

# District Review Report

Athol-Royalston  
Regional School District



Review conducted March 18-22, 2013

Center for Center for District and School Accountability

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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# Athol-Royalston Regional School District, District Review Overview

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## Purpose

Conducted under Chapter 15m Section 55A of the Massachusetts General Laws, district reviews support local school districts in establishing or strengthening a cycle of continuous improvement. Reviews consider carefully the effectiveness of system wide functions using the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (ESE) six district standards: leadership and governance, curriculum and instruction, assessment, human resources and professional development, student support, and financial and asset management. Reviews identify systems and practices that may be impeding improvement as well as those most likely to be contributing to positive results.

Districts reviewed in the 2012-2013 school year included those classified into Level 3<sup>1</sup> of the 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. Review reports may be used by ESE and the district to establish priority for assistance and make resource allocation decisions.

## Methodology

Reviews collect evidence for each of the six district standards above. A district review team consisting of independent consultants with expertise in each of the district standards review documentation, data, and reports for two days before conducting a four-day district visit that includes visits to individual schools. The team conducts interviews and focus group sessions with such stakeholders as school committee members, teachers' association representatives, administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Team members also observe classroom instructional practice. Subsequent to the on-site review, the team meets for two days to develop findings and recommendations before submitting a draft report to ESE. *It is important to note that district review reports focus primarily on the system's most significant strengths and challenges, with an emphasis on identifying areas for improvement.*

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<sup>1</sup> Districts selected were in Level 3 in school year 2012-2013; all served one or more schools among the lowest 20 percent of schools statewide serving common grade levels pursuant to 603 CMR 2.05(2)(a). The districts with the lowest aggregate performance and least movement in Composite Performance Index (CPI) in their respective regions were selected for review from among those districts that were not exempt under Chapter 15, Section 55A. Some districts were exempt because another comprehensive review had been completed or was scheduled within nine months of the planned reviews.

## Site Visit

The site visit to the Athol-Royalston district was conducted from March 18-March 22, 2013. The site visit included 36 hours of interviews and focus groups with approximately 70 stakeholders, including school committee members, district administrators, school staff, and teachers' association representatives. The review team conducted one focus group with three elementary school teachers, four middle school teachers, and two high school teachers. The site visit was extended by one day when school was cancelled because of a snowstorm.

The team observed classroom instructional practice in 34 classrooms in six schools. The team collected data using ESE's instructional inventory, a tool for recording observed characteristics of standards-based teaching.

Further information about the review, the site visit schedule and the review team can be found in Appendix A. Appendix B contains information about enrollment, expenditures, and student performance; Appendix C summarizes contains the instructional inventory—the record of the team's observations in classrooms.

## District Profile

Athol-Royalston has a town manager form of government and the chair of the school committee is elected. The 10 members of the school committee are elected at large by the voters in the towns of Athol and Royalston; they meet monthly.

The current superintendent has been in the position since November 2005. The district leadership team includes the superintendent, the assistant superintendent, the business manager, and the director of special education and guidance services. The district now has a .25 Title I director, a retired Title I director from a neighboring district. At the time of the review, there were no vacancies, although there has been much turnover in both district and school leadership in recent years.<sup>2</sup> The district has five principals leading six schools. There are also two other school administrators, a high school assistant principal and a middle school assistant principal, both of whom were members of a bargaining unit. There were 105.2 teachers in the district in 2012-2013, their number reduced from 118.6 in 2011-2012 and 127.6 in 2010-2011.

As of the school year 2012-2013, 1,476 students were enrolled in the district. Athol High School (grades 9-12) enrolled 389 students; Athol-Royalston Middle School (grades 5-8) enrolled 429;

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<sup>2</sup> According to [ESE's District Analysis and Review Tool](#), the district rate of principal turnover was 20%, 40%, 60%, and 14% in the years from 2009-2012, compared to 18%, 17%, 19%, and 18% statewide in those years. There have been transfers of principals from one school to another in recent years as well as retirements and resignations.

Pleasant Street Elementary School in Athol (PK-grade 4) enrolled 275; Riverbend Elementary School in Athol (grades 2-4) enrolled 113; Sanders Street Elementary School in Athol (K-grade 2) enrolled 128; and Royalston Community School in Royalston (K-grade 6) enrolled 142.

Between 2008 and 2012 overall student enrollment decreased by 20 percent (369 students). Approximately 300 students used the choice out option in 2011-2012, down slightly from the previous year. The predominant racial and ethnic groups are white and Hispanic/Latino students (see Table B1a in Appendix B). As of 2011–2012, the proportion of white students was 89 percent, compared with 67 percent in the state, and Hispanic/Latino students made up 5.2 percent of enrollment, compared with 16 percent in the state. English language learners (ELLs) made up 1.6 percent of enrollment, compared with 7.3 percent statewide, and students whose first language is not English made up 2.4 percent of enrollment, compared with 16.7 percent statewide. The proportion of students with disabilities was 26.0 percent, compared with 17.0 percent statewide, and the proportion of students from low-income families was 53.1 percent, compared with 35.2 percent statewide (see Table B1b in Appendix B). Per capita income in Athol in 2010 was \$17,345, the 28<sup>th</sup> lowest for municipalities in the state; for Royalston in the same year it was \$22,745, the 71<sup>st</sup> lowest.<sup>3</sup>

Total in-district per-pupil expenditures were higher in Athol-Royalston than the median for the 48 K-12 districts of similar size (1,000-1,999 students), \$13,854 in fiscal year 2011 compared with \$11,853 (see [District Analysis and Review Tool Detail: Staffing & Finance](#)). See Table B3 in Appendix B for in-district per-pupil expenditures for fiscal years 2010-2012. Actual net school spending has been above required, as shown in Table B2.

## **Student Performance**

Information about student performance includes: (1) the accountability and assistance level of the district, including the reason for the district’s level classification; (2) the progress the district and its schools are making toward narrowing proficiency gaps as measured by the Progress and Performance Index (PPI); (3) English language arts (ELA) performance and growth; (4) mathematics performance and growth; (5) science and technology/engineering (STE) performance; and (6) annual dropout rates and cohort graduation rates. Data is reported for the district and for schools and student subgroups that have at least four years of sufficient data and are therefore eligible to be classified into an accountability and assistance level (1-5). “Sufficient data” means that at least 20 students in a district or school or at least 30 students in a subgroup were assessed on ELA and mathematics MCAS tests for the four years under review.

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<sup>3</sup> See “New Community Comparison Report” on Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services website at <http://www.mass.gov/dor/local-officials/municipal-data-and-financial-management/data-bank-reports/>.

Four-and two-year trend data are provided when possible, in addition to areas in the district and/or its schools demonstrating potentially meaningful gains or declines over these periods. Data on student performance is also available in Appendix B. In both this section and Appendix B, the data reported is the most recent available.

**1. The district is Level 3 because the Riverbend, Pleasant Street, and Athol High schools are Level 3.**<sup>4</sup>

**A.** The Riverbend School is among the lowest performing 20 percent of elementary schools and the school's low income students and White students are among the lowest performing 20 percent of subgroups served by elementary schools.<sup>5</sup>

**B.** The Pleasant Street School is among the lowest performing 20 percent of elementary schools.

**C.** Athol High School is among the lowest performing 20 percent of high schools.

**D.** The district's seven schools place between the 1<sup>st</sup> percentile and the 26<sup>th</sup> percentile based on each school's four-year (2009-2012) achievement and improvement trends relative to other schools serving the same or similar grades: Riverbend (1<sup>st</sup> percentile of elementary schools); Pleasant Street (15<sup>th</sup> percentile of elementary schools); Royalston Community School (26<sup>th</sup> percentile of elementary schools); Athol-Royalston (26<sup>th</sup> percentile of middle schools); and Athol High (20<sup>th</sup> percentile of high schools). Two schools have insufficient data: Sanders Street and Ellen Bigelow.<sup>6</sup>

**2. The district is not sufficiently narrowing proficiency gaps.**

**A.** The district as a whole is not considered to be making sufficient progress toward narrowing proficiency gaps. This is because the 2012 cumulative PPI for all students and for high needs<sup>7</sup> students is less than 75 for the district. The district's cumulative PPI<sup>8 9</sup> is 46 for all students and 46 for high needs

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<sup>4</sup> Due to the district's Level 3 classification, it received a concurrent determination of need for special education technical assistance or intervention of "Needs Technical Assistance (NTA)." This serves as an indication that while areas of the district's performance may be positive, one or more schools (or, in the case of a single school district, the district as a whole) may be experiencing poor outcomes for students with disabilities and/or are having compliance issues.

<sup>5</sup> A district is classified into the level of its lowest-performing school unless it has been placed in Level 4 or 5 by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education independent of the level of its schools.

<sup>6</sup> The Ellen Bigelow School closed at the end of the 2011-12 school year. The Sanders Street School does not serve tested grades.

<sup>7</sup> The high needs group is an unduplicated count of all students in a school or district belonging to at least one of the following individual subgroups: students with disabilities, English language learners (ELL) and Former ELL students, or low income students (eligible for free/reduced price school lunch).

<sup>8</sup> The PPI combines multiple measures of performance data (achievement, improvement, and graduation and dropout rates) over multiple years into a single number. All districts, schools, and student subgroups receive an *annual PPI* based

students. The district's cumulative PPI for reportable subgroups are: 50 (low income students), 41 (students with disabilities), 59 (Hispanic/Latino students), and 46 (White students).

**3. The district's English language arts (ELA) performance is very low<sup>10</sup> relative to other districts and its growth<sup>11</sup> is low.<sup>12</sup>**

**A.** The district did not meet its annual improvement targets for all students, high needs students, low income students, students with disabilities, Hispanic/Latino students, and White students.<sup>13</sup>

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on improvement from one year to the next and a *cumulative PPI* between 0 and 100 based on four years of data. A district's, school's or subgroup's cumulative PPI is the average of its annual Progress and Performance Index scores over the four most recent MCAS administrations, weighting recent years the most (1-2-3-4). A cumulative PPI is calculated for a group if it has at least three annual PPIs. If a group is missing an annual PPI for one year, that year is left out of the weighting (e.g., 1-X-3-4). While a group's annual PPI can exceed 100 points, the cumulative PPI is always reported on a 100-point scale.

<sup>9</sup>The cumulative PPI is a *criterion-referenced* measure of a district or school's performance relative to its own targets, irrespective of the performance of other districts or schools. Conversely, school percentiles are *norm-referenced* because schools are being compared to other schools across the state that serve the same or similar grades.

<sup>10</sup>All districts, schools, and subgroups are expected to halve the gap between their level of performance in the year 2011 and 100 percent proficient by the 2016-17 school year in ELA, mathematics, and STE. The Composite Performance Index (CPI), a measure of the extent to which a group of students has progressed towards proficiency, is the state's measure of progress towards this goal. In this report the 2012 CPI is used to compare the performance of districts, schools, and grades in a particular subject for a given year. For districts, for each level of school, and for each grade the CPIs are ordered from lowest to highest and then divided into five equal groups (quintiles) with the corresponding descriptions: "very high", "high", "moderate", "low" or "very low." In their assignment to quintiles single-school districts are treated as schools rather than districts. Quintiles for grades are calculated two ways: using a ranking of all districts' CPIs for a particular grade, and using a ranking of all schools' CPIs for a particular grade. CPI figures derive from the MCAS Report on the Department's School and District Profiles website: [http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state\\_report/mcas.aspx](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/mcas.aspx).

<sup>11</sup>Massachusetts uses student growth percentiles (SGP) to measure how much a student's or group of students' achievement has grown or changed over time. At the student level, student growth percentiles measure progress by comparing changes in a student's MCAS scores to changes in MCAS scores of other students with similar achievement profiles ("academic peers"). Growth at the district, school, and subgroup levels are reported as median SGPs - the middle score when the individual SGPs in a group are ranked from highest to lowest. Median SGPs are reported for ELA and mathematics. In contrast to the CPI, which describes a group's progress toward proficiency based on the group's current level of achievement, the median SGP describes a group's progress in terms of how the achievement of the students in the group changed relative to the prior year as compared to their academic peers. A group demonstrates "moderate" or "typical" growth if the group's median SGP is between the 41st and 60th percentiles.

<sup>12</sup>For ELA trends in the aggregate, see Table B4a in Appendix B; for selected subgroups, see Table B5a.

<sup>13</sup>A district, school, or subgroup is considered to have met its target when its CPI is within 1.5 CPI points of the target.

**B.** The district did not meet its annual growth targets for all students, high needs students, low income students, students with disabilities, and White students.

**C.** The district earned extra credit toward its annual PPI for increasing the percentage of students scoring *Advanced* 10 percent or more between 2011 and 2012 for students with disabilities, and Hispanic/Latino students. It did not earn extra credit for decreasing the percentage of students scoring *Warning/Failing* 10 percent or more over this period for any reportable group.

**D.** In 2012 the district demonstrated very low performance in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, and overall relative to other districts.

**E.** In 2012 the district demonstrated moderate growth in grade 8 and low growth in grades 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, and overall.

**F.** Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, the district demonstrated potentially meaningful<sup>14</sup> declines in grades 5, 6, 7, 8 and overall. These gains were attributable to its performance over both periods.

**G.** The 2012 performance of the Pleasant Street School (PK-4) 2012 is very low relative to other elementary schools and its growth is moderate. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, it demonstrated potentially meaningful declines in grade 3 and overall. Most of the declines in both areas were attributable to its performance over both periods.

**H.** The 2012 performance of the Riverbend School (2-4) 2012 is very low relative to other elementary schools and its growth is low. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, it demonstrated potentially meaningful declines in grade 4. These declines were attributable to its performance over both periods.

**I.** The 2012 performance of the Royalston Community School (K-6) 2012 is low relative to other elementary schools and its growth is moderate. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between

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<sup>14</sup> The following changes in measures of achievement and growth, either positive or negative, are potentially meaningful, pending further inquiry: CPI (2.5 points); SGP (10 points); percent *Proficient* and *Advanced* (3 percentage points). Changes are more likely to be potentially meaningful for larger groups of students; higher performing groups tend to demonstrate fewer potentially meaningful changes than lower performing groups; and certain subjects and grade levels are more likely to demonstrate potentially meaningful changes than others. A consistent pattern of potentially meaningful change over several consecutive pairs of consecutive years is more likely to be meaningful than changes from one year to another, whether consecutive or not. In this report, a statement of potentially meaningful change is provided when a district, school, grade level, or subgroup demonstrates three or more instances of declines or gains of the amounts specified above in the CPI, SGP, and percent *Proficient* or *Advanced* over the last four years, the most recent two years, or both. Any instance of decline of one of the amounts specified above (or more) prevents three or more instances of gain from being considered potentially meaningful, and vice versa.

2011 and 2012, it demonstrated potentially meaningful gains in grades 3 and 4 and potentially meaningful declines in grade 5. Most of the gains in grades 3 and 4 and declines in grade 5 were attributable to its performance over both periods.

J. The 2012 performance of the Athol-Royalston Middle School (5-8) is very low relative to other middle schools and its growth is low. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, it demonstrated potentially meaningful declines in grades 5, 6, 7 and overall. These declines were attributable to its performance over both periods.

K. The 2012 performance of the Athol High School (9-12) 2012 is low relative to other high schools and its growth is moderate. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, it demonstrated both gains and declines.

**4. The district's mathematics performance is very low relative to other districts and its growth is low.<sup>15</sup> There were variations in performance among grades.**

A. The district did not meet its annual improvement targets for all students, high needs students, low income students, students with disabilities, Hispanic/Latino students, and White students.

B. The district did not meet its annual growth targets for all students, high needs students, low income students, students with disabilities, and White students.

C. The district did not earn extra credit toward its annual PPI for increasing the percentage of students scoring *Advanced* 10 percent or more between 2011 and 2012 for any reportable group. It did not earn extra credit for decreasing the percentage of students scoring *Warning/Failing* 10 percent or more over this period for any reportable group.

D. In 2012 the district demonstrated low performance in grade 6 and very low performance in grades 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, and overall relative to other districts.

E. In 2012 the district demonstrated high growth in grade 6 and low growth in grades 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, and overall.

F. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, the district demonstrated potentially meaningful declines in grades 3, 4, 5, 10, and overall. These gains were attributable to its performance over both periods.

G. Pleasant Street School's (PK-4) 2012 performance is very low relative to other elementary schools and its growth is low. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, it demonstrated

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<sup>15</sup> For mathematics trends in the aggregate, see Table B4b in Appendix B; for selected subgroups, see Table B5b.

potentially meaningful declines in grades 3, 4, and overall. The declines were attributable to its performance over both periods.

**H.** Riverbend School's (2-4) 2012 performance is very low relative to other elementary schools and its growth is very low. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, it demonstrated potentially meaningful declines in grade 4. Most of these declines were attributable to its performance over both periods.

**I.** Royalston Community School's (K-6) 2012 performance is low relative to other elementary schools and its growth is low. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, it demonstrated potentially meaningful gains in grades 3, 4, and 6 and potentially meaningful declines in grade 5. Most of the gains were attributable to its performance over both periods and the declines in grade 5 were mostly attributable to its performance over both periods.

**J.** Athol-Royalston Middle School's (5-8) performance is low relative to other middle schools and its growth is moderate. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, it demonstrated potentially meaningful declines in grade 6. These declines were mostly attributable to its performance over both periods.

**K.** Athol High School's (9-12) 2012 performance is very low relative to other high schools and its growth is low. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, it demonstrated potentially meaningful declines in grade 10 and overall. These declines were attributable to its performance over both periods.

**5. The district's science and technology/engineering (STE) performance is very low relative to other districts.<sup>16</sup>**

**A.** The district did not meet its annual improvement targets for all students, high needs students, low income students, students with disabilities, and White students.

**B.** The district earned extra credit toward its annual PPI for increasing the percentage of students scoring *Advanced* 10 percent or more between 2011 and 2012 for all students, students with disabilities, and White students. It did not earn extra credit for decreasing the percentage of students scoring *Warning/Failing* 10 percent or more over this period for any reportable group.

**C.** In 2012 the district demonstrated low performance in grades 8 and 10 and very low performance in grades 5 and overall relative to other districts.

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<sup>16</sup> For STE trends in the aggregate, see Table B4c in Appendix B; for selected subgroups, see Table B5c.

D. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, the district demonstrated potentially meaningful gains in grade 8. These gains were attributable to its performance over both periods.

E. Royalston Community School's (K-6) 2012 performance is low relative to other elementary schools. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, it demonstrated both gains in the percentage of students scoring Proficient or Higher over the period between 2009 and 2012 and declines in CPI over both periods.

F. Athol-Royalston Middle School's (5-8) performance is low relative to other middle schools. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, it demonstrated potentially meaningful declines in grade 5 and potentially meaningful gains in grade 8. These declines in grade 5 and the gains in grade 8 were mostly attributable to its performance between 2009 and 2012.

G. Athol High School's (9-12) 2012 performance is moderate to other high schools. Between 2009 and 2012 and more recently between 2011 and 2012, it demonstrated declines in grade 10 and overall in the percentage of students scoring Proficient or Higher. These declines were attributable to its performance over both periods.

**6. In 2012, the district did not meet its annual grade 9-12 improvement targets for all students for the four-year cohort graduation rate, and the five-year cohort graduation rate.<sup>17</sup> The district met its annual improvement target for all students for the annual grade 9-12 dropout rate. Over the most recent three-year period for which data is available,<sup>18</sup> the four-year cohort graduation rate increased, the five-year cohort graduation rate increased, and the annual grade 9-12 dropout rate declined. Over the most recent one-year period for which data is available, the four-year cohort graduation rate increased, the five-year cohort graduation rate increased, and the annual grade 9-12 dropout rate increased.<sup>19</sup>**

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<sup>17</sup> All groups (districts, schools, and subgroups) are expected to make steady progress toward a goal of 90 percent for the four-year cohort graduation rate and 95 percent for the five-year rate by the 2016-17 school year. For accountability determinations in any given year, the cohort graduation rate from the prior school year is used. For example, 2012 accountability determinations for the four-year rate use data from 2011; determinations for the five-year rate use data from 2010. Districts, schools, and subgroups are considered to be on target if they meet the state's federally-approved annual targets in a given year for either the four-or five-year cohort graduation rate, whichever is higher.

<sup>18</sup> Note that the 2012 four-year graduation and dropout rates and the 2011 five-year graduation rate will be used in the 2013 accountability determination; the 2011 four-year graduation and dropout rates and the 2010 five-year graduation rate were used in the 2012 determination. See previous footnote.

<sup>19</sup> For annual dropout rate trends from 2009 to 2012, see Table B6 in Appendix B. For cohort graduation rate trends for the last three years available, see Tables B7a and B7b.

**A.** Between 2009 and 2012 the four-year cohort graduation rate increased 13.9 percentage points, from 60.9% to 74.8%, an increase of 22.8 percent. Between 2011 and 2012 it increased 7.0 percentage points, from 67.8% to 74.8%, an increase of 10.3 percent.

**B.** Between 2008 and 2011 the five-year cohort graduation rate increased 2.0 percentage points, from 72.0% to 74.0%, an increase of 2.8 percent. Between 2010 and 2011 it increased 8.6 percentage points, from 65.4% to 74.0%, an increase of 13.1 percent.

**C.** Between 2009 and 2012 the annual grade 9-12 dropout rate declined 1.2 percentage points, from 6.9% to 5.7%, a decrease of 16.8 percent. Between 2011 and 2012 it increased 0.2 percentage points, from 5.5% to 5.7%, an increase of 4.4 percent.

**7. The district's rates of in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspension in 2011-2012 were significantly higher than the statewide rates.<sup>20</sup>**

**A.** The rate of in-school suspensions for Athol-Royalston was 4.0 percent, higher than the state rate of 3.4 percent. The rate of out-of-school suspensions for Athol-Royalston was 8.5 percent, higher than the state rate of 5.4 percent.

**B.** There was not a significant difference among racial/ethnic groups for in-school suspensions and for out-of-school suspensions.<sup>21</sup>

**C.** There was not a significant difference between the in-school suspension rates of select populations: high need students, low income students, students with disabilities, and English language learners.

**D.** There was a significant difference between the rates of out-of-school suspensions for high needs students and non high needs students (11.2 percent compared to 4.1 percent), low income students and non low income students (11.3 percent compared to 5.3 percent), and students with disabilities and students without disabilities (13.3 percent compared to 6.8 percent).

**E.** On average students in the Athol-Royalston Public Schools missed 4.4 days per disciplinary action,<sup>22</sup> higher than the state average of 3.1.

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<sup>20</sup> Statistical significance based on one sample T test.  $P \leq .05$

<sup>21</sup> Statistical significance for racial/ethnic groups and other subgroups based on Chi Square.  $P \leq .05$

<sup>22</sup> Disciplinary action refers to in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, permanent expulsion, removal by an impartial hearing officer to an alternative setting, or removal by school personnel to an alternative setting.

# Athol-Royalston Regional School District, Review Findings

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## Strengths

### *Student Support*

- 1. The Athol/Royalston Regional School District has a framework in place to address students' academic and non-academic needs.**
  - A.** The district has organized Child Study Teams (CSTs) at each school that meet regularly to brainstorm strategies to assist struggling students. The CSTs meet weekly at the middle and high schools and on demand at the elementary school, according to documents provided by the district.
    1. Administrators said that resources including the District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) were available to teachers and offered strategies to help teachers differentiate instruction before meeting with CSTs.
    2. Teachers meet with the CST team, including the principal, guidance counselor, nurse, other colleagues, and parents to create individual plans for struggling students; assistance may include small groups or Title I support.
    3. A follow-up to assess student progress is scheduled four to six weeks after a plan has been developed, according to documents provided to the team.
    4. CSTs also address behavioral issues and other non-academic needs. Teachers are supported in developing behavioral plans. Needed services for families are accessed through the community outreach coordinator, according to administrators.
  - B.** The district has invested resources to support students' social, emotional, and health needs.
    1. The district has a community outreach coordinator who for the last eight years has worked to connect families with needed services in the community. A two-page directory of services created by the coordinator and used by the district was provided to the team.
    2. The district has provided specialized training to help teachers understand the backgrounds of their students, according to interviewees. Teachers are shown how to provide supportive classrooms for students who may be dealing with issues from home, including exposure to trauma.

3. Participants in several focus groups talked about the parent engagement initiative, Parents Involved in Education (PIE). Topics in this series of well-attended workshops for parents have included anti-bullying, preparing for MCAS, Internet safety, and drug and alcohol awareness. Interviewees said that the workshops were a success in part because childcare and food were provided.

**Impact:** The district provides across all schools a clear and common process that enables teachers to respond to students' academic and non-academic needs in a timely fashion. The consistency of the CSTs has provided teachers with an immediate path and a reliable process to develop intervention plans for struggling students. The recruitment and retention of a community outreach coordinator has been valuable to the district in connecting families to needed services throughout the community.

### ***Finance and Asset Management***

**2. The district built two new schools in the 1990s and at the time of the review was ready to seek authorization from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) and its member towns to consolidate three elementary schools in Athol into one new building.**

- A. The town of Royalston replaced two old elementary schools with the Royalston Community School (RCS) in 1996 (this school had 147 students in 2012.) The Athol-Royalston Regional School District replaced the aging Athol Middle School with a new Athol-Royalston Middle School (ARMS) in 1999, for grades 5 through 8.
- B. At the time of the review a feasibility study was essentially complete and the school building committee had decided to seek approval from the MSBA and the town of Athol to build a new elementary school for 545 K-4 students and 70 pre-kindergarten students, closing the Riverbend (1907, grades 2-4), Sanders Street (1912, K-2), and Pleasant Street (1966, PK-4) schools. (The Bigelow School (originally preK-12) was closed in 2012.) The school would be built adjacent to Athol-Royalston Middle School, creating a school campus.<sup>23</sup>

**Impact:** In addition to providing modern facilities and improving accessibility, security, and technology, a new elementary school will eliminate a transition for Athol elementary students, some of whom currently enroll in two schools before they reach the middle school, and allow

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<sup>23</sup> According to district administrators, a common reason cited by parents choosing their children out of the district, when surveyed in 2006 and 2011, was the condition of the elementary schools.

class sizes to be optimized across a grade, instead of varying in size depending on the school. It will also result in staffing and operational cost savings.

**3. The district, through the office of the superintendent and business manager, exercises sound financial oversight through the use of audits, external reviews, financial procedures and controls, and BudgetSense software. The district complies with state and federal auditing requirements.**

- A. The district's business office has worked with the Department of Revenue to manage the restrictions put on the district by Chapter 50 of the Acts of 2006, "An Act regulating the financial conditions in the Athol-Royalston Regional School District," which allowed the district to borrow \$1,000,000 from the state and which was necessitated by the financial condition of the district just before the present superintendent assumed his position.
- B. The district has instituted significant savings in some areas, including the examples below.
  - 1. The superintendent and business manager worked with the Department of Revenue's Financial Control Board to bring Massachusetts Group Insurance Commission health insurance into the district, yielding substantial savings, according to interviewees.
  - 2. The Massachusetts Association of School Business Officials (MASBO) was contracted by the district to conduct a "Transportation Review" resulting in recommendations to improve the transportation operations of the district. Bus routes were consolidated, again yielding substantial savings.

**Impact:** Responsible oversight has allowed the district to improve the financial condition of the district and to have the confidence and trust of town officials and administrators, who characterized their relationship as "cordial" and "cooperative." According to interviewees, this confidence helped assure appropriations for capital improvement projects, including the proposed new elementary school.

## Challenges and Areas for Growth

It is important to note that district review reports prioritize identifying challenges and areas for growth in order to promote a cycle of continuous improvement; the report deliberately describes the district's challenges and concerns in greater detail than the strengths identified during the review.

### *Leadership and Governance*

- 4. The district has had a history of labor/management issues that have detracted from district staff's ability to carry out initiatives to improve the school system. Most notably, the district has been negotiating a successor collective bargaining agreement since June 2011 without success. With the recent change in the leadership of the teachers' association, relations between the school committee/superintendent and teachers' association officers were stated by some interviewees to be better, but they are tentative at best, and there is much work to be done.**
  - A. In recent years, labor and management issues in the district have slowed down the process of improving the school system.
    1. In the last three years the teachers' association has filed and the administration in the district has had to deal with approximately 15 grievances, 10 unfair labor practice claims, and several lawsuits, according to interviewees.
    2. District leaders said that working with the teachers' association around improving academics has been a struggle. The superintendent said that the association was the single biggest reason that things did not get done and that the principals were frustrated.
    3. Principals voiced their concerns and frustration about grievances filed in their schools on issues such as scheduling and teacher preparation time.
    4. The superintendent and school committee members supported applying to participate in Race to the Top (RTTT), but the district did not apply because of opposition from the teachers' association.
    5. The last collective bargaining agreement agreed on with teachers is dated "2006-2007, 2007-2010," with an appended memorandum of agreement on transferring health coverage to the Commonwealth's Group insurance commission (GIC) that was to remain in effect through June 30, 2011.

6. At the time of the review in March 2013, negotiations were continuing over a successor collective bargaining agreement and the implementation of a new educator evaluation system consistent with the state's new system.
- B.** In the fall of 2012, there was a change in leadership in the Athol-Royalston Teachers' Association. The school committee, the superintendent, and the officers of the teachers' association said that with the change in association leadership relations were better but there was still contention on issues.
1. Some school committee members made favorable comments about the changes in the association leadership but noted that much still needed to improve.
  2. According to the superintendent, with the change in association leadership conversations with the association leadership have improved. In addition, the superintendent said that the district was in a time of "real transition."
  3. However, the superintendent said that though the district was ahead of where it needed to be in negotiations about the new educator evaluation system, negotiations were bogging down on the issues of unannounced visits and how data was to be used in evaluations.
  4. Teachers' association leaders said that their president meets periodically with the superintendent to deal with issues collaboratively and quickly. They also said that the parties were working on the new educator evaluation system and on a successor collective bargaining agreement between the school committee and the teachers' association. They noted that things were beginning to change but there was still a lot of "baggage."
  5. Teachers expressed concern that the educator evaluation requirements would connect student performance to evaluation. Further, district leaders noted that some teachers left when they realized that they would be held responsible in their evaluations for student achievement as shown by data.

**Impact:** The contentious relationship in past years between the school committee and superintendent and the teachers' association, with the filing of numerous grievances, unfair labor practice claims, and lawsuits, diverted the time and attention of central office administrators and principals away from their primary responsibilities, such as supervision of instruction, monitoring of the curriculum, and analysis of student achievement results.

The recent change in association leadership brings the parties an opportunity to work cooperatively on improvement initiatives. Their immediate challenge is to negotiate a successor collective bargaining agreement, including language about educator evaluation; however, the history of contention raises questions as to whether the parties can meet this challenge.

**5. School committee members have not all attended the required orientation session, and the actions of the school committee show incomplete understanding of its responsibilities, which include setting goals and policy, including guidelines for the budget, and working to ensure that necessary funds are appropriated for the district.**

A. The Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) orientation session provides new school committee members with a broad overview of their roles and responsibilities. Some school committee members and the superintendent said that not all members had attended the orientation session after their election to the school committee as stipulated in the district's Policy Manual, File: BIA, "New School Committee Member Orientation" and mandated by the Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 71, Section 36A.

1. During an interview with school committee members about attendance at the new member orientation, one said that some had gone, some had not, and others had gone twice. In a different school committee group interview, one member said that he had not attended the MASC orientation session while another said that lots of members had not.
2. According to the school committee members in one interview group, the committee has given the superintendent the responsibility to run the school system and delegate authority. However, they said that they were learning that they have authority and "may have approached it wrong." In another interview group a member said that the superintendent's responsibilities included "everything we see fit" as well as day-to-day operations, adding "It's like an open ended credit card—not that he spends any money but he has open rein on everything."
3. School committee members said that there were multiple sessions to review the budget—that the superintendent came with a draft and it changed many times; however, according to these members, the school committee did not prescribe any guidelines about developing the budget. At the time of the review, members said that they had evaluated the superintendent the previous month, noting that they had not rated him on progress made toward goals in the DIP. They said that they planned to evaluate the superintendent under the new educator evaluation system next year.
4. When asked about advocating for the school system and its budget, one school committee interview group said that they did that "as well as we can." The superintendent responded in an interview that he had to work directly with town officials because the school committee did not get involved.

