District Review Report

Southbridge Public Schools

Review conducted October 19-22, 2015

Center for District and School Accountability

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Executive Summary

District Profile

Southbridge is a Level 4 district because it was declared an underperforming district by the Board of Education in 2004. Charlton Street Elementary, West Street Elementary, and Southbridge Middle/High School are Level 3 schools and among the lowest achieving and least improving schools in the state. The fourth school, Eastford Road, does not serve tested grades so it does not receive an accountability designation.

Over the last four years, Southbridge students have scored well below state averages in English language arts, mathematics, and science on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System tests, both overall and for the students making up the high needs population. Student growth in English language arts and mathematics was also low compared to their academic peers statewide.

Southbridge's out-of-school suspension and in-school suspension rates for all students in the district were almost three times the state rate in 2015. The four-year cohort graduation rate for all students was more than 23 percentage points lower than the state rate and the five-year rate more than 15 percentage points lower. Similarly, the drop-out rate was twice the state rate in 2014.

District Review Process

These findings are based on a district accountability review 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 focus on the six district standards of effective practice 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. 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 including interviews, focus group sessions with stakeholders, and observations of classroom instructional practice in all district schools. The site visit to the Southbridge Public Schools was conducted from October 1922, 2015, and included 33 hours of interviews, focus groups with approximately 111 stakeholders, and 68 classroom observations in 4 schools.

Leadership and Governance

Leadership in the Southbridge Public Schools is currently in a state of disarray. Since 2010, the district has been unable to sustain consistent leadership at any level. The constant change in district and school leadership is symptomatic of the discord that has taken place on the school committee, which has not adhered to its appropriate roles and responsibilities. The school committee has involved itself in the operations of the school district in order to advance personal interest, and interviewees told the review team that the school committee recently exerted its influence into the personnel matters of the district and misappropriated district funds.

At the same time, the school committee has not paid sufficient attention to important responsibilities associated with district turnaround or to attracting, developing, and retaining an effective leadership team. The district has not chosen a superintendent through a formal search since 2010, despite seven changes in the superintendency since that time. Stakeholders within the school community and town officials agreed that the constant change in leadership has been detrimental to district improvement. The loss of faith in the school committee's ability to select a superintendent was expressed vividly by a vote of no confidence in the school committee taken by the Southbridge town council last spring.

The school committee should focus its attention on its legally mandated responsibilities and conduct all of its work in a transparent manner. The committee's priority should be restoring stability to the district and its leadership.

Curriculum and Instruction

While the elementary level is making progress in documenting its curriculum, the middle- and high-school levels have completed little or no work in this regard. Each elementary school has Instructional Resource Specialists (IRSs) for both ELA and math to provide ongoing curriculum and instructional support and embedded professional development to teachers, and elementary teachers have sufficient common planning time (CPT) to collaborate on curriculum and lessons. However, curriculum units at the elementary level do not consistently reflect the principles of Understanding by Design.

At the middle/high school, teachers are struggling to document the curriculum, and time, expertise, and personnel to support meaningful curriculum work are scarce. While middle-school teachers have CPT each week in cross-subject teams, high school teachers have no real CPT. The district has not developed the role and responsibilities of department heads to provide sufficient instructional support to teachers, and it has provided limited training to prepare teachers to develop curriculum. The middle- and high-school levels each have only one IRS to cover all content areas, focusing on instruction.

Districtwide in observed lessons, classroom instruction was not appropriately differentiated to account for differences in the learning needs of all students. Classroom climate characterized by respectful behaviors, routines, tone, and discourse has not been well established across all schools. In contrast to observations at the elementary level, in observed lessons at the middle/high school there was a low incidence of instructional practices characterized by rigor and well-structured lessons and of students taking responsibility for their learning and being purposefully engaged in tasks that promote critical thinking.

The district should take steps to complete K-12 curriculum in all subjects. It should ensure that curriculum materials are high quality, cohesive, aligned to appropriate standards, and aligned vertically between contiguous grades and horizontally across grades and schools. It should also ensure that there is a common understanding across all schools of rigor and high expectations and that instructional practices consistently encourage students to develop critical thinking skills, cultivate understanding and application of knowledge, and support differentiation and a positive learning environment. The district should develop sufficient mid-level content-based leadership in grades 6-12 to more actively monitor

instruction through non-evaluative supervision activities and to provide teachers with frequent formative feedback.

Assessment

The district is operating without a balanced and comprehensive assessment system that would provide the needed data and evidence to measure student progress and achievement and guide instructional decision-making, particularly at the middle/high school. It also does not have the technology infrastructure to manage and share data efficiently.

The elementary schools have begun to establish the culture and systems to generate and use assessments and assessment data for continuous improvement. The elementary assessment system represents a balance of benchmark/diagnostic assessments, measures of student growth and proficiency, and frequent formative assessments. Regularly scheduled grade-level meetings and Instructional Leadership Team meetings provide a collaborative forum for elementary teachers to discuss student data and progress and use data to guide curricular and instructional decisions.

The middle/high school has not developed an effective and coordinated approach to assessment. Without a complete, aligned and documented curriculum, it is impossible for the middle/high school to have a completely aligned and articulated assessment system. As a result, groups of teachers collect and analyze little coherent data other than MCAS results. Further, there is inadequate time and expertise to systematically collect, analyze, and use what limited assessment data there is to improve teaching and learning.

District and secondary school leaders should build teachers' ability to develop and use multiple forms of assessments in order to deliver appropriately designed curriculum and instruction. They should also establish a more systematic process to ensure the effective use of data districtwide.

Human Resources and Professional Development

The district has been making increasingly effective use of quality, evidence-based, growth-oriented supervisory practices and procedures. However, the district's efforts to collect and use student and staff feedback for teachers and administrators and to identify district-determined measures of student impact have badly faltered. The district has done little to address either of these initiatives and is currently out of compliance with both of these requirements.

The district's professional development program (PD) is seriously hampered by the absence of a well defined and collaborative leadership structure, the absence of clearly articulated goals that are aligned with district needs and improvement priorities, and insufficient embedded and regularly scheduled common planning and meeting opportunities for all staff.

The district should prioritize the development of a comprehensive, coordinated, and collaborative PD system that promotes professional growth and practice, advances district goals and priorities, and significantly improves student achievement. It should also undertake prompt and appropriate action to

implement all components of its educator evaluation system, including the collection and use of multiple sources of evidence to inform the evaluations of both teachers and administrators.

Student Support

The district has not established an effective tiered system of support across all grade levels. At the elementary level, the district has begun to implement positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) activities, most of which began in fall 2015. However, as of last year, two interventionists at one elementary school were shifted to teacher roles, leaving a void in support personnel. At the middle/high school, classrooms are unstable. The district has high rates of in-school and out-of-school suspensions, which can be linked to disruptive behavior as well as to chronic absence. Compounding this issue is widespread ineffective classroom management evidenced by disrespectful behavior by both teachers and students in observed classrooms. Teachers at both the middle- and high-school levels continue to struggle with approaches for effective classroom management that can prevent, defuse, and redirect disruptive student behaviors.

Further, the district is not providing sufficient support to ensure that English language learners (ELLs) are able to fully participate in the academic program and succeed in learning. There is only one English language development (ELD) teacher position for all ELLs in the middle-school grades, and the one ELD teacher position at the high-school level is currently vacant. Districtwide, there is no ELL director for over 350 ELLs, and 30 teachers do not have SEI certification. The district does not have resources in place to provide adequate communication between key district staff and newly arrived ELLs and their families, the vast majority of whom speak Spanish.

The district should enact a multi-pronged initiative to identify and address the multiple interconnected issues related to student behavior at the middle/high school. It should convene an advisory committee to review district needs and benefits related to creating diverse options and pathways at the middle/high school that would help all students to graduate and to be prepared for success after high school. District leaders should oversee the immediate implementation of a tiered system of support (including instructional and social-emotional supports) for all learners.

Financial and Asset Management

The student population in Southbridge schools has changed over the last 15 years, reflecting changes in the town. Students from low-income families composed 37.2 percent of enrollment in 2000, compared with 76.3 percent in 2014. The number of students tuitioned out through school choice increased from 75 students in 2006 to 239 students in 2015, for a total tuition expenditure of \$1,361,992. The district opened a new middle/high school in 2012, funded without an override by using its bonding capacity and MSBA reimbursements. The district maintains its schools effectively and has a capital plan.

School committee members and municipal officials voiced concerns about financial management and reporting. Bills have gone unpaid, deficits and surpluses have not been accurately projected, and expenses have been posted to questionable accounts. School committee members said that they found financial reports "cursory" and the finance director in fiscal year 2015 was unable to give them the

financial information they needed. However, changes in leadership and reporting made in summer 2015 have been well received by the school committee and town officials.

Town support for the schools has consistently exceeded the required net school spending level, but the increase approved for the fiscal year 2016 school budget was less than in previous years, and less than the increase in Chapter 70 aid. The fiscal year 2016 budget process was characterized by ineffective communication and little collaboration between the school committee and town officials. Ultimately, the school committee did not address the pressing requests for staffing and leadership to meet the needs of a growing ELL population.

School committee members, administrators, and town officials should continue their recent efforts to communicate and collaborate more effectively. Communications about day-to-day financial management issues as well as budget development are needed to reduce tensions, to improve transparency, to ensure proper financial management, and to adopt a budget that can meet both district and town objectives. Special attention should be given to creating financial and budget reports that are complete, transparent, and accurate and that satisfy the needs of the school committee and the town.

Southbridge Public Schools 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 2015-2016 school year include districts classified into Level 2, Level 3, or Level 4 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.

Site Visit

The site visit to the Southbridge Public Schools was conducted from October 19-22, 2015. The site visit included 33 hours of interviews and focus groups with approximately 111 stakeholders, including school committee members, district administrators, school staff, parents, students, and teachers' association representatives. The review team conducted 3 focus groups with 21 elementary school teachers and 13 middle/high school teachers in attendance.

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 68 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

Southbridge has a town manager form of government and the chair of the school committee is elected. The seven members of the school committee meet twice a month.

The week before the site visit for this review, a recently appointed superintendent resigned. He had been superintendent for less than two months. The week after the site visit, the school committee appointed an interim superintendent, the third temporary appointment this school year.

The district leadership team includes the superintendent, an assistant superintendent for teaching and learning, a director of finance, a director of pupil personnel services, and an instructional resource specialist for English language learners. Central office positions and school administrator positions have been highly unstable, with 35 staff transitions that included 43 people (some individuals in more than one position) over the past 5 school years (see Table 21 in the second Leadership and Governance Challenge finding below). The district has four principals leading four schools. There are five other school administrators, including an associate principal at the middle/high school and four assistant principals; the two at the grades 1-5 elementary schools hold the title assistant principal/behavior interventionist. There are 165 teachers in the district.

In the 2014–2015 school year, 2,228 students were enrolled in the district's 4 schools:

Table 1: Southbridge Public Schools
Schools, Type, Grades Served, and Enrollment*, 2014–2015

School Name	School Type	Grades Served	Enrollment
Eastford Road School	EES	PK-K	281
Charlton Street School	ES	1-5	436
West Street School	ES	1-5	425
Southbridge Middle/High School	MH	6-12	1,086
Totals	4 schools	PK-12	2,228
*As of October 1, 2014	•	•	

Between 2011 and 2015 overall student enrollment increased by 1 percent. Enrollment figures by race/ethnicity and high needs populations (i.e., students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, 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 higher than the median in-district per pupil expenditures for 46 K-12 districts of similar size (2,000–2,999 students) in fiscal year 2014: \$13,486 as compared with \$12,747 (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 Performance

District and Subgroup Results

Southbridge is a Level 4 district because it was declared an underperforming district by the Board of Education in 2004. Charlton Street Elementary, West Street Elementary, and Southbridge Middle/High School are Level 3 schools and among the lowest achieving and least improving schools in the state.

- Charlton Street Elementary had very low MCAS participation (below 90%) for its ELL and former ELL students.
- West Street Elementary is designated as a focus school because its students with disabilities, Hispanic/Latino students, ELL and former ELL students and high needs students are among the lowest performing 20 percent of subgroups.
- Southbridge Middle/High is designated as a focus school because its white students, students with disabilities, Hispanic/Latino students, ELL and former ELL and high needs students are among the lowest performing 20 percent of subgroups.

Table 2: Southbridge Public Schools
District and School PPI, Percentile, and Level 2012–2015

			Annu	al PPI		Cumulative	School	Account
School	Group	2012	2013	2014	2015	PPI	Percentile	ability Level
EES: Eastford Road	All	-	-					
EES. Eastiora Road	High Needs	-	1					
ES: Charlton Street	All	50	70	100	85	83	8	3
ES. Chariton Street	High Needs	50	80	100	100*	91	0	J
ES: West Street	All	40	55	60	35	47	3	3
ES. West street	High Needs	50	45	50	46*	44	0	3
MSHS: Southbridge	All	25	18	68	21	35	6	3
Middle/High	High Needs	29	32	36	36	34	0	3
District	All	36	32	68	18	38		4
DISTRICT	High Needs	32	39	46	46	44	-	4

^{*}The Annual PPI for the high needs subgroup is held harmless because of a change in definition from low income to economically disadvantaged.

The percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced in ELA in the district did not improve between 2012 and 2015 for all students, high needs students, ELL and former ELL students, and students with disabilities. The district as a whole and each subgroup that makes up the high needs population were below the state rate by 15 or more percentage points in 2014.*

Table 3: Southbridge Public Schools ELA Proficiency by Subgroup 2012–2015

Group		2012	2013	2014	2015	4- Year Trend	Above/Below State 2014	
All students	District	43%	38%	44%	41%	-2.0	-25.0	
All students	State	69%	69%	69%			-25.0	
High Noods	District	35%	32%	35%	33%	-2.0	15.0	
High Needs	State	48%	49%	50%			-15.0	
Economically	District				36%			
Disadvantaged	State							
ELL and former	District	12%	9%	10.%	12%	0.0	26.0	
ELL students	State	34%	34%	36%		-	-26.0	
Students with	District	7%	7%	10%	6%	-1.0	-20.0	
disabilities	State	31%	29%	30%			-20.0	

^{*}State comparisons are made using 2014 data because of multiple assessments offered in grades 3-8 in 2015.

There was no notable improvement between 2012 and 2015 in the rate of students scoring proficient or advanced in math for the district as a whole, as well as for high needs students, ELL and former ELL students, and students with disabilities. Math proficiency rates were also below the state rate for all students and each subgroup that makes up the high needs population by 12 to 29 percentage points in 2014.*

Table 4: Southbridge Public Schools

Math Proficiency by Subgroup 2012–2015

main remainly by subgroup to the											
Group		2012	2013	2014	2015	4- Year Trend	Above/Below State 2014				
All students	District	31%	32%	35%	32%	1.0	-25.0				
All students	State	59%	61%	60%		-	-23.0				
High Noods	District	26%	26%	28%	24%	-2.0	-12.0				
High Needs	State	37%	40%	40%			-12.0				
Economically	District				26.0%						
Disadvantaged	State					-					
ELL and former	District	8%	6%	6%	8%	0.0	20.0				
ELL students	State	32%	35%	35%			-29.0				
Students with	District	5%	4%	5%	4%	-1.0	-18.0				
disabilities	State	21%	23%	23%			-18.0				

^{*}State comparisons are made using 2014 data because of multiple assessments offered in grades 3-8 in 2015.

The percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced in science was below the state rate by 29 percentage points for all students and by 11 to 17 percentage points for high needs students, economically disadvantaged students, ELL and former ELL students, and students with disabilities.

Table 5: Southbridge Public Schools
Science Proficiency by Subgroup 2012–2015

Group		2012	2013	2014	2015	4- Year Trend	Above/Below State 2015				
All students	District	32%	22%	27%	25%	-7	-29				
All students	State	54%	53%	55%	54%	0	-29				
High Noods	District	24%	18%	17%	18%	-6	12				
High Needs	State	31%	32%	33%	31%	0	-13				
Economically	District				19%		15				
Disadvantaged	State				34%		-15				
ELL and former	District	5%	3%	3%	8%	3	11				
ELL students	State	17%	19%	18%	19%	2	-11				
Students with	District	4%	2%	4%	5%	1	17				
disabilities	State	20%	21%	21%	22%	2	-17				

The district did not reach its 2015 Composite Performance Index (CPI) targets for all students in ELA, math, and science. The district also did not meet its CPI targets in ELA, math, and science for high needs students, ELL and former ELL students, and students with disabilities.

Table 6: Southbridge Public Schools 2015 CPI and Targets by Subgroup

		ELA			Math		Science		
Group	2015 CPI	2015 Target	Rating	2015 CPI	2015 Target	Rating	2015 CPI	2015 Target	Rating
All students	68.3	76.0	No Change	58.8	76.0	No Change	57.6	74.6	No Change
High Needs	62.7	78.5	No Change	52.7	73.2	Declined	51.8	71.7	Improved Below Target
Economically Disadvantaged	64.5	-1		54.6	-1		53.2		
ELLs	44.1	62.2	Improved Below Target	35.5	63.5	Improved Below Target	33.7	59.5	Improved Below Target
Students with disabilities	40.1	63.4	Improved Below Target	32.6	59.9	No Change	34.9	63.3	Improved Below Target

Students' growth in ELA and math was low compared to their academic peers statewide for all students. This is also true for each subgroup that makes up the high needs population, except for ELL and former ELL students whose growth in ELA was moderate.

Table 7: Southbridge Public Schools
2015 Median ELA and Math SGP by Subgroup

Group		Median ELA S	GP	Median Math SGP						
Group	District	State Growth Level Dis		District	State	Growth Level				
All students	34.0	50.0	Low	30.0	50.0	Low				
High Needs	34.0	47.0	Low	28.0	46.0	Low				
Econ. Disadv.	34.0	46.0	Low	29.0	46.0	Low				
ELLs	41.0	54.0	Moderate	29.0	50.0	Low				
SWD	27.0	43.0	Low	29.0	43.0	Low				

Southbridge's out-of-school suspension and in-school suspension rates for all students in the district were almost three times the state rate in 2015.

Table 8: Southbridge Public Schools
Out of School and In School Suspensions by Subgroup 2013–2015

Out of school and in school suspensions by subgroup 2013											
Group	Type of Suspension	2013	2014	2015	State 2015						
High Noods	OSS	12.9%	11.3%	9.4%	4.8%						
High Needs	ISS	6.1%	8.3%	6.2%	2.7%						
Economically	OSS	13.1%	11.5%	9.4%	5.4%						
disadvantaged*	ISS	6.3%	8.6%	6.3%	2.9%						
Students with	OSS	16.9%	16.5%	13.7%	6.1%						
disabilities	ISS	8.2%	10.6%	6.8%	3.4%						
ELL o	OSS	15.9%	9.0%	9.2%	3.8%						
ELLs	ISS	9.5%	7.7%	5.3%	1.8%						
All Ctudents	OSS	11.3%	9.9%	8.5%	2.9%						
All Students	ISS	5.2%	7.2%	5.3%	1.8%						

^{*}Low income students' suspensions are used for 2013 and 2014.

Southbridge's four-year cohort graduation rate for all students was more than 23 percentage points lower than the state rate. The four-year cohort graduation rate also declined over the past four years for all students and each subgroup that makes up the high needs population.

Table 9: Southbridge Public Schools
Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rates 2011-2014

	Number		Cohor	t Year		Change 2011	-2014	Change 2013	-2014	State
Group	Included (2014)	2011	2012	2013	2014	Percentage Points	Percent Change	Percentage Points	Percent Change	(2014)
High needs	101	64.6%	71.1%	69.9%	58.4%	-6.2	-9.6%	-11.5	-16.5%	76.5%
Low income	89	67.0%	72.9%	72.9%	62.9%	-4.1	-6.1%	-10.0	-13.7%	75.5%
SWD	21	38.5%	63.0%	50.0%	23.8%	-14.7	-38.2%	-26.2	-52.4%	69.1%
ELLs	12	52.9%	76.9%	63.2%	25.0%	-27.9	-52.7%	-38.2	-60.4%	63.9%
All students	124	69.0%	76.1%	70.6%	62.9%	-6.1	-8.8%	-7.7	-10.9%	86.1%

Southbridge's five-year cohort graduation rate for all students was more than 15 percentage points lower than the state rate and the five-year cohort graduation rate was lower than the state rate for all the groups that make up the high needs population.

Table 10: Southbridge Public Schools Five-Year Cohort Graduation Rates 2010-2013

	Number	(Cohort Ye	ar Endin	g	Change 2010	-2013	Change 2012	-2013	State
Group	Included (2013)	2010	2011	2012	2013	Percentage Points	Percent Change	Percentage Points	Percent Change	(2013)
High needs	103	67.1%	66.7%	71.1%	71.8%	4.7	7.0%	0.7	1.0%	79.2%
Low income	96	68.9%	69.2%	72.9%	75.0%	6.1	8.9%	2.1	2.9%	78.3%
SWD	24	57.1%	38.5%	63.0%	50.0%	-7.1	-12.4%	-13.0	-20.6%	72.9%
ELLs	19	70.0%	58.8%	76.9%	63.2%	-6.8	-9.7%	-13.7	-17.8%	70.9%
All students	119	67.0%	70.7%	76.1%	72.3%	5.3	7.9%	-3.8	-5.0%	87.7%

Southbridge's dropout rate for all students and students with disabilities was twice the state rate in 2014, the high needs students' dropout rate was similar to the state's high needs students' dropout rate, and the district's ELL and low income students' dropout rates were lower than the state rate.

Table 11: Southbridge Public Schools
Dropout Rates by Subgroup 2011–2014

	2011	2012	2013	2014	State 2014
High Needs	5.5%	3.7%	3.6%	3.5%	3.4%
Low income	4.8%	2.7%	3.5%	2.4%	3.6%
SWD	5.4%	6.8%	3.7%	8.5%	3.4%
ELLs	5.9%	3.1%	5.8%	2.0%	6.2%
All students	5.5%	4.5%	3.7%	4.4%	2.0%

Grade and School Results

ELA proficiency rates were below the state rate in each tested grade by 11 to 41 percentage points. There was no notable improvement in ELA proficiency rates at any of Southbridge's schools between 2012 and 2015.

- ELA proficiency rates were below the state rate by 41 and 40 percentage points in the 6th and 7th grades, by 39 and 31 percentage points in the 5th and 8th grades, by 23 percentage points in the 3rd grade and by 14 and 11 percentage points in the 10th and 4th grades.
 - Between 2012 and 2015 ELA proficiency rates decreased by 10 percentage points in the 7th and 8th grades, by 7 percentage points in the 3rd grade, and by 3 and 5 percentage points in the 5th and 6th grades.
- Between 2012 and 2015 ELA proficiency rates increased 14 percentage points in the 4th grade from 28 percent in 2012 to 42 percent in 2015, but remained 11 percentage points below the state rate of 53 percent.
- There was no notable improvement in ELA proficiency rates in any of Southbridge's schools.
 - Charlton Street's ELA proficiency rate was 45 percent in 2012 and 41 percent in 2015.
 - West Street's ELA proficiency rate was 33 percent in 2012 and 33 percent in 2015.
 - Southbridge middle/high's ELA proficiency rate was 42 percent in 2013 and 42 percent in 2015.

