the review team, Greater Lawrence's response to the many issues and concerns identified by this comprehensive self-assessment was swift and substantial. Faculty-led survey teams were promptly created to conduct the initial analysis and to quantify and summarize the results for each category. The school council then reviewed the survey summaries, selected operational priorities, and incorporated relevant goals and objectives into the 2011-2012 SIP. Subsequently, target area task force teams were established to focus the school's attention and resources.

The review team believes that Greater Lawrence has begun to create a mechanism that can significantly transform the entire school community. Embedded in and central to this process is building the capacity of the district's data system to promote needed betterments to educational programs and services, reliably inform decision-making, goal development, resource allocation, and most importantly, bring about significant and measurable improvements in learning experiences, opportunities, and outcomes for all students.

Human Resources and Professional Development

At the time of the review the district had a well-developed formal evaluation system aligned with then-current state regulations and bargaining agreements. Turnover of staff, the number of highly qualified teachers, and the culture of the district had improved, and a mentoring program for new teachers was in place. Although walkthroughs were conducted by administrators, there was confusion about the process and feedback to teachers was provided inconsistently.

Evaluation

In a side letter of agreement to the teachers' bargaining agreement (dated July 1, 2011 through June 30, 2014), the district committee and the teachers' federation agreed how to handle the article in the teachers' bargaining agreement about teacher evaluation pending new ESE teacher evaluation regulations. A review of the side letter showed that the district committee and the federation agreed to negotiate the implementation of the new teacher evaluation regulations,⁸ including changing the process and the evaluation instrument. In the interim, the district committee and the federation agreed that the existing process and instrument would remain in full force and effect.

⁸ In June 2011 the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted new educator evaluation regulations to replace the previous regulations on Evaluation of Teachers and Administrators and accompanying Principles of Effective Teaching and Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership at 603 CMR 35.00.

The review team requested and reviewed the existing procedures and instrument used to evaluate teachers and found them detailed, complete, and aligned with the “Principles of Effective Teaching.”⁹ The procedures included an evaluation philosophy, a description of the purpose of the evaluation, and an outline of the evaluation timelines for teachers both with and without professional status, including the frequency of the evaluations and a range of dates during which evaluations could take place. The review team examined a random selection of the formal evaluations in the personnel files of 40 academic and career/technical teachers with and without professional status. Teachers said that teachers without professional status were observed for evaluations three times each year and teachers with professional status twice each year. A review of teachers’ evaluations confirmed this. All 40 evaluations were timely, signed, aligned with the “Principles of Effective Teaching” and included commendations and recommendations; however, the recommendations largely concerned improvement of the lesson observed. Six evaluations included recommendations to attend professional development to improve teaching skills.

Two of the 40 evaluations reviewed were those of teachers on waivers of licensure, and two were those of teachers in the process of fulfilling the requirements to obtain licensure. A review of the staff list showed that six of the seven teachers and administrators on waivers were career/technical teachers and administrators. The personnel files of teachers reviewed by the team showed a dramatic improvement in evaluation and licensure from the time of the 2003 and 2005 district reviews conducted by the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA).¹⁰ During those reviews, EQA reviewers found that many teachers had not been evaluated and many were not licensed.

In a side letter of agreement to the administrators’ bargaining agreement (dated July 1, 2011 through June 30, 2014), the district committee and the association agreed how to handle the article in the bargaining agreement about evaluation pending new ESE evaluation regulations. A review of the side letter showed that, as the teachers did, the district committee and the administrators’ association agreed to negotiate the implementation of the new evaluation regulations, including changing the process and evaluation instrument. In the interim, the district committee and the association agreed that the current process and instrument would remain in full force and effect. In addition to administrators covered under this agreement, the district has a number of non-represented administrators. All administrators were evaluated annually according to the “Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership.”¹¹ The review team examined the formal evaluations included in the personnel files of 18 administrators. All 18 evaluations were timely, signed, aligned with the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership, and included commendations and recommendations.

⁹ See previous footnote.

¹⁰ See 2007 EQA Technical Report, p. 6, available at http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/review/district/reports/technical/07_0823.pdf.

¹¹ See footnote in first paragraph of finding.

The review team also examined the 2011-2012 evaluation schedules for all teachers, administrators, clerical staff, and custodians; the schedules included the date of the evaluations and the names of the supervisors conducting the evaluations. The review team noted that the schedule did not indicate when the principal was scheduled to conduct walkthroughs. District administrators stated that an informal effort was made to monitor evaluator inter-rater reliability and many evaluators had attended Observational and Analyzing Teaching (OAT) training. A review of agendas and attendance rosters confirmed that OAT training sessions had been held. The superintendent-director stated that the principal reviews all teacher evaluations and a sampling of other evaluations.

Culture, qualifications of staff, and mentoring

According to interviewees and a review of documents provided by the district, Greater Lawrence has a well-developed recruitment, hiring, and support system for teachers. Interviewees stated that the culture of the district has changed from a perceived culture of mediocrity several years ago to a culture of improvement today. Students are making gains and, according to interviews, potential employees are now attracted to the district for more than the generous benefits, collegial atmosphere, and safe, clean environment. Many more teachers are now highly qualified.¹² Interviewees said that many applicants who apply for employment were referred by other district employees. Interviewees also said that some employees welcome the opportunity to work with urban students in a suburban environment.

Effective recruitment and support of teachers can reduce turnover. In 2007, 46 staff were terminated; 21 of them because of an absence of appropriate licensure.¹³ Since then staff turnover has stabilized. ESE teacher turnover data shows that the teacher turnover rate was 13 percent in 2009, 17 percent in 2010, and 18 percent in 2011, compared to state teacher turnover rates of 12, 11, and 12 percent in those years. In 2010-2011, according to information provided to the review team, six teachers retired, ten resigned, three relocated, and three were not rehired.¹⁴

According to interviewees and a review of documents provided by the district, Greater Lawrence has established induction and mentoring programs for new teachers as required by 603 CMR 7.12 and as part of the teachers' bargaining agreement. The review team examined a description of the mentoring program that outlines the roles and responsibilities of mentors, recommendations for the selection and matching of mentors, and strategies for finding time for mentors and new teachers to meet. The review team noted that the formal mentoring program is not available to second-year teachers or to administrators; however, according to interviewees, second- and third-year teachers are invited to mentor/mentee meetings.

¹² According to ESE data, 100 percent of core academic classes were taught by teachers who were highly qualified in 2010-2011, as compared to 71.7 percent in 2006-2007 and 40.5 percent in 2003-2004.

¹³ See 2007 EQA Technical Report, p. 17, available at http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/review/district/reports/technical/07_0823.pdf.

¹⁴ The total of 22 is similar to the total of 23 teachers shown by ESE data to have turned over between 2009-2010 and 2010-2011.

According to information provided by the district, examples of the mentoring program goals are to recruit, attract, and retain excellent teachers and administrators; support and assist new and beginning teachers with the transition into the profession; and assist beginning teachers and administrators to meet the challenges common to new educators.

Walkthroughs

District administrators, teachers, and union representatives said that an informal walkthrough process had been established in the district; however, there was confusion among teachers, administrators, and union representatives about the intent of the walkthrough process and the type of feedback that is provided or should be provided to teachers. For example, the principal stated that as part of the district adaptive leadership initiative administrators conduct walkthroughs three times a week with half providing feedback and half not providing feedback. The principal noted that while the district did not have a formal approach to walkthroughs, she had tried to be more visible in the classroom in 2011-2012. She added that she expected that administrators would be even more visible in classrooms in 2012-2013 as a result of attending adaptive leadership professional development.

Administrators do conduct unannounced walkthroughs, but do not provide consistent feedback. The quality of walkthroughs varies according to interviewees. For example, in one focus group teachers noted that walkthroughs can be “nitpicking” and are often negative. Sometimes there is no feedback after a walkthrough. Interviewees noted that the timeline for feedback needed to improve. Career/technical teachers said that supervisors are in their shops daily, providing suggestions, and that upper-level administrators also visit.

