

District Review Report

Ayer Shirley Regional School District

Review conducted June 9-12, 2014



Center for District and School Accountability

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and
Secondary Education

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Ayer Shirley RSD District Review Overview

Purpose

Conducted under Chapter 15, 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 systemwide functions, with reference to the six district standards used by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE): 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 2013-2014 school year include districts classified into Level 2 or Level 3 of ESE's framework for district accountability and assistance. 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 reviews 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 onsite review, the team meets for two days to develop findings and recommendations before submitting a draft report to ESE. *District review reports focus primarily on the system's most significant strengths and challenges, with an emphasis on identifying areas for improvement.*

Site Visit

The site visit to Ayer Shirley was conducted from June 9 to 12, 2014. The site visit included approximately 28 hours of interviews and focus groups with approximately 100 stakeholders, including school committee members, district administrators, school staff, teachers' association representatives, and students. The review team conducted two focus groups with eight middle school teachers and four high school teachers. The review team also scheduled a meeting with elementary teachers; however, no elementary teachers attended.

A list of review team members, information about review activities, and the site visit schedule are in Appendix A, and Appendix B provides information about enrollment, student performance, and expenditures. The team observed classroom instructional practice in 57 classrooms in 4 schools. The team collected data using an instructional inventory, a tool for recording observed characteristics of standards-based teaching. This data is contained in Appendix C.

District Profile

Ayer and Shirley have a town administrator and the chair of the school committee is elected by members. There are six members of the school committee and they meet twice a month. In case of emergency, or by majority vote of the committee, more frequent meetings may be held.

The superintendent at the time of the review has been in the position since 2011; however, his contract is expiring on June 30, 2014. The district leadership team includes the assistant superintendent, the director of finance, the director of special education services, and the director of technology. Central office positions have been stable in number over the past three years. The district has four principals leading four schools, as well as three assistant principals. There were 128.6 teachers in the district in 2013-2014.

In 2013-2014, 1,666 students were enrolled in the district’s 4 schools:

**Table 1: Ayer Shirley RSD
Schools, Type, Grades Served, and Enrollment*, 2013-2014**

School Name	School Type	Grades Served	Enrollment
Page Hilltop School	ES	PK-5	560
Lura A.White Elementary School	ES	PK-5	370
Ayer Shirley Regional Middle School	MS	6-8	411
Ayer Shirley Regional High School	HS	9-12	325
Totals	4 schools	PK-12	1,666
*As of October 1, 2013			

Between 2011-2012 (the onset of regionalization) and 2013-2014, overall student enrollment increased by 11 students. Enrollment figures by race/ethnicity and high needs populations (i.e., students with disabilities, students from low-income families, and English language learners (ELLs) and former ELLs) as compared with the state are provided in Tables B1a and B1b in Appendix B.

Total in-district per-pupil expenditures were about the same as the median in-district per pupil expenditures for 51 districts of similar size (1,000-1,999 students) in fiscal year 2013: \$12,636 as compared with \$12,506 (see [District Analysis and Review Tool Detail: Staffing & Finance](#)). Actual net school spending has been above what is required by the Chapter 70 state education aid program, as shown in Table B8 in Appendix B.

Student Performance¹

Ayer Shirley is a Level 2 district because all its schools are in Level 2, except for Page Hilltop Elementary, which is in Level 1.

- Lura A. White Elementary, in the 36th percentile of elementary schools, is in Level 2 for not meeting its gap narrowing goals for all students and high needs students. Page Hilltop is in Level 1 at the 54th percentile of elementary schools with a Progress Performance Index (PPI) of 92 for all students and 90 for high needs students.
- Ayer Shirley Middle, in the 26th percentile of middle schools, is in Level 2 for failing to meet its gap narrowing targets for all students and high needs students.
- Ayer Shirley Regional High, in the 40th percentile of high schools, is in Level 2 for failing to meet its gap narrowing targets for all students.

The district did not reach its 2013 Composite Performance Index (CPI) targets for ELA and math, but its 2013 science CPI was considered on target.

- ELA CPI was 86.3 in 2013, below the district's target of 88.2.
- Math CPI was 78.2 in 2013, below the district's target of 80.0.
- Science CPI was 80.0 in 2013. This was considered on target because it was within 1.25 points of the district's target of 80.7.

ELA proficiency rates were similar to the state rate for the district as whole and for every grade except grade 5, which was above the state rate, and grade 7, which was below the state rate.

- ELA proficiency rates for all students in the district were 69 percent in 2012 and 66 percent in 2013, below the state rate of 69 percent.
- ELA proficiency was above the state by 1 to 2 percentage points in grades 3, 8, and 10 and by 7 percentage points in grade 5. ELA proficiency was below the state rate by 1 percentage point in grades 4 and 6 and by 18 percentage points in grade 7.
- Between 2012 and 2013, ELA proficiency improved by 3 to 5 percentage points in grades 5, 6, and 10 and declined by 16 percentage points in grade 3 and by 3 to 5 percentage points in grades 4, 7, and 8.

¹ See also student performance tables in Appendix B.

Math proficiency rates were below the state rate in grades 4, 6, 7, and 8 but improved in the district as a whole and in every grade from 2012 to 2013.

- Math proficiency for all students in the district was 51 percent in 2012 and 57 percent in 2013, compared with the state rate of 61 percent.
- Math proficiency was above the state rate by 3 to 5 percentage points in grades 3, 5, and 10, and below the state rate by 1 to 2 percentage points in grades 4 and 8 and by 10 and 14 percentage points in grades 6 and 7, respectively.
- Between 2012 and 2013, math proficiency improved by 2 to 7 percentage points in grades 3-8 and by 29 percentage points in grade 10.

Science proficiency was above the state rate in each tested grade and improved from 2012 to 2013 in grades 5 and 10.

- Grade 5 science proficiency improved 4 percentage points, from 51 percent in 2012 to 55 percent in 2013, above the state rate of 51 percent.
- Grade 8 science proficiency declined 7 percentage points, from 47 percent in 2012 to 40 percent in 2013, but was above the state rate of 39 percent.
- Grade 10 science proficiency improved 6 percentage points, from 73 percent in 2012 to 79 percent in 2013, above the state rate of 51 percent.

Ayer Shirley met the 2014 four year cohort graduation rate target of 80.0 percent and the five year cohort graduation rate target of 85.0 percent.

- The four year cohort graduation rate was 92.5 percent in 2012 and 80.7 percent in 2013, below the state graduation rate of 85.0 percent.
- The five year cohort graduation rate was 84.5 percent in 2011 and 92.5 percent in 2012, above the state graduation rate of 87.5 percent.
- The annual dropout rate for Ayer Shirley was 2.2 percent in 2013, equal to the statewide rate of 2.2 percent.

Ayer Shirley RSD District Review Findings

Strengths

Leadership & Governance

1. **The leadership in the Ayer Shirley Regional School District (ASRSD) has taken a number of positive initial steps to solidify its formation. These steps include decisions and actions to form a regional district, nimble and flexible responses to emerging needs, and creating structures for needs as they arise.**
 - A. An ASRSD school committee was formed with representatives from Ayer and Shirley.
 1. The ASRSD school committee consists of six members, three from Ayer and three from Shirley.
 2. The superintendent said that some of the members of the ASRSD school committee had previously served on either the Ayer or Shirley school committee while the others were new members.
 3. One school committee member stated that during the first year and a half of the ASRSD school committee's existence the members worked to consolidate the Ayer and Shirley school policies. This individual also mentioned that the members, along with the interim ASRSD superintendent, reviewed the policies, revised them as necessary, and re-adopted them.
 - B. The superintendent and interim superintendent at the time of the review, with the support of the ASRSD school committee, combined the former central school administration offices of Ayer and Shirley into one central office for the regional district.
 1. Before the formation of the ASRSD, the towns of Ayer and Shirley each had a school department central administration office headed by an interim superintendent.
 - a. The central office consolidation has resulted in the current regional administrative positions: superintendent, assistant superintendent in support of teaching & learning, finance director, director of special education and student services, and director of technology.
 2. The ASRSD interim superintendent, who also served in another central office position in one of the towns at the same time during 2010-2011, said that the three interim superintendents worked together on different tasks such as preparing agendas for regional school committee meetings, managing the search for a permanent superintendent, and renegotiating school employee contracts.

- C. School employee association/union contracts for Ayer and Shirley were renegotiated and became uniform for the ASRSD.
 - 1. The six school employee association/union contracts, five in Ayer and one in Shirley, were renegotiated and reduced to five uniform contracts for the ASRSD. The superintendent said that five contracts had to be negotiated: those for teachers, para-professionals, clerical staff, cafeteria employees, and custodians. Also, the superintendent pointed out that before these negotiations, Shirley did not have a support staff union contract whereas Ayer did.
 - 2. The superintendent stated that the negotiations on the new teacher evaluation system were separate and that the model system was adopted and is being implemented now. Three of the four principals said that all of their first year teachers have been evaluated and the other principal indicated that evaluations were being completed.

- D. In 2010-2011, the school committee approved a proposal to combine grades 6-8 in Ayer with those grades in Shirley, since space was available at the Shirley middle school. Initially, this was to be a temporary move, since the building committee was considering the construction of a new grade 6-12 regional middle/high school.
 - 1. As a result of the committee's decision, grade 6-8 students from Ayer were moved to the Shirley middle school, which was less than 10 years old and had available space; the move had the added benefit of bringing the grade 6-8 teachers from Ayer and Shirley into a setting where they could collaborate.
 - a. The superintendent said that the combining of the grade 6-8 students from both towns turned out to be a success story. He indicated that previously both middle schools were struggling but as a result of the grade consolidation they could now retain programs such as band and extracurricular activities, and the culture differences began to subside.
 - b. Furthermore, the success story of the middle school trial period has now become permanent. It altered the school building committee's original plan to have Ayer and Shirley build a new grade 6-12 regional middle/high school. Now the plan is to keep grades 6-8 for both towns in the middle school in Shirley and add to and renovate the regional high school for grades 9-12 only.

- E. The towns of Ayer and Shirley voted to build a new ASRSD grades 9-12 high school in Ayer.
 - 1. The superintendent said that the agreement between the towns of Ayer and Shirley to establish a regional school district stipulated that each town was to have its own elementary school. This decision addressed the issue of equity in terms of each community in the regional district having a pre-K to grade 5 elementary school in its town.
 - 2. The superintendent and a second central office administrator said that a proposal to add to and renovate the existing grade 9-12 Ayer Shirley Regional High School for \$56 million was

presented to the Massachusetts School Building Authority, which approved the project to be reimbursed for \$37 million.

3. On November 17, 2012, the voters of Ayer and Shirley took the necessary two votes in their towns and approved the project in the amount of \$56,543,765, as certified by the Town Clerks of Ayer and Shirley.
- F.** The leadership in the school district has worked collaboratively with members of the Regional Leadership Advisory Group (RLAG) to address both the short- and long-term needs of the ASRSD and the towns of Ayer and Shirley.
1. The RLAG includes representatives from the Ayer and Shirley board of selectmen, the finance committees, town administrators, the ASRSD school committee, and the superintendent. The leadership is rotated and facilitated by the superintendent or by one of the town administrators.
 2. Issues such as budgets (school and municipal), Shirley's ability to meet its financial obligations in the ASRSD agreement, capital projects, conditions of facilities, budget schedules, and communication are some of the issues that have been discussed or are being discussed; others still need to be addressed.

Impact: The establishment of the ASRSD school committee, unifying and adopting a set of policies, combining two central school administration offices into one, and hiring the first superintendent for the regional district were important steps addressed by the district leadership in organizing the regional school district. A collaborative planning method resulted in a smooth transition process from two districts to one, which will likely benefit stakeholders in both towns.

Curriculum and Instruction

2. The district has engaged in systematic program planning, which has resulted in cohesive initiatives in K- 8 literacy and K- 5 mathematics.

- A.** A documentation review and interviews showed that before regionalization Ayer began to develop a literacy improvement plan in consultation with an external agency. In 2010, the scope of the work was broadened to include Shirley. The district completed the Ayer Shirley Strategic Literacy Implementation and Sustainability Plan (SLISP) in September 2011.
1. The SLISP consists of nine priority goals within the five following categories: Systematic Data Use, Tiered System of Instruction and Intervention, Standards-Based Core Curriculum, Family and Community Involvement, and Leadership.
 - a. The SLISP also elaborates specific action steps for accomplishing each of the nine goals including the responsible persons, starting and completion dates, resources, and accountability measures.

- i. For example, one of the action steps set forth in the SLISP for accomplishing priority goal 5 (Develop multi-tiered literacy core curriculum guides for grade levels K-8 linking the key elements of effective literacy instruction to evidence-based practices and assessment) was to establish literacy leaders at the elementary and middle school levels and to develop schedules for their meetings with teachers.
 2. In interviews with the review team, teachers and administrators were familiar with the contents of the SLISP and stated the district's progress toward realization of the goals.
 - a. For example, interviewees told the review team that 100 percent of K-6 teachers were "involved in data use" and that teachers in grades 7 and 8 were beginning to use data to plan and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction.
 - b. In addition, teachers at the elementary and middle school levels said that literacy leaders convened grade level data meetings and helped teachers group students for instruction.
- B.** A document review and interviews showed that the district adopted the Envisions mathematics program K- 5 in 2013-2014 in order to increase student proficiency in mathematics. Administrators and teachers said that the district chose Envisions because it accommodated a range of student leaning differences and correlated with the Massachusetts 2011 Frameworks.
 1. In order to facilitate the adoption of Envisions, the district developed an implementation guide for teachers consisting of standards for mathematical practice, instructional expectations, designs for core instruction, a response to intervention (RtI) framework, assessment strategies, and a list of implementation tools and resources. Administrators said that the guide summarized key components of the training provided to teachers by the publisher and district administrators.
 - a. Teachers stated the rationale for the adoption of Envisions mathematics and said that the program was in effective use at the elementary level.