**Impact:** With not all members of the school committee having received orientation on their roles and responsibilities, the school committee is not fulfilling some of its most important responsibilities, e.g., to set the direction for the district, give guidelines for budget development,

and advocate for necessary funds to be appropriated. It is not playing its assigned part in improving education in the district, leaving the school system without the benefit of its guidance and advocacy.

**6. During the last five years the school system has seen considerable turnover of administrators, especially at the school level.**

- A. Since the start of the 2008-2009 school year, two different individuals have served as director of educational services/assistant superintendent and two different individuals have served as special education director (the first of whom began in the position in 2001). Since 2010, when the position became a permanent one, two different individuals have served as technology director.
- B. Central office administrators, school level administrators, teachers, and parents expressed concern about the turnover of administrators in the district. One interviewee said—and others in the group agreed—that the constant turnover has meant that the staff has wondered “How long is [administrator’s name] going to be here?” Furthermore, interviewees expressed the view that initiatives started under one principal were not always continued with a new principal and that usually new principals attempted to implement their own initiatives.
- C. In the last 5 years (from the beginning of 2008-2009 through 2012-2013), four schools have seen much turnover in the position of principal: Athol-Royalston Middle School, 4 principals, Pleasant Street School, 3, Riverbend School, 3, and Royalston Community School, 4. In three cases turnover was the result of a principal moving to another school within the district.

**Impact:** Administrator changes have resulted in an absence of leadership stability and voiced concerns about continuity in the district, especially at the school level. Insufficient accountability for progress toward improvement goals (see next finding) means that continuity is not ensured. Unless the school committee and the superintendent work together in addressing this challenge, administrator turnover will continue to be a barrier to improvement.

**7. Although improvement plans have been developed for the district and schools covering 2012-2013, district and school improvement goals are not aligned, and the goals do not always contain the components of SMART goals. Reporting on goal attainment is not consistent, and administrators are not held accountable for the attainment of goals.**

- A. The School Improvement Plans (SIPs) are not aligned with the District Improvement Plan (DIP), a fact recognized by the superintendent in an interview.
- B. The formats for the goals in the DIP and SIPs differ.

1. An examination by the review team of the DIP and SIPs indicated that the plans did not have a uniform template.

**C.** The components of SMART goals are not consistently evident in the DIP and SIP goals.

1. In many instances the goals in the DIP and SIPs do not include the five components of a SMART goal: S=Specific and Strategic; M=Measurable; A= Action-Oriented; R=Rigorous, Realistic and Results-Focused; and T=Timed and Tracked. For example, the first goal in The Athol High School Improvement Plan reads, “Increase family involvement in the educational process of their children at the High School”; it is missing the following key components of a SMART goal: S=Specific (how much of an increase), M=Measurable (measures used to determine the increase made), and T=Timed (the time by which the goal is to be achieved).

**D.** Reporting on progress made to attain improvement plan goals varies from plan to plan, according to interviewees.

1. The review team heard in an interview with school committee members that reports from the superintendent on progress were more general and not plan-specific and that the committee did not get direct or specific information about the DIP.
2. Principals’ responses to the question of how often they shared reports of progress toward SIP goal attainment ranged from once a month to not at all.
3. Two teachers’ association officers indicated that progress being made toward DIP and SIP goals was not often shared.

**E.** Because administrators are not evaluated in writing they are not held accountable for improvement goals.

1. A review of administrators’ personnel files showed that they contained almost no written evaluations of the administrators.

**Impact:** Without alignment of the DIP and the SIPs, the district does not have a common, unifying vision of the direction of the system; without SMART goals and accountability for progress toward them, it is harder to accomplish the goals in the plans. Without regular reporting on progress made toward the attainment of DIP and SIP goals, stakeholders are not informed of how the school system is doing, and an opportunity is lost to gain support for the district.

## ***Curriculum and Instruction***

### **8. The curricula practices in the district have not been developed to create aligned, consistently delivered, and continuously improving curriculum to promote higher levels of student achievement.**

- A.** There does not seem to be clarity about who holds responsibility for curriculum leadership in the district.
  - 1. The job description for the assistant superintendent does not explicitly delineate curriculum and instruction responsibilities. Rather it states that the assistant superintendent “. . . establishes necessary procedures and cooperates in planning with . . . , and . . . assisting the superintendent in assessing the Director of Curriculum and Instruction.” That position is not on the organizational chart provided to the team.
  - 2. Teachers in a focus group gave differing answers to the question of who the instructional leaders in their school and in the district were. A couple of teachers said that teachers themselves were the instructional leaders, in one case because of the turnover of principals.
  - 3. The teachers in the focus group also gave varying answers to the question of what feedback they got on their work and how often school and district leaders were in their classrooms, ranging from “The principal often walks through my room to “Formal feedback—not a lot,” and “Principals are gone 75 percent of the time . . . all principals are pulled a lot for meetings.”
- B.** There are not consistent district-wide expectations to ensure that the components of curriculum maps are in place for all students.
  - 1. The district documented PK-12 curriculum aligned to the frameworks over the three years before the review, according to administrators.
  - 2. In district curriculum documents the interpretation of learning objectives, essential questions, assessment data, resources, and materials showed wide variation and omissions both vertically and horizontally. One map identified thirteen essential questions; others had no materials or assessments listed.
- C.** The district does not have a formal, clearly communicated process to monitor, review, and revise the initial drafts of curriculum maps.
  - 1. Principals said that they found it challenging to monitor curriculum fidelity.

2. A review of documents and interviews with leaders indicated that a proposal for vertical curriculum evaluation K-12 by content area was developed in 2011 but has not been implemented.
3. The review team did not find evidence of a plan to review and revise the most recently written documents. Teachers said that they were being directed to mark their concerns about the documents with highlighting pens and inform the principal, but communication of individual concerns in this way does not constitute a coordinated district plan for review and revision of curriculum.

**Impact:** The absence of clearly identified curriculum leadership responsibilities and a plan and process to codify, update, and align curriculum to the frameworks means that the district is not positioned to provide a coherent, usable, 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum to improve student outcomes. This also severely limits the district's ability to create urgency and build capacity throughout the district.

**9. The district has identified limited research-based instructional practices and materials matched to content and learner needs. Instruction is not geared to enable students at all levels to effectively access the district curriculum and attain proficiency.**

The team observed 34 classes: 9 in the district's high school; 11 in the district's middle school and middle-school grades in the Royalston Community School; and 14 in the district's 4 elementary schools. The team observed 15 ELA classes, 9 mathematics classes, and 7 classes in other subject areas, including 1 science and 3 special education classes. Observations were approximately 20 minutes in length and data was recorded using ESE's instructional inventory, a protocol for documented observed characteristics of standards-based teaching (see Appendix C). The Athol-Royalston Regional School District houses grades five and six in two schools, Royalston Community School (RCS) and Athol-Royalston Middle School. Data for the RCS grades five and six were reported under the middle school data.

**A.** The district contracts with Teaching and Learning Alliance and Looney Math to provide professional development opportunities to expand teaching repertoires in literacy and mathematics. However, practices and implementation are not sufficiently monitored. According to one principal, it was a challenge to keep to the curriculum maps and to supervise that process.

1. Principals have been constrained in observing instruction and providing feedback.

- a. For instance, in the contract<sup>24</sup> that expired in 2010, under the Professional Growth and Performance Plan Addendum for Unit A (teachers), the evaluations of teachers with professional status did not normally include observations. Though an administrator could request an observation, it had to include pre- and post-conferences and an observation record had to be kept.
  - b. The superintendent, in discussing unannounced visits under the new educator evaluation system, said that teachers felt intimidated by these because they were not used to having administrators in classrooms.
2. The quality of instruction in the 34 observed classrooms was inconsistent; instruction did not include effective teaching and learning practices K-12. Observations in grade levels that have received training in using data to inform instruction did not provide substantial evidence of varied strategies.
3. At the time of the review students at the middle school received only 42 minutes of instruction in math each day, according to administrators.
4. There was little evidence of differentiated, tiered instruction in observed classrooms. In 79 percent of visited classrooms (27), the use of appropriate and varied strategies matched to objectives and content was not clearly and consistently evident. Classrooms were teacher directed; active student engagement was very limited. In 59 percent of observed classrooms (20), student engagement in challenging academic tasks was not clearly and consistently evident.
5. Use of support staff appeared ineffective in visited classrooms. Paraprofessionals/para-specialists were not observed to be providing specific directed instruction, modified curriculum, or varied strategies in classrooms.<sup>25</sup> For example, one assistant sat with a student while the student copied over a dictated story four pages long. Eleven paraprofessionals and “para-specialists” were observed in ten classrooms.
6. The team observed clear and consistent evidence of multiple resources available to meet students’ diverse learning needs in only 26 percent of visited classrooms (9).

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<sup>24</sup> Available at <http://educatorcontracts.doemass.org/view.aspx?recno=12>.

<sup>25</sup> According to ESE data, the ratio of students to paraprofessional staff in 2012 was 27:1, compared with the state ratio of 42:1.

- B. Practices between the two schools that serve grade 5-6 are inconsistent and resources are not equitable, according to administrators.
- C. While students' physical, emotional, and health needs appear to be well met in observed classes, lessons did not reflect high expectations and rigor in 46 percent of classrooms (16).
  1. Administrators, staff, and school committee members said that they placed a great emphasis on understanding how the conditions of poverty including perceived social and emotional needs of students and families can inhibit learning. They said that they worked to create safe school and classroom climates.
  2. In 62 percent of observed classrooms (21) the team did not see clear and consistent evidence of students articulating their thinking or reasoning. Some teachers asked and answered their own questions. In observed classrooms most questions involved recall or facts and were tangential to learning outcomes.
  3. In 85 percent of observed classes (29) the team did not find clear and consistent evidence that student work demonstrated high quality and could serve as exemplars.
  4. In 76 percent of observed classrooms (26) the team did not find clear and consistent evidence that teachers clearly communicated grade-appropriate learning objectives.
  5. Most observers reported seeing students being instructed in large groups.
  6. Varied questioning techniques to promote deeper understanding were either not observed or partially observed in 65 percent of visited classrooms (22).
  7. Clear and consistent evidence of frequent formative assessments to inform instruction and check for understanding was absent in 62 percent of observed classrooms (21).

**Impact:** Without sufficient monitoring of practices and implementation, teachers are not given the support necessary to improve their skills to have the capacity to teach all students.

### ***Assessment***

**10. The Athol-Royalston school district does not systematically use data across the district to improve instructional programs, raise student achievement, or inform policy development.**

- A. The district does not have a data team in place to disaggregate, analyze, and report on districtwide student performance.

- B.** The assistant superintendent is responsible for the district’s initiative in establishing school-based data teams but does not regularly analyze data for the entire district. The assistant superintendent noted that data teams had not been firmly established at each school and there were differences in frequency of meetings and team make-up. For example, in two small elementary schools with one principal, rather than a formal data team all teachers belong to the data team, according to that school’s principal. Other schools have a designated data team. At the high school, the data team met through the fall 2012, but no longer meets regularly. Interviewees noted that 2012-2013 was the first year of implementation of data teams.
- C.** The district does not disaggregate or analyze the data from its Level 3 schools to determine K-12 patterns of low performance. Further, although high-needs students are underperforming (see the second Student Performance finding), the district has not systematically analyzed the data to identify causes and improve instruction, programs, and services.
1. From 2008 to 2012, high needs students’ ELA proficiency rates improved from 35 percent to 39 percent, compared with 48 percent for their peers statewide. Over that period, their math proficiency rates were flat at 26 percent, compared with 37 percent for their peers statewide.
  2. The District Improvement Plan identifies “root causes” of student performance and includes “discussions” but not substantive analyses or ways to measure the impact of programs and interventions.
  3. The Royalston Community School and the middle school provided the team with documents that indicated that they nominally reviewed performance data of subgroups; however, the district has not analyzed the performance of subgroups either across all its schools or in its three Level 3 schools.
  4. At the middle school, some students arrive from the Royalston Community School (K-6) in grade 7 while others arrive in grade 5. Student readiness and achievement vary considerably once students reach grade 7 but school leaders have not yet sufficiently analyzed student data to identify gaps and made plans to address them, according to the superintendent.
  5. Although each school rates itself using the Conditions for School Effectiveness, according to an administrator, the review team received no evidence to show that this data is compiled or analyzed by anyone at the district level, or used as a tool in tracking individual school improvement.

- D. Interviews and a review of documents showed that the district had a district level protocol for collecting and analyzing student achievement data, but it has not been consistently followed, and has not resulted in cohesive, aligned K-12 School Improvement Plans (SIPs).
1. The team was told that the assistant superintendent had developed a comprehensive protocol to guide schools in their use of data in the development of their SIPs. A document review confirmed this.
    - a. The assistant superintendent noted that she trained principals on how to access the data and that they also participated in summer training provided by Research for Better Teaching (RBT) on data use.
    - b. Interviewees said that they received data training from DSAC on the use of the Education Data Warehouse and data walls.
    - c. However, they also noted that the protocols varied and said that might explain the inconsistencies; for example, the protocol that the district provided and the one used in RBT training were slightly different.
- E. Administrators and teachers said that although the school-level data team members (teachers) have received some training in accessing and using data, they were at different stages of skill and readiness to convert this knowledge to action.
1. The data teams have been in place since the 2011-2012 school year, and have just begun to analyze student performance data, according to administrators. Three days of training were provided by the District and School Assistance Center during the summer to data team members, with the focus on using the Education Data Warehouse and on the use of data walls.
  2. Interviews with teachers and school leaders indicated variations in the composition of data teams at each school, the frequency of meetings, and the roles that each team plays at each school.
  3. Stakeholders noted that while benchmark assessments were in place throughout the district, these were aligned to the new curriculum only at the high school. The district administers benchmark assessments developed by teachers; these are neither robust nor reliable, according to the assistant superintendent and other interviewees. An administrator said that the district was currently planning on working to develop common assessments, and was furthest along in this work at the high school.

4. District leaders said that teachers were not yet sufficiently skilled, or comfortable in the use of data to inform instruction, and data was not yet used to target supervision to improve student achievement.
  - a. The district collects some progress monitoring data for DIBELS, for example, and has recently instituted the GRADE and GMADE tests at the middle school. The district also uses formative assessments from Open Court and Real Math at the elementary levels. When asked about the balance between formative and summative assessments, interviewees noted that there was a balance, but expressed doubt about the “strength” of the assessments.
  - b. Teachers expressed concern that the educator evaluation requirements would connect student performance to evaluation. The superintendent said: “We are ahead of where we need to be [in negotiations about the new educator evaluation system] but are bogging down on unannounced visits and how we use the data.” Further, leaders noted that some teachers resigned when they realized that they would be responsible for achievement data in their evaluations.
  - c. The superintendent said that the district turned down RTTT funds because the teachers’ association “reject[ed] any data source as part of the grant.” The superintendent and school committee members noted that they had supported applying for RTTT funds.
  - d. District leaders said that working with the teachers’ association around improving academics has been a struggle. The superintendent told the review team that while in the past district leaders had found negotiations with association leadership over measures to support students difficult, the change in association leadership had made a difference and conversations with the association had improved.
  - e. School leaders said that one of the teachers’ strengths was summative assessment, but there was a need to “use formative assessments to change our instruction.” The high school principal said that they were still working to develop formative assessments to help differentiate instruction.
  - f. An administrator noted that ESE’s 2011 Coordinated Program Review Report stated that the district relied on insufficient or “light” data when making student referrals for special education services.
- F. Analysis of standardized test data has resulted in some program improvements, according to school leaders.

1. The high school analyzed the school's drop-out rates and made changes in its programming to support students at risk for dropping out; the high school's drop-out rate has begun to decrease. The high school principal noted that tests were analyzed to determine which concepts students did not understand and needed to be re-taught.
2. The middle school developed a morning skills block in grades 5-8 to better meet the needs of struggling students.
3. One elementary school has made the shift from textbook driven reading instruction to using the text as one of many tools to better meet the needs of students and improve MCAS ELA scores. Scheduling students and matching student needs with teacher strengths also took place in this elementary school.
4. As a result of analysis of MCAS data, the district contracts with Teaching and Learning Alliance and Looney Math to train teachers in ELA and math instructional practices.