A strong and well-organized human resource department positions the district well as one of 11 selected for early adoption of the state’s new educator evaluation system, with the formal evaluation system in place at the time of the review serving as a foundation for teachers’ professional growth and accountability under the new system, as well as continued improved student achievement. However, the absence of a defined, clearly understood walkthrough process with consistent feedback is likely to slow both the professional growth of teachers and gains in student achievement.

Professional development in the district has evolved from a menu of different professional development offerings to a more focused program with annual priorities developed from data and surveys and aligned with the SIP. The district also offers specialized professional development programs to teachers and administrators.

According to district administrators, before the tenure of the current superintendent-director, the district did not have a focused professional development program. One district leader stated that there was no formal professional development several years ago. After discussion with the district’s curriculum leaders, the former superintendent-director decided to focus professional development on curriculum writing. That professional development initiative continued into the next year. The former superintendent-director then decided that a professional development plan needed to be in place for the next superintendent-director. A plan was developed; however, the

current superintendent-director determined that it was too broad. He wanted everyone going in the same direction. After discussion with teachers, a decision was made to focus professional development on differentiated instruction in 2010-2011 and to continue the training in 2011-2012. Other district leaders confirmed the superintendent-director's strategy to focus professional development and told the review team that the superintendent-director focuses on one area, rather than offer disconnected topics. The superintendent-director said in an interview that he wanted focused professional development with two or three priorities. He stated that in 2010-2011 professional development focused on differentiated instruction, and in 2011-2012 the focus was on reading and writing across the curriculum.

District administrators told the review team that needs assessments and student performance data were used to determine professional development topics. One district administrator stated that she worked with teachers to determine what professional development was needed in 2011-2012 in writing and the new Massachusetts curriculum standards. Another noted that the literacy focus grew out of approximately 40 staff collaboratively drilling down into student achievement data to determine what was needed.

The review team examined the professional development plans from the years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010. A 2010-2011 plan was unavailable to the review team. The review team examined an overview of professional development for the 2011-2012 school year including topics, professional development invoices from providers, and attendance rosters. These documents confirmed interviewees' statements that since 2009-2010 professional development had focused on curriculum, differentiated instruction, and literacy. The district has also used embedded coaching as a concurrent professional development strategy. The review team confirmed that professional development was aligned with the goals of the district strategic plan and the SIP.

While district professional development was focused on literacy, many specialized professional development opportunities were available to staff. For example, interviewees stated that many administrators received Observational and Analyzing Teaching (OAT) training. Teachers indicated that many of them have received Research for Better Teaching (RBT) training. Teachers also noted that RBT training helped teachers to use data. An article in the teachers' collective bargaining agreement (dated July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2014) provides for all newly hired teachers without professional status for school year 2011-2012 and beyond to participate in RBT training once during their first three years. Also, professional development takes place in many situations other than during the nine half-days scheduled for professional development and summer professional development. Interviewees noted that academic teachers' common planning time and department meetings offer opportunities for professional development. Interviewees told the review that career/technical teachers do not have scheduled common planning time,

District administrators said that the district has a five-member professional development committee. This committee is in the development stage, has not published a schedule of meetings, and has recently developed draft committee goals, which were provided to the review team. Examples of the goals are to ensure quality in-house professional development that is pertinent to the mission of the district and to ensure that professional development requested by

the staff is pertinent to the requester's position at the school and related to the mission of the school.

The review team believes that the district has improved its professional development by focusing it, by using needs assessments, student performance data, and collaborative methods to determine the focus, and by making sure that it is aligned with the district strategic plan and the SIP. Other positive steps include using concurrent embedded professional development, offering specialized professional development opportunities such as OAT and RBT, and beginning a professional development committee. In all these ways, the district is headed in the right direction in the area of professional development.

Student Support

With consistently implemented and effective policies and programs, Greater Lawrence has made steady progress in increasing attendance, promotion, and graduation rates and lowering dropout and chronic absence rates.

Table 3 on the next page shows that from 2008-2011 Greater Lawrence made steady progress in increasing attendance, chronic absence, promotion, and graduation rates and lowering the annual dropout rate.¹⁵ Attendance rates were higher than state attendance rates for grades 9-12 all four of these years. In 2011 in comparison to the state, Greater Lawrence had a higher grade 9 to 10 promotion rate and a lower annual dropout rate. In 2011 Greater Lawrence's four-year cohort graduation rate was one percentage point lower than the state's, nearly closing what had been a much larger gap in previous years.

¹⁵ Attendance and dropout rates improved in every one of these years; 9th to 10th grade promotion rates improved in every one of these years except 2011, and four-year cohort graduation rates every year except 2009.

**Table 3: Greater Lawrence and State
Attendance, Dropout, Promotion, Graduation, and Chronic Absence Rates
(in Percentages) 2008-2011**

| | 2008 | | 2009 | | 2010 | | 2011 | |
|---|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|
| | G.L. | State | G.L. | State | G.L. | State | G.L. | State |
| Attendance | 93.6 | 92.9 | 93.8 | 92.9 | 94.3 | 93.0 | 95.0 | 93.1 |
| Annual Grade 9-12 Dropout | 4.9 | 3.4 | 2.8 | 2.9 | 2.3 | 2.9 | 1.4 | 2.7 |
| 9th to 10th Grade Promotion | 87 | 90 | 94 | 90 | 95 | 90 | 92 | 91 |
| 4-Year Cohort Graduation | 75.9 | 81.2 | 74.6 | 81.5 | 77.1 | 82.1 | 82.4 | 83.4 |
| Chronic Absence | 17.0 | 13 | 15.0 | 13 | 13.2 | 13 | 9.1 | 12.6 |
| Notes: State attendance rates given are for grades 9-12 and Special Population students. State chronic absence rates (percentages of students absent for more than 10% of days enrolled) are for all grades, not just high school grades. Sources: School/District Profiles and District Analysis and Review Tool on ESE website; other ESE data | | | | | | | | |

According to school and ESE data, Greater Lawrence continued to improve in 2011 by increasing the attendance rate to 95 percent and the four-year graduation rate to 82.4 percent, and decreasing the dropout rate to 1.4 percent. In addition, according to ESE data, Greater Lawrence decreased the percentage of students chronically absent, defined as absent for more than 10 percent of their days enrolled, from 17.0 percent in 2008 to 9.1 percent in 2011. In interviews with the review team, administrators and teachers cited personnel, procedures, and programs that they said contributed to these improvements.

Attendance

According to administrators, the school committee revised the attendance policy in August 2010. Fully incorporated in the student and family handbook, the policy establishes a clear expectation for all students to be in school on time every day. According to the policy, students are allowed 10 absences each year for eight specific reasons including illness, death in the immediate family, and religious observance. The policy also permits approval of an absence under extraordinary circumstances upon a showing of need to the attendance review team composed of the principal, the assistant principal for discipline, and the student's counselor among others.

According to the policy, parents or guardians must call the attendance office to report an absence and the reason for it no later than 8:30 a.m. on the day of the absence. On returning to school, the student must bring a note signed by a parent or guardian stating the date(s) and reason for the absence and a contact telephone number for confirmation. Students who are absent for five

consecutive days for medical reasons are admitted through the attendance office by the school nurse with the provision of a medical note. Students absent five consecutive days for non-medical reasons are admitted through the attendance office by the assistant principal and a guidance counselor. The policy prohibits family vacations during school weeks, sets forth provisions for prolonged absences and hospitalizations, and defines the conditions under which tardy and dismissed students are considered absent.

Since 2007 the school has had two bilingual parent liaisons and an assistant principal for discipline who is also responsible for attendance. According to interviewees, counselors and adjustment counselors work closely with the assistant principal for discipline and the parent liaisons to enforce the attendance policy and to help students and families abide by it. One administrator stated and others agreed that staff members know their individual roles in promoting student attendance, and that the policy is implemented “meticulously and conscientiously.” According to administrators and counselors, beginning at 8:30 attendance office staff make telephone calls to the homes of absent students to ascertain the reasons for the absence. When the staff cannot reach the student or a parent, the parent liaison makes a home visit with another staff member or the assistant principal.