Table 12: Southbridge Public Schools
ELA Percent Proficient or Advanced by Grade 2012–2015

				e o. / tarance	u, c.uuc =	UU		
Grade	Number	2012	2013	2014	2015	State	2012 to 2015	2014 to 2015
3	162	44.0%	30.0%	41.0%	37.0%	60.0%	-7.0	-4.0
4	166	28.0%	34.0%	32.0%	42.0%	53.0%	+14.0	+10.0
5	173	35.0%	35.0%	38.0%	32.0%	71.0%	-3.0	-6.0
6	174	35.0%	30.0%	39.0%	30.0%	71.0%	-5.0	-9.0
7	188	40.0%	28.0%	32.0%	30.0%	70.0%	-10.0	-2.0
8	181	59.0%	51.0%	49.0%	49.0%	80.0%	-10.0	0.0
10	121	76.0%	71.0%	76.0%	77.0%	91.0%	+1.0	+1.0
All	1,165	43.0%	38.0%	43.0%	41.0%		-2.0	-2.0

ELA proficiency rates were below the state rate for each tested grade at Charlton Street Elementary, West Street Elementary, and Southbridge Middle/High School. ELA proficiency rates were notably different in the two elementary schools in the 3rd and 5th grades.

Table 13: Southbridge Public Schools
ELA Percent Proficient or Advanced by School and Grade 2014-2015

School	3	4	5	6	7	8	10	Total
EES: Eastford Road	1				1	1	1	1
ES: Charlton Street	44%	40%	42%		-			42%
ES: West Street	31%	43%	27%					33%
Southbridge Middle/High				31%	31%	49%	77%	44%
District Total	37%	42%	32%	30%	30%	49%	77%	41%
State	60%	53%	71%	71%	70%	80%	91%	

ELA proficiency rates between 2012 and 2015 decreased 3 percentage points at Charlton Street and only improved by one percentage point at West Street. Between 2013 and 2015 ELA proficiency improved by two percentage points at Southbridge Middle/High.

Table 14: Southbridge Public Schools
ELA Percent Proficient or Advanced by School and Subgroup 2012-2015

	2014	2015	3- or 4-Year Trend		
	2012	2013	2014	2015	3- 01 4-Teal Trellu
EES: Eastford Road					
ES: Charlton Street	45%	31%	39%	42%	-3
High Needs		25%	35%	35%	10
Economically disadvantaged				36%	
ELL and former ELL		5%	20%	19%	14
Students with disabilities		4%	6%	8%	4
ES: West Street	32%	37%	38%	33%	1
High Needs	26%	27%	28%	21%	-5
Economically disadvantaged				23%	
ELL and former ELL	4%	7%	9%	0%	-4
Students with disabilities	1%	6%	2%	0%	-1
Southbridge Middle/High		42%	49%	44%	2
High Needs		37%	40%	38%	1
Economically disadvantaged				41%	
ELL and former ELL		14%	9%	14%	0
Students with disabilities		9%	13%	8%	-1

Math proficiency rates were below the state rate in each tested grade by 10 to 40 percentage points. There was no notable improvement in math proficiency rates at any of Southbridge's schools between 2012 and 2015.

• Math proficiency rates in the district were below the state rate by 40 percentage points in the 10th grade, by 37 and 36 percentage points in the 6th and 8th grades, by 33 and 31 percentage points in the 7th and 5th grades, 21 percentage points in the 3rd grade, and by 10 percentage points in the 4th grade.

- Between 2012 and 2015 math proficiency rates decreased by 12 percentage points in the 10th grade, and improved by 10 percentage points in the 4th grade.
- There was no notable improvement in math proficiency rates in any of Southbridge's schools.
 - o Charlton Street's math proficiency rate was 49 percent in 2012 and 48 percent in 2015.
 - o West Street's math proficiency rate was 34 percent in 2012 and 35 percent in 2015.
 - Southbridge Middle/High's math proficiency rate was 27 percent in 2013 and 26 percent in 2015.

Table 15: Southbridge Public Schools

Math Percent Proficient or Advanced by Grade 2012-2015

Grade	Number	2012	2013	2014	2015	State	2012 to 2015	2014 to 2015
3	158	47.0%	45.0%	61.0%	49.0%	70.0%	+2.0	-12.0
4	171	27.0%	32.0%	35.0%	37.0%	47.0%	+10.0	+2.0
5	170	38.0%	41.0%	39.0%	36.0%	67.0%	-2.0	-3.0
6	175	22.0%	34.0%	31.0%	25.0%	62.0%	+3.0	-6.0
7	187	17.0%	15.0%	23.0%	18.0%	51.0%	+1.0	-5.0
8	184	26.0%	19.0%	17.0%	24.0%	60.0%	-2.0	+7.0
10	121	51.0%	44.0%	45.0%	39.0%	79.0%	-12.0	-6.0
All	1166	31.0%	32.0%	35.0%	32.0%		+1.0	-3.0

Math proficiency rates were below the state rate for each tested grade at Charlton Street Elementary, West Street Elementary, and Southbridge Middle/High School, except for the 4th grade at West Street. Math proficiency rates differed in the elementary schools in each grade.

Table 16: Southbridge Public Schools

Math Percent Proficient or Advanced by School and Grade 2014-2015

School	3	4	5	6	7	8	10	Total
EES: Eastford Road								
ES: Charlton Street	68%	30%	50%					48%
ES: West Street	33%	48%	27%					35%
Southbridge Middle/High				26%	19%	24%	41%	26%
District Total	49%	37%	36%	25%	18%	24%	39%	32%
State	70%	47%	67%	62%	51%	60%	79%	

There was no notable improvement or decline in math proficiency rates at Charlton Street and West Street elementary schools as a whole between 2012 and 2015, and between 2013 and 2015 at Southbridge Middle/High School.

Table 17: Southbridge Public Schools

Math Percent Proficient or Advanced by School and Subgroup 2012-2015

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	2012	2013	2014	2015	3- or 4-Year Trend				
EES: Eastford Road				-					
ES: Charlton Street	49%	43%	50%	48%	-1				
High Needs		39%	47%	40%	1				
Economically disadvantaged				40%					
ELL and former ELL		8%	20%	22%	14				
Students with disabilities		6%	13%	18%	12				
ES: West Street	34%	38%	43%	35%	1				
High Needs	29%	29%	33%	24%	-5				
Economically disadvantaged				26%					
ELL and former ELL	10%	7%	7%	3%	-7				
Students with disabilities	4%	6%	6%	6%	2				
Southbridge Middle/High		27%	29%	26%	-1				
High Needs		21%	20%	20%	-1				
Economically disadvantaged				21%					
ELL and former ELL		5%	4%	7%	2				
Students with disabilities		3%	3%	1%	-2				

Science proficiency rates were below the state rate and have declined between 2012 and 2015 for each tested grade and in the district as whole.

- 5th grade science proficiency rates decreased 7 percentage points from 32 percent in 2012 to 25 percent in 2015, 26 percentage points below the state rate of 51 percent.
- 8th grade science proficiency rates decreased 9 percentage points from 27 percent in 2012 to 18 percent in 2015, 24 percentage points below the state rate of 42 percent.
- 10th grade science proficiency rates decreased 4 percentage points from 43 percent in 2012 to 39 percent in 2015, 33 percentage points below the state rate of 72 percent.

Table 18: Southbridge Public Schools
Science Percent Proficient or Advanced by Grade 2012-2015

Grade	Number	2012	2013	2014	2015	State	2012 to	2014 to
Grade	Nullibei	2012	2013	2014	2015	State	2015	2015
5	169	32.0%	17.0%	25.0%	25.0%	51.0%	-7.0	0.0
8	182	27.0%	16.0%	14.0%	18.0%	42.0%	-9.0	+4.0
10	114	43.0%	45.0%	51.0%	39.0%	72.0%	-4.0	-12.0
All	465	32.0%	22.0%	27.0%	26.0%	54.0%	-6.0	-1.0

Science proficiency rates were below the state rate for each tested grade at Charlton Street Elementary, West Street Elementary, and Southbridge Middle/High School. Science proficiency rates differed in the elementary schools in the 5th grade.

Table 19: Southbridge Public Schools
Science Percent Proficient or Advanced by School and Grade 2014-2015

School	3	4	5	6	7	8	10	Total
EES: Eastford Road	1	-		-	-	-	-	
ES: Charlton Street			34%					34%
ES: West Street			21%					21%
Southbridge Middle/High						19%	39%	27%
District Total	-		25%	-		18%	39%	26%
State			51%			42%	72%	54%

Science proficiency rates between 2012 and 2015 decreased 12 percentage points at West Street and between 2013 and 2015 increased by 15 percentage points at Charlton Street Elementary and 2 percentage points at Southbridge Middle/High School.

Table 20: Southbridge Public Schools
Science Percent Proficient or Advanced by School and Subgroup 2012–2015

	2012	2013	2014	2015	3- or 4-Year Trend
EES: Eastford Road					
ES: Charlton Street		18%	30%	33%	+15
High Needs		17%	27%	28%	+11
Economically disadvantaged				26%	
ELL and former ELL		0%	9%		
Students with disabilities		0%	0%	20%	+20
ES: West Street	33%	17%	20%	21%	-12
High Needs	28%	11%	13%	13%	-15
Economically disadvantaged				15%	
ELL and former ELL	15%	0%	0%	0%	-15
Students with disabilities	4%	5%	0%	4%	0
Southbridge Middle/High		27%	30%	27%	+2
High Needs		22%	16%	19%	-3
Economically disadvantaged				21%	
ELL and former ELL		9%	2%	8%	-1
Students with disabilities		3%	6%	2%	-1

Leadership and Governance

Contextual Background

Leadership in the Southbridge Public Schools is currently in a state of disarray. Since 2010, the district has been unable to sustain consistent leadership at any level. Seven individuals have held the position of superintendent, and five individuals have held the position of assistant superintendent. The district has seen widespread turnover of principals as well. As of October 1, 2014, there were 4 schools in the district serving 2,228 students: 3 elementary schools and a middle/high school. Since 2010, there have been 5 transitions of principals at the high school level and 7 transitions at the elementary schools. There have also been six leadership changes at the middle school level, which this year is being directed by an associate principal after being led by the high school principal since the middle/high school opened in 2012.

The constant change in district and school leadership is symptomatic of the discord that has taken place on the school committee. The committee has consistently missed the opportunity to come to agreement about the critical issues facing the district in recent years. Among the more important and divisive issues has been the organization of the middle/high school, which many argue was intended to be two schools by the original building committee but was organized as one school in 2010. In the wake of a series of changes in leadership at the high-school level and the departure of a superintendent, a proposal to divide the school into two schools was recommended to the school committee last spring. This proposal, which was ultimately defeated, was met with great acrimony in the community and continues to separate the high school administration from district leaders in critical ways.

Of course, the most obvious source of discord has been the inability of the school committee to thoughtfully select a permanent superintendent. The trauma of a problematic superintendent search in 2010 is still fresh, and the recent selection of a superintendent without a bona fide search, followed by his subsequent departure shortly thereafter, has done nothing to alleviate the public perception that the school committee cannot execute this basic responsibility. This loss of faith in the school committee's ability to select a superintendent was expressed vividly by a vote of no confidence in the school committee taken by the Southbridge town council last spring. The town council noted the failure of the school committee to hire and retain qualified administrators, and municipal officials expressed frustration with the frequent turnover, experience, and qualifications of the district's administrative staff.

In July 2015 several new school committee members were elected in Southbridge. In addition to its inability to ensure stable district leadership and thus create the conditions for stable school leadership, the school committee has not demonstrated a full understanding of its role and responsibilities. As described below, it has recently engaged in questionable personnel practices regarding the appointment and compensation for a lower-level staff member. In addition, professional staff noted feeling pressured by committee members on some initiatives.

The most recent Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP) was developed with widespread input from both faculty and administration and the plan has identified important work that needs to be accomplished in order to steer the district toward turnaround. Interviews with both faculty and school leaders confirmed their support for this work and their willingness to commit to it. Whether the district has the ability to execute the plan remains questionable, however. Execution of the plan requires the establishment and maintenance of accountability measures that need direction and support from the central office. As the calendar approaches the first quarter mark, the district has replaced its top leader for the third time this school year. Progress in the district has been hampered by altered priorities and incomplete initiatives as numerous leadership changes have taken place since 2010, each with a destabilizing effect.

Challenge Findings and Areas for Growth

- 1. The school committee has not adhered to its appropriate roles and responsibilities.
 - **A.** The school committee has involved itself in the operations of the school district in order to advance personal interest.
 - 1. During the site visit the review team observed classrooms with markedly different climate and instructional practices at the elementary schools.
 - 2. When questioned about these observations, school leaders stated the district had created accelerated classes that were homogenously grouped.
 - 3. School leaders further stated that they were established several years ago by the superintendent as a result of pressure from parents, including school committee members, who wanted this opportunity for their own children.
 - 4. A review of the recording of the April 28, 2015, meeting of the Southbridge School Committee in which a school committee member argues in favor of the continuation of this practice from which her own child benefitted provided evidence that a culture that blurs the line between personal interest and member responsibility has persisted on the school committee.¹
 - 5. In an interview, administrators said that they often felt pressured by members of the school committee about personnel decisions in the district.
 - **B.** Interviewees told the review team that the school committee recently exerted its influence into the personnel matters of the district and misappropriated district funds.

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¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kElHgMgj948 at 1:00:07 or just before

- For example, interviewees said that the school committee influenced the superintendent's
 decision to continue the employment of an athletic coach in a role as School Store/Hall of
 Fame Associate after that practice and position were discontinued by school administration.
 - a. A review of the September 8, 2015, school committee minutes indicated that the committee voted to use facilities revolving funds in order to operate the school store at the high school level and to pay for the School Store/Hall of Fame Associate position.
 - b. When asked about the vote of the committee to use revolving funds in a manner that appeared to be in conflict with regulations about the use of revolving funds, district leaders stated that the funds were being used to fund the salary of an athletic coach who was being paid to run the school store. It was further stated that in previous years the individual was paid to run the school store by classification as an education assistant (that is, a paraprofessional to support students with disabilities), a position funded by the special education budget, at a pay rate and schedule that violated the collective bargaining agreement.
 - c. Administrators indicated that the most recent superintendent directed the director of pupil personnel services to halt this practice and to offer the coach an education assistant position to provide support to students in the classroom instead of continuing to run the school store.
- 2. Interviews and a document review indicated a reorganization of administrative roles that was promoted by the new school committee.
 - a. Currently the district has four elementary principals under contract and only three elementary schools.
 - b. The fourth elementary principal has been reassigned to the position of finance director. He did not have a contract and was not certified for this position at the time of the review, but received his School Business Administrator initial certification on November 16, 2015.
- **C.** The current school committee has overstepped boundaries of appropriate school governance.
 - When asked about the role of the school committee in selecting a superintendent, the
 current school committee chair stated that the process should be transparent; however, he
 stated that the appointment of the recently departed superintendent intentionally
 sidestepped accepted procedures because the school committee needed to take steps to
 open school efficiently.
 - 2. The committee's decision to hire an interim superintendent on July 22, 2015, is in conflict with a prior vote to appoint an acting superintendent with a term that ended in June of

2016 and to conduct a search for a permanent superintendent. This type of practice contributes to the instability in the district.

- **D.** While the school committee has involved itself in a number of activities that are beyond its purview, it has not paid sufficient attention to important responsibilities associated with district turnaround.
 - 1. The first and perhaps most important responsibility of the school committee is to appoint a superintendent. The school committee has not had stable leadership at the superintendent's level since 2010.
 - 2. A second vital responsibility of the school committee is to advocate effectively for the achievement of all students.
 - a. While town support for the schools has consistently exceeded required net school spending (NSS), the percentage of school spending over the NSS requirement has declined from 14.3 percent in fiscal year 2008 to 5.1 percent in fiscal year 2015.
 - b. The town's share of the school budget declined between fiscal year 2015 and fiscal year 2016.
 - 3. The letter of no confidence sent from the town council to the school committee in May 2015 suggests that the school committee has not been able to meet its responsibilities adequately (see the second Financial and Asset Management Challenge finding below).
- **E.** Stakeholders with various roles and perspectives agreed that appropriate district governance is missing in Southbridge.
 - When asked to explain, in their view, the reason for the low rate of superintendent retention, parents agreed that hiring is often based more on political influence than merit.
 One parent said that in the past and present, people get hired on who they know "rather than on their credentials."
 - 2. Similarly, administrators stated that the most recent search committee was stacked with "good old boys" and expressed doubt that future searches would be thorough and open. One leader went on to say, "It's a Level 4 district because of leadership and we haven't seen progress on that indicator." A member of the teacher's association described several flaws in the latest aborted superintendent search.

Impact: Among other responsibilities, the school committee's role is to work cooperatively with district and school leaders to establish, implement, and evaluate policies and procedures that promote the continuous improvement of instructional practice and the high achievement of all students. In stepping

²https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-90tDMLcAM

outside of this role, the Southbridge school committee has missed valuable opportunities to support district turnaround.

- 2. The Southbridge School Committee has not taken adequate and appropriate actions to attract, to develop, and to retain an effective leadership team.
 - **A.** The district has had low retention of leaders at all levels of administration, with 35 transitions involving 43 individuals, in recent years.

Table 21: Leadership Turnover School Years 2011-2016

Leadership Role	Number of Transitions	Number of Individuals ³
Superintendent	7	7
Assistant Superintendent/	5	5
Director of Teaching and Learning		
Business Manager/Finance Director	4	5
Director of Pupil Personnel Services	1	2
High School Principal	5	7
Middle School Principal/Associate Principal	6	7
West Street School Principal	3	4
Charlton Street School Principal	2	3
Eastford Street School Principal	2	3
Total	35	43

Source: Data from information provided by district leadership. See Appendix D.

- 1. Seven individuals have held the position of superintendent since school year 2011.4
- 2. There have been five assistant superintendents since school year 2011.
- 3. The only relative stability in the central office has been in the role of director of pupil personnel services, which has turned over only once since school year 2011.
- 4. There has also been frequent change of principals during this time period, and the current group of school leaders is new to the role. Two of the four principals are in their first year and the other two are entering their second year as principal.

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⁴ This indicator includes the roles of superintendent, acting superintendent, and interim superintendent.

- 5. Ten individuals have held the business manager/finance director position since 2004.
- **B.** The district has not chosen a superintendent as a result of a formal search since 2010.
 - 1. The last formal search for a superintendent in 2010 was marked by great controversy and resulted in a leader who was ultimately dismissed by the school committee.⁵
 - 2. Since 2010 the school committee has put in place a number of interim and acting superintendents without the benefit of a formal search.
- **C.** As the school committee was once again beginning to discuss a search process this past spring, a candidate expressed a desire to serve as the district's superintendent, a solicitation that destabilized the school committee and the district before annual elections.
 - 1. On May 12, 2015, the school committee voted to extend the contract of the acting superintendent until June 30, 2016, by a 4-3 margin. The subsequent resignation of a member of the school committee created a split committee that was unable to reach a contract agreement with the acting superintendent.
 - After the election, a new school committee put aside the vote of May 12, 2015, and appointed the aforementioned candidate as an interim superintendent on July 22, 2015, without conducting a formal search and in a manner that multiple stakeholders suggested was not transparent.
 - 3. On September 22, 2015, the school committee suspended its search for a superintendent and appointed the interim to a permanent position.
 - 4. After only three weeks in the permanent role, the superintendent resigned on October 15, 2015, once again destabilizing the district.
- **D.** The school committee has addressed this current vacancy in a manner similar to the one detailed above.
 - 1. An external candidate offering to serve as interim superintendent approached the school committee.
 - 2. The school committee scheduled a special meeting on October 27, 2015, to interview this candidate. The committee voted to appoint this candidate on November 3, 2015.
- **E.** Stakeholders within the school community agreed that the constant change in leadership has been detrimental to district improvement.

⁵ May 12, 2015 School Committee, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-90tDMLcAM

- 1. School leaders told the team that there has been little consistent practice in the district, the schools have historically functioned as "silos," and that teachers have taken a "this, too, shall pass" attitude when asked to improve practice by a district or school leader.
- 2. While school leaders agreed that the current Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP) is a source of unity, they are concerned that the most recent change in leadership at the top will once again threaten the nascent progress that has been made to this point.
- 3. Teachers at all levels expressed concern about the negative effects of leadership instability in their schools, stating that it has affected the morale of teachers and students, a sentiment that was echoed by parents in their focus group. Teachers also raised the point that as each leader has entered the district, progress has been thwarted because of changes in initiatives and priorities.
- **F.** Town officials also pointed to the negative effects of the instability in leadership.
 - 1. Town officials reported that the community has lost faith in the school committee as a result of its inability to stabilize leadership in the district.
 - a. While initially supportive of the most recent superintendent, town officials stated that the absence of transparent searches, coupled with the sudden resignation of the most recent superintendent, have contributed to erosion of public confidence in the district.
 - 2. Town officials also expressed concern about the instability in the business office.
 - a. Town officials said that frequent change has contributed to inconsistent payroll procedures and some minor departures from purchasing protocols.

Impact: The instability in leadership in Southbridge has led to the absence or fragility of a number of key systems and practices that are necessary to support district turnaround and create the conditions for success. Inconsistent leadership is at the root of major gaps in curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the district and has contributed most directly to the persistently low and declining level of achievement that mark the district. Student achievement also relies heavily on systems of student support that provide access to learning for all students. The establishment and coordination of such a system of support requires stable leadership in order to establish community awareness of needs and to ultimately secure the required resources and adequate staffing for programs that provide both wraparound and direct services to high need students.

Recommendation

- 1. The school committee should focus its attention on its legally mandated responsibilities and conduct all of its work in a transparent manner. The committee's priority should be restoring stability to the district and its leadership.
 - **A.** All school committee members should participate in training that thoroughly reviews important topics such as: school committee roles and responsibilities; standards and practices for the evaluation of the superintendent; school finance; the open meeting law; the public records law; and the conflict of interest law.
 - 1. Such training is required by law for new members of the school committee by MGL Chapter 71, Section 36A. However, considering the state of school governance in Southbridge, such training would be of value to the full committee.
 - **B.** The school committee should review existing policies and by-laws to ensure that adherence to legally established roles and responsibilities are fully embedded in these important local documents.
 - **C.** The school committee should formally adopt procedures to investigate and sanction violations of policies or by-laws that define the roles and responsibilities of the school committee.
 - **D.** The school committee should establish a systematic, inclusive and open search process to select a permanent superintendent.
 - 1. If resources allow, the school committee should contract with an experienced consulting firm specializing in this area to coordinate the search.
 - 2. The school committee should ensure that the superintendent search committee is inclusive of all interests and stakeholders in the Southbridge school community.
 - 3. The school committee should establish clear norms for the search committee. It should work with the consultant to develop a transparent and inclusive process that guides both the work of the search committee and the decision-making process of the school committee. Both should be thoughtfully developed and made public.
 - 4. Once a permanent superintendent is in place, his/her priorities should include building a stable, highly skilled district leadership team.