**Impact:** While the district has begun to use data more systematically, it has not yet established a clear vision or culture of making systematic, continuous use of a wide range of information to inform teaching and learning. It does not have systems or structures to analyze overall program effectiveness and better target its resources. Because the district has an underdeveloped system of data collection, analysis, and dissemination, it is unable to analyze data effectively, monitor student achievement across schools, and evaluate and improve programs strategically. It is also unable to make predictions about areas of need and anticipate program additions or changes.

**11. District and school staff members and parents do not yet have access to user-friendly, districtwide and school-based reports on student achievement or other relevant performance data.**

- A. Teachers do not have access to data reports and must request the reports from their principals, according to administrators.
- B. Parents and administrators said that while the district has provided information about MCAS performance in evening programs, parents do not routinely have access to their children's academic progress; the implementation of a portal that would provide this access through X2 is currently in negotiation with the teachers' association; according to the superintendent, the union insists on collective bargaining to use any technology.
- C. Although some school committee members said that they were provided student achievement data and there is now a subcommittee on academic excellence, reviewers did not find evidence that the school committee has focused on data beyond a very general review.

**Impact:** When teachers and parents do not have frequent, reliable, and user-friendly access to data, they are unable to monitor student achievement effectively. More critically, teachers who do not monitor their students' learning through frequent use of reliable and valid data are unable to modify their instruction in a timely way to meet the needs of their students. Teachers must remain dependent on school leaders to access, analyze, and then disseminate data about their students' progress and are unable to quickly address learning gaps within their classrooms.

**12. The district does not manage data effectively in two areas of great concern: students in the district who are placed in foster homes and students who leave the district for nearby schools.**

- A.** Interviewees said that a large number of students in the district are placed in foster homes and require costly services or outside placements. The district did not provide the team with specific data about the numbers of students in foster homes who are currently in district schools, their program needs, or the direct impact on the budget.
- B.** The district has the second highest rate of students in the state who choose to leave the district for nearby schools, according to the superintendent, yet surveys to understand the reasons why families choose to leave their local schools have not been distributed annually.
  - 1. According to district administrators, surveys were given in 2006 and 2011, with a 34 percent return rate, and showed the three top reasons as inconsistent student performance; inadequate resources for staffing, programming, and maintaining schools, especially the elementary schools; and old elementary school buildings in Athol.
  - 2. The review team was told that the main reason families were choosing to leave ("choice-out") was that the elementary schools could no longer meet the needs of its students. At the time of the review visit, the superintendent and another stakeholder said that a new elementary school was "critical to see the return of choice . . . this building is the Rosetta Stone to unlock the future." A school committee member expressed the opinion that with better facilities the district might be able to "get people to come back." A town official said that the district spent an "appalling" amount for choice out and "when the new school comes this will take a turnaround." The superintendent said that the district's schools had issues with heat, mold, and asbestos so parents wanted their children to attend other schools.

**Impact:** The district has little data about the students who are placed in foster homes in the district by the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families or the cost of programs to meet their needs. While it is commendable that the district embraces these students and strives

to meet their needs, the district's ability to advocate for resources within the communities, and within agencies at the state level, is weakened without robust data about the cost of programs for foster students.

Interviewees expressed the belief that the main reason families were choosing to leave was that school buildings at the elementary level could no longer meet the needs of students. Since the district has not annually gathered exit survey information about the reasons why so many families choose to leave the school district, and since the return rate on the surveys that have been given has not been high, the expectation that one new building will keep students in local schools, particularly when three of the district's schools are classified in Level 3, may not be correct.

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

**13. The district's collective bargaining agreement has expired but a new one has not been negotiated. The expired agreement is extremely lengthy, contains outdated language, and is too detailed and prescriptive to allow the flexibility necessary to:**

- **ensure the ability of leadership to address emerging issues,**
- **provide sufficient instructional time,**
- **promote teacher collaboration and growth, or**
- **ensure effective oversight of students.**

At the time of the review, the district had been negotiating a successor collective bargaining agreement (CBA), including educator evaluation language, since June 2011.

- A.** Athol-Royalston's CBA is 92 pages long; it covers Units A and B and nurses and contains a memorandum of agreement as well as various addenda. It is not clear which part of the CBA applies to teachers and which to administrators.
- B.** Policies and day-to-day procedures are embedded in the CBA.
- C.** The CBA contains obsolete language in many places. For example, Article I of Appendix A reads, in part: "The elementary school day will not exceed the length of the school day for the year 1999-00."
- D.** The CBA is overly specific and prescriptive. For example, Article IX of the agreement (Professional Consultations) contains detailed stipulations about consultations with

teachers, about timelines, and about the subjects that may and may not be discussed in these consultations.

- E. In Article V of Appendix A (Non-Teaching Duties) the CBA acknowledges that “a teacher’s primary responsibility is to teach and that his energies should, to the extent possible, be utilized to that end,” yet Article I of Appendix A (Teaching Hours and Teaching Load) limits the amount of time that administrators can direct teachers to teach.
1. For example, according to the (now expired) collective bargaining agreement, elementary school teachers are to be provided 350 minutes of preparation time each week, allocated in no less than 35 contiguous minutes, and an additional 20 hours of annual preparation time (10 half days). Elementary student dismissal must be completed two and one-half hours before the end of the teachers’ workday on the half days. According to district leaders, elementary teachers are actually provided with 400 minutes of preparation time each week.
  2. High school teachers are required to teach three of the four daily periods and have a full 79-82 minute period of preparation time each day.
  3. Middle school teachers are provided one preparation period each day and one period “for the purpose of common planning time.” The expired collective bargaining agreement does not specify whether or not administrators can direct common planning time and hold teachers accountable for it. According to district administrators, teachers’ use of common planning time for common planning is sporadic.
- F. Article V of Appendix A stipulates in great detail the duties that teachers may not be required to perform, including distributing milk, collecting money for non-educational purposes, or tabulating or accounting money for educational purposes.
1. Elementary teachers are not required to maintain attendance registers or to perform any type of lunch duty. The services of a noon duty supervisor are to be provided.
  2. Elementary teachers who choose to perform lunch duty are to be paid \$21 per hour.
  3. Teachers at the elementary schools are not to perform breakfast duty; paraprofessionals or school support personnel are to be assigned this work.

**Impact:** By restricting the amount of time that administrators can direct teachers to teach and the tasks that teachers can be required to do, the CBA

- increases the costs to the district for salaries for teachers, paraprofessionals, and other aides and
- limits not only the prerogatives of the principal to effectively run the school but also administrative flexibility to ensure sufficient instructional time, teacher collaboration and growth, and effective oversight of students.

**14. The district does not have a systemic process for recruiting, screening, and hiring educators or a comprehensive strategic plan to improve instructional practice across schools and classrooms.**

**A.** Interviews and a review of documents showed that the district did not have a systemic process for recruiting, screening, and hiring.

1. The district has a recall list of teachers affected by a Reduction in Force; this list is valid for two years after a layoff, limiting the district's ability to recruit teachers, according to the superintendent.
2. The current list of the most recent layoffs is valid for another 15 months.
3. Interviews and a review of documents showed that the district did not have deliberate partnerships with and regular communication with institutions that could provide the most qualified teachers and administrators and help the district build capacity. According to district administrators, the district used to collaborate with the University of Massachusetts at Amherst for student teachers and had a program called "Bridges to the Future" in which students interned and did practica in Athol. Because the union leadership filed grievances and unfair labor practices on the issue and refused to let district teachers participate, the university dropped the district from the program.

**B.** A review of documents and interviews showed that—except for job descriptions—the district does not have a strategic plan to hire administrators using objective performance standards.

**C.** The paraprofessionals in the district fall under two separate job titles and wage rates, according to a review of the paraprofessional collective bargaining agreement. According to ESE data (based on data submitted from the district):

1. In 2012 the district had 56 paraprofessionals, with a student to paraprofessional ratio of 27:1 compared to the state's ratio of 42:1; however, the number of district paraprofessionals fell to 38.3 in 2013, for a student to paraprofessional ratio of 39:1, slightly lower than the state ratio in 2013 of 41:1.

2. Paraprofessionals working with students with disabilities numbered 19.0 in 2012 and 12.0 in 2013, for a ratio of students with disabilities to paraprofessionals working with them of 20.1:1 in 2012 and 30.4:1 in 2013.
  - a. See District Analysis and Review Tool Detail: Staffing & Finance, DistrictStaff and SWDStaff tabs, available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/default.html>.
- D. There are two categories of paraprofessionals in the district (paraprofessionals and para-specialists), but the review team did not find evidence of a job description for either. In observations of classrooms by the visiting team, the role of paraprofessionals and para-specialists in classrooms and schools was not clear.
  1. A document review by the visiting team showed that the paraprofessional collective bargaining agreement required annual evaluations, but the visiting team was told that paraprofessionals were not formally evaluated.

**15. The district does not track the effects of professional development on performance.**

- A. The District Improvement Plan (DIP) identifies “root causes” of student achievement levels, but it does not include a plan to monitor progress toward reducing or eliminating the “root causes.”
  1. The 2012 DIP outlines various goals, but they are not written in SMART format (Specific and Strategic; Measurable; Action-Oriented; Rigorous, Realistic, and Results-Focused; and Time Bound), nor are they assigned to named individuals, but to job titles.
  2. Section I of the DIP includes various tables and statistics about student learning in the district, but uses state rates as its benchmarks, not projected increases based on the results of professional development on student learning.
  3. The DIP describes various scheduled professional development events and calendars and timeframes.
  4. The visiting team read more than 60 evaluations; it did not find any that contained recommendations for professional development.
  5. Attendance at professional development events is carefully tracked, but a review by the team of personnel folders did not find any documents linking professional development to improved instruction.
  6. The Professional Development Plan, the DIP, and the SIPs present a collection of offerings with few unifying themes or expectations for improved practice as a result of implementing these plans.

7. The Professional Development Plan states that the district has a “recent history” of an active Professional Development Committee but “contractual issues” prevent the Committee from being active currently. The Plan also states that it is the district’s intent to continue the Committee.

B. A review by the team of the teachers’ collective bargaining agreement showed that the district had limited opportunity to schedule professional development events.

1. Three full days per year are dedicated to professional development.

2. Faculty meetings cannot exceed four hours per month.

**Impact:** Athol/Royalston does not have a systemic process for recruiting, screening and hiring staff or for tracking the effects of professional development on professional practice. And the district’s evaluation processes are not linked to improved practice or to improved student achievement. This limits the district’s ability to find appropriate staff when vacancies take place, denies staff timely supervision and feedback, and rules out the use of targeted job-embedded professional development to improve professional practice and student achievement. Unless these systems are fully developed and strategically connected, the hopes for an “education of the highest possible quality” outlined in the preamble of the bargaining agreement for Units A and B will not be realized.

### ***Student Support***

**16. The district has not yet developed an effective tiered system of academic support and interventions to improve proficiency, narrow achievement gaps, and improve overall student achievement.**

A. The district has not yet developed a comprehensive tiered system of support for students beginning with opportunities for differentiation of core instruction in the classroom.

1. Administrators and teachers said that instructional differentiation and classroom interventions were limited.

2. Classroom observations showed little differentiation and tiered instruction. The team saw clear and consistent evidence of multiple resources available to meet student’s diverse learning needs in only 9 out of 34 classrooms observed (26 percent). The team observed clear and consistent evidence of varied strategies matched to learning objectives and content in only 7 out of 34 classrooms visited (21 percent).

3. There are limited options for students to participate in accelerated programs. While the Massachusetts Mathematics and Science Initiative (MMSI) grant has helped the district increase the number of students taking Advanced Placement exams at the high school, according to administrators, the review team found little evidence of options for elementary and middle school students to accelerate or advance their learning through differentiated classroom instruction. In observed classrooms the team found clear and consistent evidence of appropriate and varied strategies that meet students' diverse learning needs in only 2 out of 14 elementary classrooms (14 percent) and in only 2 of 11 middle school classrooms (18 percent).
- B.** Universal screening is not consistent throughout the district. Data use to assign targeted interventions varies across the district.
1. According to documents provided to the review team, a variety of assessments are administered throughout the year at different grade levels, including Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) in K-2, Formative Real Mathematics and Formative Open Court for reading in K-4, as well as Blast Off Series for Mathematics and Burns & Rue for reading in grades 5-8. In addition, there are Title I assessments.
  2. Benchmark assessments in K-4 and 5-8 are still being refined. In grades 9-12 mid-year and end-of-term assessments are used, according to administrators. The district does not administer one assessment consistently in kindergarten through grade 6.
  3. Administrators said that they were still working on developing formative assessments to help differentiate instruction.
- C.** Small group in-class interventions vary across the district. Teachers said that in some schools interventions were with Title I teachers and in others with special education teachers.
1. Title I support provides small group in-class and pull-out in grades 3 and 4 only at the Level 3 elementary schools, Riverbend and Pleasant Street; Athol High School, also a Level 3 school, does not receive any Title I support.
  2. Teachers said that they struggled to create small groups in classes.
- D.** There are few opportunities for students at risk of not achieving proficiency on MCAS to access targeted academic support outside of the school day.
1. The district has not had formal after school programs since the end of the 21st Century Afterschool Program. The district does not have districtwide targeted

support for students at risk of not achieving proficiency on MCAS; after school programs for MCAS support vary from school to school. According to a document supplied by the district, the high school offers one credit MCAS mathematics support during the school day.

2. While the district has made a practice of holding “discipline Saturdays” for disciplinary issues, according to administrators, it was not clear to the review team if that time has ever been used to provide students with targeted academic support.
3. The summer school program is limited. It is available for students with disabilities as indicated on their IEPs and provides Fundamentals and life-skills training.

**Impact:** The absence of a comprehensive, tiered system of academic support is leaving many students without the interventions they need to achieve proficiency on MCAS. According to ESE data, in 2012 neither the district as a whole nor its schools were considered to be making progress toward narrowing proficiency gaps. In ELA and mathematics, the district’s 2012 annual Progress and Performance Index rating was zero (“declined” relative to targets) for all students, high needs students, and all reportable subgroups. In addition, the majority of students are not being challenged to accelerate their learning. Academic performance will remain flat or slide downward without a more laser-like focus on student achievement.

### ***Finance and Asset Management***

**17. School committee members and district administrators told the review team that the district had inadequate resources. Although Athol-Royalston has had to make difficult budget cuts in recent years, the district has had sufficient revenues to spend at a rate above other districts by various benchmarks. Revenues will not increase because of the district’s continuing enrollment decline but correspondingly, available funds will not have to go as far with fewer students. While efforts to reduce unnecessary expenditures and reallocate resources have been made in a few areas, district leadership and the school committee have yet to come to grips with the budget constraints that will persist. They have been tapping one-time reserves to fund their budgets for several years.**

#### *Expenditure level comparisons and explanations*

- A. In 2012 (the Department’s most recent data) the district’s expenditure per *in-district* pupil was \$14,479. This was 10.3 percent higher than the state at \$13,121, 22 percent higher than the median of \$11,883 for all K-12 districts with 1,000 to 1,999 students, and 5 percent higher than the median of \$13, 784 for 13 K-12 *regional* districts of that size. A high level of Chapter 70 aid supports a higher rate of expenditure per pupil.