Administrators and counselors described a series of proportionate actions taken after the third, fifth, eighth, tenth, and eleventh absences ranging from the parent liaison contacting the parent and an academy supervisor meeting with the student after the third absence, to a letter warning of the danger of failing after the tenth, and a meeting of the student support team to develop a plan to address the student’s attendance problem after the eleventh. Counselors told the review team that the student support team consisting of counselors and the school nurse meets weekly to discuss students with attendance problems. The team creates an improvement plan for each student and a team member is assigned to monitor it. If the plan is unsuccessful after a trial period, the team reconvenes to consider alternatives.

Administrators and counselors also said that the school allows students who have been repeatedly absent under extenuating circumstances to make up missed days after school, on Saturdays, and during summer school. At the close of the school year, the assistant principal communicates with the parents or guardians of students with poor attendance to emphasize the relationship of attendance to student achievement and meets with them in September to remind them of the terms of the attendance policy and address their concerns.

During morning announcements, the review team heard a daily report of the percentage of students attending school on the previous day from each of the four classes. Administrators and teachers said that this informal competition resulted in the students encouraging each other to attend. Both administrators and teachers said that attendance is often a topic at school assemblies and students hear about it “often from everyone.” In focus groups, teachers said that they remind students about the primacy of attendance and seek out students who are frequently absent to determine the causes and offer support. During classroom visits the review team observed several conversations between teachers and individual students about attendance.

Dropout prevention, promotion, and graduation

The 2007 EQA Report cited Greater Lawrence for having the highest dropout rate among the state's vocational schools.¹⁶ Administrators and teachers said that improving the grade 9 to 10 promotion rate was a critical factor in reducing the school's dropout rate, since retained students are at higher risk of leaving school before graduation. The school has had a freshman academy since 2007. Grade 9 classes are located in one wing of the building and grade 9 teachers teach only grade 9 students, plan together, and collaborate. Administrators and teachers also described the Reggie Leaders program through which juniors and seniors befriend freshmen and sophomores in monthly activities with a character education component.

Administrators and teachers stated that failing students can earn course credit through the credit recovery program instituted in 2008. Under this after-school program, students are awarded credit for passing 14- to 16-week classes offered online by Florida Virtual. Most students who need to make up academic and career/technical course work through the Greater Lawrence summer school program; this program is offered daily for four weeks and transportation and breakfast are provided. According to interviewees, students may rectify failures in one or two courses and a third with special permission. Although the school assesses tuition of \$175 per course, administrators and teachers stated that a "payment plan" is worked out when a family cannot afford the full tuition, and no student is turned away. Teachers described the summer school program as "thriving." About 20 percent of the students enrolled at Greater Lawrence attend, some for enrichment and others for remediation.

Administrators and counselors told the review team that they identify students at risk of dropping out by such markers as high absenteeism, multiple failures, credit deficiencies, and disciplinary referrals, and as prevention meet with these students and their parents. They stated that they can often find ways to help students remain in school through such resources as the credit recovery and summer school programs and after-school homework help classes. These sessions are conducted in the library from 2:45 to 4:30 on Tuesday and Thursdays. The staff includes one teacher from each academic area and a special educator. A snack and transportation home are provided. The school also offers academic support programs for juniors and seniors who have not met the competency determination. This program consists of deficit-centered targeted instruction in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science based on an item analysis of each student's MCAS test results; certified teachers instruct these classes during and after school and transportation home is provided. Administrators and teachers told the review team that this approach had helped improve the MCAS test scores of nearly all the students enrolled and that more than 75 percent of the students met the competency determination.

Students who drop out despite the school's efforts to assist them receive information on General Educational Development (GED) and Job Corps programs and the name of a staff member to call should they reconsider and wish to re-enroll. Administrators and counselors told the review team that according to their follow-up monitoring, most dropouts leave the region or the country.

¹⁶ See p. 20 of the 2007 EQA Technical Report cited in footnote 13 above.

Greater Lawrence has consistently implemented effective policies and programs to improve student attendance, promotion, and graduation rates and reduce drop-out and chronic absence rates. These initiatives have also been a factor in the progress that the district has made on a number of achievement indicators (see the Student Achievement finding above), including making AYP for the first time in 2011 in the aggregate for both ELA and mathematics, and for subgroups in ELA, although not for mathematics.

Greater Lawrence has increased its capacity to identify students in need, for instance through a new universal screening process, and has a wide variety of support programs. But RTI and differentiated instruction have not yet taken root districtwide, observations in academic classes showed inconsistent implementation of the co-taught inclusion model, and some co-teachers do not have common planning time.

Greater Lawrence identifies students who need support in a number of ways. For example, according to interviewees, in 2011 the school piloted a new universal screening of entering freshmen; this screening consists of the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) and MAP tests. The MAP test replaced an unstandardized locally developed assessment based on released MCAS test questions. All entering freshmen were assessed before school opened in 2011. Administrators and teachers told the review team that the results of these assessments and grade 8 course grades were used to determine honors or college-level placement in English, mathematics, and science, and eligibility for the Read 180 Program, instituted at Greater Lawrence in 2006.

According to administrators and teachers, Greater Lawrence administers benchmark assessments in ELA and mathematics: The MAP and SRI tests are administered twice each year as pre- and posttests. In 2011, the grade 9 mathematics team flexibly grouped students by common need. This strategy, entitled Math Enhancement, originated in grade 10 in 2010. On Math Enhancement Fridays, mathematics teachers provide targeted instruction based on strand and standard. Using Prosper software, teachers administer a pretest to determine students' needs and a posttest to determine their progress.

Greater Lawrence has begun to implement a three-tiered, student-support system consisting of universal (Tier I), individualized (Tier II), and intensive (Tier III) interventions based on the Response to Intervention (RTI) model. Students receive instruction to meet their needs based on the results of benchmark and other assessments. In a district description of tiered support, differentiated instruction was listed first among the universal interventions available to all students at Tier I. The district provided professional development on differentiated instruction for all teachers in 2010-2011 and has continued the training in 2011-2012. Although Greater Lawrence has made differentiated instruction a high priority, the review team observed little evidence of it in academic classes, especially in science and social studies. On the other hand, more career/technical education teachers were observed varying tasks, levels, and methods to match students' strengths and needs. This differentiated instruction was especially evident in the automotive and construction technology clusters.

The district also provides screening through teacher assistance and student-support teams. Teachers and administrators told the review team that teachers may refer a student making unsatisfactory progress to the Teacher Assistance Team (TAT) composed of the student's guidance counselor, who chairs the meeting, and all of the student's teachers. The school nurse and adjustment counselor attend certain TAT meetings, depending on the nature of the presenting problem. According to interviewees, the team develops an intervention plan consisting of supports such as assignment of an adult or student mentor, behavior monitoring through the student support team, and tutoring. The team reviews the plan after 30 days and decides whether to continue, revise, or terminate it. When the interventions have been repeatedly unsuccessful, the team may make a special education referral. The student's parent or guardian retains the right to request such a referral at any time.

In an interview with the review team, guidance counselors described their weekly student support meetings, also attended by adjustment counselors and the school nurse. The support team identifies students with academic, behavioral, and attendance problems based on an analysis of test scores and grades, attendance data, and disciplinary reports. The team then develops student-specific plans connecting the students and sometimes their families to school and community services. A team member is assigned to monitor the plan and reports to the team on its effectiveness. The team acts as case manager for all the plans. According to administrators and counselors, this approach has increased both student and staff accountability and contributed to improved student performance.

Greater Lawrence provides remedial and specially designed instruction for eligible students. Read 180 teachers provide small and large group instruction using high-interest materials and supplementary individualized programmed instruction intended to develop each student's phonetic, fluency, comprehension, and spelling skills. Read 180 is augmented by System 44, an intensive provision for students with weak phonetic skills. Grade 9 students with low SRI lexile and MAP test scores are enrolled in Read 180 in addition to their English classes. Students remain in Read 180 for a full year, or until they attain proficiency. Students with greater needs may continue in the program for a second year.

According to administrators and teachers, Greater Lawrence offers a continuum of special education services including separate, specially designed small group instruction in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. The district also offers co-taught English, mathematics, science, and social studies classes in an inclusion model in which a special educator and a regular educator collaboratively plan, deliver, and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction for a class composed of students without identified disabilities and students who are receiving special education services. Administrators stated that the co-teaching model has been in practice for more than five years. Because of scheduling difficulties, some co-teachers have common planning time, while others do not.