Recommended resources:

- Advisory on School Governance (http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/advisory/cm1115gov.html)
 explains state law as it applies to particular functions of school governance, and provides recommendations on the important role that each partner in this endeavor plays in advancing collaboration and school improvement.
- The District Governance Project (http://www.masc.org/field-services/district-governance-project), provided by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, is designed to focus on continuous improvement and to build understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the school committee and the superintendent.

Benefits: To ensure effective district governance, understanding of and adherence to the role and responsibilities of the school committee is of fundamental importance. The most important of these responsibilities is the selection, supervision and evaluation of a superintendent. In executing this responsibility properly, the school committee will begin to stabilize the district. The stability of leadership should allow the school committee and the superintendent to begin to establish the collaborative relationship between the superintendent and school committee that is characteristic of highly functioning districts. This collaboration will help the district to begin to address and resolve the many important challenges that have hindered its ability to meet the needs of all Southbridge students.

Curriculum and Instruction

Contextual Background

While the elementary level is making progress in documenting its curriculum, the middle- and high-school levels have completed little or no work in this regard.

At the elementary level, in grades 1-5 the district adopted (in 2014-2015) a unified literacy and language program, *Reach for Reading* (National Geographic), and has made progress in developing standards-based units to support the program. Although science content is embedded in the literacy program, the elementary level still needs to address the adaptation of the NGSS (Next Generation Science Standards) in its curriculum. The district has been using a unified math program, *My Math* (McGraw-Hill), since 2013-2014 and has developed standards-based units to support math instruction at the elementary level.

Each elementary school has Instructional Resource Specialists (IRSs) for both ELA and math to provide ongoing curriculum and instructional support and embedded PD to teachers. IRSs also serve on the district's Instructional Leadership Team and help drive the Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP). Elementary teachers have sufficient common planning time (CPT) to collaborate on curriculum and lessons. This year, the district scheduled monthly grade-level "bridge meetings" across elementary schools for collaboration and alignment of curricular and instructional practices.

At the middle/high school, teachers are struggling to document the curriculum. In grades 6-8, ELA units are underway, and scope and sequence documents in science and math have been completed. At the high-school level, alignment to the 2011 state frameworks is an issue. The pacing of ELA units is being realigned and existing units are being revised. In math, only Algebra I is aligned and has scope and sequence documents; no other courses are aligned or have scope and sequence documents. Science is not aligned and there are no scope and sequence documents. In October 2015, the district enlisted help from ESE's District and School Assistance Center (DSAC-Central Region) to support curriculum work in ELA, science, and math in grades 6-12.

At the middle/high school, time, expertise and personnel to support meaningful curriculum work are scarce. While middle-school teachers have CPT each week in cross-subject teams, high school teachers have no real CPT. Teachers in grades 6-12 work on curriculum during one-hour department meetings each month. The district has not developed the role and responsibilities of department heads to provide sufficient support to teachers. The middle- and high-school levels each have only one IRS to cover all content areas, focusing on instruction. With a low teacher retention rate, 6 departments do not have the expertise and continuity required to complete curriculum work. Further, the district provided limited training to prepare teachers to develop curriculum. Middle- and high-school teachers had no

⁶ According to ESE data, the 2014 teacher retention rate in Southbridge was 73.2 percent, compared with the state rate of 87.6 percent.

opportunities to work on curriculum during the summer of 2015. In addition, there are only four half-days of professional development left this year to address curriculum.

In regard to instruction, teachers at all levels are required to submit weekly lesson plans electronically in which they address the district's instructional expectations: objectives, curriculum content, instruction, assessments, differentiation and standards. Administrators and IRSs review and provide feedback on lesson plans. While the district's strategic objective in the 2015-2016 AIP calls for all students to experience rigorous, effective, data-driven instruction, classroom observations suggest that students at the elementary level are more likely to experience lessons reflecting rigor and high expectations than those at other levels.

Challenge Findings and Areas for Growth

Curriculum

- While the elementary level has established structures to support teacher collaboration and
 provide leadership at the classroom and school levels to support curriculum development,
 curriculum units do not consistently reflect the principles of Understanding by Design. At the
 middle/high school, resources, time, professional development, and expertise are inadequate to
 align and document curriculum.
 - **A**. At the elementary level, the district has made progress documenting the ELA and math curriculum for grades 1-5. Instructional Resource Specialists (IRSs), both in ELA and math, have provided curriculum leadership and help to teachers in developing and documenting the curriculum. In addition, structured time for teachers to collaborate supports the process.
 - Interviews and a review of ELA and math units on Rubicon Atlas (the district's online platform) indicated that in grades 1-5 the district is making progress in documenting the ELA and math curriculum and ensuring alignment to the 2011 frameworks. All units reviewed referenced the 2011 state frameworks.
 - a. At the time of the review, teachers reported that the ELA curriculum PreK-K and in grade 5 were in progress. This was confirmed by the team's review of documents on Rubicon Atlas. Grade 5 ELA units indicated a range in completeness and quality of units. Interviewees said that grade 5 teachers were new educators and had not had sufficient time to collaborate on the task. Although interviewees reported that the grade 1 ELA curriculum was complete, documents were not available on Rubicon Atlas to confirm this.
 - b. ELA units reviewed by the team on the district's online platform were designed using a template modeled on the Understanding by Design framework. The standards-based units included extensive resources to support the district's literacy program (*Reach for Reading*, adopted in 2014-2015). School leaders reported that the program was selected

⁷ For complete documentation of the status of the elementary curriculum, see Appendix E.

because it had SEI strategies and also addressed social studies and science content through literacy. In addition, science is taught during a 45 minute designated block every other day.

- A review of the ELA units confirmed that science and social studies topics are embedded in the units. School leaders told the review team that science will require its own mapping to address the Next Generation Science Standards.
- ii. School leaders also reported that they see the need to implement a structured writing program, but now use the writing program in *Reach for Reading*.
- **B.** Although units at the elementary level follow the UbD template, the team's review of individual units indicated that they do not consistently reflect Understanding by Design. For example, assessments are being added after Stage 3, instead of at Stage 2, and while many units have a range of activities, they have not necessarily been designed to help students achieve the desired understanding.
- **C.** ELA curriculum for the middle school level grades (6-8) and the high school level grades (9-12) is under development. At the time of the review, interviewees said that documentation was incomplete.
 - 1. The 2015-2016 Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP) identified curriculum development as its first strategic goal. Teachers noted in interviews that curriculum completion was this year's professional practice goal.
 - 2. Interviewees reported that middle school ELA teachers were making progress on curriculum units, but had not added assessments. These documents were not available for the team to review and these assertions could not be verified by the review team.
 - a. Middle school teachers use CPT by department, once in a seven-day cycle, to work on curriculum. They also attend a monthly hour-long department meeting after school led by the department head to work on curriculum.
 - b. The team was told that half of the middle school teachers are new to the district. Interviewees told the team that curriculum-writing is ineffective with so many inexperienced teachers.
 - c. There is only one IRS at the middle school level for all content areas to provide instructional support. For example, the IRS gives teachers informal oral feedback on lesson plans.
 - 3. There is no structured common planning time dedicated for high school teachers in the same subject to collaborate on curriculum development. Interviewees told the team that the only time teachers have to work together on curriculum is at one-hour monthly department meetings and on PD days.

- 4. There is only one Instructional Resource Specialist (IRS) at the high school level to cover all content areas. In addition to reviewing lesson plans, being in charge of MCAS remediation, and working with staff on improvement plans and AIP goals, the IRS also provides PD for staff on release days.
- **D.** Limited documentation of the middle /high school curriculum prevents teachers from addressing the new literacy anchor standards in a systematic way.
 - 1. Interviewees reported that at the middle and high school levels, there is a schoolwide focus on reading comprehension across all disciplines. They told the team that teachers are also focusing on annotation, close reading, and turn and talk as instructional strategies.
 - 2. When the team asked department heads about literacy standards, they replied that they know literacy is part of everything they do, but, as one department head said, they first have to deal with the "iceberg in front of us," meaning the absence of curriculum.
- **E.** The role of department head is not defined to maximize support of curriculum development and instruction, in order to ensure that curriculum is implemented with fidelity.
 - 1. The team was told that there are department heads for core content areas in grades 6 through 12 (ELA, math, science, and social studies). Department heads describe themselves as "figureheads." They teach a full load and have no time to visit classes to determine whether curriculum is being implemented with fidelity or to provide instructional feedback at either the middle or high school levels. Nor do they attend CPT meetings at the middle school level.
 - 2. While department heads are part of the district's Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) and attend ILT meetings twice a month, school leaders and teachers describe their role as liaisons to the ILT (that is, they communicate messages from ILT meetings to department staff) and said that they inventory equipment.
 - a. Interviewees reported that the ILT receives monthly PD from Focused Schools. Instructional goals are developed at those meetings and then are shared with staff. For example, the ILT selected annotation, close reading, and turn and talk as strategies for staff to focus on.
- **F.** Professional development opportunities for middle and high school teachers to gain the skills and expertise in curriculum development have been limited (see Professional Development finding below).
- **G.** Secondary teachers have not acquired the expertise to develop and use multiple forms of assessment to monitor student progress and measure achievement. They described having limited skills in using the backward design framework for Understanding by Design (UbD), which is needed to develop curriculum and assessments for the district's new lesson plan template. They also said that they have not been well prepared to analyze assessment data.

- 1. School leaders told the team that summer 2015 PD time for teachers in high-school grades to work on curriculum was cancelled as a result of "transitions" in the district.
- 2. The district's recent full day of PD (October 9, 2015) was devoted to curriculum development. Interviewees said that time for curriculum development is scheduled for the four remaining half days of PD.
- **H.** Interviewees noted that the constant turnover of the teaching staff and the "revolving door of the leadership" with the resulting absence of institutional memory and knowledge of prior initiatives have had a negative impact on curriculum and assessment initiatives for development and revision. They told the review team that the whole science department has turned over this year and the departing staff took the entire curriculum with them.

Impact: Although the district's 2015-2016 AIP identified curriculum development as its first strategic goal, the middle- and high-school levels are struggling mightily to develop curriculum in a timely way. Scarce time, personnel, and expertise at these levels have both hampered and stalled any momentum to systematically develop the needed curriculum documents. Without accomplishing this task, the district cannot ensure that the taught curriculum in core subjects K-12 is fully aligned to the 2011 Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Without a rich and thoughtfully planned standards-based curriculum, the district cannot guarantee that students participate in lessons that prepare them for success in their public school careers, post-secondary education, or careers and the workplace.

Instruction

The team observed 68 classes throughout the district: 22 at the middle/high school and 46 at the 3 elementary schools. The team observed 36 ELA classes, 25 mathematics classes, and 7 classes in other subject areas. Among the classes observed were 14 special education classes and 4 ELL classes. 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 observation data is presented in Appendix C.

- 2. In contrast to observations at the elementary level, in observed lessons at the middle/high school there was a low incidence of instructional practices characterized by rigor and well-structured lessons.
 - **A.** While teachers at the middle/high school demonstrated knowledge of subject matter, the observed lessons did not consistently provide and reinforce clear learning objectives to enable students to make meaning of the learning experience.
 - 1. In only 50 percent of observed lessons in the middle grades (25 percent, strong evidence; 25 percent, moderate evidence) the teacher provided and referred to clear learning objectives.
 - a. In half of the lessons observed, objectives were either posted, but not referred to by the teacher, or were not present. Observers noted that in many observed lessons, teachers listed activities, topics or agenda items rather than a learning objective linked to state

- standards and expressed in student friendly terms. For example, in an ELA class, the objective read: "Use each other to scale vocabulary and to expand your academic knowledge."
- 2. In 65 percent of observed lessons in high-school grades (36 percent, strong evidence; 29 percent, moderate evidence) objectives were posted and reinforced during the lesson.
 - a. In a substantial number of observed lessons at the high-school level, objectives either were unclear or were not referred to during the lesson or were not present. For example, in a grade 10 ELA class, the objective was process oriented, "To look at open response questions."
- 3. School leaders and teachers reported that teachers were expected to post daily lesson objectives. They referenced the district's acronym, OCIADS, (derived from the Southbridge Standard): Objectives, Curriculum, Instruction, Assessments, Differentiation and Standards as the district's instructional expectations for teachers to follow in planning daily lessons.
 - a. The Southbridge Standard outlines the district's teaching and learning goals: student engagement in learning; differentiated instruction; focus areas of best instructional practices, determined in each school; rigorous instruction; and the use of formative assessments.
 - b. At the time of review, school leaders at the secondary level told the team that learning walks with the assistant superintendent had just been scheduled.
- 4. The middle- and high-school levels have only one IRS each to cover all content areas, which limits instructional support and coaching.
- **B.** While a Strategic Objective in the district's 2015-16 AIP identifies that "all students experience rigorous, effective, data-driven instruction," the team found low evidence of rigor and high expectations in observed lessons at the middle/ high school.
 - 1. In middle-school grades, only 25 percent of observed lessons reflected rigor and high expectations (25 percent, strong evidence; 0 percent, moderate evidence).
 - a. In most lessons (75 percent) in the middle grades, the team found limited or low evidence of teachers implementing lessons that reflected rigor and high expectations. For example, in these classes, students often answered questions with one word or shouted out answers and teachers' voices dominated lessons. In a grade 8 lesson, the teacher wrote on the board while students copied at their seats. When there was an opportunity for group work, materials were missing and students sat idly waiting.
 - 2. The team found that just 43 percent of observed lessons at the high-school level reflected rigor and high expectations (0 percent, strong evidence; 43 percent, moderate evidence).

- a. In most observed lessons in high-school grades, there was limited or low evidence of academic rigor. The team characterized these classes as teacher dominated with low academic and behavioral expectations set for students. For example, students answered questions, often inaudibly, with one or two words; lessons were not taught bell- to-bell; and students were given time to do homework in class. In a grade 10 ELA lesson, the teacher told the students, "Just answer the questions; grammar and punctuation doesn't [sic] matter."
- b. When high-school students were asked about academic expectations, students reported that they did not fully understand what high academic expectations meant, until they took standardized tests and found out that they were not prepared. Students reported that while AP classes were "a little more challenging," they did not meet high standards. Students characterized honors classes as having more work, but not faster paced. Students agreed that they are not pushed academically to the level they should be.
 - i. When the team asked students what they would like to see changed in the school, they replied, "Raise academic standards."
- c. When students were asked about rigor in subjects, they spoke about the negative impact that teacher turnover has had upon their learning. For example, one student told the team that there were 5 different math teachers in a grade 9 algebra class. Students also described the extended presence of substitute teachers in general.
- **C.** Teachers' use of appropriate instructional strategies well matched to the learning objectives was limited at the middle/high school.
 - Instructional strategies were matched to the learning objective(s) in only 25 percent of
 observed lessons at the middle level (25 percent, strong evidence; 0 percent, moderate
 evidence). The team noted that most observed lessons in the middle-school grades were
 insufficiently or minimally linked to learning objectives.
 - a. In a substantial number of observed lessons at this level, the dominant teaching strategy was teacher centered, whole-class instruction using questions and answers.
 - b. Examples of more effective and engaging strategies noted by the review team were limited to "Do Nows" at the start of lessons, the use of multi-modalities in one ELD class, and a teacher modeling two-column notes in a grade 7 in ELA lesson.
 - 2. In observed lessons in high-school grades, instructional strategies were matched to the learning objective(s) in only 28 percent of classes (7 percent, strong evidence; 21 percent, moderate evidence).
 - a. The team noted that in most lessons observed at this level, the dominant teaching strategy was also teacher-directed, whole-class instruction centered on questions and answers. However, the reverse was also seen during the observation of a grade 11

math lesson in which the teacher did not ask the students a single question during the entire observation.

- Interviewees reported that district staffing changes have had a negative impact on setting
 consistent instructional expectations for teachers and there is limited professional
 development (PD) time for teachers to develop teaching skills.
- 4. The team was told that nearly half of the teaching staff at the middle school level was new. Teachers and school leaders reported that with PD time now used only for curriculum work, there has been little attention paid to instructional strategies.

Impact: When objectives are not written to help students make meaning of what they are learning and why, learning outcomes are compromised. In a district with a high incidence of English language learners, this fundamental teaching strategy is particularly critical along with building vocabulary, reading, writing and oral literacy skills. Without linking appropriate teaching strategies to learning objectives, teachers are not giving students what they need to access learning. When lessons are not sufficiently rigorous and do not have high expectations for learning, students are not provided with the tools they need to achieve at higher levels and to succeed in college and careers.

- 3. In contrast to the elementary level, in observed classes at the middle/high school there was a low incidence of students taking responsibility for their learning and being purposefully engaged in tasks that promote critical thinking.
 - A. Student engagement was limited.
 - In the middle grades, student engagement in content and lesson objectives was observed in just 50 percent of observed lessons (25 percent, strong evidence; 25 percent, moderate evidence).
 - 2. In 64 percent of observed lessons in high-school grades (7 percent, strong evidence; 57 percent, moderate evidence), most students did not demonstrate high levels of active engagement.
 - 3. Observers noted that most students were not actively engaged in the lesson with teachers doing the bulk of the talking or demonstrating. For example, in a grade 7 math class, the teacher did not "cold call" on students. The teacher wrote definitions on the Smartboard and students copied them. The class had no sense of urgency. Repeated scans of the class showed students yawning and not paying attention.
 - a. In a grade 9 math lesson, students sat quietly while the teacher demonstrated how to do the problem; in grade 10 ELA class, team members noted that no student engagement was evident throughout the entire observation.
 - **B.** In most observed lessons, teachers did not facilitate tasks for students that required critical or analytical thinking.

- 1. In just 38 percent of observed lessons at the middle-school level, students were engaged in tasks that required critical thinking skills (0 percent, strong evidence; 38 percent, moderate evidence).
- 2. In only 28 percent of observed lessons at the high-school level, teachers facilitated tasks to encourage students to develop critical thinking observed (7 percent, strong evidence; 21 percent, moderate evidence).
 - a. The review team noted that in most lessons at the middle- and high-school levels, teachers did not set expectations for students to answer questions in complete sentences; nor were students encouraged or required to fully explain their answers. Teachers did not challenge students to explain "why?" or "why not?" in many lessons. In most observed lessons, the teacher's voice was dominant and students were not given opportunities to demonstrate or use critical thinking skills.
- **C.** Opportunities for students to assume responsibility for their own learning individually, in pairs and in groups were limited.
 - 1. In only 38 percent of observed lessons in the middle grades, students assumed responsibility for their learning individually, in pairs and in groups (25 percent, strong evidence; 13 percent, moderate evidence).
 - a. With most lessons observed in the middle grades being teacher centered, nearly two-thirds of students did not have opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning. For example, observers noted that although students often sat in small groups, they did not do any group or collaborative work.
 - 2. In observed lessons in the high-school grades, teachers facilitated students to assume responsibility for their learning in just 36 percent of lessons observed (29 percent, strong evidence; 7 percent, moderate evidence). Again, two out of three students in observed lessons took no individual or group responsibility for learning.
 - a. Teacher talk dominated lessons at the high-school level, limiting students' opportunities to control their learning activities.
 - b. The team noted two examples of students assuming responsibility for learning. In a history lesson, students were involved in multiple activities with the teacher acting as a facilitator. In a science lab, to simulate laboratory conditions, small groups of students collaborated on a measuring assignment using iPads.

Impact: When students are not given the opportunity to be active, fully engaged participants in lessons, they are not challenged to take primary responsibility to do the thinking, exploring, and learning. Without a fully articulated curriculum that includes a rich repertoire of strategies and activities designed to promote critical thinking and active student engagement, students have limited opportunities to

demonstrate and apply what they know, can do and understand. Without consistent opportunities for all students to be responsible for their learning individually, in pairs or in groups, students are not being prepared with important skills needed to succeed in post-secondary education or in the workplace environment.

- 4. Districtwide in observed lessons, classroom instruction was not appropriately differentiated to account for differences in the learning needs of all students. Classroom climate characterized by respectful behaviors, routines, tone, and discourse has not been well established across all schools.
 - **A.** Teachers implemented lessons that were appropriately differentiated so that lesson content was accessible for all learners in just 10 percent of observed lessons overall.
 - 1. Teachers implemented lessons with appropriate differentiation in only 43 percent of observed elementary lessons (13 percent, strong evidence; 30 percent, moderate evidence).
 - a. While the team noted examples of differentiation at the elementary level, the
 majority of lessons observed had minimal or low evidence of differentiation.
 Observers noted that lessons were often "once size fits all." For example, in a grade
 3 ELA accelerated class, all students were doing the same assignment with no
 evidence of the teacher differentiating the product, process, or content throughout
 the entire observation.
 - b. The team noted examples of differentiation in a grade 3 ELA lesson in which the teacher provided instruction to two reading groups, breaking down the tasks for lower-level readers.
 - 2. In observed lessons at the middle-school level, observers noted that teachers implemented lessons with appropriate differentiation in just 25 percent of lessons (0 percent, strong evidence; 25 percent, moderate evidence).
 - 3. In observed lessons at the high-school level, teachers implemented lessons with appropriate differentiation in only 7 percent of lessons (7 percent, strong evidence; 0 percent, moderate evidence).
 - a. The review team noted that in most lessons at the middle- and high-school levels, including co-teaching models, whole-class instruction dominated with no evidence of differentiation. For example, in a grade 7 math class, students were all copying notes while the co-teacher walked around the room.
 - b. In addition, a student's learning disability was not addressed during a lesson observed by the team. When a review team member asked the student about this practice, he said that he often met with the teacher after class for help.

- **B.** Appropriate resources aligned to students' diverse learning needs varied across levels.
 - 1. In 65 percent of observed lessons at the elementary level, appropriate resources were available and used effectively to meet needs of most students (24 percent, strong evidence; 41 percent, moderate evidence).
 - a. Observers noted that a majority of elementary classrooms contained multiple resources to meet diverse learning needs, such as math manipulatives, blocks, white boards, document cameras, computers, sentence starters, graphic organizers, classroom libraries, posters including a Bloom's Taxonomy Ladder poster, and various visuals. However, a significant number of observed classrooms could not be described as literacy rich or containing plentiful resources for English language learners, such as word walls for ELA and math.
 - 2. In just 25 percent of lessons observed in the middle-school grades, appropriate resources were available to meet the needs of most students (0 percent, strong evidence; 25 percent, moderate evidence). A substantial number of observed lessons had limited or no resources aligned to students' diverse learning needs.
 - a. Observers noted that classrooms at the middle-school level were not literacy rich. For example, the team did not see often content vocabulary posted or emphasized in lessons. While the team observed document cameras in use, they were used as overhead projectors to project notes or information, rather than as interactive tools. For example, in a math lesson, students copied vocabulary words projected on the whiteboard in notebooks without opportunities to use or apply the words.
 - b. One exception noted by the team took place in a grade 7 ELA lesson where students had graphic organizers for two-column notes, which were modeled by the teacher.
 - 3. The team noted that in 28 percent of observed lessons at the high-school level there were appropriate resources to meet the needs of diverse learners (7 percent, strong evidence; 21 percent, moderate evidence).
 - a. Most of the lessons at the high-school level had limited or no resources aligned to students' diverse learning needs and linked to content taught. For example, Smartboards were underused and students did not have access to them. Teachers used them as a high tech whiteboards. The team also observed paraprofessionals underused. For example, rather than scaffolding a grade 9 lesson content task, the paraprofessionals moved from group to group to work with students on the same task.
 - b. Exceptions noted by the team included a history lesson where students used laptops to scribe for group work and a grade 11 science class in which students used IPads for a collaborative lab assignment in small groups.