1. A target aid share of each district's foundation budget is calculated based on community wealth; Athol-Royalston's targeted aid share was 66.34 percent in 2013, but the aid received was 95.65 percent of the foundation budget.
  2. One factor that drives this difference is that the state aid program's "hold harmless" provisions keep aid at the same level when enrollment and foundation budgets drop, resulting in proportionally more aid to Athol-Royalston. From 2008 to 2012, although foundation enrollment declined 12 percent, Chapter 70 aid declined only 5 percent. In 2013 foundation enrollment declined by 4.2 percent, and Chapter 70 aid to the district increased by 0.4 percent. However, this very small increase would not cover salary increases, higher health care costs, and similar rising expenditures needed to keep the same number of staff employed.
- B.** Teacher and paraprofessional lay-offs have had to be made.
1. The district maintained the same number of teachers for several years of declining enrollment, then made substantial cuts in 2012 and 2013.
  2. The district reported hiring almost 20 additional paraprofessionals in 2011, maintaining this level for another year, then reducing the number to its prior level in 2013. In 2012, expenditure on paraprofessionals was 31 percent higher than the state, at \$794 compared to \$606 per pupil.
  3. A preliminary analysis of the district's 2013 End of Year Report indicates that district expenditure per in-district pupil dropped from \$14,479 in 2012 to \$13,864 in 2013, a decrease of about 4.2 percent.
- C.** The Excess and Deficiency Fund has been depleted, and in 2013 the district used funds from the Supplemental Reserve Fund to Ensure Fiscal Stability, according to the superintendent, to keep layoffs from being higher. The supplemental reserve fund is required by the terms of the state-authorized loan of \$1,000,000 that the district had to secure in 2006-2007.
1. This is not a viable strategy for meeting a budget, and could lead to more serious financial issues. Revenues will not increase in the future, due to the declining enrollment and limitations on the towns increasing their contributions, and budgets must be within the available revenues.

*Instances of the district addressing cost issues*

- D. The district, by joining the Group Insurance Commission, has brought its cost for insurance for active employees down to an in-district per-pupil cost of \$1,408 in 2012, below the median of \$1,494 for the group of 13 similar-sized regional K-12 districts mentioned above. The district ranked 8<sup>th</sup> out of the 13 in terms per-pupil expenditures in this area.
  - 1. However, the district’s 2012 per-pupil cost for insurance for retired employees was \$657, above the median for the group of 13 similar-sized regional K-12 districts of \$551. The district ranked 5<sup>th</sup> out of the 13 in terms of expenditures in this area.
- E. A constraint on reallocation of resources has been the number of small elementary schools being run by the district. From 2009 to 2013, there were four elementary schools whose enrollments in 2013 were 113, 128, 142, and 275. While this cost constraint will persist for the short term, the district has worked hard on developing a construction plan for a single, larger, modern elementary school.
  - 1. Small schools generally increase the cost of instructional leadership—Athol-Royalston, \$1,060 per pupil; state, \$855; similar regional districts’ median, \$839.
  - 2. Small schools constrain efficient staff allocation, and limit options for job-embedded professional development.

*Instances where the district has not addressed cost issues*

- F. A constraint on both resources and quality of instruction has been the high rate of teacher absences.
  - 1. Expenditure on substitutes in 2012 was 86 percent higher than the state, at \$220 compared to \$118 per pupil. The amount spent on substitutes per pupil increased from \$157 in 2010 to \$182 in 2011 to \$220 in 2012, rising faster in those years (a rise of 40 percent)<sup>26</sup> than the total in-district per-pupil expenditure (rise of 14 percent).
  - 2. The district did not report any expenditures for substitutes under professional development.
  - 3. District administrators said that high substitute costs were due to teacher absences. The rate of districtwide teacher absence calculated from the teacher absence data reported to

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<sup>26</sup> The increase in the per-pupil expenditure on substitutes is a function of decreasing enrollment as well as increasing expenditures. Actual dollars spent on substitutes increased by about 28 percent from 2010 to 2012, from \$261,392 to \$333,681. See FY12 expenditures on ESE website at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/statistics/ppx12.html>.

the review team by the district (unclear for what year), was 15.4 days of absence per teacher, with school rates ranging from a low of 10.3 days of absence per teacher at Pleasant Street to highs of 20.3 and 21.4 days of absence per teacher at Riverbend and the middle school. Not counting days of absence for long-term illness, the rate of districtwide teacher absence was 12.0 days per teacher, with school rates ranging from a low of 9.0 days per teacher at Pleasant Street to a high of 16.9 days per teacher at Riverbend.

- G.** Overall, expenditure in 2012 on pupil services (such as medical/health services, transportation, food, security) was 40 percent above the state, at \$1,746 compared to \$1,249 per pupil, and 7 percent above the median for similar regional districts of \$1,632 per pupil.
  - 1. Transportation was perceived to be a high cost for the district. Athol-Royalston's 2012 per-pupil cost for in-district transportation services was \$680, at the median for the group of 13 similar regional K-12 districts mentioned above. The district reduced its per-pupil expenditure for in-district transportation from \$817 in 2011.
  - 2. Cuts after 2009 to the state aid program for regional transportation affected Athol-Royalston and all other regional districts, though beginning in 2012 the reimbursement percentage increased again slightly.
  
- H.** A constraint on the reallocation of resources has been the teachers' collective bargaining agreement, which requires an unusually high amount of prep time for teachers, limiting the time for instruction, and for collaborative planning and other job-embedded professional development time. According to information from district administrators, the district hires 11-12 more teachers than it would with a typical contract. According to ESE calculations, the cost of that many teachers, based on average salary and estimated benefits, would be close to \$1,000,000.
  - 1. As noted in the first Human Resources and Professional Development finding above, the collective bargaining agreement contains provisions that are costly, both in terms of money that must be spent on additional teachers, paraprofessionals or aides, and substitutes, and in terms of lost opportunities for improving teaching and learning. These include provisions for:
    - a. the amount of time teachers may be required to teach;
    - b. exemption from responsibility for certain duties;
    - c. common planning time and its direction by administrators; and
    - d. sick time.

- I. Costs associated with special education were also cited as high. The district has not yet provided a clear analysis of the reasons for the disproportionate number of students identified as students with disabilities, (25.7 percent of students compared to the state rate of 17 percent).
  - 1. District leaders have theories and some data about some factors they consider unusual and that could contribute to a higher proportion of students with disabilities. The team could not determine based on evidence provided whether the percentage of students with disabilities would be comparable to the state percentage if these factors were not present.
  - 2. According to the superintendent, the district is working on providing more services in-district. While this increases expenditure per in-district pupil, it is generally a net savings because those increases are less than the cost of out-of-district tuitions in private schools or collaboratives.
  
- J. There is a perception in the district that the high level of choicing-out from the district is one of the primary revenue problems. Choicing out might be addressed over the long term by making improvements that encourage families to stay in the district. However, it remains true that the district has enough funding to allow in-district per-pupil expenditure to be relatively high (see A above). (In-district per-pupil expenditure does not include the cost of choice tuitions.) And choicing out is more manageable fiscally when the number of students leaving the district is high enough to make cuts to district programs so as to recoup the choice tuition.

**Impact:** The urgent issue is efficient and effective allocation of resources. Local perception that funds are just inadequate may make it more difficult to have a thorough discussion of budget decisions. The district can expect to have continuing financial pressures for the foreseeable future because revenues will not increase if the number of students resident in the town continues to decline.

**18. The budget development process does not sufficiently consider district and school goals and related issues of program effectiveness, student performance, and student needs.**

- A. The description of budget development by district administrators did not give any indication that district and school goals or student performance on MCAS are a driving force in the budget development process.
  
- B. A review of documents by the team showed that School and District Improvement Plans do not contain specific budget requests for resources needed to achieve stated goals, and that the plans are not referenced in the budget.
  
- C. The district does not have systems or structures to analyze overall program effectiveness and better target its resources. (See the first Assessment finding under Challenges above.)

**Impact:** Because the budget is not aligned to district and school plans and there is an inaccurate perception of relative resources, the final budget is not a thoroughly considered and efficient resource allocation plan.

# Athol-Royalston Regional School District, Review Recommendations

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## ***Leadership and Governance***

### **1. Athol-Royalston Regional School District should develop and implement an Accelerated Improvement Plan that addresses issues from the review and align its School Improvement Plans with it to speed its efforts to improve student achievement.**

**A.** The school committee and superintendent should work collaboratively with the District and School Assistance Center (DSAC) to develop and implement a comprehensive Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP).

1. The plan should address root causes of low performance by identifying a few major objectives, along with clear benchmarks that the district can use to determine whether it is on track to achieve the objectives. The plan should also include the specific steps to be taken (activities) to address each goal; the resources required to achieve it; the measure(s) used to determine whether or not each goal is met; the person(s) responsible for addressing and achieving each goal; and relevant timelines.

a. *District Accelerated Improvement Planning - Guiding Principles for Effective Benchmarks* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/turnaround/level4/AIP-GuidingPrinciples.pdf>) is an ESE resource that provides information about different types of benchmarks to guide and measure district improvement planning.

2. Since the AIP is intended to be a “living document,” the district should establish a system for frequent reflection and data analysis related to the plan, and should modify it as needed.

**B.** Like the AIP, the School Improvement Plans should focus on student achievement, and they should have SMART goals that are aligned with the AIP.

1. The AIP and the SIPs should be based on data and focused on improving student achievement.

2. The goals in each of the SIPs should be aligned with the AIP goals. These goals should be SMART goals (Specific and Strategic; Measurable; Action-Oriented; Rigorous, Realistic, and Results-focused, and Timed and Tracked).

- C. The SIPs should have common templates. The templates should include, among other elements, information about needed resources.
  - 1. The leadership team should decide on a similar template for all the SIPs.
  - 2. The district budget should be informed by the resources needed to implement the AIP.
- D. The AIP and the SIPs should be part of an in-depth reporting and accountability system.
  - 1. Principals should report periodically to their school councils, staffs, the superintendent, the school committee, and the community on their progress toward SIP goals.
  - 2. Similarly, the superintendent should report periodically to the school committee, staff, and the community on progress made toward AIP goals.
  - 3. The SIP goals should inform administrators' educator evaluation goals, for which they should be held accountable. Likewise, the school committee's evaluation of the superintendent should include accountability for progress toward his goals, which should be informed by the AIP goals.

**Benefits:** Carefully crafted goals, intentional alignment, periodic reporting, and accountability will ensure that the AIP and SIPs provide a clear, unifying vision that guides the work of all stakeholders in improving student achievement and closing achievement gaps.

**2. The school committee and superintendent should work with the teachers' association to establish more effective communication and resolve collective bargaining issues.**

- A. The district should set up structures for regular meetings with teachers' association representatives, at least once every two weeks.
- B. The district should work with the teachers' association to resolve the remaining differences and come to an agreement on a new collective bargaining agreement (see Recommendation #8 under Human Resources and Professional Development below).
- C. If necessary, the parties should use third party mediators to ensure more efficient resolution of important issues.
- D. Models of more efficient labor-management collaboration, such as the Rennie Center case study referred to below, should be considered. The DSAC may be able to support this work.

A suggested resource is The Rennie Center. The Rennie Center's case study, *Labor-Management-Community Collaboration in Springfield Public Schools*, describes how a district improved collaboration, communication, and relationships among adult stakeholders

with the goal of improved student achievement. In particular, Lesson 4 in the case study details the district's experience in working with third-party facilitators.

Overview:

<http://www.renniecenter.org/news/120305EducationNewsReportLaborManagement.html>

Direct link: <http://www.renniecenter.org/research/LaborMgmtCommunityCollab.pdf>

### Benefits:

- With the establishment of better communications through a structure for regular meetings with the teachers' association, a new collective bargaining agreement, and the use of third-party mediators when necessary, administrators will be able to focus their full attention on supervising instruction, providing useful feedback to teachers, monitoring the implementation of curriculum, and examining assessment results in order to improve student achievement.
- Better lines of communication will also provide the teachers' association opportunities for input on key issues.
- Finally, increased communication and trust is essential for new initiatives such as the new educator evaluation system to be implemented effectively and with the full support of stakeholders.

### 3. All school committee members should

- **hold each other accountable for attending the MASC orientation session for new members; and**
  - **participate in professional development programs to continuously improve their ability to carry out their roles and responsibilities in an evolving public school environment—for instance, if possible, the District Governance Support Project.**
- A. Every school committee member should attend the orientation session mandated by Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 71, section 36A, and adhere to school committee policy file BIA on "New School Committee Member Orientation." In addition, it is recommended that the district seek to have the school committee and the superintendent attend District Governance Support Project sessions co-led by ESE, the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS), and MASC.
1. The MASC orientation session provides new school committee members with a broad overview of their roles and responsibilities.
  2. The District Governance Support Project is designed to focus on continuous improvement and build greater understanding of the distinct roles and responsibilities

of the school committee and superintendent as well as promote new strategies for teamwork and collaboration to enhance student achievement. Each participating school district cohort, consisting of the school committee members and the superintendent, is coached by a team of MASC consultants and former superintendents, with the curriculum customized to meet the particular needs and challenges of each district.

**Benefits:** Both of these recommended programs will help school committee members to understand their role and responsibilities as elected officials more thoroughly. As a result, school committee members will be better able to serve students, parents, the school district, and the community.

**4. The school committee and the superintendent should determine the reasons for the high rate of turnover in administrator positions in recent years, especially at the school level.**

- A. The superintendent should survey each administrator who has left the district in the last five years and determine the reasons for the administrator turnover.
  - 1. The survey should request information as to the reason(s) why each administrator left the district. Also, the survey should request information as to what it would have taken to retain the administrator.
- B. These results should then be shared with the school committee and, based on the results, all possible steps taken to reduce administrative turnover.

**Benefits:** Determining the reasons for the turnover will allow the district to develop a policy and practices to help it attract and retain administrators committed to the vision and mission of the district and schools, which is essential for building stability and continuity in the school system.

***Curriculum and Instruction***

**5. The district should build its capacity to develop aligned, documented, and comprehensive curricula for all content areas. The district should also develop curriculum leadership practices that ensure that all instructional leaders are knowledgeable about the scope and purpose of curriculum and their responsibilities to monitor and support curriculum implementation.**

- A. The district now has a set of written documents reflecting its recent work to align the district's taught curriculum to the frameworks. The district should now develop and implement a process for ongoing curriculum review and refinement.
  - 1. The process should include timelines, responsibilities, and principal, teacher, and community stakeholder input.

2. The district's documented curriculum should reflect the depth and breadth of development; ensure vertical and horizontal alignment; and include 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.
3. In addition to being aligned with the frameworks, revised curriculum documents (guides/maps/syllabi) for each subject should include learning objectives, resources, instructional strategies, pacing guides, and measurable outcomes or assessments aligned to the frameworks.

The following resources will help the district develop curriculum:

- a. The *Common Core State Standards Initiative* page of the ESE website (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/commoncore/>) includes links to implementation resources, model curriculum units, PARCC resources, and information about transitioning to the 2011 frameworks.
  - b. *How to Develop Curriculum Maps to Support a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum that Guides Instruction* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/model/maps/CurriculumMaps.pdf>) is an ESE presentation that shares definitions of curriculum mapping, model maps, and ideas for the curriculum mapping process.
  - c. Science and Technology/Engineering strand maps (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/omste/maps/default.html>) are resources designed to support the review of the Massachusetts Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Curriculum Framework.
  - d. Science and Technology/Engineering *Concept and Skill Progressions* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/omste/ste/default.html>) are articulations of possible ways for students to progress through levels of understanding of concepts.
  - e. *Writing Standards in Action* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/wsa/>) is a resource that includes examples of high-quality student writing with annotations that highlight how each piece demonstrates competence in learning standards at each grade level.
- B.** The district should determine who is responsible—at the district and the school levels—for overseeing the curriculum review process and for monitoring and supporting curriculum delivery.
1. Once a plan for curriculum leadership is established, this information should be broadly communicated to ensure a shared understanding throughout the district of roles and responsibilities related to curriculum and instruction.

- C. The district should move forward with a more deliberate, intentional focus on using data, including student assessment data, to inform curriculum revisions and instructional decision-making.

**Benefits:** A high-quality, comprehensive curriculum will ensure that all stakeholders have access to information reflecting what students are expected to know and be able to do. A sound curriculum development process with frequent and planned opportunities for assessment of the curriculum's effectiveness will enable the district to build its capacity to refine curriculum, increase consistency, and improve instruction in a proactive way.

Implementing these recommendations will also lead the district to greater shared understanding and clarity about developing curriculum based on high expectations for learner outcomes. There will be clear curricular leadership, and district leaders, principals, and teachers will understand their critical roles in curriculum implementation and monitoring of the taught curriculum. Stakeholders, too, will have a clearer understanding of their responsibilities in supporting higher levels of achievement for all learners.