Two additional special educators assist career/technical education teachers in adapting instruction and also provide direct services to students with disabilities in the career/technical areas. The review team observed a range of roles for the special educators in the co-taught

academic classes observed. For example, in one class, the special educator instructed small groups of students; in another the special educator conducted a lesson for the entire class while the co-teacher circulated around the room; and in two of the observed classes, the special educators merely stood by as the co-teachers lectured.

Through universal screening, benchmark assessments, pre- and post-tests, and teacher assistance and student support teams, Greater Lawrence has developed reliable procedures to identify students who need support. It has a wide variety of programs and services to provide that support, including Math Enhancement, tiered instruction, those same teacher assistance and student support teams, remedial programs, and a continuum of special education services including a co-taught inclusion model. But the co-teaching model is inconsistently implemented in academic classes and some co-teachers do not have common planning time. And the RTI model and differentiation of instruction are new initiatives that have not yet taken root districtwide conceptually or in practice. In interviews with the review team, some teachers did not support or understand the need to differentiate their instruction, or expressed the view that they were doing it already. While the district has increased its capacity to identify students in need, some of its models of service provision, though progressive, are not providing the support they could be with further development and refinement and consistent practice districtwide.

Though Greater Lawrence has increased its ESL staff, English language learners (ELLs) do not receive the amount of English language instruction recommended by the state, and ELL support in career/technical areas is not provided by a certified educator or one with SEI training. District proficiency rates for ELLs have been very low and the four-year graduation rate for a cohort of eight ELLs in 2011 was 50 percent.

Since 2007, Greater Lawrence has expanded the ESL staff to three full-time, dual-certified teachers; it also has a bilingual para-educator without certification or sheltered English immersion (SEI) training. One ESL teacher also serves as lead teacher for the combined ESL and Spanish department and has two non-teaching periods daily. Five academic teachers have received all four categories of SEI training.

According to teachers and administrators, Greater Lawrence administers a home language survey to the parents of incoming freshmen, then tests the freshmen whose first language is not English in June. The district provides transportation and approximately 80 percent of students whose first language is not English attend. Typically, more students are identified as needing ESL services in the fall. A certified ESL teacher administers the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA) and the Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral (MELA-O) to all students whose first language is not English to determine their proficiency levels and service needs.

According to administrators, students at proficiency levels one through five from all grade levels are grouped together in ESL English, taught by a licensed ESL teacher, and ESL history classes, taught by a licensed ESL/history teacher. Both classes meet for 42 minutes daily. ELLs are grouped with students with disabilities in science and mathematics classes. If an ESL teacher is

not available to teach this class, administrators stated, the district assigns a teacher with the highest level of SEI training to these classes, along with a special education aide. Although ELLs are eligible for the Read 180 program, teachers and administrators told the review team that they cannot enroll in this program because of irresolvable scheduling conflicts. In the career/technical areas, a para-educator rotates among the shops and laboratories providing equal minutes of assistance to each of the district's identified ELLs, who were 38 in number at the time of the review. Administrators told the review team that the para-educator gives the same amount of career/technical assistance to each English language learner regardless of need. Administrators also said that the para-educator's major responsibilities are translation and obtaining alternative resources.

Greater Lawrence has increased its certified staff for providing ESL services, but problems remain. Students at all five proficiency levels are grouped together in ESL classes for 42 minutes daily; thus students with lower proficiency levels are not receiving the amount of ESL instruction recommended by the state.¹⁷ The district provides only an untrained and uncertified para-educator to assist students in the career areas. ELLs and students with disabilities are grouped in science and math classes, and ELL students cannot enroll in Read 180 because of scheduling difficulties.

In 2010¹⁸ the proficiency rate for Greater Lawrence's English language learners (ELLs) in ELA was 8 percent, compared to the state's grade 10 rate for ELLs of 19 percent. The proficiency rate for Greater Lawrence's ELLs in mathematics was 0 percent, compared to the state's grade 10 proficiency rate for ELLs of 30 percent. Administrators told the review team that this subgroup is the most at risk of dropping out in the district; in 2011, according to ESE data, the four-year graduation rate for a cohort of eight ELLs was 50 percent, the lowest of all district subgroups', and the four-year dropout rate was 12.5 percent, the highest of all district subgroups'. Without correcting program deficiencies to improve the support for English language learners, it will be difficult for the district to help them access academic and career/technical content and reduce the high risk of their dropping out of school.

¹⁷ The recommended amounts are:
Levels 1 and 2: daily minimum of 2.5 hours to a full day
Level 3: daily minimum of 1-2 hours
Levels 4 and 5: weekly minimum of 2.5 hours

¹⁸ A proficiency rate for 2011 was not reported because the number of students was fewer than 10.

Financial and Asset Management

The district's fiscal operations are well-established and thorough. The district budget includes a useful level of detail, but does not include comparative data. The school committee's fiscal policy does not clearly address the use of reserves and capital assessments.

The review team examined the fiscal year 2012 district budget and found that it was clear, well composed, and included estimated revenue and a summary of instructional costs and program and departmental expenses. The budget also showed short-term and some long-term trends. The chart of accounts uses ESE function codes. The budget document contained a good balance of relevant program and fiscal information, without being excessive or redundant. In interviews with the review team, school committee members stated that the budget process was sound, but could always be improved. They stated that while the school committee had not always been fully informed in the past about the contents of the budget, the current superintendent-director insisted on transparency. The superintendent-director, in turn, expressed the view that the budget process was formal, systematic, inclusive, and open. Recent annual audits made only one significant management recommendation; the business office quickly implemented it.

Through an examination of documents, the review team found that monthly internal fiscal reports documented academic and career/technical department expenses. Within each department's expenses, classifications were broken down further by salary and associated costs and distributed both internally and externally. With accounting software the business office could produce other expense reports as needed.

From an interview with business office staff, the review team concluded that both salary and accounts payable processes and internal fiscal controls were satisfactory. Purchasing requests are entered remotely with supervisory approval. The district employs a bookkeeper who manages the general ledger software with functions including journal entries and bank reconciliations according to customary practice. A part-time treasurer manages cash flow statements, checks bank reconciliations, and works with banks to borrow revenue or bond anticipation notes as necessary.

When asked about the district's higher than average costs for employee benefits and professional development, and about comparisons with other Massachusetts regional vocational schools, school business officials responded that they did review data on other regional vocational technical schools, but not through a formal process. They said that the district periodically reviews the programs of other vocational technical schools, but usually from the viewpoint of classroom practice. The superintendent-director noted that he attends monthly meetings of the Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators where information is exchanged.

In reference to the management of capital reserves, miscellaneous revenue, and excess and deficiency (E&D) fund balances, the district included in the fiscal year 2011 budget an annual \$60,000 capital assessment to member districts on an apportioned basis, with Lawrence's share

of \$44,787 paid by the city. The superintendent-director noted that while the district has not borrowed for capital projects, it is permitted to assess for capital costs under the school's charter and has assessed members \$60,000 annually. The capital assessment was reduced to \$30,000 in fiscal year 2012. The funds are retained in a capital reserve reflected on the balance sheet and are available for potential projects.

The district did not meet required net school spending in fiscal years 2010, 2011, and 2012. In an effort to reduce the net school spending assessments of member cities and towns while maintaining programs, the district has applied Excess and Deficiency funds in the amounts of \$988,262 in fiscal year 2010 and \$1,181,134 in fiscal year 2011. In fiscal year 2012, the district's Excess & Deficiency estimated undesignated reserve application to the fiscal year 2012 budget was an estimated \$300,000 as well as an estimated \$100,000 of miscellaneous revenue.

Greater Lawrence's fiscal policies do not include guidelines about when and how excess funds should be applied to the budget, such as the revenue conditions that should trigger such use of funds, even though significant amounts of such funds have been applied to recent budgets.