Impact: The literacy and mathematics initiatives bring coherence to teaching and learning. Consistent practices provide a baseline for measuring progress, common vocabulary, and a focus for improvement efforts.

Human Resources and Professional Development

3. The summer orientation and yearly mentoring program, established within the district, are comprehensively designed to support new teachers and teachers new to the district in their teaching assignments.

- A.** Every new teacher and teachers newly hired to the district are expected to attend a one-day summer orientation where they are assigned a mentor.
 - 1. Mentor teachers, those who teach and give advice to those who are less experienced, are seasoned educators currently working at the same school.
 - a. Mentor teachers are selected by school principals to work with new teachers during the one-day orientation and throughout the school year.
 - 2. Mentors receive training during the summer by the assistant superintendent.
 - a. An outcome from the training is that mentors and new teachers develop a process for visiting each other's classrooms and observing teaching through a peer observation model.
 - i. New teachers self-assess where they need support on the continuum of practice and mentors assess how to provide strategies to their partners to improve practice.
 - 3. In addition to initial summer orientation, mentors and mentees participate four times per year in professional development (PD) sessions led by the assistant superintendent,
 - a. During PD, mentors and mentees practice and review mini lessons, which include whole group and small group teaching. New teachers learn habits of teaching and helpful skills from mentors.
 - 4. Mentors meet with their mentees daily at their schools during times arranged by the partnership. A district leader told the review team that school-based meetings follow the guidelines stated in the mentor handbook.
 - 5. Mentors receive a yearly stipend of \$666, and they are expected to provide feedback about their experience to the assistant superintendent at the end of the school year.
- B.** Newly hired teachers and teachers new to the district are supported and turnover rates are limited.
 - 1. In 2012-2013, the teacher turnover rate in the district was 8 percent as compared with the state's teacher turnover rate of 11 percent. The support for new teachers is widely known and anticipated by new hires.

- a. Interviewees stated that Ayer Shirley has made it a practice to hire from within the district as much as possible.
 - i. In exit interviews for teachers leaving the district, principals found that teacher movement has not been attributed to dissatisfaction or to absence of support.
2. In the 2014 TELL Mass survey results, 65 percent of teachers who responded agreed or strongly agreed that school leadership consistently supported teachers.
3. Teachers and teachers' association representatives spoke favorably about the summer orientation and mentoring programs.

Impact: The summer orientation and yearly mentoring programs in Ayer Shirley partners selected seasoned teachers with new teachers and teachers newly hired to the district. During PD sessions and daily meetings, mentors have an opportunity to share habits and skills that are effective in their teaching practice to help meet student needs. Continued support and encouragement for new teachers by mentors and dedicated PD to enhance adult learning can build confidence in teachers moving forward to becoming exemplary educators.

Student Support

4. The district provides services and resources for students who need academic support.

- A. The district has established practices at the elementary, middle, and high schools to respond to students who are struggling.
 1. As a result of analysis of Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) scores, elementary school students may receive additional RtI or small group instruction in reading.
 2. Struggling middle school students may be scheduled for RtI in ELA, reading or mathematics during enrichment block, which is built into the schedule for 30 minutes per day.
 3. Middle school teachers reported that they stay after school one to two times per week to provide extra help for students. Middle school students also have access to homework club two times a week after school. High school students reported that they can seek help after school and they can come to school before classes to get help.
 4. The high school developed an academic support class in mathematics providing extra time and practice for students and is developing a similar program in writing for the 2014-2015 school year. Class size is approximately 10 to 12 students.

5. As a result of analysis of MCAS scores, the district will host a **five**-week mathematics course during the 2014 summer for 8th and 9th graders. Sixty students (out of 200) have been invited. Transportation will be provided.

B. The District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) provides a list of strategies available in the district to support student learning.

1. PreK-5 supports include: part time literacy leaders; benchmark assessments in Reading, mathematics, and writing; benchmark data meetings (3 times a year); Hill for Literacy; Central Massachusetts DSAC consulting in grades 4-5 mathematics; 90 minute core reading block; additional daily 30-40 minute tiered intervention block; and Title I supplemental services for grades 1-3.

2. Grades 6-12 supports include: part time literacy leader; benchmark assessments in reading, mathematics and writing; data meetings; Hill for Literacy consulting for literacy leaders and principal; supplemental reading services for grades 6-8; and an academic support class for grades 9-12.

3. The DCAP also provides an array of modifications for classroom teachers to consider in the area of presentation, response, timing, setting, and assessment.

Impact: Small group instruction, RtI, designated enrichment blocks, and before- and after-school help provides academic support for students who may be struggling. The DCAP provides a compendium of resources available in the district and suggestions for modifications that teachers can use to support struggling students. All of these practices, when used fully, will help improve student achievement.

5. The district supports students' social and emotional health needs with programs, resources, and partnerships.

A. Teachers in the district use several programs that support students' social and emotional development.

1. The review team was told that many teachers at both elementary schools have been trained in Responsive Classroom, a social and emotional learning program and in Second Step, a program that teaches social emotional skill such as empathy, emotion management, and problem solving.

2. Interviewees reported that Developmental Designs is used by some middle school teachers. Developmental Designs is a program that helps teacher promote positive adolescent social skills through effective teaching.

3. The high school has an advisory program that provides a small group setting for 8 to 10 students, 30 minutes per week. Students reported that advisory period may cover topics such as interviewing skills and college essay writing. Juniors told the review team that they

are guided on “Your Plan for the Future,” a website that helps students consider various post-secondary choices.

- B.** The district provides resources to support students’ emotional and social growth and development.
 - 1. Interviewees reported and documents confirmed that there are two school counselors at the high school (one guidance and one adjustment), two at the middle school and Page Hilltop School, and one counselor at Lura A. White Elementary School. (One Guidance Counselor and one Adjustment Counselor)
 - 2. There are also two school psychologists (PreK-5 and 6-12) in the district.
 - 3. Counselors across the district meet monthly to discuss case studies and for their own social emotional learning; representatives for Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology (MSPP) are invited to attend.
- C.** The district has nurtured partnerships with families and outside agencies to support students’ social and emotional growth and development.
 - 1. The district uses many avenues to engage parents in their children’s schools, including; Edline, a parent portal for communication, reverse 911, an all-call system to alert parents about school events, newsletters, progress reports, report cards, school council, PTO, and availability of translations for families whose first language is not English of notices for meetings and some printed information.
 - 2. Partnerships that have been nurtured to support the district and to enhance the educational experience for students include: Partners in Education, a program designed for local businesses to share their expertise and resources with schools; Ayer Shirley Education Foundation (ASEF), a non-profit fund-raising organization that provides grants to teachers for enrichment activities; and Bemis Industries of Shirley, which provided a \$25,000 cash grant to the district for enrichment activities. Other partnerships provide direct services to students and families for counseling and other related services; these include Lipton Center in Leominster, LUK Center in Fitchburg, and the MSPP.

Impact: Support and attention to students’ social and emotional growth and development help to create and sustain an environment most conducive to learning. It enables teachers to focus on teaching and students to focus on learning.

Financial and Asset Management

- 6. Comprehensive planning and financial support by the towns and district has resulted in a major renovation project at the high school. The decision was made in a fiscally prudent way, and the new building is expected to help bring students back into the district.**

- A.** The district is in the midst of a major renovation of its high school.
 - 1. District administrators told the review team that the renovated high school will have a capacity of up to 495 students in grades 9-12, compared to its current (2013-2014) enrollment of 325. This allows for expansion, including bringing students back to the school.
 - 2. The project is to be completed in June 2015.
 - 3. The estimated cost of the project is \$56 million, of which the MSBA has committed \$37 million.
 - 4. Administrators reported that the project is on schedule and within budget.
 - 5. Reviewers observed the renovations in progress at the high school and teachers preparing to move materials and equipment to the renovated portion of the school.

- B.** Planning for the high school was comprehensive and fiscally prudent and has taken into account benefits for the district as a whole.
 - 1. The superintendent reported that the towns approved \$750,000 for a feasibility study during the transition to the regional district.
 - 2. Administrators said that the Ayer Middle/High School previously included grades 6-12, and the district first studied options to renovate the school for grades 6-12. However, during the first year of regionalization the option to renovate the school for grades 9-12 was also considered and ultimately approved.
 - a. One reason for the consideration of a grade 9-12 high school was the cost, which was projected to be considerably higher (approximately \$80 million) for grades 6-12. In addition, there would have been expenses to convert the middle school to an elementary school.
 - b. Site issues such as parking and fields were also considered in the decision to propose a grade 9-12 high school renovation.
 - 3. School committee members and administrators stressed that the renovated high school should keep local students in the district from participating in choice and charter school programs.

- C.** Both towns have supported the high school project by approving debt exclusion overrides.
 - 1. Interviewees said that during the transition planning for regionalization in 2010-2011 the towns approved \$750,000 for a feasibility study of the high school.
 - 2. In 2011-2012 both towns approved debt exclusion overrides for the \$56 million high school project.

3. Administrators reported that construction began in the summer 2013.

Impact: The newly renovated high school can serve as a magnet to keep students in the district, reducing the large number of students who participate in school choice and charter schools. It will improve programs for high school students by updating technology, classrooms, the gymnasium and auditorium.

7. The district has effectively used its limited resources to maintain educational services and programs. Despite reductions in budget requests, it has made improvements by reallocating resources, using cost-effective measures, and making effective use of partnerships.

- A. Funding for the district in fiscal year 2013 was \$12,636 per in-district pupil, which is above the district's required net school spending by 14.5 percent but below the 2013 state average of \$13,498.
 1. The superintendent said that the district finished its first year's budget in the black; last year (2012-2013) it had a special education tuition and transportation deficit of over \$500,000, and transferred funds from other budget accounts to cover all but \$189,409, which had to be taken from its excess and deficiency account. Finance reports for this year (2013-2014) project a balanced budget.
- B. Support services, a varied high school program of studies, and technology are adequately funded.
 1. Interviewees described numerous support services and counseling available to students in all grades, and the five year NEASC report noted improvements in ELL and special education services at the high school.
 2. Budget documents showed that despite a small 3.4 percent increase for next year (fiscal year 2015) the district is able to make additions to support services, including a high school special education teacher and an elementary classroom teacher.
 3. The program of studies for the high school includes many electives such as poetry microbiology, graphics design, and social media; reviewers observed some of these classes in session, offered even with small enrollments.
 4. The district has a technology budget of over \$400,000, including four staff members, and administrators described technology as one of the district's priorities with Wi-Fi in all buildings, Chrome Books on carts, and an increased budget for software and other classroom technology.
- C. The district has reallocated funds to maintain and to improve services despite reductions in budget requests.

1. During the development of the fiscal year 2015 budget, the district was able to make the necessary reductions of \$170,000 by reallocating revenues, expenses, and grants.
 2. By reallocating grants and budget funds in fiscal year 2015 the district was able to fund a literacy coordinator; by reallocating time it was able to increase PD days to three full days, ½ day (K-8) and seven 90 minute early release days in the 2014-2015 school year.
- D.** The district uses cost-effective measures to keep expenses down so that funds can be applied to educational needs.
1. Administrators reported that the district takes advantage of collaborative contracts and bidding for copiers, paper, oil, and other products. It uses an energy broker to get the best possible price for electricity.
 2. They also reported that the district has been able to reduce health insurance costs substantially by contracting for insurance with an agency, which could give them a rate based on the profile of the district's employees, who are young and healthy. According to ESE data, the district's insurance costs are less than average.
- E.** The district has established partnerships to provide additional funding and resources.
1. A document review and interviews with administrators showed that the ASEF provides over \$25,000 annually in grants to teachers for technology, enrichment programs, and other educational purposes.
 2. Administrators reported partnerships with local businesses such as Bemis for grants and summer volunteers who help with buildings and grounds.
 3. One school's improvement plan notes that a grant was used for the school playground.
 4. Interviewees mentioned partnerships with several counseling and support agencies in the area.

Impact: The flexibility and efforts of the district to reallocate funds, to search for cost effective practices, and to form partnerships with local agencies have enabled it to make better use of its limited funding and to adjust spending as required when unforeseen expenses and revenue shortfalls arise.