**6. The district should develop a common understanding of what constitutes effective instruction matched to specific content, with attention to practices that promote rigor and high expectations for all learners. The district should ensure that its instructional delivery model maximizes learning opportunities for all students.**

- A. The district should, with stakeholder input, develop a clear, research-based definition of effective instruction, and should clearly articulate specific instructional expectations to ensure consistency throughout the district.
  - 1. Monitoring of instructional practices with feedback and individualized support should be structured to develop teacher capacity in literacy and math.
  - 2. Class schedules should be reviewed and revised to ensure that the district provides sufficient instructional time for all core subjects at all grade levels.
  - 3. Particular attention should be paid to ensuring consistency of practices between the two schools that serve grades 5-6.
- B. Professional development opportunities should focus on establishing exemplars of highly effective practice with attention to effective, differentiated, tiered instructional practices that engage all learners.
  - 1. The district has undertaken work with Teaching and Learning Alliance and Looney Math to improve teaching and learning in literacy and math. This partnership should be analyzed to ensure that it is having the desired impact.

- a. A resource that could be helpful for this analysis is ESE’s *External Provider Pipeline Toolkit* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/framework/level4/PipelineToolkit.pdf>), which is designed to help districts make informed decisions about recruiting, screening, selecting and monitoring external service providers.
  - 2. Professional development should focus on questioning to provoke thinking and on engaging students in higher order tasks.
  - 3. Exemplars of high quality student work should be developed.
  - 4. Professional development should also address the use of formative assessments and data in the classroom to inform daily instruction.
- C. The district should reassess the roles of instructional staff.
- 1. The district should identify and communicate ways to leverage support staff to best meet student needs.
  - 2. The deployment of support staff (paraprofessionals and para-specialists) should be driven by student performance data.
  - 3. The district should consider redeploying finances and reconfiguring services to enable the addition of curriculum and instructional supports such as instructional coaches, co-teaching models, and team leaders, in order to build the capacity of teachers and instructional support staff members most effectively.
- D. A systematic review and inventory of all instructional materials—including texts, instructional technology, and equipment—should be undertaken to ensure equity of access at all schools.
- 1. The district should ensure that all classrooms are equipped with multiple resources that can support students’ diverse learning styles.

**Benefits:** With agreement on specific highly effective instructional practices matched to content and the establishment of expectations for teaching and learning, the district will be more equipped to align human, financial, and material resources to ensure equity and to maximize the district’s ability to improve learner outcomes. The district will be better able to make effective use of the educator evaluation system by providing consistent, reliable monitoring as well as feedback and support of instructional practices.

## ***Assessment***

- 7. To create a high-performing data-driven culture of continuous improvement, the district should develop a more systematic and collaborative process to continually collect, analyze, and use student performance data.**
  - A.** District leaders, from the school committee to principals to program leaders, should develop a shared vision and common expectations as to the role of data to improve curriculum, instruction, and student achievement.
    1. District leaders should establish methods for continuously analyzing student performance data, along with specific data sources, timelines, and communication methods. This districtwide approach to data should be aligned with the AIP, inform the SIPs, and activate a continuous improvement cycle.
    2. As part of this effort, the district should establish a districtwide data team with responsibility to disaggregate and analyze districtwide data and issue reports about its findings. Each school should have a specific designated group that shares the responsibility of disaggregating and analyzing data for the school and each subgroup and reporting to the district data team.
    3. This process should be developed in collaboration with key teacher representatives to build trust and to develop teacher leadership capacity in a data-driven culture of improvement.
    4. The district should determine which of its data sources are reliable and valid, train all teachers in the use of these selected resources, eliminate those that are not providing sufficient, reliable data (benchmark tests that are not aligned to the curriculum, for example), and identify any gaps in data.
  - B.** Parents and teachers should have efficient and reliable access to student performance data.
    1. The district should ensure that all teachers have access to data reports that can inform their teaching so that decisions about daily instructional goals, interventions, programs, and support can be made in a timely way.
    2. Parents should routinely have access to information about their children’s academic progress.
  - C.** The school committee should, with the superintendent, identify data that will be used to inform decision-making and planning.
  - D.** The educator evaluation system should support the use of data to improve curriculum, instruction, and student achievement.

1. The teachers' association, school and district leaders, and the school committee should immediately address concerns about the role of achievement data in the new educator evaluation system.
  2. The role of data in the new educator evaluation system should be clearly understood by all parties so that there is joint ownership of the task of improving instruction to help students attain proficiency.
- E. The district should gather data in two areas that are of concern: the impact of programs for foster students on the budget and the reasons why departing families choose to send their children to other districts.
1. While the district is committed to meeting the needs of students who are placed in the district by outside agencies and has dedicated resources to these needs, the district should analyze data to determine what programs and services these students are being served by and what the cost of these programs and services is.
  2. District leaders should increase the frequency of exit surveys so that departing families are asked annually why they are choosing schools outside of the district.
- F. Resources to assist the district in developing a culture that is highly-skilled in using data to improve schools include the following:
1. The *District Analysis and Review Tool (DART)* can help district leaders see where similar districts in the state are showing progress in specific areas to identify possible best practice.  
  
Overview: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/>  
  
Direct link, *DART User Guide*: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/userguide.pdf>
  2. The *District Data Team Toolkit* provides resources to help a district establish, grow, and maintain a culture of inquiry and data use through a District Data team.  
  
Overview: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/lg.html>  
  
Direct link, full text: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ucd/ddtt/toolkit.pdf>  
  
Module 4 of the Toolkit (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ucd/ddtt/Knowledge.pdf>) may be useful to identify root causes, which can then be compared to the root causes identified through the district's improvement planning.
  3. *Edwin Analytics* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/edwin/analytics/>) is a powerful reporting and data analysis tool that gives authorized districts and state level users access to new

information, reports, and perspectives on education and programs that specifically support improvement in teaching and learning.

4. The district should collaborate with its DSAC representative to prioritize those areas in which all classroom teachers need basic training on the effective use of data, and continue its work with DSAC in building the capacity of all school-level data teams.

**Benefits:** Implementing this recommendation will lead to a greater understanding of the critical role that data analysis plays in improving student achievement and will increase the district's ability to engage in a continuous cycle of improvement. The effective use of data will help district leaders, principals, and teachers to improve instruction, advance student learning, analyze program effectiveness, and target resources strategically.

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

#### **8. The parties must complete negotiations on a successor collective bargaining agreement, including language on educator evaluation, immediately.**

In recent years, labor/management issues in the district have slowed down the process of improving the school system. At the time of the review, negotiations were continuing over a successor collective bargaining agreement (CBA).

- A.** With the recent change in association leadership, the superintendent/school committee and the teachers' association have an opportunity to work collaboratively on improvement initiatives in the district. The district should take the necessary steps to ensure that any issues between the parties are resolved quickly, so that agreement about a successor CBA can be reached immediately. (See the second Leadership and Governance recommendation above.)
- B.** The review team recommends that the CBA be revised as follows:
  1. The CBA should be split into separate collective bargaining agreements for teachers and for administrators and simplified.
  2. Obsolete language and unnecessary detail should be eliminated from the agreement, and policies and procedures removed.
  3. Provisions in the CBA should be up to date, and any that no longer apply should be deleted.
  4. In negotiating the language in the CBA it should be kept in mind that "a teacher's primary responsibility is to teach and that his energies should, to the extent possible, be

utilized to that end,” (Article V of Appendix A of the expired contract); the amount of time that teachers are expected to teach should be reconsidered.

5. The detailed list of duties that teachers are not required to perform should be replaced with less restrictive language that gives teachers and principals more flexibility in doing their jobs.

**Benefits:** Implementing this recommendation will ensure that the CBA is transparent and clear to all stakeholders. It will provide principals appropriate authority to run schools effectively and administrators the flexibility to ensure

- adequate instructional time,
- teacher collaboration and growth, and
- effective oversight of students.

**9. The district should establish a new educator evaluation system that is consistent with the new Massachusetts system and begin at once to implement this new system in 2013-2014.**

At the time of the review, negotiations were continuing over a successor collective bargaining agreement, including language on educator evaluation. Under the state’s educator evaluation regulations at 603 CMR 35.11, the district was required to adopt and begin implementing a new educator evaluation system by the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year.

- A.** In order to resolve any remaining educator evaluation issues as soon as possible, a petition seeking arbitration should be filed with the commissioner of elementary and secondary education in accordance with [G.L. c. 71, s. 38](#) and school committee policy GCO-R-1. In any case, the district should update ESE’s Educator Policy, Preparation, and Leadership unit on the status of its educator evaluation negotiations.
- B.** In addition to reaching resolution on a successor collective bargaining agreement, including language on educator evaluation, the district should lose no time in beginning implementation in 2013-2014.
  1. The district should ensure all administrators and teachers have been provided with the ESE-developed training for evaluators and for teachers and specialized instructional support personnel as required by Chapter 131 of the Acts of 2012, passed by the Massachusetts legislature in June 2012. See the Quick Reference Guide for Educator Evaluation Training Requirements available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/>.
  2. It should ensure that the five-step evaluation cycle set forth in 603 CMR 35.06 is implemented, including self-assessment by educators, goal-setting and plan development, plan implementation, formative evaluation, and summative evaluation.

3. It should ensure that in 2013-2014 evaluations begin for at least half of its educators under the new system, as required by 603 CMR 35.11(1)(d).
4. As recommended above under Assessment, the teachers' association, school and district leaders, and the school committee should immediately address concerns about the role of achievement data in the new educator evaluation system. They should also address the concerns the team was told existed about teaching in a new culture of frequent observations.
  - a. *The Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/model/>) is a collection of resources to support effective implementation of the new educator evaluation system, including district- and school-level planning and implementation guides, model rubrics, and model contract language.
  - b. The *Educator Evaluation Training Programs* page of the ESE website (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/training/>) is part of a comprehensive strategy of support and set of resources for districts to support effective implementation of local evaluation systems, including a list of ESE-approved vendors.
  - c. The *Educator Evaluation Resources* page of the ESE website (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/resources/>) provides additional resources to support implementation of the new educator evaluation framework.

**Benefits:** Benefits from implementing an educator evaluation system consistent with the new Massachusetts system include alignment of district/school, team, and educator goals and the promotion of collaboration and continuous learning. When implemented well, such a system will be a powerful driver for improving instruction.

**10. The district should develop a systemic process for recruiting, screening, and hiring educators and align this process with the Accelerated Improvement Plan and School Improvement Plans. The district should prioritize specific proven professional development programs that lead to improved instruction and improved student learning, initiating procedures to determine the effects of professional development on educator practice.**

- A. The district should develop a systemic process for recruiting, screening, and hiring educators and align this process with the Accelerated Improvement Plan and School Improvement Plans.
  1. The review team recommends that the district take the steps necessary to form deliberate partnerships and regular communication with institutions that could provide the most promising candidates for teaching and administrative positions and help build capacity in the district.

2. The district should develop and carry out a plan for hiring administrators and teachers based on needs determined by reference to the AIP and SIPs and based on evidence that candidates for positions in the district have the skills and experience that match those needs.
- B.** The district should use the AIP and the SIPs and data provided by the district's data teams to prioritize targeted professional development that will lead to improved student learning outcomes.
1. The district's data teams can provide data indicating how specific professional development might improve student learning outcomes, to be used by the district's Professional Development Committee and by educators and their evaluators.
  2. The district should work with the teachers' association to take the steps necessary to allow the Professional Development Committee to be active again, so that it can create a district Professional Development Plan that targets professional development to the prioritized needs of the district shown by the data provided by the district data teams.
  3. Educators and evaluators should tie the mandatory goal development included in the new educator evaluation system to data.
- C.** The new educator evaluation system offers an opportunity to integrate promising professional development into educator plans.
1. The district can develop a formative conference protocol in which, as part of his or her educator plan, the educator being evaluated participates in targeted professional development and provides evidence of its impact on classroom instruction.
- D.** The district should initiate procedures for determining the effects of professional development on practice across the district; over time these can become a powerful tool to improve student learning.

**Benefits:**

- Developing a systemic process aligned with district needs to recruit, screen, and hire the most qualified educators available to meet those needs will build capacity in the district, bringing about improved professional practice and student achievement.
- Linking strong targeted professional development with student data by enabling the Professional Development Committee to plan district professional development based on district needs and priorities and by strengthening the relationship between professional development and educator evaluation will ensure that the investment in professional development at the district and school levels is effective and efficient.

- Determining the effects of professional development on practice will give the district the information to determine how best to make use of professional development to improve professional practice and student learning.

### ***Student Support***

#### **11. The district should strengthen its tiered system of support to more effectively address a wide spectrum of student needs including students working below grade level and those ready for accelerated work.**

- A.** The district should identify a few valid and reliable screening tools and assessments to identify struggling and advanced students and to monitor progress. This will provide Athol-Royalston with a clear indication of needs at each grade level and can guide teachers in developing instructional modifications to meet those needs.
- B.** The district should focus on differentiating instruction by offering professional development, in-class support, and observation and supervision of instruction in a safe and supportive environment. The new educator evaluation system may provide an excellent framework for this. A unified focus on differentiated instruction will create more student-focused classrooms that are organized in fluid small groups and are more responsive to students' individual strengths and challenges.
- C.** The district should list the opportunities for Tier 2 and 3 interventions and provide them to students as they move through the continuum of services. Interventions should be targeted and focused, based on specific needs that emerge from data. With a tighter focus on in-class differentiation, Tiers 2 and 3 could be strategically used for students who are not progressing in class. Tiers 2 and 3 should be used to supplement—not supplant—core instruction. This additional instructional time in Tiers 2 and 3 should be documented and monitored by the district.
- D.** The district should consult the Massachusetts Tiered System of Support (MTSS) (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/mtss/>) for more detailed guidance on how to establish and monitor an effective tiered system of support.

**Benefits:** A more effective tiered system of support with opportunities for students with a range of abilities to be appropriately challenged and supported will provide access to learning for all students.

## ***Finance and Asset Management***

**12. The district should take a variety of steps to make sure that its funds are allocated efficiently, in accordance with the goals and priorities in its AIP and SIPs, and in the ways that will boost student achievement most effectively.**

- A. Unit A collective bargaining agreement:** As it completes negotiations on a successor collective bargaining agreement for Unit A (see first recommendation under Human Resources and Professional Development above), the district should:
1. analyze the allocation of resources under the language of the old agreement (and its interpretation via past practice) and under any proposed new language, including
    - a. the provisions for the amount of time teachers may be required to teach and the list of duties they are not responsible for (see first recommendation under Human Resources and Professional Development above),
    - b. the provisions for common planning time and its direction by administrators, and
    - c. the provisions for sick time; and
  2. set as goals for the negotiation remedying the inefficiencies and achieving the possible cost-savings identified through this analysis.
- B. Other agreements:** In negotiating other agreements, for instance, the next paraprofessional collective bargaining agreement, the district should similarly analyze the allocation of resources under the agreement and under any proposed new language, and set goals remedying any identified inefficiencies and achieving any identified cost-savings.
- C. Consolidation of elementary schools:** As a means to achieve further cost-savings (e.g., by eliminating the duplication of staff roles and reducing operational expenses), the district needs to continue implementing plans to build a new elementary school in Athol, closing the Riverbend, Sanders Street, and Pleasant Street schools.
- D. Inclusion of improvement plan goals and priorities in budget documentation and presentations:** As part of ensuring that School Improvement Plans (SIPs) and the Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP) provide direction and focus for the schools and district, goals and priorities from the plans should be included in the budget documentation and presentations with an explanation of how funds are allocated to support these goals and priorities.

1. The budget should be aligned with the AIP and SIPs: the allocation of funds should reflect the plans' goals and priorities. In order to accomplish this, the school committee should set guidelines for budget development in accord with these goals and priorities.
2. Information and resources about establishing budget priorities can be found in *Smart School Budgeting* from The Rennie Center and The Massachusetts Association of School Business Officials (MASBO):  
(<http://www.renniecenter.org/research/SmartSchoolBudgeting.pdf>).
3. As is the case in many districts, the school committee should have more in-depth conversations with district administration about each year's budget and about how it reflects district goals and priorities.

**E. Review of staffing plan:** As it allocates funds through budget development, the district should review the way it assigns staff roles and uses staff time. Since, as in any district, the large majority of Athol-Royalston's expenditures are in the areas of salaries and benefits, the way it uses staff has to be continually re-examined.