- **C.** The presence of a positive learning environment characterized by respectful behaviors, routines, tone and discourse varied across school levels.
 - 1. In observed elementary lessons, 89 percent of lessons reflected a classroom climate characterized by respectful behavior, routines, tone and discourse (72 percent, strong evidence; 17 percent, moderate evidence).
 - a. The review team noted that most elementary teachers used positive corrections and emphasized positive actions. The review team noted positive actions posters, which read, "To learn how to think, act and feel positive."
 - b. However, in some lessons observed, the team found limited evidence of a positive learning environment.
 - c. The review team noted a meaningful difference in students' behavior and engagement in "accelerated classes" as compared with non-accelerated classes. In non-accelerated classes, for example, students had few role models who could demonstrate appropriate behavior, tone, and discourse. Observers noted that in these classes teachers had not firmly established rituals, routines, and the use of positive responses to deal with students who spoke out, were off task, or not engaged in the lesson.
 - i. For example, in a grade 3 ELA lesson, the teacher repeatedly interrupted learning by addressing the entire class rather than approaching disruptive students individually. In a grade 5 ELA lesson, the teacher allowed five students to sit in the back of room without engaging in the lesson and sometimes shouting.
 - 2. In only 50 percent of lessons observed at the middle-school level, teachers established rituals, routines and appropriate responses to maintain a positive learning environment (0 percent, strong evidence; 50 percent, moderate evidence).
 - a. For example, the team noted that in teacher-dominated lessons, students seemed to lose interest in instruction more frequently and became disruptive or put their heads down. In a grade 8 math class, the teacher repeatedly asked a student to "sit up" or to "wake up," rather than including the student in the lesson. The teacher did not approach the student; instead, the teacher remained at the front of the room and called out the student's name.
 - 3. Only 58 percent of lessons observed at the high-school level reflected a positive learning environment (29 percent, strong evidence; 29 percent, moderate evidence).
 - a. Students said that behavior in general has improved during the current school year. Rules are enforced more consistently and there is better order in the hallways.

⁸ Students are grouped beginning in grade 3 according to assessment results, student achievement data and teacher recommendations; students stay in the ability grouping for all of their classes including specials.

- According to students, classroom behavior is a problem because of inconsistent behavioral expectations at the classroom level.
- b. The review team characterized many lessons as having an academic environment where students were off-task, noisy, disorderly, disrespectful, and paying little attention to the teacher. In these classes teachers demonstrated ineffective classroom management strategies. While there were ongoing behavioral problems, no personal expectations for behavior were posted or reinforced. Teachers were often ineffective at restoring order. For example, in a grade 10 ELA class, observers recorded students shouting out answers while the teacher shouted back.
- **D**. Teachers' use of appropriate formative assessments to check students' understanding, to make adjustments to instruction, and to provide feedback to students varied among levels.
 - 1. In 69 percent of observed elementary lessons, teachers checked for student understanding and provided feedback to students (30 percent, strong evidence; 39 percent, moderate evidence).
 - a. The review team observed the following examples of formative assessments in elementary classes: exit tickets, whiteboards in math so that teachers could immediately check students' work, monitoring students group work, and routines as hands-up, hands-down; or thumbs up, thumbs down to get immediate feedback. Pulse clickers were used in a grade 5 math class, enabling the teachers to immediately assess the aggregate of student answers.
 - 2. In 50 percent of observed lessons at the middle-school level, teachers conducted appropriate formative assessments to check for understanding and provide feedback to students (0 percent, strong evidence; 50 percent moderate evidence).
 - a. While the team noted some examples of practices such as thumbs up, thumbs down, or the use of whiteboard in math classes, formative practices were not used or were ineffective in half of the classes observed. For example, in a grade 8 math class, the teacher, who was at the front of the room for the lesson, did not walk around the room to check the whiteboards as students worked. Some students drew pictures on their whiteboards rather than doing math problems.
 - 3. In just 28 percent of observed lessons at the high-school level, teachers checked for student understanding and provided feedback to students (14 percent, strong evidence; 14 percent, moderate evidence).
 - a. Throughout the observed lessons at both the middle- and high-school levels, the team noted that teachers did not require students to explain their answers. This limited assessment of true understanding and the chance to adjust instruction. At both levels, teachers did not use "cold calling" to check student understanding at random.

b. Examples of checking for understanding at the high-school level were limited to teachers checking students' work at their desks. In one lesson, teacher used thumbs up, thumbs down; in a grade 11 science lesson, students filled out an "exit ticket" at the end.

Impact: When learning is not structured so that it is accessible and addresses differences in the learning needs of all students, learning outcomes are compromised. The effective use of formative assessments is inextricably linked to differentiation. Without formative assessments, learning cannot be differentiated and students do not receive personalized feedback to improve their understanding and performance. When the district cannot ensure that teachers in all schools have established a positive learning environment characterized by respectful behaviors, routines, tone, and discourse, it is not providing students with an essential condition for learning.

Recommendations

Curriculum

- The district should take steps to complete K-12 curriculum in all subjects. It should ensure that curriculum materials are high quality, cohesive, aligned to appropriate standards, and aligned vertically between contiguous grades and horizontally across grades and schools.
 - **A.** The district should ensure that curriculum documents K-12 contain components such as curriculum maps, sequenced units guided by state standards (including literacy standards), learning objectives, instructional strategies for all learners, WIDA standards, resources, formative and summative assessments, and authentic performance tasks. Urgent attention should be paid to completing curriculum for grades 6-12.
 - 1. The district should provide the necessary support and accountability to ensure that grades 6-12 curriculum is completed as soon as possible and that it meets high quality standards.
 - 2. The district should strengthen its newly formed collaboration with the District and School Assistance Center (DSAC) to support all curriculum development.
 - a. The district should enlist the DSAC or other experts to review all curriculum units K 5 to ensure that they are complete, high quality, and aligned to the 2011 state
 frameworks.
 - b. The district should enlist DSAC's assistance in identifying regional opportunities for representatives from all grade levels in multiple districts to unpack the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and develop science curriculum aligned to the Massachusetts' adaptation of the NGSS.

- 3. The district should ensure that the literacy anchor standards are incorporated into standards and units so that all teachers have the resources and strategies to teach multiple forms of literacy visual, oral, reading, and writing.
- **B.** The district should provide sufficient curriculum leadership and support to core content teachers at the middle/high school to ensure the consistent development, alignment, and effective delivery of the curriculum.
 - 1. The district should provide content expertise to teachers in core content subjects by identifying content specialists in ELA, math, science and social studies and defining their role in providing mid-level curriculum leadership.
 - 2. This role should include leading frequent conversations about curriculum, instruction, and assessment and ensuring that teachers are implementing the curriculum with fidelity.
- **C.** The district should also provide teachers at all schools with high-quality and sustained professional development to build their capacity to understand and use backward design and the Understanding by Design framework that has informed the district's new lesson plan template. Without this knowledge, it will be difficult to create coherent and cohesive curriculum plans and teach units and lessons well.
- **D.** Time must also be provided to complete this important development work.
 - 1. The district should consider ways to provide sufficient common planning time at the secondary level in order to support curriculum development, revision, and review.
 - 2. The district should consider providing stipends to teachers to work collaboratively on unit design after school, during vacations, and during the summer months at all schools.
- **E.** The district should continue with the practice of periodic grade-level bridge meetings across the elementary schools to support horizontal alignment and instructional improvement.

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 year as they worked to develop Massachusetts' Model Curriculum Units. It includes videos about

- developing essential questions, establishing goals, creating embedded performance assessments, designing lesson plans, selecting high-quality materials, and evaluating the curriculum unit.
- ESE's Quality Review Rubrics (http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/model/rubrics/) can support the analysis and improvement of curriculum units.

Benefits from implementing this recommendation will include a fully developed and documented curriculum in ELA, math and science aligned to the 2011 Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and the district's lesson design template. Districtwide, teachers and other staff members will be able to make use of well-developed curriculum materials that can support teaching and learning for understanding. In addition, the new curriculum will address students' diverse learning needs, including those of English language learners and students with disabilities. The ultimate benefit will be that the educational program will be strengthened and students will have access to a more rigorous, engaging, and challenging school experience that will prepare them for success after high school.

Instruction

- 2. The district should ensure that there is a common understanding across all schools of rigor and high expectations. In addition, it should ensure that instructional practices consistently encourage students to develop critical thinking skills, cultivate understanding and application of knowledge, and support differentiation and a positive learning environment.
 - **A.** Although the district has identified rigorous instruction as a goal in its 2015-2016 AIP, it needs to develop and communicate a shared definition of what constitutes rigor and high expectations for learning. This should be clarified for teachers at faculty meetings, department meetings, grade-level meetings and bridge meetings, so that all teachers consistently develop and teach lessons that provide students with opportunities to use critical thinking skills, assume greater voice and responsibility for their learning, and actively engage in learning.
 - 1. The district should develop a protocol to broaden opportunities for teachers and other school leaders to participate in learning walks to promote, observe and encourage effective instructional practices.
 - Instructional Resource Specialists (IRSs) at every level should present ongoing
 demonstration lessons focused on rigor and high expectations for teachers to observe and
 collaboratively discuss. IRSs should regularly observe instruction and provide ongoing
 coaching to teachers, individually and in small groups, for the purpose of developing
 rigorous and engaging instruction.
 - 3. The district should identify classrooms at every level in which teachers have firmly established positive learning environments and, as a result, students exhibit positive learning behaviors and engagement in learning. Teachers should observe and discuss these classes to identify ways to continually improve their instruction.

- a. The district should also provide examples of highly effective instruction from outside the district for example, videos of lessons that illustrate appropriate rigor and student-centered instruction.
- 4. The needs of diverse learners, active student-centered learning activities, and effective classroom management strategies. The leadership team's priority should be the implementation of these practices throughout the district.
- **B.** The district should develop a shared understanding of how to effectively and appropriately differentiate instruction.
 - 1. The district should provide ongoing and in depth professional development on effective differentiation.
 - 2. As teachers develop curriculum units, they should include differentiated, language-based and SEI strategies that meet all students' learning needs so that they can be appropriately used in lessons and units. Examples of instructional accommodations and modifications to meet the needs of students with disabilities and English language learners should be incorporated in all units.
 - 3. The district should identify exemplary teachers who have gained skill and expertise in differentiation and arrange for peer observations of their classes or other opportunities for peers to learn from them.

Recommended resources:

- ESE's Learning Walkthrough Implementation Guide
 (http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/ese/programs/accountability/tools-and-resources/district-analysis-review-and-assistance/learning-walkthrough-implementation-guide.html) is a resource to support instructional leaders in establishing a Learning Walkthrough process in a school or district. It is designed to provide guidance to those working in an established culture of collaboration as well as those who are just beginning to observe classrooms and discuss teaching and learning in a focused and actionable manner. (The link above includes a presentation to introduce Learning Walkthroughs to stakeholders.)
- Appendix 4, Characteristics of Standards-Based Teaching and Learning: Continuum of Practice
 (http://www.mass.gov/edu/docs/ese/accountability/dart/walkthrough/continuum-practice.pdf)
 is a framework that provides a common language or reference point for looking at teaching and learning. The continuum provides an overview of seventeen characteristics of standards-based practice, along with related indicators to suggest the level at which the practice is implemented, from Not Evident to Developing to Providing to Sustaining.

Benefits from implementing this recommendation will include the district's development and implementation of high quality teaching and learning practices. Classrooms will be more student-centered and promote rigorous learning expectations. Students will more consistently have opportunities to express their ideas and engage in tasks that require critical thinking. Lessons will be appropriately differentiated so that content and concepts are accessible to all learners. Classrooms will reflect a positive learning environment where students take academic risks and an active role, thus avoiding behaviors that interfere with learning. Ultimately, an important benefit will be the establishment of a more beneficial classroom climate conducive to learning and the creation of the professional culture of learning and teaching identified in the district's AIP.

- 3. The district should provide and develop sufficient mid-level content-based leadership in grades 6-12 to more actively monitor instruction through non-evaluative supervision activities and to provide teachers with frequent formative feedback.
 - **A.** The district should establish content-based instructional leadership roles at the middle/high school, with the responsibility of providing ongoing support and expertise to teachers specific to instruction in their content area.
 - 1. The district might consider amending the role and job description for department heads to focus on this responsibility.
 - 2. It is critical that the district establish clear criteria in selecting leaders for this role, to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to provide robust content and instructional support to teachers.
 - 3. The content-based instructional leaders should be supported and empowered to lead useful conversations about curriculum, instruction and assessment practices and ensure that teachers are implementing the curriculum with fidelity.
 - **B.** The content-based instructional leaders should frequently observe teaching to identify teachers' instructional needs and strengths and provide non-evaluative, constructive feedback and coaching.
 - The district should consider two different types of formative observations of instruction:
 one, by evaluators, as currently conducted as part of the evaluation process, and a second
 type of formative evaluation that is supervisory rather than evaluative. The IRSs and the
 content leaders should observe lessons to provide constructive feedback to individuals and
 groups in order to improve instruction.

Benefits from implementing this recommendation will include sufficient mid-level leadership in grades 6-12 that will help to ensure that teachers receive the support they need to provide highly effective instruction. Instructional practices are likely to improve from frequent formative feedback, especially feedback that is non-evaluative. Deeper conversations about content and teaching and learning can take place at department meetings, at leadership meetings, and in faculty meetings, hopefully leading to

increased rigor and higher expectations, which will likely lead to improved student achievement and understanding.

Assessment

Contextual Background

The district's assessment systems and practices are stronger at the elementary schools than at the middle/high school. In addition, the elementary schools have ensured that there is frequent, regularly scheduled time for teachers and leaders to collaborate to analyze assessment results and other student data and information, and then use those analyses to inform decisions about teaching, learning, and the curriculum.

The elementary schools have begun to establish the culture and systems to generate and use assessments and assessment data for continuous improvement. The elementary assessment system represents a balance of benchmark/diagnostic assessments such as DIBELS Next to monitor literacy skill development and NWEA's MAP assessments (new this year) to measure student growth and proficiency in ELA, reading, and math. In addition, teachers use unit and chapter tests from two new and recently adopted standards-based programs, *Reach for Reading* and *My Math* to provide useful data to guide decision-making. Frequent formative assessments take place during lessons as quick checks for understanding.

Although the elementary curriculum in ELA and math has not been completely documented, and assessments are not included in all curriculum documents, teachers and leaders, including the principals and Instructional Resource Specialists (IRSs), seem well aware of this and are working to complete these documents. At the elementary schools, the science curriculum and assessments are the least developed of all subject areas.

Another positive factor is that elementary teachers have the time to collaborate to develop teaching materials and make collaborative data-based decisions during daily common planning time (CPT). In CPT, teachers meet almost daily in grade-level teams to cooperate on planning instruction, analyzing student data, and guiding decisions about learning groups, interventions, and curriculum and instructional improvement. CPT meetings are led once a week by IRSs and on other days by teacher leaders. During CPT, elementary teachers also meet with interventionists and ELD teachers to address teaching and learning issues related to English language learners and students with IEPs. Although progress in student achievement has not been made in recent years, the elementary schools have now put systems and personnel in place to improve teaching and learning.

The middle/high school has not successfully developed an effective and coordinated approach to assessment that ensures high-quality common assessments and the effective collection, analysis, and sharing of assessment results and other useful data to inform decision-making. A number of reasons for this have been offered. Most frequently, teachers, leaders, and even parents cite the absence of leadership stability at the district and school levels and the low rate of teacher retention to explain why the work of developing curriculum, assessments, and a workable process to use data has not emerged. Sustained professional development that would build teachers' capacity and understanding for data collection and analysis has also not taken place.

Without a complete, aligned and documented curriculum, it is impossible for the middle/high school to have a completely aligned and articulated assessment system. Currently, teachers and leaders are attempting to create or improve the common quarterly assessments, which until this year have been mainly composed of released MCAS items in ELA, math, and science. This year, the plan at the middle/high school also is to add NWEA's MAP tests through grade 10 to measure growth in ELA, reading and math. However, at the time of the site visit, the baseline test had not been given and teachers had not received trained on how to use the results. Formative classroom assessments are not routine.

The middle/high school has no regularly scheduled CPT for secondary-school teachers to collaborate with subject peers to address teaching and learning issues, including the identification, analysis, and use of assessment data. As a result, groups of teachers collect and analyze little coherent data other than MCAS results. School leaders present most data analysis, such as MCAS results, and then teachers use the data to form student groups for remediation and intervention or placement. Little time is devoted in departments to identifying, collecting, and analyzing other useful data or information to collaboratively plan and improve teachers' work or students' work. Also, there is no CPT for teachers to address the data collaboratively in logical subject-based teams.

In summary, the systems and practices for assessment and the use of data are undeveloped at the middle/high school. The district has a long road to travel before it will be able to create the conditions for success by fostering a districtwide data-literate culture and engaging in consistent practices for data-driven decision-making.

Strength Finding

- 1. At the two grades 1-5 elementary schools, regularly scheduled grade-level meetings and Instructional Leadership Team meetings provide a collaborative forum for elementary teachers to discuss student data and progress and use data to guide curricular and instructional decisions.
 - **A.** The K-5 assessment system has been designed to use a balance of benchmark, summative, and formative assessments. Teachers are using the data to guide decisions for student placement, instruction, and modest curriculum development.
 - Interviews and a review of a district self-assessment indicated that in ELA teachers and leaders use DIBELS Next, Fry word lists, and the *Reach for Reading* (National Geographic) chapter and unit tests to monitor and measure progress in literacy skills and reading comprehension. Interviewees said that, in mathematics, results from chapter and unit assessments from *My Math* (McGraw Hill) provide data to monitor and measure progress and achievement in mathematics.
 - **B.** Grade-level meetings with the Instructional Resource Specialists (IRSs) take place once a week for an hour during a designated common planning period. Teachers also have a daily 45-minute grade-level common prep time and grade-level teams often meet during that time. In addition, teachers have two grade-level collaboration sessions with special education teachers and ESL

teachers each week targeted to discuss students with IEPs and English language learners (ELLs). Either IRSs or grade-level team leaders lead the various grade-level meetings.

- Special education teachers and ELL teachers also participate in weekly grade-level meetings
 with the IRSs. They also attend the monthly elementary school "bridge meetings" where all
 elementary teachers share curriculum, instructional strategies, assessments, and
 assessment results.
- 2. Teachers and IRSs noted that they discuss a variety of assessment data at grade-level meetings, including MCAS results. These discussions inform plans for re-teaching and placing students in flexible learning groups in ELA and math, and in intervention groups for daily Response to Intervention (RtI) blocks.
 - a. Interviewees provided an example of adjusting curriculum and instruction by incorporating and spiraling the teaching of figurative language in grade 3. Another example was to include the use of exit tickets in math in all grade levels after teachers learned of stronger results in math at grade 4 at the West Street School with their use of exit tickets.
- **C.** Interviewees frequently noted using data to identify topics and concepts to re-teach in order to address the needs of struggling students. MCAS analysis also takes place at grade-level meetings and in school-level Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) meetings with the principal, IRSs, and grade-level team leaders.

Impact: Elementary leaders and teachers use multiple forms of assessment data to monitor student progress and growth and measure student achievement using benchmark assessments and others from the new instructional programs in ELA and math. They are learning to analyze and use data more effectively to make better decisions about student placement in flexible learning groups and intervention groups. With reliable and useful data available, elementary teachers and leaders are also making sounder and more informed decisions to define and revise teaching strategies and are beginning to develop more effective curriculum units and lessons. The systems and practices in place for data-driven decision-making are gaining traction at the elementary schools. These practices, if consistently and thoughtfully continued, can help improve student achievement and can help create a culture of data literacy.

Challenge Findings and Areas for Growth

- 2. The district is operating without a balanced and comprehensive assessment system that would provide the needed data and evidence to measure student progress and achievement and guide instructional decision-making.
 - **A.** The assessment system is in transition.

- District leaders and teachers said that before the current school year, in addition to unit and lesson assessments, the district used Achievement Network (ANet) assessments in ELA and math to measure proficiency at the middle/high school. This year, the plan is to replace ANet with NWEA's Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments in ELA and reading and math through grade 10 in order to better track and measure student growth.
 - At the time of the onsite review, MAP tests were scheduled to be given in grades 6 through 10 in November 2015 to set a baseline and then twice more during the school year.
 - b. However, the tests were scheduled for the Monday after the site visit and the professional development for teachers to learn to use the new MAP assessment data had not taken place because of a scheduling error.
- **B.** Interviews and a review of a district self-assessment indicated that the assessment system is incomplete and not well developed.
 - 1. District-developed assessments were not made available for review by the team.
- **C.** The assessment system has not sufficiently addressed assessing students' proficiency in multiple literacies as described by the literacy anchor standards in the 2011 Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.
 - When asked about implementing assessments that measured proficiency on skills based on the literacy anchor standards in the 2011 Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, interviewees noted that they were struggling to put their own content curriculum and assessments in order, referred to it as "the iceberg in front of us."
 - 2. Interviewees reported the expectation to use formative assessments, and said that the school's administrative team "communicates this on a daily basis." Some mentioned using exit tickets, do-nows, turn-and-talk, and quick informal checks for understanding. Most of these are on-the-spot in-formative strategies and do not represent more strategic formative assessments to help differentiate curriculum and instruction.
 - a. Interviewees reported, however, that teachers have had very little professional development on the use of formative assessments.
 - b. Although the IRSs and principals monitor the use of formative assessments in walkthroughs, teachers were not certain that most teachers used formative assessments with fidelity. This was supported by data from classroom observations.
 - In only 50 percent of classrooms in middle school grades, observers noted the use of formative assessments (0 percent, strong evidence; 50 percent, moderate evidence).

- In just 28 percent of classrooms at the high-school level, observers noted the use of formative assessments (14 percent, strong evidence; 14 percent, moderate evidence).
- **D.** There is an absence of coordination and oversight around the use of assessment data at the district level.

Impact: In Southbridge at the secondary level, the curriculum is incomplete. Also, instructional practices are inconsistent and insufficiently rigorous. In this current partial and inconsistent state of implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment---systems at the heart of the educational process---the middle/high school cannot adequately measure student achievement and monitor student progress in order to make the needed adjustments in lessons. Without a robust and complete repertoire of assessments, the school does not have the necessary variety of data to inform decisions for instructional improvement and to guide curriculum revision or fine-tuning. Complicating the goal of developing appropriate assessments and the intent to use data well is the absence of coordination and oversight districtwide and the constant turnover of the teacher corps, which hampers progress and continuity on tasks. A system as incomplete as this cannot, in its current state, meet the diverse learning needs of all students and prepare them well for the workplace or for the next stage in their education.