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

8. The district has not developed a unifying common vision and an implementation plan.

- A.** The regional school district does not have a vision statement or an operating strategic plan that has goals to which school improvement plan (SIP) goals are aligned.
1. One school committee member stated that the school committee planned to work on matters pertaining to the strategic plan and goals in the summer of 2014. This committee member also said that there was a need to rework the former strategic plan.
 2. The superintendent said that a strategic plan (Action Plan for School Improvement) was developed before he came to the district. He indicated that the plan was developed by the interim ASRSD superintendent with the assistance of a facilitator during the transition year, 2010-2011. He also stated that under his leadership six draft district goals were written but that he “did not do a good job operationalizing that plan” since he was confronted with one crisis after another. In addition, the superintendent mentioned that there was no district improvement plan.
 - a. The superintendent told review team members that the ASRSD Goals (Draft 08-23-12) were prepared by central office administrators, principals, assistant principals, and coordinators and were shared with the school committee, but no formal action was taken on them.
 - b. Both the strategic plan and the ASRSD goals were made available to the review team. There is no alignment between the strategic plan and the ASRSD goals.
 3. Principals acknowledged six district goals. However, when the principals were asked a question about the alignment of school and district goals, one principal said that he could recall a meeting asking for something along those lines but said “We are all different.” The principals agreed that some goals were aligned and others might or might not be aligned.
 4. A teacher in one focus group said that teachers have struggled because “we don’t have a vision or plan.” A second teacher said that teachers needed direction, some goals, communication, and feedback. A third teacher mentioned the need for continuity, noting “We start things and then we stop them.”
 5. A teachers’ association representative said the district did not have a fully developed strategic/district improvement plan.
- B.** Although each school has a SIP, the goals are not all SMART goals (Specific and Strategic; Measureable; Action-Oriented; Rigorous, Realistic, and Results-Focused; and Timed and Tracked) and the SIPs do not all contain sufficient detail about how the goals will be accomplished.

Impact: The absence of a vision statement and a plan for accomplishing it leaves school employees unclear as to the direction of the district—especially with regard to improving student achievement—and without a blueprint for how the district intends to get where it is going.

Curriculum and Instruction

9. Principals have a limited role in curriculum development and renewal, especially at the elementary and middle school levels, and are not consistently informed by central office leaders about changes in programs, practices, and procedures. Central office leaders have a limited role in curriculum development and renewal at the high school.

- A. Elementary and middle school principals, literacy leaders, and team leaders identified the assistant superintendent in support of teaching and learning as the curriculum leader for their schools.
 - 1. Elementary and middle school principals told the review team that while they supported their teachers in implementing the district curriculum, they did not have a defined role in curriculum development and renewal.
 - 2. A central office leader stated that there were no “layers of leadership” between the central office and teachers.
 - 3. Literacy and team leaders at the elementary and middle school levels said that they communicated directly with central office leaders whenever they had curricular questions or concerns.
- B. The high school principal and high school teachers identified the department liaisons, the principal and assistant principal (in that order) as the high school curriculum leaders and said that central office leaders were usually not involved in discussions of the high school curriculum. They added that central office leaders consulted with school leaders when they were asked to and that they informed central office leaders about changes in program topics, sequence, and emphasis.
 - 1. A central office leader told the review team that developing consistent programs at the two elementary schools and at the middle school had been the first priority, since the high school program was already established.
- C. Although a central office leader stated that principals attended monthly curriculum meetings and summer curriculum workshops, principals told the review team that they received information at summer workshops but had little part in decision-making, which they described as unilateral. They went on to tell the review team that there was no designated time to meet with central office leaders about the curriculum.

- D.** Elementary and middle school principals said that they were sometimes not informed by district leaders about changes in practices and procedures, adding that this had resulted in mixed messages, confusion, and inconsistency.
1. For example, one principal inadvertently contradicted central office determinations about the dates and manner of administration of certain assessments.
 2. Another principal was first informed about changes in the written language program by literacy and team leaders rather than by the central office.
 3. A third principal told the review team that too much time was spent “playing catch up to know what the staff knows.”
 4. Central office leaders said that problems with communication had led to some inconsistency in educational practices.

Impact: When principals do not have a defined role in curriculum development and renewal their commitment to curriculum implementation may wane. Improvement is impeded when leaders do not develop and nurture common beliefs, practices, and plans of action. It is difficult to promote, implement, and sustain change when school leaders do not collaborate, communicate clearly and completely with each other, speak with one voice, and support each other in their roles.

10. Documentation is in a preliminary phase in most disciplines at most grade levels. Vertical articulation of the curriculum K-12 and horizontal articulation of the curriculum between the two K-5 elementary schools is incomplete in all disciplines. The district has limited time for curriculum development and renewal.

- A.** Interviews and documentation review showed that Ayer adopted a database (Rubicon Atlas) many years before regionalization to facilitate documentation and revision of the curriculum and to provide teachers constant and ready access to current curriculum maps.
1. Ayer teachers were trained to use the database, but newer Ayer teachers and Shirley teachers have not been trained.
 2. Teachers with historical perspective said that before regionalization development of the database had been sporadic and that in many years no content was added.
- B.** The district has completed the first stage of a curriculum documentation cycle based on backward design principles and consisting of the following stages: (1) identifying what students should know and be able to do; (2) developing assessments to provide evidence of learning and learner needs; and (3) developing instruction, including differentiated instruction, to ensure mastery of standards.
1. The components of the first stage include enduring understandings and essential questions, essential vocabulary, content topics, and skills.

2. A review of the database showed that the curriculum maps are complete at the first stage in all grades for ELA, mathematics, and science. The maps are complete at stage 3 in certain high school courses, including American Literature, The Short Story, and AP Calculus AB and in certain subject areas at a grade level, such as third grade ELA; but this is not typical.
 3. Elementary and middle school teachers and team leaders told the review team that they used the curriculum frameworks and manuals, including those for the basal series and the new Envisions mathematics program, to plan their instruction. Some elementary teachers said that they did not know how to consult the database.
 4. High school teachers told the review team that they used the course syllabus as their primary guide and also consulted the course curriculum maps on the database. A review of a sample of course syllabi showed that they contained detailed scope and sequences, assessment strategies, and lists of resources and materials.
- C. Vertical articulation of the curriculum and horizontal articulation of the curriculum between the two elementary schools have been impeded by limited conjoint planning time.
1. Interviewees, including principals, central office administrators, team leaders, liaisons, and teachers, told the review team that vertical articulation of the curriculum was incomplete in ELA, mathematics, and science.
 2. Elementary team leaders and principals stated that the curriculum was not fully aligned horizontally between the two schools at each grade level. One teacher said and others agreed that “We’re often doing separate things, except when there’s a program to follow like Envisions or a format like our literacy plan.”
 3. A documentation review and interviews showed that the district’s PD days are used for many purposes, including mandatory trainings. Interviewees told the review team that trainings on the new educator evaluation system and district determined measures had been the focus for the past and current years and there had been little opportunity to discuss the curriculum.
 4. Elementary teachers have one prep period per day and five common prep times where a minimum of one is used as common planning time each week, occasionally augmented by faculty meeting time once each month. At the middle school, common planning time is grade-level rather than discipline specific. High school teachers have one department meeting each month. Teachers told the review team that curricular topics were rarely discussed at these meetings.

Impact: Ayer Shirley does not have a fully documented curriculum in every core subject area. Under current conditions, it is difficult to ensure that all Ayer Shirley students are receiving standards-based instruction at all grade levels in all core subject areas. A fully elaborated and documented curriculum is fundamental to improving proficiency rates, closing the achievement gap, interpreting the results of

student and programmatic assessments, holding teachers accountable for teaching and learning, and identifying PD needs.

11. In observed classrooms, review team members noted a positive environment for teaching and learning in all the district's schools. However, learning objectives were usually not made apparent to students, and teachers' use of best practices was inconsistent.

The team observed 57 classes throughout the district: 11 at the high school, 17 at the middle school, and 29 at the two elementary schools. The team observed 23 ELA classes, 16 mathematics classes, and 18 classes in other subject areas. The observations were approximately 20 minutes in length. All review team members collected data using ESE's instructional inventory, a tool for recording observed characteristics of standards-based teaching. This data is presented in Appendix C.

A. The review team found clear and consistent evidence that the environment was conducive to teaching and learning in most observed classes.

1. Interactions among students and between teachers and students were positive and respectful (95 percent of visited classes); behavioral standards were clearly communicated and disruptions, if present, were managed effectively and equitably enforced (77 percent of observed classrooms); and classroom procedures were established and maintained to create a safe physical environment and promote smooth transitions among all classroom activities (82 percent of visited classes).
2. The physical arrangement of the classroom ensured a positive learning environment and provided all students with access to learning activities (79 percent of observed classrooms), and most students assumed responsibility for their own learning in individual work and while working with other students (79 percent of classes visited). This characteristic was especially prevalent at the elementary level (K-5) where there was clear and consistent evidence of students assuming responsibility for their own learning in 90 percent of the observed classes.

B. The review team noted varied incidence of some teaching practices.

1. Most teachers did not make the learning objectives apparent to students.
 - a. Although instruction was clearly purposeful in almost all classes, teachers clearly and consistently verbalized or posted written lesson objectives aligned to the 2011 Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks in only 39 percent of observed classes. This characteristic was more prevalent at the middle school level in other grades: Objectives were clearly evident in 71 percent of middle school classes, versus 31 percent of elementary level classes and 9 percent of high school classes.

2. Students' responses to questions clearly and consistently elaborated about content, opinions or ideas in only 33 percent of observed classes.
 - a. In most observed classes, teachers did not require students to give fully developed responses. For example, in an elementary class the teacher allowed students to respond to her open-ended questions with short phrases that did not reveal their underlying reasoning. In a middle school class, the teacher posed questions about the origins of power struggles, but did not follow-up with clarifying questions when student responses were vague or contradictory. In a high school class, the teacher posed questions that could be answered "yes" or "no," then asked whether the responses were correct or incorrect.
3. The review team found clear and consistent evidence of lessons reflecting rigor in 49 percent of observed classes.
 - a. Examples of practices and activities reflecting rigor included:
 - Students arranging cardboard representations of stars by color, ascending and descending magnitude, and ascending and descending luminosity, and subsequently recording and sharing their observations;
 - After students completed a story about an imaginary town, they constructed their own imaginary towns outdoors in small groups and each group explained the features of their towns to each other;
 - Students said "Good morning" using vocal inflections and body language intended to convey the unspoken message on a card each had selected (e.g., "I want to gossip with you") and the student audience determined the unspoken message;
 - Students wrote a culminating report about how external forces changed the value of their imaginary stock portfolios over the course of the school year;
 - Students explained how a bad motivation can sometimes produce a good outcome and good motivation can sometimes produce a bad outcome;
 - Students identified the strategies authors use to show rather than to tell what their characters are like; and
 - Teachers surveyed the class for opinions about ethical dilemmas such as stealing food to prevent starvation or stealing medicine to save a life.
4. Teachers were clearly and consistently observed to be checking for student understanding through formative assessments in 46 percent of observed classes. This characteristic was more prevalent in classes at elementary level (in 52 percent of visited classes) than in 47 percent and 27 percent at the middle and high schools, respectively.

- a. Examples of checking for understanding included:
 - Asking students to put their thumbs up if they understood a concept, thumbs down if they did not, and thumbs sideways if they were uncertain;
 - Giving students a problem to solve based on the lesson as a “ticket to leave;”
 - Circulating to monitor students’ independent or small group work and providing direct in-the-moment assistance; and
 - Asking students to repeat given directions in their own words.

C. Students were observed to be engaging clearly and consistently in challenging academic tasks in 54 percent of the classes visited.

1. Examples of practices and activities that were not sufficiently challenging included:
 - Calling only on volunteers without broadening the discussion;
 - Getting to “right answers” without discussing strategies and reasoning;
 - The teacher’s own conclusions dominating the class;
 - Students waiting in line to have their work checked;
 - The class not sufficiently engaged as a student solved problems on the board; and
 - Not providing extension tasks for students who finished assigned work early.

Impact: Ayer Shirley has established appropriate conditions for teaching and learning in all district schools, positioning the district to move forward in closing the achievement gap. However, when lesson objectives are not posted or stated, learning is less meaningful and motivating to students and teachers’ instruction may drift from mastery of the standards. While in some observed classes there was clear evidence of best practices to increase rigor, to provide feedback, to increase discourse, to extend thinking, and to promote active involvement, the district is unlikely to make effective progress until these practices become more common.

Assessment

12. The district is making expanded use of student assessment data in ELA and mathematics K-8. Overall progress has been limited, however, because the district does not have a formal, comprehensive, and fully coordinated K-12 assessment system with the capacity to accurately determine both student and district needs.