1. In connection with this review, the district should examine the teacher absence rates at all of its schools, determine the reasons for the high rates of absence across schools, and take steps to reduce the number of absences.

**F. Comparison of expenditures:** The district should compare its expenditures to comparable districts and the state average to better understand current and possible allocation of resources.

1. Large differences between expenditures by comparable districts and/or the state can be followed up with further investigation of specific expenditures by the district and their likely impact on student performance, as well as inquiries to other districts.
2. The following resources provide data to support these comparisons:

ESE's School Finance Statistical Comparisons:

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/statistics/>

District Analysis and Review Tools (DARTs): <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/>

In particular, the DART for Staffing and Finance

(<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/DARTFinanceStaff.xlsx>) provides reports

comparing finance and staffing data from four districts and the state over three years.

**G. Cooperation with other districts:** The district should investigate cooperating with neighboring districts on programs and services where expenses can be shared, with savings to all participating districts.

1. As district staff make inquiries to other districts about particular expenditures, as recommended in F. above, they should pursue the possibility of sharing expenses with neighboring districts—for instance, expenses for food services.
2. Nearby communities are also experiencing financial constraints, and might welcome the possibility of savings in purchasing as the result of group buying and bidding.

**H. Special education review:** The district has a high percentage of students in special education programs. Detailed review of these programs and their effectiveness, and of the district’s identification practices, could drive revisions to the allocation of resources for more targeted and effective interventions and programs.

**Benefits:** Benefits to the district from implementing these recommendations include:

- alignment of resource allocation with plans and their objectives,
- more effective use of resources,
- more shared understanding of plans and programs among stakeholders including the school committee, and
- greater accountability for district leadership and the school committee.

## Appendix A: Review Team, Activities, Schedule, Site Visit

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### **Review Team Members**

The review of the Athol-Royalston Regional School District was conducted from March 18-March 22, 2013, by the following team of independent ESE consultants.

1. John Kulevich, Leadership and Governance
2. Marilynne Smith-Quarcoo, Curriculum and Instruction
3. Christine Brandt, Assessment, review team coordinator
4. Thomas Johnson, Human Resources and Professional Development
5. Lenora Jennings, Student Support
6. David A. King, Financial and Asset Management

### **District Review Activities**

The following activities were conducted during the review of Athol-Royalston Regional School District.

- The team conducted interviews with the following financial personnel: the business manager.
- The team conducted interviews with the following members of the school committee: the chair, vice-chair, and eight members.
- The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the teachers' association: the president and the treasurer.
- The team conducted interviews/focus groups with the following central office administrators: the assistant superintendent, the director of special education and guidance, the director of technology, the director of maintenance, and the Title I director. The team visited the following schools: Athol High School (grades 9-12), Athol-Royalston Middle School (grades 5-8), Royalston Community School (kindergarten through grade 6), Pleasant Street School (prekindergarten through grade 4), Sanders Street School (kindergarten through grade 2), and Riverbend School (grades 2-4).
- During school visits, the team conducted one interview with three elementary school teachers, four middle school teachers, and two high school teachers. The team interviewed all school principals in several small groups.

- The team observed 34 classes in the district: 9 at the high school, 11 at the one middle school and middle school grades at the Royalston Community School, and 14 at the 4 elementary schools.
- The review team analyzed multiple sets of data and reviewed numerous documents before and during the site visit, including:
  - Student and school performance data, including achievement and growth, 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, school schedules, and the district’s end-of-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 Athol-Royalston conducted from March 18-March 22, 2013. Classes were canceled and all schools closed on Tuesday, March 19, because of a snowstorm.

Monday March 18, 2013	Wednesday March 20, 2013	Thursday March 21, 2013	Friday March 22, 2013
Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff and principals; document reviews; interview with teachers’ association, review of personnel files, and visits to schools.	Interviews with district staff and principals; review of personnel files; teacher focus groups; school committee interviews; and visits to schools for classroom observations.	Interviews with town or city personnel; interviews with school leaders; teacher focus groups; interview with teachers’ association; parent focus group; review of personnel files, and visits to all schools for classroom observations.	Interviews with school leaders; follow-up interviews; district review team meeting; visits to schools for classroom observations; emerging themes meeting with district leaders and principals.

## Appendix B: Enrollment, Expenditures, Performance

**Table B1a: Athol-Royalston  
2012-2013 Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity**

Student Group	District	Percent of Total	State	Percent of Total
Asian	9	0.6%	56,517	5.9%
Afr. Amer./Black	32	2.2%	81,806	8.6%
Hispanic/ Latino	86	5.8%	156,976	16.4%
Multi-race, Non-Hisp. /Lat.	41	2.8%	26,012	2.7%
Nat. Haw. Or Pacif. Isl.	--	--	1,020	0.1%
White	1,306	88.5%	630,150	66.0%
<b>All students</b>	<b>1,476</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>954,773</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Note: As of October 1, 2012

**Table B1b: Athol-Royalston  
2012-2013 Student Enrollment by High Needs Populations**

Student Group	District			State		
	N	Percent of High Needs	Percent of District	N	Percent of High Needs	Percent of State
Students w/ disabilities	384	39.4%	25.7%	163,921	35.5%	17.0%
Low income	842	86.4%	57.0%	353,420	76.5%	37.0%
ELL and Former ELL	22	2.3%	1.5%	95,865	20.7%	10.0%
<b>All high needs students</b>	<b>974</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>65.2%</b>	<b>462,272</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>47.9%</b>

Notes: As of October 1, 2012. District and state numbers and percentages for students with disabilities and high needs students are calculated including students in out-of-district placements. Total district enrollment including students in out-of-district placement is 1,495; total state enrollment including students in out-of-district placement is 965,602.

**Table B2: Athol-Royalston  
Expenditures, Chapter 70 State Aid, and Net School Spending  
Fiscal Years 2011–2013**

	FY11		FY12		FY13
	Estimated	Actual	Estimated	Actual	Estimated
<b>Expenditures</b>					
From school committee budget	24,910,508	24,209,612	23,786,715	30,892,308	22,834,417
From revolving funds and grants	---	3,347,120	---	3,601,087	---
Total expenditures	---	27,556,732	---	34,493,395	---
<b>Chapter 70 aid to education program</b>					
Chapter 70 state aid*	---	16,880,687	---	16,971,310	17,043,590
Required local contribution	---	2,103,961	---	2,172,893	2,286,653
Required net school spending**	---	18,984,648	---	19,144,203	19,330,243
Actual net school spending	---	20,686,448	---	20,522,404	20,587,750
Over/under required (\$)	---	1,701,800	---	1,412,181	1,257,507
Over/under required (%)	---	9.0	---	7.2	6.5

\*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, FY12 District End-of-Year Reports; Chapter 70 Program information on ESE website.

**Table B3: Athol-Royalston  
Expenditures Per In-District Pupil  
Fiscal Years 2010–2012**

<b>Expenditure Category</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>
Administration	\$424	\$413	\$455
Instructional leadership (district and school)	\$874	\$1,048	\$1,060
Teachers	\$4,839	\$4,952	\$5,023
Other teaching services	\$1,191	\$1,422	\$1,389
Professional development	\$92	\$110	\$115
Instructional materials, equipment and technology	\$276	\$478	\$200
Guidance, counseling and testing services	\$389	\$436	\$421
Pupil services	\$1,580	\$1,738	\$1,746
Operations and maintenance	\$1,021	\$977	\$1,126
Insurance, retirement and other fixed costs	\$2,023	\$2,279	\$2,944
<b>Total expenditures per in-district pupil</b>	<b>\$12,708</b>	<b>\$13,854</b>	<b>\$14,479</b>

Sources: Per-pupil expenditure reports on ESE website

**Table B4a: Athol-Royalston  
English Language Arts Performance, 2009-2012**

Grade and Measure		Number Included (2012)	Spring MCAS Year				Gains and Declines			2012 Performance (CPI, SGP)
			2009	2010	2011	2012	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend	Potentially Meaningful?	
3	CPI	122	77.7	80.8	70.8	70.7	-7	-0.1		Very Low
	P+	122	44%	51%	39%	39%	-5	0		
4	CPI	129	68.4	71.0	69.8	63.4	-5	-6.4		Very Low
	P+	129	27%	35%	36%	32%	5	-4		
	SGP	118	43.0	37.0	38.0	36.5	-6.5	-1.5		Low
5	CPI	102	83.4	76.2	79.1	73.5	-9.9	-5.6	Yes	Very Low
	P+	102	49%	45%	55%	40%	-9	-15		
	SGP	93	48.0	45.0	51.0	38.0	-10.0	-13.0		Low
6	CPI	124	79.0	83.6	79.5	74.0	-5.0	-5.5	Yes	Very Low
	P+	124	52%	57%	50%	48%	-4	-2		
	SGP	109	48.5	51.0	53.0	34.0	-14.5	-19.0		Low
7	CPI	107	79.6	80.2	87.1	78.0	-1.6	-9.1	Yes	Very Low
	P+	107	53%	52%	60%	50%	-3	-10		
	SGP	98	44.5	29.0	47.5	37.0	-7.5	-10.5		Low
8	CPI	144	89.3	84.4	88.7	88.4	-0.9	-0.3	Yes	Very Low
	P+	144	72%	69%	72%	68%	-4	-4		
	SGP	131	76.0	54.0	61.5	53.0	-23.0	-8.5		Moderate
10	CPI	84	93.9	91.0	89.8	94.3	0.4	4.5		Very Low
	P+	84	86%	72%	74%	85%	-1	11		
	SGP	59	66.0	58.0	50.0	40.0	-26.0	-10.0		Low
All	CPI	812	81.8	80.8	81.0	76.9	-4.9	-4.1	Yes	Very Low
	P+	812	55%	54%	56%	51%	-4	-5		
	SGP	608	53.0	42.0	51.0	39.0	-14.0	-12.0		Low

Notes: The number of students included in CPI and percent *Proficient* or *Advanced* (P+) calculations may differ from the number of students included in median SGP calculations. A median SGP is not calculated for students in grade 3 because they are participating in MCAS tests for the first time. The “2012 Performance” column shows the quintile into which the CPI for the grade (or all grades) falls in a ranking of all Massachusetts districts’ CPIs for that grade (or all grades). See footnote 10 in the Student Performance section above. The “2012 Performance” column also gives the level of the median SGP. Median SGPs from 0 to 20 are considered to be Very Low; from 21 to 40, Low; from 41 to 60, Moderate; from 61 to 80, High; and from 81 to 100, Very High.

**Table B4b: Athol-Royalston  
Mathematics Performance, 2009-2012**

Grade and Measure		Number Included (2012)	Spring MCAS Year				Gains and Declines			2012 Performance (CPI, SGP)
			2009	2010	2011	2012	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend	Potentially Meaningful?	
3	CPI	122	77.7	72.1	67.9	62.5	-15.2	-5.4	Yes	Very Low
	P+	122	50%	40%	37%	36%	-14	-1		
4	CPI	129	67.4	66.5	70.4	57.4	-10	-13	Yes	Very Low
	P+	129	27%	27%	30%	21%	-6	-9		
	SGP	117	38.0	37.5	60.0	30.0	-8.0	-30.0		Low
5	CPI	102	66.7	66.8	68.6	63.2	-3.5	-5.4	Yes	Very Low
	P+	102	34%	40%	36%	32%	-2	-4		
	SGP	92	38.0	43.0	45.0	37.5	-0.5	-7.5		Low
6	CPI	124	76.7	82.7	80.6	77.6	0.9	-3.0		Low
	P+	124	54%	54%	61%	53%	-1	-8		
	SGP	112	71.0	73.5	76.5	70.5	-0.5	-6.0		High
7	CPI	110	58.3	73.2	71.6	68.6	10.3	-3.0		Very Low
	P+	110	27%	49%	40%	35%	8	-5		
	SGP	100	27.5	51.5	52.0	39.0	11.5	-13.0		Low
8	CPI	143	55.7	62.9	67.6	63.8	8.1	-3.8		Very Low
	P+	143	27%	33%	35%	30%	3	-5		
	SGP	129	45.0	41.0	31.0	27.0	-18.0	-4.0		Low
10	CPI	84	86.2	80.9	79.9	76.2	-10.0	-3.7	Yes	Very Low
	P+	84	66%	55%	57%	44%	-22	-13		
	SGP	59	41.0	35.0	47.0	21.0	-20.0	-26.0		Low
All	CPI	814	69.4	72.2	71.9	66.6	-2.8	-5.3	Yes	Very Low
	P+	814	41%	43%	42%	35%	-6	-7		
	SGP	609	45.0	49.0	50.0	37.0	-8.0	-13.0		Low

Notes: The number of students included in CPI and percent *Proficient* or *Advanced* (P+) calculations may differ from the number of students included in median SGP calculations. A median SGP is not calculated for students in grade 3 because they are participating in MCAS tests for the first time. The “2012 Performance” column shows the quintile into which the CPI for the grade (or all grades) falls in a ranking of all Massachusetts districts’ CPIs for that grade (or all grades). See footnote 10 in the Student Performance section above. The “2012 Performance” column also gives the level of the median SGP. Median SGPs from 0 to 20 are considered to be Very Low; from 21 to 40, Low; from 41 to 60, Moderate; from 61 to 80, High; and from 81 to 100, Very High.

**Table B4c: Athol-Royalston  
Science and Technology/Engineering Performance, 2009-2012**

Grade and Measure		Number Included (2012)	Spring MCAS Year				Gains and Declines			2012 Performance (CPI)
			2009	2010	2011	2012	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend	Potentially Meaningful?	
			5	CPI	101	70.8	70.8	69.7	69.1	
	P+	101	32%	36%	34%	29%	-3	-5		
8	CPI	142	64.6	67.5	71.1	70.4	5.8	-0.7	Yes	Low
	P+	142	30%	30%	33%	39%	9	6		
10	CPI	64	87.9	90.5	86.2	86.3	-1.6	0.1		Low
	P+	64	70%	72%	68%	64%	-6	-4		
All	CPI	<b>307</b>	<b>72.4</b>	<b>74.2</b>	<b>73.9</b>	<b>73.3</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>-0.6</b>		<b>Very Low</b>
	P+	<b>307</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>		

Notes: P+ = percent *Proficient* or *Advanced*. Students participate in STE MCAS tests in grades 5, 8, and 10 only. Median SGPs are not calculated for STE. The “2012 Performance” column shows the quintile into which the CPI for the grade (or all grades) falls in a ranking of all Massachusetts districts’ CPIs for that grade (or all grades). See footnote 10 in the Student Performance section above.

**Table B5a: Athol-Royalston  
English Language Arts (All Grades)  
Performance for Selected Subgroups Compared to State, 2009-2012**

Group and Measure			Number Included (2012)	Spring MCAS Year				Gains and Declines	
				2009	2010	2011	2012	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend
High needs	District	CPI	513	75.0	74.7	74.6	70.0	-5	-4.6
		P+	513	41%	41%	43%	39%	-2	-4
		SGP	348	48.5	41.0	50.0	37.0	-11.5	-13
	State	CPI	235,216	75.3	76.1	77.0	76.5	1.2	-0.5
		P+	235,216	44%	45%	48%	48%	4	0
		SGP	177,719	45.0	45.0	46.0	46.0	1	0
Low income	District	CPI	449	76.1	76.2	76.2	72.1	-4	-4.1
		P+	449	44%	45%	47%	43%	-1	-4
		SGP	300	53.0	41.5	50.5	37.0	-16.0	-13.5
	State	CPI	180,261	75.5	76.5	77.1	76.7	1.2	-0.4
		P+	180,261	45%	47%	49%	50%	5	1
		SGP	137,185	45.0	46.0	46.0	45.0	0.0	-1.0
Students w/ disabilities	District	CPI	215	62.8	62.7	61.4	53.5	-9.3	-7.9
		P+	215	17%	16%	18%	13%	-4	-5
		SGP	131	39.0	37.0	45.5	28.0	-11.0	-17.5
	State	CPI	91,757	67.8	67.3	68.3	67.3	-0.5	-1.0
		P+	91,757	28%	28%	30%	31%	3	1
		SGP	66,785	40.0	41.0	42.0	43.0	3.0	1.0
English language learners or Former ELL	District	CPI	15	63.6	70.0	62.5	61.7	-1.9	-0.8
		P+	15	18%	40%	25%	27%	9	2
		SGP	8	--	--	--	--	--	--
	State	CPI	45,367	64.8	66.1	66.2	66.2	1.4	0.0
		P+	45,367	30%	32%	33%	34%	4	1
		SGP	29,933	51.0	51.0	50.0	51.0	0.0	1.0
All students	District	CPI	812	81.8	80.8	81.0	76.9	-4.9	-4.1
		P+	812	55%	54%	56%	51%	-4	-5
		SGP	608	53.0	42.0	51.0	39.0	-14.0	-12.0
	State	CPI	497,549	86.5	86.9	87.2	86.7	0.2	-0.5
		P+	497,549	67%	68%	69%	69%	2	0
		SGP	395,772	50.0	50.0	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0

Notes: The number of students included in CPI and percent *Proficient* or *Advanced* (P+) calculations may differ from the number of students included in median SGP calculation. State figures are provided for comparison purposes only and do not represent the standard that a particular group is expected to meet.