- 3. At the middle/high school there is inadequate time and expertise to systematically collect, analyze and use what limited assessment data there is to improve teaching and learning. At the elementary schools, there is insufficient technology infrastructure to manage and share data.
 - **A.** There is limited time at the secondary level, particularly at the high school level, for teachers to analyze and discuss assessments and assessment data thoughtfully and in depth with department colleagues or even with colleagues teaching the same class, assuming a robust data were available.
 - 1. Common planning time to discuss curriculum, instruction, assessment, and data, is scarce at the middle/high school.
 - a. Middle-school level teachers meet in interdisciplinary teams twice every seven-day cycle. Departments meet once a month for an hour.
 - b. High-school level teachers used to have one common planning period by department every seven-day cycle, but this is no longer the case. Currently, teachers' common planning time may be with another teacher from the same department or with a teacher or teachers from a different department. They have been asked to look at student work (from different disciplines) during this shared time, but a participant noted that the protocol and support given was not helpful.
 - c. High-school level departments meet once a month for an hour; this is the only regularly scheduled time for collaboration.

- 2. One representative from a high-school level department described the process used to design common assessments as, "We do it at lunch, after school at a department meeting, in emails and then check on it at night and give feedback in an email." This interviewee noted just before the first quarterly exams, each teacher hammers out questions on parts of the assessment and then delivers them.
- **B.** The technology infrastructure is currently inconsistent across schools to permit a state-of-the art ability to collect, analyze and share data throughout.
 - 1. The district uses iPass as its data collection system and an interviewee noted that it does not work well.
 - 2. There have been discussions to move to a Student Information System (SIS) that fully enables a Schools Interoperability Framework. This would allow sharing and analysis of data across multiple components: students in a classroom, grade-levels in a school, schoolwide, etc., as well as comparisons with state data.
 - 3. At the elementary level, some teachers have "view only" ability to examine student data; some have "classroom only" ability.
 - 4. In addition, at each school, student information is not entered into the SIS in a consistent manner. This makes cross-school accountability efforts to track data almost impossible.
 - 5. The district is without directive leadership in technology and has no technology plan.

Impact: The district's data analysis systems and practices are uneven and insufficient. There is limited knowledge and skills on the part of teachers to use data to guide instruction and revise curriculum and assessments. The middle/high school does not have a full complement of data---assessment data, benchmarks, performance tasks---that align with its Understanding by Design curriculum. In addition, there is insufficient regularly scheduled common planning time for department colleagues to collaborate on developing professional practice. Until all of these critical components of the teaching, learning, and assessment system are in place, the district will continue to struggle to meet the needs of its diverse population of learners.

Recommendations

1. In order to achieve the first objective of its Accelerated Improvement Plan⁹, district and secondary school leaders should build teachers' ability to develop and use multiple forms of assessments in order to deliver appropriately designed curriculum and instruction.

A. Secondary school teachers and leaders need meaningful professional development to learn to more effectively develop and use a variety of formative and summative assessments as well as authentic performance tasks.

⁹ Objective 1: Ensure that all students experience rigorous, effective, data-driven instruction that builds an environment for continuous improvement.

- Once teachers have completed Understanding by Design (UbD) Stage 1 to establish goals, understandings, and essential questions, they should move to Stage 2 to develop a variety of assessments that give evidence and opportunities for students to show what they know, can do and understand. This work should *precede* unit and lesson design, in contrast to current practice in the district.
- **B.** Common assessments at the secondary level should be developed with urgency.
 - 1. The assessments should incorporate authentic assessments and student reflection as well as standards-based items.
 - 2. The district should establish a process for review of the assessments to ensure quality, consistency, and rigor.
 - 3. Assessment results should be analyzed at the individual student, classroom, grade, and school levels, to identify ways to address results and continually improve student achievement.
- **C.** The middle/high school should establish more regularly scheduled common planning time for teachers who teach in the same department and, especially, for those who teach the same course(s), to collaborate on all aspects of curriculum, instruction and assessment.
 - 1. The district in collaboration with the middle/high school leadership should develop a schedule and ensure that middle and high school teachers within the same department share frequent common planning time at least once a week.
 - Regular common planning time should become an important collaborative opportunity for department members to engage in improving the many aspects of curricular and instructional improvement, including the development and use of assessments and assessment data.
 - The district should communicate clear expectations for regular common planning time and should support and monitor these meetings to ensure they are productive. They should be used to help create a culture of cooperation and trust that can focus on continuous improvement.

Benefits from implementing this recommendation include a teacher force that will be able to create more rigorous and complete curriculum units and lessons guided by more authentic assessments that provide opportunities for students to demonstrate what they know, can do and understand. Common assessments can more accurately reflect classroom learning as students demonstrate proficiency in mastering state standards. More thoughtfully developed UbD lessons will enhance and deepen students' understandings and their ability to actively engage in their learning. In addition, teachers will have opportunities to participate in regular, professional and rigorous discussions of effective teaching and learning, assessments and assessment data, thus creating a more professional and collaborative culture of learning as described in the district's AIP.

- 2. District and school leaders should establish a more systematic process to ensure the effective use of data districtwide.
 - **A.** To create a more effective system for collecting, analyzing, and sharing data, the district should create two data teams one at the elementary level and one at the secondary level with representation from both leadership and teaching staff from all subjects.
 - The data teams should participate in professional development to learn to use data well and
 to develop the district's systems and practices to regularly collect, analyze, and disseminate
 relevant achievement and performance data and other useful information to leaders and
 teachers.
 - 2. In addition to assessment results, the data teams should identify other relevant information (including behavioral data) that would assist teachers and leaders in understanding trends in students' growth and development.
 - 3. The data teams should also help teachers use and share formative assessment data, observational data, and student work as indicators of how well students understand what they are learning and to guide the next steps for both teachers and students.
 - **B.** The data teams should identify ways to continually develop teachers' capacity to use multiple forms of data to inform their instruction.
 - 1. Team members should lead and model data discussions to guide decision-making.
 - 2. Team members should frequently lead frequent, timely, actionable discussions with colleagues that help them to leverage data well to improve learning and teaching.
 - 3. With guidance from the data teams, teachers should provide data to students, as appropriate, to help them to reflect about their progress as learners.
 - **C.** The district should ensure that each school has state-of-the art technological infrastructure in order to collect, analyze and share multiple forms of data for continuous improvement.
 - 1. The district should ensure parity of technology resources (hardware as well as software) across schools by developing and implementing and district technology plan.
 - 2. The district should also ensure that there is sufficient human capacity, both leadership and staff, to plan for technology improvement and to support leaders and teachers at all school levels in the use of technology for data analysis for continuous improvement.

Recommended resources:

• ESE's District Data Team Toolkit (http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/ese/programs/accountability/tools-and-resources/district-analysis-review-and-

<u>assistance/leadership-and-governance.html</u>) 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.

- ESE's Student Growth Model web page (http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/growth/) provides links to tutorials and documents that explain the Student Growth Model, along with research supporting the model, materials to help education leaders present the model, and links to student growth data.
- 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.

Benefits from implementing this recommendation include an expanded group of educators responsible for data collection, analysis, dissemination and discussions for improvement. This can ensure that assessments can be used well at all schools to guide improvements to teaching as well as revise and fine-tune curriculum. Overall, data will be used more effectively to improve student achievement. A more thoughtful and expansive use of data can also engage students more in the learning process. Building a more robust data and technology system and practices can also help create a sound data-literate and data-driven culture that can more accurately inform decision-making of all types at the school and district levels.

Human Resources and Professional Development

Contextual Background

The district has been making progress in implementing some components of its educator evaluation system. Although focusing at first on developing systems to ensure consistency and adherence to the system, administrators and teachers confirmed that evaluators have been making increasingly effective use of quality, evidence-based, growth-oriented supervisory practices and procedures.

Even though the district has been effectively implementing some elements of the Massachusetts' educator evaluation framework, its subsequent efforts to implement important components related to the collection and use of multiple sources of evaluative evidence have badly faltered. The full implementation of a system aligned to the state evaluation framework requires (a) the collection and use of student and staff feedback for teachers and administrators, respectively, and (b) the identification of district-determined measures (DDMs) to assess and subsequently to be used to determine educator Student Impact Ratings. The district has done little to address either of these initiatives and is currently out of compliance with both of these requirements.

The district's professional development program (PD) is seriously hampered by the absence of a well defined and collaborative leadership structure, the absence of clearly articulated goals that are aligned with district needs and improvement priorities, and insufficient embedded and regularly scheduled common planning and meeting opportunities for all staff. The PD program misses the opportunity to meet any of the current ESE Standards for High Quality Professional Development (HQPD). Consequently, the PD program is unable to properly support educators at all stages of their careers, including induction, and cannot enhance professional practice, retain educators, improve classroom instruction, advance district goals and improvement priorities--- and ultimately students' educational opportunities and achievement.

The factors contributing to these systemic challenges are numerous and complex. Among the most significant must certainly be the detrimental impact of the district's recent history of administrative instability, low retention, and turmoil at both the central office and school levels. This chronic leadership crisis has critically impaired the district's ability to develop and sustain those key systems and practices that are essential for school improvement.

Strength Finding

- The district is making steady progress in its implementation of several components of its educator evaluation system. After first focusing on consistency and adherence to the system, administrators are now making increasingly effective and systematic use of quality, evidencebased, growth-oriented supervisory practices and procedures.
 - **A.** District and school leaders have acknowledged the need to consistently use supervisory and evaluative practices and policies that are fully aligned with the state framework, promote high

performance expectations, and improve the professional practices, climate, and overall effectiveness of educators.

- Review team members reviewed the personnel folders of 25 faculty members randomly selected from across the district. Overall, evaluative documentation (for example, self assessments, professional practice and student learning goals, educator plans, formative and summary evaluations) was timely and complete. Although there were notable variations in quality, in general, evaluations were descriptive, evidenced-based, and contained feedback that was specific and actionable.
- Because of the recent history of high turnover both of school and district leaders, administrator personnel folders were often incomplete. Where evaluative documents had been produced, however, they were generally descriptive and instructive and were properly focused on the administrator's responsibility and accountability for improving teaching and learning.
- 3. Both administrators and teachers confirmed that evaluators now conduct regular announced and unannounced classroom observations that not only meet but often substantially exceed the number specified in the collective bargaining language.
 - a. Feedback is subsequently provided to educators in the form of electronic documentation, as well as through individual teacher-administrator dialogue. Although feedback is somewhat uneven, interviewees reported that the timeliness and quality of feedback is continuing to improve.
- 4. The district is making increasingly effective use of its teacher evaluation software system to monitor and support overall implementation and ensure consistent, equitable, and timely adherence to the requirements and timelines of the district's evaluation system.
- 5. The district now requires that, using an online system (planbook.com), all teachers submit weekly lesson plans for review. These are expected to include specific components such as learning objectives, curriculum standards, assessments, and differentiation strategies. Evaluators carefully review the plans and routinely provide constructive feedback. In separate interviews, teachers and administrators indicated that this is becoming an integral and useful component in both planning and evaluating instruction.
- 6. Administrators reported that efforts have been and continue to be made to promote consistency in the evaluation process and procedures, including calibration activities and formal trainings to improve the competencies of evaluators and subsequently enhance the accuracy, fairness, and overall quality of educator evaluations.
- Although there is no joint committee currently in place to oversee the uniform
 implementation of all components of the educator evaluation system districtwide,
 administrators and teachers' association officials indicated that meetings between principals

and union representatives are held regularly and questions or concerns, including those dealing with the evaluation program, are dealt with proactively.

Impact: Although the district's current administrators acknowledge that the quality of the district's past efforts have been inconsistent and results uneven, they are now demonstrating the ability to implement supervisory and evaluative practices that provide educators with the continuous feedback and meaningful support needed to improve classroom practices, professional competencies, and student achievement. If, despite its recent history of administrative instability and turnover, the district can maintain an ongoing commitment to the educator evaluation system, then continuous and comprehensive improvements in classroom instruction and in student educational opportunities and academic outcomes can likely result.

Challenge Findings and Areas for Growth

- 2. The district's professional development program is badly hampered by an organizational and leadership structure that is not well defined, and it is missing meaningful collaboration or clear and sustained alignment with identified needs and core goals.
 - **A.** Professional development (PD) programming in the district is not aligned with ESE's Standards for High Quality Professional Development (HQPD). Among the guiding principles of HQPD are those that ensure that it (a) is intentional, (b) is a structured process, (c) is evaluated for effectiveness, and (d) requires strong leadership. The following are the most significant challenges in the district's PD program as measured against the HQPD standards.
 - 1. Interviewees reported that the amount of time provided for PD is insufficient to enable staff to engage in the sort of sustained, coordinated, and collaborative work needed to build professional ability and improve student achievement. The district calendar includes only one full day and four early release PD days during the school year. Further, with the exception of two of the district's elementary schools, which schedule regular grade-level teacher meetings, there are presently very few regularly scheduled, job embedded common planning or meeting time opportunities available to staff across the district.
 - 2. Stakeholders agreed that the district's PD program does not have a clear and effective leadership structure as well as a genuinely collaborative process whereby teachers can work directly with administrators to develop and coordinate PD programs, activities, and services.
 - a. At present, the administrative council acts in an ad hoc capacity to plan PD programming and teachers are provided with little opportunity to directly contribute to or actively participate in the PD governance or decision-making process at either the district or school levels.
 - 3. The district has not developed or articulated a comprehensive PD plan, coordinated program, or activities calendar, nor has it identified or clearly communicated specific PD goals, objectives, or priorities. Consequently, teachers expressed concern that the limited

PD time that was available was often spent on topics that were uncoordinated and seemed disconnected to their professional growth goals, student learning needs, or school and district priorities.

- 4. Administrators acknowledged that there is very little use of data to identify PD goals or professional learning objectives. Further, data is neither collected nor used to measure progress in the attainment of intended outcomes, to assess the effectiveness of PD programs and activities to ensure that they are meeting targeted objectives, or to inform efforts to improve the quality or results of programming.
- **B.** The district's mentoring program meets the current minimum state requirement that all teachers be provided with a mentor and an induction program in their first year of practice. The overall effectiveness of the program is compromised, however, by many of the same identified factors that impact the larger PD program. Additionally, it falls well short of the substantially more comprehensive three-year program now strongly recommended by ESE.
 - Interviewees identified a number of concerns with the district's current mentoring program.
 These included inconsistent and/or inadequate training for mentors, and an absence of
 central coordination, accountability, follow-up, meeting opportunities, or program
 assessment by mentees or mentors.
 - 2. Administrators believe that an improved and expanded mentoring program could improve the high rate of teacher turnover. One interviewee stated, and others concurred, "We keep losing teachers and mentoring could be the difference maker in keeping teachers. [New] people feel they are left on an island."

Impact: The effectiveness of the district's PD programming is limited by the absence of a well defined and collaborative leadership structure, the absence of clearly articulated goals that are aligned with well defined district needs and priorities, and insufficient embedded and regularly scheduled common planning and meeting opportunities for all staff. The fact that the district has not created and sustained a comprehensive PD program and services that properly support educators at all stages of their careers, including induction, limits its ability to enhance professional practice, retain highly effective educators, improve classroom instruction, advance district goals and priorities, and ultimately increase the educational opportunities and academic achievement of its students.

- 3. Although the district is effectively implementing initial elements of its educator evaluation system, its efforts to implement all components of the state framework have been inadequate and ineffective.
 - **A.** The educator evaluation regulations (603 CMR 35.07) require that all Massachusetts school districts collect and incorporate student feedback into the evaluation process. Similarly, staff feedback is expected to be collected and used in the administrator evaluation process. The district is currently out of compliance with this component of the regulations.

- 1. Interviewees acknowledged that no formal action or initiative to collect and use student feedback as a component of educator evaluation is currently underway in the district.
- 2. Administrators reported that some preliminary efforts have been made to collect and use staff feedback. They said that the ESE model survey instrument was made available electronically to all staff during the latter part of the 2014-2015 school year and that the assistant superintendent did share and discuss the results with them. The process was largely informal, however, and no plan or system has subsequently been developed to determine the formal manner in which staff feedback will be collected or incorporated in the evaluation of administrators.
- 3. District and school leaders indicated that the district's recent history of administrative instability, turnover, and leadership turmoil at both the central office and school levels has had a negative impact on its ability to move forward with this important category of evidence.
- **B.** A second component of the state's educator evaluation framework requires that school districts develop district-determined measures (DDMs) to be used to assess student learning, growth, or achievement. DDMs are intended to provide feedback to educators about student learning across the full range of content areas and to serve as a key element in determining an individual educator's Student Impact Rating. The district is currently out of compliance with this component of the regulations.
 - 1. Administrators stated that although some isolated and incomplete efforts to develop DDMs were undertaken last year, little was accomplished. They reported that there is currently no organized or formal initiative underway in the district to respond to this ESE requirement.
- C. ESE has provided districts with the option of developing alternative pathways for incorporating evidence of educator impact into Student Impact Ratings. Districts interested in pursuing this alternative pathway option were to submit their plan to ESE by June 30, 2015. In August 2015 the district requested and received approval for additional time to fully implement the Student Impact Rating component.
 - 1. District administrators said that, the district's ability to meet this requirement has been critically compromised by the continuing turnover of key district leadership.

Impact: The Massachusetts educator evaluation framework is designed to promote educator growth and development while keeping student learning as its central focus. The district has demonstrated recognition of this through its efforts to appropriately implement supervisory practices and evaluative procedures that are aligned with those initial regulations. The full implementation of district evaluation systems aligned to the state framework requires, however, that districts use an educator evaluation system that incorporates other sources of evidence in addition to direct observations and artifacts of practice. Specifically, these include multiple measures of student learning (including DDMs) and student and staff feedback.

Recommendations

- 1. The district should prioritize the development of a comprehensive, coordinated, and collaborative professional development system that promotes professional growth and practice, advances district goals and priorities, and significantly improves student achievement.
 - **A.** The district's efforts to develop an effective PD program should be guided and informed by the by principles articulated in the state's Ten Standards for High Quality Professional Development.
 - 1. A joint committee of administrators and teachers should develop a districtwide PD plan and oversee the district's PD program. The committee should create a well-defined and genuinely collaborative leadership structure through which to plan and implement comprehensive and integrated K-12 PD programs and services.
 - a. The committee should use multiple sources of data to inform the district's PD plan, and should establish systems for analyzing the impact of PD and making adjustments accordingly.
 - 2. The PD program should be carefully linked to and directly supportive of well-defined district priorities and specific student learning goals, as articulated in the Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP). Further, there should be a systematic alignment of individual School Improvement Plans with the AIP. The professional goals of administrators and teachers should be aligned with School Improvement Plans.
 - 3. Significantly more collaborative time dedicated to PD programs and related activities should be built into the district calendar and embedded within the master schedules of all schools, including the middle and high school. Current impediments to regularly scheduled and/or frequent common planning and meeting times in all grade levels, subject areas, and schools must be addressed.
 - a. The district should carefully examine a variety of scheduling models and options, including additional full and early release days, aligned bell schedules, delayed openings, summer workshops, etc., in order to substantially increase opportunities for staff to participate together in efficient, sustained, and coordinated professional development.
 - 4. The district should ensure that it allocates the necessary resources to supporting and systemically improving the district's PD programming. This includes financial resources as well as professional services and expertise, including those available through ESE and the regional District and School Assistance Center (DSAC).
 - **B.** The district should address deficiencies in its mentoring program and should consider expanding the program to become a more comprehensive three year induction model.

- The district should consider establishing a joint steering committee, composed of teachers
 and administrators, to be charged with developing a new, expanded, and substantially more
 effective induction program for both beginning and incoming teachers.
- Major components of the new induction plan should include: program goals; roles and
 responsibilities of key participants; orientation and training programs and schedules for
 teachers and their mentors; processes for mentor selection and matching; recognition and
 compensation for mentors; and a program evaluation component for both teachers and
 mentors.

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.
- Quick Reference Guide: Educator Evaluation & Professional Development
 (http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/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
 (<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-addition-addit
- ESE's Professional Development Self- Assessment Guidebook
 (http://www.mass.gov/edu/docs/ese/accountability/dsac/professional-development-self-assessment-guide.pdf)
 provides tools for analyzing professional development offerings' alignment with the Massachusetts High-Quality Professional Development Standards, the Educator Evaluation Framework, and the Standards and Indicators of Effective Practice.
- Identifying Meaningful Professional Development
 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhuFioO8GbQ&feature=youtu.be) is a video in which educators from three Massachusetts districts discuss the importance of targeted, meaningful professional development and the ways districts can use the evaluation process to identify the most effective PD supports for all educators.
- The 2015 Guidelines for Induction & Mentoring Programs
 (http://www.doe.mass.edu/educators/mentor/guidelines.pdf)
 provides updated information for how districts can develop, implement, and refine induction and mentoring programs for educators new to the profession, the district, and/or their roles.
- ESE's revised Induction and Mentoring web page
 (http://www.doe.mass.edu/educators/mentor/resources.html) includes links to guidance

materials and several examples of induction and mentoring strategies and programs in Massachusetts districts.

- ESE's Annual Induction and Mentoring Report web page
 (http://www.doe.mass.edu/educators/mentor/reports.html) provides guidance to support the requirement for districts to submit an annual Induction and Mentoring District Report to ESE.
- Collecting Stakeholder Feedback on Induction and Mentoring Programs
 (http://www.doe.mass.edu/educators/mentor/StakeholderFeedback.pdf) is a resource for districts to use when considering components of an induction and mentoring program for which they would like to solicit stakeholder feedback.
- The Working Group for Educator Excellence (WGEE), in partnership with ESE, compiled a list of District Promising Practices and Tools (http://wgee.org/best-practices/promising-practices-by-district/) that support seven levers of educator expertise:
 - o Recruitment, Hiring and Placement
 - Comprehensive Induction
 - o Professional Development
 - o Supervision and Evaluation
 - o Teacher Leadership
 - Organizational Structure
 - Adult Professional Culture

WGEE also offers an *Electronic Clearinghouse* (http://wgee.org/electronic-clearinghouse-with-promising-practices/), which includes exemplars for teachers, school administrators, district leaders and evaluators that clarify particular Indicators on the Classroom Teacher Rubric from the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation.

Benefits from implementing this recommendation are that the creation of a unified, well defined, collaborative PD leadership structure will help ensure that resources are deployed across the district in a more coordinated, systematic, and equitable manner. This will result in meaningful improvements in communication and efficiency and help ensure that all PD programs and services are carefully aligned with and directly supportive of well-defined district priorities and initiatives. Providing increased common planning and meeting time for staff will expand opportunities for curriculum development, instructional improvement, and the analysis and use of assessment data. By expanding and improving the induction and mentoring program, the district will help to ensure that educators receive meaningful supports and leadership opportunities suited to professional growth and retention. Further, effective induction and mentoring programs contribute to a professional culture built on collegiality and a shared responsibility for student learning. Ultimately, by building the overall effectiveness of educators, the district will be better able to provide significantly enhanced learning opportunities and increased academic outcomes for all of its students.