- A.** Student performance data in ELA and mathematics is currently collected and used most extensively in the district's elementary schools.
1. The district's two elementary schools share a common assessment calendar. In addition to MCAS testing, they administer benchmark assessments to all K-5 students during the fall, winter, and spring of each year. These include: Envisions Math, DIBELS, Star Early Literacy and Reading Assessments, and standardized writing prompts and reading comprehension tests. Assessment data is used to inform RTI placement, to assign reading groups, and to identify students who may have special learning needs or require remediation. Testing is administered more frequently for at-risk students, for whom it serves as progress monitoring.
 - a. Interviewees indicated that, although they are not included in the assessment calendars, some assessments, notably Star Reading and Envisions Math unit tests, are now being administered more frequently at specific grade levels and consequently are providing more timely and targeted information about student academic progress, as well as achievement.
 2. Individual K-8 grade level data meetings are conducted three times each year in conjunction with the assessment calendar. These meetings are led by the assistant superintendent and literacy leaders and provide teachers at each grade an opportunity to examine and discuss the results of the fall, winter, and spring student assessments.
 3. The grade-level teacher team leaders, known as Instructional Team Leaders (ILTs), are scheduled to meet with the assistant superintendent up to four times each year to discuss a broad range of topics related to curriculum and instruction, including student assessment results. When these meetings are held, ILTs are expected to take back relevant information to their grade level teacher teams.
 4. The elementary schools have developed and share a Student Assessment Portfolio Protocol. An Individual Student Assessment Record is created for every K-5 student, into which data and documents from all current year benchmark assessments and MCAS scaled scores are entered and housed. These records follow each student through grade 5, and are supported by specific and clearly defined procedures and protocols for both teachers and administrators.
 5. Based on a review of student performance data and teacher input, the district recently replaced the Everyday Math Program with Envisions Mathematics in grades 1-5.
- B.** At the secondary level, and particularly at the high school, student assessment policies and practices lag well behind those of the elementary schools.
1. The middle school makes use of some benchmark assessments, and as at the elementary level, they are administered during the fall, winter, and spring of each year. These include:

DIBELS (ORF and Daze) in grade 6 only, STAR mathematics in grades 6-8, and Benchmark Writing Prompts and LANGUAGE! Reading Scale, in grades 6-8. Unlike the elementary schools, however, no formal data meetings are regularly scheduled.

2. In interviews, middle school teachers in the non-benchmark content areas, e.g., science, social studies, foreign language, and the enrichment subjects, said that other than MCAS testing, no common formative or summative assessments or other special testing, either standardized or locally developed, were in place. They reported as a consequence the absence of timely and reliable student academic progress information and achievement data.
 3. The high school's 2009 NEASC Report recommended creating a formal process to collect student data to measure the school's progress and providing PD activities to train teachers in data analysis and formal opportunities for teachers to meet and collaborate to share and improve assessment strategies. In interviews, however, teachers indicated that little corrective action has been taken. They said that very few common formative or summative student assessments had been developed, and they noted that the high school still does not have a formal system or process for collecting, analyzing, and disseminating student academic data. Faculty indicated that these goals are not currently among the high school's priorities and, therefore, are not included in the school's 2013-2014 Improvement Plan.
- C.** Although the elementary schools in particular are making increasingly effective use of student assessment data, the district as a whole does not have a formal and comprehensive K-12 assessment system capable of collecting, analyzing, and disseminating student performance data in all grade levels and subject areas, and using it to carefully monitor student progress, to measure achievement, and to make timely modifications to classroom instruction and the curriculum.
1. The district's Action Plan for School Improvement (strategic plan) indicates that the use of student assessment data is a priority and that districtwide data teams should be developed. The district, however, has missed the opportunity to create either a central district data team or to build data teams in any of the schools. Although K-8 teacher teams do examine grade-level assessment results, none of the schools has formal data teams responsible for developing a comprehensive and fully integrated data system with the authority and capacity to coordinate the schoolwide collection, analysis, or dissemination of student assessment results.
 2. In interviews, district leaders acknowledged that student assessment data has not played a substantial role in prioritizing district goals, in allocating financial and human resources, or in initiating, modifying, or discontinuing district policies or programs.
 3. District leaders indicated that student achievement data is neither formally or widely disseminated nor systematically monitored throughout the year in order to accurately

determine progress toward the achievement of district or school goals or to make needed adjustments to programs, policies, services, or supervision practices.

4. In general, teachers at all grade levels, particularly secondary level staff, indicated a need for additional and ongoing training in data collection and analysis methodologies.
5. Many staff members indicated that access to districtwide and school-based reports on student achievement and other relevant data is limited or very inconvenient. No centralized, readily accessible electronic data bank currently exists within the district.

Impact: Although the elementary schools, and to a lesser extent the middle school, have begun to make more and better use of student achievement data, the district as a whole is not making effective use of data to improve student achievement and to fully inform all aspects of its policy and decision making. As a result, the district's ability to make informed decisions and timely revisions to its curriculum, assessment practices, PD programming, classroom instruction, and goal, policy, and budget development is substantially compromised.

Human Resources and Professional Development

13. Although the ASRSD PD Plan for 2013-2014 was based on four priority topics, including the Educator Evaluation System, RETELL-SEI Endorsement, Implementing 2011 MA ELA/Literacy and Math Frameworks, and Technology–Google Platform, there was no mechanism to determine the effectiveness of PD offerings. Also, the district's PD plan offered few opportunities for districtwide collaboration in unifying adult learning to meet district goals.

- A. The PD plan focuses on six district goals, which are aligned with state mandates, but falls short in building professional learning communities and ongoing professional improvement.
 1. The PD calendar offers monthly topics for full day PD and early release days, but it does not specify how topics are presented within each school during school-based sessions or how topics are linked to preferred districtwide student outcomes as documented in the Massachusetts Standards for Professional Development.
 - a. A districtwide PD committee, composed of 16 people from throughout the district, meets to review an annual needs assessment, which includes MCAS data; however, there is no mechanism for determining how closely planned PD is linked to TELL Mass survey results, support of educators at all levels of expertise in building their skills and careers, or student achievement outcomes.
 - i. According to 2014 TELL Mass survey results, 85 percent of teachers responding disagreed or strongly disagreed that PD is evaluated and results communicated to teachers.

- ii. According to 2014 TELL Mass survey results, 75 percent of teachers responding disagreed or strongly disagreed that PD provides ongoing opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues to refine teaching practice.
 - iii. According to 2014 TELL Mass survey results, 34 percent of teachers who responded agreed that PD enhances teachers' abilities to improve student learning.
 2. Interviewees said that PD has been a priority over the last few years and sessions have increased from three days to seven days; however, there is limited evidence to link adult learning from scheduled PD to job-embedded growth in a teacher's particular content area.
 - a. According to 2014 TELL Mass survey results, 35 percent of teachers responding agreed or strongly agreed that school leaders make a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about PD.
 3. Principals receive needs assessment survey data from the PD committee. Even though they are encouraged by district leaders to incorporate follow up to PD sessions in their individual schools during monthly faculty meetings, there is limited evidence of whether time is designated for follow up.
 - a. According to 2014 TELL Mass survey results, only 19 percent of teachers who responded agreed or strongly agreed that follow up is provided from PD sessions in their schools.
- B.** SIPs neither address PD opportunities for teachers and staff nor describe how schools will work to reinforce the prioritized district goals.
 1. Although SIPs state goals for improving student performance within each school, they do not give details about how adult learning through PD will have an impact on instruction and subsequently on student learning.
 - a. Teams meet in some schools during common planning time, but there is limited evidence of teacher takeaways from these PD sessions.
 - i. According to 2014 TELL Mass survey results, only 35 percent of teachers who responded agreed or strongly agreed that PD provides ongoing opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues to refine teaching practices as compared with 59 percent statewide.
 2. SIPs fall short in indicating how proposed improvement strategies within each school will be promoted and reinforced through PD or how their outcomes will lead to districtwide increases in student achievement as measured by SMART goals (specific and strategic; measurable; action-oriented; rigorous, realistic, and results-focused, and timed and tracked).

Impact: Because PD is a systematic effort for a continuous process of educator development, it is imperative that districts ensure that content and context of PD offerings target improved teacher

practice throughout the district. Even though school-based PD can function to address specific school issues, it limits the growth and consistent improvement throughout the district and prevents districtwide collaboration in adult learning. It also curtails district efforts to evaluate the progress of all educators. When PD opportunities are not assessed for their effectiveness in meeting goals, time and money are not effectively allocated.

14. Although the district has taken steps to adopt an educator evaluation system and align it to the state model, there are gaps preventing full implementation.

- A.** The nine district-submitted samples of completed teacher evaluations included SMART goals that were not measurable, and they included limited actionable feedback that would enhance learning and continuous improvement.
 - 2. A document review showed that the district has provided training in the new educator evaluation system through a consultant; however, school leaders told review team members that evaluators expressed the need for additional training to effectively evaluate staff.
 - a. School leaders stated that they need to practice the process more and focus on consistency of the process and then master the final product.
 - 3. Although teachers participated in six hours of training workshops, which included creating SMART goals, completed teacher evaluations reviewed by the team showed that written goals had limited connection to measurable student performance.
 - a. Evaluators referred to what transpired during classroom observations but fell short in pinpointing how lesson-planning, delivery of plans, communication with students, or assessing student classroom participation and performance could improve.
 - b. A few SMART goals within the nine reviewed samples referred to a change that would be attempted in classroom instruction but did not include how student learning would be affected or how the change would improve the teacher's practice.
- B.** The superintendent said that the new educator evaluation system is not fully implemented for the central office administrators and principals in the district. In addition, he stated that he has fallen behind on evaluating them.
 - 1. School principals have not been given the opportunity to sharpen their leadership skills because of insufficient training and an absence of evaluations.
 - a. Principals stated they rely on conversation with colleagues to figure out whether or not their leadership is effective for teachers and to what degree it affects student performance.

2. School principals do not have a leadership model to follow, based on their own evaluations, as they evaluate their staffs.
3. School committee members mentioned not having used the new evaluation system for the superintendent and that it was one of the items they planned to work on this summer. They also said that they evaluated him in 2012-2013 but did not plan to evaluate him in 2013-2014 since he is retiring at the end of this month. They also indicated that a new superintendent has been hired and will begin her assignment shortly.

Impact: Unless teachers receive high quality, instructive feedback that specifies how to improve their teaching practice and how to use well-written SMART goals, they will find difficulty in moving towards exemplary teaching in all content areas.

When district leaders do not evaluate a principal's performance and lend credence to a principal's work, it is difficult for a principal to serve as a model for staff, to better understand how to evaluate employees, and to demonstrate confidence in moving towards exemplary performance.

Student Support

15. The district has not created a unified support system used throughout the district to ensure that the academic needs of all students are identified and appropriate interventions are provided and continually monitored.

- A. There are procedures at the two elementary schools and the middle school for identifying students who are lagging in reading and mathematics.
 1. Administrators and team leaders reported that at grade-level team meetings, teachers refer and discuss students who are not making expected gains in literacy or mathematics; referring teachers receive suggestions to use in class. Grade-level team meetings are also used to review benchmark data and to create instructional groupings.
 2. Documents provided to the team indicated that the Student Support Team (SST) at the Lura White School reviews and monitors struggling students.
 - a. The principal and other appropriate school specialists make up the SST.
 - b. The printed referral form requires student report card results, standardized test results, an attendance report, and printed results from any benchmark assessments.
 - c. Students who have not made progress in class or during RtI and small group interventions are discussed and considered for further interventions.

3. The child study team at Page Hilltop Elementary School reviews and discusses students who are referred and are not making adequate progress after RtI and other small group interventions.
 - a. The referral form suggests that three phases of interventions are attempted before a child study is considered. Each phase is dated and a description of how the child is progressing is included.
 - b. Phase four (child study) is also called the principal meeting.
 - c. New goals are established and consideration is given to other interventions. Student performance is reviewed again after six to eight weeks.
- B.** Common benchmark assessments, though available up to grade 8, are limited in their use.
 1. The DIBELS benchmark assessment is administered three times a year and used for placement in groups or in RtI classes.
- C.** Each of the four schools has a different practice for discussing students who are struggling.
 1. Teachers discuss struggling students at individual grade-level team meetings at the two elementary schools and the middle school.
 2. One elementary school has a child study team with one set of forms requiring data results and other pertinent information about students.
 3. The other elementary school has an SST with a different set of forms requiring different information about students.
 4. High school teachers reported that there is no SST at the high school, and some services for students depend upon teacher advocacy.
- D.** Academic interventions for struggling students are limited, and some students are left without additional support.
 1. In the elementary schools there is targeted Title I service for eligible students, but there are no Title 1 services offered in the middle or high school.
 2. Students in the elementary and middle schools may be assigned to RtI groups based on benchmark assessment results. Administrators reported that students are assigned based on priority and teacher referral.
 3. Interviewees said that each elementary school and the middle school have a literacy leader who serves primarily as a reading teacher. There is currently not a similar role in the district for mathematics.

4. Administrators told the review team that middle and high school students have been invited to participate in a summer program based on their MCAS scores and teacher recommendation to support their mathematics learning and to improve their mathematics performance. There is currently not a similar program for reading and writing.

Impact: The absence of a common support system used throughout the district prevents leaders' from providing a seamless flow of predictable practices PK-12 to refer students, to respond to student needs, and to ensure that all students' needs are met.

Financial and Asset Management

16. Funding and approval of district budgets are problematic because of the financial condition of the town of Shirley and the absence of a long-range plan for funding its share of district costs.