**Table B5b: Athol-Royalston  
Mathematics (All Grades)  
Performance for Selected Subgroups Compared to State, 2009-2012**

Group and Measure			Number Included (2012)	Spring MCAS Year				Gains and Declines	
				2009	2010	2011	2012	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend
High needs	District	CPI	515	61.7	66.0	64.5	59.8	-1.9	-4.7
		P+	515	30%	33%	30%	26%	-4	-4
		SGP	349	43.5	47.0	50.0	37.0	-6.5	-13.0
	State	CPI	235,552	64.5	66.7	67.1	67.0	2.5	-0.1
		P+	235,552	32%	36%	37%	37%	5	0
		SGP	178,144	45.0	46.0	46.0	46.0	1.0	0.0
Low income	District	CPI	451	63.0	67.4	66.5	61.5	-1.5	-5.0
		P+	451	33%	35%	33%	28%	-5	-5
		SGP	301	44.0	48.0	51.0	35.0	-9.0	-16.0
	State	CPI	180,433	64.5	67.1	67.3	67.3	2.8	0.0
		P+	180,433	33%	37%	38%	38%	5	0
		SGP	137,529	44.0	47.0	46.0	45.0	1.0	-1.0
Students w/ disabilities	District	CPI	217	49.3	55.1	51.6	47.5	-1.8	-4.1
		P+	217	13%	14%	10%	10%	-3	0
		SGP	132	35.0	38.0	44.0	36.0	1.0	-8.0
	State	CPI	91,876	56.9	57.5	57.7	56.9	0.0	-0.8
		P+	91,876	20%	21%	22%	21%	1	-1
		SGP	66,876	43.0	43.0	43.0	43.0	0.0	0.0
English language learners or Former ELL	District	CPI	15	47.7	52.5	54.7	50.0	2.3	-4.7
		P+	15	23%	30%	38%	13%	-10	-25
		SGP	8	--	--	--	--	--	--
	State	CPI	45,695	59.2	61.5	62.0	61.6	2.4	-0.4
		P+	45,695	29%	31%	32%	32%	3	0
		SGP	30,189	49.0	54.0	52.0	52.0	3.0	0.0
All students	District	CPI	814	69.4	72.2	71.9	66.6	-2.8	-5.3
		P+	814	41%	43%	42%	35%	-6	-7
		SGP	609	45.0	49.0	50.0	37.0	-8.0	-13.0
	State	CPI	497,984	78.5	79.9	79.9	79.9	1.4	0.0
		P+	497,984	56%	58%	58%	59%	3	1
		SGP	396,357	50.0	50.0	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0

Notes: The number of students included in CPI and percent *Proficient* or *Advanced* (P+) calculations may differ from the number of students included in median SGP calculation. State figures are provided for comparison purposes only and do not represent the standard that a particular group is expected to meet.

**Table B5c: Athol-Royalston  
Science and Technology/Engineering (All Grades)  
Performance for Selected Subgroups Compared to State, 2009-2012**

Group and Measure			Number Included (2012)	Spring MCAS Year				Gains and Declines	
				2009	2010	2011	2012	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend
High needs	District	CPI	173	65.5	69.1	68.1	67.2	1.7	-0.9
		P+	173	31%	33%	30%	31%	0	1
	State	CPI	96,996	62.1	64.3	63.8	65.0	2.9	1.2
		P+	96,996	25%	28%	28%	31%	6	3
Low income	District	CPI	149	67.8	69.1	69.4	68.8	1	-0.6
		P+	149	35%	33%	33%	34%	-1	1
	State	CPI	74,300	61.1	63.6	62.8	64.5	3.4	1.7
		P+	74,300	25%	28%	28%	31%	6	3
Students w/ disabilities	District	CPI	66	48.3	58.2	56.1	57.6	9.3	1.5
		P+	66	5%	18%	9%	11%	6	2
	State	CPI	38,590	58.1	59.0	59.2	58.7	0.6	-0.5
		P+	38,590	18%	19%	20%	20%	2	0
English language learners or Former ELL	District	CPI	3	--	--	--	--	--	--
		P+	3	--	--	--	--	--	--
	State	CPI	15,271	50.8	51.8	50.3	51.4	0.6	1.1
		P+	15,271	15%	16%	15%	17%	2	2
<b>All students</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>CPI</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>72.4</b>	<b>74.2</b>	<b>73.9</b>	<b>73.3</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>-0.6</b>
		<b>P+</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>State</b>	<b>CPI</b>	<b>211,464</b>	<b>76.8</b>	<b>78.3</b>	<b>77.6</b>	<b>78.6</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>1.0</b>
		<b>P+</b>	<b>211,464</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>

Notes: Median SGPs are not calculated for STE. State figures are provided for comparison purposes only and do not represent the standard that a particular group is expected to meet.

**Table B6: Athol-Royalston  
Annual Grade 9-12 Dropout Rates, 2009-2012**

	School Year Ending				Change 2009-2012		Change 2011-2012		State (2012)
	2009	2010	2011	2012	Percentage Points	Percent	Percentage Points	Percent	
<b>All students</b>	6.9%	6.6%	5.5%	5.7%	-1.2	-16.8%	0.2	3.6%	2.5%

Notes: The annual dropout rate is calculated by dividing the number of students who drop out over a one-year period by the October 1 grade 9–12 enrollment, multiplied by 100. Dropouts are those students who dropped out of school between July 1 and June 30 of a given year and who did not return to school, graduate, or receive a GED by the following October 1. Dropout rates have been rounded; percent change is based on unrounded numbers.

**Table B7a: Athol-Royalston  
Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rates, 2009-2012**

Group	Number Included (2012)	School Year Ending				Change 2009-2012		Change 2011-2012		State (2012)
		2009	2010	2011	2012	Percentage Points	Percent	Percentage Points	Percent	
High needs	83	43.8%	45.6%	58.2%	63.9%	20.1	45.9%	5.7	9.8%	74.1%
Low income	70	43.6%	45.6%	63.6%	64.3%	20.7	47.5%	0.7	1.1%	72.4%
Students w/ disabilities	43	31.3%	37.5%	37.5%	39.5%	8.2	26.2%	2.0	5.3%	68.6%
English language learners (ELL) or Former ELL	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	61.1%
<b>All students</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>60.9%</b>	<b>59.8%</b>	<b>67.8%</b>	<b>74.8%</b>	<b>13.9</b>	<b>22.8%</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>10.3%</b>	<b>84.7%</b>

Notes: The four-year cohort graduation rate is calculated by dividing the number of students in a particular cohort who graduate in four years or less by the number of students in the cohort entering their freshman year four years earlier, minus transfers out and plus transfers in. Non-graduates include students still enrolled in high school, students who earned a GED or received a certificate of attainment rather than a diploma, and students who dropped out. Graduation rates have been rounded; percent change is based on unrounded numbers.

**Table B7b: Athol-Royalston  
Five-Year Cohort Graduation Rates, 2008-2011**

Group	Number Included (2011)	School Year Ending				Change 2008-2011		Change 2010-2011		State (2011)
		2008	2009	2010	2011	Percentage Points	Percent	Percentage Points	Percent	
High needs	91	57.6%	52.1%	54.4%	64.8%	7.2	12.5%	10.4	19.1%	76.5%
Low income	77	58.7%	52.7%	54.4%	66.2%	7.5	12.8%	11.8	21.7%	75.0%
Students w/ disabilities	40	53.3%	34.4%	43.8%	50.0%	-3.3	-6.2%	6.2	14.2%	70.8%
English language learners (ELL) or Former ELL	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	64.2%
<b>All students</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>72.0%</b>	<b>65.6%</b>	<b>65.4%</b>	<b>74.0%</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>13.1%</b>	<b>86.3%</b>

Notes: The five-year cohort graduation rate is calculated by dividing the number of students in a particular cohort who graduate in five years or less by the number of students in the cohort entering their freshman year five years earlier, minus transfers out and plus transfers in. Non-graduates include students still enrolled in high school, students who earned a GED or received a certificate of attainment rather than a diploma, and students who dropped out. Graduation rates have been rounded; percent change is based on unrounded numbers. Graduation rates have been rounded; percent change is based on unrounded numbers.

**Table B8: Athol-Royalston  
Attendance Rates, 2009-2012**

	School Year Ending				Change 2009-2012		Change 2011-2012		State (2012)
	2009	2010	2011	2012	Percentage Points	Percent	Percentage Points	Percent	
<b>All Students</b>	<b>92.9%</b>	<b>92.2%</b>	<b>92.9%</b>	<b>92.6%</b>	<b>-0.3</b>	<b>-0.3%</b>	<b>-0.3</b>	<b>-0.3%</b>	<b>94.9%</b>

Notes: The attendance rate is calculated by dividing the total number of days students attended school by the total number of days students were enrolled in a particular school year. A student's attendance rate is counted toward any district the student attended. In addition, district attendance rates included students who were out placed in public collaborative or private alternative schools/programs at public expense. Attendance rates have been rounded; percent change is based on unrounded numbers.

**Table B9: Athol-Royalston  
Suspension Rates, 2009-2012**

Group	School Year Ending				Change 2009-2012		Change 2011-2012		State (2012)
	2009	2010	2011	2012	Points	Percent	Percentage Points	Percent	
In-School Suspension Rate	10.4%	9.9%	5.3%	4.0%	-6.4	-61.5%	-1.3	-24.5%	3.4%
Out-of-School Suspension Rate	8.6%	10.8%	11.0%	8.5%	-0.1	-1.2%	-2.5	-22.7%	5.4%

Note: This table reflects information reported by school districts at the end of the school year indicated. Suspension rates have been rounded; percent change is based on unrounded numbers.

## Appendix C: Instructional Inventory

Learning Environment	By Grade Span	Evidence					
		None	Partial	Clear & Consistent	Overall		
		(0)	(1)	(2)	#	%	
1. Interactions between teacher & students & among students are positive & respectful.	ES	0	1	13	(0)	0	0%
	MS	0	2	9	(1)	3	9%
	HS	0	0	9	(2)	31	91%
2. Behavioral standards are clearly communicated. Disruptions, if present, are managed effectively & equitably.	ES	0	3	11	(0)	3	9%
	MS	2	1	8	(1)	5	15%
	HS	1	1	7	(2)	26	76%
3. Classroom procedures are established & maintained to create a safe physical environment & promote smooth transitions among all classroom activities.	ES	1	1	12	(0)	2	6%
	MS	0	1	10	(1)	3	9%
	HS	1	1	7	(2)	29	85%
4. Lesson reflects rigor & high expectations.	ES	4	3	7	(0)	8	24%
	MS	2	2	7	(1)	7	20%
	HS	2	2	5	(2)	19	56%
5. Classroom rituals, routines & appropriate interactions create a safe intellectual environment in which students take academic risks & most behaviors that interfere with learning are prevented.	ES	1	4	9	(0)	2	6%
	MS	0	0	11	(1)	6	18%
	HS	1	2	6	(2)	26	76%
6. Multiple resources are available to meet students' diverse learning needs.	ES	7	3	4	(0)	16	47%
	MS	6	3	2	(1)	9	26%
	HS	3	3	3	(2)	9	26%
7. The physical arrangement of the classroom ensures a positive learning environment & provides all students with access to learning activities.	ES	2	2	10	(0)	2	6%
	MS	0	2	9	(1)	6	18%
	HS	0	2	7	(2)	26	76%

Teaching	By Grade Span	Evidence					
		None	Partial	Clear & Consistent	Overall		
		(0)	(1)	(2)	#	%	
8. Demonstrates knowledge of subject & content.	ES	2	1	11	(0)	3	9%
	MS	0	1	10	(1)	2	6%
	HS	1	0	8	(2)	29	85%
9. Communicates clear grade-appropriate learning objectives aligned to state standards. Applicable ELL language objectives are evident.	ES	9	3	3	(0)	18	53%
	MS	7	3	1	(1)	8	24%
	HS	2	3	4	(2)	8	24%
10. Uses appropriate & varied strategies matched to learning objectives & content.	ES	9	4	1	(0)	18	53%
	MS	6	3	2	(1)	9	26%
	HS	3	2	4	(2)	7	21%
11. Requires inquiry, exploration, application, analysis, synthesis, &/or evaluation of concepts individually, in pairs or in groups to demonstrate higher-order thinking. (circle observed skills)	ES	8	4	2	(0)	15	44%
	MS	2	1	8	(1)	5	15%
	HS	5	0	4	(2)	14	41%
12. Uses varied questioning techniques that require/seek thoughtful responses & promote deeper understanding.	ES	8	2	4	(0)	17	50%
	MS	6	2	3	(1)	5	15%
	HS	3	1	5	(2)	12	35%
13. Implements appropriate & varied strategies that meet students' diverse learning needs.	ES	9	3	2	(0)	19	56%
	MS	6	3	2	(1)	7	20%
	HS	4	1	4	(2)	8	24%
14. Paces lesson to engage all students & promote understanding.	ES	3	3	8	(0)	5	15%
	MS	0	2	9	(1)	7	20%
	HS	2	2	5	(2)	22	65%
15. Conducts frequent formative assessments to check for understanding & inform instruction.	ES	5	4	5	(0)	15	44%
	MS	5	1	5	(1)	6	18%
	HS	5	1	3	(2)	13	38%
16. Makes use of technology to enhance learning.	ES	10	1	3	(0)	23	68%
	MS	7	1	3	(1)	2	6%
	HS	6	0	3	(2)	9	26%

Learning	By Grade Span	Evidence					
		None	Partial	Clear & Consistent	Overall		
		(0)	(1)	(2)	#	%	
17. Students are engaged in productive learning routines.	ES	2	2	10	(0)	6	18%
	MS	0	3	8	(1)	7	20%
	HS	4	2	3	(2)	21	62%
18. Students are engaged in challenging academic tasks.	ES	8	2	4	(0)	11	32%
	MS	0	4	7	(1)	9	26%
	HS	3	3	3	(2)	14	41%
19. Students assume responsibility for their own learning.	ES	4	2	8	(0)	7	20%
	MS	0	2	9	(1)	8	24%
	HS	3	4	2	(2)	19	56%
20. Students articulate their thinking or reasoning verbally or in writing either individually, in pairs or in groups.	ES	9	3	2	(0)	15	44%
	MS	1	1	9	(1)	6	18%
	HS	5	2	2	(2)	13	38%
21. Students' responses to questions elaborate about content & ideas (not expected for all responses).	ES	10	3	1	(0)	25	74%
	MS	9	0	2	(1)	4	12%
	HS	6	1	2	(2)	5	15%
22. Students make connections to prior knowledge, real world experiences & other subject matter.	ES	8	2	4	(0)	14	41%
	MS	3	1	7	(1)	5	15%
	HS	3	2	4	(2)	15	44%
23. Students use technology as a tool for learning &/or understanding.	ES	12	0	2	(0)	30	88%
	MS	11	0	0	(1)	1	3%
	HS	7	1	1	(2)	3	9%
24. Student work demonstrates high quality & can serve as exemplars.	ES	11	1	2	(0)	25	74%
	MS	9	1	1	(1)	4	12%
	HS	5	2	2	(2)	5	15%