While Greater Lawrence's internal financial data is comprehensive, the district does not routinely engage in a systematic analysis of external comparative demographic and financial data. The business office and superintendent-director have jointly developed a well-considered budget format that reflects a comprehensive financial plan in clear and understandable language. The budget format and financial information contained in monthly reports appears to satisfy the needs of all stakeholders. The district also does not have information on prevalent program and internal fiscal practices in other districts. Although the district's use of surplus funds appears to be within the scope of regional districts' allowed use of excess funds, in the absence of a fiscal policy on use of these funds, the budget could be challenged as being too conservative or too generous in its use of surplus funds.

Because the procedures for collecting and analyzing student performance data are being developed, the district cannot fully use student performance data to allocate fiscal resources optimally.

The superintendent-director stated that available student performance data drove budget considerations in the district. According to district leaders, however, the collection and analysis of academic performance data was "a work in progress." According to interviews and documentation, the district made progress in uploading the results of the MCAS tests, MAP, SRI, and other measures onto its iPass database. The district was also using a variety of protocols and student management data on the same information system. Administrators stated that staff needed instruction, assistance, and support to make fullest use of the database. When asked by the review team, school leaders said that they were not yet able to make highly effective use of the database because 2011-2012 was the start-up year. In focus groups, some teachers said that there was too much data and that the data was not in the most effective format for teacher use.

In interviews with the review team, the principal said that she took student-to-staff ratios into account in resource allocation. Interviewees told the review team that the principal had not been

involved in the budget process, although she would be central to establishing budget priorities in the future. A newly hired literacy coach had begun working “primarily with the academic side” and analysis of student data was “leading to modifications.”

Although career/technical program data was also used to some extent in budget considerations, administrators told the review team that the nature and substance of the data collected was undergoing reconsideration and change. The district collected data from multiple sources and administrators stated that there was no integrated analysis of the implications. Administrators stated that the district included data on curricular and instructional needs in the budget although the curriculum was not fully developed, aligned, and cyclically reviewed, as discussed in the first curriculum and instruction finding.

The district’s professional development cost per pupil was among the highest of Massachusetts vocational schools with approximately \$640,000 expended on professional development from general fund appropriations in FY2011. Approximately \$116,000 in additional professional development funding was from grants. According to interviews and documents, the professional development program was based on SIP goals, student data, and staff surveys, and had become more focused. At the time of this review, a professional development committee was being developed and was to meet regularly. The review team found these developments promising (see finding on professional development above). In interviews, administrators stated that impending budget challenges include maintaining the professional development budget in 2012-2013.

The district has shown that good budgets can be built based on analysis of available student data. Achieving a higher level of analysis of student achievement data depends upon continuing to develop the district’s capacity to collect, organize, and analyze data. Without the ability to analyze a full range of valid student achievement data and to do so program by program, the district will be hard-pressed at budget time to reallocate its fiscal resources optimally to improve teaching and learning.

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 district should continue to increase the capacity and the effectiveness of the leadership team by clearly defining roles and responsibilities for middle- and lower-level administrators, providing continued professional development, coaching, and supervision, and holding all administrators accountable.

While a new administrative organizational structure has given the principal requisite authority as the educational leader of the school, the superintendent-director, principal, teachers, and teachers' federation leaders told the review team in separate interviews that the roles of some middle- and lower-level administrators are unclear. Some decisions that should be made at a lower level are deflected upward. Some administrators, perhaps because of their strong relationships with teachers, have not yet taken full responsibility in their roles by making the tough decisions and having the hard conversations with teachers that are necessary. On the other hand, some administrators have a top-down, non-collaborative approach to decision-making, resulting in strained relationships with teachers. Teachers are sometimes given tasks without being given the reasons or an opportunity to participate in solving problems. Teachers told the review team that unclear and inconsistent communication from administrators creates tension in the staff.

The review team encourages the entire leadership team to continue to discuss leadership problems openly and honestly as part of the district's adaptive leadership training. The leadership team should discuss the possible effects of unclear roles and unclear communication to staff. As a group, they should consider developing a plan to address the issues of leadership capacity and style that have been identified. They might consider assigning a mentor to each administrator, or pairing administrators for ongoing peer coaching and feedback. Every administrator might also write goals to address areas of improvement. The performance expectations for each administrative position should be explicit (job descriptions should be updated and aligned with the new organizational structure), and each administrator should be held accountable for fulfilling them. They should be supported in doing so by appropriate professional development, coaching, and supervision.

Interviews showed the review team that all district administrators have strengths. The review team encourages district administrators to enlist their strengths to increase their leadership capacity. The leadership team should make the commitment to speak in one voice when they are working with staff and to take personal responsibility for every decision made by the team as a

whole. A cohesive leadership team will help to move the district forward to higher levels of student achievement.

Curriculum and Instruction

Greater Lawrence should develop a systematic process and cycle for curriculum development and review to keep the curriculum current and relevant. It should continue its efforts to improve the quality of instruction by including effective instructional strategies in curriculum documents and providing targeted professional development on these strategies, along with coaching to help teachers implement them.

The Greater Lawrence curriculum documents vary in format and completeness and the district does not have a cyclical process for curriculum development and renewal. All curriculum documents should include essential components such as standards and learning objectives, instructional strategies, and formative assessments. Greater Lawrence should establish a steering committee and a formal curriculum review and revision procedure and cycle. A district curriculum steering committee might establish a repeating multi-year cycle for curriculum development and renewal, including sequential periods of curricular analysis, design and development, and implementation. A systematic process based on standards, data analysis, and teacher recommendations will ensure that the district curriculum is current, responsive, and meets the needs of all learners.

The prevalence of effective instruction in observed classes at Greater Lawrence was generally low. Although the district had recently emphasized differentiated instruction in professional development, the review team found differentiation of instruction to be an area of need, particularly in academic classes; it found promoting higher-order thinking to be an area of need, particularly in career/technical classes. To improve instruction, Greater Lawrence should ensure that curriculum guides and maps include effective instructional strategies highly correlated with the district's professional development program. Some teachers in the conditions of school effectiveness survey advocated placement of students in single ability groups, but it should not be assumed that differentiated instruction is primarily ability grouping. Greater Lawrence serves students with a wide range of learning styles in heterogeneously composed classes; to meet their diverse needs, it is necessary for teachers to differentiate their instruction.

Two other areas of need found by the review team were the posting of learning objectives and the use of formative assessments. Teachers have complied with the district requirement to post agendas, but in classes observed by the review team these agendas often consisted of descriptions of learning activities rather than measurable learning outcomes. Without measurable learning outcomes, neither teachers nor students can be held accountable. And the use of formative assessments to help teachers determine what students understand "in the moment" was not widespread. Formative assessments are powerful tools that enable teachers to adjust instruction, provide feedback, and help students revise their work and thinking to achieve the lesson objective.

The district should continue working to make effective instructional strategies part of instructional practice at Greater Lawrence. Through interviews, the review team learned that academic teachers have two daily common planning periods, but career/technical teachers have none. Greater Lawrence should explore ways to increase the amount of time that career/technical teachers have for professional discussion. The district should also consider allocating increased coaching time on differentiating instruction and should provide teachers more explicit guidance on writing learning objectives. Greater Lawrence might have teachers who already use formative assessments model these simple but powerful instructional strategies for other teachers. Both learning objectives and differentiating instruction should be elements of formal classroom observations. The review team also recommends that administrators use walkthroughs to target and give teachers feedback on high priority instructional practices.

A cyclical development and review process will ensure the currency and relevance of the district curriculum. By articulating expectations for student learning and instructional strategies in the curriculum documents and providing correlated professional development, coaching, and supervision, the district will ensure that the goals of the SIP are translated into practice and that student achievement continues to improve.

Assessment

Greater Lawrence is encouraged to expand upon its promising initiatives to collect, analyze, and use multiple sources of student academic data to inform curriculum and instruction and improve student achievement. Data should include the results of formative and benchmark assessments as well as summative measures.

The review team was impressed by the commitment displayed by Greater Lawrence to the implementation of data collection and dissemination policies that are increasingly comprehensive, continuous, and timely. Multiple sources of evidence, including staff interviews and key district documents such as the recently revised SIP, confirmed the district's goal of creating a culture of data usage for decision-making in the classroom. Although much progress has already been achieved, much remains to be done. The district data team, a representative committee composed of administrators and teachers, was created in 2010-2011 to initiate and oversee the development and implementation of data policies and protocols. It will therefore be its responsibility, primarily, to develop the plans and strategies needed to implement the following recommendations.