- A. According to ESE documents, the district is funded at a level comparable to that of similar districts, but below the state average.
 1. The district's net school spending has been 8 percent above the requirement since fiscal year 2012.
 2. The district's average in district per pupil expenditure for fiscal year 2013 was \$12,636, which is comparable to the median for 51 districts of similar size (1,000-1,999 students) of \$12,506, but below the state average.
 3. Reviewers found class sizes to be reasonable, and 2014 TELL Mass survey results indicated that 85 percent of teachers who responded agreed or strongly agreed that class size was reasonable. Teachers reported they have access to curriculum materials (such as new mathematics programs), support services, and technology.
- B. Approval of the district budget has been problematic.
 1. Administrators and school committee members reported that financing the district's budget has been difficult because of disparities in the towns' abilities to afford educational budgets associated with making services and costs equitable for schools and students in both towns. The superintendent has made it a priority to make services equitable.
 2. In 2014 the general fund budget proposed by the superintendent in January called for an increase of 5.5 percent; this was reduced to 4.1 percent when the budget was certified by the school committee in March.
 3. The certified budget was passed by the Ayer town meeting in May, but Shirley town officials would not support it because it required an 8.5 percent increase in Shirley's assessment.

4. The superintendent and school committee negotiated an increase of 7.5 percent in the Shirley assessment; it was passed by town meeting in June despite opposition by the Shirley selectmen. The adjusted general fund fiscal year 2015 budget of \$24,906,510 (an increase of 3.4 percent) was then certified by the school committee.
 5. Inequities in the towns' support for education were noted by administrators: Every \$1 cut from the Shirley assessment cost the district \$3; Shirley's share of the district costs above the required local contribution (36 percent for fiscal year 2015) is less than its share of student enrollment (44 percent); and Ayer believes that it is subsidizing Shirley.
- C.** The ability of the town of Shirley to afford its assessment has been affected by its weak financial condition.
1. Department of Revenue data and municipal officials indicated that Shirley had free cash of \$403,814 in 2013 (compared to \$1.7 million in Ayer), all of which was applied to the fiscal year 2015 budget.
 2. Shirley had excess capacity from taxes of only \$315, a higher average residential tax bill than Ayer, and a stabilization fund of \$356,061.
 3. Under the formula for assessments, Shirley's increases have been higher than Ayer's (7.5 percent compared with 3.9 percent for fiscal year 2015) during the six year transition period. The superintendent reported that Shirley must contribute virtually 100 percent of town revenue increases to the assessment. This is because Shirley's per pupil budgets for education were lower than Ayer's when the region was formed, and the formula provided that their contributions should become equitable over a six year period.
 4. Municipal officials stated that Shirley's fiscal year 2015 municipal budget had to be reduced by 4 percent while the education budget increased, and that increases in district assessments of 7 to 8 percent are not sustainable.
- D.** A task force formed to discuss and propose plans to improve town and district funding has not been successful.
1. The superintendent told the review team that the RLAG was created as the regional district was being formed. It consisted of selectmen, finance committee members, town administrators, school committee members, and the superintendent.
 2. Administrators and municipal officials reported that the RLAG was reconvened in February 2014 during discussions of the fiscal year 2015 proposed budget. However, it met only once or twice, was not successful in preparing a viable proposal for the fiscal year 2015 budget, and did not consider a long-range plan for financing the towns and district or for revisions of the regional agreement.

3. District and municipal officials suggested that district and town officials start budget deliberations earlier and engage in long term financial planning for the towns and the district.

Impact: The difficult budget approval process by the towns has negative effects at both the district and municipal levels. Shirley's limited ability to meet its assessments constrains the district and inhibits efforts to improve programs and services for students. The relatively large increases in Shirley's assessments have had negative effects on its municipal budgets. At times the difficult relationship between Shirley and the regional district could have long-term effects on their ability to agree on future budgets and long-range plans, even after equitable assessments have been phased in.

17. The district's elementary schools are old and in need of frequent repairs, and the district's long-range planning for capital and technology needs is inadequate.

- A. Capital improvements at both elementary schools have been deferred, and they have not been renovated or updated in over 30 years.
 1. The Lura A. White elementary school was built in 1936 and last renovated in 1972, and the Page Hilltop school buildings were built in 1968 with additions and renovations completed in 1980.
 - a. Administrators described both elementary schools as antiquated. Both were neglected during the years leading up to regionalization in 2011 and are in need of many major repairs and improvements such as roofs, heating and pneumatic controls renovations, new windows, and insulation.
 - b. Reviewers found both buildings clean but with inadequate learning spaces. The White school has small classrooms, and the Page Hilltop building is rambling because it combined two elementary buildings connected by a long passage and a library.
 2. The middle school, built in 2003, is clean and well maintained.
 - a. Reviewers found the middle school had effective learning spaces.
 - b. Administrators stated that the middle school needs heating and ventilation repairs.
 3. Administrators reported that maintenance on the schools was deferred during the years leading up to regionalization and said that the schools need many major repairs and improvements.
- B. Maintenance of the buildings is underfunded and resources are limited to maintain buildings proactively.
 1. Administrators stated that there are many repair needs in all the schools, and many systems including HVAC are in need of replacement. They are repaired, often on an emergency basis,

but the district cannot afford permanent repairs or replacements. The district has no truck, and just purchased its first lawn mower in 15 years.

- a. The district uses contracted services and a part-time HVAC specialist to manage emergency and major technology-based repairs of building systems.
 2. According to budget documents, requests for some maintenance, grounds, and custodial personnel and services have not been funded.
 3. Budget documents and school committee minutes indicated that maintenance and facility costs are volatile and often over budget; approximately \$100,000 had to be transferred to maintenance budgets for fiscal year 2014.
 3. Administrators reported that there is no capital budget or emergency funding, and facilities' budgets are understaffed and underfunded.
- C. There is no long-range capital plan for the district, but the school committee has approved a facilities study for grade K-8 schools.
1. District and town administrators agreed there is a need for long-range capital planning for the K-8 schools and for town facilities now that the high school renovation is underway.
 2. The district has made a priority of upgrading technology, installing wireless Internet access, increasing classroom technology, and purchasing new software.
 - a. There is a technology plan for the district, but it does not include timelines or estimates of needed funding. It includes technology needed for K-8 schools as well as that planned for the new high school.
 - b. Teachers reported using technology in their classrooms, and reviewers observed some students using technology.

Impact: Because maintenance and capital needs have not been adequately planned and funded for K-8 schools, the buildings are not as conducive to education as they could be, and the effect on budgets is unpredictable and contributes to a need for emergency and contingency funding.

Ayer Shirley RSD District Review Recommendations

Leadership and Governance

- 1. The new superintendent, in collaboration with the school committee and the administrative team, should develop a district improvement plan (DIP) for the ASRSD.**
 - A.** The new superintendent, working with other district leaders and including input from a wide range of stakeholders, should prepare a DIP that includes a vision statement; specific, ambitious short- and long-term goals, including goals related to student achievement; and the strategies that will lead to achieving the goals and realizing the vision for the district.
 1. The DIP should be informed by the superintendent's entry plan.
 2. The DIP should be developed and refined through an iterative process that includes input from staff, families, and partners on district goals, initiatives, policies, and programs.
 3. The goals developed for the strategic plan should be SMART (Specific and Strategic; Measureable; Action-Oriented; Rigorous, Realistic, and Results-Focused; and Timed and Tracked).
 4. The plan should also include elements such as action steps, resources needed, means of measurement, person(s) responsible and benchmark dates/deadlines.
 - B.** The plan should be presented to the school committee.
 1. Once approved, it should be shared widely.
 2. District leaders should periodically report to the school committee, staff, families, and the community on the progress made toward achieving each of the goals in the plan.
 3. The superintendent and school committee should consider aligning some goals in the superintendent's Educator Plan (as part of the district's educator evaluation system) with DIP goals.
 - C.** Each School Improvement Plan (SIP) should be developed in alignment with the DIP.
 1. The SIPs should include SMART goals that are aligned with the goals in the DIP.
 2. Similar to the DIP, the SIP should include specific strategies and action steps that are designed to help the school achieve its goals.
 3. Following approval by the school committee, SIPs should be shared widely, with frequent updates from principals about progress toward goals and midcourse corrections, if needed.

4. The principal should use the SIP to inform his/her self-assessment and goal setting process when creating the Educator Plan, and progress toward Educator Plan goals should be used as evidence during implementation.

Recommended resources:

- ESE's *District Standards and Indicators* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/review/district/StandardsIndicators.pdf>) identify the characteristics of effective districts in supporting and sustaining school improvement.
 - The *District Self-Assessment* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/review/district/district-self-assessment.pdf>) frames the District Standards and Indicators, along with key questions, in a rubric for conducting a scan of current practice, identifying areas of strength and highlighting areas requiring greater focus.
- ESE's *Conditions for School Effectiveness* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ucd/CSE.pdf>) identify the research-based practices that all schools, especially the state's most struggling schools, require to effectively meet the learning needs of all students. This tool also defines what each condition looks like when implemented purposefully and with fidelity.
 - The *Conditions for School Effectiveness Self-Assessment* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ucd/CSESelf-Assesment.pdf>) is a tool for conducting a scan of current practice, identifying areas of strength, and highlighting areas requiring greater focus.
- The *Massachusetts Definition of College and Career Readiness* (<http://www.mass.edu/library/documents/2013College&CareerReadinessDefinition.pdf>) is a set of learning competencies, intellectual capacities and experiences essential for all students to become lifelong learners; positive contributors to their families, workplaces and communities; and successfully engaged citizens of a global 21st century. This could be a helpful resource as the district articulates its vision and goals.
- *Massachusetts Transfer Goals* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/model/MATransferGoals.pdf>) are long-range goals that students should work toward over the course of their PK-12 academic experience. They were written to provide an explicit connection between the standards-based Model Curriculum Units and Massachusetts' definition of College and Career Readiness. They are not recommended for use as a checklist, evaluation tool, or as an assessment tool, but they could be a helpful resource for districts as they articulate a vision and engage in long-term planning.
- ESE's *Planning for Success* tools (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/success/>) support the improvement planning process by spotlighting practices, characteristics, and behaviors that support effective planning and implementation and meet existing state requirements for improvement planning.

- *District Accelerated Improvement Planning - Guiding Principles for Effective Benchmarks* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/turnaround/level4/AIP-GuidingPrinciples.pdf>) provides information about different types of benchmarks to guide and measure district improvement efforts.
- *What Makes a Goal Smarter?* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/resources/presentations/SMARTGoals/Handout5.pdf>) is a description of SMART goals with accompanying examples. The handout was designed to support educators in developing goals as part of the educator evaluation system, but could also be a useful reference for the districts as it develops and refines its DIP and SIPs.

Benefits: A vision statement and improvement plan will ensure that school committee members, teachers, support staff, parents, students, town officials, and town residents know the future plans of the school system. This will help to clarify roles and will provide a focus for school-level planning. Reports by the superintendent and principals on the progress made toward goals will keep stakeholders informed about the school district's progress toward achieving its goals.

Curriculum and Instruction

- 2. The district should take steps to ensure that principals and district leaders have appropriate involvement in curriculum development and implementation at all levels. Additionally, the district should allocate more time for curriculum-related activities in order to complete the remaining phases of curriculum documentation.**
 - A.** The district should give principals a defined role in curriculum oversight at the elementary and middle school levels, and central office leaders should have greater involvement in curriculum oversight at the high school level.
 1. Principals at all levels should be involved to an appropriate extent in overseeing the process of curriculum development and renewal, and decisions related to curriculum and assessments should be communicated to principals in a clear, timely way.
 2. The district might consider including principals in periodic Instructional Team meetings with the assistant superintendent.
 - B.** Since the district has been unable to make effective progress with curriculum documentation under current conditions, greater emphasis should be placed on curriculum work.
 1. As noted in the Strengths section of this report, the work accomplished in developing the SLISP and implementing the K-5 math program is evidence that the district has the capacity to thoughtfully plan, communicate, and implement curricular policies and programs when these efforts are prioritized.

2. The district should review and modify schedules to provide sufficient time for ongoing curriculum documentation and review at all levels.
 - a. This should include time for the necessary personnel to meet regularly in order to complete vertical articulation of the kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum and horizontal articulation of the curriculum across the grades at the two elementary schools.
3. All educators should have the training and access necessary for them to use Atlas or a similar tool for reviewing and updating curriculum. District and school leaders should provide support and monitoring to ensure consistent and effective use of the tool.
4. District and school leaders should continue to inform the school committee and other constituent groups about the status of curriculum development in the district and the need to make more rapid progress.
5. The district is encouraged to continue its good practice of making trade-offs and economies in the budget to fund high priorities.

Recommended resources:

- *Creating Curriculum Units at the Local Level* (http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/model/mcu_guide.pdf) is a guidance document that can serve as a resource for professional study groups, as a reference for anyone wanting to engage in curriculum development, or simply as a way to gain a better understanding of the process used to develop Massachusetts' Model Curriculum Units.
- *Creating Model Curriculum Units* (<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLTuqmiQ9ssquWrLjKc9h5h2cSpDVZqe6t>) is a series of videos that captures the collaboration and deep thinking by curriculum design teams over the course of a full year as they worked to develop Massachusetts' Model Curriculum Units. The series includes videos about developing essential questions, establishing goals, creating embedded performance assessments, designing lesson plans, selecting high-quality materials, and evaluating the curriculum unit.