- 2. The district should undertake prompt and appropriate action to implement all components of its educator evaluation system, including the collection and use of multiple sources of evidence to inform the evaluations of both teachers and administrators.
 - **A.** The district should develop appropriate strategies and structures to incorporate student and staff feedback into the evaluation process.
 - The district should consider forming a successor committee to the team that collaboratively developed its original educator evaluation system in 2012. This should be a joint team of administrators, teachers, and specialists which would serve as a steering committee to oversee, coordinate, and support full and effective implementation of the educator evaluation process.
 - **B.** The district should put in place the necessary plans and resources to ensure that Student Impact Ratings are included in educators' evaluations in a timely way.
 - The district must report Student Impact Ratings for some educators at the completion of the 2016-2017 school year and for all educators by the completion of the 2017-2018 school year. This will require thorough planning and implementation during the 2015-2016 school year.

Recommended resources:

- Quick Reference Guide: Student and Staff Feedback
 (www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/QRG-Feedback.pdf) provides guidance on student
 and staff feedback, including requirements, principles for choosing feedback instruments,
 and related resources.
- ESE's Student and Staff Feedback web page (http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/feedback/) includes model surveys, a training tool on student and staff feedback, a video series, and other resources.
- Rating Educator Impact: The Student Impact Rating
 (http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/sir/RatingEducatorImpact.pdf) is intended to be a useful guide for educators and evaluators in the determination of Student Impact Ratings that meet the regulatory requirements.
- ESE's Developing Common Measures web page
 (http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/sir/assessments.html) includes several example common measures, a model development process, and a video featuring teachers describing how they developed common measures.
- The MA Educator Evaluation Framework: Supporting Educator Impact on Student Learning
 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mqVKJ_miFM0&feature=youtu.be) is a video in which members of ESE's Teacher and Principal Advisory Cabinets describe the process of using

district-determined common measures to facilitate meaningful dialogue about educator impact on student learning and ultimately arrive at a Student Impact Rating.

Benefits: By effectively implementing all elements of the framework, the district will provide educators and administrators with meaningful feedback about their practice as well as their impact on student learning. This comprehensive feedback, coupled with continuous support, will ensure that all educators can improve their professional practice, expand their skills, and have greater impact on student achievement.

Student Support

Contextual Background

At the elementary level, the district has begun to implement positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) activities, most of which began in the fall 2015. The director of pupil personnel services has developed and widely shared a flowchart to guide teachers in bringing concerns about students in need of social-emotional support and interventions to school-based support teams (SBSTs), and to guide SBSTs in their step-by-step response to teachers' concerns. A positive behavior curriculum linked to PBIS is being implemented beginning this year. Districtwide, the number and deployment of interventionists varies across schools and as of last year, two interventionists at one elementary school were shifted to teacher roles, leaving a void in support personnel.

In contrast to some positive behavioral efforts beginning to take shape in the elementary schools, classrooms are unstable at the middle/high school. The district has high rates of in-school and out-of-school suspensions, which can be linked to disruptive behavior as well as to chronic absence. Many students in the district have pressing needs outside of school (for example, babysitting for siblings in a single-parent household). Compounding this issue is widespread ineffective classroom management evidenced by disrespectful behavior by both teachers and students in observed classrooms. Stability in classrooms at the middle/high school seems elusive, as there has been low teacher retention in recent years accompanied by little effective professional development for teachers who are new to the district or new to teaching.

A document review indicated that issues related to the high number of ELLs in the district and compliance with state and federal laws about their education are a major concern in the district. For example, there is only one English Language Development (ELD) teacher position for all English language learners (ELLs) in the middle-school grades, resulting in overcrowded classes. The ELD teacher at the middle-school level provides math and science instruction, although she is not certified to do so. Many ELLs at Levels 3 and 4 are receiving no ELD instruction. Only one ELD teacher position exists at the high-school level and it is currently vacant. Districtwide, there is no ELL director for over 350 ELLs, and 30 teachers do not have SEI certification. The team was told that last year many families arrived in Southbridge from Puerto Rico, resulting in scores of ELLs who are on IEPs entering district schools. The district did not have sufficient language resources to assist these families in a timely manner. In addition, a critical challenge in the district is its ability and procedures to discern if ELLs whose language skills are not well developed also need access to special education services.

Another notable challenge in the district is the ability of educators to fully understand and comprehensively implement a tiered system of instructional and social-emotional support (TSS). Although the need to implement a tiered system of support has been identified as a strategic goal in the 2015 Accelerated Improvement Plan, educators reported that they are only working on Tier 1(core

¹⁰ According to ESE data, approximately 60 first-year ELLs entered the district in the 2014-2015 school year from Puerto Rico. Of these students, 17 had Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

instruction and universal behavior supports) this year. Also, there is little evidence of differentiation (including using SEI strategies for ELLs) and many educators said that they struggle with it even in Tier 1. Because it is not sufficient to focus only on Tier 1 students, a more comprehensive and inclusive approach needs to be undertaken immediately. However, it is not clear that educators or leaders understand how to implement all components of a TSS. There are over 70 educational aides (i.e., paraprofessionals to support special education) in the district; yet, the review team was told that the district is just beginning to train them. Because a TSS engages instructional and support staff simultaneously, it is of utmost importance that there be careful coordination between instructional and support leaders in the district.

Challenge Findings and Areas for Growth

- 1. An effective tiered system of support for all students has not been established across all grade levels by the district.
 - A. The elementary schools have begun to implement school-based activities supporting a positive social culture. A flow chart guides the implementation of a tiered system for effective academic and social-emotional interventions in the district. The chart documents steps that teachers and school-based learning teams (SBSTs) can take when problem behaviors arise. These include initial strategies for teachers to try in the classroom as well as subsequent tiered interventions if problem behaviors persist. The chart is in use on a trial basis.
 - **B.** At the elementary level, two years ago, the schools began to implement positive behavior interventions and supports as well as a socio-emotional curriculum to forestall problem behaviors and address them if they arise.
 - 1. PBIS was discontinued for a period of time and has been reinstated this year.
 - 2. In 89 percent of observed elementary classrooms the review team found moderate or strong evidence that the climate was characterized by respectful behavior, routines, tone, and discourse.
 - **C.** Multiple stakeholders reported that problematic student behavior is pervasive.
 - The 15 staff (made up of district principals, IRSs, and central office administrators) who
 contributed to the 2015 Accelerated Improvement Plan process of identifying root causes to
 district problems named several shortcomings, including "a need for better reporting of
 discipline and follow-up" and a "limited approach to discipline/lack of professional
 development."
 - 2. The district's rate of in-school suspensions is more than three times that of the state average (7.2 percent for Southbridge as compared with 2.1 percent for the state). Although the district's rate of 8.5 percent for out-of-school suspensions (OSSs) in 2015 decreased

from 9.9 percent in 2014 and 11.3 percent in 2013, it is still almost three times the state rate of 2.9 percent.

- **D.** The district's most recent response to the high rate of OSSs was to form "Saturday School," a four-hour detention session that suspended students are required to attend in place of being suspended. Saturday School is not reported as a suspension and does not include instruction or positive behavior support. Saturday School was created by and staffed by the former superintendent who left in October 2015. It is unclear how it will be staffed moving forward.
- **E.** According to the most recent ESE data (2015), the percentage of students absent 10 or more days per year has increased from 45.2 percent in 2010 to 49.7 percent in 2015 (compared to the state rate of 32.9 percent). The district's rate of chronic absence defined as students absent 10 percent or more of days in membership per year, has also increased from 24.0 percent in 2010 to 29.0 percent in 2015 (compared to the state rate of 12.9 percent).
 - 1. This data is particularly concerning because students cannot effectively engage in the educational process if they are chronically absent. In addition, a high percentage of chronic absence is an indicator of an unsupportive school climate.
- **F.** The related challenges of ineffective classroom management and disruptive student behavior at the middle/high school have not been effectively addressed. Teachers at both the middle- and high-school levels continue to struggle with approaches for effective classroom management that can prevent, defuse, and redirect disruptive student behaviors.
 - An administrator reported that teachers need strategies to support students' wide range of social-emotional issues. Another interviewee stated that many students have severe social/emotional needs and it is extremely challenging for teachers to deal with these problems.
 - The School Quality Review (SQR) conducted by School Works in 2015 reported "high levels
 of disrespect" between students and teachers (in both directions) and stated, "Behavior
 disrupted learning in some classrooms."
 - 3. An interviewee reported that because of the separation of "accelerated" and "non-accelerated" classrooms at the elementary level, the non-accelerated classrooms are "loaded with behavior issues."
 - 4. Administrators reported that the school year 2015-2016 professional development focus on curriculum writing at the middle/high school, mandated by the recently departed superintendent, does not serve the needs of new teachers struggling with classroom management.
 - **G.** According to data provided by the district, from school year 2013-2014 to school year 2014-2015, in grades 6 through 12 there was an increased rate of course failures from academic

quarter to academic quarter in almost all instances. This data raises questions about the strength of academic supports provided for secondary students.

- 1. For example, the largest increase took place in the 2014-2015 fourth quarter for grade 6 students. Grade 6 showed a 208 percent increase in the number of courses failed: 75 failed courses in 2013-2014 compared with 231 failed courses in 2014-2015. This rate represented 34 grade 6 students failing one or more courses in 2013-2014 and 91 grade 6 students failing one or more courses in the 2014-2015 fourth academic quarter.
- 2. The course failure rates for other grade levels at the middle-school level in the 2014-2015 fourth quarter represented a 56 percent increase for grade 7 and an 87 percent increase for grade 8. At the high-school level in the 2014-2015 fourth quarter, there was a 21 percent increase for grade 9, a 50 percent increase for grade 10, a 60 percent increase for grade 11, and a 52 percent increase for grade 12 (See Table B8 in Appendix B).

Impact: When a district does not provide a coordinated, comprehensive tiered system of student support (ideally in conjunction with a tiered system of instruction) and support for teachers is limited, efforts at improving student behavior tend to be inconsistent. Student support practices appear only as isolated approaches by individuals without coordination. They may or may not be prioritized across the district and depend on that person's presence and employment. When a school does not have an approach to address the related challenges of ineffective classroom management and disruptive student behavior, students and teachers may become stuck in an ineffective cycle of infraction and punishment that substitutes for time spent on instruction and leads frustrated stakeholders to abandon the belief that all students in the district can learn. Furthermore, when a district's academic supports are not strong enough to meet students' needs, student achievement does not progress and more students demonstrate unsuccessful academic achievement and higher course failure rates.

- 2. The district is not providing sufficient support and resources to ensure that all students, including English language learners and struggling students, are able to fully participate in the academic program and succeed in learning. Limitations at the middle/high school are particularly concerning.
 - **A.** An instructional leader stated that the middle/high school "did not keep up with changing demographics in Southbridge in terms of resources and personnel," including strategies for instruction and students' social-emotional needs.
 - **B.** Interviews, a document review, and classroom observations indicated that the district is not adequately serving its English language learners (ELLs).
 - 1. The percentage of ELLs has grown from 10 percent in 2010 to 17 percent in 2015, more than twice the state average of 8 percent
 - 2. Current staffing does not serve the needs of the district's 383 ELLs.

- a. The district has no director of ELLs to manage the district's ELL program.
- a. Interviewees reported there are currently three ELD teachers in the district, two at the elementary level and one at the middle-school level. Two other ELD teaching positions are vacant. In addition, 30 regular teachers (including the IRSs) do not have the SEI endorsement.
- 3. An Instructional Resource Specialist for ELLs (IRS ELL) was hired last year and is responsible for serving the 383 ELLs as well as supporting teachers with professional development on SEI. The IRS ELL is also trying to serve the needs of all ELLs in the district by coordinating with pupil support services and special education personnel, sharing placement data and student-specific achievement data with teachers, and tracking program compliance.
- 4. The middle/high school is not meeting the state or federal requirements in around instruction for ELLs in several areas. Interviewees told the team that efforts to engage leaders at the middle/high school about addressing the non-compliance pertaining to the education of ELLs have seen limited success.
 - a. The high-school level does not have an ELL teacher or Educational Aide (EA) who speaks Spanish, although 100 percent of the students designated as ELLs in the district are Spanish speakers. The middle-school level has one Spanish-speaking EA but the EA's primary responsibility is one-on-one support of a student with disabilities.
 - b. Many Level 3 and 4 ELLs at the middle-school level are not receiving services because there is not enough room for them in the single ELD classroom.
 - c. No ELLs at the high-school level receive services because the single ELD teacher was recently let go. A long-term replacement is being sought, but in the meantime, there is no ELD teacher for the ELD classroom.
 - d. The ELD teacher at the middle-school level is not certified in math or science but is teaching both subjects to ELLs, in addition to reading, writing, and language development.
- 5. The district does not have resources in place to provide adequate communication between key district staff and newly arrived ELLs and their families, the vast majority of whom speak Spanish.
 - a. Although there are Spanish-speaking family outreach coordinators at the two elementary schools to support parent engagement for all families, there are no family outreach coordinators at the middle/high school.
 - b. Interviewees reported that a few district staff hired for other positions, who are not trained translators, carry out all translating for the district, including translation of students' IEPs.

- c. No members of the guidance staff at the high-school level are bilingual. As a result, ELLs only get information about career and college planning in a class with a bilingual student or from someone else who is bilingual who is sitting with a guidance counselor.
- 6. Interviewees reported that the district does not have an adequate and consistent process for determining whether struggling ELLs need only language support or also special education services. At present, bilingual staff who do not have special education training are asked to weigh in on this decision.
 - a. Last year, the district was highly challenged by an influx of numerous ELLs on IEPs from Puerto Rico. Interviewees said that the translation of these IEPs was complex and the time involved slowed the provision of appropriate academic support for those students. 11
- 7. The acting superintendent reported that last year, when she saw that ELL MCAS results showed no growth, she went to the school committee to get more ELL support but was turned down.
- 8. Strong and moderate evidence of appropriate differentiated instruction (including SEI strategies) was found in 43 percent of observed elementary classrooms, in only 25 percent of classrooms at the middle-school level, and in just 7 percent of classrooms at the high-school level.
- **C.** The district has not implemented consistent instructional practices and collaborative opportunities to serve and support the needs of all learners, including struggling students.
 - 1. Interviewees, including administrators and teachers, stated that teachers are not effectively differentiating instruction.
 - 2. An interviewee reported that implementation of the Response to Intervention (RTI) block at the elementary level is not highly successful: it has confused the teachers; there is understaffing at one school since some interventionists have moved into classroom teaching roles and not been replaced; there are concerns about scheduling issues; and, some teachers are reluctant to share their struggling students with other teachers.
 - 3. The schedule at the high-school level does not allow for general education teachers and special education teachers to meet, precluding the opportunity for special education teachers to make the accommodations to lessons that students on IEPs need.
 - 4. An administrator reported that there are 73 education aides (EAs) (that is, paraprofessionals) who are just now being trained in how to offer support to students with disabilities.

¹¹ According to ESE data, approximately 60 first-year ELLs entered the district in the 2014-2015 school year from Puerto Rico. Of these students, 17 had Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

Impact: A district unable to provide adequate and collaborative programs and support services that serve the needs of all learners creates an environment that, in the short term, limits student engagement and achievement and invites the frustration and disengagement of students and their families. In the longer term, such an environment limits students' opportunities for successful post-secondary education and career options. When a district does not provide sufficient support and resources to all students, students do not have equitable opportunities to learn.

Recommendations

- 1. The district should enact a multi-pronged initiative to identify and address the multiple interconnected issues related to student behavior at the middle/high school.
 - **A.** It is critical for all educators to learn to understand and address the root causes of students' behavior issues through proactive, preventative, schoolwide approaches. All members of the school community should be held responsible for proactively supporting a positive school climate.
 - **B.** To this end, using the AIP as a starting point, the district should produce a plan and materials for improving the culture and climate at the middle/high school. The plan should include raising expectations for classroom management and creating effective avenues to prevent and address disruptive behaviors that currently lead to in-school or out-of-school suspension.
 - 1. Each department should identify a teacher to be part of a districtwide professional learning community (PLC) to study via research, resources, and school observations various types of teacher and student behavior that contribute to unruly classrooms and how to address them. The participation of teachers who are members of the school based support teams (SBSTs) should be prioritized in creating the PLC. In addition, at least two behavior interventionists should be included in the PLC, along with school administrators.
 - 2. The dual goal of the PLC should be to create, within three months, a concrete plan for teachers to improve classroom behaviors accompanied by a written "climate guide," to be vetted at faculty meetings and ultimately used across the district, delineating positive beliefs and accountability of both adults and children related to learning, behavior, and classroom and behavior management at each school level. The resulting "climate guide" would not be intended to supplant other district guidelines and policies, but rather to serve as a unified statement of the district's practices.
 - 3. The PLC should identify and engage as advisors at least two¹² community partners that specialize in working with high needs youth, including at least one with experience working

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¹² Having a PLC and including at least two community partners and two university advisors is advised to avoid the common dynamic in the district of initiatives being connected to one person and then failing or ending when that person leaves. A systematic approach requires enough people to create and implement the system.

- with both English-speaking <u>and</u> Spanish-speaking youth and families in Southbridge or nearby communities.
- 4. The PLC should identify and engage as advisors both professors and/or practicum support experts at two or more university teacher education programs that have a strong track record in preparing teachers and administrators for work in underserved and underperforming districts with high needs students. They should invite guidance on current research on effective practices.
- 5. The plan that the PLC produces should prioritize PD sessions on classroom management for new teachers in the middle/high school. It should also include the universal expectation that every teacher will use the climate guide and that mentor-mentee pairs for new educators and leaders will review it thoroughly and act on it.

Recommended resources:

- Making the Case for the Importance of School Climate and Its Measurement
 (http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/events/webinar/making-case-importance-school-climate-and-its-measurement) is a recorded webinar, along with a detailed PowerPoint presentation, that addresses: the linkages between school climate and students' development; models of school climate; best practices in communicating the importance of school climate to stakeholders; and characteristics of good school climate measures.
- Addressing the Root Causes of Disparities in School Discipline
 (https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/addressing-root-causes-disparities-school-discipline)
 is an action planning guide designed to help school and district teams address disparities in school discipline.
- School Climate Practices for Implementation and Sustainability
 (http://www.schoolclimate.org/publications/documents/SchoolClimatePracticeBriefs-2013.pdf),
 from The National School Climate Center, is a set of Practice Briefs focused on improving school climate.
- The Wraparound Replication Cookbook (https://sites.google.com/site/masswazcookbook/) is a practical guide focused on improving academic performance by systematically addressing students' social emotional and non-academic needs. It is based on the experience of several Massachusetts districts, and is organized according to the following key strategy areas:
 - o Addressing School Culture and the Social Emotional Aspects of Learning
 - o Rethinking Systems for Identifying and Addressing Academic and Social Emotional Needs
 - Creating Focused Partnerships & Coalitions
- Every Student, Every Day: A Community Toolkit to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism (http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/chronicabsenteeism/toolkit.pdf) is a set of Action Guides that provide information and resources to help ensure that all young people are in school every day and benefitting from coordinated systems of support.

- Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline
 (http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/guiding-principles.pdf) highlights ways in which states and school districts can promote academic excellence by creating safe and productive learning environments for all students.
- 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.
- The Center for Restorative Justice website (https://www.suffolk.edu/college/centers/14521.php) provides information and resources related to restorative practices in schools.
- Teaching With Poverty in Mind: What Being Poor Does to Kids' Brains and What Schools Can Do
 About It is a book that describes how schools can improve the academic achievement and life
 readiness of economically disadvantaged students.
- The Skillful Teacher: Building Your Teaching Skills is a book that discusses teaching from the foundational perspective that all students can learn. It contains proven approaches to engaging students cognitively in classroom learning activities as well as addressing classroom management, instruction, motivation and curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Benefits from implementing this recommendation could include more effective teaching and more productive classrooms in which all students can learn; fewer disruptive behaviors from students; and greater understanding of what causes them. A "climate guide" can represent a unified vision by district educators. Both of these potential benefits may have a positive effect on teacher and administrator retention in the district.

- The district should convene an advisory committee to review district needs and benefits related to creating diverse options and pathways at the middle/high school that would help all students to graduate and to be prepared for success after high school.
 - **A.** The committee should identify the specific groups of students that would most benefit from an alternative approach (e.g., overage and under-credited students, parenting students, or students who would benefit from a smaller school environment).
 - **B.** The committee should research programs that would best support the identified student groups. It should make a recommendation to the school committee about the types of programs needed, who they would serve and how, the qualifications that program staff members would require, and the feasibility of implementing each program at the middle/high school.
 - C. Members of the advisory committee should include district partners with expertise in building effective educational programs that meet the needs of students who are not engaged in the life of the school. It should also include the two middle/high school assistant principals, who have already done preliminary research and budgeting regarding an alternative education program for the school.

Recommended resources:

- The Alternative Education Resources and Other Academic Options Overview
 (http://www.doe.mass.edu/dropout/2014-05AlternativeOptions.pdf) provides brief descriptions of education options available in Massachusetts, including those that are specifically designed for students who are struggling academically, who are at-risk for dropping out, or who are interested in returning to high school.
- ESE's Alternative Education web page (http://www.doe.mass.edu/alted/resources.html) provides links to resource materials and websites with information, research, and guidance for alternative education programs.
- Alternative Pathways to a High School Diploma
 (http://www.doe.mass.edu/ccr/massgrad/SummaryBrief-AlternativePathways.pdf) is a summary brief that shares promising practices, successes, and challenges from the "alternative pathways" programs implemented in 17 Massachusetts high schools during the 2011–12 through 2014 –15 school years. It is one of five briefs based on evidence-based strategies for dropout prevention utilized by schools that received "Implementation Awards" through the MassGrad initiative.
- Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming
 (https://www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/School-Improvement Services/Documents/AEP/Exemplary%20Practices%20in%20Alternative%20Education%20Programs.p
 df) provides a synopsis and indicators related to ten exemplary practices for implementing alternative education programs.
- Dropout Prevention (http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practice_guides/dp_pg_090308.pdf) is a practice guide produced by the US Department of Education, the Institute of Education Sciences, and the What Works Clearinghouse. It provides specific and coherent evidence-based recommendations for use by educators addressing the challenge of reducing dropping out. Strategies presented include identifying and advocating for at-risk students, implementing programs to improve behavior and social skills, and keeping students engaged in the school environment.

Benefits: The study and possible development of alternative education programs can enhance the district's understanding of how to better support all students. If alternative education programs are implemented, the result could be fewer suspensions at the MHS, more students on track to complete a diploma, a higher graduation rate, and ultimately better outcomes for students after high school.

- District leaders should oversee the immediate implementation of a tiered system of support (including instructional and social-emotional supports) for all learners, as identified in the district's 2015 AIP.
 - **A.** A team of co-leaders that includes the assistant superintendent, the director of pupil personnel services and the district's IRS for ELLs should identify clear action steps to effectively implement a tiered system of support (TSS).