At present the district uses data collection tools and techniques that are largely summative in nature. Standardized assessments such as MAP and SRI are used essentially as universal screenings of students' overall academic strengths and weaknesses. They are generally administered in the fall to all incoming freshmen and again in the spring and serve basically as pre- and post-tests. They are most useful for placement, to identify students who may need additional supports, and to broadly inform the school's RTI screening process. Additional student performance data is compiled through the administration of common quarterly, mid-

term, and final examinations. Less well developed is the district's capacity to use a comprehensive, regular, and balanced system of formative and benchmark assessments, both standardized and locally developed, that can continuously and accurately monitor the academic progress of every student toward achieving well-defined learning objectives throughout the school year.

In establishing comprehensive assessment policies and practices, Greater Lawrence is encouraged to focus its efforts on the need for the continuous collection, systematic analysis, and regular and balanced use of multiple sources of student performance data. The data should include the results of formative and benchmark assessments as well as summative measures. The creation of a more integrated and comprehensive progress monitoring system will facilitate timely adjustments to classroom instructional practices, appropriate student academic supports and interventions, and needed curricular modifications. Further, a more integrated and comprehensive system will more effectively support all instructional decision-making within the school and ultimately contribute to enhanced student achievement.

The review team recommends that the district develop a formal and consistent data-based process to accurately and systematically assess the effectiveness of both academic and career/technical programs and services and inform decision-making.

Although some progress has been made, there remains a clear need, particularly in the career/technical area, to develop a consistent and comprehensive process by which student assessment results, demographic data, and other pertinent and timely information is systematically incorporated into all aspects of decision-making and program assessment. The review team found that Greater Lawrence is beginning to use available performance data, including the MCAS tests, MAP, and SRI results, as well as some teacher-made common assessments, to identify program needs, accurately measure academic proficiencies, and inform curriculum revision and development for its academic programs. For example, the district is using performance data in the current major revision to the mathematics curriculum and in significant enhancements to the science and English language arts (ELA) curricula.

Although the career/technical program does administer a battery of standardized career and occupational assessments from NOCTI, uses the Skills Plus Work Force Ready System to record and track competency attainment, and collects OSHA certification information, Perkins placement data, licensure rates, and other information, the review team found little evidence that the results are systematically organized or compiled, uniformly analyzed, or consistently used. Administrators and staff expressed widely differing ideas when asked how the effectiveness of specific career/technical programs was determined or how to best measure student career/technical competencies. There was little agreement about what data should be used, how it should be used, and in some cases where the data was located. Because the career/technical program does not have in place a uniform and well-defined process by which it regularly compiles, systematically integrates, and consistently analyzes student assessment results, it does not have the ability to use performance data to appropriately inform all aspects of its decision-making. Consequently, the career/technical program has a diminished capacity to prioritize

goals, allocate human and financial resources, and accurately monitor or measure the effectiveness of its programs and the related competencies of its graduates.

The review team recommends that career/technical program leaders and staff work with the district data team to develop a formal and standardized process for reliably evaluating the effectiveness of career/technical programs and services. Clearly defined protocols and consistent procedures should be developed to ensure that a coordinated and comprehensive system of data collection, analysis, and use is implemented. This mechanism will better enable district and vocational leadership to effectively monitor, accurately identify, and appropriately evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of programs and subsequently to introduce, improve, or discontinue programs or services. Ultimately this process will ensure that students experience a high-quality, rigorous, and relevant program of study that will better prepare them to meet their future career challenges and opportunities.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The district should develop and implement a consistent walkthrough procedure that includes constructive and timely written and oral feedback to teachers. Greater Lawrence should develop a walkthrough protocol with a standardized feedback form used by all evaluators to document feedback.

Over the last several years, compliance with teacher evaluation and licensure requirements has dramatically improved at Greater Lawrence. Teachers are highly qualified, the culture of the district is more attractive to staff, and the district has stabilized its teacher turnover rate. One area remaining for improvement is the current process of formatively evaluating teachers, also known as walkthroughs, which should be formalized. The district should create a protocol for walkthroughs that distinguishes formative observations of teachers from the summative observations conducted for required evaluations.

The review team found that stakeholders were confused about the intent and format of walkthroughs. Most of the confusion concerned feedback from walkthroughs. It was unclear whether feedback was supposed to be written or in person. Some interviewees said that feedback was not provided, while others said that every administrator gave some kind of feedback after walkthroughs. The review team was told that in connection with the adaptive leadership program, only half of district evaluators regularly provided teachers feedback.

The review team believes that a formative walkthrough protocol that includes written and in person feedback from administrators trained in observing classrooms can improve student achievement, especially when used with a well-conceived formative student assessment program. Among the benefits of implementing a walkthrough process: the expectations of teachers and administrators for what should be happening in the classroom can be aligned, and administrators can measure the extent to which the professional development program is improving teachers' instruction.

The district should continue its focused approach to professional development and its allocation of professional development resources based on an analysis of student achievement data and staff needs assessments.

Professional development in the district in 2011-2012 was focused on literacy. In 2010-2011, the district focused on differentiated instruction and in 2009-2010, on curriculum. District leaders told the review team that in the past there was little formal professional development. The decision to make literacy a focal point of professional development in 2011-2012 grew out of teachers working together to analyze student achievement data to determine what professional development was needed. The district has used embedded coaching as a concurrent professional development strategy, and the review team determined that professional development was aligned with the goals of the district strategic plan and the SIP. At the time of the review, the district had a five-member professional development committee in the development stage.

The review team recommends that the district continue its focused, data-driven approach; it also recommends that the district include on its professional development committee administrators, a range of teachers, and district data team representatives, and that the committee hold regularly scheduled meetings. In addition, the review team recommends that the district continue to offer specialized professional development such as Research for Better Teaching (RBT) and Observational and Analyzing Teaching (OAT) training to improve the skills of teachers and administrators. The rationale for allocating resources to professional development and offering both focused and specialized professional development is clear: the more staff develop as teachers in the areas of greatest need, the more their students will learn. Focused, strategic professional development aligned with the school improvement and strategic plans of the district will improve both staff competency and student achievement.

Student Support

The district should provide professional development to co-teachers and explore ways to give all co-teachers common planning time.

Greater Lawrence has developed reliable procedures for identifying students in need of support through screening with benchmark and other assessments and teacher assistance and student support teams. The district has a wide variety of programs and services to provide that support, among them a continuum of special education services for eligible students, including a co-taught inclusion model. However, some special educators did not have defined roles and were inactive in the co-taught classes observed by the review team.

The district should consider providing co-teachers professional development on approaches to co-teaching that make the best and highest use of both co-teachers. For example, one advantage of co-teaching is the opportunity to make detailed observations of student learning: one teacher instructs the whole class while the other gathers specific observational information. The co-

teachers decide in advance what kind of information to collect during the lesson and agree on a system for gathering it. They then use the data to inform their joint instructional planning.

In another approach, one teacher assumes primary responsibility for instructing the class while the other circulates and provides unobtrusive assistance to students in need. In a third approach, the co-teachers divide the class into two groups and instruct them simultaneously on the same content. This strategy augments teacher supervision and increases opportunities for students to respond. In a fourth approach, the co-teachers divide the class into two groups, then each co-teacher instructs one group on a segment of the lesson and repeats the instruction for the other group. By dividing up the content, the co-teachers teach to their strengths, while the students experience a variety of appropriate instructional methods.

In a fifth approach, one co-teacher works with a small group of students in need of more intensive support while the other instructs the remainder of the class. Finally, in a team teaching approach, the co-teachers work together to deliver the content in an alternating presentation. Since there is no one best approach, the co-teachers should choose the one that best meets the specific identified needs of their students and accomplishes the lesson objectives.

The review team was told in interviews that not all co-teachers have common planning time. To be effective, co-teachers need the opportunity to plan together. Otherwise, they are reduced to improvising in the moment. Perhaps the inconsistencies the review team observed in the co-teaching model during its classroom visits resulted from the absence of common planning time. By committing resources to inclusion through the co-teaching model, the district has helped place students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment and minimized the separation of students. Greater Lawrence can increase the effectiveness of this progressive model by making sure that co-teachers have a repertoire of co-teaching approaches and, if possible, giving them time to plan their instruction and evaluate its effectiveness.