Benefits: Central office direction of the K-12 curriculum facilitates curricular coherence and ensures that decisions about programs and initiatives serve the entire district. When principals participate directly in curriculum development, they become stronger advocates for faithful implementation of the curriculum and are able to offer teachers more informed support. Curriculum development by team leaders, department liaisons, and teachers working collaboratively increases their shared understanding and helps to unify the district. A fully documented curriculum based on the 2011 Frameworks with common expectations for student learning and alignment from grade to grade and from school to school will contribute to better transitions for students at key junctures (grade 5 to grade 6 and grade 8 to grade 9) and has the potential to raise the overall level of student achievement in the district.

3. The district should establish a definition of high quality instruction and support teachers in designing lessons that embody these characteristics.

- A. District and school leaders should inform teachers that lesson objectives must be posted, stated orally, or both, and should be referenced periodically during the course of the lesson.
- B. Leaders and teachers should develop a common definition of high quality instruction emphasizing student engagement, high expectations for student learning and higher order thinking.
 - 1. The district should help teachers further develop and use higher order questioning skills that encourage students to articulate and elaborate on thoughtful responses.
 - 2. Curriculum documents should include strategies for checking for understanding so that teachers can identify students' needs in real time and can target their instruction accordingly.
- C. The level of instructional rigor, including evidence of tasks that appropriately challenge students, should be monitored as part of informal classroom visits and formal observations with feedback to teachers.
- D. The district should consider compiling and disseminating examples of highly effective teaching practices.

Recommended resources:

- *Characteristics of an Effective Standards-Based K-12 Science and Technology/Engineering Classroom* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/STEM/Standards-BasedClassroom.pdf>) and *Characteristics of a Standards-Based Mathematics Classroom* (http://www.doe.mass.edu/STEM/news07/mathclass_char.pdf) are references for instructional planning and observation, intended to support activities that advance standards-based educational practice, including formal study, dialogue and discussion, classroom observations, and other professional development activities.

Benefits: A common definition of high quality instruction will support teachers in designing lessons with high expectations for student learning that consist of clear learning goals closely aligned with the standards and unit outcomes, provisions for diverse learning needs, and measurement by a variety of on-the-spot, formative and summative assessments. This will also provide principals with a focus for classroom observations and feedback. High expectations and an emphasis on higher order thinking will accelerate student growth and can result in higher student performance on rigorous measures of proficiency.

Assessment

4. The district should create a unified, fully coordinated, and comprehensive K-12 assessment system.

- A.** The district should develop uniform and integrated policies, structures, and practices needed for the continuous collection, analysis, and dissemination of student performance data K-12. These should include specific strategies, timelines, and expectations for all schools, grade levels, and subject areas across the district.
1. The district is encouraged to create a central district data team composed of administrators and teacher representatives from each school, whose primary responsibility should be to oversee the development and effective operation of a comprehensive and fully coordinated K-12 assessment system.
 - a. Its work should be supported by data teams in each of the district's schools, which should be responsible for the collection, analysis, and dissemination of student assessment data in their respective grade levels and subject areas.
 2. The data teams should provide information to teachers to guide their analysis and use of data from formative, summative, and benchmark assessments, both standardized and locally developed.
 - a. As part of this effort, the district should identify areas in which assessments should be developed or disseminated, to ensure that meaningful student performance data is available for all grades and subjects.
 - b. The district's set of assessments should include authentic assessments, such as portfolios and performance tasks, in addition to more traditional formats.
 - c. The development and use of district-determined measures (DDMs), part of the educator evaluation system, should be included in this work.
 3. The work of the data teams should be collaborative and encourage regular and systematic communication as part of the processes of data collection, analysis, and timely dissemination of student performance results.
 - a. All educators should have easy, timely access to appropriate student data.
 - b. All members of the school community, including the school committee and parents, should be routinely provided with appropriate and timely information generated by the expanded assessment programs and practices.

- B. Targeted and sustained professional development should be provided for all staff in the collection, analysis, and applications of student performance data, sufficient to embed these competencies in every school and all grade levels and content areas.
- C. District and school leaders should incorporate student assessment results and other pertinent data into all aspects of planning and decision making, including the development of the annual budget, DIP and SIPs, professional development planning, and the evaluation of educational programs, services, and personnel.

Recommended resources:

- ESE's *Assessment Literacy Self-Assessment and Gap Analysis Tool* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/ddm/webinar/PartI-GapAnalysis.pdf>) is intended to support districts in understanding where their educators fit overall on a continuum of assessment literacy. After determining where the district as a whole generally falls on the continuum, districts can determine potential next steps.
- ESE's *District Data Team Toolkit* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ucd/ddtt/toolkit.pdf>) is a set of resources to help a district establish, grow, and maintain a culture of inquiry and data use through a District Data Team.
- The *Edwin Analytics* web page (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/edwin/analytics/>) includes links to a Getting Started Guide, as well as a video tutorial series.
- *District-Determined Measures* (<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLTuqmiQ9ssquEalxpfpzD6qG9zxvPWl0c>) is a series of videos featuring different aspects of the development and use of District-Determined Measures (DDMs).

Benefits: The expanded and continuous collection and systematic analysis of student performance data can improve classroom instruction and student support services, enhance curriculum, inform educational policy and decision making, and greatly strengthen and expand the district's capacity to accurately monitor the academic progress of all students in every school. In addition, the results of data analysis should have a substantial impact on professional development programming and the evaluation of staff. Ultimately, by promoting a culture of inquiry and data use, the district will do much to enhance instruction and provide all students with greatly improved learning opportunities and academic outcomes.

Human Resources and Professional Development

- 5. **The district should ensure that its professional development programs and services are based on district priorities, student achievement data, and information about staff needs. Professional development should be embedded and collaborative.**

- A.** The district’s professional development (PD) committee should ensure that PD is designed to prepare educators to address state, district, school, and individual goals and priorities.
 - 1. The district’s PD plan should be aligned with goals and strategies outlined in the DIP.
 - 2. SIPs should note the PD that will be provided and how it will directly support educators in making progress toward SIP goals.
 - 3. Student data should inform DIP and SIP goals and PD planning.
 - a. PD plans should include the student outcomes that are expected to result from teacher learning.

- B.** The PD plan should be informed by student and teacher data.
 - 1. The PD committee, perhaps in collaboration with the district data team, should ensure that student data from multiple sources informs PD learning objectives.
 - 2. The PD committee should develop a plan for formally collecting and analyzing both formative and summative teacher feedback on PD to ensure that PD offerings meet teachers’ needs and are improved based on teacher input.

- C.** PD should be sustained over time, and should include regular and frequent opportunities for educators to collaborate with colleagues.
 - 1. PD should include job-embedded learning opportunities, such as professional learning communities, coaching, and structured common planning time focused on particular PD topic(s).
 - 2. The district’s PD plan should include opportunities for educators to practice and apply new skills and strategies in the classroom and to receive helpful feedback to continue their learning.

Recommended resources:

- *The Massachusetts Standards for Professional Development* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/pd/standards.pdf>) describe, identify, and characterize what high quality learning experiences should look like for educators.
- ESE’s Mathematics Learning Community materials (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/STEM/mlc/default.html>) are designed to support job-embedded professional development for K-8 mathematics teachers. Their focus is to develop teachers' content knowledge through examining students' work in professional learning communities.
- *Classroom Connections* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/STEM/mlc/ClassConnections/>) is a professional development (PD) curriculum that explores important mathematical content across the grade levels

and provides teachers with the opportunity to examine written student work in order to identify evidence of the Standards for Mathematical Practice.

- The *Teacher Education Materials Project Database* (<http://www.te-mat.org/default.aspx>) is a website that was developed to support professional development providers as they design and implement programs for pre-service and in-service K - 12 mathematics and science teachers.
- The *PLC Expansion Project* website (<http://plcexpansionproject.weebly.com/>) is designed to support schools and districts in their efforts to establish and sustain cultures that promote Professional Learning Communities.
- *PBS LearningMedia* (<http://www.pbslearningmedia.org/>) is a free digital media content library that provides relevant educational resources for PreK-12 teachers. The flexible platform includes high-quality content tied to national curriculum standards, as well as professional development courses.

Benefits: Careful alignment of professional development with district priorities and the use of a range of data to identify appropriate learning objectives will lead to a PD program that is coordinated, targeted to student and teacher needs, and focused on achieving the district's short- and long-term goals. By providing opportunities for embedded and collaborative professional growth, the district will maximize the potential of PD to lead to deep learning and high-quality implementation.

6. The district should fully implement the educator evaluation system, including completing evaluations of administrators and supporting evaluators' ability to provide feedback that helps educators improve their practice.

- A.** The school committee should carry out its plans to evaluate the superintendent annually using the adopted educator evaluation system.
 1. School committee members should become familiar with and apply all requirements of the new educator evaluation system to the evaluation of the superintendent.
- B.** The superintendent should meet all requirements of the educator evaluation system, including completing timely, effective evaluations of all central office administrators and principals.
- C.** District leaders should ensure that all evaluators receive ongoing professional development and support focused on providing effective feedback.
 1. This should include formal training as well as opportunities for principals and other evaluators to calibrate their understanding of high-quality, useful feedback.
 2. Evaluators should receive ongoing guidance and feedback focused on their observations and follow-up with teachers.

Recommended resources:

- The March 2014 ESE Educator Evaluation e-Newsletter (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/eeval/communications/newsletter/2014-03.pdf>) includes a section called *Implementation Spotlight: Strategies for Focusing Observations and Providing Consistent, Constructive Feedback*.
- *Quick Reference Guide: Educator Evaluation & Professional Development* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/eeval/resources/QRG-ProfessionalDevelopment.pdf>) describes how educator evaluation and professional development can be used as mutually reinforcing systems to improve educator practice and student outcomes.
- *The Relationship between High Quality Professional Development and Educator Evaluation* (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-aDxtEDncg&list=PLTuqmiQ9ssqt9EmOcWkDEHPKBqRvurebm&index=1>) is a video presentation that includes examples from real districts.

Benefits: Full, effective implementation of the educator evaluation system – including the provision of frequent, useful, and targeted feedback – will contribute to an authentic and collaborative culture of growth-oriented supervision and evaluation. This will increase the likelihood that the overall effectiveness of both teachers and administrators will continue to improve, which will lead to improved student achievement.

Student Support

- 7. The district should create a unified system of student support that includes an enhanced balanced assessment system, common referral procedures, and interventions for both literacy and mathematics.**
 - A.** The district should enhance its assessment system to ensure that comprehensive, meaningful information about students' achievement, growth, and needs is readily available (see Assessment recommendation above).
 - B.** The district should create a common set of support procedures.
 1. The review team recommends that the district adopt one referral system with clearly outlined procedures to be used throughout the district for students who are struggling.
 - a. There should be a universal referral form for all students.
 2. The role and expectations of grade level teams and the role of child study/student support teams should be clarified.

3. A student support team should be established at the high school, and its role and policies should be communicated to all staff members.

C. The district should examine current interventions for literacy and mathematics and reallocate resources as needed to enhance this support.

Recommended resources:

- ESE's *Early Warning Indicator System* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/edwin/analytics/ewis.html>) is a tool to provide information to districts about the likelihood that their students will reach key academic goals. Districts can use the tool in conjunction with other data and sources of information to better target student supports and interventions and to examine school-level patterns over time in order to address systemic issues that may impede students' ability to meet academic goals.
- The *Massachusetts Tiered System of Support (MTSS)* (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/mtss/>) is a blueprint for school improvement that focuses on systems, structures and supports across the district, school, and classroom to meet the academic and non-academic needs of all students.

MTSS Self-Assessment Overview (includes links to the MTSS Self-Assessment tool and *How to Complete the MTSS Self-Assessment*): <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mtss/sa/>

Benefits: A comprehensive system of support with common referral procedures will help the district maintain consistency across schools, which will nurture a common understanding of district expectations for supporting at-risk and struggling students. Having a system used and understood by all is likely to help teachers more readily respond to student's needs and can facilitate meaningful dialogue and ongoing improvement. Ensuring that students have access to appropriate interventions for both literacy and mathematics will help to provide all students with the differentiated and targeted support they need in order to achieve at high levels.

Financial and Asset Management

8. The district, together with officials from both towns, should prepare a long-range funding plan for the school district taking into account the ability of Shirley to meet its assessments.

A. The district and the towns formed the RLAG when the district was being created; this group could be reconvened or a subcommittee could be formed before the next budget season to work on a long-range plan for providing revenue streams for the district.

1. The plan should include estimated budgets, state aid and reimbursements, and town assessments for at least three years. It should consider Shirley's ability to meet its assessments, while preserving district and town programs.

2. Long-range funding plans for the for the towns should be considered in the plan for the district.
 3. Under the plan some district and municipal expenditures, such as capital and services, may need to be deferred. All revenue sources should be explored, such as stabilization funds and free cash; possible overrides; school choice tuitions, both into and out of the district; and other outside sources.
- B.** Because a long-range plan can only estimate revenues and needed expenditures, district and town officials should meet annually early during the budget development process and regularly thereafter to collaborate on the district budget and assessments.
- C.** The towns and district may also wish to explore a longer transition period for assessments and other revisions to the district agreement, based on a study of other regional agreements; the RLAG or a similar venue may be an appropriate forum for that.