- The co-leaders should identify and document all areas in which the district is not in compliance with state and federal laws regarding the education of ELLs, particularly at the middle/high school. They should present this information to the superintendent and school committee in order to take steps to address these areas.
 - a. Administrators in the district, particularly at the middle/high school, should immediately prioritize class assignment, teacher certification and increased staffing in order to provide sufficient support for students and to meet state and federal laws.
- 2. The co-leaders should set expectations and create accompanying materials for teachers and interventionists that clearly define behaviors and strategies related to each of the three tiers of instructional support and each of the three tiers of social-emotional support.
 - a. Moving forward, the co-leaders should engage all educators in the district in developing differentiated instruction and engaging in interventions for all tiers simultaneously, not just Tier 1.
- 3. The co-leaders should implement informal classroom observations to give specific, actionable feedback to staff on differentiated practices and SEI strategies that they should be providing in classrooms.
 - a. The co-leaders may want to first share examples and demonstrations of effective practices among themselves to calibrate high expectations for these informal observations and feedback.
- 4. As part of implementation of a TSS, a comprehensive professional development plan, as well as ongoing oversight and feedback loop procedures, are of utmost importance. The coleaders should research, consult outside experts and document a process by which ELLs who may need to access special education services can be accurately identified and placed on a 504 or IEP, and accurately assessed over time to identify when they might be able to be successful in general education classrooms.
 - a. To carry out this recommendation, the co-leaders may want to consult an external consultant specializing in this work.
- 5. The co-leaders should present their plan for ongoing professional development to support tiered systems of support to be prioritized during the AY 2015-16 budget and planning cycle.

Recommended resources:

• The Massachusetts Tiered System of Support (MTSS) (<u>www.mass.gov/ese/mtss</u>) 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. The MTSS website includes links to a self-assessment and a variety of helpful 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 Early Warning Implementation Guide
 (http://www.doe.mass.edu/edwin/analytics/2014ImplementationGuide.pdf) provides information on how to use early warning data, including the Massachusetts Early Warning Indicator System (EWIS), to identify, diagnose, support and monitor students in grades 1-12. It offers educators an overview of EWIS and how to effectively use these data in conjunction with local data by following a six-step implementation cycle.
- ESE's Guidance from the Massachusetts Dept. of Education and Laws web page
 (http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/guidance_laws.html) provides links to guidance on programming for ELLs, as well as relevant federal and state laws.
- ESE's RETELL: Extending the Learning web page (http://www.doe.mass.edu/retell/courses.html)
 provides a registry of SEI-related courses, which have been reviewed and approved by the
 Department's Office of English Language Acquisition and Academic Achievement. These courses
 provide opportunities for educators to extend their learning and practice beyond the Sheltered
 English Instruction (SEI) Endorsement course.
- Four ELL Case Studies of High Performing and Improving Boston Schools
 (http://www.ccebos.org/ell_success.html)
 describe key themes at schools identified for their consistent, multi-year out-performance of like schools in ELL outcomes.
- The English Learner Tool kit for State and Local Education Agencies

 (http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/english-learner-toolkit/index.html) is designed to help state and local education agencies to meet their legal obligations to English language learners (ELLs) and to provide ELLs with the support needed to attain English language proficiency while meeting college- and career- readiness standards. The tool kit includes such topics as identifying English language learners, evaluating the effectiveness of programs, and supporting limited English proficient parents. Each of its 10 chapters includes: (1) explanations of the civil rights and other legal obligations to ELLs; (2) checklists that can be used as selfmonitoring tools; (3) sample tools that may be used or adapted for use to aid with compliance; and (4) free online resources that provide additional relevant information and assistance.

Benefits from implementing this recommendation could include the establishment of a system, as delineated in the AIP that unites district educators in establishing conditions that support the learning of all students. Related benefits include the implementation of more effective teaching strategies that better serve all learners. Additionally, informal observation and feedback, accompanied by a

comprehensive plan for PD on implementing a TSS may build the confidence of teachers struggling with differentiation and in turn may support their persistence in the district. On broader level, prioritizing high expectations for classroom instruction for all students signals to teachers, staff, students and families that the district has a shared vision for teaching and learning that serves all students that can withstand teacher and administrator turnover in the future.

Financial and Asset Management

Contextual Background

The student population in Southbridge schools has changed over the last 15 years, reflecting changes in the town. Students from low-income families composed 37.2 percent of enrollment in 2000, compared with 76.3 percent in 2014. (In 2015, ESE introduced a different variable called "economically disadvantaged," which typically is a lower percentage. Southbridge's economically disadvantaged students were 60.5 percent of enrollment in 2015, compared with 26.3 percent in the state.) Hispanic students were 28.9 percent of enrollment in 2000 and 44.7 percent in 2015. Total enrollment declined from 2,499, to 2,228 in this period, but has been fairly stable for the last 5 years.

However, the number of students tuitioned out through school choice increased from 75 students in 2006 (the earliest year available) to 239 students in 2015, for a total tuition expenditure of \$1,361,992.

The town funded the schools at 7 to 14 percent above required net school spending for a number of years before fiscal year 2012, at 2.5 percent to 3.7 percent above from fiscal years 2012 to 2014, and at 5.1 percent above in 2015. The average in-district per pupil expenditure in 2014 was \$13,486, compared to the median for similar size districts of \$12,747 and an average of \$13,997 for the state. The 2016 school budget documents indicate the school budget is \$25,574,689, an increase of 1.4 percent over fiscal year 2015. In fiscal year 2015, the town's tax levy was virtually at its levy limit, indicating that unless the total property valuation increases, increases to general funds appropriations will be limited.

The district opened a new middle/high school in 2012. The town was able to fund the new school without an override by using its bonding capacity and MSBA reimbursements. It also has three elementary schools, including an early childhood (PK-K) school, and its administration offices are housed in the old high school.

Strength Finding

- 1. The town has constructed a new middle/high school and the district maintains its schools effectively and has a capital plan.
 - A. The town completed construction and opened a new middle/high school in 2012.
 - **B.** Town officials reported that an override vote was not necessary for the school, which was funded through MSBA funding and town bonding capacity.
 - 1. Team members found the building to be a state-of-the-art school with up-to-date technology, including computer labs and classroom digital projectors. Science labs and athletic facilities are also good spaces for learning and for student activities.
 - **C.** The district has a maintenance staff and custodial staff adequate to maintain and clean the schools effectively.

- Administrators said that the maintenance staff includes expertise and licenses for electrical, plumbing, and HVAC work. They are able to take care of most school building needs themselves.
- 2. Review team members found the schools to be clean and well maintained.
- **D.** The school business office maintains a five-year capital plan.
 - The current plan, dated 2017-2021, includes roofs, façade and cornice repairs, painting, generators, HVAC replacements, flooring, windows, clocks, and other building needs. The town has funded some projects in past years, and unfunded needs are shifted forward to future years.
 - 2. School committee minutes indicated that the town voted in favor of several capital projects for schools in 2014, including special education vehicles, computer servers, and printers.
 - Administrators also reported that \$200,000 was invested in technology for the elementary schools two years ago, and the school budget has funded computers and software.
 Reviewers found most elementary classrooms equipped with digital projectors and computers.
 - 4. Administrators anticipated other capital needs in the future, including new roofs and floors, trucks with plows, and more advanced internet infrastructure.
- **E.** The school district and the town are cooperating on energy projects.
 - 1. The town is actively contracting for solar panels, including four projects to be located on school roofs and property.
 - The district and town are cooperating on an energy audit and have contracted with National Grid to provide upgraded and energy efficient lighting, motors, and energy control systems to be paid from future savings.

Impact: The new middle/high school, the district's clean and well-maintained elementary schools, and its efforts to provide up-to-date technology have helped make its schools positive environments for learning.

Challenge Findings and Areas for Growth

- 2. School committee members and municipal officials voiced concerns about financial management and reporting. After recent changes in leadership and reporting, both groups expressed more confidence.
 - **A.** There has been frequent turnover in the superintendent and financial director positions.

- The district has had seven superintendents (acting, interim, and appointed) since 2010 and five finance directors. The current finance director has served in that position since August 2015, and is not certified in this field.
- 2. All clerks in the business office have held their positions for two years or more.
- **B.** Interviewees said that past problems with financial management and reporting contributed to an absence of confidence in the school department.
 - 1. There have been instances where bills have gone unpaid, and deficits and surpluses have not been accurately projected. Some examples follow:
 - a. Utility bills from previous fiscal years had been unpaid until approved by the town for payment in 2015.
 - Longevity pay (compensation beyond base salaries) was not included in the fiscal year
 2016 payroll budget.
 - b. There are four contracted elementary principals but only three elementary schools. The fourth principal has been assigned to the central office as finance director, although he has neither certification nor experience.
 - c. A review of school committee minutes indicated a "payroll emergency" in 2014 and "multiple payroll issues" in 2015.
 - d. Interviewees said that in spite of previous projections of deficits, the district had a \$200,000 surplus at the end of fiscal year 2015. This type of inaccurate projection leads to questions about the financial situation throughout the year.
 - 2. Interviewees voiced concerns that expenses have been posted to questionable accounts. Examples included:
 - a. A school posted basketball uniforms to an instructional supplies account, and the business office had to stop the purchase order.
 - b. Charges to deficit accounts without transfers were made in 2014-2015.
 - c. As mentioned previously, the football coach was assigned to manage the school store and his salary was charged to the facilities revolving fund.
 - 3. School committee members said that they found financial reports "cursory" and the finance director in fiscal year 2015 was unable to give them the financial information they needed.
 - Administrators reported that the frequent turnover of central office staff has contributed to insufficient and inconsistent budget documentation and school committee frustrations.

- b. Administrators and school committee members noted that the budget document did not include a line item budget. A review of minutes indicated that the school committee repeatedly requested additional information regarding staffing changes, utilities, budgeting for software, reports, and so on.
- **C.** Changes in leadership and reporting made in summer 2015 have been well received by school committee and town officials.
- **D.** Administrators and school committee members reported that the new finance director is taking steps to provide a new line item budget report that is more thorough and transparent. It includes line items by school, salary information for every employee, expenditures from grants and revolving funds, and comparisons to the previous year.
- **E.** In addition the finance director is preparing quarterly financial updates that include general ledger and staffing reports, and budget projections.
- **F.** School committee members expressed confidence in recent financial reporting.
- **G.** Interviewees reported that the new finance director meets biweekly with town officials in order to keep communications open and to deal with accounts payable, payroll, and reporting issues that may arise, and business office clerks meet frequently with the town finance office to address questions about purchases, bids and contracts, payroll issues, and warrants.

Impact: The turnover in administrators, inconsistent reporting, and apparent irregularities in financial management eroded the confidence of school committee members in the district administration, and in turn of town officials in the school committee (as evidenced by the vote of no confidence from the town council to the school committee). The support of the town council for the school budget was particularly low in 2015, in part because of the absence of budget transparency (also the limited funds available.) While there is currently more confidence and collaboration, a new superintendent will face considerable challenges in establishing credibility as a sound financial manager.

- 3. Town support for the schools has consistently exceeded the required net school spending level, but the increase approved for the fiscal year 2016 school budget was less than in previous years, and less than the increase in Chapter 70 aid. The fiscal year 2016 budget process was characterized by ineffective communication and little collaboration between the school committee and town officials. Ultimately, the school committee did not address the pressing requests for staffing and leadership to meet the needs of a growing English language learner population.
 - **A.** Administrators reported that frequent turnover and inexperienced central office administrators resulted in a late start to budget development in 2015 and inadequate documentation.
 - **B.** Town officials made budget decisions early in the fiscal year 2016 budget process about the appropriation for the schools. The superintendent and school committee came back in May 2015 with budget proposals far above the town's amount. The town did not change its original

estimate, and the district had to cut its budget proposal drastically in June 2015, losing the benefit of time and effort spent on planning by school personnel.

- 1. The town manager met with the acting superintendent in February 2015 and gave her a proposed budget figure for the schools' fiscal year 2016 budget based on no tax increase for the town. The superintendent stated that she could not meet that number, and would have to work with the school committee to determine a reasonable budget.
- 2. In March 2015 the acting superintendent presented the school committee a level service budget of \$25,898,407 (a 2.64 percent increase) for fiscal year 2016 and a needs budget of \$27,130,930 (a 7.52 percent increase).
 - a. The school committee added more to the budget proposal and in April 2015 voted a budget of \$28,255,846 budget (a 12 percent increase).
- 3. Budget documents compared current fiscal year 2015 budgets to the superintendent's proposed level service and needs budgets by function and school, and listed additions proposed by the principals, but did not provide salary detail, line item detail, or projected expenditures from revolving funds and grants.
- 4. At the end of April 2015 the town Education and Health Services (EHS) committee voted to recommend a budget increase of 1.2 percent, based on the budget proposed by town officials, plus any funds remaining after funding other town needs. This was approved by the town council in May 2015.
- 5. Interviewees said that the town council sent a letter of no confidence to the school committee in May 2015 criticizing hiring decisions, the controversy over the proposal to separate the middle and high schools, and other decisions, and the EHS committee stated they could not trust the school numbers.
- 6. School committee members and administrators reported that at a joint meeting between the school committee and the town council members of the boards "yelled at each other" and a councilor behaved inappropriately. A review of school committee minutes indicated that they included reference to Facebook comments about people at school committee hearings.
- 7. In June 2015, school administrators had to cut their budget proposal down to the amount appropriated, losing any benefit of the budget planning they had done.
 - a. An example of budget planning that may have been lost is the needs listed for programs in special education, ELL, and social-emotional and behavioral supports for underserved student populations, which were proposed to be offset by savings in special education through creating in-house programs for students with disabilities then tuitioned out of district.

- 8. New school committee members elected in July 2015 stated that they did not find the detail in the budget documents to be transparent and that the 12 percent increase requested by the previous school committee showed "a lack of responsibility."
- **C.** Relationships between the school committee and the town council have improved after recent changes in the committee and in administrators.
 - 1. There have been changes in leadership in both the schools and the town, including new school administrators and a new town manager.
 - a. School committee members and town officials stated that new school committee members work well with town councilors and some arrived already having established relationships with other members, making it easier to work together.
 - b. Administrators stated that the new town manager has met with the superintendent, the business manager, and the human resources manager. The new town manager has also attended a school business and finance subcommittee meeting.
 - 2. School committee members and administrators stated that relations between the school district and town officials are improving and that the new chairman works well with the town council and "can sell a budget."
 - a. They noted the approval of funds for textbooks, sharing solar credits, and collaboration on an energy audit as indicators of improved relations.
 - The town council made \$200,000 from bonded capital projects available to the school district for textbooks, and it appropriated funds to pay unpaid utility bills from previous years.
 - 3. School committee members stated that they now have a better understanding of salaries and other money being spent.

Impact: Given the depth of divisions, conflict, and loss of faith in school leadership that characterized the budget process for the fiscal year 2016 budget, the continuation of recent improvements in management and relationships is hardly assured. An inexperienced team (interim superintendent, new financial director) will manage a fiscal year 2017 budget process with funding constraints, and with no established credibility in budgeting. There is no assurance that the new school committee will address inevitable challenges more skillfully than the previous one did.

Recommendations

- School committee members, administrators, and town officials should continue their recent
 efforts to communicate and collaborate more effectively. Communications regarding day to day
 financial management issues as well as budget development are needed to reduce tensions, to
 improve transparency, to ensure proper financial management, and to adopt a budget that can
 meet both district and town objectives.
 - **A.** Given the recent tensions between town and school officials and the recent changes in committee membership and town and district staff, regular meetings involving district and school leaders should be scheduled. This will be especially useful when budget development begins.
 - 1. Regular contact between the new interim superintendent and the new town manager will be particularly important.
 - 2. The district, school committee, and town should continue their collaboration on projects such as the solar panel project, the energy audit, and capital plans for future projects.
 - **B.** As the budget season commences there should be joint meetings of the school committee's Budget and Finance Subcommittee and the town's EHS subcommittee.
 - **C.** Stability in the administrative and leadership staffs will be critical to developing trust, creating long range and consistent goals and procedures, and improving communication. (See Leadership and Governance recommendation above.)

Benefits: Frequent, meaningful, and honest communication, including frequent meetings and complete, transparent budget documents, are essential to developing an atmosphere of trust, collaboration, and mutual benefit. Such measures will require long-term commitment and effort by all involved.

- 2. Special attention should be given to creating financial and budget reports that are complete, transparent, and accurate and that satisfy the needs of the school committee and the town.
 - **A.** Recent changes in line item budget documentation have been well received by school committee members, and should be refined as needed to ensure they provide the necessary information.
 - 1. The finance director and interim superintendent should propose a format for budget and financial reports.
 - Sample budget documents and reports used successfully in other districts or recommended by professional organizations such as the Association of School Business Officials (ASBO) could provide useful models.

- 2. A brief explanation of the reports at a school committee meeting could help committee members to use the reports.
- 3. It is essential that budget and quarterly reports are complete, including grants and funds as well as the school budget. They should include transfers, encumbrances, current balances, and, as appropriate, previous years' data and projected balances.
 - a. Budget presentations should also include comparisons of local expenditures to comparable districts for areas such as class size, educational assistants (paraprofessionals), and professional development.
- **B.** As the district undertakes a serious review of expenditures and seeks to reallocate resources strategically, the following resources may be helpful:
 - Spending Money Wisely: Getting the Most from School District Budgets
 (http://dmcouncil.org/spending-money-wisely-ebook), authors Nathan Levenson, Karla
 Baehr, James C. Smith, and Claire Sullivan of The District Management Council identify and
 discuss the top ten opportunities for districts to realign resources and free up funds to
 support strategic priorities. Drawing on the wisdom of leading thinkers, district leaders, and
 education researchers from across the country, the authors gathered a long list of
 opportunities for resource reallocation. To distill these down to the ten most high-impact
 opportunities, each opportunity was assessed based on its financial benefit, its impact on
 student achievement, its political feasibility, and its likelihood of success relative to the
 complexity of implementation.
 - Smarter School Spending for Student Success (http://smarterschoolspending.org/home)
 provides free processes and tools to help districts use their resources to improve student achievement.
 - The Rennie Center's Smart School Budgeting
 (http://www.renniecenter.org/topics/smart_school_budgeting.html; direct link:
 http://www.renniecenter.org/research/SmartSchoolBudgeting.pdf) is a summary of existing resources on school finance, budgeting, and reallocation.
 - Best Practices in School District Budgeting (http://www.gfoa.org/best-practices-school-district-budgeting) outlines steps to developing a budget that best aligns resources with student achievement goals. Each step includes a link to a specific resource document with relevant principles and policies to consider.

Benefits from implementing this recommendation will include more effective communication with school committee members. More transparent documents would also help improve communication and trust and generate support for school budgets. They would provide a clearer picture of how resources are allocated, and how they might be reallocated to better address student needs.

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

Review Team Members

The review was conducted from October 19-22, 2015, by the following team of independent ESE consultants.

- 1. Tom Pandiscio, Ed. D. leadership and governance
- 2. Suzanne Kelly, curriculum and instruction
- 3. Linda L. Greyser, Ed. D., assessment, review team coordinator
- 4. Frank Sambuceti, Ed. D., human resources and professional development
- 5. Janet Smith, Ed. D., student support
- 6. George Gearhart, Ed. D., 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, staff members responsible for grants, accounts receivable, accounts payable and payroll; town finance manager, town treasurer, and finance committee chair.

The team conducted interviews with the following members of the school committee: chair, vice-chair, and four of the five remaining members.

The review team conducted interviews with the following representatives of the teachers' association: president, vice-president, treasurer, and grievance chair.

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

The team visited the following schools: Eastford Elementary School (PK-K,) Charlton Street Elementary School (grades 1-5), West Street Elementary School (grades 1-5), and Southbridge Middle/High School (grades 6-12).

During school visits, the team conducted interviews with 4 principals and focus groups with 21 elementary school teachers and 13 middle/high school teachers.

The team observed 68 classes in the district: 22 at the middle/high school and 46 at the elementary schools.

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.
- o 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.
- o All completed program and administrator evaluations, and a random selection of completed teacher evaluations.

Site Visit Schedule

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
10/19/2015	10/20/2015	10/21/2015	10/22/2015
Orientation with district	Interviews with district	Interviews with district	Interviews with school
leaders and principals;	staff and principals;	and school leaders;	leaders; follow-up
interviews with district	review of personnel	interviews with school	interviews; district review
staff and principals;	files; teacher focus	committee members;	team meeting; visits to two
document reviews and	groups; interview with	interviews with school	elementary schools and the
review of personnel	town officials, and visits	committee members,	middle/high school for
files; interview with	to the middle/high	visits to three	classroom observations;
teachers' association;	school for classroom	elementary schools for	emerging themes meeting
team meetings.	observations; focus	classroom observations;	with district leaders and
	group with high school	team meetings.	principals.
	students; team		
	meetings.		

Appendix B: Enrollment, Performance, Expenditures

Table B1a: Southbridge Public Schools 2014–2015 Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity

Student Group	District	Percent of Total	State	Percent of Total
African-American	27	1.2%	83,556	8.7%
Asian	32	1.4%	60,050	6.3%
Hispanic	995	44.7%	171,036	17.9%
Native American	7	0.3%	2,238	0.2%
White	1,142	51.3%	608,453	63.7%
Native Hawaiian	1	0.0%	930	0.1%
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	24	1.1%	29,581	3.1%
All Students	2,228	100.0%	955,844	100.0%

Note: As of October 1, 2014

Table B1b: Southbridge Public Schools
2014–2015 Student Enrollment by High Needs Populations

		District		State N Percent of High Needs Percent of State 165,060 40.4% 17.1% 251,026 61.5% 26.3%		
Student Groups	N	Percent of	Percent of	N	Percent of	Percent of
		High Needs	District		High Needs	State
Students w/ disabilities	453	27.7%	20.0%	165,060	40.4%	17.1%
Econ. Disad.	1,348	82.6%	60.5%	251,026	61.5%	26.3%
ELLs and Former ELLs	383	23.5%	17.2%	81,146	19.9%	8.5%
All high needs students	1,631	100.0%	72.0%	408,200	100.0%	42.2%

Notes: As of October 1, 2014. 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 2,264; total state enrollment including students in out-of-district placement is 966,391.