The district should consider increasing coaching for teachers on differentiating instruction and making differentiating instruction an element in walkthroughs.

Greater Lawrence has begun to implement a three-tiered student-support system based on the Response to Intervention (RTI) model. In a district description of tiered support, differentiated instruction was listed first among the universal interventions available to all students. The district provided professional development on differentiated instruction for all teachers in 2010-2011 and continued the training in 2011-2012. Although Greater Lawrence has made it a high priority, the review team's classroom observations bore out administrators' statement that the school was still working on instruction, and teachers' statement that differentiated instruction was more prevalent in career/technical classes. The review team found that the RTI model and differentiation of instruction had not yet taken root districtwide conceptually, or in practice.

At the time of the review, a newly hired literacy coach had begun working "primarily with the academic side" and analysis of student data was "leading to modifications." Greater Lawrence had only a part-time differentiated instruction coach. The review team recommends that the district consider augmenting coaching and modeling for teachers on differentiating instruction to

enable them to make further progress in translating theory into practice. It might also make differentiated instruction an element in walkthroughs. The district has allocated resources to provide professional development on differentiating instruction. Increasing coaching and making differentiating instruction a focus in walkthroughs will help to realize the intent behind this extensive training and improve teaching and learning.

Greater Lawrence must address issues in its education of English language learners by meeting state licensure requirements. The district should also meet recommendations for hours of ESL instruction, ensure ELLs have access to the Read 180 program, and provide sheltered English immersion in both academic and career-technical classes.

Greater Lawrence has three full-time, dual-certified ESL teachers, one of whom serves as lead teacher, serving 38 English language learners (ELLs) at the time of the review. However, the review team found a number of issues with the ELL program, and at the same time learned that district proficiency rates for ELLs have been very low and was told by administrators that this subgroup was the most at risk of dropping out.

Students at proficiency levels one through five all have 42 minutes a day in ESL classes, with students at the lower proficiency levels not receiving the hours of ESL instruction recommended by the state (see footnote 17 above). Grouping of ELLs and students with disabilities in science and math classes is not best practice for either group of students. Also, although ELLs are eligible for the Read 180 program, they cannot enroll because of scheduling conflicts. Finally, in the career/technical areas, a para-educator without ESL certification or SEI training rotates among the shops and laboratories providing equal minutes of assistance to each of the district's identified ELLs, regardless of individual need.

Greater Lawrence should address these issues. The review team encourages Greater Lawrence to consider adjusting the schedule to make more flexible use of the staff with ESL licenses to meet the needs of ELLs in the academic and career/technical areas and comply with recommendations for the number of hours of ESL instruction, along with the requirement that ESL instruction be given by a licensed ESL teacher. It might also consider a program to encourage more of its teachers to obtain ESL licensure. The district should arrange for more of its staff to receive SEI training aligned with ESE's RETELL¹⁹ initiative, so that ELLs in both academic and career/technical classes are provided with sheltered English immersion. The district should also re-examine the schedule to determine how to arrange for support for students with disabilities and ELLs without always grouping them together in science and math classes, and how to accommodate ELLs in the Read 180 program. English language learners are entitled to equal access to all district programs. Providing the necessary supports for English language learners will allow them to access the academic and career/technical content provided by the district and reduce the high risk of their dropping out of school.

¹⁹ Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners.

Finance and Asset Management

The district should develop clear policies for the use of excess and deficiency and other reserve funds and appropriate authorizations from its member cities and towns.

The district does not have clear fiscal policies about the use of excess and reserve funds in its operating budget or for other purposes. Setting aside funds and using them typically requires authorization of member cities and towns, and this process should be spelled out in the district's policy. In considering revisions of fiscal policy, it would be beneficial for the district to canvas other regional district policies to identify "best practices." The objective would be to protect administration and school committees from criticism about how they apply reserve funds.

Greater Lawrence should analyze the finances of comparable districts to inform the budget process and improve fiscal decision-making.

Greater Lawrence does not have an established procedure for comparative analysis of its finances with those of other Massachusetts regional vocational schools. In interviews with the review team, district business officials said that they review data on other regional vocational technical schools informally. The district periodically reviews the programs of other vocational technical schools, but usually from the viewpoint of classroom practice.

While internal information from the accounting system is well presented, the overall quality of the information would be enhanced if a comparison of external financial data were added to the budget process and document. The DOR and ESE websites provide data for district analysis on income, equalized valuations, function and object code, and per pupil costs, to name a few areas. A fiscal self-examination might include areas such as comparative benefits costs.

The district should continue to refine its use of student performance data to allocate fiscal resources optimally.

The superintendent-director stated that available student performance data drives budget considerations in the district. According to district leaders, however, the collection and analysis of academic performance data is "a work in progress." When asked by the review team, school leaders said that they were not able to make full use of the district database because 2011-2012 was the start-up year. Although career/technical program data is also used to some extent in budget considerations, administrators told the review team that the nature and substance of the data collected was undergoing reconsideration and change. The district collects data from multiple sources, but administrators stated that there was no integrated analysis of the implications. It has already been noted that budget decisions are driven by the available student data. Currently, with its inclusion of available data, the budget is well-conceived. In the future, however, the district should further develop the process of using analysis of student achievement data in budget decisions, while expanding the data available.

Appendix A: Review Team Members

The review of the Greater Lawrence Regional School District was conducted from December 12-15, 2011, by the following team of educators, independent consultants to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Nadine Bonda, Ed.D., Leadership and Governance

Mary Eirich, Curriculum and Instruction

Frank Sambuceti, Ed.D., Assessment

James Hearn, Human Resources and Professional Development

James McAuliffe, Ed.D., 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 Greater Lawrence Regional Vocational Technical School District.

- The review team conducted interviews with the following six members of the seven member Greater Lawrence School Committee: chairperson, vice-chairperson, assistant-treasurer, and three school committee members.
- The review team conducted an interview with two representatives of the local unit of the Massachusetts Association of Professional School Administrators representing 15 administrators below the level of principal.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the Greater Lawrence Teachers' Federation, Local 1707: president, vice-president, secretary treasurer, and negotiating representative.
- The review team conducted interviews and focus groups with the following representatives from the central office administration of the Greater Lawrence Regional School District: superintendent-director; principal; grant writer/director of research and development; director of human resources; director of curriculum, instruction and professional development; director of career and technical programs; coordinator of special education; assessment supervisor; supervisor of guidance and admissions; and school business manager.
- The review team visited the Greater Lawrence Regional Vocational Technical School District, grades 9-12.
 - During school visits, the review team conducted interviews with the school principal, assistant principals, academy supervisors, literacy coach, guidance counselors, ELL director, bookkeeper, accounts payable clerk, payroll clerk, and school council members. The team interviewed 37 high school teachers.
 - The review team conducted 49 classroom visits, 31 academic and 18 career/technical.
- The review team analyzed multiple sets of data and reviewed numerous documents before and during the site visit, including:
 - Data on student and school performance, including achievement and growth data and enrollment, graduation, dropout, retention, suspension, and attendance rates.
 - Data on the district's staffing and finances.
 - Published educational reports on the district by ESE, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), and the former Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA).

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

Site Visit Schedule

The following is the schedule for the onsite portion of the district review of the Greater Lawrence Regional School District, conducted from December 12-15, 2011.

| Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday |
|---|--|---|---|
| December 12 Orientation with district leaders and principal; interviews with district staff and principal; review of documents; interview with teachers' federation. | December 13 Interviews with district staff and principal and administrators' association; visits to Greater Lawrence classrooms; review of personnel files; teacher focus groups; focus group with parents. | December 14 Interviews with district staff; visits to Greater Lawrence classrooms; district committee interviews; review of documents. | December 15 Visits to Greater Lawrence classrooms; teacher team meetings; follow-up interviews; team meeting; emerging themes meeting with district leaders and principal. |

Appendix C: Student Achievement Data 2009-2011

Table C1: Greater Lawrence Regional Vocational Technical School District and State Proficiency Rates and Median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs) 2009-2011 English Language Arts

| | 2009 | | 2010 | | 2011 | |
|-------------------|------------------------------|------------|------------------------------|------------|------------------------------|------------|
| Grade | Percent Advanced/ Proficient | Median SGP | Percent Advanced/ Proficient | Median SGP | Percent Advanced/ Proficient | Median SGP |
| Grade 10—District | 58 | 39 | 48 | 38 | 65 | 51 |
| 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.
Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

Table C2: Greater Lawrence Regional Vocational Technical 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 |
| Grade 10—District | 41 | 45 | 37 | 40 | 48 | 57 |
| 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.
Source: School/District Profiles on ESE website

**Table C3: Greater Lawrence Regional Vocational Technical School District and State
Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)
for Selected Subgroups
2011 English Language Arts**

| | Greater Lawrence RVTSD | | | State | |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| | <i>Number of Students Included</i> | <i>CPI</i> | <i>Median SGP</i> | <i>CPI</i> | <i>Median SGP</i> |
| All Students | 310 | 87.6 | 51 | 87.2 | 50 |
| African-American/Black | 3 | --- | --- | 77.4 | 47 |
| Asian | --- | --- | --- | 90.2 | 59 |
| Hispanic/Latino | 246 | 86.9 | 48 | 74.2 | 46 |
| White | 57 | 90.4 | 62 | 90.9 | 51 |
| ELL | 7 | --- | --- | 59.4 | 48 |
| FELL | 22 | 79.5 | 67 | 81.7 | 54 |
| Special Education | 64 | 74.6 | 42 | 68.3 | 42 |
| Low-Income | 243 | 87.1 | 51.5 | 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: Greater Lawrence Regional Vocational Technical School District and State Composite Performance Index (CPI) and Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP) for Selected Subgroups 2011 Mathematics

| | Greater Lawrence RVTSD | | | State | |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|------------|-------------------|------------|-------------------|
| | <i>Number of Students Included</i> | <i>CPI</i> | <i>Median SGP</i> | <i>CPI</i> | <i>Median SGP</i> |
| All Students | 309 | 76.3 | 57 | 79.9 | 50 |
| African-American/Black | 3 | --- | --- | 65 | 47 |
| Asian | --- | --- | --- | 89.5 | 64 |
| Hispanic/Latino | 245 | 75.4 | 57 | 64.4 | 46 |
| White | 57 | 78.5 | 60 | 84.3 | 50 |
| ELL | 7 | --- | --- | 56.3 | 52 |
| FELL | 22 | 68.2 | 57 | 75.1 | 53 |
| Special Education | 63 | 62.7 | 57.5 | 57.7 | 43 |
| Low-Income | 243 | 74.4 | 56 | 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. Greater Lawrence has made substantial progress recently in ELA achievement as well as other student indicators, but in mathematics there was no improvement from 2007-2011 in the 29-point proficiency gap between Greater Lawrence students and their peers statewide.

Leadership and Governance

2. The superintendent-director and principal work in a redesigned organizational structure that better aligns their roles, responsibilities, and areas of authority; they have a common understanding of these, share a common approach to school improvement, and have worked to develop positive relationships with staff and other administrators.
3. The roles of some middle and lower-level administrators are not well-defined, and some administrators in these positions have not yet taken full responsibility in their roles. Differences in administrative style and decision-making and the absence of clear, consistent communication with staff have been sources of tension in the school.

Curriculum and Instruction

4. Greater Lawrence has developed curriculum maps based on the state curriculum frameworks in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science at all grade levels. Most maps do not have instructional strategies and pacing guides. Although there is no curriculum review cycle, curriculum is being revised and developed during recently instituted common planning time.
5. Although teachers had recently received professional development on differentiated instruction (DI) and half had participated in Research for Better Teaching (RBT), the review team's classroom observations were consistent with administrators' statement that the school was still working on instruction—and with teachers' statement that DI was more prevalent in career/technical classes. The team noted as areas of need differentiating instruction, promoting higher-order thinking, establishing learning objectives for purposeful instruction, and using formative student assessments.

Assessment

6. Although the district was still in the early stages of developing a comprehensive assessment system, it had made progress on building capacity to collect and disseminate student performance data and to use it to identify student learning needs, monitor academic progress, modify instruction, and inform curriculum.
7. The district does not have a sufficiently well developed, comprehensive, and reliable data system to effectively inform decision-making, prioritize goals, allocate resources, and initiate, modify, or discontinue programs and services.

Human Resources and Professional Development

8. At the time of the review the district had a well-developed formal evaluation system aligned with then-current state regulations and bargaining agreements. Turnover of staff, the number of highly qualified teachers, and the culture of the district had improved, and a mentoring program for new teachers was in place. Although walkthroughs were conducted by administrators, there was confusion about the process and feedback to teachers was provided inconsistently.
9. Professional development in the district has evolved from a menu of different professional development offerings to a more focused program with annual priorities developed from data and surveys and aligned with the SIP. The district also offers specialized professional development programs to teachers and administrators.

Student Support

10. With consistently implemented and effective policies and programs, Greater Lawrence has made steady progress in increasing attendance, promotion, and graduation rates and lowering dropout and chronic absence rates.
11. Greater Lawrence has increased its capacity to identify students in need, for instance through a new universal screening process, and has a wide variety of support programs. But RTI and differentiated instruction have not yet taken root districtwide, observations in academic classes showed inconsistent implementation of the co-taught inclusion model, and some co-teachers do not have common planning time.
12. Though Greater Lawrence has increased its ESL staff, English language learners (ELLs) do not receive the amount of English language instruction recommended by the state, and ELL support in career/technical areas is not provided by a certified educator or one with SEI training. District proficiency rates for ELLs have been very low and the four-year graduation rate for a cohort of eight ELLs in 2011 was 50 percent.

Finance

13. The district's fiscal operations are well-established and thorough. The district budget includes a useful level of detail, but does not include comparative data. The school committee's fiscal policy does not clearly address the use of reserves and capital assessments.
14. Because the procedures for collecting and analyzing student performance data are being developed, the district cannot fully use student performance data to allocate fiscal resources optimally.

Recommendation Statements:

Leadership and Governance

1. The district should continue to increase the capacity and the effectiveness of the leadership team by clearly defining roles and responsibilities for middle- and lower-level administrators, providing continued professional development, coaching, and supervision, and holding all administrators accountable.

Curriculum and Instruction

2. Greater Lawrence should develop a systematic process and cycle for curriculum development and review to keep the curriculum current and relevant. It should continue its efforts to improve the quality of instruction by including effective instructional strategies in curriculum documents and providing targeted professional development on these strategies, along with coaching to help teachers implement them.

Assessment

3. Greater Lawrence is encouraged to expand upon its promising initiatives to collect, analyze, and use multiple sources of student academic data to inform curriculum and instruction and improve student achievement. Data should include the results of formative and benchmark assessments as well as summative measures.
4. The review team recommends that the district develop a formal and consistent data-based process to accurately and systematically assess the effectiveness of both academic and career/technical programs and services and inform decision-making.

Human Resources and Professional Development

5. The district should develop and implement a consistent walkthrough procedure that includes constructive and timely written and oral feedback to teachers. Greater Lawrence should develop a walkthrough protocol with a standardized feedback form used by all evaluators to document feedback.
6. The district should continue its focused approach to professional development and its allocation of professional development resources based on an analysis of student achievement data and staff needs assessments.

Student Support

7. The district should provide professional development to co-teachers and explore ways to give all co-teachers common planning time.
8. The district should consider increasing coaching for teachers on differentiating instruction and making differentiating instruction an element in walkthroughs.

9. Greater Lawrence must address issues in its education of English language learners by meeting state licensure requirements. The district should also meet recommendations for hours of ESL instruction, ensure ELLs have access to the Read 180 program, and provide sheltered English immersion in both academic and career-technical classes.

Finance

10. The district should develop clear policies for the use of excess and deficiency and other reserve funds and appropriate authorizations from its member cities and towns.
11. Greater Lawrence should analyze the finances of comparable districts to inform the budget process and improve fiscal decision-making.
12. The district should continue to refine its use of student performance data to allocate fiscal resources optimally.