Benefits from implementing this recommendation could include:

- A more stable and predictable process for approval of district assessments by the towns, allowing all three entities to anticipate and to accommodate budget increases;
- Making clear the fact that Shirley’s increases in assessments will not be permanently out of line once they are equitable with Ayer’s, as provided for in the agreement;
- A more collaborative process for budgeting for the district; and
- Better public understanding of the implications of the agreement on assessments, especially their equity at the end of the transition period.

9. The district should build on its planned study of K-8 schools to create a long term plan for funding the capital, maintenance, and technology needs of the district.

- A.** The district school committee has approved a K-8 facilities study, which is a first step in developing a long term capital and maintenance plan.
1. The facilities study will identify K-8 needs and the steps and costs necessary to remediate schools.
 2. ESE’s *School Building Issues* web page (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/sbuilding/>) may be helpful. It includes funding opportunities, guidelines, and resources related to school buildings.
 3. Technology has been a priority for the district, and its continued funding should also be considered in a capital plan.

B. The funding of the capital plan can be coordinated with a long term funding plan for the district.

1. The capital and technology plan may be combined with the long-range funding plan to give a complete picture of district and town needs and obligations.

Benefits from implementing this recommendation will include:

- Increased resources for the improvement and maintenance of buildings.
- Some maintenance projects may be downsized or deferred if the capital plan schedules related renovations in the near future.
- Budgeting for maintenance and facility improvements will be more realistic and predictable.
- K-8 schools will be in better condition and become improved environments for teaching and learning.

Appendix A: Review Team, Activities, Site Visit Schedule

Review Team Members

The review was conducted from June 9 to 12, 2014, by the following team of independent ESE consultants.

1. Dr. John Kulevich, leadership and governance
2. Dr. James McAuliffe, curriculum and instruction
3. Dr. Frank Sambuceti, assessment
4. Willette Johnson, human resources and professional development
5. Lenora Jennings, student support and review team coordinator
6. Dr. George Gearhart, financial and asset management

District Review Activities

The following activities were conducted during the review:

The team conducted interviews with the following financial personnel: finance director, coordinator of operations, coordinator of facilities, payroll HR assistant, Ayer Town Administrator, Shirley Town Administrator and Town of Shirley Board of Selectmen Chair.

The team conducted interviews with the following members of the School Committee: chair, vice-chair, and two members

The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the teachers' association: president and vice president.

The team conducted interviews/focus groups with the following central office administrators: superintendent, assistant superintendent, finance director, and the director of student services.

The team visited the following schools: Page Hilltop School (PreK- 5), Lura A. White Elementary School (PreK- 5), Ayer Shirley Regional Middle School (grades 6, 7, and 8), and Ayer Shirley Regional High School (grades 9, 10, 11, and 12).

During school visits, the team conducted interviews with four principals and focus groups with eight] middle school teachers, and four high school teachers. No elementary teachers attended the elementary teachers' focus group.

The team observed 57 classes in the district: 11 at the high school, 17 at the one middle school, and 29 at the two elementary schools.

Ayer Shirley District Review

The review team analyzed multiple data sets 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

Monday 6/9/2014	Tuesday 6/10/2014	Wednesday 6/11/2014	Thursday 6/12/2014
Orientation with district leaders and principals; interviews with district staff and principals; document reviews; interview with teachers’ association	Interviews with district staff and principals; review of personnel files; teacher focus groups; parent focus group; student focus group and visits to Ayer Shirley Regional High School for classroom observations.	Interviews with town or city personnel; interviews with school leaders; interviews with school committee members; visits to Lura A. White Elementary School, Page Hilltop School , and Ayer Shirley Regional Middle School for classroom observations.	Interviews with school leaders; follow-up interviews; district review team meeting; visits to Page Hilltop School, Ayer Shirley Regional Middle School, and Ayer Shirley Regional High School for classroom observations; emerging themes meeting with district leaders and principals.

Appendix B: Enrollment, Performance, Expenditures

**Table B1a: Ayer Shirley
2013-2014 Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity**

Student Group	District	Percent of Total	State	Percent of Total
Afr. Amer./Black	83	5.0%	82990	8.7%
Amer. Ind. or Alaska Nat.	5	0.3%	2209	0.2%
Asian	38	2.3%	58455	6.1%
Hispanic/Latino	179	10.7%	162647	17.0%
Multi-race, Non-Hisp./Lat.	61	3.7%	27803	2.9%
Nat. Haw. or Pacif. Isl.	4	0.2%	1007	0.1%
White	1296	77.8%	620628	64.9%
All Students	1666	100.0%	955739	100.0%

Note: As of October 1, 2013

**Table B1b: Ayer Shirley RSD
2013-2014 Student Enrollment by High Needs Populations**

Student Groups	District			State		
	N	Percent of High Needs	Percent of District	N	Percent of High Needs	Percent of State
Students w/ disabilities	387	46.2%	22.8%	164336	34.8%	17.0%
Low Income	613	73.2%	36.8%	365885	77.5%	38.3%
ELLs and Former ELLs	50	6.0%	3.0%	75947	16.1%	7.9%
All high needs students	838	100.0%	49.3%	472001	100.0%	48.8%

Notes: As of October 1, 2013. 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 1,701; total state enrollment including students in out-of-district placement is 966,360.

**Table B2a: Ayer Shirley RSD
English Language Arts Performance, 2010-2013**

Grade and Measure		Number Included (2013)	Spring MCAS Year					Gains and Declines	
			2010	2011	2012	2013	State 2013	4-Year Trend	2 Year Trend
3	CPI	129	--	--	88.1	86.2	83.3	--	-1.9
	P+	129	--	--	74.0%	58.0%	57.0%	--	-16.0%
4	CPI	138	--	--	83.1	79.3	78.9	--	-3.8
	P+	138	--	--	56.0%	52.0%	53.0%	--	-4.0%
	SGP	131	--	--	45.5	36	49	--	-9.5
5	CPI	135	--	--	87.1	88	84.7	--	0.9
	P+	135	--	--	69.0%	73.0%	66.0%	--	4.0%
	SGP	123	--	--	59	61	52	--	2
6	CPI	154	--	--	81.6	87.2	85.1	--	5.6
	P+	154	--	--	61.0%	66.0%	67.0%	--	5.0%
	SGP	147	--	--	29	45	52	--	16
7	CPI	137	--	--	82.3	80.5	88.4	--	-1.8
	P+	137	--	--	59.0%	54.0%	72.0%	--	-5.0%
	SGP	130	--	--	35	28.5	48	--	-6.5
8	CPI	127	--	--	92.8	91.1	90.1	--	-1.7
	P+	127	--	--	83.0%	80.0%	78.0%	--	-3.0%
	SGP	119	--	--	57	65	50	--	8
10	CPI	66	--	--	94.7	98.1	96.9	--	3.4
	P+	66	--	--	89.0%	92.0%	91.0%	--	3.0%
	SGP	55	--	--	49	64	57	--	15
All	CPI	886	--	--	86.6	86.3	86.8	--	-0.3
	P+	886	--	--	69.0%	66.0%	69.0%	--	-3.0%
	SGP	705	--	--	48	49	51	--	1

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.

**Table B2b: Ayer Shirley RSD
Mathematics Performance, 2010-2013**

Grade and Measure		Number Included (2013)	Spring MCAS Year					Gains and Declines	
			2010	2011	2012	2013	State 2013	4-Year Trend	2 Year Trend
3	CPI	129	--	--	82	86.4	84.3	--	4.4
	P+	129	--	--	65.0%	71.0%	66.0%	--	6.0%
4	CPI	140	--	--	75.8	78.9	80.2	--	3.1
	P+	140	--	--	44.0%	51.0%	52.0%	--	7.0%
	SGP	132	--	--	35.5	47.5	54	--	12
5	CPI	134	--	--	79.6	82.3	80.6	--	2.7
	P+	134	--	--	60.0%	66.0%	61.0%	--	6.0%
	SGP	123	--	--	41	62	54	--	21
6	CPI	158	--	--	73.3	76.6	80.3	--	3.3
	P+	158	--	--	48.0%	51.0%	61.0%	--	3.0%
	SGP	151	--	--	37	27	50	--	-10
7	CPI	137	--	--	63.6	64.4	74.4	--	0.8
	P+	137	--	--	36.0%	38.0%	52.0%	--	2.0%
	SGP	132	--	--	36	47	46	--	11
8	CPI	129	--	--	74	75.8	76	--	1.8
	P+	129	--	--	48.0%	53.0%	55.0%	--	5.0%
	SGP	120	--	--	57	71.5	50	--	14.5
10	CPI	65	--	--	75.6	90	90.2	--	14.4
	P+	65	--	--	54.0%	83.0%	80.0%	--	29.0%
	SGP	56	--	--	21.5	51	51	--	29.5
All	CPI	892	--	--	75.1	78.2	80.8	--	3.1
	P+	892	--	--	51.0%	57.0%	61.0%	--	6.0%
	SGP	714	--	--	40	49	51	--	9

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.

**Table B2c: Ayer Shirley RSD
Science and Technology/Engineering Performance, 2010-2013**

Grade and Measure		Number Included (2013)	Spring MCAS Year					Gains and Declines	
			2010	2011	2012	2013	State 2013	4-Year Trend	2 Year Trend
5	CPI	133	--	--	81.9	82.5	78.5	--	0.6
	P+	133	--	--	51.0%	55.0%	51.0%	--	4.0%
8	CPI	129	--	--	74.8	72.5	71	--	-2.3
	P+	129	--	--	47.0%	40.0%	39.0%	--	-7.0%
10	CPI	57	--	--	87.9	91.2	88	--	3.3
	P+	57	--	--	73.0%	79.0%	71.0%	--	6.0%
All	CPI	319	--	--	80.5	80	79	--	-0.5
	P+	319	--	--	54.0%	53.0%	53.0%	--	-1.0%

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.

**Table B3a: Ayer Shirley RSD
English Language Arts (All Grades)
Performance for Selected Subgroups Compared to State, 2010-2013**

Group and Measure			Number Included (2013)	Spring MCAS Year				Gains and Declines	
				2010	2011	2012	2013	4 Year Trend	2-Year Trend
High Needs	District	CPI	443	--	--	77.4	78.3	--	0.9
		P+	443	--	--	50.0%	50.0%	--	0.0%
		SGP	340	--	--	43.5	45	--	1.5
	State	CPI	237163	76.1	77	76.5	76.8	0.7	0.3
		P+	237163	45.0%	48.0%	48.0%	48.0%	3.0%	0.0%
		SGP	180087	45	46	46	47	2	1
Low Income	District	CPI	319	--	--	79.8	79.7	--	-0.1
		P+	319	--	--	54.0%	54.0%	--	0.0%
		SGP	250	--	--	46	43.5	--	-2.5
	State	CPI	184999	76.5	77.1	76.7	77.2	0.7	0.5
		P+	184999	47.0%	49.0%	50.0%	50.0%	3.0%	0.0%
		SGP	141671	46	46	45	47	1	2
Students w/ disabilities	District	CPI	219	--	--	66.8	67.9	--	1.1
		P+	219	--	--	32.0%	30.0%	--	-2.0%
		SGP	173	--	--	37	43	--	6
	State	CPI	88956	67.3	68.3	67.3	66.8	-0.5	-0.5
		P+	88956	28.0%	30.0%	31.0%	30.0%	2.0%	-1.0%
		SGP	64773	41	42	43	43	2	0
English language learners & Former ELLs	District	CPI	34	--	--	71.5	75	--	3.5
		P+	34	--	--	40.0%	44.0%	--	4.0%
		SGP	23	--	--	50	61	--	11
	State	CPI	46676	66.1	66.2	66.2	67.4	1.3	1.2
		P+	46676	32.0%	33.0%	34.0%	35.0%	3.0%	1.0%
		SGP	31672	51	50	51	53	2	2
All students	District	CPI	886	--	--	86.6	86.3	--	-0.3
		P+	886	--	--	69.0%	66.0%	--	-3.0%
		SGP	705	--	--	48	49	--	1
	State	CPI	496175	86.9	87.2	86.7	86.8	-0.1	0.1
		P+	496175	68.0%	69.0%	69.0%	69.0%	1.0%	0.0%
		SGP	395568	50	50	50	51	1	1

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 B3b: Ayer Shirley RSD
Mathematics (All Grades)
Performance for Selected Subgroups Compared to State, 2010-2013**

Group and Measure			Number Included (2013)	Spring MCAS Year				Gains and Declines	
				2010	2011	2012	2013	4 Year Trend	2-Year Trend
High Needs	District	CPI	448	--	--	61.4	65.6	--	4.2
		P+	448	--	--	28.0%	36.0%	--	8.0%
		SGP	348	--	--	35	39.5	--	4.5
	State	CPI	237745	66.7	67.1	67	68.6	1.9	1.6
		P+	237745	36.0%	37.0%	37.0%	40.0%	4.0%	3.0%
		SGP	180866	46	46	46	46	0	0
Low Income	District	CPI	320	--	--	62.5	66.6	--	4.1
		P+	320	--	--	31.0%	39.0%	--	8.0%
		SGP	253	--	--	35	40	--	5
	State	CPI	185392	67.1	67.3	67.3	69	1.9	1.7
		P+	185392	37.0%	38.0%	38.0%	41.0%	4.0%	3.0%
		SGP	142354	47	46	45	46	-1	1
Students w/ disabilities	District	CPI	225	--	--	50.6	53.6	--	3
		P+	225	--	--	15.0%	20.0%	--	5.0%
		SGP	180	--	--	31	36	--	5
	State	CPI	89193	57.5	57.7	56.9	57.4	-0.1	0.5
		P+	89193	21.0%	22.0%	21.0%	22.0%	1.0%	1.0%
		SGP	65068	43	43	43	42	-1	-1
English language learners & Former ELLs	District	CPI	35	--	--	53.5	62.1	--	8.6
		P+	35	--	--	26.0%	31.0%	--	5.0%
		SGP	24	--	--	49	58.5	--	9.5
	State	CPI	47046	61.5	62	61.6	63.9	2.4	2.3
		P+	47046	31.0%	32.0%	32.0%	35.0%	4.0%	3.0%
		SGP	31986	54	52	52	53	-1	1
All students	District	CPI	892	--	--	75.1	78.2	--	3.1
		P+	892	--	--	51.0%	57.0%	--	6.0%
		SGP	714	--	--	40	49	--	9
	State	CPI	497090	79.9	79.9	79.9	80.8	0.9	0.9
		P+	497090	58.0%	58.0%	59.0%	61.0%	3.0%	2.0%
		SGP	396691	50	50	50	51	1	1

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 B3c: Ayer Shirley RSD
Science and Technology/Engineering (All Grades)
Performance for Selected Subgroups Compared to State, 2010-2013**

Group and Measure		Number Included (2013)	Spring MCAS Year				Gains and Declines		
			2010	2011	2012	2013	4 Year Trend	2-Year Trend	
High Needs	District	CPI	166	--	--	69.7	71.8	--	2.1
		P+	166	--	--	34.0%	40.0%	--	6.0%
	State	CPI	96902	64.3	63.8	65	66.4	2.1	1.4
		P+	96902	28.0%	28.0%	31.0%	31.0%	3.0%	0.0%
Low Income	District	CPI	119	--	--	70.6	74.4	--	3.8
		P+	119	--	--	36.0%	45.0%	--	9.0%
	State	CPI	75485	63.6	62.8	64.5	66.1	2.5	1.6
		P+	75485	28.0%	28.0%	31.0%	32.0%	4.0%	1.0%
Students w/ disabilities	District	CPI	84	--	--	63	61	--	-2
		P+	84	--	--	23.0%	25.0%	--	2.0%
	State	CPI	37049	59	59.2	58.7	59.8	0.8	1.1
		P+	37049	19.0%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	1.0%	0.0%
English language learners & Former ELLs	District	CPI	14	--	--	48.6	67.9	--	19.3
		P+	14	--	--	11.0%	43.0%	--	32.0%
	State	CPI	16179	51.8	50.3	51.4	54	2.2	2.6
		P+	16179	16.0%	15.0%	17.0%	19.0%	3.0%	2.0%
All students	District	CPI	319	--	--	80.5	80	--	-0.5
		P+	319	--	--	54.0%	53.0%	--	-1.0%
	State	CPI	209573	78.3	77.6	78.6	79	0.7	0.4
		P+	209573	52.0%	52.0%	54.0%	53.0%	1.0%	-1.0%

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 B4: Ayer Shirley Public Schools
Annual Grade 9-12 Dropout Rates, 2010-2013**

	School Year Ending				Change 2010-2013		Change 2012-2013		State (2013)
	2010	2011	2012	2013	Percentage Points	Percent	Percentage Points	Percent	
All students	2.2	1.2	3.3	2.2	0	0.0%	-1.1	-33.3%	2.2

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 B5a: Ayer Shirley Public Schools
Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rates, 2010-2013**

Group	Number Included (2013)	School Year Ending				Change 2010-2013		Change 2012-2013		State (2013)
		2010	2011	2012	2013	Percentage Points	Percent Change	Percentage Points	Percent Change	
High needs	43	--	--	80.6%	62.8%	--	--	-17.8	-22.1%	74.7%
Low income	37	--	--	78.3%	67.6%	--	--	-10.7	-13.7%	73.6%
Students w/ disabilities	15	--	--	70.0%	40.0%	--	--	-30.0	-42.9%	67.8%
English language learners & Former ELLs	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	63.5%
All students	83	--	--	92.5%	80.7%	--	--	-11.8	-12.8%	85.0%

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 B5b: Ayer Shirley Public Schools
Five-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 Change	Percentage Points	Percent Change	
High needs	31	--	--	--	80.6%	--	--	--	--	78.9%
Low income	23	--	--	--	78.3%	--	--	--	--	77.5%
Students w/ disabilities	10	--	--	--	70.0%	--	--	--	--	73.8%
English language learners & Former ELLs	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	68.5%
All students	93	--	--	--	92.5%	--	--	--	--	87.5%

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 B6: Ayer Shirley Public Schools
Attendance Rates, 2010-2013**

Group	School Year Ending				Change 2010-2013		Change 2012-2013		State (2013)
	2010	2011	2012	2013	Percentage Points	Percent Change	Percentage Points	Percent Change	
All students	--	--	96.7%	95.2%	--	--	-1.5	-1.6%	94.8%

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 B7: Ayer Shirley Public Schools
Suspension Rates, 2010-2013**

Group	School Year Ending				Change 2010-2013		Change 2012-2013		State (2013)
	2010	2011	2012	2013	Percentage Points	Percent Change	Percentage Points	Percent Change	
In-School Suspension Rate	--	--	3.7%	5.8%	--	--	2.1	56.8%	2.2%
Out-of-School Suspension Rate	--	--	1.7%	2.2%	--	--	0.5	29.4%	4.3%

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.

**Table B8: Ayer Shirley RSD
Expenditures, Chapter 70 State Aid, and Net School Spending
Fiscal Years 2011–2013**

	FY11		FY12		FY13	
	Estimated	Actual	Estimated	Actual	Estimated	Actual
Expenditures						
From school committee budget	#N/A	\$452,199	\$21,000,106	\$21,088,702	\$21,927,962	\$22,477,515
From revolving funds and grants	--	\$297,840	--	\$4,295,755	--	\$3,739,303
Total expenditures	--	\$750,039	--	\$25,384,457	--	\$26,216,818
Chapter 70 aid to education program						
Chapter 70 state aid*	--	\$0	--	\$7,844,036		\$7,915,436
Required local contribution	--	\$0	--	\$9,899,773		\$10,045,000
Required net school spending**	--	\$0	--	\$17,743,809	--	\$17,960,436
Actual net school spending	--	\$9,418	--	\$19,973,959	--	\$20,534,932
Over/under required (\$)	--	\$9,418	--	\$2,230,150	--	\$2,574,496
Over/under required (%)	--	100	--	12.6	--	14.3

*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.

Data retrieved September 29, 2014

**Table B9: Ayer Shirley RSD
Expenditures Per In-District Pupil
Fiscal Years 2010-2012**

Expenditure Category	2010	2011	2012	2013
Administration	--	--	\$546	\$501
Instructional leadership (district and school)	--	--	\$968	\$964
Teachers	--	--	\$4,850	\$4,803
Other teaching services	--	--	\$1,360	\$1,519
Professional development	--	--	\$31	\$35
Instructional materials, equipment and technology	--	--	\$355	\$404
Guidance, counseling and testing services	--	--	\$394	\$390
Pupil services	--	--	\$983	\$1,104
Operations and maintenance	--	--	\$1,029	\$1,033
Insurance, retirement and other fixed costs	--	--	\$1,785	\$1,868
Total expenditures per in-district pupil	--	--	\$12,301	\$12,622

Sources: [Per-pupil expenditure reports on ESE website](#)

Note: Any discrepancy between expenditures and total is because of rounding.

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%	3%	97%	(0)	0	0%
	MS	0%	12%	88%	(1)	3	5%
	HS	0%	0%	100%	(2)	54	95%
2. Behavioral standards are clearly communicated. Disruptions, if present, are managed effectively & equitably.	ES	0%	14%	86%	(0)	3	5%
	MS	6%	24%	71%	(1)	10	18%
	HS	18%	18%	64%	(2)	44	77%
3. Classroom procedures are established & maintained to create a safe physical environment & promote smooth transitions among all classroom activities.	ES	3%	3%	93%	(0)	3	5%
	MS	6%	24%	71%	(1)	7	12%
	HS	9%	18%	73%	(2)	47	82%
4. Lesson reflects rigor & high expectations.	ES	10%	41%	48%	(0)	7	12%
	MS	6%	59%	35%	(1)	22	39%
	HS	27%	0%	73%	(2)	28	49%
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	3%	10%	86%	(0)	1	2%
	MS	0%	24%	76%	(1)	9	16%
	HS	0%	18%	82%	(2)	47	82%
6. Multiple resources are available to meet students' diverse learning needs.	ES	14%	17%	69%	(0)	17	30%
	MS	41%	47%	12%	(1)	14	25%
	HS	55%	9%	36%	(2)	26	46%
7. The physical arrangement of the classroom ensures a positive learning environment & provides all students with access to learning activities.	ES	0%	17%	83%	(0)	0	0%
	MS	0%	29%	71%	(1)	12	21%
	HS	0%	18%	82%	(2)	45	79%

Ayer Shirley District Review

Teaching	By Grade Span	Evidence					
		None	Partial	Clear & Consistent	Overall		
		(0)	(1)	(2)	#	%	
8. Demonstrates knowledge of subject & content.	ES	7%	17%	76%	(0)	5	9%
	MS	0%	0%	100%	(1)	6	11%
	HS	27%	9%	64%	(2)	46	81%
9. Communicates clear grade-appropriate learning objectives aligned to state standards. Applicable ELL language objectives are evident.	ES	48%	21%	31%	(0)	22	39%
	MS	12%	18%	71%	(1)	13	23%
	HS	55%	36%	9%	(2)	22	39%
10. Uses appropriate & varied strategies matched to learning objectives & content.	ES	48%	21%	31%	(0)	24	42%
	MS	24%	35%	41%	(1)	14	25%
	HS	55%	18%	27%	(2)	19	33%
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	17%	28%	55%	(0)	11	19%
	MS	18%	18%	65%	(1)	13	23%
	HS	27%	18%	55%	(2)	33	58%
12. Uses varied questioning techniques that require/seek thoughtful responses & promote deeper understanding.	ES	31%	31%	38%	(0)	22	39%
	MS	35%	41%	24%	(1)	17	30%
	HS	64%	9%	27%	(2)	18	32%
13. Implements appropriate & varied strategies that meet students' diverse learning needs.	ES	31%	28%	41%	(0)	29	51%
	MS	65%	35%	0%	(1)	16	28%
	HS	82%	18%	0%	(2)	12	21%
14. Paces lesson to engage all students & promote understanding.	ES	0%	17%	83%	(0)	1	2%
	MS	0%	35%	65%	(1)	16	28%
	HS	9%	45%	45%	(2)	40	70%
15. Conducts frequent formative assessments to check for understanding & inform instruction.	ES	14%	34%	52%	(0)	13	23%
	MS	24%	29%	47%	(1)	18	32%
	HS	45%	27%	27%	(2)	26	46%
16. Makes use of technology to enhance learning.	ES	59%	3%	38%	(0)	34	60%
	MS	59%	12%	29%	(1)	3	5%
	HS	64%	0%	36%	(2)	20	35%

Learning	By Grade Span	Evidence					
		None	Partial	Clear & Consistent	Overall		
		(0)	(1)	(2)	#	%	
17. Students are engaged in productive learning routines.	ES	0%	24%	76%	(0)	2	4%
	MS	6%	24%	71%	(1)	15	26%
	HS	9%	36%	55%	(2)	40	70%
18. Students are engaged in challenging academic tasks.	ES	7%	34%	59%	(0)	7	12%
	MS	12%	41%	47%	(1)	19	33%
	HS	27%	18%	55%	(2)	31	54%
19. Students assume responsibility for their own learning.	ES	3%	7%	90%	(0)	6	11%
	MS	6%	25%	69%	(1)	6	11%
	HS	36%	0%	64%	(2)	44	79%
20. Students articulate their thinking or reasoning verbally or in writing either individually, in pairs or in groups.	ES	28%	21%	52%	(0)	16	28%
	MS	18%	47%	35%	(1)	15	26%
	HS	45%	9%	45%	(2)	26	46%
21. Students' responses to questions elaborate about content & ideas (not expected for all responses).	ES	55%	14%	31%	(0)	31	54%
	MS	59%	6%	35%	(1)	7	12%
	HS	45%	18%	36%	(2)	19	33%
22. Students make connections to prior knowledge, real world experiences & other subject matter.	ES	17%	21%	62%	(0)	13	23%
	MS	35%	35%	29%	(1)	14	25%
	HS	18%	18%	64%	(2)	30	53%
23. Students use technology as a tool for learning &/or understanding.	ES	72%	3%	24%	(0)	38	67%
	MS	71%	6%	24%	(1)	3	5%
	HS	45%	9%	45%	(2)	16	28%
24. Student work demonstrates high quality & can serve as exemplars.	ES	62%	14%	24%	(0)	39	68%
	MS	76%	12%	12%	(1)	6	11%
	HS	73%	0%	27%	(2)	12	21%