Table B2a: Southbridge Public Schools
English Language Arts Performance, 2012–2015

		Number		Cnr	ing MCAS V	/oor		Gains and	Declines
	de and easure	Included (2015)	2012	2013	ing MCAS Y	2015	State (2015)	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend
	CPI	162	71.2	67.5	72.8	67.9	83.4	-3.3	-4.9
3	P+	162	44.0%	30.0%	41.0%	37.0%	60.0%	-7.0%	-4.0%
	CPI	166	56.4	60.5	62.4	69.6	78.5	13.2	7.2
4	P+	166	28.0%	34.0%	32.0%	42.0%	53.0%	14.0%	10.0%
	SGP	138	28.5	37	51.5	50	50	21.5	-1.5
	CPI	173	64.9	65.5	67.1	63.7	87.3	-1.2	-3.4
5	P+	173	36.0%	35.0%	38.0%	32.0%	71.0%	-4.0%	-6.0%
	SGP	149	40	42	46	32	50	-8	-14
	CPI	174	63.1	64.4	67.3	59.6	86.6	-3.5	-7.7
6	P+	174	35.0%	30.0%	39.0%	30.0%	71.0%	-5.0%	-9.0%
	SGP	151	33	33	41	25	50	-8	-16
	CPI	188	71.6	61.7	63.2	63.4	87	-8.2	0.2
7	P+	188	40.0%	28.0%	32.0%	30.0%	70.0%	-10.0%	-2.0%
	SGP	157	39	19.5	24	20	50	-19	-4
	CPI	181	79.9	74.5	70.1	71.8	91.4	-8.1	1.7
8	P+	181	59.0%	51.0%	49.0%	49.0%	80.0%	-10.0%	0.0%
	SGP	157	49.5	38	53	43	50	-6.5	-10
	CPI	121	90.3	88.5	87.4	88.8	96.7	-1.5	1.4
10	P+	121	76.0%	71.0%	76.0%	77.0%	91.0%	1.0%	1.0%
	SGP	103	59	42	55	46	51	-13	-9
	CPI	1,165	69.6	67.5	69.6	68.3		-1.3	-1.3
All	P+	1,165	43.0%	38.0%	43.0%	41.0%		-2.0%	-2.0%
	SGP	855	41	34	45	34	50	-7	-11

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: Southbridge Public Schools Mathematics Performance, 2012–2015

		Number		Spri	ing MCAS Y	/ear		Gains and	Declines
	de and easure	Included (2015)	2012	2013	2014	2015	State (2015)	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend
	CPI	158	72.1	69.7	79.7	70.3	85.4	-1.8	-9.4
3	P+	158	48.0%	45.0%	61.0%	49.0%	70.0%	1.0%	-12.0%
	CPI	171	60.3	66.6	65.3	68.4	77.2	8.1	3.1
4	P+	171	28.0%	32.0%	35.0%	37.0%	47.0%	9.0%	2.0%
	SGP	141	37	42.5	45	44	49	7	-1
	CPI	170	64.2	65.9	66.2	61.9	83.6	-2.3	-4.3
5	P+	170	38.0%	41.0%	39.0%	36.0%	67.0%	-2.0%	-3.0%
	SGP	150	48	51.5	49.5	36	50	-12	-13.5
	CPI	175	51.1	59.2	58.6	55.1	81.5	4	-3.5
6	P+	175	22.0%	34.0%	31.0%	25.0%	62.0%	3.0%	-6.0%
	SGP	151	16.5	23.5	26	25	50	8.5	-1
	CPI	187	48.9	41.6	48.8	47.1	73	-1.8	-1.7
7	P+	187	17.0%	15.0%	23.0%	18.0%	51.0%	1.0%	-5.0%
	SGP	157	20	21	36	28	51	8	-8
	CPI	184	54.4	51.2	43.1	49.3	78.7	-5.1	6.2
8	P+	184	26.0%	19.0%	17.0%	24.0%	60.0%	-2.0%	7.0%
	SGP	162	41	33	40	26	51	-15	-14
	CPI	121	76	67	69.7	63.6	89.9	-12.4	-6.1
10	P+	121	50.0%	44.0%	45.0%	39.0%	79.0%	-11.0%	-6.0%
	SGP	102	48	36	29	29	50	-19	0
	CPI	1,166	60.2	59.6	60.9	58.8		-1.4	-2.1
All	P+	1,166	32.0%	32.0%	35.0%	32.0%		0.0%	-3.0%
	SGP	863	32	32	37	30	50	-2	-7

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: Southbridge Public Schools
Science and Technology/Engineering Performance, 2012–2015

		Number		Spri	ing MCAS Y	ear/		Gains and	Declines
	de and asure	Included (2015)	2012	2013	2014	2015	State (2015)	4-Year Trend	2-Year Trend
_	CPI	169	63.3	55.7	57.6	58	78.2	-5.3	0.4
5	P+	169	32.0%	17.0%	25.0%	25.0%	51.0%	-7.0%	0.0%
8	CPI	182	56.2	50	50	50.8	72.4	-5.4	0.8
8	P+	182	27.0%	16.0%	14.0%	18.0%	42.0%	-9.0%	4.0%
10	CPI	114	70.8	74.4	72.9	67.8	88.2	-3	-5.1
10	P+	114	43.0%	45.0%	51.0%	39.0%	72.0%	-4.0%	-12.0%
All	CPI	465	61.8	57.3	58.4	57.6	79.4	-4.2	-0.8
All	P+	465	32.0%	22.0%	27.0%	26.0%	54.0%	-6.0%	-1.0%

Notes: P+ = percent *Proficient* or *Advanced*. Students participate in Science and Technology/ Engineering (STE) MCAS tests in grades 5, 8, and 10 only. Median SGPs are not calculated for STE.

Table B3a: Southbridge Public Schools English Language Arts (All Grades)

Performance for Selected Subgroups Compared to State, 2012–2015

			Number			_		Gains and	Declines
Group a	nd Measu	re	Included		Spring ivi	CAS Year		4-Year	2-Year
			(2015)	2012	2013	2014	2015	Trend	Trend
		CPI	867	65	63.3	64.8	62.7	-2.3	-2.1
	District	P+	867	36.0%	31.0%	36.0%	34.0%	-2.0%	-2.0%
High Needs		SGP	613	39	33	41	34	-5	-7
nigii Neeus		CPI	93,277	76.5	76.8	77.1			
	State	P+	93,277	48.0%	48.0%	50.0%			
		SGP	68,746	46	47	47	47	1	0
		CPI	779				64.5		
	District	P+	779				36.0%		
Econ.		SGP	558				34		
Disad.		CPI	63,124						
	State	P+	63,124						
		SGP	47,064				47		
		CPI	232	38.5	40.2	39.7	40.1	1.6	0.4
	District	P+	232	7.0%	7.0%	10.0%	6.0%	-1.0%	-4.0%
Students w/		SGP	142	27.5	28	29.5	27	-0.5	-2.5
disabilities		CPI	39,117	67.3	66.8	66.6			
	State	P+	39,117	31.0%	30.0%	31.0%			
		SGP	28,234	43	43	43	44	1	1
		CPI	175	44.2	41.7	41.8	44.1	-0.1	2.3
English	District	P+	175	12.0%	9.0%	10.0%	13.0%	1.0%	3.0%
language		SGP	106	42	29.5	42	41	-1	-1
learners or		CPI	18,541	66.2	67.4	67.8			
Former ELLs	State	P+	18,541	34.0%	35.0%	36.0%			
		SGP	11,589	51	53	54	54	3	0
		CPI	1,165	69.6	67.5	69.6	68.3	-1.3	-1.3
	District	P+	1,165	43.0%	38.0%	43.0%	41.0%	-2.0%	-2.0%
All aturdomts		SGP	855	41	34	45	34	-7	-11
All students		CPI	216,396	86.7	86.8	86.7			
	State	P+	216,396	69.0%	69.0%	69.0%			
		SGP	172,652	50	51	50	50	0	0

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

Table B3b: Southbridge Public Schools Mathematics (All Grades)

Performance for Selected Subgroups Compared to State, 2012–2015

			Number		_	CAS Year		Gains and	
Group an	d Measure	•	Included			1	r	4-Year	2-Year
		•	(2015)	2012	2013	2014	2015	Trend	Trend
		CPI	873	55.7	54.9	55.6	52.7	-3	-2.9
	District	P+	873	26.0%	26.0%	28.0%	25.0%	-1.0%	-3.0%
High Needs		SGP	620	30	31	35	28	-2	-7
riigii Needs		CPI	93,295	67	68.6	68.4			
	State	P+	93,295	37.0%	40.0%	40.0%			
		SGP	69,106	46	46	47	47	1	0
		CPI	786				54.6		
	District	P+	786	1			26.0%		
Economically		SGP	565				29		
Disadvantaged		CPI	63,076						
	State	P+	63,076						
		SGP	47,295				46		
		CPI	234	32.2	32.2	33.5	32.6	0.4	-0.9
	District	P+	234	5.0%	4.0%	5.0%	4.0%	-1.0%	-1.0%
Students w/		SGP	151	19.5	23.5	30	29	9.5	-1
disabilities		CPI	39,181	56.9	57.4	57.1			
	State	P+	39,181	21.0%	22.0%	22.0%			
		SGP	28,451	43	42	43	44	1	1
		CPI	185	35.3	33.4	32.5	35.5	0.2	3
English	District	P+	185	8.0%	6.0%	6.0%	9.0%	1.0%	3.0%
language		SGP	111	31	30	31	29	-2	-2
learners or		CPI	18,625	61.6	63.9	63.8			
Former ELLs	State	P+	18,625	32.0%	35.0%	36.0%			
		SGP	11,735	52	53	52	50	-2	-2
		CPI	1,166	60.2	59.6	60.9	58.8	-1.4	-2.1
	District	P+	1,166	32.0%	32.0%	35.0%	32.0%	0.0%	-3.0%
All about a sate		SGP	863	32	32	37	30	-2	-7
All students		CPI	216,363	79.9	80.8	80.3			
	State	P+	216,363	59.0%	61.0%	60.0%			
		SGP	173,217	50	51	50	50	0	0

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

Table B3c: Southbridge Public Schools Science and Technology/Engineering (All Grades)

Performance for Selected Subgroups Compared to State, 2012–2015

			Number		Carina M	CAS Voor		Gains and	Declines
Group a	nd Measu	re	Included		Spring ivi	CAS Year		4-Year	2-Year
			(2015)	2012	2013	2014	2015	Trend	Trend
	District	CPI	346	56.3	53.4	51.3	51.8	-4.5	0.5
High Noods	DISTRICT	P+	346	24.0%	18.0%	17.0%	18.0%	-6.0%	1.0%
High Needs	Chaha	CPI	91,013	65	66.4	67.3	66.3	1.3	-1
	State	P+	91,013	31.0%	31.0%	33.0%	32.0%	1.0%	-1.0%
	District	CPI	309				53.2		
Econ.	District	P+	309				19.0%		
Disadv.	Chata	CPI	62,345				67.1		
	State		62,345				33.0%		
	District	CPI	101	35.4	37.8	33.4	34.9	-0.5	1.5
Students w/	District	P+	101	4.0%	2.0%	4.0%	5.0%	1.0%	1.0%
disabilities	Chaha	CPI	38,520	58.7	59.8	60.1	60.2	1.5	0.1
	State	P+	38,520	20.0%	20.0%	22.0%	22.0%	2.0%	0.0%
English	District	CPI	63	37.1	35.3	31.2	33.7	-3.4	2.5
language	District	P+	63	5.0%	3.0%	3.0%	8.0%	3.0%	5.0%
learners or	Chaha	CPI	17,516	51.4	54	54	53.9	2.5	-0.1
Former ELLs	State	P+	17,516	17.0%	19.0%	18.0%	18.0%	1.0%	0.0%
	District	CPI	465	61.8	57.3	58.4	57.6	-4.2	-0.8
All students	District	P+	465	32.0%	22.0%	27.0%	26.0%	-6.0%	-1.0%
All students	Chaha	CPI	210,454	78.6	79	79.6	79.4	0.8	-0.2
	State	P+	210,454	54.0%	53.0%	55.0%	54.0%	0.0%	-1.0%

Notes: Median SGPs are not calculated for Science and Technology/ Engineering (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: Southbridge Public Schools
Annual Grade 9-12 Drop-Out Rates, 2011–2014

	S	chool Ye	ar Endin	g	Change 2011	-2014	Change 2013	-2014	State
Group	2011	2012	2013	2014	Percentage Points	Percent Change	Percentage Points	Percent Change	(2014)
High Needs	5.5%	3.7%	3.6%	3.5%	-2.0	-36.4%	-0.1	-2.8%	3.4%
Low Income	4.8%	2.7%	3.5%	2.4%	-2.4	-50.0%	-1.1	-31.4%	3.6%
Students w/									
disabilities	5.4%	6.8%	3.7%	8.5%	3.1	57.4%	4.8	129.7%	3.4%
ELL	5.9%	3.1%	5.8%	2.0%	-3.9	-66.1%	-3.8	-65.5%	6.2%
All students	5.5%	4.5%	3.7%	4.4%	-1.1	-20.0%	0.7	18.9%	2.0%

Notes: The annual drop-out 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. Drop outs 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 high school equivalency by the following October 1. Drop-out rates have been rounded; percent change is based on unrounded numbers.

Table B5: Southbridge Public Schools

Attendance Rates, 2012-2015

	S	chool Ye	ar Endin	g	Change 2012	-2015	Change 2014	State	
Group	2012	2013	2014	2015	Percentage Points	Percent Change	Percentage Points	Percent Change	(2015)
All students	93.3	92.5%	92.4%	91.5%	-1.8	1.9%	-0.9	-0.9%	94.7%

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 B6: Southbridge Public Schools
Expenditures, Chapter 70 State Aid, and Net School Spending Fiscal Years 2012–2014

	FY	12	FY	13	FY	14
	Estimated	Actual	Estimated	Actual	Estimated	Actual
Expenditures						
From local appropriations for schools:						
By school committee	\$23,154,366	\$22,957,096	\$23,786,493	\$23,871,811	\$24,606,366	\$24,628,491
By municipality	\$7,558,697	\$35,112,791	\$6,257,188	\$11,419,252	\$6,925,819	\$8,285,758
Total from local appropriations	\$30,713,063	\$58,069,887	\$30,043,681	\$35,291,063	\$31,532,185	\$32,914,249
From revolving funds and grants		\$3,954,356		\$4,901,869	-	\$4,116,975
Total expenditures		\$62,024,244		\$40,192,932		\$37,031,224
Chapter 70 aid to education program						
Chapter 70 state aid*		\$17,230,163		\$17,682,899		\$18,620,962
Required local contribution		\$7,165,928		\$7,503,317		\$7,736,324
Required net school spending**		\$24,396,091		\$25,186,216		\$26,357,286
Actual net school spending		\$25,202,522		\$25,809,805		\$27,322,433
Over/under required (\$)		\$806,431		\$623,589		\$965,147
Over/under required (%)		3.3		2.5		3.7

^{*}Chapter 70 state aid funds are deposited in the local general fund and spent as local appropriations.

Sources: FY12, FY13, and FY14 District End-of-Year Reports, Chapter 70 Program information on ESE website Data retrieved 11/20/15

^{**}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.

Table B7: Southbridge Public Schools
Expenditures Per In-District Pupil
Fiscal Years 2012–2014

Expenditure Category	2012	2013	2014
Administration	\$403	\$583	\$607
Instructional leadership (district and school)	\$816	\$866	\$832
Teachers	\$4,681	\$4,873	\$4,677
Other teaching services	\$1,547	\$1,654	\$1,698
Professional development	\$149	\$81	\$63
Instructional materials, equipment and technology	\$296	\$349	\$381
Guidance, counseling and testing services	\$341	\$361	\$328
Pupil services	\$1,416	\$1,606	\$1,934
Operations and maintenance	\$1,088	\$1,045	\$1,071
Insurance, retirement and other fixed costs	\$1,512	\$1,566	\$1,895
Total expenditures per in-district pupil	\$12,250	\$12,984	\$13,486

Sources: Per-pupil expenditure reports on ESE website

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

Appendix C: Instructional Inventory

Focus Area #1: Learning		Insufficient	Minimal	Moderate	Strong	Avg Number
Objectives & Instruction						of points
		(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(0 to 3)
1. The teacher demonstrates	ES	0%	0%	24%	76%	2.8
knowledge of subject matter	MS	0%	23%	65%	13%	1.9
and content.	HS	7%	7%	14%	71%	2.5
	Total #	1	3	18	46	2.6
	Total %	1%	4%	24%	68%	
2. The teacher provides and	ES	4%	15%	35%	46%	2.2
refers to clear learning	MS	25%	25%	25%	25%	1.5
objective(s) in the lesson.	HS	7%	29%	29%	36%	1.9
	Total #	5	13	22	28	2.1
	Total %	7%	19%	32%	41%	
3. The teacher implements a	ES	2%	28%	46%	24%	1.9
lesson that reflects high	MS	13%	63%	0%	25%	1.4
expectations aligned to the	HS	21%	36%	43%	0%	1.2
learning objective (s).	Total #	5	23	27	13	1.7
	Total %	7%	34%	40%	19%	
4. The teacher uses	ES	2%	13%	43%	41%	2.2
appropriate instructional	MS	25%	50%	0%	25%	1.3
strategies well matched to the	HS	14%	57%	21%	7%	1.2
learning objective(s).	Total #	5	18	23	22	1.9
	Total %	7%	26%	34%	32%	
	ES					9.1/12
Total Score For Focus Area #1	MS					6.0/12
Total Score For Focus Area #1	HS					6.9/12
	Total					8.3/12

Focus Area #2: Student		Insufficient	Minimal	Moderate	Strong	Avg Number
Engagement & Critical						of points
Thinking		(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(0 to 3)
5. Students are motivated and	ES	2%	9%	46%	43%	2.3
engaged in the lesson.	MS	0%	50%	25%	25%	1.8
	HS	14%	21%	57%	7%	1.6
	Total #	3	11	31	23	2.1
	Total %	4%	16%	46%	34%	
6. The teacher facilitates tasks	ES	13%	30%	37%	20%	1.6
that encourage students to	MS	38%	25%	38%	0%	1.0
develop and engage in critical	HS	7%	64%	21%	7%	1.3
thinking.	Total #	10	25	23	10	1.5
	Total %	15%	37%	34%	15%	
7. Students assume	ES	11%	22%	28%	39%	2.0
responsibility for their own	MS	25%	38%	13%	25%	1.4
learning whether individually,	HS	29%	36%	7%	29%	1.4
in pairs, or in groups.	Total #	11	18	15	24	1.8
	Total %	16%	26%	22%	35%	
	ES					5.9/9
Total Score For Focus Area #2	MS					4.1/9
Total Score For Focus Area #2	HS					4.2/9
	Total					5.3/9

Focus Area #3: Differentiated		Insufficient	Minimal	Moderate	Strong	Avg Number
Instruction & Classroom						of points
Culture		(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(0 to 3)
8. The teacher appropriately	ES	39%	17%	30%	13%	1.2
differentiates instruction so	MS	38%	38%	25%	0%	0.9
the lesson content is	HS	64%	29%	0%	7%	0.5
accessible for all learners.	Total #	30	15	16	7	1.0
	Total %	44%	22%	24%	10%	
9. The teacher uses	ES	22%	13%	41%	24%	1.7
appropriate resources aligned	MS	25%	50%	25%	0%	1.0
to students' diverse learning	HS	36%	36%	21%	7%	1.0
needs. (e.g., technology,	Total #	17	15	24	12	1.5
manipulatives, support		25%	22%	35%	18%	
personnel).	Total %	2570	22/0	3370	10/0	
10. The classroom climate is	ES	0%	11%	17%	72%	2.6
characterized by respectful	MS	0%	50%	25%	25%	1.8
behavior, routines, tone, and	HS	21%	21%	29%	29%	1.6
discourse.	Total #	3	12	14	39	2.3
	Total %	4%	18%	21%	57%	
11. The teacher conducts	ES	17%	13%	39%	30%	1.8
appropriate formative	MS	13%	38%	50%	0%	1.4
assessments to check for	HS	14%	57%	14%	14%	1.3
understanding and provide	Total #	11	17	24	16	1.7
feedback to students.	Total %	16%	25%	35%	24%	
	ES					7.3/12
Total Score For Focus Area #2	MS					5.0/12
Total Score For Focus Area #3	HS					4.4/12
	Total					6.4/12

Appendix D: Leadership Transitions, School Years 2011-2016

Table 1: Transitions of Central Office Leadership
Southbridge Public Schools
School Years 2011-2016

School Year	Superintendent	Asst.	Business	Director of Pupil
		Superintendent	Manager or	Personnel
		or Director of	Finance Director	Services
		Teaching and		
		Learning		
2010-2011	Eric Ely	Jeffrey Zanghi	Cortney Keegan	Michael Meyer
2011-2012	Eric Ely	Jeffrey Zanghi	Terry Wiggin	Michael Meyer
2012-2013	Eric Ely	Amy Allen	Terry Wiggin	Michael Meyer
	7/12-1/13		7/12-3/13	7/12-11/12
	Terry Wiggin		Karin Sheridan	Colleen Culligan
	11/12-1/13		5/13-6/13	11/12-6/13
	Basan Nembirkow			
	1/13-6/13			
2013-2014	Basan Nembirkow	Pat Gardner	Karin Sheridan	Colleen Culligan
	7/13-6/14			
	Pat Gardner			
	4/14 only			
	(medical leave)			
2014-2015	Patricia Gardner	Sheryl Stanton	Karin Sheridan	Colleen Culligan
	7/14-1/15	7/14-1/15	7/14-8/14	
	Sheryl Stanton	William Lataille	Aaron Osborne	
	1/15—6/15	2/15-6/15	8/14-6/15	
2015-2016	Sheryl Stanton	William Lataille	Aaron Osborne	Colleen Culligan -
	7/1/15-7/22/15	7/1/15-7/22/15	7/15 only	current
	Steven Bliss	Sheryl Stanton	William Lataille	
	7/23/15-10/16/15	7/23/15 –	8/15 - current	
	Sheryl Stanton	10/16/15		
	10/16/15 –	Sheryl Stanton		
	11/9/15	11/9/15-		
	Tim Connor	current		
	11/9/15 – current			

Source: Developed from a table provided by district administration at the request of the review team.

(Continued on next page)

Table 2: Transitions of School Principals
Southbridge Public Schools
School Years 2011-2016

School Year	High School Level	Middle School Level	West Street	Charlton Street	Eastford Street
			Elementary	Elementary	Early Childhood
2010-2011	Bill Bishop	Amy Allen	John Riley	Bryant Montigny	Diane Shaw
2011-2012	Bill Bishop	Amy Allen	John Riley	Bryant Montigny	Diane Shaw
2012-2013	Tammy Perreault 8/12-12/12 Gregory Leach 12/12-6/13	Tammy Perreault 8/12-12/12 Gregory Leach 12/12-6/13	Dana Labb	Bryant Montigny	Diane Shaw
2013-2014	Amy Allen 7/13-2/14 K. Potter/T Walles 2/14-6/14	Amy Allen 7/13-2/14 K. Potter/T. Walles 2/14-6/14	Dana Labb	Bryant Montigny	Diane Shaw 7/13-12/13 Anthony Aucoin 12/13-6/14
2014-2015	Melissa Earls	Melissa Earls	Vinnie Regan	William Lataille 7/14-2/15 Emily Mantineo 3/15-6/15	Mary Skrzypczak
2015-2016	Melissa Earls - current	Rebecca Sweetman (Associate Principal)- current	Kathleen Cadarette - current	Emily Mantineo – current	Mary Skrzypczak - current

Source: Developed from a table provided by district administration at the request of the review team.

Appendix E: Status of Curriculum as of October 2015

Table 1: Elementary Schools
Status of Documented Curriculum in ELA, Math, and Science, October 2015

GRADE	ELA	Math	Science
Kindergarten	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete
Grade 1	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete
Grade 2	Complete	Complete	Incomplete
Grade 3	Complete	Complete	Incomplete
Grade 4	Complete	Complete	Incomplete
Grade 5	Incomplete	Complete	Incomplete

Table 2: Southbridge Middle School Level
Status of Documented Curriculum in ELA, Math, and Science, October 2015

Grade	ELA	Math	Science
Grade 6	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete
Grade 7	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete
Grade 8	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete

Table 3: Southbridge High School Level
Status of Documented Curriculum in ELA, Math, and Science, October 2015

Grade	ELA	Math	Science
Grade 9	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete
Grade 10	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete
Grade 11	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete
Grade 12	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete